The Women’s Question:
A case study of the Russian Revolution

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Revolutionaries, in contrast to reactionaries, do not look down upon the world, but instead find in the world a source of great inspiration. A revolutionary realizes that the content of the world cannot change, but that she can give it a new form based on new productive forces. Human diversity is a tremendous strength; a revolutionary does not seek to subvert or change human nature, but instead to give it new and greater expression than previously realized.

~from Marxists.org

An expressed goal of a revolutionary movement often involves overthrowing a Repressive State Apparatus, that is to say a government that serves the ruling class in violent oppression of the working class.\footnote{Definition of Repressive State Apparatus taken from Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Monthly Review Press 1971. Retrieved March 30, 2008, 3:33pm from http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm} While the Russian Revolutions sought to end the Imperial rule of Tsar Nicholas II, another expressed goal of the Bolshevik party was to create a “dictatorship of the proletariat” where there was no longer oppression.\footnote{“Expressed goals” taken from interview with V.I. Lenin conducted by Clara Zetkin on the Women’s Question.} To end the cycle of oppressive power relationships in a society, a social revolution must occur. For the aims of a revolution to be realized both the state apparatus and the underlying ideological state apparatuses must change, but to achieve a social revolution this must be taken one-step farther: basic social relations must be redefined and new social contracts must be written. Society is not a singular force that acts on people in creation of their personalities, but rather an underlying agreement of a group of individuals to form a social contract and community that creates a society. A state is made up both of the actual state apparatus: the government, army, police, prisons, courts, and other administrative expressive institutions and the ideological state apparatus: the religious, political, legal, and cultural beliefs and systems that support the indoctrination and furthering of these beliefs such as schools,
families, media, trade unions. (Althusser, 16) To create a new state the economic relations as well as the state apparatus, the form of organization of the state, and underlying ideologies must change. However, if this change is forced from the top-down, a new Repressive State Apparatus will emerge that embodies many of the markers of the recently overthrown state. For a sustainable, egalitarian social revolution to occur, the newly formed state and the ideological apparatuses it seeks to set up must be in the spirit of equality and at the same time, there needs to be a movement within the people to redefine their perceptions of themselves and objectives with their neighbors. The personal and group identities established under the Repressive State have to be renegotiated on both individual and social levels. Under the prior Repressive State Apparatus, the Ideological State Apparatuses contributes to “the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation.”

That is to say, through the organization of family, schools, and the church children are taught the roles of oppressor/oppressed so that when they enter the workforce and begin their own families they continue to reproduce the capitalist cycle of exploitation. A series of political revolutions between 1905 and 1917 in Russia culminated with a social revolution in October of 1917. This was a social revolution because it attempted to redefine not only the role of the government but also the social and economic relations in a way that would eliminate class division. It was idealized that the centralized state would exist only temporarily in order to reorganize the means of production and the Ideological State Apparatuses ultimately enabling the proletariat masses to wield state power. The ultimate goal was for the means of class oppression to be destroyed so that the material basis for a repressive state no longer exists. However, by 1930 the reemergence of the Repressive State was evident. Even though many progressive initiatives occurred before this period in the economic, legal, and political arenas

towards an egalitarian society, still a new Repressive State emerged. Why? One possibility for this could be because there was not really an attempt to explore the complexities of a social revolution: to change individual’s perception of themselves, their roles in society, and their relations to the state. One domain where the lack of understanding of the intricacy of a sustainable social revolution can be seen is with the handling of the ‘Women’s Question’ by the Bolshevik Party. Women are workers, and were recognized as such by the party; but at the same time, their role in the nuclear family, an example of an ideological state apparatus under patriarchy, causes them to also be the means of reproduction of society. To figure out how a social revolution can be more successful, it is important to understand both the successes and failings of prior attempts. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, it was declared that men and women were equals. While this was not achieved, the accomplishments of the social revolution would have been more sustainable if the social roles and personal identities of the individual’s involved had been redefined.

Examining Russia with a focus on events from 1905-1930 can be used as a historical case study of a social revolution. Starting with the women’s movement in 1860 and continuing with the soviet, worker’s local councils, Russia underwent a series of profound social movements that attempted to redefine political and economic interactions. With the Revolution of 1905 and the February and October Revolutions of 1917, these social movements culminated with a new State Apparatus that initially attempted to redefine its underlying Ideological State Apparatuses. The economic infrastructure of a nation is in constant interaction with its superstructure consisting of the “politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.). (Althusser, 8) By October of 1917, Russia had not only changed the infrastructure of the nation by focusing economically on the interest of the soviets, which represented both workers and peasants, but also created a new superstructure where the state, its
laws and administration, was only to be a transitional representation of the “will of the people” and ideologically built on equality in all aspects of society. The new soviet coalition government attempted to expand legal and political rights to previously excluded members of society, such as women, as well as redefine the educational, familial, and religious systems to secure the expansion of economic opportunities. The Program of the Communist Party of Russia declared the Women’s Question answered in March of 1919⁴ and “that it had abolished all traces of women’s inequality.” (Wood, 1) If that had been true perhaps the initial progressive agenda for redefining social relations between men and women and domestic life would have continued with more lasting and dramatic effects on Western civilization. Nonetheless, that creating equality was a stated goal of the administration is a declaration that is still not a campaign promise made in modern American politics. Therefore, it is important to understand why this statement was not sufficient even with the support of administrative superstructure of the state. Power relations have a material basis and cannot be wished or declared away; they must be reorganized or eliminated. The party not only opposed questioning the Ideological foundations of gender roles and “Women's Work” but also opposed the organization of women outside of the party into their own party or organizations. In order to understand how it could be possible to make social equity a possibility in the modern era, an examination of historical attempts is necessary. The history of the Russian Revolution and the progressive social, economic, and political programs initiated by the Communist Party needs to be viewed with the theory of integrative complexity in mind, as it was not just the failing of some state programs or the economic short comings in one of the five-year plans that prevented Russia from reaching the goal of a workers’ paradise. There were

⁴ Program and date taken from The ABC of Communism (Ann Arbor, 1966) p.38 according to Wood, Elizabeth A. The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.
fundamental social conflicts that even today have yet to be fully worked out when it comes to attempting to create a society based in self-determination.

*A Very Brief History of Women in Russia*

The history of women in Russia illuminates the class division, existing in the social fabric of the country. The history of women of noble birth is one characterized by extremes. On the one hand, the Russian throne had a woman at its helm as early as Kievan Rus in 912 AD with Oleg the second ruler in the Riurikid clan. (Freeze, 3) Women held a prominent place on the Russian throne until the 1797 Succession Law, a law that stated all male heirs had rights to the throne before any female heirs regardless of prior succession traditions. (Freeze, 147) In the early 1700s, Peter the Great, succeeded by Catherine I and a nearly constant rule of women for the next 70 years, started a movement to include upper-class women in academies. The creation of Smolny Institute in Petersburg in the late eighteenth century by Catherine the Great for the ‘daughters of the upper classes’ furthered the inclusion of women in education. (Stites, xii) On the one hand, while there was a theme of strong female stewardship on the Russian throne, this was over a Russian court where the nobility existed under seclusion of the sexes in public. For instance, Russian churches built before this period have windows and closed off balconies for women to attend mass as they were not allowed in general public. The extreme division of the sexes seemed very ‘backwards’ compared to the French and other Western courts that Peter I visited, so in 1711 Peter I began a series of modernizing reforms to make Russia competitive with the West. Ultimately, these reforms brought upper class women into education and public life. (Freeze, 101-122)
Russian peasant women were not included in these early reforms in education but they were also not forced to live in seclusion prior to these reforms either. For peasant women who worked land that was in the *mir*, land that was taxed directly by the Tsar but land that was not owned by a landlord; when a man would die, his wife and daughters, while not equally proportional to what the sons inherited, received full rights to work a percentage of the acreage he once worked. For the rest of the wife’s life, she had equal voting rights, continued use of a certain amount of land deemed adequate for her substance and farmable by her household, and the right to speak at commune meetings to divide the crop rotation for the upcoming year. A peasant woman whose husband died was therefore still able to retain farming rights and voting rights without remarrying, and without depending on her children to stay within the household.

Two social movements began around 1860 in Russia that called into question traditional assumptions of what Russia had been and what it would continue to be. With the Emancipation Manifesto on March 3, 1861, the relationship of production changed for a very large portion of the Russian population. It was at this same time the women’s movement began to crystallize because of the social upheaval that had lead to the serfs’ emancipation. Both the women’s and labor movement in Russia can therefore trace their roots from this period.

_A Very Brief History of the Revolutions in Russia_

A series of revolutions occurred between 1905 and 1917, because of the social transitions that were occurring in response to industrialization and urban migration. The first revolution occurred on January 9, 1905 a day now known as ‘Bloody Sunday’ in which a general strike calling for shorter hours and higher wages evolved into a march on the Winter Palace and ended with Imperial troops firing on women and children armed only with Orthodox crosses and icons.
However, by 1906, this revolution was unsuccessful insofar as dethroning Tsar Nicholas II; however, it did lead to elections for a lower house in the state *Duma*. One of the reasons for the failure of the 1905 Revolution was the Octoberist movement where many supporters left the revolutionary movement based on promises of the Tsar to uphold his concessions. In the October Manifesto, Tsar Nicholas II promised to add to the *Duma*; a parliamentary body that until this period had just been appointed cabinet members serving only as council to the Tsar when requested by the throne. The October Manifesto established a lower house, one that was elected by nearly universal male suffrage, but the arrangement kept the old *Duma*, which would be reappointed by the Tsar as an upper house. The Octoberists hoped this would function as a constitutional monarchy, a way to limit the power of the Imperialist Tsar. There were two *Duma* sessions, 1907-12 and 1912-1914; but throughout this period, Tsar Nicholas II was still an ‘autocrat’. Russia’s entrance in World War I had dramatic effects on the ability of the Third and Fourth *Dumas* to perform. Whether or not this ‘constitutional monarchy’ was doomed for failure is a matter still left to historical debate. The most important concession of the October Manifesto was allowing workers to form unions, hereto illegal under imperialist rule.

On February 23, 1917, the first of the last two revolutions began during a demonstration by women on International Women’s Day in protest of high bread prices and food shortages. The outcome politically produced a continuation of the bourgeoisie *Duma* it called the *Provisional Government* still containing Octoberist members from the Revolution of 1905. This *Provisional Government* took power after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated for himself and his son but at a time when the *Duma* had been disbanded. The *Provisional Government* not only was dealt the challenges of still being embroiled in an International War and facing food shortages, they still faced many of the same issues of state and social organization unresolved from the Third and Fourth *Dumas*. There was sharp division between the Menshevik “Whites” and the Bolshevik
“Reds” as to what needed to be done. The split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks began in 1903 during the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, and continued to form lasting fissures ideologically and pragmatically between the two parties. The Mensheviks were the minority of the congress, hence the name derived from *men'shinstvo* meaning ‘minority’, and tended to be more moderate and liberal. They were more afraid of the peasant uprising losing control as demonstrated by Chernov, the Menshevik Minister of Internal Affairs when he used the military apparatus to combat perceived peasant lawlessness and assert control over the land committees. (Freeze, 250) The Bolsheviks were more radical and socialist as well as tending to side with the peasants. V. I. Lenin, a prominent Bolshevik felt that the stronghold of power should lie in the *soviets*, both the workers and peasants, so that class divisions of power could be overcome. The Mensheviks tended to have more faith in the *Provisional Government*. After a series of conflicts between supporters of each side throughout the summer, on October 24, 1917 the Bolshevik’s called for ‘all power to the soviets’ and in the name of the soviets the Central Committee seized power at centers in Petrograd. The Menshevik delegates denounced this action, but could do nothing and left the assembly, and so the Central Committee declared a Workers’ and Peasants’ Temporary Government. (Freeze, 250)

**Examining State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus through the Women’s Movement**

Women played a pivotal role in the economic and political revolutions of 1905 and 1917 granting them new realization of their power as well as inclusion into the newly formed government following October of 1917. In 1921 V. I. Lenin gave an interview to Clara Zetkin regarding the “Women’s Question” in Russia. He makes it clear that women are a valued asset to

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5 Importance of the Bolshevik party as the catalyst of change is demonstrated throughout his interview with Zetkin.
the revolution and deserve special consideration and effort on the part of the party, but he places women’s struggle within the proletariat as their proper position. Lenin felt that working women should see the benefits being offered by the Communist Party and work to support the party. “The Government of the proletarian dictatorship, together with the Communist Party and trade union, is of course leaving no stone unturned in the effort to overcome the backward ideas of men and women, to destroy the old un-communist psychology.” This is a very grand task and important for the success of a social revolution. However, the ways that Lenin argues that the state is working to change this psychology is through “communal kitchens, public eating-houses, laundries, and repairing shops, nurseries, kindergartens, children’s homes, educational institutes of all kinds.” All of these initiatives do show an interest in including women by the state and demonstrate a practical approach to many of the issues faced by working class women. However, as progressive and necessary as these initiatives are, they do not have anything to do with reconstructing the psychology of men and women in regards to each other and themselves. It is also important to keep in mind that it was in the best interest of the party to include women in some way. By inviting women into the party with such initiatives, it was thought to help suppress counter-revolution and allow access into Central Asian via the women where there was not a proletariat, theorized many top male party officials. (Wood, 3)

Women were granted inclusion within the party's political framework following the revolution of October 1917 was the zhenotdel, the women’s section of the party. Yet another demonstration of legal acceptance of tackling the issue of women’s equality was the granting of the right to divorce. (Wood, 2) That the state and newly formed Communist Party included these on the early agenda at a time when facing food shortages and still embroiled in an International war, shows that the Women’s Question was being treated with equal commitment as to peasants with land socialization and the urban labor force with the eight-hour day. Not to imply that
women were not active within the labor force at this time: 1921 in Petrograd, women were 43% of all union members⁶, so labor reforms effected many women just as personally as divorce laws. And it was as workers that women were viewed by the Bolshevik party and its leaders. Lenin stressed the importance of women placing their faith in the Bolshevik Party and the workers movement to grant equality and did not support feminism as a separate movement. “The first proletarian dictatorship is a real pioneer in establishing social equality for women. It is clearing away more prejudices than could volumes of feminist literature.”⁷ While the Russian Feminist movement and the League for Women’s Equality had actively campaigned for there to be a separate Women’s Party, not part of the Bolshevik party, but held with equal esteem of the workers and peasants because “Men cannot defend our interests; they do not understand us.”⁸ However, not all women agreed with this sentiment, and some women such as Kollontai only listed to their arguments to better understand the ‘enemy’. Following the First Conference of Working Women of the Petrograd Region organized by the Rabotnitsa group on November 12, 1917 in which the debate was held to persuade working women to vote their support for either the Bolshevik party or the League of Women’s Equality. (Stites, 307) This was the end of the Russian Feminist movement, as the Bolshevik Party became the vehicle women would be using to attempt to gain equality in Russian society.

It is very important to note that while the Bolshevik Party undertook such important steps towards developing new domestic relations with public cafeterias and laundries and inclusion of women in the work force by tackling maternity leaves and advancing education for all with children’s houses and literacy programs, this was not an attempt to overthrow the Patriarchal Apparatus. Party members realized that it was in their best interest to indoctrinate women,

⁶Wood, Elizabeth A. The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia, pg. 101
⁷Taken from Zetkin 1921 interview, pg. 2
⁸Stites, Richard. The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia, pg. 307
according to early Bolshevik writings “women’s roles as mothers of the next generation also made women as essential group in the population. If they put negative ideas into the heads of their offspring, then those children might also resist the new Soviet order.” (Wood, 3) It was against the party to put the issues of women’s emancipation or specific female related problems above that of the workers or the peasant issues. In fact, a charge of “female deviations” could be leveled against a feminist activist too focused on women issues. (Wood, 9) One feminist who seems to have met an unpleasant end was Dr. Maria Ivanovna Pokrovskaya, a noble woman who was educated and became a medical doctor. Founder and main support of the Women’s Progressive Party, which was an upper class women’s feminist movement, and publisher of *Women’s Herald* its organ that never abandoned the call for female equality; she was staunchly opposed to “subordinating feminism to socialism.”9 Another of her focuses was concerning the legalization and support of prostitution, as she came from a medical profession; however, prostitutes specifically were not high on the list of concerns of the Bolshevik Party. According to Lenin, “The other [prostitutes] is only a diseased excrescence.”10 Dr. Pokrovskaya worked with many different women’s organization and the Women’s Progressive Party was involved in early conferences with other women’s organizations and the Bolshevik Party; however, as the revolution drew close, she began to form more separatist ideas in regards to the Bolshevik Party because of their repeated argument against feminism and feminists as being ‘anti-party’. Her fate is unknown, but the Women’s Progressive Party and *Women’s Herald* disappeared not long after the October Revolution. (Stites, 307)

Women were given inclusion into the state apparatus by the *zhenotdel* and to some of the state’s ideological apparatuses; new laws, programs, and educational opportunities, began to grant greater incorporation of women. Yet it is important to note that these reforms and changes were

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9 Dr. Pokrovskaya from Women’s Progressive Party
10 Taken from Clara Zetkin’s interview, 1921.
not complete and therefore did not lead to a sustainable social revolution because the Party actively crusaded against feminism and a redefinition of social relations. The Communist Party argued that there was no need for working with women and men in regards to issues of sex, marriage, and family because once there was a “dictatorship of the proletariat” men and women are just equal. The justification for this came from an interpretation of The Communist Manifesto in which such phrases as, “The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.”

Which could be understood as once the proletariat had risen up all of society had changed. As Lenin saw it, the Bolshevik Party was the solution to creating equality and ending oppression:

Must I again swear to you, or let you swear, that the struggles for our demands for women must be bound up with the object of seizing power, of establishing the proletarian dictatorship? That is our Alpha and Omega at the present time. That is clear, quite clear. But the women of the working people will not feel irresistibly driven into sharing our struggles for the state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. No, no! The women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own suffering, needs, and wishes. They must realise what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie.

However, this theory of the proletarian dictatorship seems to overlook the necessary withering away of the state for true proletarian emancipation from class as described in this later passage also from The Communist Manifesto where Marx writes:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so call, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

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11 Taken from Karl Marx: Selected Writings 2nd Ed. pg. 254
12 Taken from Zetkin 1921 interview, pg. 10
13 Taken from Karl Marx: Selected Writings pg. 262
In fact, this statement implies that so long as the dictatorship of the proletariat exists, or a bureaucratic party such as the Bolsheviks so long as any state continues to exist the fundamental forms of power and patriarchy have not been entirely destroyed. It is one thing to make a law stating men and women are equal it is still another to establish the economic and social programs to make this a reality. For example, even though women were almost the majority in many trade unions, they still did not hold a representative showing on the trade council, such as in Petrograd where they were only 13% of the council staff.\textsuperscript{14} Another way in which this reductionist view of the complexity of the social relations between men and women played out can be seen in the progressive initiatives leading up to 1921 followed by the subsequent liquidation of many women’s sections because of the other more ‘pressing’ issues that developed and the initiation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). By declaring the Women Question over, they avoided putting it into the NEP, effectively destroying the power of women at a state level by removing it from the agenda.

It was not as though women did not take advantage of the new outlets given to them through the \textit{zhenotdel} to attempt to redefine their roles in Russian society. Alexandra Kollontai utilized her role as leader of the \textit{zhenotdel} as a furthering of her and Armand’s new focus on organizing women: “the psychology of gender relations and women’s own needs.” (Wood, 101) Kollontai was one who recognized that to achieve female’s equality in Russia “society would have to overcome two key holdovers from the past: the backwardness of the female masses, their ignorance, illiteracy, lack of skills, and lack of preparation for political life; and the shameful prejudices of men toward women.”\textsuperscript{15} This is recognition of the need for not only new supportive ideological state apparatuses but also a need for new social interactions. However, achieving such goals was very difficult. Kollontai and Armand set out to wield the power granted to women to

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\textsuperscript{14}Wood, Elizabeth A.  \textit{The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia}. pg. 101
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\textsuperscript{15}Wood, Elizabeth A.  \textit{The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia}.
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participate in the party through the branch of the zhenotdel to advance the needs of women in the workforce and in relation to domestic work, in the areas of prostitution and public health, and crusaded for greater equality within trade unions. The initial list of needs of women included in the zhenotdel circular to be sent to the Central Labor Committee (Glavkomtrud) called to protect female labor and elevate the work of housewives to an equally respected union with the support of maternity leaves and daycare centers and centralized laundries and kitchens. However, by the time of the final draft in May of 1920 there was no longer any reference to these special needs of women in the zhenotdel final circular. Here a vessel to yield state power for the benefit of the populous, in the zhenotdel and its potential for women, ultimately set out to create a new social relation between men and women but because of the other pressing problems confronting Russia and the general disinterest on the behalf of the male party members to such measures, the social restructuring was not allowed to occur. Women were seen more as a force to harness in order to legitimate and maintain power, but not as a social force equal to the proletariat, and therefore neither capable of their own liberation independent of the state apparatus, nor deserving their own independent organizations, such as women’s soviets, women’s unions, or a women’s party outside of the Bolshevik party. As a result, the social relations of men and women and the organization of the family was not sustainably altered by the 1930s when a new Repressive State Apparatus began to emerge. Kollontai continued working through the zhenotdel until it was liquidated in 1930, and while it attempted to tackle problems of motherhood and legalized abortion and prostitution as well as granting women equal power in labor conscription; as early as 1921 with the economic pressures following all of the civil turmoil, the ‘women’s question’ was no longer seen as an equally valid pursuit within the social revolution.

It is important to note that this conflict is not entirely on the part of the male members of the party. Throughout the history of the women’s movement in Russia, there were internal
struggles over the definitions and goals of what women wanted and what they should have. Two clear examples of the different viewpoints of women at this time is how various camps felt about Russian involvement in WWI and the role of feminism in the newly forming soviet government. In *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism 1860–1930* Richard Stites traces these divisions in the philosophies of these three perspectives formed within the Women’s Movement during this time. Bolshevism held that through the party and the attainment of class equality, women would naturally become equal, so wasting any time on specific women issues was an unnecessary use of resources. They were also in favor of nationalism, patriotism, and remaining in the war. Feminists felt that the soviet government could be a vehicle for granting women equality, was just as important as dealing with issues concerning the labor movements and peasantry, and all these relations need to be redefined during this transition: but the women question could never be secondary. They were traditionally anti-war and this was another source of contention against them going into the 1917 Revolutions. Once again, this demonstrates that during a time of social revolution there are many factors to be considered. Not all members that might be identified as the same class have the same needs or priorities, and that other classes, in particular women, can contain a radical consciousness as advanced if not more so than workers or the party.

*Revolution affects everyone differently*

Born in 1872 to a government official, Vera Figner set about her studies to become a doctor’s assistant and was not drawn into revolutionary movements on her own steam. It was actually her younger sister, Lidiya that became involved with the Fritsch Group later to form the center of the All-Russian Social Revolutionary Organization. Because of her sister’s
imprisonments, Vera made the decision to leave her husband and return to Russia from Zurich. Although, she did view her marriage as more of a tool to leave her autocratic father rather than a profound love of the concept itself.\textsuperscript{16} However, for her revolutionary activity and involvement in a plot to assassinate Tsar Alexander in 1883 she was imprisoned for twenty-two years. By the time of her release, the period of revolutions in Russia had begun. Because of her status as an ‘old revolutionary’, she was not forced to really choose sides between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks but she was not really given much of a position of authority either. Her investment in the revolution cannot be denied, but ultimately she did not find it to be the source of equality that she had hoped for while sitting all those years in her cell.

Alexandra Kollontai was born in St. Petersburg on March 9, 1872 to Mikhail Domontovich, a Russian army officer and Alexandra Masalin-Mravinsky, who was a half-Russian daughter of a somewhat wealthy Finnish lumber dealer. (Stites, 246) Through out her childhood education, Kollontai showed a rebellious nature exemplified by her own words, “from childhood I brought my mother a good deal of trouble and woe by my determination ‘not to live like others’.”\textsuperscript{17} (Stites, 247) She attended school and was mentored by Mariya Strakhova. She was sent abroad to delay her marriage to Vladimir Kollontai, and while in Berlin unearthed The Communist Manifesto in a bookstore. Vladimir Kollontai was an engineer at Kronholm Works in Narva and while Alexandra was appalled at the conditions she witnessed at the industrial park he worked above, he seemed unconcerned. Five years after her marriage to Vladimir she left him to pursue her independence. At 26, she went to the Zurich University to study economics and wrote The Life of the Finnish Workers “a typical Marxist study of a ‘backward’ society rapidly undergoing capitalist development.” (Stites, 249) Alexandra Kollontai has been quoted as saying

\textsuperscript{16} Memoirs of a Revolutionist by Vera Figner pg.10
\textsuperscript{17} Kollontai’s early autobiographical works are not translated to English. This is quoted is cited by R. Stites with this footnote “Like most revolutionaries, Kollontai has a tendency to push the origins of her political consciousness rather far back into childhood. I have tried to balance this by choosing only a few of the most plausible examples.” pg. 246.
her life work was the ‘emancipation of women’ but her philosophy was that this was to be achieved through the focus of the party. This belief began around 1905-1906; she also thought that a separate ‘women’s question’ and feminism outside the party detracted from party membership. A Menshevik until 1914, by 1919, she was appointed by Lenin along with Inessa Armand to establish the Zhendotdel. She was involved in the administration of this, the first government department for women by women in the world, until it was shut down in 1930 when many of the initial soviet progressive programs were ended. Even though there was a drastic shift in party objectives following 1930, Kollontai went on to serve as a USSR Ambassador to Sweden in 1943.

These are two women who were both very involved and made many sacrifices for the revolution but their experiences were very different and they viewed the accomplishments of the revolution in different lights. This is not just because of their different generations, or their cohort effect, but this is the result of a number of facets of the human personality in interplay. It is not just the experiences or privileges that one is given access to, it is also, what one has had to give out relative to these gains, and the position one holds in the new society that shapes their perceptions of this new order.

Psychological Formation of Identity

There is a rich body of research regarding the formation of an individual’s identity and how salient that identity is relative to various environments. A person’s temperament is thought to be genetic; this is then influenced by the environment that a person grows up in. How the individual reacts to the world effects how the world reacts to the child’s responses, shaping the individual’s expectation of their reality. (Rothbart) In 1963, Stanley Milgram performed studies
on obedience, conformity, and aggression showing that people were willing to inflict remarkable amounts of pain on a subject with the only incentive being the approval of an experimenter. Showing that even in cases that are not as traumatic as a political revolution people will behave in ways that are not consistent with their personality, especially if prompted to do so by authority.

The understanding of the formation of gender is another topic that has been much debated within psychology. One of the positions held towards the development of gender roles is that because of prenatal hormones and genetic predispositions children self-segregate; and the different natural temperaments lead to self-socializing of gender roles - bottom-up socialization. (Maccoby) On the other side is the debate is that children are empty vessels socialized by the world around them; so the behavior they witness by their parents, the language they learn, the type of education they receive, the media’s portrayal of gender roles, the toys they play with, the behaviors they are rewarded/punished for, etc top-down socialization is what creates prevailing gender roles in a given society. Regardless of how the gender roles are formed, much like roles of oppressor/oppressed, there comes a point where these become a part of a person’s identity. Chandler et al. (2003) found that an inner sense of personal continuity predicted well-being in adolescents. This is consistent with the findings of Lampinen et al. (2004) in which they concluded that ‘diachronic disunity’ (the tendency to see oneself as having little endurance over time) is positively correlated with dissociative experiences. With this research in mind, it is important to consider what the effects are during a social revolution when people are asked to abandon their socialized identities, be it a gender role or the role of the oppressor, for a new vague state prescribed way of relating to each other and seeing themselves.

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During a time of social revolution, a person’s psychological development must undergo change as well as their concepts of social interaction. The members of the society as a whole need to become aware of their roles within the current repressive state apparatus and how the existing ideological state apparatus affects their self-identity. This is a process of class-consciousness. The individual needs to become aware of all of the different roles in society that constructs their identity a process of self-consciousness that depends on their reliance on others within their community. These realizations should lead to a process by which both the individual as themselves and their concept within the larger group undergoes change and is pushed to new boundaries of social interaction. The group actualization that needs to occur for a social revolution to be sustainable is similar to Maslow’s idea of self-actualization in that it can only come after other situations are satisfied, i.e. the overthrow of the repressive state apparatus, and is a point of higher functioning but it transcends the individual level and deals with social interactions as whole. Sherif (1958) proved that group dynamics and long-standing prejudice can be overcome by working within the larger group for the larger good. Once people become aware of their roles within society and their contributions as well as needs to social interactions, it can be a sustainable environment for long-term egalitarian social change. Even the oppressor classes can have more satisfying lives by becoming more involved in society and overcoming the alienation from society that is created by living in a class-based society. Because people benefit psychologically from feelings of universality and purpose for their lives, then a collective state, which empowers individuals to have direct and conscious control over their lives lead to a society, were profound self-actualization is possible. This would increase the happiness and quality of life of all participants as well as most likely reduce many of the antecedents of mental disorders.

Conclusion
“Thus all the exploiting classes have now been eliminated.”
~Stalin describing changes from 1924-1936.

If this were so, the state should have withered away. It was the initial objective for the soviet government only to be transitional, helping to pass power from the Imperial State to the people. During a time of economic and political transition, it is important to focus on not just changing social relations but helping individuals go through such radical transformation of their environments. Following a successful social revolution, some identities are eliminated completely while others are drastically redefined. This personal transition for all participants requires social services to help individuals cope. Regardless of the revolutionary movements’ era or local, the economic infrastructure and the politico-legal and ideological superstructures are shaping the environment for individuals. However, individuals are not just pawns that are acted upon by these forces, they also create and interpret their environments, and not all individuals draw the same conclusions. While Ideological State Apparatuses such as the church, schools, families, media, etc. create institutionally supported roles of oppressor and oppressed, during a time of revolution, for these now internalized roles to be changed it must be considered that the individuals are all at different points of internalizing these roles and willingness to accept new social relations. The State Apparatus cannot deal with this problem by itself; this is a transition that cannot be imposed upon the individuals, it must be developed. Creating new social relations therefore, needs to be addressed with not only economic, political, and social initiatives, but also with a focus on addressing the psychological needs of individuals living through such transition. At the same time, society needs organizations to protect us from the stagnation of the state apparatus, to facilitate the withering away of the state.
Limitations of research

Because I do not speak Russian, I have limited access to a wealth of material that might be available on women not discussed herein. Focused on women who were involved in the movements prior to the first revolution of 1905, such as Vera Figner and because she was in a unique position as her past prestige for actions during the initial revolutionary activities and the time served for those actions, she was allowed certain freedoms during the later revolution. Also I wasn’t able to get as much information in the form of primary sources regarding lower class women who were not already involved in some form of higher education and publication prior to the beginning of revolutionary career – this could also be fixed if read Russian – perhaps many more primary sources, such as newspapers and other first hand accounts, like journals might be available.

References


**Bibliography**


