

Alexandra Kollontai

The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman

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Prefatory Note

This is the first time that the complete autobiography which Alexandra Kollontai wrote in 1926 has been published. The sentences and paragraphs in italics were crossed out in the galleyproofs and left out in her time. Variants were indicated in footnotes which likewise were rejected and crossed out. The reader thus will have an idea of the extent and the intensity of corrections made by the author under the pressure of the gradually sharpening Stalinist control.

The Aims and Worth of My Life

Nothing is more difficult than writing an autobiography. 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*. [1] 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 I [2a] may succeed in setting into bold relief that which concerns the women's liberation struggle and, further, the social significance which it has.*[2] That I 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 [3] 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 honor in human society, but the worth of the useful mission accomplished by her, [4a] the worth of her personality as human being, as citizen, [4b] 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 [4c] (for nearly thirty years, indeed, I have belonged to the [4d] Communists) but, at the same time, to shape my personal, intimate life as a woman according to my own will and according to the given laws of my nature. [4e] It was this that conditioned my line of vision. [4f] And [4g] in fact I have [4h] succeeded in structuring my intimate life according to my own standards and I make no secret of my love experiences [4i] anymore than does a man. [4k] 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. [4l] 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, [4m] 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 had thereby achieved a victory not only for myself, but [4n] for women in general [4o] and indeed, a victory over their worst enemy, that is to say, [4p] over conventional morality and conservative concepts of marriage. When on occasion I am told that it is truly remarkable [4r] that a woman has been appointed to such a responsible position, I always [4s] 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, [4t] who has settled*

scores with the double standard and who has never concealed it,[4u] 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 dispel[4v] the[4w] 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* [5] in life but *sentimental love feelings*. [6] 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 demands for perfect happiness[7] 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 yet[8] understand how to be free. The whole thing was an absolutely incredible squandering of our mental energy, a diminution of our labor 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 center. 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* [9] 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*. [10] 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. [11]

But *over and over again things turned out differently, since* [12] 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 eternally recurring struggle with the beloved man, we finally tore ourselves away and rushed toward freedom. Thereupon we were *again* [13] alone, *unhappy*, [14] 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.*^[15]

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.^[16] 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 maneuver 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.*^[17] 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 a Finn). Already as a *small*^[18] child I criticized^[19] the injustice of adults and *I experienced as a blatant* contradiction^[20] 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.*^[21] 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 critically^[22] 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 took^[23] the examinations qualifying me for admission to the university when I was barely sixteen (*in 1888*)^[24] and thereafter I was expected to lead the life of a "young society woman."^[25] 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 even^[26] 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*^[27] and mother was bent upon marrying me off at a very early age. My oldest sister, at the age of nineteen, had contracted marriage with a highly placed gentleman who was nearly *seventy*.^[28] I revolted against this *marriage of convenience*, this marriage for money^[29] and wanted to marry only for love, *out of a great passion.*^[30] 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*,^[31] 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^[32] interests turned to the revolutionary working class of Russia. I read voraciously. I zealously studied *all*^[33] 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. George Plechanov 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 Krenholm 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 directed against him. I left husband and child and journeyed to Zurich in order to study political economy under Professor Heinrich Herkner. Therewith^[34] 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 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 Czarist regime at the end of the '90's, 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*^[35] scientific work in political economy was a *comprehensive investigation*^[36] of the living and working conditions of the Finnish proletariat *in relation to industry*.^[37] 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*:^[38] to the Russian revolutionary movement and to the working-class movement *of the whole world*.^[39] 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 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* [40] 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 meager 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* [41] *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 Russian* [42] *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 program.* [43] *It was very difficult* [44] *to win my fellow members* [45] *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 over to my plans. I* [46] *wrote* [47] *an article published in the illegal press in 1906 in which for the first time* [48] *I 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 Party (K. Nicolaieva, Marie Burke, etc.). One result of my activity in connection with the women workers,* [49] *but especially of my political writings—among which was a pamphlet on Finland containing the call to rise up against the Czarist Duma* [50] *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 Bolsheviks on the one side, the Mensheviks on the other. *In 1908 I belonged to the Menshevik faction, having been forced thereto by the hostile position taken by the Bolsheviks towards the Duma, a pseudo-Parliament called by the Czar in order to Pacify the rebellious spirits of the age. Although with the Mensheviks I espoused the point of view that even a pseudo-Parliament 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.[51] 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*[52] 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 comrades[53] 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*[54] 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*[55] program 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.

The Years of Political Emigration

As a political refugee henceforth I lived in Europe and America until the overthrow of Czarism in 1917. As soon as I arrived in Germany, after my flight, I joined the German Social Democratic Party in which I had many personal friends, among whom I especially numbered Karl Liebknecht,[56] Rosa Luxemburg, *Karl Kautsky*. [57] Clara Zetkin also had a great influence on my *activity*[58] in defining the principles of the women-workers movement in Russia. Already in 1907 I had taken part, as a delegate from Russia, in the first International Conference of Socialist Women that was held in Stuttgart. This gathering was presided over by Clara Zetkin and it made an enormous contribution to the development of the women-workers movement along Marxist lines. I put myself at the disposal of the Party press as a writer on social and political questions, and I was also frequently called upon as an orator by the German Party and I worked for the Party as an agitator from the Palatinate to Saxony, from Bremen to south Germany. But I assumed[59] no leading posts either in the Russian party or in the German party.[60] By and large I was mainly a "popular orator" and an esteemed political writer. *I can now openly confess*[61] that in the Russian Party I deliberately kept somewhat aloof from the controlling center, and that is explainable mainly by the fact that I was not yet in complete agreement with the policy of my comrades.[62] *But I had no desire to pass over to the*

Bolsheviks, nor could I for that matter since at the time it seemed to me as if they did not attach sufficient importance to the development of the working-class movement in "breadth and depth." Therefore I worked on my own seemingly almost as though I wanted to remain in the background without setting my sights or obtaining a leading position.[63] Here it must be admitted that, although I possessed a certain degree of ambition, like every other active human being, I was never animated by the desire to obtain "a post." For me "what I am" was always of less importance than "what I can," that is to say, what I was in a position to accomplish. In this way I, too, had my ambition and it was especially noticeable there where I stood *with my whole heart and soul* [64] in the struggle, where the issue was the abolition of the slavery of working women. I had above all set myself the task of winning over women workers in Russia to socialism and, at the same time, of working for the liberation of [65] woman, for her equality of rights. My book "The Social Foundations of the Women's Question" had appeared shortly before my flight; it was a polemical disputation with the bourgeois suffragettes but, at the same time, a challenge to the Party to build a viable women workers movement in Russia. The book enjoyed a great success. At that time I wrote for the legal and illegal press. Through an exchange of letters I tried to influence Party comrades and women workers themselves. *Naturally, I always did this in such a way that I demanded from the Party that it*[66] *espouse* the cause of women's liberation. I did not always have an easy time of it. Much passive resistance, little understanding, and even less interest for this aim, over and over again, lay as an obstacle in the path. It was not until 1914, shortly before the outbreak of the World War, that finally both factions—the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks—took up the question in an earnest and practical way, a fact which had on me an effect almost tantamount to a personal commendation. Two periodicals for working women were launched in Russia, the International Working Women's Congress of March 8, 1914, was celebrated. I was still living in exile, however, and could help the so dearly loved women-workers movement in my homeland only from afar. I was in close contact, also from afar, with the working women of Russia. Already several years earlier [67] I had been appointed by the Textile Workers Union as an official delegate to the Second International Conference of Socialist Women (1910) and, *further,* [68] to the extraordinary International Socialist Congress in Basle in 1912. Later when a draft of a bill on social insurance was introduced in the Russian pseudo-Parliament (the Duma), the Social Democratic Duma faction (of the Menshevik wing) requested me to elaborate the draft of a bill on maternity welfare. It was not the first time that the [69] faction lay claim to my energies for legislative work. Just before I was forced to go into exile, I had been enlisted by them—as a qualified expert—to participate in the deliberation of the question of Finland in the Imperial Duma.

The task that had been assigned to me, namely, the elaboration of a draft of a bill in the field of maternity welfare, motivated me to undertake a most thorough study of this special question. The *Bund für Mutterschutz*, and the outstanding work of Dr. Helene

Stöcker, also provided me with valuable suggestions. Nevertheless I also studied the question in England, France, and in the Scandinavian countries. The result of these studies was my book "Motherhood and Society," a *comprehensive*^[70] work of 600 pages on maternity welfare and the relevant legislation in Europe and Australia. The fundamental regulations and demands in this field, which I summed up at the end of my book, were realized later in 1917 by the Soviet regime in the first social insurance laws.

For me the years of political emigration were hectic, *quite stirring*^[71] years. I travelled as a Party orator from country to country. In 1911, in Paris, I organized the housewives' strike "La grève des menagères" against the high cost of living. In 1912 I worked in Belgium setting the groundwork for the miners' strike in the Borinage and in the same year the Party dispatched me to the left-oriented Socialist Youth Association of Sweden in order to strengthen the Party's^[72] anti-militaristic tendencies. Several years earlier, *this still merits mention here*,^[73] I fought in the ranks of the British Socialist Party side by side with Dora Montefiore and Madame Koeltsch^[74] against the English suffragettes for the strengthening of the still fledgling socialist working-women's movement. In 1913 I was again in England. This time I was there in order to take an active part in a protest action against the famous "Beilis Trial" which had been instigated by the anti-semites in Russia. In the spring of the same year, the left wing of the Swedish Social Democratic Party invited me to Sweden. These were truly hectic years, marked by the most varied types of militant activity. Notwithstanding, my Russian Party comrades also laid claim to my energies and appointed me delegate to the Socialist Party and Trade Union Congress. *Thus with the help of Karl Liebknecht I also sparked an activity in Germany on behalf of the deported socialist members of the Duma.*^[75] In 1911 I was called to the Russian Party School in Bologna, where I delivered a series of lectures. The present Russian Minister of Education in Soviet Russia, A. Lunacharsky, Maxim Gorki, as well as the famous Russian economist and philosopher A. Bogdonov, were the founders of this Party school, and Trotsky delivered lectures at the school at the same time that I was there. The present Soviet Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, G. Chicherin, who at that time worked as secretary of a relief agency for political refugees, oftentimes called upon me to hold public lectures on the most disparate cultural problems of Russian life in order to help fill the relief agency's almost empty kitty. At his behest I travelled all over Europe but Berlin was my fixed abode. I felt at home in Germany and have always greatly appreciated the conditions there so ideally suited for scientific work. But I was not allowed to give speeches in Prussia. On the contrary, I had to keep as quiet as possible to avoid expulsion by the Prussian police.

Then the World War broke out and once again I arrived at a new turning point in my life.

But before I talk about this important period of my intellectual existence, I still want to say a few words about my personal life. The question rises whether in the middle of all these manifold, exciting labors and Party-assignments I could still find rime for intimate experiences, for the pangs and joys of love. Unfortunately, yes! I say unfortunately because ordinarily these experiences entailed all too many cares, disappointments, and pain, and because all too many energies were pointlessly consumed through them. Yet the longing to be understood by a man down to the deepest, most secret recesses of one's soul, to be recognized by him as a striving human being, repeatedly decided matters. And repeatedly disappointment ensued all too swiftly, since the friend saw in me only the feminine element which he tried to mold into a willing sounding board to his own ego. So repeatedly the moment inevitably arrived in which I had to shake off the chains of community with an aching heart but with a sovereign, uninfluenced will. Then I was again alone. But the greater the demands life made upon me, the more the responsible work waiting to be tackled, the greater grew the longing to be enveloped by love, warmth, understanding. All the easier, consequently, began the old story of disappointment in love, the old story of Titania in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

[76]

The outbreak of the World War found me in Germany. My son was with me. We were both arrested because my identity papers were not in order. During the house search, however, the police found a mandate from the Russian Social Democratic Party appointing me as delegate to the World Congress of Socialists. Suddenly the gentlemen from Alexander Platz became utterly charming: they figured that a female Social Democrat could not be a friend of the Czar *and consequently certainly not an enemy of Germany. They were right.*[77] I was in fact no enemy of Germany and still less a Russian patriot. To me the war was an abomination, a madness, a crime, and from the first moment onwards—more out of impulse than reflection—I inwardly rejected it and could never reconcile myself with it *up to this very moment.*[78] The intoxication of patriotic feelings has always been something alien to me, on the contrary I felt an aversion for everything that smacked of super-patriotism. I found no understanding for my "anti-patriotic" attitude among my own *Russian*[79] Party comrades, *who also lived in Germany.*[80] Only Karl Liebknecht, his wife Sofie Liebknecht, and a few other German Party comrades, like myself, espoused the same standpoint and, *like myself,*[81] considered it a socialist's duty to struggle against the war. Strange to say, I was present in the Reichstag on August 4, the day the war budget was being voted on. The collapse of the German Socialist Party struck me as a calamity without parallel. I felt utterly alone and found comfort only in the company of the Liebknechts.

With the help of some German Party friends I was able to leave Germany with my son in August of 1914 and emigrate to the Scandinavian peninsula. I left Germany not because

I had felt the slightest manifestation of unfriendliness towards me but only for the reason that without a sphere of activity I would have been forced to live in idleness in that country. I was impatient to take up the struggle against the war. After arriving on Sweden's neutral soil, I *immediately*[82] began the work against the war *and for*[83] the international solidarity of the world working class. An appeal to working women made its way, along illegal channels, to Russia and to different other countries. In Sweden I wrote and spoke against the war. I spoke at public meetings, most of which had been called by the leftist-leaning *world-famous*[84] Swedish Party leaders Zeta Höglund and Frederic Strön. I found in them the pure echo of my *ideas and*[85] feelings and we joined forces in a common task for the victory of internationalism and against the war hysteria. It was only later that I learned of the attitude which the leading minds of the Russian Party had taken towards the war. When the news finally reached us, by way of Paris and Switzerland, it was for us a day of ineffable joy. We received assurance that both Trotsky and Lenin, although they[86] belonged to different factions of the Party, had militantly risen up against the war. Thus I was no longer "isolated." *A new grouping was proposed*[87] in the Party, the internationalists and the "social-patriots." *A Party periodical was also founded in Paris.*[88] In the middle of my zealous activities, however, I was arrested by the Swedish authorities and brought to the Kungsholm prison. The worst moment during this arrest was born of my concern over the identity papers of a good friend and Party comrade, Alexander Schlapnikov, who had just arrived illegally in Sweden from Russia, which I had taken over for safe-keeping. Under the eyes of the police I managed to hide them under my blouse and somehow make them disappear. Later I was transferred from the Kungsholm prison to the prison in Malma and then banished to Denmark. As far as I know I was one of the first of the European socialists to be jailed because of anti-war propaganda. *In Denmark I continued my work but with greater prudence. Nevertheless*[89] the Danish police did not leave me in peace. Nor did the Danish Social Democrats exhibit friendliness for the internationalists. In February of 1915 I emigrated to Norway where together with Alexander Schlapnikov we served as a link between Switzerland, the place of residence of Lenin and of the Central Committee,[90] and Russia. We had full contact with the Norwegian socialists. On March 8 of the same year I tried to organize an international working women's demonstration against the war in Christiania (now Oslo), but the representatives from the belligerent countries did not show up.

That was the time when the decisive rupture in Social Democracy was being prepared, since the patriotically minded socialists could not go along with the internationalists. Since the Bolsheviks were those who most consistently fought social-patriotism, in June of 1915 I officially joined the Bolsheviks *and entered into a lively correspondence with Lenin (Lenin's letters to me have recently been published in Russia).*[91]

I again began to do a prodigious amount of writing, this time for the international-minded press of the most different countries: England, Norway, Sweden, America, Russia. At this time one of my pamphlets, "Who Profits from the War?," appeared. Deliberately written in a very popular view, it was disseminated in countless editions, *in millions of copies*,[\[92\]](#) and was translated into several languages, German included. So long as the war continued, the problem of women's liberation obviously had to recede into the background since *my only concern, my highest aim*,[\[93\]](#) was to fight against the war and call a new Workers International into being. In the autumn of 1915 the German section of the American Socialist Party invited me to journey to America to deliver lectures there in the spirit of "Zimmerwald" (a gathering of international-minded socialists). I was immediately ready to cross the ocean for this purpose, despite the fact that my friends determinedly advised me against it. They were all deeply worried about me because the journey had become very hazardous as a result of submarine warfare. But the aim enticed me enormously. My propaganda tour in America lasted five months, during which time *I visited eighty-one cities in the United States and delivered lectures in German, French, and Russian*.[\[94\]](#) The work was extremely strenuous, *but also as fruitful, and I had warrant to believe that as a result the internationalists in the American Party were strengthened. Much opposition to the war, passionate debates, also existed overseas, but the police did not bother me*.[\[95\]](#) The newspapers, by turns, branded me either as a spy of the German Kaiser or as an agent of the Entente. I returned to Norway in the spring of 1916. I love Norway with its incomparable fjords and its majestic mountains, its courageous, gifted, and industrious people. At that time I lived on the famous Holmenkollen near Oslo and continued to work with the view 'of welding together all the forces of the internationalists in opposition to the World War. *I shared Lenin's view which aimed at spreading the conviction that the war could be defeated only by the Revolution, by the uprising of the workers. I was in substantial agreement with Lenin and stood much closer to him than many of his older followers and friends*.[\[96\]](#) But my sojourn in Norway was not a long one because only a few months after my arrival I had to embark upon a second journey to America, where I remained till shortly before the outbreak of the Russian Revolution. *For me the situation in America had changed insofar as, in the meanwhile, many Russian Party comrades had come over, Trotsky among others. We worked zealously for the new Workers International but America's intervention in the war aggravated our activity*.[\[97\]](#)

I had already been in Norway for several weeks, when the Russian people rose up against absolutism and dethroned the Czar. A festive mood reigned among all our political friends. But I harbored no illusions because I knew that the overthrow of the Czar would be only the beginning of even more momentous events and difficult social struggles so *I hastened*[\[98\]](#) back to Russia in March 1917. I was one of the first political emigrants *who came*[\[99\]](#) back to the liberated homeland. Torneo, the tiny frontier town lying north of the

Swedish-Finnish frontiers, through which I had to pass, was still in the grip of a cruel winter. A sleigh carried me across the river which marks the frontier. On Russian soil stood a soldier. A bright red ribbon fluttered on his chest. "Your identity papers, please, citizenness!" "I have none. I am a political refugee." "Your name?" I identified myself. A young officer was summoned. Yes, my name was on the list of political refugees who were to be freely admitted into the country by order of the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviet. The young officer helped me out of the sleigh and kissed my hand, almost reverently. I was standing on the republican soil of liberated Russia! Could that be possible? It was one of the happiest hours of my *whole*[100] life. Four months later, by order of the Kerensky regime (the Provisional Government), the same charming young officer placed me under arrest as a dangerous Bolshevik at the Torneo frontier station ...Such is life's irony.

The Years of Revolution

So overwhelming was the rush of subsequent events that to this very day I really do not know what I should describe and emphasize: what have I accomplished, desired, achieved? Was there altogether an individual will at that time? Was it not only the omnipotent storm of the Revolution, the command of the active, awakened masses that determined our will and action? Was there altogether a single human being who would not have bowed to the general will? There were only masses of people, bound together in a bipartite will, which operated either for or against the Revolution, for or against ending the war, and which sided for or against the power of the Soviets. Looking back one perceives only a massive operation, struggle, and action. In reality there were no heroes or leaders. It was the people, the working people, in soldiers' uniform or in civilian attire, who controlled the situation and who recorded its will indelibly in the history of the country and mankind. It was a sultry summer, a crucial summer of the revolutionary flood-tide in 1917! At first the social storm raged only in the countryside, the peasants set fire to the "nests of gentle folk." In the cities the struggle that raged was between the advocates of a republican-bourgeois Russia and the socialist aspirations of the Bolsheviks ...

As I have previously stated, I belonged to the Bolsheviks. Thus immediately, from the first days onwards, I found an absolute enormous pile of work waiting for me. Once more the issue was to wage a struggle against the war, against coalescence with the liberal bourgeoisie, and for the power of the workers' councils, the Soviets. The natural consequence of this stand was that the bourgeois newspapers branded me as a "mad female Bolshevik." But this bothered me not at all. *My field of activity was immense, and my followers, factory workers and women-soldiers, numbered thousands.*[101] At this time I was very popular, especially[102] as an orator,[103] and, at the same time, hated and viciously attacked by the bourgeois press. *Thus it was a stroke of luck~ that*

I was^[104] so weighed down with current work that I found hardly any time to read the attacks and slanders against me. The hate directed against me, allegedly because I had been in the pay of the German Kaiser for the purpose of weakening the Russian front, grew^[105] to monstrous proportions.

One of the most burning questions of the day was the high cost of living and the growing scarcity of vital necessities. Thus the women of the poverty-stricken strata had an indescribably hard time of it. *Precisely this situation prepared the terrain in the Party for "work with women" so that very soon we were able to accomplish useful work.* ^[106] Already in May of 1917 a weekly called "The Women Workers" made its debut. I authored an appeal to women against the high cost of living and the war.^[107] The first mass meeting, packed with thousands of people,^[108] that took place in Russia under the Provisional Government, was organized by us, by the Bolsheviks. Kerensky and his ministers made no secret of their hatred of me, the "instigator of the spirit of disorganization" in the Army. One particular article of mine in "Pravda" in which I interceded for German prisoners of war unleashed a *veritable storm of*^[109] indignation on the part of patriotic-minded circles. When in April Lenin delivered his famous programmatic speech within the frame of the Soviets, *I was the only one of his Party comrades who took the poor to support his theses. What hatred this particular act kindled against me!*^[110] Often I had to jump off tramcars before people recognized me, since I had become a topical theme of the day and often bore personal witness to the most incredible abuse and lies directed against me. *I should like to cite a small example which can show how the enemy worked with might and main to defame me. At that time the newspapers hostile to me were already writing about the "Kollontai party dresses" which particularly then was laughable because my trunk had been lost en route to Russia, so I always wore the one and the same dress. There was even a little street ballad that commented on Lenin and me in verse.*^[111] There was also nothing extraordinary in the fact that, threatened as I was by irritated mobs, I was always protected from the worst only by the courageous intercession of my friends and Party comrades. Nevertheless I myself personally *experienced little*^[112] of the hatred around me and, of course, there was also a great number of enthusiastic friends: the workers, the sailors, the soldiers *who were utterly devoted to me.*^[113] Moreover, the number of *our followers*^[114] grew from day to day. Already in April, I was a member of the Soviet executive which, in reality, was the guiding political body of the moment, to which I belonged as the only woman and over a long period. In May of 1917 I took part in the strike of women laundry workers who set forth the demand that all laundries be "municipalized." The struggle lasted six weeks. Nevertheless the principal demand of the women laundry workers remained unmet by the Kerensky regime.

At the end of June, I was sent by my Party to Stockholm as a delegate to an international consultation which was interrupted when news reached us of the July

uprising against the Provisional Government and of the extremely harsh measures that the [115] government was taking against the Bolsheviks. Many of our leading Party comrades had already been arrested, others, including Lenin, had managed to escape and go into hiding. The Bolsheviks were accused of high treason and branded as spies of the German Kaiser. The uprising was brought to a standstill and the coalition regime retaliated against all those who had manifested sympathy for the Bolsheviks. I immediately decided to return to Russia, although my friends *and Party comrades* [116] considered this to be a risky undertaking. They wanted me to go to Sweden and await the course of events. Well-intentioned as these counsels were, *and correct as they also appeared to me later*, [117] I nevertheless could not heed them. I simply had to go back. Otherwise it would appear to me as an act of cowardice to take advantage of the privilege, that had become mine, of remaining wholly immune from the persecutions of the Provisional Government, when a great number of my political friends were sitting in jail. *Later I realized that, perhaps, I might have been able to be move useful to our cause from Sweden, but I was under the compulsion of the moment.* [118] By order of the Kerensky regime I was arrested on the border of Torneo and subjected to the most boorish treatment as a spy ... But the arrest itself proceeded quite theatrically: during the inspection of my passport I was requested to step into the commandant's office. I understood what that meant. A number of soldiers were standing in an enormous room, pressed close against each other. Two young officers were also present, one of them being the charming young man who had received me *so amiably* [119] four months previously. A *veritable* [120] silence prevailed in the room. The facial expression of the first officer, Prince B., betrayed a great nervousness. Composed, I waited to see what would happen next. "You are under arrest," explained Prince B. "So. Has the counter-revolution triumphed Do we again have a monarchy?" "No," was the gruff reply. "You are under arrest by order of the Provisional Government." "I have been expecting it. Please, let my suitcase be brought in, I don't want it to be lost." "But, of course. Lieutenant, the suitcase!" I saw how the officers heaved a sigh of relief, and how the soldiers left the room with displeasure writ large on their faces. Later I learned that my arrest had occasioned a protest among the soldiers who insisted upon witnessing the arrest. The officers, however, had feared that I might make a speech to the soldiers. "In that case we would have been lost," one of them told me afterwards.

I was forced to wait for the course of the investigation, like the other Bolsheviks, in a Petrograd prison, in strict isolation. The more incredibly the regime conducted itself towards the Bolsheviks, the more *their* influence grew. [121] The march of the White general Kornilov on Petrograd strengthened the most radical elements of the Revolution. The people demanded that the jailed Bolsheviks be freed. Kerensky, however, refused to free me and it was only by an order of the Soviet that I was released from jail upon payment of bail. But already on the next day, Kerensky's decree that I be placed under house arrest hung over me. Nevertheless I was given my full freedom of movement one

month before the decisive struggle, the October Revolution in 1917. Again my work piled up. Now the groundwork was to be set for a systematic women-workers movement. The first conference of women workers was to be called. It also took place and it coincided with the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the establishment of the Soviet Republic.

At that time I was a member of the highest Party body, the Central Committee, *and I voted for the policy of armed uprising.*^[122] I was also a member of different Party representations in decisive Congresses and State institutions (the preliminary Parliament, the democratic Congress, etc.). Then came the great days of the October Revolution. Smolny became historic. The sleepless nights, the permanent sessions. And, finally, the stirring declarations. "The Soviets take power!" "The Soviets address an appeal to the peoples of the world to put an end to the war." "The land is socialized and belongs to the peasants!"

The Soviet Government was formed. I was appointed People's Commissar (Minister) of Social Welfare. I was the only woman in the cabinet *and the first woman in history*^[123] who had ever been recognized as a member of a government. When one recalls the first months of the Workers' Government, months which were so rich in *magnificent illusions*,^[124] plans,^[125] ardent initiatives to improve life, to organize the world anew, months of the real romanticism of the Revolution, one would in fact like to write about all else save about one's self. I occupied the post of Minister of Social Welfare from October of 1917 to March of 1918.^[126] It was not without opposition that I was received by the former officials of the Ministry. Most of them sabotaged us openly and simply did not show up for work. But precisely this office could not interrupt its work, come what may, since in itself it was an extraordinarily complicated operation. It included the whole welfare program for the war-disabled, hence for hundreds of thousands of crippled soldiers and officers, the pension system in general, foundling homes, homes for the aged, orphanages, hospitals for the needy, the work-shops making artificial limbs, the administration of playing-card factories (the manufacture of playing cards was a State monopoly), *the educational system*,^[127] clinical hospitals for women.^[128] In addition a whole series of educational institutes for young girls were also under the direction of this Ministry. One can easily imagine the enormous demands these tasks made upon a small group of people who, at the same time, were novices in State administration. In a clear awareness of these difficulties *I formed*,^[129] immediately, an auxiliary council in which experts such as physicians, jurists, pedagogues were represented alongside the workers and the minor officials of the Ministry. The sacrifice, the energy with which the minor employees bore the burden of this difficult task was truly exemplary. It was not only a matter of keeping the work of the Ministry going, but also of initiating reforms and improvements. New, fresh forces replaced the sabotaging officers of the old regime. A new life stirred in the offices of the formerly highly conservative Ministry. Days of grueling

work! And at night the sessions of the councils of the People's Commissar (of the cabinet) under Lenin's chairmanship. A small, modest room and only one secretary who recorded the resolutions which changed Russia's life to its bottommost foundations. *My first act*^[130] People's Commissar was^[131] to compensate a small peasant for his requisitioned horse. Actually by no stretch of the imagination did this belong to the functions of my office. But the man was determined to receive compensation for his horse. He had travelled from his distant village to the capital and had knocked patiently on the doors of all the ministries. Always with no results! Then the Bolshevik revolution broke out. The man had heard that the Bolsheviks were in favor of the workers and peasants. So he went to the Smolny Institute, to Lenin, who had to pay out the compensation. I do not know how the conversation between Lenin and the small peasant went. As a result of it, however, the man came to me with a small page torn from Lenin's notebook on which I was requested to settle the matter somehow since at the moment the People's Commissariat for Social Welfare had the greatest amount of cash at its disposal. The small peasant received his compensation.

My main work as People's Commissar consisted in the following:^[132] by decree to improve the situation of the war-disabled, to abolish religious instruction in the schools for young girls which were under the Ministry (this was still before the general separation of Church and State), and to transfer priests to the civil service, to introduce the right of self-administration for pupils in the schools for girls, to reorganize the former orphanages into government Children's Homes (*no distinction was to be made between orphaned children and those who still had fathers and mothers*),^[133] to set up the first hostels for the needy and street-urchins, to convene a committee, composed *only*^[134] of doctors, which was to be commissioned to elaborate^[135] the free public health system for the whole country. In my opinion the most important accomplishment of the People's Commissariat, however, was the legal foundation of a Central Office for Maternity and Infant Welfare. The draft of the bill relating to this Central Office was signed by me in January of 1918. A second decree followed in which *I*^[136] changed all maternity hospitals into free Homes for Maternity and Infant Care,^[137] in order thereby to set the groundwork for a comprehensive government system of pre-natal care. I was greatly assisted in coping with these tasks by Dr. Korolef. We also planned a "Pre-Natal Care Palace," a model home with an exhibition room in which courses for mothers would be held *and, among many other things*,^[138] model day nurseries were also to be established.^[139] We were just about completing preparations for such a facility in the building of a girls' boarding school at which formerly young girls of the nobility had been educated and which was still under the direction of a countess, when a fire destroyed our work, which had barely begun! Had the fire been set deliberately? ... I was dragged out of bed in the middle of the night. I rushed to the scene of the fire; the beautiful exhibition room was totally ruined, as were all the other rooms. Only the huge name-plate "Pre-Natal Care Palace" still hung over the entrance door.

My efforts to nationalize maternity and infant care set off a new wave of insane attacks against me. All kinds of lies were related^[140] about the "nationalization of women," *about my legislative proposals which assertedly ordained that little girls of 12 were to become mothers.* A special fury gripped the religious followers of the old regime when, *on my own authority (the cabinet later criticized me for this action),*^[141] I transformed the famous Alexander Nevsky monastery into a home for war invalids. The monks resisted and a shooting fray ensued. The press again raised a loud hue and cry against *me.*^[142] The Church organized street demonstrations *against my action*^[143] and also pronounced "anathema" against me...

I received countless threatening letters, but I never requested military protection. I always went out alone, unarmed and without any kind of a bodyguard. In fact I never gave a thought to any kind of danger, being all too engrossed in matters of an utterly different character.^[144] In February of 1918 a first State delegation of the Soviets was sent to Sweden *in order to clarify different economic and political questions.*^[145] As Peoples' Commissar I headed this delegation. But our vessel was shipwrecked; we were saved by landing on the Aland Islands which belonged to Finland. At this very time the struggle between the Whites and the Reds in the country had reached its most crucial moment and the German Army was also making ready to wage war against Finland.

The White troops occupied the Aland Islands on the very evening of our shipwreck as we were seated at dinner in an inn of the city of Marieham, rejoicing over our rescue. We managed to escape thanks to the greatest determination and cunning, yet one of our group, a young^[146] Finn, was captured and shot. We returned to Petrograd, where the evacuation of the capital was being prepared with feverish haste: German troops already stood before the gates of the city.

Now began a *dark time*^[147] of my life which I cannot treat of here since the events are still too fresh in my mind. *But the day will also come when I will give an account of them.*^[148]

There were differences of opinion in the Party.^[149] I resigned from my post as People's Commissar *on the ground of total disagreement with the current policy. Little by little I was also relieved of all my other tasks. I again gave lectures and espoused my ideas on "the new woman" and "the new morality."*^[150] The Revolution was in full swing. The struggle was becoming increasingly irreconcilable and bloodier, *much of what was happening did not fit in with my outlook.*^[151] But after all^[152] there was still the unfinished task, women's liberation. Women, of course, had received all rights but in practice, of course, they still lived under the old yoke: without authority in family life, enslaved by a thousand menial household chores, bearing the

whole burden of maternity, even the material cares, because many women now found life alone as a result of the war and other circumstances.

In the autumn of 1916 when I devoted all my energies to drawing up systematic guidelines for the liberation of working women in all areas, *I found a valuable support in the*[\[153\]](#) first President of the Soviets, Sverdlov, now dead.[\[154\]](#) Thus the first Congress of Women Workers and Women Peasants could be called as early as November of 1918; some 1147 delegates were present. Thus the foundation was laid for methodical work in the whole country for the *liberation*[\[155\]](#) of the women of the working and the peasant classes. A flood of new work was waiting for me. The question now was one of drawing women into the people's kitchens and of educating them to devote their energies to children's homes and day-care centers, the school system, household reforms, and still many other pressing matters. The main thrust of all this activity was to implement, in fact, equal rights for women as a labor unit in the national economy and as a citizen in the political sphere and, of course, with the special proviso: maternity was to be appraised as a social function and therefore protected and provided for by the State.

Under the guidance of Dr. Lebedevo, the State institutes for pre-natal care also flourished then. At the same time, central officers were established in the whole country to deal with issues and tasks connected with women's liberation and to draw women into Soviet work.[\[156\]](#)

The Civil War in 1919 saddled me with new tasks. When the White troops tried to march north from south Russia, I was again sent to the Ukraine and to the Crimea where at first I served as chairwoman of the enlightenment department in the Army. Later, *up to the evacuation of the Soviet government*,[\[157\]](#) I was appointed People's Commissar of Enlightenment and Propaganda in the Ukrainian government. *I managed to send 400 women communists out of the threatened zone near Kiev with a special train. I did my most possible best for the communist women workers movement also in the Ukraine.*[\[158\]](#)

A serious illness tore me away from the exciting work for months. Hardly having recovered—at that time I was in Moscow—I took over the direction of the Coordinating Office for Work among Women and again a new period of intensive, grueling work began. A communist women's *newspaper*[\[159\]](#) was founded, conferences and congresses of women workers were convoked. The foundation was laid for work with the women of the East (Mohammedans). Two world conferences of communist women took place in Moscow. The law liberalizing abortion was put through and a number of regulations of benefit to women were introduced by our Coordinating Office and legally confirmed. *At this time I had to do more writing and speaking than ever before...*[\[160\]](#) Our work received wholehearted support from Lenin. And Trotsky, although he was overburdened with military tasks, unflinching and gladly appeared at our conferences. Energetic, gifted

women, two of whom are no longer alive,[161] sacrificially devoted all their energies to the work of the Coordinating Office.

At the eighth Soviet Congress, as a member of the Soviet executive (*now there were already several women on this body*[162]), I proposed a motion that the Soviets in all areas contribute to the creation of a consciousness of the struggle for equal rights for women and, accordingly, to involve them in State and communal work. I[163] managed to push the motion through and to get it accepted but not without resistance. It was a great, an enduring victory.

A heated debate flared up when I published my thesis on the new morality. *For our Soviet marriage law, separated from the Church to be sure, is not essentially more progressive than the same laws that after all exist in other progressive democratic countries. Marriage, civil marriage and*[164] *although the illegitimate child was*[165] *placed on a legal par with the legitimate child,*[166] *in practice a great deal of hypocrisy and injustice still exists in this area. When one speaks of the "immorality" which the Bolsheviks purportedly propagated, it suffices to submit our marriage laws to a close scrutiny to note that in the divorce question we are on a par with North America whereas in the question of the illegitimate child we have not yet even*[167] *progressed as far as the Norwegians.*

The most radical wing of the Party was formed around this question. My theses, my *sexual and moral*[168] *views,*[169] *were bitterly fought by many Party comrades of both sexes:*[170] *as were still other differences of opinion in the Party regarding political guiding principles.*[171] Personal and family cares were added thereto and thus months in 1922 went by without fruitful work. Then in the autumn of 1922 came my official appointment to the legation of the Russian Soviet representation in Norway. I really believed that this appointment would be purely formal and that therefore in Norway I would find time to devote to myself, to my literary activity. Things turned out quite differently. With the day of my entry into office in Norway I also entered upon a wholly new course of work in my life which drew upon all my energies to the highest degree. During my diplomatic activity, therefore, *I wrote only one article, "The Winged Eros," which caused an extraordinarily great flutter. Added to this were three short novels, "Paths of Love," which have been published by Malik-Verlag in Berlin.*[172] My book "The New Morality and the Working Class" and a socio-economic study, "The Condition of Women in the Evolution of Political Economy," were written when I was still in Russia.

The Years of Diplomatic Service

I took up my duties in Norway in October of 1922 and as early as 1923 the head of the legation went on holiday so that I had officially to conduct the affairs of the Soviet Republic for him. Soon thereafter, however, I was appointed as the representative of my country in his stead. Naturally this appointment created a great sensation since, after all, it was the first time in history that a woman was officially active as an "ambassador." The conservative press and especially the Russian "White" press were outraged and tried to make a real monster of immorality and a bloody bogey out of me. Now especially a profusion of articles were written *about my "horrid views" in relation to marriage and love. Nevertheless I must stress here that it was only the conservative press that gave me such an unfriendly reception in my new position.* In[173] all the social relations which I had during the three[174] years of my work[175] in Norway, I never once experienced the least trace of aversion or mistrust against woman's capabilities. To be sure, the healthy, democratic spirit of the Norwegian people greatly contributed to this. Thus the fact is to be confirmed that my work as official *Russian*[176] representative[177] in Norway was never, and in no wise, made difficult for the reason that I belonged "to the weaker sex." In connection with my position as ambassadress I also had to assume the duties of a Trade Plenipotentiary of the Russian governmental trade representation in Norway. Naturally both tasks in their special way were new to me. *Nevertheless I set myself the*[178] *task of effecting the de jure* recognition of Soviet Russia and of re-establishing normal trade relations between the two countries which had been broken by the war and the revolution.[179] The work began with great zeal and the most roseate hopes. A *splendid*[180] summer and an eventful winter marked the year of 1923! The newly resumed trade relations were in full swing: Russian corn and Norwegian herring and fish, Russian wood products and Norwegian paper and cellulose. On February 15, 1924, Norway in fact[181] recognized the U.S.S.R. de jure. I was appointed "chargé d'affaires" and officially introduced into the diplomatic corps. Now negotiations for a trade treaty between the two countries began. My life was as crammed with strenuous work and highly interesting experiences alike. *I*[182] had also to settle grave questions connected with the further development of trade and of shipping. After several months, in August of 1924, I was appointed "Ministre Plenipotentiere" and handed over my warrant to the king of Norway with the usual ceremonial. This, of course, gave the conservative press of all countries another occasion to spew their invectives upon me. After all, never before in all history had a woman been accepted as ambassador with the customary pomp and ceremony.

The trade agreement was concluded *in Moscow*[183] at the end of 1925 and in February *I countersigned the ratified treaty in Oslo with the president of the Norwegian cabinet, I. L. Mowickl.*[184]

The signing marked the successful accomplishment of my whole mission in Norway. I could hasten towards new goals and *for this reason*[185] I left my post in Norway.

If I have attained something in this world, it was not my personal qualities that originally brought this about. Rather my achievements are only a symbol of the fact that woman, after all, is already on the march to general recognition. It is the drawing of millions of women into productive work, which was swiftly effected especially during the war and which thrust into the realm of possibility the fact that a woman could be advanced to the highest political and diplomatic positions. Nevertheless it is obvious that only a country of the future, such as the Soviet Union, can dare to confront woman without any prejudice, to appraise her only from the standpoint of her skills and talents, and, accordingly, to entrust her with responsible tasks. Only the fresh revolutionary storms were strong enough to sweep away hoary prejudices against woman and only the productive-working people is able to effect the complete equalization and liberation of woman by building a new society.

As I now end this autobiography, I stand on the threshold of new missions and life is making new demands upon me [\[186\]](#)

No matter what further tasks I shall be carrying out, it is perfectly clear to me that the complete liberation of the working woman and the creation of the foundation of a new sexual morality will always remain the highest aim of my activity, and of my life.[\[187\]](#)

In July of 1926

Signed: Alexandra Kollontai

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) Author's correction: created something which is recognized by society.

[\[2a\]](#) perhaps

[\[2\]](#) 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

[\[3\]](#) Author's correction: I had a certain presentiment

[\[4a\]](#) for society

[\[4b\]](#) as creative worker

[\[4c\]](#) who fought for the realization of our social ideals

[4d] Socialists – now communists

[4e] crossed out

[4f] world-view

[4g] I believe

[4h] always

[4i] when once love came, I have my relations to the man

[4k] as men do

[4l] 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.

[4m] for example (crossed out)

[4n] crossed out

[4o] crossed out

[4p] : the

[4r] "truly remarkable" (in quotes)

[4s] privately

[4t] crossed out

[4u] crossed out

[4v] can be dispelled (and crossed out)

[4w] that

Author's note with respect to 4: delete completely

Author's new note: Instead of deleting

For it is not her specific womanish virtue that gives her a place of honor 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.

[5] Author's correction: primarily upon all other areas

[6] Author's correction: and are not guided by sentimental love-feelings

[7] Author's correction: "spiritual community"

[8] Author's correction: inwardly, in the mind

[9] crossed out

[10] so that only a very subordinate place remains available to love

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

[12] crossed out

[13] crossed out

[14] crossed out

[15] crossed out

[16] Author's correction: old Russian landowner (class)

[17] crossed out

[18] Author's correction: experienced

[19] crossed out

[20] Author's correction: painfully felt the

[21] crossed out

[22] Author's correction: "rebelliously"

[23] Author's correction: in St. Petersburg

[24] crossed out

[25] crossed out

[26] Author's correction: liberal

[27] Author's correction: "good match" (in quotes)

[28] Author's correction: sixty

[29] Author's correction: "marriage of convenience" and "marriage for money" (in quotes)

[30] "great passion" (in quotes)

[31] crossed out

[32] crossed out

[33] Author's correction: the

[34] Author's correction: at that time; second correction: then

[35] Author's correction: more comprehensive [in German grosse, grossere – tr.]

[36] Author's correction: studies on the

[37] crossed out

[38] Author's correction: to my work

[39] crossed out

[40] Author's correction: and

[41] 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 the lib-

[42] Author's correction: against the bourgeois-minded

[43] crossed out

[44] Author's correction: not so easy

[45] Author's correction: comrades

[46] Author's correction: Since

[47] Author's correction: I

[48] crossed out

[49] Author's correction: and propaganda work among the masses of women-workers

[50] Author's correction: Czarism

[51] Author's note: delete

[52] Author's correction: the

[53] Author's correction: (the Mensheviks)

[54] Author's correction: insufficient

[55] Author's correction: the socialist

[56] Author's correction: And

[57] crossed out

[58] Author's correction: work

[59] Author's correction: at that time I had

[60] crossed out

[61] crossed out

[62] Author's correction: (the Mensheviks)

[63] Author's note: delete

[64] crossed out

[65] Author's correction: working

[66] Author's correction: a more zealous activity

[67] crossed out

[68] crossed out

[69] Author's correction: Duma

[70] Author's correction: a

[71] crossed out

[72] Author's correction: in Sweden

[73] crossed out

[74] crossed out

[75] Author's note: delete

[76] Author's note: delete

[77] crossed out

[78] crossed out

[79] crossed out

[80] Author's correction: at that time

[81] crossed out

[82] crossed out

[83] Author's correction: through revival of the

[84] crossed out

[85] crossed out

[86] Author's correction: both

[87] Author's correction: a new grouping took place

[88] crossed out

[89] crossed out

[90] Author's correction: of our Party

[91] crossed out

[92] crossed out

[93] Author's correction: our only and living aim

[94] Author's correction: I had to cross the whole of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and deliver lectures in the most different languages along the lines of the Internationalists

[95] Author's note: delete

[96] Author's note: delete

[97] Author's note: delete

[98] Author's correction: as soon as the political amnesty was declared by the new Republic I hastened

[99] Author's correction: who had the luck to

[100] crossed out

[101] Author's note: delete

[102] crossed out

[103] Author's correction: with the workers, the soldiers, the working women and the women soldiers

[104] Author's correction: I, however, was

[105] Author's correction: grew among the non-Soviet minded strata

[106] Author's correction: This gave our Party occasion to initiate enlightenment and political work among working women

[107] crossed out

[108] Author's correction: under the slogan of international solidarity and against the war

[109] Author's correction: the

[110] Author's note: delete

[111] Author's note: delete

[112] Author's correction: did not worry at all

[113] crossed out

[114] Author's correction: of the Bolsheviks

[115] Author's correction: Provisional (Kerensky)

[116] crossed out

[117] crossed out

[118] crossed out

[119] Author's correction: amicably

[120] Author's correction: strange

[121] Author's correction: of Bolshevism

[122] Author's correction: crossed out 34

[123] Author's correction: So far as I knew it was the first time in history that a woman

[124] Author's correction: great aims and

[125] Author's correction: in

[126] crossed out

[127] Author's correction: leper colonies

[128] Author's correction: etc.

[129] Author's correction: we formed

[130] Author's correction: my first day

[131] Author's correction: began as follows

[132] Author's correction: the most important achievements of our Peoples Commissariat (Ministry for Social Welfare) in the first months after the October Revolution were the following:

[133] crossed out

[134] crossed out

[135] Author's correction: to work out

[136] crossed out

[137] Author's correction: were

[138] crossed out

[139] Author's correction: etc.

[140] Author's correction: written in Russian, on laws which "obligated" 12-year old girls to become mothers and suchlike

[141] Author's correction: we

[142] Author's correction: our action

[143] crossed out

[144] Author's note: delete

[145] crossed out

[146] Author's correction: "red" (in quotes)

[147] Author's correction: period

[148] crossed out

[149] crossed out: Author's correction: I

[150] Author's note: delete

[151] crossed out

[152] Author's correction: also

[153] Author's correction: it was the

[154] Author's correction: who recognized the task of the political education of working women as a serious aim of the Party and helped us in our work

[155] Author's correction: emancipation

[156] Author's correction: to win them over to the new political system, to educate them politically

[157] crossed out

[158] Author's note: delete

[159] Author's correction: periodical

[160] crossed out

[161] Author's correction: Inessa Armand, and Samoslova

[162] crossed out

[163] Author's correction: we

[164] crossed out

[165] Author's correction: in Soviet Russia

[166] Author's correction: is

[167] Author's correction: only

[168] crossed out

[169] Author's correction: in the area of sexual morality

[170] crossed out

[171] crossed out

[172] Author's correction: wrote little: three short stories, "F Love," my first attempt at short-story writing, a sociological "Winged Eros," and other unimportant articles.

[173] Author's correction: that in

[174] Author's correction: and one half

[175] Author's correction: diplomatic activity

[176] crossed out

[177] Author's correction: the Soviet Republic

[178] Author's correction: The

[179] Author's correction: laid special claim on my energies

[180] Author's correction: laden with work

[181] Author's correction: (in fact) [in parentheses]

[182] Author's correction: we

[183] crossed out

[184] Author's correction: the trade agreement was ratified

[185] crossed out

[186] Author's correction: and to be sent to Mexico as ambassadress of the Soviet Union

[187] Author's note: delete

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