

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

Selected Writings

with introduction and commentaries by ALIX HOLT



A Bolshevik leader—the only woman member of Lenin's government—speaks on revolution, socialism, and feminism.

Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai

Translated with an introduction
and commentaries by

Alix Holt



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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Contents

Translator's note / 7

Chronology / 9

Introduction / 13

- 1 **Social Democracy and the Woman Question / 29**
From "Towards a History of the Working Women's
Movement in Russia" / 39
From "The Social Basis of the Woman Question" / 58
- 2 **Exile and War / 75**
From "Excerpts from a Diary" / 81
From "Around Workers' Europe" / 88
Why was the German Proletariat Silent during
the July Days? / 99
- 3 **The Revolution / 105**
Where does "Revolutionary Defencism" Lead? / 110
- 4 **Women and the Revolution / 113**
In the Front Line of Fire / 123
A Serious Gap / 125
Working Woman and Mother / 127
Document from the Commissariat of Social Welfare / 140
From "The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the
Economy" / 142
- 5 **Crisis in the Party / 151**
The Workers' Opposition / 159
- 6 **Morality and the New Society / 201**
Sisters / 216
Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of
Marital Relations / 225
Soon / 232

Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle / 237
Communism and the Family / 250
Prostitution and Ways of Fighting it / 261
Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth / 276

7

Diplomatic Duties / 293
Marriage and Everyday Life / 300
The Opposition and the Party Rank and File / 312
Soviet Woman: Citizeness with Equal Rights / 316

Notes / 318
Bibliography / 321
Index / 333

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From "Excerpts from a Diary" / 81
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the July Days? / 99
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Where does "Revolutionary Defencism" Lead? / 110
- 4 **Women and the Revolution / 113**
In the Front Line of Fire / 123
A Serious Gap / 125
Working Woman and Mother / 127
Document from the Commissariat of Social Welfare / 140
From "The Labour of Women in the Evolution of the
Economy" / 142
- 5 **Crisis in the Party / 151**
The Workers' Opposition / 159
- 6 **Morality and the New Society / 201**
Sisters / 216
Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of
Marital Relations / 225
Soon / 232

Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle / 237
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Prostitution and Ways of Fighting it / 261
Make Way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth / 276

- 7**
- Diplomatic Duties / 293**
 - Marriage and Everyday Life / 300**
 - The Opposition and the Party Rank and File / 312**
 - Soviet Woman: Citizeness with Equal Rights / 316**
- Notes / 318**
Bibliography / 321
Index / 333

Translator's Note

The translations in this selection, with a few exceptions, appear for the first time in English. "Communism and the Family" was published in 1920 in *The Worker*, the paper of the Scottish Workers' Committee, and the same translation was republished by Pluto Press in 1971; the translation here is, however, a new one. "The Workers' Opposition" was published in 1921 in *The Workers' Dreadnought* on the initiative of Sylvia Pankhurst, and reprinted in 1962 by Solidarity. Although this early translation is sometimes unclear or ambiguous, no copy of the Russian original is available and I have therefore been unable to make a new translation. "Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle" was first published in my own translation in 1972, by Falling Wall Press.

Until the revolution, Russia used the old Gregorian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Roman calendar: dates before and during 1917 are given according to the Gregorian calendar, dates after the beginning of 1918 according to the Roman calendar.

Chronology

- 1873** Alexandra Mikhailovna Domontovich born.
- 1878** Bestuzhevskii courses providing higher education for women opened in St Petersburg.
- 1881** Tsar Alexander II assassinated.
- 1884** Engels's **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State** published.
- 1889** First congress of the Second International held in Paris.
- 1893** Alexandra Mikhailovna marries V.L.Kollontai.
- 1896-8** Kollontai engages in political work, teaching in workers' schools and helping political prisoners.
- 1898** **1-3 March:** Founding conference of Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party.
August: Kollontai travels to Zurich to study political economy.
- 1899** Kollontai returns to St Petersburg but not to her husband.
- 1901** Kollontai visits Europe and meets Rosa Luxemburg, Paul and Laura Lafargue, Karl Kautsky and Georgii Plekhanov.
- 1902** Lenin writes **What Is To Be Done**.
- 1903** Kollontai speaks in public for the first time: to students on Nietzsche and morality.
- 1905** **9 January, "Bloody Sunday":** Troops fire on peaceful demonstration.
14 October: Petrograd soviet of workers' deputies established.
- 1907** **3 June:** Second Duma dissolved.
17-19 August: Kollontai participates in international conference of socialist women in Stuttgart.
- 1908** **September:** Arrest warrant out for Kollontai for her book **Finland and Socialism**. Propaganda work in textile workers' union.
13-14 December: Kollontai leaves for the West to escape arrest.
- 1909** **January:** Kollontai joins German social democratic party.
April-May: Kollontai visits London with Clara Zetkin to take part in suffrage campaign.
- 1910** **28 August - 3 September:** Kollontai present at Eighth Congress of Second International.
August-September: Kollontai speaks at meetings in Denmark and Sweden.
- 1911** **February-March:** Kollontai lectures in Bologna.
Spring: Kollontai moves to Paris.

August–September: Kollontai active in the south of France during a wave of strikes by housewives.

1912

Kollontai visits Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland.

2–7 September: Kollontai attends Forty-fifth British Trade Union Congress in Newport.

24–25 November: Kollontai in Basle for international congress of Second International.

1914

June: Austrian ultimatum to Serbia.

3 August: Kollontai arrested by German authorities.

4 August: Kollontai released. Reichstag approves war credits.

Mid-September: Kollontai leaves for Denmark.

October: Kollontai moves to Sweden.

Mid-November: Kollontai in Swedish prison. After release at end November she settles in Norway. Writes first letters to Lenin.

1915

September: Zimmerwald conference, international gathering of socialists opposed to the war.

8 October: Kollontai begins a speaking tour of USA.

Kollontai now a member of Bolshevik party.

1917

23 February: Demonstration of women workers which begins "February Revolution".

March: Kollontai returns to Petrograd, and is elected a member of executive committee of Soviet.

4 April: Kollontai speaks at meeting of social democratic deputies in support of Lenin's April theses.

24–29 April: Kollontai at Seventh All-Russian party conference. Attempts unsuccessfully to raise question of the organisation of women.

3–6 July: Popular demonstrations suppressed by the government. Kollontai arrested.

26 July – 3 August: Sixth party congress. In absentia Kollontai elected member of central committee.

21 August: Kollontai freed.

September–October: Kollontai organises first Petrograd conference of working women.

25–26 October: Revolution. Kollontai is named Commissar of Social Welfare.

December: New marriage law.

1918

January: Under new marriage law Kollontai marries Pavel Dybenko.

6–8 March: Kollontai attends Seventh party congress, speaking against Brest-Litovsk treaty.

March: Kollontai resigns from Commissariat of Social Welfare.

- 1919** **January:** Rosa Luxemburg murdered in Berlin.
July–August: Kollontai works as People's Commissar of Propaganda and Agitation of the Ukraine. Returns to Moscow in September and works in Central Women's Department.
- 1920** **November:** Abortion legalised.
22–29 December: Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Kollontai elected member of VTsIK (All-Russian All-Union Central Executive Committee).
- 1921** **March:** Kronstadt uprising.
8–16 March: Tenth party congress. Kollontai speaks for Workers' Opposition. New Economic Policy introduced.
22–27 December: Ninth All-Russian congress of Soviets. Kollontai re-elected member of VTsIK.
Marie Stopes opens birth-control clinic in London.
- 1922** **February:** Kollontai signs the "Letter of the 22" that put the case of the Workers' Opposition to the Executive Committee of the Communist International.
4 October: Kollontai appointed adviser to Soviet legation in Norway.
- 1923** **30 May:** Kollontai given plenipotentiary powers in Norwegian legation.
- 1924** **January:** Death of Lenin.
4 August: Kollontai appointed Ambassador to Norway.
- 1926** **September:** Kollontai appointed head of legation in Mexico; within a year she is recalled for health reasons.
19 November: Laws on marriage, divorce, the family and guardianship passed.
- 1926–7** **Joint Opposition** opposes Stalin.
- 1927** **October:** Kollontai sent to Norwegian embassy.
14 November: Trotsky excluded from the party.
Wilhelm Reich's *The Function of the Orgasm* published.
- 1929** **February:** Trotsky deported.
- 1930** **January:** Women's departments closed down.
Kollontai transferred to Swedish embassy.
- 1933** **7 March:** Kollontai awarded Order of Lenin for work with working and peasant women.
Shlyapnikov (co-leader of the Workers' Opposition) expelled from the party.
- 1936** **27 June:** Abortion made illegal.
August: Trials of Zinoviev and Kamenev.
- 1938** **July:** Pavel Dybenko shot. Massive purge trials.
- 1939** **November:** War with Finland begins.

- 1940** **January–March:** Kollontai active in concluding Finno-Soviet peace.
- 1942** **4 April:** Kollontai awarded Red Banner of Labour for services to Soviet state to mark her 70th birthday.
- 1945** **5 September:** Kollontai awarded second Red Banner of Labour for services during Second World War.
- 1952** **9 March:** Kollontai dies of heart attack.
- 1953** **5 March:** Death of Stalin.
- 1955** Abortion made legal.
- 1956** Twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party.