

KOLLONTAI 150



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Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai

Introductory essays by

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Contents

In the Name of Equality, Liberty and Love Julia Cámara	9
The March We Carry in Our Hands A Humble Tribute to Alexandra Kollontai Ândrea Francine Batista and Atiliana da Silva Vicente Brunetto	33
 KOLLONTAI 150 	
The Social Basis of the Women's Question (1909)	43
International Women's Day A Militant Celebration (1920)	67
Make Way for Winged Eros A Letter to Working Youth (1923)	80
The Aims and Worth of My Life (1926)	102
<i>Contributors</i>	114

In the Name of Equality, Liberty and Love

JULIA CÁMARA

As a communist leader, the first woman in the world to form part of a government since the creation of modern states, organizer of the Workers' Opposition within the Bolshevik party and theorist on love and sexual relations (among many other things), Alexandra Kollontai is a complex figure. Her particular political career, combining committed activism and theoretical work, has until recently seen her excluded from the training programmes of almost all communist tendencies and even today her name remains unknown to those feminist sectors not directly linked to Marxism. Yet her texts, especially those written during the early years of the Soviet revolution, provide vital keys to understanding the relationship between gender and class and open up horizons that remain accurate, advanced and radically revealing even today.

In many ways, Kollontai's writings would fall under the broad label of 'the classics'. A significant part of the Left tends to approach the classics with religiousness rather than respect: it memorizes entire paragraphs without even understanding them, inserts decontextualized quotations from them at the slightest opportunity as an appeal to authority or poetical emphasis and is indignant when anyone dares to question this. The accurate assertion that

Marx was right becomes a grotesque caricature: Marx, Lenin and anyone else who is cited were right *about everything* and never had any doubts (or if they did, they unequivocally resolved them); their works are lineal and devoid of evolution or internal rectification; and their theses are valid as ahistorical truths that can (and should) be mechanically reproduced in any context. Despite their valuable work, theorists and political organizers are thus paradoxically reduced to inert fossils, plastinated corpses and completely emptied of politics.

Breaking with this notion of the classics is a duty and a necessity for revolutionary politics. What makes an author part of this category should not be his or her sacralization (marking the death of his or her transformative power), but the repeated substantiation of the usefulness of his or her approaches, the discovery of new nuances and their functioning as a toolbox with which to understand the present and build viable emancipatory strategies. We cannot view the classics as if we were looking at a museum piece, a past that is over and that remains forever static. It is their present existence, their thoroughly political relevance, that grants them such a status. It is in the present where everything is at stake.

Unlike other classics (all male, perhaps with the two exceptions of Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin), Kollontai has scarcely been studied until now. The fact that her most significant work does not include any extensive texts but consists mainly of pamphlets, personal correspondence and newspaper articles makes the dissemination and translation of her texts somewhat difficult. However, the main impediments have always been of a political nature.

Alexandra Kollontai left Russia as a member of the diplomatic corps in 1922, a date that roughly coincides with the end of her written production (or at least the richest of it). In historical terms, from then on, she was cast into complete irrelevance. The draft of her first memoir, entitled *The Autobiography of a Sexually*

Emancipated Communist Woman, written in 1926, includes crossed out sentences in an obvious exercise of self-censorship, as well as several clear affirmations: ‘Now began [1918] a dark time of my life which I cannot treat of here since the events are still too fresh in my mind.’¹ In 1930, without taking a stand on it, and despite witnessing the savage dismantling of all of the legislation that she herself had promoted and pushed for a few years earlier, Kollontai publicly supported Stalin. But despite the political capitulation of her final years, a surrender that surely kept her alive, ‘official’ communism never forgave her for her opposition work within the party, her rejection of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and her Menshevik background. Her appointment in 1917 as the People’s Commissar of Social Welfare and her influence on part of the drafting of the first Soviet Constitution demonstrate, however, that the revolution did recognize her role and that ideological debate remained a reality within the Party at that time.

Three sectors have promoted the revival of interest in Kollontai since the mid-1970s. They have approached her in different ways and are interested in specific aspects of her work. On the one hand, various communist groups opposed to the doctrine of the Third International have viewed Kollontai as a figure to be reassessed, as the organizer of one of the main tendencies within the Russian Communist Party, an advocate of cooperativism and an enemy of bureaucracy. Her text *The Workers’ Opposition* has been republished many times, almost always together with another of her more programmatic pamphlets, such as *Communism and the Family*.

Overall, there has been little interest in the rest of Kollontai’s theoretical work, possibly because it is considered to be devoted to ‘minor’ issues, such as emotional ties and literary studies. However, from the 1980s onwards, certain feminists began to

¹ Alexandra Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, trans. Salvator Attansio (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).

JULIA CÁMARA

approach Kollontai precisely on the basis of these texts, which address the relationship between building the revolution and the transformation of customs and collective morality. Many of us who are interested in Kollontai today recognize ourselves as part of this group. We began to discover her work not through those texts which most closely follow the *party line*, but thanks to the editions published by the previous generation of feminists focusing on ideas such as the modern woman and the proletarian ideology of love. From my point of view, these remain her most original, thought-provoking and politically radical contributions. This leads us to consider the way in which, at the height of the twenty-first century, Kollontai can help us to build an internationalist and class-based feminism that serves as a key aspect of the articulation of an emancipatory strategy for humanity as a whole.

EMANCIPATION THROUGH WORK:

THE BOLSHEVIK PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

One of the unquestionable truths first formulated by socialists and later adopted by all feminists is that women are much less likely to put up with situations of discrimination, violence and abuse if they are not materially dependent on their abusers. This emotional dependence (understood in its most negative sense and not as a synonym of the mutual dependence that we currently recognize as healthy) is mainly caused by a lack of economic independence. In addition, the family model of isolated heterosexual couples with marked gender roles and a strong sexual division of labour also decisively contributes to the stifling of women's agency and autonomy. Since the mid-nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, different political tendencies have proposed diverse solutions to address this problem. The Bolshevik solution was based on a three-pronged approach: participation in the labour market; maternity rights; and an end to domestic labour.

An important part of Kollontai's work centers on the study

of specific historical processes that created inequality between women and men. Kollontai was influenced by the conceptions of the socialist tradition in this field (which were still scarce at the beginning of the twentieth century, as was the case with other tendencies). She drew on Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* to place oppression in its historical context: there is no natural basis for the domination and social exclusion of women, which is the result of material social relations and can therefore be transformed by changing them. Based on this theory, Kollontai undertakes an exercise which Clara Zetkin had already embarked upon years earlier. Women of different social classes necessarily find themselves in diverse situations, as these are dependent on historical social relations. There are distinct explanations and solutions even to phenomena which apparently affect women of different classes equally. We will expand on this below.

In 1921, when Kollontai was almost entirely focused on organizing women, she gave a series of fourteen lectures at Sverdlov University in Leningrad as part of a training programme for Communist Party members responsible for organizing women who were not party members. The main thesis was clear: the position women occupy in a given society is determined by their level of participation in production and by the importance of the tasks they undertake for the collective (or, failing that, by the collective perception of their actual importance). The path to women's emancipation that follows from this is obvious. The incorporation of women into production was the centerpiece of the Bolshevik programme for women's liberation. The 'right to work' (the historical slogan of the workers' movement) is tantamount to the right to survive, to advance by one's own means.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, as the female workforce became a significant part of the active labour force in almost all parts of the world (and, as a general rule, with a majority presence in the reserve army), the concept of the 'double burden'

sparked an important debate among feminists. Many activists denounced the *trap* that capitalism had set for them: in addition to their 'gender' obligations (considered a product of patriarchal oppression), they now also had to contribute to the labour market. We know the result of this phenomenon firsthand: our domestic and care responsibilities encumber our professional careers, while our work demands detrimentally affect our personal and family development. Delaying childbearing too close to the biological limits and the radical decline in the number of children in countries of the Global North are good examples of one side of this. And if we look at the other side, the result is also well known, including widespread job insecurity in professions where women predominate; the lack of rights and protection at work; and high rates of temporary and informal employment. Where, within this, is the promised liberation?

The double burden as theorized by feminists at the end of the twentieth century was already a reality for many working-class women fifty or even a hundred years earlier. In 1923, Bolshevik journalist Larisa Reisner, who was 20 years old at the time and a member of the Left Opposition, travelled to Hamburg to write about the attempted German revolution. Among her notes and articles, a particular interest in documenting the experiences of working mothers stands out. The situation of women in the country with the most developed working class in the world was bleak: malnutrition, a lack of milk, a high probability of death in childbirth and very high infant mortality.² This reality had already been addressed earlier, if less specifically, by the broad field of working-class sociology, whose 'scientific' beginning is usually dated 1845, the year that Friedrich Engels' study, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, was published. Under

² The article 'Workers' Children', which appears in Larisa Reisner, *Hamburg at the Barricades: And Other Writings on Weimar Germany*, trans. Richard Chappell (London: Pluto Press, 1977), is a chilling sample of what could be found in the waiting room of a doctor's office.

capitalism, motherhood and a profession were (and often still are) incompatible. The Bolshevik programme for the emancipation of women sought to respond to this reality with maternity rights that would end the contradiction between work and caretaking responsibilities and guarantee all women the possibility of becoming mothers without suffering a loss of rights or being doomed to an even greater situation of social vulnerability. In January 1918, as part of her work as the Social Welfare Commissar, Kollontai established the Central Office for Maternity and Child Protection, an institution responsible for coordinating policies aimed at training women workers in pre- and post-natal care, the creation and management of free nurseries and maternity homes and other similar measures. The Soviet state understood motherhood as a 'social function' which should therefore be protected and remunerated. The effectiveness of all of this was limited by the vastness of the territory, the differences between the countryside and the city, the severity of the years known as 'war communism' and the country's economic hardships. Still, the measures that were put into practice are surprisingly advanced compared to those of the post-1945 capitalist Welfare States, or even compared to our contemporary legislation. Examples of these measures include the paid exemption from work for mothers during the eight weeks before and after childbirth (equivalent to our current four-month maternity leave³) and the allocation of a free package of basic food and hygiene products (milk, butter, nappies, etc.) to all women during the second half of pregnancy and until the end of the breastfeeding period.⁴ In 1920, and at the same time, the People's Commissariats of Health and Justice published a decree on the artificial termination of pregnancy, which made the

³ Translator's note: Currently, in the European Union, where the author is based, each parent is given 16 weeks of parental leave.

⁴ In the case of women who did not do manual, but only intellectual work, this leave was reduced from sixteen to twelve weeks.

USSR the first country in the world to legalize abortion.⁵

The idea that being a woman is synonymous with being a mother (motherhood as differentiating women from the rest of their class) is a constant throughout Kollontai's work. Her explicit opposition to equality as a political goal is based on this fact: equality is understood as a denial of the specific female condition, an aspiration without a material basis that erases differences and results in violence against women by overlooking the biological realities of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. Recognition of the 'biological characteristics of each sex' is not understood here as justification for segregation, but as a fact leading to a whole series of rights particular to women as mothers. As opposed to equality, Kollontai defends 'equalization' and 'special rights'. In 'The Feminist Movement and the Role of Working Women in the Class Struggle', she writes: 'Indeed, women do not have to do the same work as men; in order to guarantee equal rights with men, it is sufficient that they undertake work of equal value for the collective.'

It is easy to understand Alexandra Kollontai's insistence on strengthening 'the healthy instinct of motherhood' as an essentialist concept of female destiny, a *social mission* derived from biology.⁶ Her enthusiastic defence of motherhood as a social function is uncomfortable and problematic for us as contemporary women readers and in her own day she was heavily criticized by the political opposition.⁷ Her most extensive work

⁵ 'Russia, after all, suffers not from an overproduction of living labour but rather from a lack of it. (...) Why then have we declared abortion to be no longer a criminal offence? Hypocrisy and bigotry are alien to proletarian politics', which appears in 'The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the Economy' in Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt (London: Allison & Busby, 1977).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kollontai recounts in her early memoirs how the Whites spread the rumour that one of the policies promoted by the Central Office for Maternity and Child Protection was to force 12 and 13-year-old girls to become pregnant. Fake news is not a contemporary phenomenon.

on the subject, *Society and Motherhood* (1916), is more of a study of conditions under capitalism and different state legislation than a political proposal. In her articles written after the Revolution, the general tone is one of almost constant praise and one equating the woman and mother. Despite this, in ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ (1908), Kollontai warned against the ‘bourgeois ideal that recognizes women as females rather than as people’ and ridiculed those who consider motherhood to be women’s life ‘goal’. Beyond the debates that can be sparked on this point (and carefully observing maternalistic tendencies which also subsume the will of mothers to a certain extent as part of the general will), the fact is that Kollontai understood that, in capitalist societies, motherhood weighed like a millstone on women’s bodies. This is something that we also recognize at least partially today, when we say that many more women would choose to have children if it did not mean economic instability and problems at work. Thus, if the first point of the Bolshevik programme for women’s emancipation was incorporation into productive work, the second was liberation from the burdens of motherhood and the third, closely linked to this, was liberation from domestic work through the gradual disappearance of the family.

The controversies on this subject have continued ever since Marx and Engels spoke of abolishing the family in *The Communist Manifesto*. However, no working-class tradition has ever proposed the dissolution of the bonds of cohabitation and affection that we call the ‘family’ in historical terms. What is in question is the specific hegemonic form that the family adopts in capitalist societies – that which feminism has recently denominated the ‘nuclear family’ – and that Kollontai termed the ‘isolated family’. What the Bolsheviks intended was to dismantle this form of the family – not through the individualized exploitation of each of its members, as capitalism has done, but through the collectivization of most of its functions and the creation of new material bases that would allow for the emergence of distinct forms of socialization.

This included state-run canteens, low-rent communal apartments accessed through a waiting list, children's homes and a free public education system from early childhood. The implementation of these measures was limited (partly due to economic hardships, partly due to political resistance), but they undoubtedly signal a rich and fruitful path for experimentation and the establishment of less individualistic family relations and more solidary, fair and horizontal social and family relations.

The main shortcoming of Kollontai's ideas on this subject is possibly the lack of questioning of gender roles, an omission that is justified if we bear in mind that feminism only began to speak in these terms fifty years later. Despite her accurate critique of domestic slavery and women's double burden as workers and mothers, Kollontai appears to accept the existence of women's natural predisposition for certain types of tasks. Even when she recognizes that this inclination is a product of habit and therefore a historical construction, she does not do so in order to dismantle this tendency, but rather to politically mobilize it. The 'selfish' *maternal instinct* thus becomes an instinct put at the service of society through work in state-run children's homes, while women's culinary skills are made use of in public canteens, and so on. It would be many decades before second-wave feminists pointed to the social and cultural construction of gender as one of the cornerstones of the reproduction of oppression. Today, we can only subscribe to this critique and ask ourselves how to coordinate the recognition of women's historical knowledge and skills with the transformation of the social relations that reproduce the sexual division of labour and the reactionary ethics of care.⁸

Today, economic independence, maternity rights (by allocating sufficient public resources but also by guaranteeing that the decision to become a mother has been taken freely, voluntarily

⁸ A concept discussed in Amaia Pérez Orzco, *The Feminist Subversion of the Economy: Contributions for a Dignified Life Against Capital*, trans. Liz Mason-Deese (New York: Common Notions).

and consciously) and emancipation from domestic labour remain the three central pillars of any programme of liberation from gender oppression. The fourth pillar, the transformation of ways of life and interpersonal relationships, was theorized by Kollontai in probably the most systematic and satisfactory manner to date, which we will discuss below. Kollontai's answer to all the other determining factors which affect women's lives and place us in situations of violence, discrimination and injustice (borders, the super-exploitation of labour, racial segregation, migration policies, substandard housing and energy poverty) was clear: their solution depends on the political action of the entire class.

KOLLONTAI AND THE FEMINISTS

The rejection of the existence of a specific 'woman question' separate from the general social question is a constant throughout Kollontai's work and one of the most controversial statements for a contemporary reading. Yet, strictly speaking, it is an accurate observation. There is no 'woman question' that can be separated from the question of class, migration, or race, as indeed important feminist sectors have been warning for some time. Any denial of this reality can only end up justifying and reproducing the logics of systematic exclusion and oppression, as has happened on many occasions throughout history.

Sadly notorious examples of how feminism (or rather, a specific sector of feminism) has allowed for the perpetuation of relations of discrimination and violence, or has directly promoted them, include the imperialist justification by British suffragette movement; the rejection of lesbian visibility in the 1960s (and the current rejection of the recognition of the rights of trans women); the support for laws that regulate and criminalize the ways of life of Black or migrant communities and sex workers; and femonationalism as a neo-colonial tool. In response, various

positions and explanatory frameworks have emerged that seek to consider how each of these phenomena are interconnected. The most famous of these proposals is probably the theory of intersectionality, although social reproduction feminists have demonstrated the significant gaps and limitations of this theory. Either way, reality clearly demonstrates that it is not possible to improve the lives of the majority of women through a purely sectoral perspective, denying or not seeking to address the origin of most of the problems that affect us.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, what was initially termed the 'women's movement' was present throughout Europe, the Americas and part of Asia and was mainly focused on the right to vote. Feminists had created their own organizations in a significant number of countries, coordinated at the international level and demonstrated a great capacity for media advocacy, tactical thinking and political commitment. The scope of their action ranged from mass letter-writing to politicians and public representatives, to strategies with a high level of danger and sacrifice: boycotts of cultural and sporting events; attacks on shops and public institutions; hunger strikes; and self-harm in prison, among others. The violence of these practices was one of the defining characteristics of the movement (especially in its British and US strands) and contributed to building an image of radicalism for the suffragette movement.

Kollontai and other contemporary Marxists debated with this feminism which existed at the time. Unlike supposedly communist grouplets that use Kollontai to insult feminism today, they did so by recognizing the influence of the suffragettes and the importance and courage of the women who preceded them. Much of Kollontai's written work is devoted to this exercise, without which she could not address them as political competitors or explain the advance of the movement. There is no contempt or caricaturing – just a systematic analysis of all the points on

which ‘the feminists’ seem to programmatically agree with the communists and of the motivations and aims that really lie behind each group. As she wrote in 1908, ‘If in certain circumstances the short-term tasks of women of all classes coincide, the final aims of the two camps (...) and the tactics to be used, differ sharply.’⁹

An unquestioning reading of key texts such as ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ and ‘The Feminist Movement and the Importance of Working Women in the Class Struggle’ can lead us to commit two opposing errors: rejecting Kollontai’s overall reasoning, appalled by the way in which she reduces feminism to its bourgeois manifestations, or assuming that this reductionism is correct and ending up upholding the fallacy that any feminist articulation is necessarily an expression of bourgeois ideology. Personally, I am firmly convinced that almost all of Kollontai’s criticisms of ‘the feminists’ are correct today with respect to liberal feminism and institutional feminism. There is a *hegemonic* feminism (with greater or lesser ease in exercising this hegemony according to the true level of development of the movement, among other things) with access to the media and a strong cultural influence which considers itself to be class-neutral and claims to represent the interests of all women. Alongside this (or, to be more precise, faced with this), there is also a feminism that articulates gender demands alongside other social conflicts and understands that the situation of women and their main needs and concerns vary according to the class to which they belong.

Feminism, like any mass movement, is always a contested field. To give up on the struggle is to assume one’s own political incapacity and to bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy. Kollontai repeatedly recognized and demonstrated the existence of the dual origins of the women’s movement, even using terminology very close to our own today: ‘women’s movement’ and ‘bourgeois

⁹ ‘The Social Basis of the Woman Question’ in Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*.

JULIA CÁMARA

women's movement'.¹⁰ The two tendencies may coincide in their immediate tasks, but they differ radically in their final objectives. They are the result of the emergence of two distinct groups of women as a consequence of the development and expansion of capitalism. Understanding this point of view facilitates a first reading of Kollontai that is free of reservations and prejudices, allowing for a more open-minded approach to her arguments.

COMRADELY LOVE

The most innovative, extraordinary and original of Kollontai's contributions to Marxist thought are her reflections on love. Ever since Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and, with greater depth, the first volume of *Capital*, Marxism has accepted as a fundamental argument that the social relations developed under capitalism do not emanate from human nature, but are historical constructions produced by the capitalist mode of organizing the production and life. The political consequences of this argument are immense: if they are not natural, if they do not necessarily stem from our human nature, then it is possible to imagine different ways of relating to each other and socially organizing ourselves; if they are historical (if they have a beginning point), then they can have an end; if they are both the result and the reproductive agent of concrete material relationships, then we can and should invent different material bases that give rise to healthier and fuller social relations.

Broadly speaking, until Alexandra Kollontai, the conclusions drawn from this reality only went as far as to consider the relations

¹⁰ 'Las causas del "problema de la mujer"' in Alexandra Kollontai, *La mujer en el desarrollo social* (Barcelona: Editorial Guardarrama, 1976). This Spanish text is based on the 14 lectures Kollontai delivered at Sverdlov University in 1921, which were published in Russian in 1923 under the title *Trud zhenshchiny v evolyutsii khozyaistva* [Women's Labour in the Evolution of the Economy].

between classes. While it is true that we can find several attempts throughout the nineteenth century to envisage other ways of coexisting and organizing not only production but also life, these are usually limited to numerically reduced, isolated groups (the various utopian experiences, among which Fourier's phalansteries are perhaps the most famous) or are understood as a complement to classical labour demands (such as the opening of nurseries and children's canteens inside factories). At the end of the century, the concept of 'free love' began to be theorized, especially among anarchist sectors. Without necessarily having the same implications that we attach to the term today, free love implied relationships outside marriage, initiated and terminated by mutual desire. One of its greatest advocates was Emma Goldman.

In the socialist camp, the reactions to free love were diverse, although mostly negative. On the one hand, it was argued that working-class women and men had in practice already established relationships outside of marriage, an institution that was more closely guarded among the bourgeoisie due to the imperative of ensuring the line of inheritance. On the other hand, there was a tendency to interpret the adjective 'free' in the liberal sense of the term. Free love thus came to mean selfish love, free of responsibilities. There is a well-known and significant exchange of letters on this subject between Lenin and Inessa Armand in which Lenin tries to persuade Inessa to remove the term from one of her texts. Lenin establishes as many as ten possible shades of meaning for the expression, of which the first seven (*freedom* from material calculations in affairs of love; from material worries; from religious prejudices; from prohibitions by the head of the family; from the prejudices of society; from the circumstances of one's environment; and from the fetters of the law) would indeed correspond to the interests of working-class women. The last three (freedom from the serious element in love; from childbirth; and freedom of adultery) would constitute bourgeois demands

and would be the most closely associated with the term.¹¹ It is important to recall that, beyond Lenin's view that 'sexual excesses' and 'overstimulation of sex life' contributed to the 'wasted health and strength of young people', ideas on degeneration and social hygiene were quite popular at the time, even in revolutionary circles.¹² Kollontai's response to the problem of love transcended the debate on free love. Based on observing the existence of a 'sexual crisis' in revolutionary Russia (i.e. *chaos* in sexual and relational behaviours, especially among the youth), Kollontai attempted to go beyond the level of individual attitudes to consider love in its historical, social and political dimension. The result is a comprehensive proposal that breaks with many of the conceptions of the most rigid communist tendencies, but which fits perfectly into the apparatus of Marxist thought. By understanding love as part of an ideology (recognized as a battleground by socialism), Kollontai dismissed the idea that it is a 'minor issue' in order to position loving feelings (or, to use more modern and less cheesy terms to position the affections and ways in which we emotionally relate) at the centre of any revolutionary political strategy.

One of Kollontai's most important innovations is precisely this: having identified love as a social construct half a century before feminism began to say the same about gender. It was not until the most recent elaborations of the feminist movement and

¹¹ Letter to Inessa Armand dated 17 January 1915 in Bern, first published in 1939 in the magazine *Bolshevik*, issue no. 13. *Lenin Collected Works*, trans. Andrew Rothstein, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), volume 35, pp. 180–181.

¹² Clara Zetkin, *Lenin on the Woman Question* (New York: International Publishers, 1934). In a reversal of classical degenerationist discourses, at the end of the nineteenth century it became possible to find workers' literature that characterized bourgeois practices as degenerate and presented the organized working class as responsible for moral and social cleansing. The campaigns against alcohol consumption undertaken by anarchism or the famous 'deportation' in sealed trains of the women who were part of the Durruti Column are good examples. Communist leaders, including Kollontai, used a similar vocabulary and differentiated between invigorating or revitalizing and excessive or exhausting sexual stimuli.

the critique of the 'romantic love' model that we find something similar to what Kollontai did a hundred years ago and, even so, it does so with much weaker political connotations and implications. Her proposal is not based on thinking about what each of our separate relationships should be like (individual ethical criteria), but on the type of interpersonal ties and bonds that we need to build a classless, fairer, happier and fulfilled society.

Shifting the focus from the private and introspective sphere to cast light on the social dimension of love helps us to envisage how it contributes to shaping a certain kind of collective. This is an apparently obvious fact (after all, conventional couples, families and groups of female friends are also collectives based on love), but one that we have naturalized to the point of making it invisible. Historically, love has been a political weapon that has always been used: love for a god, love for the nation, love for your people (as in the case of feminism and especially in the civil rights movement of the twentieth century) and even love for a woman (as Kollontai explains well on discussing the chivalrous logic of feudal societies). As a feeling, love is an element of union and therefore an organizing element. Understanding and appreciating the transformative power of feelings of love is fundamental to any political project.

From what principles does the sexual and affective morality of our societies emanate as a morality that permits and enables atrocities? Based on what principles do we want to build a new sexual morality that will help us to live freer and fuller lives? Kollontai posed these questions at a time when the foundations were being laid for a new model of society (of the transition to socialism) and when the revolution had shattered the moral customs and habits of significant sectors of the population, especially in urban areas and with a strong impact on the younger sectors. Her most interesting texts in this respect constitute the last stage of her written work before leaving Russia and many take the form of public replies, which appeared in several newspapers and

magazines and letters she received from young party members; 'Make Way for Winged Eros!' is a good example.

In her effort to understand sexual morality as part of ideology, Kollontai distanced herself from the two predominant positions of the time: the reactionary nostalgia for lost customs and the individualistic denial of any code of conduct. In the midst of the twenty-first century and after decades of savage neoliberalism, it is easy to recognize both positions in the discourses that surround us today. The relative flexibilization of customs, the progressive acceptance of diverse family models and an evident though superficial rejection of taboos on sex have on the one hand provoked the emergence or strengthening of a conservative tendency opposed to change. This seeks to enshrine supposed traditional customs and gender discipline as a moral canon of conduct and is also present in (minority) sectors who claim to be of the Left. The other side of the coin is a kind of emotional nihilism that has been defined in several ways: the consumption of bodies, emotional selfishness, sexual neoliberalism, and so on.

The debates of recent years surrounding polyamory and romantic love and the growing interest among feminists regarding emotions are a response to all of this. Without judging or blaming individual attitudes, they instead seek to understand the logic that leads us to reproduce the dynamics of possession and consumption/discarding inherent to the system in our sexual and relational behaviours. In 1921, Kollontai wrote that 'We are people living in the world of property relationships, a world of sharp class contradictions and of an individualistic morality. We still live and think under the heavy hand of an unavoidable loneliness of spirit'.¹³ She was right then, and she still is. Kollontai tried to differentiate between the passive adaptation to capitalist conditions of life and the emergence of active and creative principles that represent an active reaction to that logic. She then

¹³ 'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle', in Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*.

went on to defend the construction of a proletarian morality as part of the same process as the class struggle and also as a tool for it, not because it destroys anything in itself (and here there would be an interesting debate regarding the more enthusiastic conceptions of the revolutionary potential of sexuality, in which I personally side with Marxists like Holly Lewis), but because of its potential to create solidarity, bonds and ties and to influence the transformation of mentalities. The question, therefore, is how we increase humanity's 'loving potential' (reduced to a minimum under capitalist living conditions) and on which principles we construct a new sexual and affective morality: how can we transcend individual solutions and generate emancipatory and fair relational frameworks for all? Kollontai offers a dual response and starts with the selection of solidarity and cooperation as the two basic principles of bonding. What follows is a logical observation: 'For a social system to be built on solidarity and co-operation, it is essential that people should be capable of love and warm emotions'.¹⁴ Only in a society organized according to criteria different from that of today and only through the fundamental reorganization of our socioeconomic relations on a communist basis, is it possible to expand the 'love potential'. *Without this old truth, there is no solution.* Surely one of the major attractions of Kollontai's thought is the way in which her ideas, formulated a century ago, link to our current debates and offer us far more satisfactory and politically advanced answers than all subsequent feminism (let alone the labour movement) has provided. In her work, we find the first formulation of a *proletarian ideology of love*, which transcends thought on couples' or strictly sexual relationships, to theorize the ability to love in the broadest sense of the term, breaking with the hierarchy that ranks our relationships from most to least important and with the competition or contradiction between different types of emotional ties. In other words, in Kollontai we

¹⁴ 'Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth', trans. Alix Holt, first published in *Molodoya Gvardiya* magazine, no. 3, 1923.

find a proposal for a break with monogamy that is not based on personal preference or convenience, but rather on the evidence that the ideal of comprehensive love through a single person, besides being unattainable, is in direct contradiction with the interests of our class. This is the definition of *love-comradeship*: a love based on complete freedom, equality and friendly solidarity, where it is not the form but the content of the emotional ties that matters. It includes mutual equality, recognition of rights and closeness based on comradeship – factors that can only be achieved collectively in and through political struggle and which transcend any debate on polyamory and free love, to build more complete and fairer ways of relating to each other. As Kollontai writes, it is understood that ‘One of the tasks that confronts the working class in its attack on the “beleaguered fortress of the future” is undoubtedly the task of establishing more healthy and more joyful relationships between the sexes.’¹⁵

THE CENTRALITY OF FEMINISM IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Rescuing Kollontai from the clutches of the past makes particular sense at the present time, marked by an uninterrupted succession of crises in which the reproduction of the material bases that sustain life is increasingly precarious; in which struggles are feminized (not because they didn’t include women before, but because today it is precisely those led by women that are on the front line); and in which the feminist movement is emerging as a vehicle for mass politicization capable of encapsulating a large part of the contradictions of the system. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the misnamed ‘real socialism’, the world was left with no alternatives to capitalism. The discourse of the ‘end of history’ was imposed: there was no longer a class struggle,

¹⁵ Alexandra Kollontai, *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle: Love and the New Morality*, trans. Alix Holt (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972).

conflict was no longer the driving force of history and there were no more attempts to explain social phenomena with ‘grand narratives.’ Now that anyone could be a property owner and society did not exist, there were only men and women making personal choices for whose consequences they were entirely responsible. Of course, this tale was a lie.

In the last decade, we have witnessed a renewed interest in Marxist thought within universities, but also within social movements. The collapse of the facade of welfare and progress through the market marked by the 2008 crisis has shattered the illusions of individual salvation and refocused the debate on the construction of a rival collective subject capable of challenging the current correlation of forces. This phenomenon has occurred in diverse ways among different sectors. Faced with the recovery of class as a fixed sociological category or as an identifying pastiche, the richest branches of Marxist thought have sought to detect which struggles and social processes are in fact contributing to the formation of this new class subject and the mechanisms through which collective consciousness raising takes place. The way in which the feminist movement has organized the struggle against the dynamics of capitalist exploitation and dispossession places it at the heart of these processes.

After decades of fragmentation, the fact that it is feminism that has in practice recovered the idea of a collective subject *for itself*, which is politically self-built and internationally coordinated, has aroused a furious reaction among the advocates of a mythical and idealized class subject. Those who reduce the power of the working class to a petrified and univocal image forget that subjects do not declare themselves and that classes are constructed and defined only through class struggle.¹⁶ Subjects require praxis; they are constituted in joint struggle and on the basis of concrete shared

¹⁶ Possibly the best definition of ‘social class’ formulated so far is that found in Edward Palmer Thompson’s ‘Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?’, *Social History*, no. 3 (1978): 133–165.

experiences. There is no essential identity to claim without the materiality of practice.

Feminist consciousness and class consciousness are interlinked. No matter how much it may irritate the propagandists of a universal sisterhood that erases the relations of exploitation and denies the differences between women, the emancipation of women is not possible under capitalism because gender oppression, in its present form, is a direct result of the conflict between capital and labour. No matter how much it infuriates those who are nostalgic for oppression and a mythical working class that never existed, it is not possible to question the capitalist system without touching on gender and race because both are at the very heart of capitalist dynamics of exploitation and dispossession. It is through experience and concrete struggle that women make these connections because it is not possible to separate the two questions in the material reality. In this sense, insofar as feminism can come to question and directly confront many of the mechanisms of the reproduction of capital, at times it has also developed the capacity to become a process of class subjectivation, of the construction of the subject; it becomes *feminist class struggle*.

Kollontai explained with various examples how this consciousness raising takes place and the way in which class and 'feminist' consciousness have a mutual impact on each other. Despite her arguments against bourgeois feminists and the existence of a specific woman question, she devoted much of her life to promoting women's self-organization (including and especially, of those women who were not party members) and her work does not contain a single explicit rejection of the feminist demands of the time – not even those of the suffragettes, as she recognized that working women were the majority of this movement in many places. On 'Women's Day', Kollontai addressed the accusations of dividing the class by defending the specific need for the celebration of March 8. While she was clear that the

formal recognition of rights alone would not bring about an end to discrimination, she pointed out in several of her texts that this did not mean that partially improving the system was not possible and she advocated for the participation of communists in these processes and in the struggle for political rights.

In Kollontai, we find a proposal for solidarity based on common interest – not on kindness or empathy, but on the realization that if the situation improves for a disadvantaged sector of the class, it will necessarily also improve for the class as a whole. Accepting this maxim as a starting point for our political action today puts us in a better position to address many of the debates regarding the expansion of rights, the supposed contradiction of interests and the alliance between oppressed sectors. Together with subsequent developments regarding the role of gender in the workings of contemporary capitalism, this allows us to understand that the transformative potential of women’s movements is not due to any essential or ahistorical characteristic, but to our position as a strategic class sector.¹⁷

Kollontai wrote that the proletarian women’s movement is an organic part of the workers’ movement. In 2022, we must say that not only is this still true, but that the feminist movement also constitutes a central pillar of the processes of class recomposition. Any other interpretation does not correspond to a rigorous analysis of capitalist dynamics and social relations. Approaching Kollontai in an unprejudiced and critical way can provide us with tools to envisage how to push for the (re)construction of the much-needed class subject, but also to imagine different ways of organizing life. The defence of life in the face of capitalist destruction and the conviction that a good and beautiful life is necessarily possible has run through all emancipatory thought since Marx and Engels and is an essential part of communist power. In Kollontai, we also

¹⁷ Particularly relevant, given her capacity for creativity and synthesis, is Nancy Fraser, *Los talleres ocultos del capital: Un mapa para la riqueza* (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2020).

JULIA CÁMARA

find a proposal for the moral and material bases of complete social reorganization.

‘In the name of equality, liberty and the comradely love of the new marriage, we call upon the working and peasant men and women to apply themselves courageously and with faith to the work of rebuilding human society in order to render it more perfect, more just and more capable of ensuring the individual the happiness which he or she deserves.’¹⁸ Enjoy reading.

Translated by Catriona Goss

¹⁸ ‘Communism and the Family’ in Alexandra Kollontai, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*.

The March We Carry in Our Hands

A Humble Tribute to Alexandra Kollontai

ÂNDREA FRANCINE BATISTA AND

ATILIANA DA SILVA VICENTE BRUNETTO

March may end, but its intensity continues to pulsate in the peasant and indigenous red April, in the workers' May, in the harvest festivals, in the winter that draws nearer, in the spring that we carry between our teeth. March dwells within us.

The March that dwells within us bears the strength of socialist women, the power of the struggle for human emancipation that, in its stubbornness, sprouts and resprouts from the ruins of the darkest moments, from the most dangerous corners, from the most violent storms, from the whirlwinds that swirl, from the fog that obscures the path, from the searing pain of a cut in living flesh. The March that dwells within us beats like a drum, marking the rhythm of life in all its humanity, yet to be discovered, yet to be made.

To these times, we offer with our own hands the March that dwells within us; to the eyes that have been blindfolded and do not

see but feel the touch of solidarity; to the catatonia induced by the deafening crash; to the fragments of our class that knead the bread each day but do not recognize themselves in the crumbs scattered on the ground; to those who can no longer support the weight of daily oppression on their shoulders; but also to those who still can.

The March that we offer from our hearts and with our hands bears the words, the gazes and the combative raised fist of the women peasants, indigenous peoples, *quilombolas* and workers of history who broke with the many forms of resignation and subordination to launch themselves into the audacious feat of reinventing human life. It carries the strength and energy of Anas, Olgas, Marias, Nadezhdas, Elenas, Inessas, Matildas, Claudias, Veras and Alexandras – women who inaugurated the socialist experience of the Russian Revolution with their political participation in the construction of a new social collectivity.

Alexandra Kollontai was born on 31 March 1872, 150 years ago. Rebellious and resolute, she threw herself with full intensity into militant life in the name of the socialist cause. She worked as a volunteer educator in the outskirts of the Russian capital and wrote stories about and for the working class. She organized the enlistment of young revolutionaries into the political movement and carried out occasional missions such as transporting secret documents until she eventually joined the party of the international socialist movement definitively. There, she made the acquaintance of Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Vera Zasulich, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Vladimir Lenin, all critics of the revisionist wing, a tendency within the international socialist movement during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

On 30 January 1905, Kollontai took part in a peaceful march of peasants and workers held in St Petersburg against the Russian Empire, which immediately responded with violence, killing and injuring thousands. That day, known as Bloody Sunday, provoked a sequence of activities which would result in the October

Revolution. The insurrection of 1905 is considered to have been a rehearsal for that revolution.

It was in this context that Alexandra Kollontai joined the Bolshevik tendency within the social democratic party and devoted all of her energy to organizing working women, agitating the masses and the promoting socialist ideas alongside the feminist movement.

With Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg at her side, she agitated tirelessly within the international workers' organization the Second International and to advance women's political participation. The International Socialist Women's Conferences that took place just before the International Congresses would bear many fruits. In these spaces, the women met to discuss the challenges facing socialist feminism, identifying solutions and actions to be developed. For example, in the struggle for women's right to vote within the Socialist International, a motion was approved at the First International Socialist Women's Conference (Stuttgart, 1907) and subsequently defended by Zetkin and Kollontai at the Seventh Congress of the Socialist International (Stuttgart, 1907). This proposal was deliberated jointly with the proposal for International Workers' Day. It is also essential to remember that the creation of International Women's Day as a way to organize and spread socialist ideas among women workers and peasants took place during the Second International Socialist Women's Conference, held shortly before the Eighth Congress of the Socialist International in Copenhagen, 1910.

Kollontai was directly engaged in organizing International Women's Day, first held in Russia on 2 March 1913, where women workers and peasants participated on a massive scale. Initially, International Women's Day was commemorated on a different day in each country; the important thing was to organize a moment of struggle, commemoration and international coordination of the struggle of socialist women, which in many cases was met

with repression and arrests. On 8 March 1917 (23 February in the Russian calendar), weavers and seamstresses spontaneously rose up in a strike in Petrograd (formerly known as St Petersburg before 1914), demonstrating for bread and peace. This strike became the trigger for the movement which led to the October Revolution. It was the women of March who raised the first torch of the revolutionary flame.

Kollontai was one of the pioneers organizing women workers and socialist feminism. She acted organically within this collective to further human emancipation and the political emancipation of women. True women's liberation could only happen in totality once the working class was liberated from the shackles of the capitalist system.

In 1917, this Bolshevik acted as the People's Commissar for Social Welfare, which worked to eliminate illiteracy and draft laws that furthered gender equality (related to divorce, for example), as well as creating collective laundries and kitchens and spaces for children's education so that Russian women could take part in the country's effervescent political life.

The March that was bubbling up in Kollontai's heart made her even more uneasy with the daily experience of the confrontation between two faces of the revolutionary process: the urgency to rebuild the economic production of life and the urgency of women's liberation from oppression. This is evident in her short story 'Sisters' (1923) and in her essays 'Communism and the Family' (1920), 'The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the Economy' (1921), 'The Family and the Communist State' (1919) and 'Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman' (1926).

She was constantly preoccupied with the need to find a working method to allow a larger number of women workers to involve themselves in the struggles of their time. Her texts 'The First International Conference of Communist Women' (1920) and

'Trade Unions and the Working Woman' (1921) are a testament to this. In order to advance women's participation in political organization, it was fundamental to go beyond propaganda; women's professional training and education would be necessary to enable them to take on the tasks of the party as well as to advance the consciousness of workers as a whole, combatting any and every prejudice against women that still existed within the masses.

At the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921, Kollontai, together with Alexander Shliapnikov and other comrades, warned of the dangers of bureaucratic degeneration that threatened the party and revolutionary process. She proposed that institutions be controlled by the workers and production processes be based on self-management through the programme the 'Workers' Opposition', though this was defeated by the position Lenin took during the Congress.

After Lenin's death (1924), the Soviet Union took on new contradictions that would impact the political life of various revolutionaries, including Alexandra Kollontai, who would become the Soviet Union's ambassador to Norway and Sweden while in 'exile' – the first time in history that a woman had assumed this role. Her mission in Norway was completed with success, contributing to the normalization of commercial relations between the two countries in 1925. She arrived in Mexico as a trade delegate in 1926, first passing through the port of Havana (Cuba), where she was prohibited from disembarking due to strained diplomatic relations, though this did not stop a group of Cuban women from visiting her boat to pay tribute to her. She remained in Mexico until 1927, returning to the Soviet Union between 1935 and 1936 as a member of the Soviet delegation to the League of Nations. During this period, she met Tina Modotti, a luminous revolutionary photographer who reflected the sincere commitment of Mexican revolutionaries, the Weimar Left and fighters in the Spanish Civil War, with whom she maintained a

long and lasting friendship. In 1937, Kollontai once again passed through Mexico to raise funds for combatants in the Spanish Civil War.

Kollontai would only return to her country of origin in 1945 at the age of 73, where she would continue her militancy and her writing on the revolutionary process. She died in Moscow on 9 March 1952 at the end of the Russian winter.

The March that dwelled in Kollontai carried with it the mass engagement of women in building the revolution. The March that dwells in us carries her legacy, her intensity and her perspective of human emancipation.

The March that we offer in our hands carries a ‘sea of flags raging against capital’, as women of the Landless Workers declared during gatherings for International Women’s Day in 2020; it carries our Manifesto of Landless Women, which repudiates the atrocities of capital’s political and economic project for the countryside. It denounces violence against women, be it domestic or institutional; it condemns the persecution of workers’ rights; and it stands in solidarity with the struggling people of Brazil and the world as part of the great collective work of humanity to build a new form of society.

Without feminism, there is no socialism!

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Translated by Alex Hochuli

Kollontai 150

The Social Basis of the Women's Question (1909)

The women's movement in Russia is passing through a decisive moment in its history: in December 1908 it will be reviewing the creative activity carried out by women's organizations over the last few years and at the All-Russia Women's Congress it must decide upon the 'course of action' to be followed by feminists² in the coming years of struggle for women's emancipation. Complex socio-political problems, which until recently still belonged to the realm of abstract 'thorny' issues, are now, as a result of the events that have taken place in Russia, becoming urgent issues demanding energetic practical involvement and solution. These problems include the so-called women's question. With each passing day a growing number of women are drawn into the search for an answer to three disturbing questions: Which way shall we go? What should we do? How can we make sure that the female section of the population of Russia also receives the fruit of the long, stubborn and agonizingly difficult struggle for a new political structure in our homeland?

The Alliance for Equality,¹ together with the section on women's voting rights of the Russian Women's Mutual Aid Society, have decided to convene the First All-Russia Women's Congress²

¹ The Alliance for Female Equality was a feminist organization formed in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. The alliance demanded that women be given political equality and the right to enter various professions. The Alliance was dissolved after the defeat of the first Russian revolution of 1905-1907.

² The First All-Russia Women's Congress, organized by bourgeois societies, took place in St Petersburg from 10 to 16 December, 1908. It was attended by 700 delegates, including a group of 45 women workers. The feminists,

in order to give a comprehensive answer to these three questions.

The programme of the forthcoming women's congress is extremely broad: in the first section it is proposed to undertake an evaluation of women's activity in various professions in Russia; in the second section it is proposed to examine the economic position of women and investigate the conditions of work in trade and industry and in the domestic services and also to look at the question of the protection of women's labour, etc.; a special subsection will be set up to discuss questions relating to the family, marriage and prostitution; the work of the third section will include the present civil and political position of women and measures to be taken in the struggle for women's equality in these areas; finally, section four will study questions related to women's education.

One cannot but welcome this broadened programme of the All-Russia Women's Congress, particularly when one compares it with the draft programme published in the magazine *Soyuz zhenshchin* (The Women's Alliance) No. 3, 1907. This draft programme totally omitted such an important question as the economic position of women in connection with the legal protection of female labour. Was this merely an oversight, an accident? If it was indeed simply

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who organized the congress, intended to conduct it under the slogan: 'The women's movement should not be either bourgeois or proletarian, but a single movement animated by one spirit.' In their speeches, the women worker delegates exposed the class-opposite nature of the proletarian and the bourgeois women's movements. Despite the fact that they were in the minority, the women worker delegates were able to persuade the congress to adopt resolutions on the protection of female and child labour, on the protection of peasant mothers, and others. The women workers also introduced a resolution demanding universal, equal, direct and secret voting rights. The presidium refused to put forward this resolution and replaced it with another, drawn up in the liberal-bourgeois spirit. The group of women-worker delegates then left the congress in protest.

Kollontai was one of the organizers in charge of preparatory work with the women worker delegates prior to the congress, in which she herself took an active part. A speech which she had prepared was read at the congress by V. I. Volkova, a woman worker, as Kollontai had been forced to flee abroad as a result of police surveillance.

an oversight, then it was a characteristic oversight; to forget about the economic aspect of the women's question, about the situation of working women and the protection of female labour, is the kind of 'accident' that would immediately determine the nature of the forthcoming congress and would make the participation of those sections of the female population for whom the women's question is intimately and inextricably bound up with the overall labour issues of our day both impossible and futile. Now this oversight has been corrected; the second section will be given over entirely to the question of female labour and the economic position of women. Therefore it would not have been worthwhile pausing to comment on such a minor incident had it not been typical of our bourgeois 'suffragettes'.

With the caution typical of bourgeois feminists, the organizers of the congress hesitated for a long time: what should the nature of the congress be? The omission from the draft programme of the point dealing with the economic position of women is, in our opinion, closely connected with these hesitations. At one of the meetings on the forthcoming congress, individuals with considerable influence in the feminist world insisted that the congress should not become involved in 'propaganda work' but should concentrate on concrete issues such as the fight against alcoholism. Thus until quite recently the organizers of the congress still did not know whether it ought to assume the nature of a benevolent 'ladies' conference concerned with moral and charitable activities, or whether an attempt should be made to break through women's indifference to their own fate and draw them into the ranks of those fighting for women's emancipation. However under the influence of the more clear-thinking supporters of equal rights, the second tendency gradually won the upper hand. The slogan chosen for the forthcoming congress is the traditional feminist rallying cry: the union of all women in the struggle for purely female rights and interests.

The congress has served as a spur to feminist organizations.

The female ant-hill has stirred. One after the other such feminists as Pokrovskaya, Kal'manovich, Shchepkina, Vakhtina and others delivered speeches and lectures whose content could be summed up in the same women's rallying call: 'Women from all classes of the population, unite!'

However tempting this 'peaceful' slogan may sound, however much it may appear to promise to the 'poor younger sister' of the bourgeois woman – the working woman – it is precisely this slogan so beloved of the feminists that compels us to pause and examine in greater detail the forthcoming women's congress and to subject its objectives and fundamental aspirations to a careful appraisal from the point of view of the interests of working-class women.

In concrete terms, the question is whether working-class women should respond to the call of the feminists and participate actively and directly in the struggle for women's equality, or whether, faithful to the traditions of their class, they should go their own way and fight using other means in order to free not only women but all mankind from the oppression and enslavement of contemporary capitalist forms of social life.

Before going on to answer this question, however, I believe it necessary to state the basic propositions that serve as the starting point for the arguments I am about to present.

Leaving our right honourable friends, the bourgeois scholars, to examine more closely the question of the superiority of one sex over the other, or to weigh the brain and calculate the intellectual make-up of men and women, the supporters of historical materialism fully recognize the naturally existing differences between the sexes and demand only one thing, namely that each individual, man or woman, be given the real possibility of achieving the freest and fullest self-determination, that the widest possible opportunities be provided for the development and application of all natural talents. At the same time, the supporters of historical materialism deny the existence of specifically female issues apart from the overall social issue of our day. Certain economic factors

once led to the subordinate position of women, with her natural characteristics playing a purely *secondary* role. Only the total disappearance of those (economic) factors, only the evolution of those economic forms that once caused the enslavement of women, can effect a radical change in their social position. In other words, women can only become truly free and equal in a world that has been transformed and based on new social and economic principles.

This assertion, however, does not rule out the possibility of a partial improvement in the life of women within the framework of the existing system, although a truly radical solution of the labour problem is possible only with the complete restructuring of existing production relations. Nonetheless, such a view of the situation should not act as a brake upon reform work aimed at satisfying the immediate interests of the proletariat. On the contrary, each new gain by the working class is a rung in the ladder leading mankind to the kingdom of freedom and social equality; each new right won by women brings them closer to their goal—total emancipation.

One further comment: in discussing the question of women's emancipation, one must, as with any other socio-political question, base oneself firmly upon the actually existing relationships. Everything that pertains to the realm of 'moral aspirations' or other ideological structures we willingly leave at the disposal of bourgeois liberalism. For us, the emancipation of women is not a dream, nor even a principle, but a concrete reality, a fact coming into being with every day that passes. Step by step, modern economic relations and the entire future course of development of the productive forces are assisting and will continue to assist the liberation of women from centuries of oppression and enslavement. One need only look around to see that this is so. Everywhere, in almost every sphere of production, women are now working alongside men. In England, France, Germany, Italy and Austria, of the 81 million individuals employed in manufacture, 27 million are

women.³ The number of women leading an independent existence and their proportional relationship to the total female population in civilized countries is shown in the following table; according to the most recent national censuses, the percentage of the male and female population living on its own earnings was as follows:⁴

Country	Women	Men
Austria	47%	63%
Italy	40%	66%
Switzerland	29%	61%
France	27%	58%
Great Britain and Ireland	27%	62%
Belgium	26%	60%
Germany	25%	61%
United States	13%	59%
Russia	10%	43%

On turning from proportional evaluation to absolute figures we discover that, although the number of women in Russia who live on their own earnings is lower than in other countries, that number is nonetheless fairly large. According to the last census, of the 63 million female population in Russia, more than six million live on their own earnings; in the cities two out of eight million (i.e. 25 per cent) earn their own living; in rural areas four million of the total 55 million female population are independent. If one considers the total gainfully employed population in Russia (i.e. the population living on its own earnings) then of the 33 million gainfully employed individuals, 27 million are men and six million women ...

In Russia, female labour is particularly widespread in the textile

³ Cf. T. Schlesinger-Eckstein, *Women at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, p. 38, in Russian. (The footnotes to this article are all those of Kollontai.)

⁴ Cf. Prof. Y. Pirstorf, *Women's Labour and the Women's Question*, St Petersburg, 1902, p. 27 (in Russian).

industry, in every branch of which female labour predominates over male ...⁵ In addition to the textile industry, female industrial labour in Russia is also widely used in such branches of industry as food processing and in particular bakeries – 4,391 women and 8,868 men; in the chemical industry, in particular cosmetics – 4,074 women and 4,508 men; in the glass industry – about 5,000 women; in the china industry – about four thousand; in the tile and brick industry – about six thousand. Only in the metal-processing industry is the number of women small.

The figures quoted above are, in our opinion, sufficient to show that female labour is widely used in Russian industry. Moreover, it must be remembered that Russia moved to large-scale capitalist production comparatively recently and that, as the sphere of capitalist economics expands, its industry will draw in an ever greater number of women workers.

Even now, in the bigger towns and cities of Russia that have large-scale capitalist enterprises, female labour and in particular female proletarian labour, constitutes, taking account of female labour reserves, a fairly considerable proportion of the total work force. In St Petersburg, for example, according to the 1900 census, for every 100 men living by their own labour, there were 40 women ...⁶

Women are most numerous among those who earn their living by proletarian labour: for every 269 thousand working men there are 74 thousand working women and for every 40 thousand 'single' men, there are 30 thousand 'single' women. Who are these 'single' women? Naturally they constitute the most exploited section of the petty handicraft workers: seamstresses, knitters, flowergirls, etc., who work at home as supposedly independent workers for

⁵ *Statistical Handbook*, Issue III, 1908 (in Russian).

⁶ In 1881 in St Petersburg there were 27 women living by their own labour for every 100 men; in 1890 there were 34 women and by 1900 this figure had risen to 40. (Levikson-Lessing, *On the Employment of Women in St Petersburg According to the Censuses of 1881, 1890 and 1900*, pp. 141-147; in Russian.)

capitalist middlemen and are subjected, as a result of their isolation from each other, to the harshest enslavement by capital. There are considerably fewer women employed in the professions (13,000 for every 74,000 men) while only 13,000 women for every 31,000 men come under the heading 'proprietor'.

The proportions within female labour of the various social groups in other countries and the position of male and female industrial workers among those who earn their living independently, is shown in the following table.

Country	Year of census	Total population		Industrial population		Including industrial workers	
		Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
(in millions)							
Austria	1890	11.7	12.2	7.8	6.2	4.4	5.3
Germany	1895	25.4	26.4	15.5	6.6	9.3	5.3
France	1891	18.9	19.2	11.1	5.2	5.0	3.6
England & Wales	1891	14.1	14.9	8.9	4.0	5.4	3.1
USA	1890	32.1	30.6	18.8	3.9	8.7	2.9
Total	—	102.2	103.3	62.1	25.9	32.8	20.2

As can be seen from this table, in Austria the number of women workers exceeds the number of men: for 4.4 million men there are more than 5 million women. In Germany, the number of women workers amounts to over half the number of men. The same is true for France and England. Only in America is this correlation somewhat less favourable to women.

... The growth in female labour naturally means a continuing growth in the role of women in national production. Already women produce about 1/3 of the total world production of goods for the world market. This constant growth of female labour arouses fear in many bourgeois economists, forcing them to see in

the woman a dangerous rival to the man in the sphere of labour and to react with hostility to the expansion of female labour. Is such an attitude justified and is the woman always merely a 'threatening' rival to the man?

The number of working women is constantly increasing, but the continuous development of the productive forces also demands a larger and larger work force. Only at certain moments of technological revolution is there either a reduction in the demand for new workers, or a replacement of one category of workers by another: women replace men only to be replaced in their turn by children and youth. However, each step forward in technological progress eventually causes the rate of production to intensify and this new surge in production inevitably brings with it a new demand for workers of every category. Thus, despite temporary lulls and, at times, sharp fluctuations, the number of workers drawn into industry ultimately grows with the growth of world productive forces. The growth in the number of both categories of workers (men and women) is *absolute*, whereas the more intensive growth of female labour in comparison to male labour is only *relative* . . .

Viewed overall, what is happening on the labour market is not the replacement of male labour by female labour, but rather the grouping of the labour forces of both these categories according to profession: some professions and branches of industry are employing more and more women (domestic service, the textile industry, the clothing industry), while others rely mainly on male labour (mining, the iron and steel industry, the machine industry, etc.). Moreover, there can be no doubt that the quantitative growth of female labour is also taking place thanks to a drop in child labour and this is something that one can only welcome. With the promulgation of new laws to protect young children and raise the age at which children may be employed in industrial labour, the regrouping of the labour forces undoubtedly involves an increase in the number of women workers.

Thus the assertion that women are men's most dangerous labour rival can only be accepted with a number of reservations. Leaving aside the question of the competition existing in the professions, we will note only that in the proletarian milieu, the woman worker only constitutes a rival to the man when she is isolated, not involved in the joint proletarian struggle. The woman worker is a rival to the male, a 'threatening' rival who lowers his wages and mercilessly destroys the fruit of his successes in his organized struggle against capital, only when she is not drawn into the general class and professional movement. However, is not every *unorganized* proletarian just such a rival, whether he be a hungry village 'yokel', a 'has-been' pushed out of his profession, or simply a worker deprived of a permanent job? The woman worker has a detrimental effect upon the conditions of work insofar as she is, as yet, the less organized section of the working class. Capital readily makes use of her to counter the more conscious and united section of the working class. However, the moment she enters the ranks of the organized fighters for working-class liberation, the assertion that she, the woman worker, is the worst rival of the working man, ceases to be categorical. The organized proletariat of whichever sex loses his or her capacity for harming class comrades.

Having made these preliminary reservations and looked very briefly at some statistical examples, we will now seek the answer to the questions posed earlier. We refer those who wish to acquaint themselves more fully with the conditions of female labour, the growth of the female work force and its significance in the economic life of the nations to special works written on this subject. Here we wish merely to stress once again the close link which undoubtedly exists between the desire for emancipation on the part of women and the trends that can be observed in the economic development of society. Keeping these trends constantly in mind will enable us to discover more easily the path that should be followed by the woman who has a broad understanding of what

must be done to achieve the full and comprehensive emancipation of women.

In answer to the question, what must be done by women who wish to defend their violated rights and interests, the bourgeois ideologist hastens to reply: 'Unite with another socially weak element, organize and join together in the struggle against the male oppressors' ...

Such advice has not fallen on stony ground. Over recent years we have seen feminist organizations spring up one after the other. Feminism in Russia, including feminism as we traditionally understand it, is indisputably a new phenomenon. The first feminist publication *Zhenskoye dyelo* (The Women's Cause) appeared in 1899.⁷ For many years the desire for emancipation on the part of Russian women was limited to calls for equal educational opportunities. From the 1860s, when the women's question was first raised in Russia, up to the present, the women's movement has been nothing other than the history of the struggle to improve and expand the level of female education and primarily higher education. In the successes obtained in this sphere the women of the bourgeois classes saw, and not without reason, one of the principal methods of extending the sphere of female professional labour, the basis of their economic independence.

With the abolition of serfdom, which radically altered both economic and social relations in Russia and compelled a large section of the population to seek the means of existence, the women's question also arose in Russia. The post-reform system began to toss onto the labour market not only the professional male worker, but also a hitherto unknown type of woman who, like her male colleague, was also seeking work in order to earn her daily

⁷ Prior to this, starting from 1898, there existed only the annual *Zhensky kalendar* (Woman's Almanac). The magazine *Zhenskoye dyelo* (The Women's Cause) appeared for only two years and was replaced in 1904 by the feminist *Zhensky vestnik* (Woman's Herald). This was replaced in turn by the magazine *Soyuz zhenshchin* (Women's Alliance).

bread. The traditional women's slogan 'freedom to work' became, when adopted by Russian women, a demand for the freedom to receive education, without which all the doors of professional employment remained closed. Naturally, having completed their higher education, women then demanded free access to state and private employment and this demand was satisfied on the basis of purely economic considerations as private enterprise and state institutions began to realize the advantages of employing the cheaper and more amenable female work force.

The sphere of female professional labour gradually expanded, but women still continued to call for 'the freedom of education and choice of profession'. There could be no question of demanding political equality, for at that time even the men lacked political rights. As regards women's civil rights, the position of Russian women in this regard was fairly tolerable as compared with that of their Western European colleagues,⁸ and thus there was little obvious ground here for feminist agitation.

It goes without saying that the women's movement here under discussion was distinctly bourgeois in nature: it involved only a fairly narrow circle of women, mainly from the nobility, with a few representatives of the *raznochintsy*, (the new 'middle classes').⁶ No socialist ideals found expression in the demands put forward by the leading champions of female equality in Russia. It was indeed true that every year Russian industry was employing thousands more proletarian women, but it seemed that an unbridgeable gulf

⁸ According to Russian legislation a woman, on attaining her legal adult age, is considered fully competent in law: she may undertake civil actions in her own right, become the guardian even of non-relatives, be a witness, etc. The woman disposes of her own property, even if she marries, as the law recognizes the independent property rights of each marriage partner. The guardianship of the husband over the wife, as is practised, for example, in France, does not exist in Russia. Only in matters of inheritance is the woman discriminated against in law as compared to the man: in the direct line of descent the daughter inherits only 1/14 of the fixed and 1/7 of the moveable property, while in the collateral line of descent the rights of the women are even fewer.

separated the emancipated, educated woman and the woman worker with calloused hands and that no contact whatsoever was possible between them.

The women from these two opposing social camps were brought into contact only through philanthropic activity. From the very beginning of the women's movement in Russia (as, indeed, everywhere where women's organizations had still not arrived at self-determination) philanthropy was in the forefront.⁹ Almost all the women's organizations in Russia over recent years have been essentially philanthropic. Women organized themselves and set up women's societies not in order to win reforms in the sphere of women's rights but in order to carry out individual acts of charity. From the Society to Supply Material Support for Women's Higher Educational Courses (the largest in terms of the scope of its activity) to the first women's club founded by the Women's Mutual Aid Society, all such societies, as their names indicate, pursued philanthropic aims.

The above is not meant to accuse Russian women of indifference towards social and political issues. Can any other country boast of such a host of truly noble and charming 'nameless heroines' who gave their strength, their youth, their very life to the struggle for the ideals of social justice and the political liberation of their country? What has history to offer that can rival the inner beauty of the 'repentant gentlewoman' of the 1870s who put aside not only her finery but also all the privileges of her 'noble birth' in order to merge with the people and repay at least part of the debt owed them by her class ... And later, when, as a result of repression, any protest inevitably turned into a bitter struggle against the old order, there emerged from among the women of Russia innumerable heroines who amazed the world with their selflessness, their inner strength and their limitless dedication to the people ... Following upon the 'repentant gentlewoman', with her gentleness and inner beauty,

⁹ Cf. the chapter 'Women's Societies and Their Objectives' in the book *The Women's Movement* by Kechedzhi-Shapovalova (in Russian).

came the fearless *raznochinka*, and thereafter an endless stream of 'martyr women workers' who fought for the emancipation of their class ... The list of women martyrs fighting for the ideals of social justice is constantly being replenished by the names of new victims and the future historian writing about our age will only be able to bow his head in respect before these noble examples of women-fighters and women-martyrs ...

However, this is not the central issue here. Here we are speaking of those women who are struggling for what is called 'female emancipation'. In this particular area, the objectives and aspirations of our first feminists were extremely narrow and limited. Philanthropy and education constituted, until recently, the sum total of the activity undertaken by women's organizations. Even the first women's congress planned for 1905¹⁰ was to limit its objectives to these two areas.¹¹

The picture changes sharply following the memorable events of January. The revolutionary upsurge which swept through all sections of the population also affected the feminists, hitherto modest in their claims. Women's circles became more active, stirred into life. Bold speeches and radical demands could be heard. Declarations, resolutions and petitions were dispatched to rural and urban councils and to radical organizations, and this was followed by a series of conferences and meetings which adopted decisive political resolutions. In 1905, it seemed that there was not a corner of Russia where women were not, in one way or another, making themselves heard, reminding society of their existence and demanding that they too be granted new civil rights. The feminists, until recently so modest in their demands, became aware of the fact that the regeneration of Russia and the

¹⁰ Due to the events of the 1905 rebellions, the congress did not take place until Dec 1908.

¹¹ 'The tasks facing the first congress of Russian women include philanthropy and education. Russian women have long been active in both these spheres and are therefore able to speak on both issues.' (*Zhensky vestnik*, No. 1, 1905.)

establishment of a new state system were the essential prerequisites of female emancipation . . .

The women's movement is abandoning its former, modest course and adopting a new path of social action. This, of course, did not happen without friction. Among the new members who had poured into the women's organizations two tendencies were becoming clearly distinguishable: some, more to the left, insisted upon the need to clearly define the political credo of the women's movement and gave priority to the struggle for *political* equality for women; those to the right, on the other hand, remained faithful to the old traditions, not wishing to bring 'politics' into their narrowly feminist aspirations. In April, 1905, the more left-wing elements formed the Alliance for the Equality of Women: the first women's organization in Russia to adopt a clear political platform. Meanwhile the right-wingers continued to group themselves around the Women's Mutual Aid Society and the *Zhensky vestnik* (Women's Herald), pursuing the idea of politically neutral feminism. The Alliance for Equality set up a broad network of branches across Russia, and as little as one year later, in May, 1906, its bureau estimated its membership at around 8,000.¹² The Alliance hoped to rally together women from all social classes on the basis of its vague slogans, and just as the Cadets had, in their early days, spoken in the name of the whole people, so the Alliance for Equality declared that it was voicing the needs of all Russian women.

However, the continuous growth of class self-consciousness and the inevitable differentiation among the various social strata of the population led to a further regrouping within women's social organizations also. The political bloc that fulfilled specific purposes in the heyday of the Union of Unions was becoming increasingly unsatisfactory, particularly as many of the suffragettes had, as a result of their convictions, aligned themselves with

¹² Cf. *Female Equality, Reports and Minutes, 1906* (in Russian).

certain political parties. Thus, as early as the spring of 1906 the St Petersburg branch of the Alliance split into two parts: the ‘left-wing’ feminists who aligned themselves, as a result of their political convictions, with the revolutionary parties, and the ‘right-wing’, who founded the Women’s Progressive Party¹³ similar in spirit to the Party of Peaceful Renovation, almost as small in number and just as ineffectual. Both of these women’s organizations marked the beginning of their activity by establishing political clubs – the first of a more or less democratic nature,¹⁴ the second still preserving its bourgeois nature, with high membership fees, etc.

The process by which women of various social strata gathered around politically and socially diverse banners took place spontaneously, regardless of the will or desires of those who struggled passionately to unite women in one, universal women’s organization. The Women’s Progressive Party in fact expressed the demands and requirements of the big bourgeoisie and, while continuing to argue the need to unite all women without any distinction of class and political conviction, elaborated its own political programme corresponding to the desires of that social stratum of which it was, in fact, the mouthpiece. The Alliance for Equality united women representatives of the liberal, ‘Cadet-type’ opposition; around it there gathered, and continue to gather, women from the middle bourgeoisie, mainly members of the intelligentsia. The Women’s Political Club in St Petersburg won the approval of the more radical elements, but here also the possibility of forming a political bloc led to vagueness in its objectives and,

¹³ This party put out the *Zhensky vestnik* (Woman’s Herald), edited by the woman physician M. I. Pokrovskaya.

¹⁴ ‘A distinctive feature of the Women’s Political Club was its genuinely democratic organization, which was achieved firstly, by the fact that all meetings were open to anyone who wished to attend, and the entry charge was minimal – 2 kopecks; secondly, by the fact that every group of 25 members, organized according to political party or profession, could have a representative on the management committee to defend its interests.’ (Cf. ‘The Women’s Political Club’, article by M. Margulies, in *Zhensky kalendar* – Woman’s Almanac – for 1907.)

indeed, in the very nature of the organization.¹⁵ Although they had dissociated themselves from all the more moderate women's organizations, the members of the Women's Political Club were, however, unable to define for themselves or for others whose class interests they expressed or what were their immediate objectives. Should they defend the interests of the proletarian women, of peasant women, or simply of all 'working women'? Should they pursue specific feminist goals, or operate on a general political basis? Hesitation between these basic objectives marked the whole of the short-lived activity of the Women's Political Club. When the club discussed the question of handing in to the first State Duma a petition demanding that voting rights be extended to women (a petition that had been signed mainly by women workers from the city) the members found themselves seriously embarrassed: the club was unable to make up its mind which political party was closest to it in spirit, and finally decided to send the petition to the Trudoviks.

As women continued to argue the need for a women's bloc, the actual facts of life were clearly and irrefutably revealing the illusory nature of such a plan. Women's organizations, as men's organizations, underwent a rapid and irresistible process of differentiation. The champions of women's unity could do nothing to prevent the grouping of women into various feminist organizations distinguished by varying degrees of political radicalism as a result of the inevitable growth of class consciousness in the whole of Russian society. The age of the women's political bloc came to an end shortly after the demise of the men's liberal

¹⁵ It must, however, be noted to its credit that the Women's Political Club attempted to organize in St Petersburg the first political clubs for women industrial workers. In the spring of 1906, there were four such clubs, among which the Vasileostrovsky was particularly active. It organized lectures and discussions intended to stimulate the interest of working women in the political life going on around them. Together with the other three clubs, it was closed down by the police after only six weeks, following the dissolution of the First Duma. The Women's Political Club also ceased to exist.

bloc. Yet feminists and suffragettes of every hue continue to shout about the need for women's unity, the possibility of a broad-based women's party pursuing its own specific goals ...

Such a proposition would, however, only have any meaning if *not one* of the existing political parties had contained in its programme the demand for total female emancipation.

When arming themselves against the indifference, or even hostility of men towards the question of female equality, feminists turn their attention only to the representatives of every shade of bourgeois liberalism, ignoring the existence of a large political party which, on the issue of women's equality, goes further than even the most fervent suffragettes. Since the appearance of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, Social-Democracy has always defended the interests of women. The *Communist Manifesto* was the first to point to the close link between the overall proletarian problem existing today and the women's question. It traced the process whereby capitalism gradually draws woman into production and makes her a co-participant in the great struggle waged by the proletariat against oppression and exploitation. Social-Democracy was the first to include in its programme the demand for equal rights for women; always and everywhere, by the spoken and written word, it demands the abolition of all limitations restricting women. It is only as a result of this pressure that other parties and governments have been compelled to introduce reforms to the benefit of the female population ... In Russia also this party is not merely a theoretical defender of women's interests, but always and everywhere pursues in practice the principle of women's equality.

What, then, is preventing our suffragettes from standing beneath the protective shield of this experienced and powerful party? While the right-wing feminists are frightened by the 'extremism' of Social-Democracy, the Alliance, which went so far as to speak of Constituent Assembly, should find the political position of the Social-Democrats perfectly to their taste. However – here lies the catch! Despite all their political radicalism, our

suffragettes continue to base themselves on the aspirations of their own bourgeois class. Political liberty is now an essential prerequisite of the growth and power of the Russian bourgeoisie; without this political liberty, its economic prosperity will prove to be built on sand. Capital requires certain norms and guarantees if it is to grow and flourish; these norms can be ensured only with the participation of bourgeois representatives in the government of the country. Next comes the attainment of political rights equally important for both men and women. The demand for political equality is, for women, a necessity dictated by life itself.

The slogan 'freedom of profession' has ceased to appear all-embracing in the eyes of women; only the direct participation of women in the running of the state promises to help ensure a rise in their economic well-being. Hence the passionate desire of women from the middle bourgeoisie to finally attain access to the ballot box, hence their hostility to the present bureaucratic system ...

However, our feminists, as their sisters abroad, go no further than demands for political equality. The broad horizons opened up by the doctrines of Social-Democracy are, for them, alien and incomprehensible. The feminists are striving for equality within the framework of the existing class-based society and without in any way encroaching upon its foundations; they are fighting for their female prerogatives without striving to achieve the abolition of all existing prerogatives and privileges ...

We are not blaming the representatives of the bourgeois women's movement for these 'unwitting sins'; they are the inevitable consequence of their class position. Nor do we wish to minimize the importance of feminist organizations for the success of the purely bourgeois women's movement. However, we would like to caution the female proletariat against enthusiasms for narrowly feminist aims. Insofar as bourgeois women limit their activity to arousing the self-awareness of their own sisters, we can only applaud them. However, as soon as they begin to call into their ranks women workers, Social-Democrats should

not, dare not, remain silent. One cannot stand by and watch this futile dissipation of the forces of the proletariat. One must then put the question directly: what benefit could an alliance with their bourgeois 'sisters' bring the women workers, and what, on the other hand, could women workers achieve through their own class organization?

Is a *united* women's movement possible, and in particular in a society based on class antagonisms? ...

The world of women, as the world of men, has divided into two camps: one, in its aims, aspirations and interests, sides with the bourgeois classes, while the other is closely linked to the proletariat, whose aspiration to freedom also involves the solution of the women's question in all its aspects. These two groups of fighting women differ in their aims, interests and methods of struggle, even though they are both acting on the basis of the common slogan 'the emancipation of women'. Each of these militant groups unconsciously proceeds on the basis of the interests of its own class, which gives a specific class colouring to its aspirations and objectives. One individual woman may be capable of standing above the interests of her own class and of disregarding them in the name of the triumph of the aims of another class, but this is impossible for a united women's organization reflecting all the real needs and interests of the social group that had founded it. However radical the demands of the feminists may appear, it must not be forgotten that, by virtue of their class position, the feminists cannot struggle to achieve a fundamental restructuring of the present economic-social structure of society, and that without this the emancipation of women cannot be complete.

Whereas in individual instances the immediate objectives of women of all classes coincide, the ultimate objectives determining the direction of the movement and the very tactic to be used differ sharply. For the feminists, the achievement of equal rights with men within the framework of the contemporary capitalist world

is a concrete 'end in itself,'¹⁶ for proletarian women equal rights is merely a *means* to be used in the continuing struggle against the economic enslavement of the working class. For the feminists, the immediate enemy are men as such, who have arrogated to themselves all rights and privileges and left women only bondage and obligation. Each victory of the feminists means that men must concede their exclusive prerogatives in favour of the 'fair sex'. The proletarian woman, however, has a completely different attitude to her position: in her eyes men are not her enemy and oppressor but, on the contrary, first and foremost a comrade in sharing a common, joyless lot and a loyal comrade-in-arms in the struggle for a brighter future. The same social relations enslave both the woman and her comrade; one and the same hateful bonds of capitalism oppress their will and deprive them of the happiness and pleasures of life. It is indeed true that certain specific characteristics of the present system weigh doubly upon the woman; it is also true that the conditions of hired labour sometimes transform the woman friend and worker into a menacing rival of the man. However, the working class knows who is to blame for these unfortunate conditions.

The woman worker, no less than her brother in suffering, loathes that insatiable monster with the gilded maw which falls upon man, woman and child with equal voracity in order to suck them dry and grow fat at the cost of millions of human lives . . . The woman worker is bound to her male comrade worker by a thousand invisible threads, whereas the aims of the bourgeois woman appear

¹⁶ The very principle of equality is viewed by each group of women according to the social stratum to which it belongs. Women of the big bourgeoisie, who are coming to suffer more and more from property inequality (in Russia, for example, in the laws of inheritance) are concerned primarily to secure the removal from the civil code of those clauses inimical to women's interests. For women from the middle bourgeoisie, equality hinges on 'freedom to work'. However, both recognize the need to secure the right to have a voice in the running of the country, as without this no achievement, no reform, is secure. Hence the focal point has been shifted to the struggle for political equality.

to her to be alien and incomprehensible, can bring no comfort to her suffering proletarian soul and do not offer women that bright future on which the whole of exploited humanity has fixed its hopes and aspirations . . . While the feminists, arguing the need for women's unity, stretch out their hands to their younger working-class sisters, these 'ungrateful creatures' glance mistrustfully at their distant and alien female comrades and gather more closely around the purely proletarian organizations that are more comprehensible to them, and nearer and dearer to their hearts.

Political rights, access to the election booth and a seat in parliament – this is the real aim of the bourgeois women's movement. But can political equality in the context of the retention of the entire capitalist-exploiter system free the working woman from that abyss of evil and suffering which pursues and oppresses her both as a woman and as a human being?

The more aware among proletarian women realize that neither political nor juridical equality can solve the women's question in all its aspects. While women are compelled to sell their labour force and bear the yoke of capitalism, while the present exploitative system of producing new values continues to exist, they cannot become free and independent persons, wives who choose their husbands exclusively on the dictates of the heart and mothers who can look without fear to the future of their children . . . The ultimate objective of the proletarian woman is the destruction of the old antagonistic class-based world and the construction of a new and better world in which the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible.

Naturally, this ultimate objective does not exclude attempts on the part of proletarian women to achieve emancipation even within the framework of the existing bourgeois order, but the realization of such demands is constantly blocked by obstacles erected by the capitalist system itself. Women can only be truly free and equal in a world of socialized labour, harmony and justice.

The above is something the feminists cannot and do not wish

to understand. It seems to them that if they can attain formal equality as recognized by the letter of the law, they will be perfectly able to make their way, even in the 'old world of oppression and enslavement, groans and tears.' And this is true, to a degree. Whereas for the majority of women workers equality of rights with men would simply mean equality in 'lack of rights,' for bourgeois women it would indeed open the doors to new and hitherto unprecedented rights and privileges that until now have been available only to the male members of the bourgeoisie. However, each such success, each new prerogative attained by the bourgeois woman, only puts into her hands yet another instrument with which to oppress her younger sister and would merely deepen the gulf dividing the women from these two opposing social camps. Their interests would clash more sharply, their aspirations become mutually exclusive.

Where, then, is this universal 'women's question'? Where is that unity of objectives and aspirations of which the feminists talk so much? A sober examination of reality reveals that this unity does not and cannot exist. In vain the feminists seek to convince themselves that 'the women's question is in no way a question of political party' and that 'it can be solved only with the participation of all parties and all women,' the argument advanced by the radical German feminist Minna Cauer. The logic of the facts refutes this feminist reassuring self-delusion.

It would be pointless to try to convince all bourgeois women of the fact that the victory of the women's cause depends on the victory of the common proletarian cause. However, appealing to those among them who are capable of abandoning the narrow objectives of 'short-term politics,' who are able to take a broader view of the destiny of all women, we insistently urge you not to summon into your ranks your proletarian sisters alien to you in spirit! Throw off the finery of idealistic phraseology in which you, the women of the bourgeois classes, so love to dress yourselves and, arming yourselves with the sobering lessons of history, look

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

yourselves to the defence of your own class rights and interests, leaving the working women to follow their own path, struggle by their own methods for the freedom and happiness of women. Whose path is the shorter and whose means the more certain will be shown by life itself . . .

International Women's Day

A Militant Celebration (1920)

Women's Day or Working Women's Day is a day of international solidarity and a day for reviewing the strength and organization of proletarian women.

But this is not a special day for women alone. The 8th of March is a historic and memorable day for the workers and peasants, for all the Russian workers and for the workers of the whole world. In 1917, on this day, the great February revolution broke out.¹ It was the working women of Petersburg who began this revolution; it was they who first decided to raise the banner of opposition to the Tsar and his associates. And so, working women's day is a double celebration for us.

But if this is a general holiday for all the proletariat, why do we call it 'Women's Day'? Why then do we hold special celebrations and meetings aimed above all at the women workers and the peasant women? Doesn't this jeopardize the unity and solidarity of the working class? To answer these questions, we have to look back and see how Women's Day came about and for what purpose it was organized.

¹ Tsarist Russia still used the old 'Julian' calendar of the Middle Ages, which was 13 days behind the 'Gregorian' calendar used in most of the rest of the world. Thus March 8th was 'February 23rd' in the old calendar. This is why the revolution of March 1917 is called 'the February revolution' and that of November 1917 'the October revolution.'

HOW AND WHY WAS WOMEN'S DAY ORGANIZED?

Not very long ago, in fact about ten years ago, the question of women's equality and the question of whether women could take part in government alongside men was being hotly debated. The working class in all capitalist countries struggled for the rights of working women: the bourgeoisie did not want to accept these rights. It was not in the interest of the bourgeoisie to strengthen the vote of the working class in parliament; and in every country they hindered the passing of laws that gave the right to working women.

Socialists in North America insisted upon their demands for the vote with particular persistence. On the 28th of February, 1909, the women socialists of the U.S.A. organized huge demonstrations and meetings all over the country demanding political rights for working women. This was the first 'Women's Day'. The initiative on organizing a women's day thus belongs to the working women of America.

In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Working Women, Clara Zetkin² brought forward the question of organizing an International Working Women's Day. The conference decided that every year, in every country, they should celebrate on the same day a 'Women's Day' under the slogan, 'The vote for women will unite our strength in the struggle for socialism'.

During these years, the question of making parliament more democratic, i.e., of widening the franchise and extending the vote to women, was a vital issue. Even before the First World War, the workers had the right to vote in all bourgeois countries except Russia.³ Only women, along with the insane, remained without

² Clara Zetkin was a leader of the German socialist movement and the main leader of the international working women's movement. Kollontai was a delegate to the international conference representing the St. Petersburg textile workers.

³ Though in most bourgeois countries, voting rights were afforded to a greater sector of their population, the vast majority of unskilled workers in England,

these rights. Yet, at the same time, the harsh reality of capitalism demanded the participation of women in the country's economy. Every year there was an increase in the number of women who had to work in the factories and workshops, or as servants and charwomen. Women worked alongside men and the wealth of the country was created by their hands. But women remained without the vote.

But in the last years before the war the rise in prices forced even the most peaceful housewife to take an interest in questions of politics and to protest loudly against the bourgeoisie's economy of plunder. 'Housewives uprisings' became increasingly frequent, flaring up at different times in Austria, England, France and Germany.

The working women understood that it wasn't enough to break up the stalls at the market or threaten the odd merchant: They understood that such action doesn't bring down the cost of living. You have to *change the politics* of the government. And to achieve this, the working class has to see that the franchise is widened.

It was decided to have a Women's Day in every country as a form of struggle in getting working women to vote. This day was to be a day of international solidarity in the fight for common objectives and a day for reviewing the organized strength of working women under the banner of socialism.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The decision taken at the Second International Congress of Socialist Women was not left on paper. It was decided to hold the first International Women's Day on the 19th of March, 1911.

France and Germany could not vote. A smaller percentage of working class men in the United States could not vote – in particular immigrant men. In the South of the US black men were often prevented from voting. The middle class suffrage movements in all the European countries did not fight to give votes to either working class women or men.

This date was not chosen at random. Our German comrades picked the day because of its historic importance for the German proletariat. On the 19th of March in the year of the 1848 revolution, the Prussian king recognized for the first time the strength of the armed people and gave way before the threat of a proletarian uprising. Among the many promises he made, which he later failed to keep, was the introduction of votes for women.

After January 11, efforts were made in Germany and Austria to prepare for Women's Day. They made known the plans for a demonstration both by word of mouth and in the press. During the week before Women's Day two journals appeared: *The Vote for Women* in Germany and *Women's Day* in Austria. The various articles devoted to Women's Day ('Women and Parliament,' 'The Working Women and Municipal Affairs,' 'What Has the Housewife got to do with Politics?', etc.) analyzed thoroughly the question of the equality of women in the government and in society. All the articles emphasized the same point: that it was absolutely necessary to make parliament more democratic by extending the franchise to women.

The first International Women's Day took place in 1911. Its success succeeded all expectations. Germany and Austria on Working Women's Day was one seething, trembling sea of women. Meetings were organized everywhere – in the small towns and even in the villages, halls were packed so full that they had to ask male workers to give up their places for the women.

This was certainly the first show of militancy by the working woman. Men stayed at home with their children for a change and their wives, the captive housewives, went to meetings. During the largest street demonstrations, in which 30,000 were taking part, the police decided to remove the demonstrators' banners: the women workers made a stand. In the scuffle that followed, bloodshed was averted only with the help of the socialist deputies in Parliament.

In 1913 International Women's Day was transferred to the

8th of March. This day has remained the working women's day of militancy.

IS WOMEN'S DAY NECESSARY?

Women's Day in America and Europe had amazing results. It's true that not a single bourgeois parliament thought of making concessions to the workers or of responding to the women's demands. For at that time, the bourgeoisie was not threatened by a socialist revolution.

But Women's Day did achieve something. It turned out above all to be an excellent method of agitation among the less political of our proletarian sisters. They could not help but turn their attention to the meetings, demonstrations, posters, pamphlets and newspapers that were devoted to Women's Day. Even the politically backward working woman thought to herself: 'This is our day, the festival for working women', and she hurried to the meetings and demonstrations. After each Working Women's Day, more women joined the socialist parties and the trade unions grew. Organizations improved and political consciousness developed.

Women's Day served yet another function; it strengthened the international solidarity of the workers. The parties in different countries usually exchange speakers for this occasion: German comrades go to England, English comrades go to Holland, etc. The international cohesion of the working class has become strong and firm and this means that the fighting strength of the proletariat as a whole has grown.

These are the results of working women's day of militancy. The day of working women's militancy helps increase the consciousness and organization of proletarian women. And this means that its contribution is essential to the success of those fighting for a better future for the working class.

WOMEN WORKERS' DAY IN RUSSIA

The Russian working woman first took part in 'Working Women's Day' in 1913. This was a time of reaction when Tsarism held the workers and peasants in its vice like a grip. There could be no thought of celebrating 'Working Women's Day' by open demonstrations. But the organized working women were able to mark their international day. Both the legal newspapers of the working class (the Bolshevik *Pravda* and the Menshevik *Luch*) carried articles about the International Women's Day:⁴ They carried special articles, portraits of some of those taking part in the working women's movement and greetings from comrades such as Bebel and Zetkin.⁵

In those bleak years meetings were forbidden. But in Petrograd,⁶ at the Kalashaikovsky Exchange, those women workers who belonged to the Party organized a public forum on 'The Woman Question'. Entrance was five kopecks. This was an illegal meeting but the hall was absolutely packed. Members of the Party spoke. But this animated 'closed' meeting had hardly

⁴ At its 1903 Congress, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party divided into two wings, the Bolsheviks (which means 'majority' in Russian) and the Mensheviks (which means 'minority'). In the period between 1903 and 1912 (when the division became permanent) the two wings worked together, unified for a while, split again. Many socialists, including entire local organizations, worked with both wings or tried to stay neutral in the disputes. Kollontai, an active socialist and fighter for women's rights since 1899, was at first independent of the factions, then became a Menshevik for several years. She joined the Bolsheviks in 1915 and became the only woman member of their central committee. She also served as Commissar of Welfare of the Soviet Republic and head of the Women's Section of the Bolshevik Party.

⁵ August Bebel (1840-1913) was a leader of the German Social-Democratic Party. He was a well-known supporter of the women's movement and author of a classic book on Marxism and women (*Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, translated into English as *Woman Under Socialism*, which has been translated into many languages.)

⁶ Petrograd is known today as St. Petersburg.

finished when the police, alarmed at such proceedings, intervened and arrested many of the speakers.

It was of great significance for the workers of the world that the women of Russia, who lived under Tsarist repression, should join in and somehow manage to acknowledge with actions International Women's Day. This was a welcome sign that Russia was waking up and the Tsarist prisons and gallows were powerless to kill the workers' spirit of struggle and protest.

In 1914, 'Women Workers' Day' in Russia was better organized. Both the workers' newspapers concerned themselves with the celebration. Our comrades put a lot of effort into the preparation of 'Women Workers' Day'. Because of police intervention, they didn't manage to organize a demonstration. Those involved in the planning of 'Women Workers' Day' found themselves in the Tsarist prisons, and many were later sent to the cold north. For the slogan 'for the working women's vote' had naturally become in Russia an open call for the overthrow of Tsarist autocracy.

WOMEN WORKERS' DAY DURING THE IMPERIALIST WAR

The First World War broke out. The working class in every country was covered with the blood of war.⁷ In 1915 and 1916 'Working Women's Day' abroad was a feeble affair – left-wing socialist women who shared the views of the Russian Bolshevik Party tried to turn March 8th into a demonstration of working women against the war. But those socialist party traitors in Germany and other countries would not allow the socialist women

⁷ When war broke out in 1914, there was a massive split in the international socialist movement. The majority of the Social-Democrats in Germany, Austria, France and England supported the war. Other socialists, such as Kollontai, V.I. Lenin, the Bolshevik Party and Leon Trotsky in Russia, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and Eugene Debs in the United States, to name some of the leaders, denounced the pro-war socialists for being traitors to the working class and to the fight for a workers' revolution.

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

to organize gatherings; and the socialist women were refused passports to go to neutral countries where the working women wanted to hold international meetings and show that in spite of the desire of the bourgeoisie, the spirit of international solidarity lived on.

In 1915, it was only in Norway that they managed to organize an international demonstration on Women's Day; representatives from Russia and neutral countries attended. There could be no thought of organizing a Women's Day in Russia, for here the power of Tsarism and the military machine was unbridled.

Then came the great, great year of 1917. Hunger, cold and trials of war broke the patience of the women workers and the peasant women of Russia. In 1917, on the 8th of March (23rd of February), on Working Women's Day, they came out boldly in the streets of Petrograd. The women (some were workers, some were wives of soldiers) demanded 'Bread for our children' and 'The return of our husbands from the trenches'. At this decisive time the protests of the working women posed such a threat that even the Tsarist security forces did not dare take the usual measures against the rebels but looked on in confusion at the stormy sea of the people's anger.

The 1917 Working Women's Day has become memorable in history. On this day the Russian women raised the torch of proletarian revolution and set the world on fire. The February revolution marks its beginning from this day.

OUR CALL TO BATTLE

'Working Women's Day' was first organized ten years ago in the campaign for the political equality of women and the struggle for socialism. This aim has been achieved by the working-class women in Russia. In the Soviet republic the working women and peasants don't need to fight for the franchise and for civil rights.

They have already won these rights. The Russian workers and the peasant women are equal citizens (in their hands is a powerful weapon to make the struggle for a better life easier) the right to vote, to take part in the Soviets and in all collective organizations.⁸

But rights alone are not enough. We have to learn to make use of them. The right to vote is a weapon which we have to learn to master for our own benefit, and for the good of the workers' republic. In the two years of Soviet Power, life itself has not been absolutely changed. We are only in the process of struggling for communism and we are surrounded by the world we have inherited from the dark and repressive past. The shackles of the family, of housework, of prostitution still weigh heavily on the working woman. Working women and peasant women can only rid themselves of this situation and achieve equality in life itself, and not just in law, if they put all their energies into making Russia a truly communist society.

And to quicken this coming, we have first to put right Russia's shattered economy. We must consider the solving of our two most immediate tasks – the creation of a well-organized and politically conscious labour force and the re-establishment of transport. If our army of labour works well, we shall soon have steam engines once more; the railways will begin to function. This means that the working men and women will get the bread and firewood they desperately need.

Getting transport back to normal will speed up the victory of communism. And with the victory of communism will come the complete and fundamental equality of women. This is why the message of 'Working Women's Day' must this year be: 'Working women, peasant women, mothers, wives and sisters, all efforts to

⁸ The word 'soviet' means 'council.' Soviets, or workers' councils, are democratic bodies in which delegates are elected in factory and neighbourhood meetings and are controlled by their sister and brother workers. The representatives of the soviets must report back to their constituency and are subject to immediate recall.

helping the workers and comrades in overcoming the chaos of the railways and re-establishing transport. Everyone in the struggle for bread and firewood and raw materials’.

Last year the slogan of the Working Women’s Day was: ‘All to the victory of the Red Front’.⁹ Now we call working women to rally their strength on a new bloodless front – the labour front! The Red Army defeated the external enemy because it was organized, disciplined and ready for self-sacrifice. With organization, hard work, self-discipline and self-sacrifice, the workers’ republic will overcome the internal foe – the dislocation (of) transport and the economy, hunger, cold and disease. ‘Everyone to the victory on the bloodless labour front! Everyone to this victory!’

THE NEW TASKS OF WORKING WOMEN’S DAY

The October Revolution gave women equality with men as far as civil rights are concerned. The women of the Russian proletariat, who were not so long ago the most unfortunate and oppressed, are now in the Soviet republic able to show with pride to comrades in other countries the path to political equality through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and soviet power.

The situation is very different in the capitalist countries where women are still overworked and underprivileged. In these countries the voice of the working woman is weak and lifeless. It is true that in various countries (in Norway, Australia, Finland and in some of the States of North America) women had won civil rights even before the war.¹⁰

⁹ After the working class seizure of power in October/November 1917, the Russian workers’ state was faced with two major problems. One was an invasion by thirteen countries, including the United States; the second was resistance by the pro-monarchist and pro-capitalist elements in Russia. Primarily under the direction of Leon Trotsky, the soviets created a workers and peasants army, the Red Army, which defeated the forces of counterrevolution.

¹⁰ Women had won the right to vote in several of the United States prior to

In Germany, after the Kaiser had been thrown out and a bourgeois republic established, headed by the 'compromisers',¹¹ thirty-six women entered parliament – but not a single communist!

In 1919, in England, a woman was for the first time elected a Member of Parliament. But who was she? A 'lady'. That means a landowner, an aristocrat.¹²

In France, too, the question has been coming up lately of extending the franchise to women.

But what use are these rights to working women in the framework of bourgeois parliaments? While the power is in the hands of the capitalists and property owners, no political rights will save the working woman from the traditional position of slavery in the home and society. The French bourgeoisie are ready to throw another sop to the working class, in the face of growing Bolshevik ideas amongst the proletariat: they are prepared to give women the vote.¹³

MR. BOURGEOIS, SIR – IT IS TOO LATE!

After the experience of the Russian October Revolution, it is clear to every working woman in France, in England and in other countries that only *the dictatorship of the working class*, only *the power of the Soviets* can guarantee complete and absolute equality,

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World War I. A federal amendment guaranteeing all women over 21 the right to vote was passed on August 26, 1920. It was not until the 1960s that the last legal barriers to working class people voting in the United States were abolished.

¹¹ The 'compromisers' Kollontai is referring to are the Social-Democratic leaders who formed a new capitalist government in Germany after the fall of the Kaiser in 1918. They actively supported counterrevolution after coming to office.

¹² While the aristocratic Lady Astor was indeed the first woman to serve in the British parliament, the first woman elected to parliament was the Irish revolutionary Constance Markievicz. Together with other members of the Sinn Féin party, she refused to take her seat in the imperial parliament.

¹³ French women did not finally get the vote until 1944.

the ultimate victory of communism will tear down the century-old chains of repression and lack of rights. If the task of 'International Working Women's Day' was earlier in the face of the supremacy of the bourgeois parliaments to fight for the right of women to vote, the working class now has a new task: to organize working women around the fighting slogans of the Third International. Instead of taking part in the working of the bourgeois parliament, listen to the call from Russia:

Working women of all countries! Organize a united proletarian front in the struggle against those who are plundering the world! Down with the parliamentarism of the bourgeoisie! We welcome soviet power! Away with inequalities suffered by the working men and women! We will fight with the workers for the triumph of world communism!

This call was first heard amidst the trials of a new order, in the battles of civil war it will be heard by and it will strike a chord in the hearts of working women of other countries. The working woman will listen and believe this call to be right. Until recently they thought that if they managed to send a few representatives to parliament their lives would be easier and the oppression of capitalism more bearable. Now they know otherwise.

Only the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of soviet power will save them from the world of suffering, humiliations and inequality that makes the life of the working woman in the capitalist countries so hard. The 'Working Woman's Day' turns from a day of struggle for the franchise into an international day of struggle for the full and absolute liberation of women, which means a struggle for the victory of the soviets and for communism!

**Down with the world of Property and the Power of Capital!
Away with Inequality, Lack of Rights and the Oppression**

**of Women - The Legacy of the Bourgeois World!
Forward to the International Unity of Working Women and Male
Workers in the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat
- The Proletariat of Both Sexes!**

Make Way for Winged Eros

A Letter to Working Youth (1923)

You ask me, my young friend, what place proletarian ideology gives to love? You are concerned by the fact that at the present time young workers are occupied more with love and related questions than with the tremendous tasks of construction which face the workers' republic. It is difficult for me to judge events from a distance, but let us try to find an explanation for this situation, and then it will be easier to answer the first question about the place of love in proletarian ideology.

LOVE AS A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR

There can be no doubt that Soviet Russia has entered a new phase of the civil war. The main theatre of struggle is now the front where the two ideologies, the two cultures (the bourgeois and the proletarian) do battle. The incompatibility of these two ideologies is becoming increasingly obvious, and the contradictions between these two fundamentally different cultures are growing more acute.

Alongside the victory of communist principles and ideals in the sphere of politics and economics, a revolution in the outlook, emotions and the inner world of working people is inevitably taking place. A new attitude to life, society, work, art and to the rules of living (i.e., morality) can already be observed. The arrangement of sexual relationships is one aspect of these rules of living. Over the

five years of the existence of our labour republic, the revolution on this non-military front has been accomplishing a great shift in the way men and women think.

The fiercer the battle between the two ideologies, the greater the significance it assumes and the more inevitably it raises new 'riddles of life' and new problems to which only the ideology of the working class can give a satisfactory answer.

The 'riddle of love' that interests us here is one such problem. This question of the relationships between the sexes is a mystery as old as human society itself. At different levels of historical development mankind has approached the solution of this problem in different ways. The problem remains the same: the keys to its solution change. The keys are fashioned by the different epochs, by the classes in power and by the spirit of a particular age (in other words by its culture).

In Russia over the recent years of intense civil war and general dislocation there has been little interest in the nature of the riddle. The men and women of the working classes were in the grip of other emotions, passions and experiences. In those years everyone walked in the shadow of death, and it was being decided whether victory would belong to the revolution and progress or to counter-revolution and reaction. In face of the revolutionary threat, tender-winged Eros fled from the surface of life. There was neither time nor a surplus of inner strength for love's 'joys and pains.' Such is the law of the preservation of humanity's social and psychological energy. As a whole, this energy is always directed to the most urgent aims of the historical moment. And in Russia, for a time, the biological instinct of reproduction, the natural voice of nature dominated the situation. Men and women came together and men and women parted much more easily and much more simply than before. They came together without great commitment and parted without tears or regret.

Prostitution disappeared and the number of sexual relationships where the partners were under no obligation to

each other and which were based on the instinct of reproduction unadorned by any emotions of love increased. This fact frightened some. But such a development was, in those years, inevitable. Either pre-existing relationships continued to exist and unite men and women through comradeship and long-standing friendship, which was rendered more precious by the seriousness of the moment, or new relationships were begun for the satisfaction of purely biological needs, both partners treating the affair as incidental and avoiding any commitment that might hinder their work for the revolution.

The unadorned sexual drive is easily aroused but is soon spent; thus 'wingless Eros' consumes less inner strength than 'winged Eros', whose love is woven of delicate strands of every kind of emotion. 'Wingless Eros' does not make one suffer from sleepless nights, does not sap one's will, and does not entangle the rational workings of the mind. The fighting class could not have fallen under the power of 'winged Eros' at a time when the clarion call of revolution was sounding. It would not have been expedient at such a time to waste the inner strength of the members of the collective on experiences that did not directly serve the revolution. Individual sex love, which lies at the heart of the pair marriage, demands a great expenditure of inner energy. The working class was interested not only in economizing in terms of material wealth but also in preserving the intellectual and emotional energy of each person. For this reason, at a time of heightened revolutionary struggle, the undemanding instinct of reproduction spontaneously replaced the all-embracing 'winged Eros'.

But now the picture changes. The Soviet republic and the whole of toiling humanity are entering a period of temporary and comparative calm. The complex task of understanding and assimilating the achievements and gains that have been made is beginning. The proletariat, the creator of new forms of life, must be able to learn from all social and psychological phenomena, grasp the significance of these phenomena and fashion weapons from

them for the self-defence of the class. Only when the proletariat has appropriated the laws not only of the creation of material wealth but also of inner, psychological life is it able to advance fully armed to fight the decaying bourgeois world. Only then will toiling humanity prove itself to be the victor, not only on the military and labour front but also on the psychological-cultural front.

Now that the revolution has proved victorious and is in a stronger position, and now that the atmosphere of revolutionary élan has ceased to absorb men and women completely, tender-winged Eros has emerged from the shadows and begun to demand his rightful place. 'Wingless Eros' has ceased to satisfy psychological needs. Emotional energy has accumulated and men and women, even of the working class, have not yet learned to use it for the inner life of the collective. This extra energy seeks an outlet in the love experience. The many-stringed lyre of the god of love drowns the monotonous voice of 'wingless Eros.' Men and women are now not only united by the momentary satisfaction of the sex instinct but are beginning to experience 'love affairs' again, and to know all the sufferings and all the exaltations of love's happiness.

In the life of the Soviet republic an undoubted growth of intellectual and emotional needs, a desire for knowledge, an interest in scientific questions and in art and the theatre can be observed. This movement towards transformation inevitably embraces the sphere of love experiences too. Interest is aroused in the question of the psychology of sex, the mystery of love. Everyone to some extent is having to face up to questions of personal life. One notes with surprise that party workers who in previous years had time only for *Pravda* editorials and minutes and reports are reading fiction books in which winged Eros is lauded.

What does this mean? Is this a reactionary step? A symptom of the beginning of the decline of revolutionary creativity? Nothing of the sort! It is time we separated ourselves from the hypocrisy of bourgeois thought. It is time to recognize open that love is not only a powerful natural factor, a biological force, but also a social

factor. Essentially love is a profoundly social emotion. At all stages of human development love has in different forms, it is true, been an integral part of culture. Even the bourgeoisie, who saw love as a 'private matter', was able to channel the expression of love in its class interests.

The ideology of the working class must pay even greater attention to the significance of love as a factor which can, like any other psychological or social phenomenon, be channelled to the advantage of the collective. Love is not in the least a 'private' matter concerning only the two loving persons: love possesses a uniting element which is valuable to the collective. This is clear from the fact that at all stages of historical development society has established norms defining when and under what conditions love is 'legal' (i.e., corresponds to the interests of the given social collective), and when and under what conditions love is sinful and criminal (i.e., contradicts the tasks of the given society).

HISTORICAL NOTES

From the very early stages of its social being, humanity has sought to regulate not only sexual relations but love itself.

In the kinship community, love for one's blood relations was considered the highest virtue. The kinship group would not have approved of a woman sacrificing herself for the sake of a beloved husband: fraternal or sisterly attachment were the most highly regarded feelings. Antigone, who according to the Greek legend risked her life to bury the body of her dead brother, was a heroine in the eyes of her contemporaries. Modern bourgeois society would consider such an action on the part of a sister as highly curious.

In the times of tribal rule, when the state was still in its embryonic stage, the love held in greatest respect was the love between two members of the same tribe. In an era when the social collective had only just evolved from the stage of kinship

community and was still not firmly established in its new form, it was vitally important that its members were linked by mental and emotional ties. Love-friendship was the most suitable type of tie, since at that time the interests of the collective required the growth and accumulation of contacts not between the marriage pair but between fellow members of the tribe, between the organizers and defenders of the tribe and state that is to say, between the men of the tribe, of course; women at that time had no role to play in social life, and there was no talk of friendship among women). 'Friendship' was praised and considered far more important than love between husband and wife. Castor and Pollux were famous for their loyalty to each other and their unshakable friendship, rather than for the feats they performed for their country. For the sake of friendship or its semblance a husband might offer his wife to an acquaintance or a guest.

The ancient world considered friendship and 'loyalty until the grave' to be civic virtues. Love in the modern sense of the word had no place, and hardly attracted the attention either of poets or of writers. The dominant ideology of that time relegated love to the sphere of narrow, personal experiences with which society was not concerned; marriage was based on convenience, not on love. Love was just one among other amusements; it was a luxury which only the citizen who had fulfilled all his obligations to the state could afford. While bourgeois ideology values the 'ability to love' provided it confines itself to the limits set down by bourgeois morality, the ancient world did not consider such emotions in its categories of virtues and positive human qualities. The person who accomplished great deeds and risked his life for his friend was considered a hero and his action 'most virtuous' while a man risking himself for the sake of a woman he loved would have been reproached or even despised.

The morality of the ancient world, then, did not even recognize the love that inspired men to great deeds (the love so highly regarded in the feudal period) as worthy of consideration. The ancient world

recognized only those emotions which drew its fellow members close together and rendered the emerging social organism more stable. In subsequent stages of cultural development, however, friendship ceases to be considered a moral virtue. Bourgeois society was built on the principles of individualism and competition, and has no place for friendship as a moral factor. Friendship does not help in any way, and may hinder the achievement of class aims; it is viewed as an unnecessary manifestation of 'sentimentality' and weakness.

Friendship becomes an object of derision. Castor and Pollux in the New York or London of today would only evoke a condescending smile. This was not so in feudal society, where love-friendship was seen as a quality to be taught and encouraged.

The feudal system defended the interests of the noble family. Virtues were defined with reference not so much to relations between the members of that society as to the obligations of the individual to his or her family and its traditions. Marriage was contracted according to the interests of the family, and any young man (the girl had no rights whatever) who chose himself a wife against these interests was severely criticized. In the feudal era the individual was not supposed to place personal feelings and inclinations above the interests of family, and he who did so 'sinned'. Morality did not demand that love and marriage go hand in hand.

Nevertheless, love between the sexes was not neglected; in fact, for the first time in the history of humanity it received a certain recognition. It may seem strange that love was first accepted in this age of strict asceticism, of crude and cruel morals, an age of violence and rule by violence; but the reasons for acceptance become clear when we take a closer look.

In certain situations and in certain circumstances, love can act as a lever propelling the man to perform actions of which he would otherwise have been incapable. The knighthood demanded of each member fearlessness, bravery, endurance and great feats

of individual valour on the battlefield. Victory in war was in those days decided not so much by the organization of troops as by the individual qualities of the participants. The knight in love with the inaccessible 'lady of his heart' found it easier to perform miracles of bravery, easier to win tournaments, easier to sacrifice his life. The knight in love was motivated by the desire to 'shine' and thus to win the attention of his beloved.

The ideology of chivalry recognized love as a psychological state that could be used to the advantage of the feudal class, but nevertheless it sought to organize emotions in a definite framework. Love between man and wife was not valued, for the family that lived in the knightly castle and in the Russian boyar's *terem*¹ was not held together by emotional ties. The social factor of chivalrous love operated where the knight loved a woman outside the family and was inspired to military and other heroic feats by this emotion. The more inaccessible the woman, the greater the knight's determination to win her favour and the greater his need to develop in himself the virtues and qualities which were valued by his social class. Usually the knight chose as his lady the woman least accessible, the wife of his suzerain, or often the queen. Only such a 'platonic' love could spur the knight to perform miracles of bravery and was considered virtuous and worthy.

The knight rarely chose an unmarried woman as the object of his love, for no matter how far above him in station and apparently inaccessible the girl might be, the possibility of marriage and the consequent removal of the psychological lever could not be ruled out. Hence feudal morality combined recognition of the ideal of asceticism (sexual restraint) with recognition of love as a moral virtue. In his desire to free love from all that was carnal and sinful and to transform it into an abstract emotion completely divorced from its biological base the knight was prepared to go to great

¹ 'Terem' describes the separate living quarters for men and women who were members of the upper stratum of medieval Russian society and state administration.

lengths, choosing as his lady a woman he had never seen or joining the ranks of the lovers of the Virgin Mary. Further he could not go.

Feudal ideology saw love as a stimulus, as a quality assisting in social cohesion: spiritual love and the knight's adoration of his lady served the interests of the noble class. The knight who would have thought nothing of sending his wife to a monastery or of slaying her for unfaithfulness would have been flattered if she had been chosen by another knight as his lady and would have made no objections to her platonic friendships.

But while placing so much emphasis on spiritual love, feudal morality in no way demanded that love should determine legal marriage relationships. Love and marriage were kept separate by feudal ideology and were only united by the bourgeois class that emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The exalted sophistication of feudal love existed. Therefore, alongside indescribably crude norms of relations between the sexes. Sexual intercourse both within and outside marriage lacked the softening and inspiring element of love and remained an undisguisedly physiological act.

The church pretended to wage war on depravity, but by encouraging 'spiritual love' it encouraged crude animal relations between the sexes. The knight who would not be parted from the emblem of the lady of his heart, who composed poetry in her honour and risked his life to win her smile, would rape a girl of the urban classes without a second thought or order his steward to bring him a beautiful peasant for his pleasure. The wives of the knights, for their part, did not let slip the opportunity to enjoy the delights of the flesh with the troubadours and pages of the feudal household.

With the weakening of feudalism and the growth of new conditions of life dictated by the interests of the rising bourgeoisie, a new moral ideal of relations between the sexes developed. Rejecting platonic love, the bourgeoisie defended the violated rights of the body and injected the combination of the spiritual

and physical into the very conception of love. Bourgeois morality did not separate love and marriage; marriage was the expression of the mutual attraction of the couple. In practice of course the bourgeoisie itself, in the name of convenience, continually sinned against this moral teaching, but the recognition of love as the pillar of marriage had a profound class basis.

Under the feudal system the family was held together firmly by the traditions of nobility and birth. The married couple was held in place by the power of the church, the unlimited authority of the head of the family, the strength of family tradition and the will of the suzerain; marriage was indissoluble.

The bourgeois family evolved in different conditions; its basis was not the co-ownership of family wealth but the accumulation of capital. The family was the guardian of this capital; in order that accumulation might take place as rapidly as possible, it was important that a man's savings should be handled with care and skill: in other words, that the woman should not only be a good housewife but also the helper and friend of her husband.

With the establishment of capitalist relations and of the bourgeois social system, the family. In order to remain stable, had to be based not only on economic considerations but also on the co-operation of all its members, who had a joint interest in the accumulation of wealth. And co-operation could serve as a more powerful factor when husband and wife and parents and children were held together by strong emotional and psychological bonds.

At the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries, the new economic way of life gave rise to a new ideology. The conceptions of love and marriage gradually changed. The religious reformer, Luther, and the other thinkers and public figures of the Renaissance and the Reformation, understood the social force of love perfectly. Aware that the stability of the family (the economic unit on which the bourgeois system rests) required that its members be linked by more than economic ties alone, the revolutionary ideologists of the rising bourgeoisie propagated the

new moral ideal of a love that embraced both the flesh and the soul. The reformers of the period challenged the celibacy of the clergy and made merciless fun of the 'spiritual love' of chivalry that kept the knight in a continual state of aspiration but denied him the hope of satisfying his sensual needs. The ideologists of the bourgeoisie and the reformation recognized the legitimacy of the body's needs. Thus, while the feudal world had divided love into the sexual act (relations within marriage or with concubines) on the one hand, and spiritual, platonic love (the relations between the knight and the lady of his heart) on the other, the bourgeois class included both the physical attraction between the sexes and emotional attachments in its concept of love. The feudal ideal had separated love from marriage; the bourgeoisie linked the two. The bourgeoisie made love and marriage inseparable. In practice, of course, this class has always retreated from its ideal; but while the question of mutual inclination was never raised under feudalism, bourgeois morality requires that even in marriages of convenience, the partners should practise hypocrisy and pretend affection.

Traces of feudal tradition and feudal attitudes to marriage and love have come down to us, surviving the centuries and accommodating themselves to the morality of the bourgeois class. Royal families and the higher ranks of the aristocracy still live according to these old norms. In these circles it is considered 'amusing' but rather 'awkward' when a marriage is concluded on the basis of love. The princes and princesses of this world still have to bow to the demands of birth and politics, joining themselves for life to people they do not care for.

In peasant families one also finds that family and economic considerations play a big part in marriage arrangements. The peasant family differs from that of the urban industrial bourgeoisie chiefly in that it is an economic labour unit; its members are so firmly held together by economic circumstances that inner bonds are of secondary importance. For the medieval artisan, love likewise had no role in marriage, for in the context of the

guild system the family was a productive unit, and this economic rationale provided stability. The ideal of love in marriage only begins to appear when, with the emergence of the bourgeoisie, the family loses its productive functions and remains a consumer unit also serving as a vehicle for the preservation of accumulated capital.

But though bourgeois morality defended the rights of two 'loving hearts' to conclude a union even in defiance of tradition, and though it criticized 'spiritual love' and asceticism, proclaiming love as the basis of marriage, it nevertheless defined love in a very narrow way. Love is permissible only when it is within marriage. Love outside legal marriage is considered immoral. Such ideas were often dictated, of course, by economic considerations, by the desire to prevent the distribution of capital among illegitimate children. The entire morality of the bourgeoisie was directed towards the concentration of capital. The ideal was the married couple, working together to improve their welfare and to increase the wealth of their particular family unit, divorced as it was from society. Where the interests of the family and society were in conflict, bourgeois morality decided in the interests of the family (cf. the sympathetic attitude of bourgeois morality – though not the law – to deserters and to those who, for the sake of their families, cause the bankruptcy of their fellow shareholders). This morality, with a utilitarianism typical of the bourgeoisie, tried to use love to its advantage, making it the main ingredient of marriage and thereby strengthening the family.

Love, of course, could not be contained within the limits set down by bourgeois ideologists. Emotional conflicts grew and multiplied and found their expression in the new form of literature – the novel – which the bourgeois class developed. Love constantly escaped from the narrow framework of legal marriage relations set for it, into free relationships and adultery, which were condemned but which were practised. The bourgeois ideal of love does not correspond to the needs of the largest section of the population –

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

the working class. Nor is it relevant to the life-style of the working intelligentsia. This is why in highly developed capitalist countries one finds such an interest in the problems of sex and love and in the search for the key to its mysteries. How, it is asked, can relations between the sexes be developed in order to increase the sum of both individual and social happiness?

The working youth of Soviet Russia is confronting this question at this very moment. This brief survey of the evolution of the ideal of love marriage relationships will help you, my young friend, to realize and understand that love is not the private matter it might seem to be at a first glance. Love is an important psychological and social factor, which society has always instinctively organized in its interests. Working men and women, armed with the science of Marxism and using the experience of the past, must seek to discover the place love ought to occupy in the new social order and determine the ideal of love that corresponds to their class interests.

LOVE-COMRADESHIP

The new, communist society is being built on the principle of comradeship and solidarity. Solidarity is not only an awareness of common interests: it depends also on the intellectual and emotional ties linking the members of the collective. For a social system to be built on solidarity and co-operation it is essential that people should be capable of love and warm emotions. The proletarian ideology, therefore, attempts to educate and encourage every member of the working class to be capable of responding to the distress and needs of other members of the class, of a sensitive understanding of others and a penetrating consciousness of the individual's relationship to the collective. All these 'warm emotions' (sensitivity, compassion, sympathy and responsiveness) derive from one source: they are aspects of love, not in the narrow, sexual sense but in the broad meaning of the word.

Love is an emotion that unites and is consequently of an

organizing character. The bourgeoisie was well aware of this, and in the attempt to create a stable family bourgeois ideology erected 'married love' as a moral virtue; to be a 'good family man' was, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, an important and valuable quality.

The proletariat should also take into account the psychological and social role that love, both in the broad sense and in the sense of relationships between the sexes, can and must play, not in strengthening family-marriage ties, but in the development of collective solidarity.

What is the proletariat's ideal of love?

We have already seen that each epoch has its ideal; each class strives to fill the conception of love with a moral content that suits its own interests. Each stage of cultural development, with its richer intellectual and emotional experiences, redefines the image of Eros. With the successive stages in the development of the economy and social life, ideas of love have changed; shades of emotion have assumed greater significance or, on the other hand, have ceased to exist.

In the course of the thousand-year history of human society, love has developed from the simple biological instinct (the urge to reproduce which is inherent in all creatures from the highest to the lowest) into a most complex emotion that is constantly acquiring new intellectual and emotional aspects. Love has become a psychological and social factor.

Under the impact of economic and social forces, the biological instinct for reproduction has been transformed in two diametrically opposed directions. On the one hand the healthy sexual instinct has been turned by monstrous social and economic relations, particularly those of capitalism, into unhealthy carnality. The sexual act has become an aim in itself – just another way of obtaining pleasure, through lust sharpened with excesses and through distorted, harmful titillations of the flesh. A man does not have sex in response to healthy instincts which have drawn him to a particular woman: a man approaches any woman, though he

feels no sexual need for her in particular, with the aim of gaining his sexual satisfaction and pleasure through her. Prostitution is the organized expression of this distortion of the sex drive. If intercourse with a woman does not prompt the expected excitement, the man will turn to every kind of perversion.

This deviation towards unhealthy carnality takes relationships far from their source in the biological Instinct.

On the other hand, over the centuries and with the changes in human social life and culture, a web of emotional and intellectual experiences has come to surround the physical attraction of the sexes. Love in its present form is a complex state of mind and body; it has long been separated from its primary source, the biological instinct for reproduction, and in fact it is frequently in sharp contradiction with it. Love is intricately woven from friendship, passion, maternal tenderness, infatuation, mutual compatibility, sympathy, admiration, familiarity and many other shades of emotion. With such a range of emotions involved, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish direct connection between the natural drive of 'wingless Eros' and 'winged Eros', where physical attraction and emotional warmth are fused. The existence of love-friendship where the element of physical attraction is absent, of love for one's work or for a cause, and of love for the collective, testify to the extent to which love has become 'spiritualized' and separated from its biological base.

In modern society, sharp contradictions frequently arise and battles are waged between the various manifestations of emotion. A deep intellectual and emotional involvement in one's work may not be compatible with love for a particular man or woman, love for the collective might conflict with love for husband, wife or children. It may be difficult for love-friendship in one person to coexist with passion in another; in the one case love is predominantly based on intellectual compatibility, and in the other case on physical harmony.

'Love' has many faces and aspects. The various shades of feeling

that have developed over the ages and which are experienced by contemporary men and women cannot be covered by such a general and inexact term.

Under the rule of bourgeois ideology and the capitalist way of life, the complexity of love creates a series of complex and insoluble problems. By the end of the nineteenth century the many-sidedness of love had become a favourite theme for writers with a psychological bent. Love for two or even three has interested and perplexed many of the more thoughtful representatives of bourgeois culture. In the sixties of the last century our Russian thinker and writer Alexander Herzen tried to uncover this complexity of the inner world and the duality of emotion in his novel *Who Is to Blame?*, and Cheryshevsky tackled the same questions in his novel *What is to be Done?*. Poetic geniuses such as Goethe and Byron, and bold pioneers in the sphere of relations between the sexes such as George Sand, have tried to come to terms with these issues in their own lives; the author of *Who Is to Blame?* also knew of the problems from his own experience, as did many other great thinkers, poets and public figures. And at this present moment many 'small' people are weighed down by the difficulties of love and vainly seek for solutions within the framework of bourgeois thought. But the key to the solution is in the hands of the proletariat. Only the ideology and the life-style of the new, labouring humanity can unravel this complex problem of emotion.

We are talking here of the duality of love, of the complexities of 'winged Eros'; this should not be confused with sexual relations 'without Eros', where one man goes with many women or one woman with a number of men. Relations where no personal feelings are involved can have unfortunate and harmful consequences (the early exhaustion of the organism, venereal diseases etc.), but however entangled they are, they do not give rise to 'emotional dramas'. These 'dramas' and conflicts begin only where the various shades and manifestations of love are present. A woman feels close

to a man whose ideas, hopes and aspirations match her own; she is attracted physically to another. For one woman a man might feel sympathy and a protective tenderness, and in another he might find support and understanding for the strivings of his intellect. To which of the two must he give his love? And why must he tear himself apart and cripple his inner self, if only the possession of both types of inner bond affords the fullness of living?

Under the bourgeois system such a division of the inner emotional world involves inevitable suffering. For thousands of years human culture, which is based on the institution of property, has been teaching people that love is linked with the principles of property. Bourgeois ideology has insisted that love, mutual love, gives the right to the absolute and indivisible possession of the beloved person. Such exclusiveness was the natural consequence of the established form of pair marriage and of the ideal of 'all-embracing love' between husband and wife. But can such an ideal correspond to the interests of the working class? Surely it is important and desirable from the proletariat's point of view that people's emotions should develop a wider and richer range? And surely the complexity of the human psyche and the many-sidedness of emotional experience should assist in the growth of the emotional and intellectual bonds between people which make the collective stronger? The more numerous these inner threads drawing people together, the firmer the sense of solidarity and the simpler the realization of the working-class ideal of comradeship and unity.

Proletarian ideology cannot accept exclusiveness and 'all-embracing love'. The proletariat is not filled with horror and moral indignation at the many forms and facets of 'winged Eros' in the way that the hypocritical bourgeoisie is; on the contrary, it tries to direct these emotions, which it sees as the result of complex social circumstances, into channels which are advantageous to the class during the struggle for and the construction of communist society.

The complexity of love is not in conflict with the interests of

the proletariat. On the contrary, it facilitates the triumph of the ideal of love-comradeship which is already developing.

At the tribal stage love was seen as a kinship attachment (love between sisters and brothers, love for parents). The ancient culture of the pre-Christian period placed love-friendship above all else. The feudal world idealized platonic courtly love between members of the opposite sex outside marriage. The bourgeoisie took monogamous marital love as its ideal.

The working class derives its ideal from the labour co-operation and inner solidarity that binds the men and women of the proletariat together; the form and content of this ideal naturally differs from the conception of love that existed in other cultural epochs. The advocacy of love-comradeship in no way implies that in the militant atmosphere of its struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat the working class has adopted a straitjacket ideology and is mercilessly trying to remove all traces of tender emotion from relations between the sexes. The ideology of the working class does not seek to destroy 'winged Eros' but, on the contrary, to clear the way for the recognition of the value of love as a psychological and social force.

The hypocritical morality of bourgeois culture resolutely restricted the freedom of Eros, obliging him to visit only the 'legally married couple'. Outside marriage there was room only for the 'wingless Eros' of momentary and joyless sexual relations which were bought (in the case of prostitution) or stolen (in the case of adultery).

The morality of the working class, on the other hand, in so far as it has already been formulated, definitely rejects the external forms of sexual relations. The social aims of the working class are not affected one bit by whether love takes the form of a long and official union or is expressed in a temporary relationship. The ideology of the working class does not place any formal limits on love. But at the same time the ideology of the working class is already beginning to take a thoughtful attitude to the content of love

and shades of emotional experience. In this sense the proletarian ideology will persecute 'wingless Eros' in a much more strict and severe way than bourgeois morality. 'Wingless Eros' contradicts the interests of the working class. In the first place it inevitably involves excesses and therefore physical exhaustion, which lower the resources of labour energy available to society. In the second place it impoverishes the soul, hindering the development and strengthening of inner bonds and positive emotions. And in the third place it usually rests on an inequality of rights in relationships between the sexes, on the dependence of the woman on the man and on male complacency and insensitivity, which undoubtedly hinder the development of comradely feelings. 'Winged Eros' is quite different.

Obviously sexual attraction lies at the base of 'winged Eros' too, but the difference is that the person experiencing love acquires the inner qualities necessary to the builders of a new culture – sensitivity, responsiveness and the desire to help others. Bourgeois ideology demanded that a person should only display such qualities in their relationship with one partner. The aim of proletarian ideology is that men and women should develop these qualities not only in relation to the chosen one but in relation to all the members of the collective. The proletarian class is not concerned as to which shades and nuances of feeling predominate in winged Eros. The only stipulation is that these emotions facilitate the development and strengthening of comradeship.

The ideal of love-comradeship, which is being forged by proletarian ideology to replace the all-embracing and exclusive marital love of bourgeois culture, involves the recognition of the rights and integrity of the other's personality, a steadfast mutual support and sensitive sympathy and responsiveness to the other's needs.

The ideal of love-comradeship is necessary to the proletariat in the important and difficult period of the struggle for and the consolidation of the dictatorship. But there is no doubt that

with the realization of communist society, love will acquire a transformed and unprecedented aspect. By that time the 'sympathetic ties' between all the members of the new society will have grown and strengthened. Love potential will have increased and love-solidarity will become the lever that competition and self-love were in the bourgeois system. Collectivism of spirit can then defeat individualist self-sufficiency and the 'cold of inner loneliness', from which people in bourgeois culture have attempted to escape through love and marriage, will disappear.

The many threads bringing men and women into close emotional and intellectual contact will develop and feelings will emerge from the private into the public sphere. Inequality between the sexes and the dependence of women on men will disappear without trace, leaving only a fading memory of past ages.

In the new and collective society, where interpersonal relations develop against a background of joyful unity and comradeship, Eros will occupy an honourable place as an emotional experience multiplying human happiness. What will be the nature of this transformed Eros? Not even the boldest fantasy is capable of providing the answer to this question. But one thing is clear: the stronger the intellectual and emotional bonds of the new humanity, the less the room for love in the present sense of the word. Modern love always sins, because it absorbs the thoughts and feelings of 'loving hearts' and isolates the loving pair from the collective. In the future society, such a separation will not only become superfluous but also psychologically inconceivable. In the new world the accepted norm of sexual relations will probably be based on free, healthy and natural attraction (without distortions and excesses) and on 'transformed Eros'.

But at the present moment we stand between two cultures. And at this turning point, with the attendant struggles of the two worlds on all fronts, including the ideological one, the proletariat's interest is to do its best to ensure the quickest possible accumulation of 'sympathetic feelings'. In this period the moral ideal defining

relationships is not the unadorned sexual instinct but the many-faceted love-experience of love-comradeship. In order to answer the demands formulated by the new proletarian morality, these experiences must conform to three basic principles:

1. Equality in relationships (an end to masculine egoism and the slavish suppression of the female personality).
2. Mutual recognition of the rights of the other, of the fact that one does not own the heart and soul of the other (the sense of property, encouraged by bourgeois culture).
3. Comradely sensitivity, the ability to listen and understand the inner workings of the loved person (bourgeois culture demanded this only from the woman).

But in proclaiming the rights of 'winged Eros', the ideal of the working class at the same time subordinates this love to the more powerful emotion of love-duty to the collective. However great the love between two members of the collective, the ties binding the two persons to the collective will always take precedence, will be firmer, more complex and organic. Bourgeois morality demanded all for the loved one. The morality of the proletariat demands all for the collective.

But I can hear you objecting, my young friend, that though it may be true that love-comradeship will become the ideal of the working class, will this new 'moral measurement' of emotions not place new constraints on sexual relationships? Are we not liberating love from the fetters of bourgeois morality only to enslave it again?

Yes, my young friend, you are right. The ideology of the proletariat rejects bourgeois 'morality' in the sphere of love-marriage relations. Nevertheless, it inevitably develops its own class morality, its own rules of behaviour, which correspond more closely to the tasks of the working class and educate the emotions in a certain direction. In this way it could be said that feelings are again in chains. The proletariat will undoubtedly clip the wings

of bourgeois culture. But it would be short-sighted to regret this process, since the new class is capable of developing new facets of emotion which possess unprecedented beauty, strength and radiance. As the cultural and economic base of humanity changes, so will love be transformed.

The blind, all-embracing, demanding passions will weaken; the sense of property, the egoistical desire to bind the partner to one 'forever', the complacency of the man and the self-renunciation of the woman will disappear. At the same time, the valuable aspects and elements of love will develop. Respect for the right of the other's personality will increase and a mutual sensitivity will be learned; men and women will strive to express their love not only in kisses and embraces but in joint creativity and activity.

The task of proletarian ideology is not to drive Eros from social life but to rearm him according to the new social formation and to educate sexual relationships in the spirit of the great new psychological force of comradesly solidarity.

I hope it is now clear to you that the interest among young workers in the question of love is not a symptom of 'decline'. I hope that you can now grasp the place love must occupy in the relationships between young workers.

The Aims and Worth of My Life (1926)

Nothing is more difficult than writing an autobiography.¹ What should be emphasized? Just what is of general interest? It is advisable, above all, to write honestly and dispense with any of the conventional introductory protestations of modesty. For if one is called upon to tell about one's life so as to make the events that made it what it became useful to the general public, it can mean only that one must have already wrought something positive in life, *accomplished a task that people recognize.*² Accordingly it is a matter of forgetting that one is writing about oneself, of making an effort to abjure one's ego so as to give an account, as objectively as possible, of one's life in the making and of one's accomplishments.

I intend to make this effort but whether it will turn out successfully is something else again. At the same time I must confess that, in a certain sense, this autobiography poses a problem for me. For by looking back while prying, simultaneously, into the future, I will also be presenting to myself the most crucial turning points of my being and accomplishments. *In this way I³ may succeed in setting into bold relief that which concerns the women's liberation struggle and, further, the social significance which it has.*⁴ That I

¹ Kollontai wrote this text in 1926. The English edition, translated by Salvator Attansio, was published in 1971. The text here is the first section of her full autobiography, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*. Italicized text represents sections from the galleys that had been crossed off- for one reason or another. Other variants and edits marked in the notes are represented in the footnotes.

² Author's correction: created something which is recognized by society.

³ Perhaps.

⁴ Author's correction: to emphasize that which has an importance for the solution of the social problems of our time, and which also includes the great problem of complete women's liberation. Author's note with respect to 2: delete.

ought not to shape my life according to the given model, that I would have to grow beyond myself in order to be able to discern my life's true line of vision was an awareness that was mine already in my youngest years. *At the same time I was also aware*⁵ that in this way I could help my sisters to shape their lives, in accordance not with the given traditions but with their own free choice to the extent, of course, that social and economic circumstances permit. I always believed that the time inevitably must come when woman will be judged by the same moral standards applied to man. *For it is not her specific feminine virtue that gives her a place of honour in human society, but the worth of the useful mission accomplished by her,*^{6,7} *the worth of her personality as human being as citizen,*⁸ *as thinker, as fighter.*

*Subconsciously this motive was the leading force of my whole life and activity. To go my way, to work, to struggle, to create side by side with men and to strive for the attainment of a universal human goal*⁹ (for nearly thirty years, indeed, I have belonged to the¹⁰ Communists) *but, at the same time, to shape my personal, intimate life as a woman according to my own will and according to*

⁵ Author's correction: I had a certain presentiment.

⁶ For society.

⁷ Author's note with respect to the italicized text beginning with 'the worth of her personality': delete completely.

Author's new note: Instead of deleting: 'For it is not her specific womanish virtue that gives her a place of honour in human society, but the worth of her useful work accomplished for society, the worth of her personality as human being, as creative worker, as citizen, thinker, or fighter. To go my way, to create, to fight side by side with men for the realization of our social ideals (indeed for almost thirty years I belonged to the communists), but, at the same time, to shape my personal life as a woman according to my will. Subconsciously this was the guiding force of my whole life and activity. Above all, however, I never let my feelings, joy in love, or sorrow take the first place in my life: productive work, activity, struggle always stood in the foreground.'

⁸ As creative worker.

⁹ Who fought for the realization of our social ideals.

¹⁰ Socialists – now communists.

the given laws of my nature.¹¹ *It was this that conditioned my line of vision.*¹² *And*¹³ *in fact I have*¹⁴ *succeeded in structuring my intimate life according to my own standards and I make no secret of my love experiences*¹⁵ *any more than does a man.*¹⁶ *Above all, however, I never let my feelings, the joy or pain of love take the first place in my life inasmuch as creativity, activity, struggle always occupied the foreground.* I managed to become a member of a government cabinet, of the first Bolshevik cabinet in the years 1917-18. I am also the first woman ever to have been appointed ambassadress, a post which I occupied for three years and from which I resigned of my own free will.¹⁷ *This may serve to prove that woman certainly can stand above the conventional conditions of the age. The World War, the stormy, revolutionary spirit now prevalent in the world in all areas has greatly contributed to blunting the edge of the unhealthy, overheated double standard of morality. We are already accustomed not to make overly taxing demands, for example,*¹⁸ *on actresses and women belonging to the free professions in matters relating to their married life. Diplomacy, however, is a caste which more than any other maintains its old customs, usages, traditions and, above all, its strict ceremonial. The fact that a woman, a 'free', a single woman was recognized in this position without opposition shows that the time has come when all human beings will be equally appraised according to their activity and their general human dignity.*

When I was appointed as Russian envoy to Oslo, I realized that I

¹¹ Crossed out.

¹² World-view.

¹³ I believe.

¹⁴ Always.

¹⁵ When once love came, I have my relations to the man.

¹⁶ As men do.

¹⁷ As was shown later, my private life, which I did not shape according to the traditional model, was no hindrance when in all seriousness it was a question of utilizing my energies for a new State [the Soviet Republic] and of functioning first as a member of the first Soviet cabinet, later as ambassadress.

¹⁸ For example (crossed out).

had thereby achieved a victory not only for myself, but¹⁹ for women in general²⁰ and indeed, a victory over their worst enemy, that is to say,²¹ over conventional morality and conservative concepts of marriage. When on occasion I am told that it is truly remarkable²² that a woman has been appointed to such a responsible position, I always²³ think to myself that in the final analysis, the principal victory as regards women's liberation does not lie in this fact alone. Rather, what is of a wholly special significance here is that a woman, like myself,²⁴ who has settled scores with the double standard and who has never concealed it,²⁵ was accepted into a caste which to this very day staunchly upholds tradition and pseudo-morality. Thus the example of my life can also serve to dispel²⁶ the²⁷ old goblin of the double standard also from the lives of other women. And this is a most crucial point of my own existence, which has a certain social-psychological worth and contributes to the liberation struggle of working women.

To avoid any misunderstanding, however, it should be said here that I am still far from being the type of the positively new women who take their experience as females with a relative lightness and, one could say, with an enviable superficiality, whose feelings and mental energies are directed upon all *other things*²⁸ in life but *sentimental love feelings*.²⁹ After all I still belong to the generation of women who grew up at a turning point in history. Love with its many disappointments, with its tragedies and eternal

¹⁹ Crossed out.

²⁰ Crossed out.

²¹ The.

²² 'Truly remarkable' (in quotes).

²³ Privately.

²⁴ Crossed out.

²⁵ Crossed out.

²⁶ Can be dispelled (and crossed out).

²⁷ That.

²⁸ Author's correction: primarily upon all other areas.

²⁹ Author's correction: and are not guided by sentimental love-feelings.

demands for perfect happiness³⁰ still played a very great role in my life. An all-too-great role! It was an expenditure of precious time and energy, fruitless and, in the final analysis, utterly worthless. We, the women of the past generation, did not yet³¹ understand how to be free. The whole thing was an absolutely incredible squandering of our mental energy, a diminution of our labour power which was dissipated in barren emotional experiences. It is certainly true that we, myself as well as many other activists, militants and working women contemporaries, were able to understand that love was not the main goal of our life and that we knew how to place work at its centre. Nevertheless we would have been able to create and achieve much more had our energies not been fragmentized in the eternal struggle with *our egos and with*³² our feelings for another. It was, in fact, an eternal defensive war against the intervention of the male into our ego, a struggle revolving around the problem-complex: work or marriage and love? We, the older generation, did not yet understand, as most men do and as young women are learning today, that work and the longing for love can be harmoniously combined *so that work remains as the main goal of existence*.³³ Our mistake was that each time we succumbed to the belief that we had finally found the one and only in the man we loved, the person with whom we believed we could blend our soul, one who was ready fully to recognize us as a spiritual-physical force.³⁴

But *over and over again things turned out differently, since*³⁵ the man always tried to impose his ego upon us and adapt us fully to his purposes. Thus despite everything the inevitable inner rebellion ensued, over and over again since love became a fetter. We felt enslaved and tried to loosen the love-bond. And after the

³⁰ Author's correction: spiritual community.

³¹ Author's correction: inwardly, in the mind.

³² Crossed out.

³³ So that only a very subordinate place remains available to love.

³⁴ Author's correction: unreservedly gave our entire ego to the beloved man in the hope that thereby we could attain a complete spiritual harmony.

³⁵ Crossed out.

eternally recurring struggle with the beloved man, we finally tore ourselves away and rushed toward freedom. Thereupon we were *again*³⁶ alone, *unhappy*,³⁷ lonesome, but free – free to pursue our beloved, chosen ideal – work.

Fortunately young people, the present generation, no longer have to go through this kind of struggle which is absolutely unnecessary to human society. Their abilities, their work-energy will be reserved for their creative activity. *Thus the existence of barriers will become a spur.*³⁸

It is essential that I relate some details here about my private life. My childhood was a very happy one, judging by outward circumstances. My parents belonged to the *old* Russian nobility.³⁹ I was the only child born of my mother's second marriage (mother was separated and I was born outside the second marriage and then adopted). I was the youngest, the most spoiled and the most coddled member of the family. This, perhaps, was the root cause of the protest against everything around me that very early burgeoned within me. Too much was done for me in order to make me happy. I had no freedom of manoeuvre either in the children's games I played or in the desires that I wanted to express. At the same time, *I wanted to be free.*⁴⁰ I wanted to express desires on my own, to shape my own little life. My parents were well-to-do. There was no luxury in the house, but I did not know the meaning of privation. Yet I saw how other children were forced to give up things, and I was particularly and painfully shocked by the little peasant children who were my playmates (we lived almost always in the countryside, on the estate of my grandfather, who was Finnish). Already as a *small*⁴¹ child I criticized⁴² the injustice of adults and

³⁶ Crossed out.

³⁷ Crossed out.

³⁸ Crossed out.

³⁹ Author's correction: old Russian landowner (class).

⁴⁰ Crossed out.

⁴¹ Author's correction: experienced.

⁴² Crossed out.

*I experienced as a blatant contradiction*⁴³ the fact that everything was offered to me whereas so much was denied to the other children. *My criticism sharpened as the years went by and the feeling of revolt against the many proofs of love around me grew apace.*⁴⁴ Already early in life I had eyes for the social injustices prevailing in Russia. I was never sent to school because my parents lived in a constant state of anxiety over my health and they could not endure the thought that I, like all other children, should spend two hours daily far from home. My mother probably also had a certain horror of the liberal influences with which I might come into contact at the high school. Mother, of course, considered that I was already sufficiently critically⁴⁵ inclined. Thus I received my education at home under the direction of a proficient, clever tutoress who was connected with Russian revolutionary circles. I owe very much to her, Mme. Marie Strakhova. I took⁴⁶ the examinations qualifying me for admission to the university when I was barely sixteen (*in 1888*)⁴⁷ and thereafter I was expected to lead the life of a 'young society woman'.⁴⁸ Although my education had been unusual and caused me much harm (for years I was extremely shy and utterly inept in the practical matters of life), it must nevertheless be said that my parents were by no means reactionaries. On the contrary, they were even⁴⁹ rather progressive for their time. But they held fast to traditions where it concerned the child, the young person under their roof.

My first bitter struggle against these traditions revolved around the idea of marriage. I was supposed to make a *good match*⁵⁰ and mother was bent upon marrying me off at a very early age. My

⁴³ Author's correction: painfully felt the.

⁴⁴ Crossed out.

⁴⁵ Author's correction: rebelliously.

⁴⁶ Author's correction: in St. Petersburg.

⁴⁷ Crossed out.

⁴⁸ Crossed out.

⁴⁹ Author's correction: liberal.

⁵⁰ Author's correction: 'good match' (in quotes).

oldest sister, at the age of nineteen, had contracted marriage with a highly placed gentleman who was nearly *seventy*.⁵¹ I revolted against this *marriage of convenience*, this marriage for money⁵² and wanted to marry only for love, *out of a great passion*.⁵³ Still very young and against my parents' wishes, I chose my cousin, an impecunious young engineer whose name, Kollontai, I still bear today. My maiden name was Domontovich. The happiness of my marriage lasted hardly three years. I gave birth to a son. Although I personally raised my child *with great care*,⁵⁴ motherhood was never the kernel of my existence. A child had not been able to draw the bonds of my marriage tighter. I still loved my husband, but the happy life of a housewife and spouse became for me a 'cage'. More and more my *sympathies, my*⁵⁵ interests turned to the revolutionary working class of Russia. I read voraciously. I zealously studied *all*⁵⁶ social questions, attended lectures and worked in semi-legal societies for the enlightenment of the people. These were the years of the flowering of Marxism in Russia (1893-96). Lenin at that time was only a novice in the literary and revolutionary arena. Georgi Plekhanov was the leading mind of the time. I stood close to the materialist conception of history, since in early womanhood I had inclined towards the realistic school. I was an enthusiastic follower of Darwin and Roelsches. A visit to the big and famous Kregolm textile factory, which employed 12,000 workers of both sexes, decided my fate. I could not lead a happy, peaceful life when the working population was so terribly enslaved. I simply had to join this movement.

At that time this led to differences with my husband, who felt that my inclinations constituted an act of personal defiance

⁵¹ Author's correction: sixty.

⁵² Author's correction: 'marriage of convenience' and 'marriage for money' (in quotes).

⁵³ 'great passion' (in quotes).

⁵⁴ Crossed out.

⁵⁵ Crossed out.

⁵⁶ Author's correction: the.

directed against him. I left husband and child and journeyed to Zurich in order to study political economy under Professor Heinrich Herkner. Therewith⁵⁷ began my conscious life on behalf of the revolutionary goals of the working-class movement. When I came back to St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) in 1899, I joined the illegal Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party. I worked as a writer and propagandist. The fate of Finland, whose independence and relative freedom were being threatened by the reactionary policy of the Tsarist regime at the end of the 1890s, exercised a wholly special power of attraction upon me. Perhaps my particular gravitation towards Finland resulted from the impressions I received on my grandfather's estate during my childhood. I actively espoused the cause of Finland's national liberation.

Thus my first *extensive*⁵⁸ scientific work in political economy was a *comprehensive investigation*⁵⁹ of the living and working conditions of the Finnish proletariat *in relation to industry*.⁶⁰ The book appeared in 1903 in St. Petersburg. My parents had just died, my husband and I had been living separately for a long time and only my son remained in my care. Now I had the opportunity to devote myself completely to my *aims*:⁶¹ to the Russian revolutionary movement and to the working-class movement *of the whole world*.⁶² Love, marriage, family, all were secondary, transient matters. They were there, they intertwine with my life over and over again. But as great as was my love for my husband, immediately it transgressed a certain limit in relation to my feminine proneness to make sacrifice, rebellion flared in me anew. I had to go away, I had to break with the man of my choice, otherwise (this was a subconscious feeling in me) I would have exposed myself to the danger of losing my

⁵⁷ Author's correction: at that time; second correction: then.

⁵⁸ Author's correction: more comprehensive [in German *grosse, grossere* – Tr.].

⁵⁹ Author's correction: studies on the.

⁶⁰ Crossed out.

⁶¹ Author's correction: to my work.

⁶² Crossed out.

selfhood. It must also be said that not a single one of the men who were close to me has ever had a direction-giving influence on my inclinations, strivings, or my world-view. On the contrary, most of the time I was the guiding spirit. I acquired my view of life, my political line from life itself and in uninterrupted study *from*⁶³ books.

In 1905, at the time the so-called first revolution in Russia broke out, after the famous Bloody Sunday, I had already acquired a reputation in the field of economic and social literature. And in those stirring times, when all energies were utilized in the storm of revolt, it turned out that I had become very popular as an orator. Yet in that period *I realized for the first time how little our Party concerned itself with the fate of the women of the working class and how meagre was its interest in women's liberation. To be sure a very strong bourgeois women's movement was already in existence in Russia. But my Marxist outlook pointed out to me with an illuminating clarity that women's liberation*⁶⁴ could take place only as the result of the victory of a new social order and a different economic system. Therefore I threw myself into the struggle between the Russian⁶⁵ suffragettes and strove with all my might to induce the working-class movement to include the woman question as one of the aims of its struggle *in its programme*.⁶⁶ It was very *difficult*⁶⁷ to win my fellow *members*⁶⁸ over to this idea. I was completely isolated with my ideas and demands. Nevertheless in the years 1906-1908, I won a small group of women Party comrades

⁶³ Author's correction: and.

⁶⁴ Author's correction: I realized that in Russia little had yet been done to draw women workers into the liberation struggle. To be sure a quite strong bourgeois women's movement already existed in Russia at that time. But, as a Marxist, it was clear to me that.

⁶⁵ Author's correction: against the bourgeois-minded.

⁶⁶ Crossed out.

⁶⁷ Author's correction: not so easy.

⁶⁸ Author's correction: comrades.

over to my plans. I⁶⁹ wrote⁷⁰ an article published in the illegal press in 1906 in *which for the first time*⁷¹ set forth the demand to call the working-class movement into being in Russia through systematic Party work. In autumn of 1907 we opened up the first Working Women's Club. Many of the members of this club, who were still very young workers at that time, now occupy important posts in the new Russia and in the Russian Communist Party⁷² (K. Nicolaeva, Marie Burke, etc.). One result of my *activity in connection with the women workers*,⁷³ but especially of my political writings (among which was a pamphlet on Finland containing the call to rise up against *the Tsarist Duma*⁷⁴ with 'arms') was the institution of legal proceedings against me which held out the grim prospect of spending many years in prison. I was forced to disappear immediately and was never again to see my home. My son was taken in by good friends, my small household liquidated. I became 'an illegal'. It was a time of strenuous work.

The first All Russian Women's Congress which had been called by the bourgeois suffragettes was scheduled to take place in December of 1908. At that time the reaction was on the rise and the working-class movement was prostrate again after the first victory in 1905. Many Party comrades were in jail, others had fled abroad. The vehement struggle between the two factions of the Russian Workers Party broke out anew: the Bolsheviki on the one side, the Mensheviki on the other. *In 1908 I belonged to the Menshevik faction, having been forced thereto by the hostile position taken by the Bolsheviki towards the Duma, a pseudo-Parliament called by the Tsar in order to Pacify the rebellious spirits of the age.*

⁶⁹ Author's correction: Since.

⁷⁰ Author's correction: I.

⁷¹ Crossed out.

⁷² Also known as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the major political party of Russia and the Soviet Union from 1917-1991.

⁷³ Author's correction: and propaganda work among the masses of women-workers.

⁷⁴ Author's correction: Tsarism.

*Although with the Mensheviks I espoused the point of view that even a pseudoParliament should be utilized as a tribute for our Party and that the elections for the Duma must be used as an assembling point for the working class. But I did not side with the Mensheviks on the question of coordinating the forces of the workers with the Liberals in order to accelerate the overthrow of absolutism. On this point I was, in fact, very left-radical and was even branded as a 'syndicalist' by my Party comrades.*⁷⁵ Given my attitude towards the Duma it logically followed that I considered it useless to exploit the first bourgeois women's congress in the interest of our Party. Nevertheless I worked with might and main to assure that *our*⁷⁶ women workers, who were to participate in the Congress, emerged as an independent and distinct group. I managed to carry out this plan but not without opposition. My Party comrades⁷⁷ accused me and those women-comrades who shared my views of being 'feminists' and of placing too much emphasis on matters of concern to women only. At the time there was still no comprehension *at all*⁷⁸ of the extraordinarily important role in the struggle devolving upon self-employed professional women. Nevertheless our will prevailed. A women-workers' group came forward at the Congress in St. Petersburg with its *own*⁷⁹ programme and it drew a clear line of demarcation between the bourgeois suffragettes and the women's liberation movement of the working class in Russia. However, I was forced to flee before the close of the Congress because the police had come upon my tracks. I managed to cross the frontier into Germany and thus, in December of 1908, began a new period of my life, political emigration.

⁷⁵ Author's note: delete.

⁷⁶ Author's correction: the.

⁷⁷ Author's correction: (the Mensheviks).

⁷⁸ Author's correction: insufficient.

⁷⁹ Author's correction: the socialist.

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Alexandra Kollontai (31 March 1872–9 March 1952) was a communist revolutionary; the first woman in the world to form part of a government since the creation of modern states; an organizer of the Workers' Opposition within the Bolshevik party; a theorist on love and sexual relations; and a diplomat.

And yet, Alexandra Kollontai has had a complex legacy. Her particular political career, combining committed activism and theoretical work, has until recently seen her excluded from the training programmes of almost all communist tendencies. Even today her name remains unknown to those feminist sectors not directly linked to Marxism. Yet her texts, especially those written during the early years of the Soviet revolution, provide vital keys to understanding the relationship between gender and class and open up horizons that remain accurate, advanced and radically revealing even today.

This volume, to commemorate the 150 years of Alexandra Kollontai, brings together four of her writings, as well as two introductory essays that place her writings in historical perspective and assert their relevance in our times.