



Women and Revolution: Women's Political Activism in Russia from 1905-1917

a resource for educators, grades 7-12



Prepared by
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This curriculum module is one of a series of topical resources created on a variety of historical, political, and sociocultural themes relating to Russia and Eurasia. Each document includes a content essay, classroom applications and approaches, a bibliography and list of further resources, as well as connections to the Common Core Standards. In order to access additional modules and multimedia content, please visit the Davis Center website at <http://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/outreach>.

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+ Don’t forget these accompanying materials:

A video interview with Rochelle Ruthchild, author of *Equality and Revolution*
 Video footage of a women’s march in Petrograd

Approaches and Objectives in Regional Studies

In the years leading up to the monumental revolutions of 1917, female political activists in Russia played key roles in a broad spectrum of political circles and developed one of the first successful movements for women's suffrage in the modern world. Study of this historical moment, dense with social change and global significance, both introduces students to a dynamic set of historical actors and invites consideration of questions that reverberate far beyond this place and time.

Students of social studies, history, women's history, and Russian history on the 7-12th grade level can be invited to consider the following questions:

**Can groups with different values but intersecting goals work together?
How can elements of individual identity (gender, class, citizenship) inform political values
and diverse social movements?**

Events in 20th-century movements for women's rights that are perhaps more familiar to students, such as 1848's seminal convention at Seneca Falls and the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, were in fact part of a global movement which saw women in Russia gain the right to vote three years before women in North America. Broadening the lens of study to reveal these interconnections enriches students' ability to understand dynamics of global historical and political trends, a key 21st-century skill.

Students can also consider more broadly how revolutionary movements develop in a diverse society. How do class and gender affect the goals and priorities of individuals during times of political change? The women who took part in movements for women's rights in Russia from 1905 to 1917 were acting at the intersections of these different social identities. While some were part of the radical revolutionary tide that overthrew the tsar (the Slavic term for a king or monarch) and resulted in Soviet socialist rule, others sought individual rights without such large-scale political change. And while some saw the fight for women's rights as a critical part of the larger challenge to autocratic governance, others thought demands for women's suffrage should only be voiced, if at all, after these other goals were accomplished.

How did people with these very different priorities work together? When did they and when did they not? How do political authorities and citizens in pluralistic communities decide when, and how much, to compromise with those who hold differing values? These remain critical questions for the study of diverse political landscapes both large and small.

Common Core Standards

Approaches outlined in this module support key Career Readiness Anchor Standards articulated in the Common Core State Standards, reflecting a focus on reading, speaking, and listening literacies in the K-12 social studies classroom.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 : Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Background for Teachers and Students

This section is adapted from Equality and Revolution: Women's Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905-1917 by Rochelle Ruthchild (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010). This text is available through the Davis Center's lending library.

Women's Lives in Pre-Revolutionary Russia

The life experience of women in pre-socialist Russia varied greatly. A peasant in a rural village and an upper-class woman in the city would have had very different degrees of access to power and resources. While men and women of all social classes were denied many political and social rights under the tsarist autocracy, rights of workers and peasants were limited even further. Voting that occurred on rural and local levels was restricted to property owners.

Some experience, however, cut across class boundaries. As was the case across the globe, married women were commonly considered subject to the absolute authority of their husbands and had little to no access to education, whether basic or higher, or to many types of intellectual life and work. In the second half of the 19th century women began to address these social limitations in a variety of ways. Some formed independent study groups, or "self-education circles," to learn together and teach one another. Other civic groups formed as well, representing the diverse spectrum of women's political engagement. From the Fritsche Circle, to the Ladies Committee of the Society for Poor Relief, to the Russian Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society, some were quite radical groups focused on women's liberation while others focused on women's political engagement through charitable activity.

Context of the Revolutionary Period

The turn of the 20th century in Russia was a time of great political upheaval. Following a period of revolutionary fervor in the late 19th century, a series of revolutions in 1905 and 1917 resulted in the transition from a tsarist autocratic Russian Empire to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the socialist power structure that existed until its dissolution in 1991. Though this full transformation occurred in only a handful of years, these revolutionary movements took on several forms. The first series of organized strikes and demonstrations occurred in 1905 in opposition to the tsar and resulted in a short-lived constitutional monarchy, in which the power of the tsar was theoretically tempered by the Duma (legislature).

This set the stage for the more dramatic revolutions of 1917. In February of that year, the tsar was removed from power. A chaotic time followed during which a provisional government made up of legislators from the Duma took power. In October, a second revolution occurred, led by Vladimir Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks were now in power, ushering in the age of socialist rule in Russia and the creation of the USSR. Women were involved in every stage of this revolutionary period, beginning with the earliest days of protest in the 1870s. It was during the chaotic, but also dynamic and energized, period at the beginning of the 20th century that many of the historic victories for women's rights occurred in Russia.

The parallel development of these movements contrasts with the history of revolution and women's suffrage in America. While many women took part in the American Revolution that resulted in the colonies' separation from British power, major victories for women's civil rights, including suffrage, did

not occur until a century after that revolutionary period. Rights for women were never explicitly tied to the agenda of American revolutionaries, or to demands made of the fledgling American government. In contrast, in early 20th-century Russia, the struggle for the vote happened simultaneously for both men and women.

This simultaneity compelled women to consider how the struggle for women's rights would relate to the larger struggle for political change in Russia and vice-versa. Were women's rights just one part of the larger movement, or a separate movement in its own right? Would women activists be best served by emphasizing their common ties to men fighting for political change, or by working on their own? These were questions that Russian women answered in many different ways.

Diverse Forms of Activism

During and preceding the revolutionary period, Russian women ran civic and charitable organizations, such as the Society for Cheap Lodging, a shelter for women escaping violence in the home. These groups sought to improve the lives of women in Russia, but how much did they connect women's equality with larger struggles for social justice? Ruthchild argues that they did quite a bit, often fueled by their own experience of being held back from higher education or professional goals because of their gender (Ruthchild, 30-36).

After 1905 more radical groups began to emerge. The Women's Equal Rights Union, the first women's political group devoted to achieving equal rights for women, appeared soon after "Bloody Sunday," the massacre of unarmed demonstrators protesting against the imperial Tsar Nicholas II. The union was particularly broad in its influence and makeup, including women from many political backgrounds, and deliberately framed its focus on women's rights as part of the larger struggle for political liberation from the Tsarist regime (Ibid, 47). From here the momentum of women organizers grew, but the complexities of differing priorities and loyalties increased as well.

While grassroots organizing and publications flourished, institutional recognition of women's rights was difficult to obtain. This became clear during proceedings of the Duma, a parliamentary council the tsarist government was pressured to convoke following the Revolution of 1905. Increased citizen participation in governance was the focus of these assemblies, and women had high hopes that this would naturally include support for their own right to vote. Would the call for "universal suffrage" from the Duma be truly universal? Women were barred from voting or holding office in the Duma, and so had to rely on their ability to influence male members of the legislative body. The question of women's suffrage was given significant time and attention, and parties such as the Trudoviks argued to explicitly include women in the written demands for political rights. Opposition from other groups, however, led to more debate than action even before the assemblies were dissolved by Tsar Nicholas (Ibid, 71-101).

The major activists of the movement carried on and in 1908 the First All-Russian Women's Congress, the largest legal women's gathering in Russia up to that point, was held. Competing ideas about the goals of women's activism remained hotly contested. Could bourgeois (middle class) women truly be allies to worker and peasant women? Was women's suffrage central to liberation or merely a distraction that would cause divisions between men and women? This landmark meeting provided a space for speakers to argue passionately about the role of women in rapidly changing Russian society.

While the years following the first congress held disappointments, including the introduction and failure of more proposals for female suffrage at the third and fourth Duma, women would soon play a critical and visible role in the dramatic culminating events of this revolutionary period.

On February 23, 1917, what would come to be understood as the first day of the February Revolution, International Women's Day was observed by female activists with organized gatherings and strikes. Despite calls to wait for male Bolshevik party leaders' permission, women took to the streets, factories, and public trolleys. Women incited both men and women to join the growing crowds, in many instances overcoming the hesitancy of male factory workers, setting into motion many of the tactics that led to the final overthrow of Russia's tsarist government. An editorial in the Socialist paper Pravda published a week after the uprising proclaimed "The women were the first to come out on the streets of Petrograd on their Women's day. The women in Moscow in many cases determined the mood of the military; they went to the barracks and convinced the soldiers to come over to the side of the Revolution. Hail the women!" (ibid, 220 - 222).

Following the February Revolution, women were well positioned to argue that "women's rights [were] not... a frivolous demand of 'privileged women,' but a natural consequence of women's courageous actions in sparking the initial demonstrations and then moving events forward" (ibid, 225). One month later on March 19th, 1917, a mass women's suffrage demonstration was held in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), during which forty thousand women marched to the state Duma and refused to leave until they were granted the right to vote and run for political office. On July 20, 1917, the provisional government made this decree official for all women over the age of twenty.

Revolutionary Intersections: Class and Gender

Economic class – the disparity between rich and poor, owners, workers, and peasants - was the defining catalyst of political and revolutionary history in 19th and 20th century Russia. The revolutionary movements of the 1860's and 70's were largely driven by the goal of liberation for Russian peasants who were living as serfs. In later years, the liberation of peasants became linked to the liberation of Russian workers and the socialist economic vision that developed in the first half of the 20th century.

How did the rights of women, and women's right to vote, fit into this history? Some revolutionary party leaders claimed that women workers and peasants were not interested in the right to vote because they were more focused on gaining liberation from land and factory owners. For these women, so went the argument, their class identity, and the oppression they faced because of it, was a more immediate concern than political rights denied to them based on their gender. Was this accurate?

There were many ways that the diverse Russian society of this time created competing priorities and goals during the revolutionary period. Some who were politically conservative and did not want to see a total overthrow of the current government, worried that women's suffrage would make Russian citizens more politically radical. Some activists who wanted more dramatic political change feared that women would only vote for conservative leaders (ibid, 239). There were assumptions made about men, as well, including the belief that peasant men would be appalled by giving women the right to vote (ibid, 69). Likewise, some socialist men resented the presence of "bourgeois" (middle class) women who were working for women's suffrage. These men pressured socialist and working-class women not to work with suffragists, saying that although they might agree on the issue of women's rights, wealthy women were part of the oppressive class and could never be true allies of working men and women. Women activists such as Alexandra Kollontai voiced this opinion as well, arguing that a

feminist movement inclusive of many different classes would be a threat to working-class solidarity. Bourgeois feminists, she believed, were entirely ignorant about the real struggle facing poor and working women.

While these tensions were present, we learn from Rochelle Ruthchild's research that this is only part of the story. Ruthchild demonstrates that there were many ways in which women from different segments of society worked together, and that men and women from upper class, worker, and peasant backgrounds responded in many different ways to the intersection of women's rights and the Russian revolutions.

One way we see this is in engagement with women's groups. As the Women's Union was forming, similar peasant women's groups organized in Moscow and Voronezh. During this time a union member wrote that "the great majority, almost all, old and young peasant women warmly support the idea of women's equality and that they found the idea of proxy votes by males "laughable" (Ibid, 51). Later on, the petition for women's suffrage presented at the Second Duma showed signatures from entire villages of peasant men and women (Ibid, 91). The idea that peasant men were more wary of women's suffrage than upper class men is also questioned by historical sources. "At the founding congress of the Peasant Union in October 1905, the majority of delegates voted to support women's suffrage, explaining their decision with a statement declaring that 'since we don't exclude women from using the land, it makes no sense to deny them political rights'" (Ibid, 51).

As calls for women's rights grew more intense following the February Revolution, worker and peasant women grew more engaged, as well. "On March 5th, women from four factories held a meeting at which they called for their sisters to unite with their proletarian brothers and fight for women's rights, among other issues. On the same day a meeting of twelve hundred credit union employees, after heated debate, passed four resolutions. The second of these called for Constituent Assembly elections based on universal suffrage 'without distinction of sex'" (Ibid, 224). At the large scale marches for women's rights that followed, the presence of worker and peasant women can be seen clearly (Ibid, 9).

Learn more about the intersections between class and gender in Russian women's political activism in the accompanying video interview with Rochelle Ruthchild.

Classroom Applications and Approaches

Entry Point Activities

Studying this moment of history offers students the opportunity not only to learn more deeply about the revolutionary period in Russia, and the global context of movements for women's rights, but to consider larger questions about political change in diverse societies. To prepare for such conversations, it is helpful for students to articulate their own "points of entry," identifying the assumptions that inform their claims and opinions.

Writing and Reflection Prompts

1. Ask students to imagine that they are invited to a summit on improving opportunities for high school students. Would they go if it were run by a group they disliked or with whom they disagreed? What factors would impact their decision to go or not?

2. Another option is to provide students with a handout including the following prompts:

"There are some beliefs on which you should never compromise, even if it would help you reach a larger goal."
"Compromise is always part of working with other people. "

Ask students to briefly write if they agree or disagree with each statement. Then, circulate around the room trying to find one student who agrees and one who disagrees with their own answers. Ask students to share the reasoning that led them to that stance.

Continuum Line-Up

This is a way for students to visually represent their opinion on a question or event, as well as illustrate that a range of opinions may be possible on one "polarized" issue. In this activity, one end of the room or white / black board is designated one extreme of an issue, the other end of the room or board the other. Students can either physically stand next to their position along the line or write their initials along a line on a white or blackboard. It can be interesting to have the students comment on the distribution of opinions represented along the continuum before they discuss their individual opinions.

Classroom Activity 1: The First All-Women's Russian Congress

During this period of Russian history, individuals and groups were actively shaping the political destiny of their country. In this activity, students explore these figures through role play and discussion, presenting an opportunity for students to consider the significance of multiple stakeholders in a political ecosystem while developing skill-based communication literacy.

Objectives

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Materials

1. The First All-Women's Russian Congress: Briefing Document (Appendix A)
2. Congress Attendee Profiles (Appendices C-K)

Procedure

a. Setting the Scene

Explain to students that they will be participating in the **First All-Russian Women's Congress**. Pass out the Briefing Document (Appendix A). Read through the document together, prompting students to answer the questions within it.

Perspectives and Process Writing

Tell students that each of them will be taking on the identity of one of the individuals who lived during this time, and holding their own congress to debate and discuss questions about the future of revolution and women's rights in Russia. Pass out profiles from **Appendices C-K**. There are nine profiles provided. Students can work in teams for each profile, or have multiple students individually review the same profiles. Have students fill out the process writing worksheet (**Appendix B**) to analyze the perspective and goals of the individual they will be representing.

a. Setting the Scene (Continued)

Questions for Discussion

“The main point of conflict between the worker’s group and the feminists centered on three issues: primacy of economic factors, separatism, and suffrage” (Ruthchild, 126).

As participants in the first All-Russian Women’s Congress, students will be asked to address the following questions:

- What should the major goals of the First All-Russian Women’s Congress be?
- Should women work on these goals alone or with men?
- Should the fight for women’s suffrage be a top priority during the revolutionary period? Why or why not?
- Should the current government be overthrown?
- Is it possible for bourgeois men and women to work together with working and peasant men and women?
- What should be the role of women in any future government?

b. Conversational Strategies

The following strategies can be used to add structure to the congress discussion:

Socratic Seminar as Classroom Convention

Have students form two concentric circles: the inner circle will be participants in the Women’s Congress, while the outer circle will be active observers and spectators. This format can be used to help students develop awareness of how productive discussions develop, to provide feedback to individual students about their role in classroom discussion, and as a method of assessment. After they have filled out graphic organizers, give students in the inner circle 10-15 minutes to address discussion questions. After 10-15 minutes have students on the outer circle reflect on the conversation thus far. What are the major sources of conflict between the participants? On what points have they managed to agree? Do you think their discussion has been productive? What suggestions would you give for improving the discussion? If there is time, have students switch from inner to outer circle and continue the conversation.

Final Word

This activity format is a way for students to dramatize several different perspectives on an issue or debate. Each involved student role-plays the perspective of a person or group of people [Ex: Socialist Feminists, Radical Feminists, Male Socialists]. Students sit facing each other; one will have the “final word.” This student begins by stating their perspective in 1 minute or less. Each remaining student then has 1 minute to respond to the original statement. At the end, the first student has the final word: they have 30 seconds to respond to what the other three have said. The teacher can repeat this, in turn giving each student in the group the “final word.” After the activity the class as a whole can engage in a larger discussion about the issues raised by each person or group.

b. Conversational Strategies (continued)**Hot Seat**

Students are picked, either one at a time or in a group of two or three, to sit in the “hot seat” and portray an individual, group, or idea (examples: Vera Figner, the Tsar, “Socialism”, etc...) The rest of the class then asks the student questions about their experiences, opinions, and ideas.

Wrap Up and Reflection

Following the students’ congress, have students report back about their experience while still in character. What do they see as the future for differing revolutionary groups in Russia? Did their own goals or perspectives shift? Who might they want to work with to accomplish their goals for Russian society? What challenges and opportunities do they see in working with activists from diverse segments of Russian society?

Classroom Activity 2: Close Looking and Primary Sources

In “Equality and Revolution,” Rochelle Ruthchild addresses the multiple perspectives and narratives that have been shaped around the role of women activists in revolutionary Russia. When confronting these multiple claims, it is powerful for students to engage directly with primary source materials.

Have students watch the film clip once and record answers to the following prompts:

What do you See in the clip?
What do you Think is happening here?
What do you Wonder about the clip or what is happening in it?
Make a Claim about the film
Give Support to your claim
Ask a Question related to your claim.

Give opportunities for multiple viewings: ask students to share their responses to the prompts above before viewing a second time. During this viewing, provide more guided questions:

How would you describe the tone or mood of the gathering?
Who is in attendance?
What clues can you gather about the demographics of the crowd?
What sources of diversity do you notice, if any?

After students have shared their observations, show video clip of Rochelle Ruthchild giving background on the march.

“Written accounts, augmented by photos and newsreel, show the cross-class nature of the march. Those wearing hats (signifying more affluent women) and those wearing kerchiefs (the head coverings of female workers and peasants) mingled freely in the crowd....” (Full account on Ruthchild, 227)

How does the context provided by Ruthchild compare to the student’s observations and conclusions about the event? What is the significance of the crowd’s economic diversity?

Learn more about this march in the accompanying video interview with Rochelle Ruthchild.

Further Resources

1. ***Equality and Revolution: Women's Rights in the Russian Empire, 1905-1917***

by Rochelle Ruthchild. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

2. ***Five Sisters: Women Against the Tsar***

by Barbara Engel and Clifford Rosenthal. Routledge, 1992.

3. **Library of Alexandra Kollantai's Works**

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/kollonta/>

A full library of Kollantai's works in English translation, including a number of pieces describing the participation of women in the 1917 revolution and the philosophical foundation's for Kollantai's response to the "women's question." The site also includes a biography of Kollantai and an image gallery.

4. **"The New Woman" at Seventeen Moments in Soviet History**

<http://www.soviethistory.org/index.php?page=subject&SubjectID=1917woman&Year=1917>

Part of a larger collection of educational modules in Soviet history, "The New Woman" features a short subject essay about women revolutionaries in 1917, as well as images of relevant posters and documents, and a photo essay. With free registration, users can also access a number of primary source documents related to the topics.

Appendices

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Name: _____

Appendix B: Worksheet

What four elements of your identity or background do you think most influence your beliefs and goals?

What do you think are the most important issue in Russian society today?

Why are you attending the First All-Russian Women's Congress?

What do you think should be the main goal of the Women's Congress?

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 the 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, in 1919, started the "Women's Department," 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

"...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... 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)

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 was 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 leaders 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 Afutile 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 (Ruthchild, 122).

Quotes

"Existing laws give men unlimited power, and women - submission" (Ibid, 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 others who fought against the tsar. At first Anna tried to work for political change through government approved groups such as the Jewish Section of the Society for Poor Relief and later the Ladies Committee of the Society for Poor Relief, both charities. 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, at the time of the Women's Congress Paul was a key figure of opposition to women's suffrage, arguing that it was too soon to give women the right to vote. He warned that including women's suffrage in the fight for political representation would anger peasant men, making it more difficult to work together.

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. Although he later ended up reversing his position, at this time Paul argued that the party platform was already "overloaded" and that advocating for women's suffrage was "unrealistic" (Ruthchild, 65-66).

Quotes

"[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 he at one point 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 toughened, 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).

"One of the chief tasks of the twentieth century... consists of keeping women in the sphere most suited to them - the family and the home" (Ibid, 165).