The Bolshevik Party on Women's Rights and Equality 1917-1920

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Abstract

(Key words: Bolshevik Party, Women’s Rights, Gender Equality)

This thesis deals with the opinions and views regarding women’s rights and equality by the Bolshevik Party in Russia during the period of 1917 to 1920. This study examines the Bolshevik party’s rhetoric involving gender issues, primarily that of women, and the proposed methods of creating a better environment for women. This work relies heavily on Vladimir Lenin and Alexandra Kollontai’s speeches and writings which express their views on women’s equality and the rights of women. It also relies on the writing of Louise Bryant, a woman from the United States who was present during the Bolshevik revolution for the initial six months, as she expresses her own opinions on the work of the Bolshevik party regarding women’s rights. This thesis addresses the initial steps made by the Bolshevik party towards liberating women and creating gender equality during 1917-1920, but primarily deals with the ideas expressed regarding the issue.
THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

The Bolshevik Party on Women’s Rights and Equality

1917-1920

By

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A Thesis submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2011
The members of the Defense Committee approve the thesis of Elizabeth Beck defended on April 14, 2011.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Honor’s Program at Florida State University for first introducing me to the prospect of undergraduate research as a freshman and continuing to provide opportunities and encouragement for developing an undergraduate thesis throughout the past 3 years. I would also like to thank my family. My parents for encouraging me to take on such an endeavor even when it did not seem possible and my younger brother, whose frequent competition inspired me to go one step further. I would lastly like to thank the members of my committee. I thank my thesis director, Dr. Jonathan Grant, who began talking with me about my thesis at the end of the spring term in 2010 and has continued to work with me ever since. I also thank my other committee members, Dr. Nathan Stoltzfus and Dr. Gants, for agreeing to patiently work with me through my research and their anticipation of the final results of the project.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Throughout the Bolshevik revolution, Bolshevik leaders, such as Lenin, wanted women to be involved in the revolution as well as in the building of socialism. In theory, the Bolshevik party sought to give more rights to women to make them equal to men in Russia. Through the speeches and efforts made by Lenin and Kollontai, it appeared that women would become more equal and in a better position in society in Russia than anywhere else in the world. These leaders argued that socialism sought to provide equality to all working class individuals, which also included leveling the rights of men and women so that they would also be equal. During the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent years under Lenin, the Soviet Union sought to be revolutionary in its treatment of women and propelled theories of equality that could not be matched by other nations.

In addition to Lenin and Kollontai’s views on women’s rights and equality, outside supporters of the movement also found inspiration in the focus on women’s rights. Louise Bryant, a woman from the United States who was also sympathetic to Marxist ideas, travelled to Russia during the revolution. During the six months she spent in the country, she wrote of her experiences and her awe in the ideas regarding women’s rights and the actions being made towards achieving those ideas.

From the period of 1917 until 1920, these radical ideas on equality began to be put into place and the new Soviet Union was rapidly becoming a model for equal gender relations. Although after 1920 many of the ideals presented by Lenin, Kollontai, and Bryant did not come to fruition, the intentions of the Bolshevik party in regards to the woman’s question could still
be seen. Even today, the theories of a completely gender equal system that gave women rights and assisted them in gaining independence from patriarchal society, still prove to be influential. Ultimately, despite the turns the communist party in Russia would take, their initial ideas regarding women that promoted equal rights reflect a party dedicated to the improvement of women’s condition and the importance of sex equality.
Chapter II: Vladimir Lenin

In Lenin’s Speech at the First All Russia Congress of Working Women, Lenin stated “one of the hardest things in any country has been to stir the women into action. There can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take part in it,” indicating the perceived importance of women to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Lenin served as the political face of the revolution and had been conducting socialist revolutionary activities in Russia for a significant amount and, therefore, serves as a preeminent source on women’s role in the revolution and in indicating what socialism could do for women. As a result, in his speech he is blatantly stating that women were not simply beneficial to the Bolshevik revolution but were, in fact, a necessity.

In a 1920 interview with Clara Zetkin, a women’s rights activist and leader in the Communist Party of Germany, he describes his respect of women for their contributions to the revolution in Russia. In Zetkin’s report, Lenin explains that “proletarian women showed up splendidly during the revolution. We would not have won without them, or hardly. That is my opinion,” emphasizing the importance he placed on women due to their involvement in the revolution. By crediting them with greatly aiding in the Bolshevik Revolution three years after the fact in 1920, it can be seen that throughout his time as head of the party he desired equality for women for all they sacrificed in the revolution.

He continues by stating “In all civilized countries, even the most advanced, women are actually no more than domestic slaves. Women do not enjoy full equality in any capitalist state, not even in the freest of republics. One of the primary tasks of the Soviet Republic is to abolish all restrictions on women’s rights. The soviet government has completely abolished divorce proceedings, that source of bourgeois degradation, repression, and humiliation.” This statement indicates Lenin’s intended purpose for the women in the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik revolution succeeded. He suggests that the oppression and inequality of women is a characteristic associated with capitalist nations and, since capitalism is directly opposed to socialism, the oppression of women should also be in opposition to the ideas of socialism.

Clara Zetkin affirms Lenin’s belief in equality of the sexes being necessary for socialist ideology to be achieved; she argues that Lenin saw the equality of women as a principal that no communist could dispute. She also states that Lenin believed that women’s rights were essential to the “mass movement,” based on her numerous discusses with him. Through her confirmation, it is seen that Lenin desired rights for women and would not feel as though socialism had truly succeeded without it, therefore placing an enormous emphasis on the advancement of women in Russia.

Lenin refers to the women in capitalist countries as “domestic slaves,” insinuating that they are not treated as equals to men; they are not treated as equals in any sense because he is comparing their treatment to slavery. He refers to women’s role in capitalist society as servitude towards men and other individuals in their lives where their only intent is to serve

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3 Lenin, 60
4 Zetkin, 685
others and work to ensure other peoples pleasure. He goes on to say that this would not be the case in Soviet society.

August Bebel, a German Marxist and one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, writes in his book, *Woman Under Socialism* in 1904, “The reign of the mother-right implied communism; equality for all; the rise of the father-right implied the reign of private property, and, with it, the oppression and enslavement of women." Through his statement, he is expressing Lenin’s idea that, through socialism, women can be freed of their domestic “bondage” and gain equality by becoming independent of men. He argues that patriarchy involves woman remaining the lesser being and this concept is associated with capitalism through his mention of private property. He contrasts this with socialism, where women are free, and therefore all individuals are equal. Bebel lends precedence to Lenin’s arguments for socialism for women by expressing ideas for equality through socialism outside of the contexts of Russia and the revolution.

Lenin continues to support socialism as an ideology with women’s interest in mind by arguing Bebel’s point that socialism ensures women’s freedom and that capitalism ensures the continued oppression of women. He insists that “Wherever there are landowners, capitalists and merchants, women cannot be the equal of men even before the law. Where there are no landowners, capitalists or merchants, and where the government of the working people is building a new life without these exploiters, men and women are equal before the law." He is arguing that in capitalist society where individuals own land (the majority of land owners being

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6 Lenin, 76
men); women cannot be equal from a legal standpoint and will never be equal under such a political structure.

However, he argues, because under socialism the government treats the working people as equals, women must be equal by law. Bebel again adds precedent to this argument by stating that it is the working man’s duty to educate women “into a fellow combatant in the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat from capitalism.” This argument further fortifies Lenin’s assertion that socialism will provide equal rights to women and is his attempt to get them to support him and become active in politics because he is creating a system that will work with and for them.

He also clarifies that he wants women’s equality to not only be a declaration written within the law, but wants the equality to actually be executed and to truly exist. He argues that “Equality before the law is not necessarily equality in fact. We want working woman to be the equal of the working man not only before the law but in actual fact,” showing his desire for women to not be “technically” equal under the legal system but to actually be treated as equals in life. He wants women and men to all be recognized the same under the law with the same weight applied to their work and their value.

He also reiterates the fact that he wants women to be involved in this creation of real equality because, without their cooperation, it is not possible. “For this, working women must take an increasing part in the administration of socialized enterprises and in the administration of the state. By taking part in administration, women will quickly learn and will catch up with

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7 Bebel, 90
8 Lenin, 76
men. Elect more working women to the soviet, both communist women and nonparty women. In this statement, women are once again approached in an equal fashion by Lenin, indicating his sincerity in his desire for increased involvement in the government on behalf of women. He encourages women to become involved in government administration and claims that, once they begin work, they will learn to work as efficiently as men, which gives credit to the abilities of women while also placing faith in their ability to function in the government with men.

Prior to the revolution, when the Bolshevik party first tried to target women for their involvement, they were faced with many challenges and failures. The cause for directing campaigns towards women eventually became viewed as hopeless for a time due to the lack of reception from the women. The absence of response from their campaigns lead many members of the party to consider rural women “backwards” and that there was no way to get through to them about the importance of political involvement. However, Lenin felt targeting the women had value and was a useful job and, therefore, did not give up after the failures of the early periods of the 1900’s. By January 1914, Lenin approved editorial board consisting of Krupskaia, Inessa, Stal, Samoilova, Anna Elizarova, and Elena Rozmirovich to begin work on the Rabotnista, a newspaper targeting women. The inaugural issue was released on Woman’s Day 1914. A few years later, the effort to involve women would be further rejuvenated. Recognizing

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9 Lenin, 76-77
women’s new visibility after gaining the right to vote in 1917, all of the socialist parties, and the Bolsheviks in particular, intensified their efforts to garner support from women.¹¹

Lenin uses the abolition of divorce proceedings as an example of steps that the Bolshevik party has already taken to free women from their “humiliation.” He conveys that, in a society where divorce proceedings are necessary, the women are degraded because their request to leave their husbands must be granted by an outside individual and that they cannot leave their spouse out of their own desire to do so. He proudly abolished that practice and insinuates that he will continue to grant women equal rights on par with men in order to create a socialist society. Lenin even continues by boasting that “Nowhere else in the world have equality and freedom for working women been so fully established,¹²” emphasizing the fact that just through the divorce decree, women have already become more free in Russia than in other countries throughout the world. This shows that, at least in his public policy, Lenin had full intention of including women in his socialist society and wanted them to become involved in public life.

However, Lenin also expresses irritation over women in socialist parties placing marriage and sex issues over those of the party as a whole. In his interview with Clara Zetkin, he informs her that her party should not be addressing marriage and sex first and foremost, but should instead be focusing on the proletariat and fighting counter-revolutionaries and their activities against socialism. Through this irritation, it is seen that, although Lenin speaks on behalf of women’s rights, he still remains insistent that the class struggle and maintaining

¹² Lenin, 60
socialist revolutions are the primary purpose, and that equality comes with this priority. He states that “nowadays all the thoughts of Communist women, of working women, should be centered on the proletarian revolution, which will lay the foundation, among other things, for the necessary revision of marital and sexual relations.” Through this statement, he ensures Zetkin that, through the party and the revolution, marriage and sex will have revolutions, but the focus must be on obtaining and maintaining communism. By focusing on revolutionary activity, equality will present itself because, as Lenin argues, it is the natural way of socialism.

Despite his expressed agitation for the focus on women’s issues solely, Lenin continues to elaborate on his plans for women in Soviet Russia. He states “We are setting up model institutions, dining rooms and nurseries, that will emancipate women from housework,” which indicates his intention of freeing women in order for them to be active in the building of socialism. He says that “the building of socialism will begin only when we have achieved the complete equality of women and undertake the new work together with women who have been emancipated from that petty, stultifying, unproductive work.” According to Lenin, the housework that women are expected to do is merely holding them back and disabling them from participating in the construction of a socialist society because it is preventing them from becoming workers.

Lenin believes that by taking away the need for women to take care of children and feed their families at all times, they will be able to better participate in public life. Kollontai, a prominent female leader in the Bolshevik party, encouraged the party to appeal to the working

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13 Zetkin, 692
14 Lenin, 69
15 Lenin, 69
woman and her every day issues and pointed out the important role that women’s domestic skills could play in social and public life.\textsuperscript{16} As a result, Lenin is suggests that dining halls and nurseries for children will be set up that will free most Bolshevik women from this work that he considers to be petty, insignificant, yet part of a woman’s every day issues. By creating such institutions that remove these responsibilities, Lenin shows his desire to create equality for women as to get them involved as working class women.

Not only did the Bolshevik party want women to be involved as a member of the working class, they also wanted them to be involved in the civil war effort and the construction of the communist order.\textsuperscript{17} Since women made up a large minority of the workers, Lenin desperately wanted them to become communists and to be involved in the party as well as in the construction of the communist state. This emphasis on women playing a part in politics is also emphasized in his speeches. He states “women played an insignificant part in politics, even in the most advanced and free capitalist countries. Our task is to make politics available to every working woman,\textsuperscript{18}” showing that Lenin’s intention of removing women from household work was to encourage them to participate in politics and the building of the state. As Bebel writes, “the moment woman acquires equal rights with man, the sense of her duties will be quickened,” arguing that by giving women equal rights they will soon begin to support the institution that allowed them such equality.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Wood, Elizabeth A. The Baba and the Comrade. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, (1997), 68
\textsuperscript{18} Lenin, 69
\textsuperscript{19} Bebel, 224
However, despite Lenin’s insistence on freeing the women of Russia, other members of the party were not as supportive. Opinions on the woman’s question varied. Well educated and long standing members of the party supported expanding women’s civil, political, and economic rights based because the comrades were knowledgeable of Marxism and its goals. However, less educated members, who were frequently newer members of the party, were not so willing to expand rights to women to such an extent, largely based on their lack of knowledge of Marxist ideology. In an interview with Clara Zetkin, Lenin openly criticized these newer members of the party, once again showing his support of female equality. He argued that it was ridiculous for men to merely sit and watch women wear themselves out and that husbands should purge their minds of women being their property and to invite them to participate in social and political activities outside of the home.20

This invitation, however, was not only directed at soviet working women. He desperately desired for non-party women to also be involved in the socialist state as he recognized that, throughout the Bolshevik revolution, the power of the soviet comrades alone was barely enough to preserve the Bolsheviks power. He writes, “here, too, the participation of working women is essential – not only of party members and politically conscious women, but also the non-party women and those who are at least politically conscious...it was difficult for us to fight on the battlefield...because the number of people...who came whole heartedly to our aid with their own labor was much too small...Soviet power can appreciate as much as the help given by masses on non-party women.”21” Lenin is, therefore, treating the women of Russia

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20 Clements, 192
21 Lenin, 70
equally in his quest for equality amongst the sexes. He is discussing women’s involvement not only in the Bolshevik party but also in the soviet government that he is in the process of creating. He does not limit the participation in politics and in the state to only active participants of the Bolshevik party, but is also including non-party women because he realizes that his party is way too small individually to support the state. This call for equality amongst parties while discussing the equality of women indicates his sincerity in his attempt to equalize males and females in Soviet Russia. In the same way that he appreciates Soviet women working and becoming involved outside of the home, he also extends his appreciation of women who are not active in the Bolshevik party and conveys that he will create equality of all women, not just Bolshevik women, as long as they cooperate with the communist state.

In Lenin’s speech, “To the Working Women”, he continues to encourage women to become involved in politics and argues that socialism should be supported because it is naturally equal, which further shows the intention to support and include women in the soviet government. He declares that “Working women must take a bigger part in the elections...The soviet government is the first and only government in the world to have abolished all the privileges of men in property questions.”22 Also, in the December of 1920, the eighth congress of soviets wanted women introduced into all administrative bodies, thus pushing for women’s involvement in all levels of society.23 Through this, the Bolsheviks are continuing to encourage women to become active in politics by voting in elections and being passionate about the politics of their country.

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22 Lenin, 76
23 Wood, 75
Lenin shows his dedication to women’s involvement in the government and continuously appeals to working women to become further involved in the building of socialism because he has an interest in the rights of women. He then goes on to ensure that the government will treat the soviet and women fairly. He insists that women will be elected to the soviet and will be represented. He also includes equality in this by letting it be known that not only communist women will be in the soviet, but also women who have different party affiliations as long as they are cooperative with the state. Through this speech, Lenin is encouraging women that, not only does he want them to be involved in the government, but also assuring them that the government will treat them kindly and will appreciate their work.

In addition to encouraging women to participate in soviet government because he can guarantee equality, he also discourages women from fighting against the system and states that doing so is bourgeois and will only keep inequality in place. Although many women in the cities were adjusting to the changing family system, those in rural areas were not as willing to accept the approach made by the Bolshevik party towards women’s issues. In these areas, many women (and men) were illiterate, the women did not want to attend meetings, and their husbands did not want them to either. Also, the focus remained on agricultural production as opposed to factory work, which also made them distrust the changing policies. As a result, they did not trust Lenin or the Bolshevik party and were prone to resist the changes.\(^{24}\) This has also been an issue earlier in socialisms history, shown by Bebel who writes “It is mainly the Socialist working women, who are vigorously agitating for the idea (of political equality),\(^ {25}\)” showing that

\(^{24}\) Wood, 83  
\(^{25}\) Bebel, 223
it is mainly the working class women who support the ideas of the changing family and female independence and equality. However, the women who do not fall under the working class are not arguing for their own freedom and are hesitant to accept change, as they do not necessarily see immediate benefit.

As a result, Lenin argues that “women who stand outside this movement are inevitably a stronghold of bourgeois ideas and a target for counter-revolutionary propaganda, both in the West and in the East.” Through this statement, he is suggesting that women who stand outside of the socialist equality movement are holding onto capitalist and bourgeois ideas; this behavior is not encouraged by the communists. This approach to encouraging women’s equality does not involve emphasizing benefits for supporting the soviets and supporting female equality, but discourages resistance by stating that it is bourgeois and against the worker and the state. As a result, women will be encouraged to avoid behavior that would result in being outcast as opposed to directly supporting soviet ideals.

Lenin continues to argue against capitalist behaviors by stating “The Third Congress of the Communist International warns working women against any kind of cooperation or agreement with bourgeois feminists...Women must never forget that the slavery of women is rooted in the bourgeois system and that to end this slavery a new communist society has to be brought into being.” This, found in the 6th theses from Methods and Forms of Work Among Communist Party Women, once again attacks capitalism and informs soviet women that associating with feminist movements that are not socialist in nature is a bourgeois activity and

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26 Lenin, 118
27 Lenin, 120
is not approved of by the government. Although this continues to elaborate on Lenin’s intention of creating a society in which men and women are equal, it hinders his argument towards equality by stating that not all equality is necessarily good. He suggests that attempts at freedom that are not founded within the communist party and are instead from capitalist nations and bourgeois in nature are not actual freedom and should, therefore, be avoided.

Through this, he is insisting that women in Russia can only find equality through the communist system and must avoid other methods because, not only will they not find true equality, they will also be rejected by soviet society as well. However, this method still shows Lenin’s support for women in the Soviet state and his desire for them to participate, although it limits them in the ways they can go about fighting for their own freedom. As opposed to using incentives to motivate the women, he is using disincentives to discourage them from resorting to bourgeois methods to become involved and be on the same level as men.
Chapter III: Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai, a longstanding supporter of socialism in Russia, ultimately siding with the Bolshevik party, served as the People’s Commissar for Social Welfare following the revolution in 1917. As a leader in the party, she was considered to be the party’s most accomplished female orator and frequently gave speeches regarding the woman’s question.\(^{28}\)

As the commissar for social welfare and a politically active female in the Bolshevik party, Kollontai supported sex equality and expressed many arguments for the improvement of women’s rights and their involvement within the Russian government and the Bolshevik party. In *The Social Basis of the Woman Question* she claims that “social democracy was the first to include in its programme the demand for the equalization of the rights of women with those of men; in speeches and in print the party demands always and everywhere the withdrawal of limitations affecting women; it is the party’s influence alone that has forced other parties and governments to carry out reforms in favor of women.”\(^{29}\) She is, therefore, presenting the fact that the Social Democrats (including the Bolsheviks) had proposed the idea of equalizing the genders and sought to enact law that would allow women to be equal with men. In addition to supporting the equality of the sexes in their ideas, they influenced government before the revolution to rule in favor of women’s rights.

In addition to the issue of women’s rights, Kollontai strongly encouraged and believed in the equality of women with men as opposed to focusing solely on the advancement of women. Kollontai’s arguments were frequently similar to those of the feminists, though she argued

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\(^{28}\) Clements, 127

against feminism. Much of her written work deals with issues regarding women’s equality and she consistently addressed Bolshevik leaders about their stance on women’s rights. What differentiated Kollontai’s views from feminism was that she viewed socialism as the solution to women’s problems and that, with the Bolsheviks, sweeping revolution would liberate them.\textsuperscript{30}

For the Bolsheviks, the importance was the equality of the community as a whole, which, as a result, required women to be granted rights on the same level as men but not to be focused on as separate from other groups. Kollontai could not and did not condone feminism because it was viewed as a capitalist concept that sought to place women’s rights above other groups’ rights, as opposed to absolute class equality.

Therefore, Kollontai posed many arguments against feminism, including the argument that feminists supported World War I, a fight many working women disapproved of at the time.\textsuperscript{31} She provides an example that states “The class conscious worker must understand that the value of male labour is dependent on the value of female labour, and that by threatening to replace male workers with cheaper female labour the capitalists can put pressure on men’s wages, lowering them to the level of women’s wages. Therefore, only a lack of understanding could lead one to see the question of equal pay for equal work as a purely “women’s issue” or to accuse those who bring forward this demand of feminism.”\textsuperscript{32}\textsuperscript{a} Through this example, she shows that feminism focuses solely on women and that this focus does not advance other individuals in society, or the women. She argues that the result will be men being degraded to

\textsuperscript{30} Ruthchild, Rochelle Goldberg. \textit{Equality and Revolution}. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, (2010), 244
\textsuperscript{31} McDermid & Hillyar, 50
\textsuperscript{32} Holt, 126
the same status as women in regards to pay and social liberties as opposed to women rising to the level experienced by men.

Kollontai also had to give her assurance that her women’s sections were not feminist in nature because many male comrades were not fond of women’s organizations, though central party authorities and women’s activists supported it, because they viewed the sections as factious and focusing on the single group as opposed to the whole. Since male Bolshevik party members viewed the separate women’s sections as feminist, they were, in turn, viewed as capitalist. However, party leaders argued that these sections were not separate or factions but instead groups working for the party, not against it. The women’s sections were defended by stating that they were not raising these issues in order to separate women from men but rather to “weld” and “forge” female and male workers into a united force for the overthrow of the old regime. Thus, Kollontai as well as other party leaders struggled to form their women’s divisions and focus solely on women’s issues because they were viewed as separatist, not because they were focused on women’s equality. Therefore, they had to focus on the fact that these groups were intended to propagate to women in order to get them involved in communism and that they were attempting to create gender equality, not woman-only empowerment.

Therefore, her support is shown to be for equality in a way that will improve the conditions of both men and women, though Kollontai places most of her attention on women and bringing them to the same standards as men. As a result, she supports the Bolshevik party

33 Wood, 71
34 Wood, 76
stating “women will only become free and equal in a world where labour has been socialized and where communism has been victorious,\textsuperscript{35}” indicating that true equality of the sexes will only be achieved through socialism. Therefore, by being a proponent of equality and women’s rights, she must be aligned with the socialists because they support the equality of all for the betterment of everyone’s lives, not just one group of people. She continues by writing “every member of society – and that means every working woman and every citizen, male and female – has the right to demand that the state and community concern itself with the welfare of all,\textsuperscript{36}” once again emphasizing the role of equality in her arguments regarding women and their advancement in society.

Although she pursues the idea that both men and women should be able to demand that their government provide for them in the fairest and most efficient way possible, she places a large emphasis on the women because they do not currently hold the right. Kollontai argued throughout her leadership that women’s divisions could exist and call women into action while still supporting the party as a whole.\textsuperscript{37} She felt that these sections, while still being dedicated to class issues, could act on behalf of women as opposed to merely creating an image to encourage women to join the party and participate. In her article published in Pravda, she argues that the best way to recruit women into the party was to show them what the Bolsheviks could do for them, as opposed to just talking about it.\textsuperscript{38} She did not want the women’s sections to be dedicated solely to sending out a message to women; she wanted them

\textsuperscript{35} Holt, 52
\textsuperscript{36} Holt, 139
\textsuperscript{37} Wood, 69
\textsuperscript{38} Wood, 74
to act to liberate women and to provide them with opportunities to act on behalf of their freedom.

In the fall of 1918, Inessa, Kollontai, Samoilova, and Nikolaeva organized the First All-Russian Congress of Working-Class and Peasant Women, which drew more than 1000 delegates to the conference to hear the aforementioned leaders speak. The group that showed up showed male party leadership, who were in doubt, that there were women who were interested in what the party was offering. Lenin – who was in attendance – allowed the women’s ‘movement’ to continue and gave authorization for the formation of women’s sections, the Zhenotdel. This shows the continued support from Lenin for the cause of women. Although he already declared that he was supporting their equality, he was hesitant to allow the formation of separate sections of acting bodies because of the connotation that they may be feminist in nature. However, after witnessing that at least 1000 women were interested in such a cause and getting involved in the party, he was convinced to support these women’s groups. This shows his support for equality growing and his allowance for women to be involved extending past that of just propaganda. As a result, Kollontai developed many ideas regarding women and mothers in the party and designed programs, meetings, and other events that assisted women, particularly mothers, with daily life.

In Communism and the Family, Kollontai discusses her view on the changing structure of the Russian family and how, due to the changing structure, women need to be assisted to maintain their household duties in addition to their duties at the factory. Throughout the work, she argues that men and women under communism are equal in regards to their ability and

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39 Clements, 205
right to work but that women need to work in addition to maintaining the household. She argues, however, that this is an unfair practice that supports inequality because it forces women to remain at home when they need to work to support their families and should be able to do so.

Bebel also discusses the issue of having to choose between work and family as a disservice to women. Bebel was particularly influential for the later ideas of Kollontai; she referred to his work, Woman Under Socialism, as the woman’s “bible”. She felt Bebel showed women’s issues from a class standpoint, which is what she grew to believe and support.\textsuperscript{40} He writes that “woman is increasing torn from family life by modern developments...from the viewpoint afforded by this fact also, it is an absurdity to direct women to a domestic life,\textsuperscript{41}” furthering the idea that in society at the time it was unfair to delegate women to solely domestic work while they may need additional wages to support the family. Therefore, throughout her time as a leader for the Bolshevik party, Alexandra Kollontai attempted to reconcile this issue regarding women in both her speeches and proposed ideas for women under communism.

Women working in the home, referred to as the “natural calling,” is believed to have become impractical by many socialists due to women’s need to supplement their husband’s income or to support themselves or their families as a single woman. As a result, many women exhaust themselves by working long hours, supporting their families on a small salary without

\textsuperscript{40} McDermid & Hillyar, 37
\textsuperscript{41} Bebel, 176
assistance, or both, which provides little pleasantry or hope in their lives.\textsuperscript{42} This indicates a shift in the family and, in \textit{Communism and the Family}, Kollontai begins by assuring the women of Russia that the changes for woman and the family are not to be feared. She purports that the increased equality of the sexes is not a cause for concern; that it is merely a result of the changing family system and that he discussed changes are to assist women in this transition. She writes, “There is no point in not facing up to the truth: the old family in which the man was everything and the woman nothing, the typical family where the woman had no will of her own, no time of her own and no money of her own, is changing before our very eyes,\textsuperscript{43}” insisting that the equality of the sexes will benefit the women as individuals as well as their children because they will be able to function independently of men, which should not be feared.

She insists that under communism, women will be able to work and make a living of their own while the community will contribute to the raising of the children and, although this way of life is different than the people are used to, it is not the first time the family has changed. She then provides examples of previous changes in the family structure stating that, at one time, women were the heads of the households and the grandchildren and great grandchildren also lived within the home. Following this, she writes that a patriarchal society developed, which was the predominant form of the household leading up to the Revolution.\textsuperscript{44}

These changes in the way the home is run are presented to show that the home does in fact change and was once different from the way people are used to currently and will continue to change throughout time. Therefore, Kollontai insists that the changing system is nothing to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{42} Bebel, 2
\item \textsuperscript{43} Holt, 252
\item \textsuperscript{44} Holt, 251
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\end{footnotesize}
be feared, but instead something to be embraced. She proclaims, “They have not yet understood that a woman must accustom herself to seek and find support in the collective and in society, and not from the individual man,” conveying her idea that the change from equality and independence as opposed to male dependence will ultimately benefit women and is merely a shift that they must adjust to. The party made a point to draw women workers into the business of constructing a new life, meaning that they encouraged women to partake in the new roles available for women and accept the change. Once the adjustment occurs, they will be able to enjoy the benefits of their equality, according to Kollontai.

Following her assurance that the shift in the family system will better the lives of women due to their equality, she discusses the changes that are occurring and what has caused the need for communal child care and freeing women of their housework. She discusses how in the past, men were typically the “breadwinners” and women did not have to concern themselves with jobs outside of the home. However, the sole wages being brought in by the man have become insufficient to support a family and many women, including women in capitalist countries, have had to seek work outside of the home to supplement the income. Even in 1904, it became increasingly difficult to support a family in Russia and many women were joining the workforce or needed to begin work in order to supplement income. Bebel writes in Woman Under Socialism, “the struggle for existence forces women to turn in ever larger numbers to industrial occupations,” showing the need for women to begin work, frequently in

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45 Holt, 250  
46 Wood, 74  
47 Bebel, 90
the factories where large amounts of labor was needed. As a result, some women were not taking care of the home during the day but were instead working long hours in factories.

Kollontai argues that this is where the transition in family structure has grown from; because more women are working, family life has been dramatically affected. In addition to women working outside of the home more frequently, she presents the fact that the type of work has also changed. In the past, cloth and other textiles were made and sold by families but that work has been transferred to the factories and is no longer required to be produced by individual households. As a result of these goods being made in factories as opposed to in the home, the idea of working in the home is no longer beneficial to the collective and the labor is instead needed in the factories where the goods are now being produced.

This is where Kollontai argues that capitalism has failed women in terms of their equality in the amount of work they do and that bolshevism will correct. She claims that “Capitalism has placed a crushing burden on woman’s shoulders: it has made her a wage-worker without having reduced her cares as housekeeper or mother,” insisting that capitalism forces women to both work in the factories while also maintaining the household, a burden that the man does not possess. As a result, she suggests that in order to have an equal amount of work on both sexes, women need assistance in their duties to their families while they work in the factories for money and to provide for the community. The Bolshevik party argues that

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48 Holt, 252
49 Holt, 254
50 Holt, 253
they will do as much as possible to correct this issue; work among women was now included on
the national level at the highest level of the party.\textsuperscript{51}

Kollontai’s solution to this inequality of work is for the state – or the community – to
provide services to aid in daily household chores as well as in the upbringing of children.
Kollontai insisted to Lenin that they needed to set up a “bureau” for the wives of soldiers so
that they would receive help by means of work and would then support the communists. Lenin
allowed her to draw up a plan. Although the project failed, she continued to try to help the
soldier’s wives to gain support for the party.\textsuperscript{52} Following the creation these institutions,
Kollontai emphasizes the time they will have to donate to the party that provided them with
the time.

Her idea is that women will no longer have to participate in trivial tasks such as laundry
and the mending of garments; facilities will be available where the laundry is washed and
pressed to be picked up at a later time. In addition to cleaning the clothes, they will also repair
any items that need repairing in the attempt to allow more free time for women to other
activities. Kollontai writes that “special clothes-mending centres will free the working woman
from the hours spent on mending and give her the opportunity to devote her evenings to
reading, attending meetings and concerts,\textsuperscript{53}” emphasizing the fact that the new spare time of
women can be spent in ways that better herself and the state. By reading, attending various
meetings, and attending concerts, they will be improving themselves in a way that will benefit

\textsuperscript{51} Wood, 75
\textsuperscript{53} Holt, 255
the state because the women will enjoy the activities and appreciate the time the state provided them with and will also become more educated as to participate in society.

In addition to being a proponent of the state becoming involved in the completion of basic household chores, Kollontai discusses extensively in *Communism and the Family* the idea of the community becoming involved in child care for the benefit of both the women and the children. Women at the time were largely concerned with the state of maternity benefits and, because Kollontai wanted to focus on the issues that actually concerned woman, she addressed maternity.\(^54\) Based on her established belief that working both in the factories and at home is a crushing burden on women, she proposes that “the workers’ state aims to support every mother, married or unmarried, while she is suckling her child, and to establish maternity homes, day nurseries and other such facilities in every city and village, in order to give women the opportunity to combine work in society with maternity.\(^55\) The idea of having public child care available to all women, according to Kollontai, equalizes men and women by providing women with the opportunity to be involved in work as well as their families just as men have done in society in the past.

By providing care for the children, women will not have to choose between their families and their jobs, which support their families, but will be able to actively participate in both without becoming exhausted in the process. She once again emphasizes the fact that this is a part of the naturally changing structure of the family and is, therefore, nothing to be feared. She insists that these measures are by no means attempting to “tear apart” the family but is

\(^{54}\) McDermid & Hillyar, 161  
\(^{55}\) Holt, 257
simply trying to aid in the adjustment to a world where women work as equals with men; the state is merely providing assistance.

In addition to assuring women with families, the act is also aimed at women from all different situations. In regards to work conscription, she presented a list of situations that would exempt women from work, including mothers who were about to or just gave birth, women with families of 5 or more, women who had no one to care for their children during the day, as well as for sick women or women with sick children.\textsuperscript{56} Also, in accordance with her theory that women under Bolshevism will be completely equal in society as well as amongst themselves, she points out that all women will be able to benefit from these state child care institutions.

Other party members were reluctant to accept Kollontai’s stance on the treatment of unwed mothers; she felt they should be treated the same as those who were married and that the state should help them equally.\textsuperscript{57} However, the decree of the Council of People’s Commissars issued on 18 December 1917 significantly reduced the difficulty involved in obtaining a divorce,\textsuperscript{58} meaning that many women who may have children will be single, working, and a mother. She writes that “No need for women to fear being left without support and with children to bring up. The woman in communist society no longer depends upon her husband but on her work. It is not in her husband but in her capacity for work that she will find

\textsuperscript{56} Farnsworth, 192
\textsuperscript{57} Farnsworth, 147
\textsuperscript{58} Holt, 250
support. She need have no anxiety about her children. The workers’ state will assume responsibility for them.\textsuperscript{59}

Kollontai is ultimately arguing for equality not only among men and women but also women as a group. Her theory is that if a woman will be independent of men, and if she does not have a man assisting her, she will not need to worry about providing for her children. She insists that the state will provide for all children, regardless of their mother’s situation. As a result, women will be able to function within society separately of men and their families without worry because they will all be equally supported and will not have to bear additional burden because of motherhood.

\textsuperscript{59} Holt, 259
Chapter IV: Louise Bryant

Louise Bryant is an American citizen who was present in Russia for six months during the Bolshevik revolution. Upon hearing the news of revolution in Russia, she boarded a ship to witness the events as they transpired. When she arrived, the Kerensky telegram, which declared counter-revolution, was two days old. She was a supporter of socialism and Marxist ideas, as expressed in her book *Six Months in Red Russia*, when she writes “Everything considered there is just as much reason to believe that the Soviet Republic of Russia will stand as that it will fall. The most significant fact is that it will not fall from *inside* pressure. Only *outside*, foreign, hostile intervention can destroy it... On the grey horizon of human existence looms a great giant called Working Class Consciousness. He treads with thunderous step through all the countries of the world. There is no escape, we must go out and meet him.”

She expresses her interest in socialism and expresses that fact that she sees no reason that socialism in Russia would fail because it cannot support itself or that a country cannot function as a socialist state. She also expresses her support of “working class consciousness,” which conveys her Marxist beliefs and that she herself feels that the workers will, in fact, rise in many countries and that it is unavoidable, as shown by the revolution in Russia.

However, despite her tendencies to support the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, she provides an accurate account of the events in Russia, particularly those involving female revolutionary leaders and gender equality. Though in support of Marxism, she in unbiased in her view of the revolution in Russia and expresses doubt in the revolution by stating that one cannot be sure where socialism will take the nation. She goes on to write, in regards to the

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60 Bryant, Louise. *Six Red Months in Russia*. New York: George H. Doran Company, (1918), ix
rising proletariat, “There is no escape, we must go out and meet him. It all depends on us whether he will turn into a loathsome, ugly monster demanding human sacrifices or whether he shall be the saviour of mankind," indicating her uncertainty into how socialism will play out in Russia. Therefore, throughout her text, she provides an accurate account of the events of the Bolshevik revolution, particularly those involving women and gender rights despite having a Marxist inclination.

Throughout her text, Bryant, as an American woman, expresses her admiration for the strong Russian women who hold political influence in the country and, as an outsider, recognizes the strives towards equality that have been made in Russia during the revolution and the women who have flourished in such an environment. She first mentions her admiration of the political influence of women in Russia as compared to other locations by stating “Not by any means to be overlooked were the twenty-three regularly elected women-delegates, notable among them Marie Spiridonova, the most politically powerful woman in Russia or in the world, and the only woman the soldiers and peasants are sentimental about.”

Maria Spiridonova, while Russia was still ruled by Tsar Nicholas II, assassinated Luzhenovskii, the Governor of Tamboy, for his violence towards the peasants under his rule. As a result of this assassination, she was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death. However, due to the protests of the western world, she was spared her life and instead exiled to Siberia. She spent eleven years in exile until the February revolution freed her and she returned to Russia.

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61 Bryant, ix
62 Bryant, 58
and began to partake in revolutionary activity. During Bryant’s time in Russia, Spiridonova “had been collaborating with the Bolsheviks as a member of the left SR delegation but later separated herself from the Bolshevik party and began to criticize their policies and development of socialism following the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty in 1918, which she opposed. Due to her activities against the Bolshevik party, she was twice arrested and, once again, imprisoned for a time by 1920.

However, because Bryant was in Russia during 1917 and Spiridonova was currently cooperating with the Bolshevik party at this time, she praises her by writing about both Maria Spiridonova and the elected women delegates. She expresses the fact that she is impressed by the political power women hold in Russia during the revolution and also how she feels women are gaining equality through the socialist revolution. By discussing the presence of elected women delegates, she is showing how Russia is including women in their political structure and also that the women do, in fact, hold power within the system. She describes Spiridonova, who is among these twenty-three delegates at the time, and how she is not only the most powerful woman in Russia but also throughout the world, in Bryant’s opinion. Through this statement, Bryant conveys her admiration for Spiridonova as a powerful woman and also Russia for allowing a woman to be powerful in their country.

She also states that a woman of power like Spiridonova is also well liked by the people because both soldiers and peasants support her. Even following her split from the Bolshevik party following the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, Spiridonova remained popular with the

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64 Wood, 72
65 Goldman, 96
people not just as a woman but as a revolutionary figure. This is seen during an election of an honorary presidium, which was intended to be made up of mostly socialist males. An individual present at the election unpredictably suggested that Spiridonova should be elected into the honorary presidium because she was so beloved by the people.

However, because she had begun to denounce the Bolshevik party, her election would not be allowed. Her support from the people present at the election rallied behind her nomination to such an extent that it took a great deal of persuasion to convince them that she had misled the people.\textsuperscript{66} Through this example, it can be seen that Spiridonova was a popular individual in Russia, regardless of the fact that she was a woman. Through the incident at the honorary presidium election and through Bryant’s statements about Spiridonova, as well as powerful women in general, small moves towards equality for women in Russia in both ideology and practice through the revolution.

Later in the text, Bryant once again discusses Spiridonova in regards to her power she held in Russia, her leadership, and her accomplishments which Bryant views as possible due to the “sex equality” present through socialism. She praises the respect Spiridonova commands from men – including those in the military – by referencing the fact that she is addressed as “dear comrade” as opposed to “tavarish” by the soldiers and sailors, showing their respect of her as an equal\textsuperscript{67}. She also describes her positions she held within the government. She was elected president of the first two All-Russian Peasant Congresses held in Petrograd and Bryant describes her capable leadership of those congresses. She portrays her as a woman who was

\textsuperscript{66} Wood, 72
\textsuperscript{67} Bryant, 166
able to get what she wanted accomplished and swayed others to follow her orders. Bryant states that “she swayed those congresses largely to her will,” showing her persuasive abilities as well as others respect of her as to obey her orders.

Bryant continues by providing an example where Spiridonova’s leadership and dedication to her ideology benefitted the party in a situation of disagreement. She describes an event where, when the Bolsheviks took over the land program, the Socialist Revolutionists were angry and felt that the Bolsheviks had stolen their program without right or warrant. However, Spiridonova and her leftist wing members found only amusement in this turmoil and explained why the conflict was unnecessary. She explained to those present, “what difference does it make who gives the peasants their land—the principal thing is that they get it,” showing her dedication to socialist and Marxist ideas regardless of who was executing them. Through her leadership, she was able to calm the right wing Socialist Revolutionists, who felt the Bolsheviks, were stealing their program, and rationalized that the ideology was more important than the parties who executed the ideology.

In Bryant’s opinion, this dedication to ideals and the power to calm people in a time of upset is a sign of power, and this power had been bestowed upon a woman, which is a positive sign for gender equality. Even outside of the time line of Bryant’s book, Spiridonova continued to hold true to her ideals, particularly those involving peasants. When asked why she assassinated Luzhenovskii, she stated that the ideals of her party, the Socialist Revolutionary

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68 Bryant, 166
69 Bryant, 167
Party, explained her actions\textsuperscript{70}, showing the dedication she held to her ideals, even prior to the revolution. Following the start of the revolution, she continued to maintain her views on social and political issues. She eventually grew discontent over the Bolshevik’s methods for land distribution, which also contributed to her split with the party,\textsuperscript{71} showing that she once again refused to alter her ideology. This, in addition to Bryant’s comments on Spiridonova, shows her dedication to what she wanted socialism to be and her fight to accomplish it, even if it resulted in her own danger due to opposition of her criticism. Since Spiridonova possessed the ability to control individuals and maintain her ideological principals even in times of change and turmoil, she was a powerful woman leader. In Bryant’s mind, it was a positive reflection on Russia at the time that a woman would be able to possess such power and leadership to accomplish the goals that she wanted to accomplish.

In an interview Bryant had with Spiridonova on the topic of women’s issues, Bryant addresses women’s low participation in politics. In 1904, many years prior to Bryant’s interview with Spiridonova, August Bebel also questions the small amount of women who hold positions of power around the world. He writes “Resting upon the fact that, in all races and all parts of the world, women have ruled with marked ability, even over the wildest and most turbulent hordes, Burbach makes the statement that, in all probability, women are fitter for politics than men,” arguing that women are more than capable of holding office. To support his case, he presents both Elizabeth of England and Catherine the Great of Russia and discusses their great capabilities as rulers of their respective countries.\textsuperscript{72} Bryant, as a proponent of women being

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{70} Hillyar & McDermid, 141
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Goldman, 92
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Bebel, 191
\end{itemize}
capable of holding positions of power, states “I wanted to know why more of them did not hold public office since Russia is the only place in the world where there is absolute sex equality,” once again showing her opinion that the revolution has resulted in sex equality that has surpassed that of other nations by presenting as fact that Russia has achieved “absolute sex equality.”

However, she is also questioning why many women do not take advantage of the equal opportunities they are provided, such as holding political office and having the opportunity to help shape the state that is attempting to provide the women’s rights. Spiridonova responds with “Politicians are usually not very fine, they accept political positions when they are elected to them—not because they are especially fitted for them. I think women are more conscientious. Men are used to overlooking their consciences—women are not.” Through this reasoning, Spiridonova is arguing that women are not less interested in politics than men or that they are not as capable or able to participate, but that when they do not see themselves fit to be in an office of power, they do not take the office.

Bryant, however, does not necessarily approve of Spiridonova’s argument, despite the fact that she admires a woman who has obtained such a level of power. After comparing the argument to another theory that she had previously heard that was similar to Spiridonova’s, she argues that “I wish I could believe it, but I can never see any spiritual difference between men and women inside or outside of politics. They act and react very much alike; they certainly did in the Russian revolution. It is one of the best arguments I know in favour of equal

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73 Bryant, 169
74 Bryant, 169
suffrage. This opinion held by Bryant reflects back more towards the ideology held by Lenin and many other Bolshevik leaders that asserts that women’s issues should not be an independent topic because all people should be solitary and united in the building of the socialist state. In Zetkin’s interview with Lenin, she states that “They claimed that since the Communist Parties gave equality to women they should, consequently, carry on work without differentiation among all the working people in general. The approach to men and to women should be the same,” which reflects the argument Bryant is presenting against Spiridonova’s reasoning. She, like the comrades Zetkin discusses, sees men and women as equal and, therefore, a difference between their capabilities in and reasons for participating in politics should not be based on sex.

Bryant insists that men and women are inherently completely equal and that a “spiritual” difference in motivation to be involved in politics puts doubt on that equality. She does not agree that women possess a stronger conscience that prevents them from taking positions of power that they do not feel fit to take, but that men and women react in the same way and that is an argument for gender equality. In this instance – although Bryant still supports the leadership of women in the newly forming Soviet Union – she does not agree with some ideological views on gender differences possessed by some of the empowered women of Russia.

Bryant continues to describe women of power in Russia and praises the country for allowing women to obtain such political positions and views it as an example of sex equality.

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75 Bryant, 170
76 Zetkin, 692
that has not been reached by other countries around the world. For a section in her book, she focuses on the political leader Alexandra Kollontai who, throughout her involvement with the Bolshevik party, argued for women’s rights and encouraged women to be active in the building of socialism. Once again, Bryant admires Kollontai’s political leadership as well as the country and political party that have allowed her to be a political player within the government. She writes “Unlike most intellectuals, Kollontay instead of deserting the revolution when it became an ugly class struggle and everyone else was running chose that particular time to give her most valuable assistance. That is one of the traits I admire most about Kollontai.” Through her statement, she is expressing her idea that Kollontai provided powerful assistance through her leadership and, the tougher the ideological struggle got, the more help she was able to provide for her cause.

Bryant continues to describe her admiration of Kollontai primarily through her leadership abilities and dedication as opposed to her specific political and ideological beliefs. To support her argument that she supports Kollontai based on her actions as opposed to her ideology, she argues “She often disagrees with Lenine and Trotsky, but she told me herself that she would never desert the ranks of the proletariat, ‘if they made every mistake on the calendar’, showing that she herself did not always agree with ideas of the individuals who helped bring about the Bolshevik revolution and the building of socialism in Russia. Kollontai and Lenin, even prior to the revolution, disagreed on militarism and civil war among other topics and, in 1916, Lenin frequently argued with many members of the party, including

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77 Bryant, 129
78 Bryant, 129
Kollontai. However, even when Kollontai disagreed with her fellow party members, she continued to support the party and fulfill her duties and this is what Bryant admires about her. Bryant insists that Kollontai “preferred to stay with the people,” praising her dedication to her nation and in the idea that she would be creating something better for the Russian people.

After Bryant explains her reasons for respecting Kollontai, she describes her actions that sought to create a more equal government for women and to assist women in their duties and to get them involved in politics. Bryant describes that “One of her dearest ambitions for years has been to establish a home for convalescent mothers known as the Palace of Motherhood, describing Kollontai’s desire to assist ill women in their duties as mothers by providing government assistance. Following the revolution, Kollontai elaborated on these ideas of providing for communist mothers. She discussed the concept of public kitchens that would be in many cities throughout Russia that would help feed Russian families, taking the burden off of the mothers.

In addition to public kitchens, she also formed ideas on developing nurseries, day cares, health resorts for sick children, free textbooks and lunch at school, among other facilities dedicated to the raising of children. The intentions of these facilities were to ease the burden of mothers, though mostly to encourage their participation as a member of the working class and in the communist party. Furthermore, Bryant tells that the physicians who are in Petrograd remain keenly interested in Kollontai’s idea and are attempting to carry out her goal. Kollontai herself stated that “Great attention was paid to the organization of public canteens,

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79 Farnsworth, 62-63
80 Bryant, 131
81 Farnsworth, 146-147
kindergartens, pioneer camps, children’s playgrounds and crèches – to those institutions which, as Lenin wrote, would in practice liberate woman and in practice make her more equal with man,\textsuperscript{82} showing both Kollontai and Lenin’s continued focus on sex equality and relieving women of domestic duties that prevented such equality. Bryant, throughout her work, views these efforts in a positive manner.

Of all Kollontai’s ideas and policy implementations regarding women during the early Soviet Union, the most popular was that regarding maternity welfare. Based on a bill drafted by Kollontai prior to the revolution regarding maternity welfare, the Social Insurance Laws included a decree that stated that maternity leave would be provided before and after childbirth. This decree is something that highly impressed female workers, more so than other policies intending to assist women.\textsuperscript{83} Bryant continues to discuss Kollontai’s ideas for the government that would benefit women, particularly mothers, by providing care for mothers and their children following childbirth in the goal of getting them back to working and participating in society. Ultimately, the Bolshevik government provided sixteen weeks of free care for women before, during, and after childbirth. Following the sixteen weeks, it was expected that, if the woman was well, she would return to work but would only be required to work four hours a day in their respective factory for the first month following to giving birth.

Also, this act would not be biased towards certain women within the country, but would apply to all women regardless of if they were married or single; removing some discrimination

\textsuperscript{82} Holt, 315
\textsuperscript{83} Farnsworth, 98
that existed towards unwed mothers.\textsuperscript{84} The reasoning behind these acts, as described by Bryant, is “The Bolsheviki believe that this care of mothers is one of the first debts to the State,\textsuperscript{85}” once again showing her outsider admiration of the steps being made towards equality and assistance of women. She expresses that these acts to assist women who have just given birth in order to get them back into functioning society shows the Bolshevik desire to include women in both government as well as regular day active social life. The ultimate goal through these acts is to get women back into the factories and to remain a part of the working class as opposed to remaining at home to watch their children and maintain the household.

Lenin also believed in marriage equality. Bryant witnessed throughout her time in Russia that the marriage laws create equality by not confining either women or men to marriages or making marriages desired by men or women difficult. Prior to the time where divorce became, in Lenin’s terms, “completely free,\textsuperscript{86}” obtaining a divorce was very difficult. A female journalist, Tyrkova, split from her husband in 1897, which left her fearful of her future financial situation and of how she would raise her two children. In fact, because divorces were rare and legally restricted, it is unknown whether she was even actually legally obtained a divorce from her husband at the time.\textsuperscript{87} This example shows the difficulty involved in obtaining a divorce and living life as a divorced woman prior to 1918 Code on Marriage, which allowed divorce by the request of either partner.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{84} Bryant, 132
\textsuperscript{85} Bryant, 132
\textsuperscript{86} Lenin, 60
\textsuperscript{87} Ruthchild, 35
\textsuperscript{88} Lenin, 7
In reference to the marriage practices, Bryant writes “According to the marriage laws passed early in January, nothing but civil marriages are recognized. Civil marriages do not mean common law marriages, but those that have been legalised by process of law. All the contracting parties have to do is to go before the Department of Marriage and Divorce and register. No ceremony is necessary. Divorce is equally easy. Either or both of the parties can swear they find it impossible to live together any more, and they are legally free.” Through her statement, she expresses her admiration of the marriage laws that have been enacted by the Bolshevik party by describing both marriage and divorce “easy” and, therefore, insinuating that marriage has been made equal and simple. If a man and woman want to get married, it has been set up so that they can without hassle, and divorce has been likewise made a simple process as to make the lives of both men and women easier because there is less concern over creating and ending a marriage. She considers it a benefit to the people that marriage and divorce has been removed from the church and placed instead in the hands of the government because it provides less pressure on marriage and divorce and equalizes the institution among the sexes.

In addition, she describes the fairness involved in divorces in which children are involved. She once again describes gender equality in regards to the children of a dissolved marriage, stating “If there are children the affair is a little more complicated and the one who has the most money, either the man or the woman, must give the most financial aid.” As opposed to the woman having to take on the burden of the child, the financial responsibility is

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89 Bryant, 268-269
90 Bryant, 269
91 Bryant, 269
instead placed on the individual who has the most money to provide. As laid out in the Family Code of 1918, present fathers, whether married or not, had to share the burden of raising the child with the mother.\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, according to Bryant, the laws are attempting to provide for the child based on which party can most easily provide for the children as opposed to directing the responsibility on the mother who gave birth, which furthers the ideals of gender equality.

\textsuperscript{92} Farnsworth, 158
Chapter V: Conclusion

Despite all of the call through change during the early revolutionary period, by 1921 women in Russia were once again demanding the government provide them with more bread, as times continued to be rough during the transitional period.\textsuperscript{93} However, regardless of whether all of the ideas regarding women were fully realized, the ideas themselves still proved to be radical and influential. Throughout 1917 to 1920, Lenin proclaimed that he sought to provide women with the equality they deserved from the efforts they made during the October revolution. He made his opinion known that, through socialism, the classes would become equal and, as a result, the sexes would as well. Although there were small steps made in creating the equality of women that he spoke about, there were large leaps made in ideology that presented a view of gender equality that remains revolutionary for the time and a model for women’s rights movements.

In addition to Lenin’s ideas on women’s rights, he had women working in his party, such as Alexandra Kollontai, who further developed ideas to equalize women and feverishly pursued resolutions to women’s issues. Although the actual construction of nurseries, day cares, health facilities, and the like were often stifled due to the lack of readily available funds\textsuperscript{94}, her ideas regarding women’s equality were not as limited. She argued for dramatic emancipation from limitations as well as from domestic work and family life. Throughout Kollontai’s writing, she argues that women should be able to work in the factories without worrying about the burden of motherhood and traditional family roles. As a result, she believed that women would be

\textsuperscript{93} Engel, 146
\textsuperscript{94} Engel, 143
liberated from their husbands and their children with the assistance of the state and would, therefore, be able to actively participate in society and politics. Although some of her goals were realized, her goals themselves show the Bolshevik party as revolutionary in regards to their opinions on gender equality.

Outside of party leaders, individuals from other parts of the world also recognized the radical ideas being supported by the Bolshevik party. Louise Bryant, a female American, travelled to Russia during the revolution to witness what changes were taking place under a socialist system. She, as an outside, was aware of the steps that Lenin and Kollontai were making towards sex equality and admired the work that was being done to accomplish it during the early revolutionary period. From the leadership of female Bolsheviks, to the institutions created by Kollontai that came to actualization, she recognized the work the party wanted to do for women and supported their efforts. Through her writing, the impact of the ideas formed regarding women’s equality during the time could be clearly seen; based on what she knew about the party’s stance on women’s issues, she believed that Russia under communism would become the most liberated country in the world for women, which shows the true scale of ideas expressed.

Ultimately, the Bolshevik party during the early revolutionary period from 1917-1920, made many strides towards sex equality and formed even more ideas dealing with the issue. Their ideology regarding the rights of women was dramatic and, despite the fact that many of them did not make it to fruition, they were in and of themselves significant to society. These ideas presented by the party showed an organization that strongly desired social
transformation, particularly regarding the rights of women, in a way that was both more radical than in other parts of the world and ahead of its time in its theories on women’s equality.
Bibliography

Primary:


Secondary:


