

Chapter 28 Viewpoint Activity



Women were generally excluded from leadership roles in the Russian Revolution, and even though they played an important part, they had to fight for recognition (textbook page 732). In the first excerpt below, Alexandra Kollontai describes some of the women’s contributions in the revolution of 1905. The second is a petition from a group of women in 1917. ♦ *As you read, think about the people whose work for a cause is often forgotten. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Women in the Russian Revolution

Alexandra Kollontai

. . . During the October days, exhausted by their working conditions and their harsh hungry existence, women would leave their machines and bravely deprive their children of the last crust of bread in the name of the common cause. The working woman would call on her male comrades to stop work. Her words were simple, compelling, and straight from the heart. She kept up morale and imparted a renewed vigor to the demoralized. The working woman fought on tirelessly and selflessly. . . . The voices of the working class began to ring out more clearly and forcefully for the recognition not only of general class demands but of the specific needs and demands of working women. In March 1905 the exclusion of women from the elections of workers’ delegates. . . . aroused deep dissatisfaction; the hardships the men and women had been through together had brought them closer to each other, and it seemed particularly unjust to emphasize woman’s inferior status at a time when she had shown herself an able fighter and a worthy citizen.

Petition to the Provisional Government

We have come here to remind you that women were your faithful comrades in the gigantic struggle for the freedom of the Russian people; that they also have been filling up the prisons, and boldly marched to the gallows. The best of us looked into the eyes of death without fear. Here at my side stands Vera N. Figner [imprisoned for 20 years], who has been struggling all her life for what has now been obtained.

We declare that the Constituent Assembly in which only one half of the population will be represented can in no wise be regarded as expressing the will of the whole people, but only half of it.

We want no more promises of good will. We have had enough of them! We demand an official and clear answer—that the women will have votes in the Constituent Assembly.

“We want no more promises of good will. We have had enough of them! We demand an official and clear answer—that the women will have votes in the Constituent Assembly.”

Sources: (1) “Towards a History of the Working Women’s Movement in Russia,” in *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. and ed. Alix Holt (Allison and Busby, 1977); (2) *Feminism in Russia, 1900–1917*, by Linda Harriet Edmondson (Heinemann, 1984).

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Questions to Discuss

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| <p>1 According to Kollontai, what did women workers do in the 1905 revolution?</p> <p>2 What is the basic demand of the women who are presenting the petition to the government?</p> <p>3. Checking Consistency These two excerpts refer to two revolutions—1905 and 1917.</p> | <p>What points do they both make? In a discussion, do you think Kollontai and the women would agree or disagree on women’s place in the government?</p> |
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