One of the most suggestive aspects of the current "women's liberation" movement in the West is the fact that the word liberation has replaced the word emancipation. Until recently, it has been customary in the Western world to describe the issue of women's role in life as the "woman question"; the progressive response to it as "feminism"; and its proper solution as "emancipation." Bolsheviks and other Russian revolutionaries, however, have usually avoided these terms as being excessively narrow. A hundred years ago Russian radicals of both sexes insisted that the so-called woman question was simply one facet of the "human question"—by which they meant the general social question or the problem of mankind. They rejected feminism, as it was then understood, and urged women to join the common cause of revolution and socialism. Finally, the word liberation (osvobozhdenie), with its Russian root and its verbal connotation of action, was used by Russians who wanted to free women, workers, and nations, in preference to emansipatsia, Latin in origin, often connoting a condition rather than an action, and subtly suggesting legal rather than violent means. The use of the word liberation by the present-day women's movement, I would suggest, is not simply a faddish attempt to get in step with Black Liberation, Mozambique Liberation, and Gay Liberation; it is rather that the word denotes more self-propelled activism than the older term. The history of the women's struggle in Russia is charged with a tension between the Liberators and the Emancipators.

There is little of this to be found in the history of Western feminism. Aside from the English suffragettes, and some American crusaders on the fringe of the feminist movement, there is little verbal or physical violence in the Western feminist tradi-

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2. A few examples of this attitude: The first known revolutionary manifesto addressed to women, "Ot Russkago Revoliutsionnago Obshchestva k zhenshchinam" (1869 or early 1870), published in Literaturnoe nasledstvo, XLI-XLII (1941), 147-150; N. K. Mikhailovskii, Sochineniia, 6 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1896-1897), I, 884-886; S. S. Shashkov, Istoricheskiia sud'by zhenshchiny (St. Petersburg, 1871), p. 313; Vera Figner, "Studencheskie gody (1872-1873)," Colos minuvshogo, X (October 1922), 165-181 (p. 181).

3. Here and in the coming pages, I use the word "feminism" and its derivatives in the conventional, historical sense, not in the sense used, for sound reasons, by the neo-feminist or Radical feminist groups of the present-day women's liberation movement in the United States. In Russia, both the feminists and the radicals differed from these in two important ways: in allowing themselves to be coopted by establishments or movements that were male-led and extra-feminist in their goals; and in playing down or ignoring the sexual factor in their approach to the woman question. For a guide through the labyrinth of contemporary American feminist ideologies (as of 1970), see Celestine Ware, Women Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation (New York, 1970), pp. 16-75.
tion. More important, outside Russia there was much less willingness to submerge the women’s cause in the general cause of social or national liberation. Feminists were, as a rule, legalist, moderate, polite, patient, and limited in their demands; and in most cases were more willing to accept reforms that would give some women a privileged position than to fight for general equality. In Russia there was, to be sure, a similar group of feminist—moderate, upper-class ladies and middle-class professionals—who followed their Western sisters along the path to “emancipation.” But alongside them, from the very beginning, appeared the Liberators: women and men who wished for total solutions and who placed the freeing of women in the context of freedom for all subjected and dependent social groups. The liberators, ranging in ideology from populism to Marxism and anarchism, and in tactics from scholarly polemizing to assassination, endeavored to solve the Human Question by liberation through revolution. Why did such a dichotomy between feminist and radical women appear so early and so sharply in Russia?

The answer is not to be found in any profound contrast between the status of Russian women and those of the West. In relation to the other sex, Russian women were hardly more subjugated or oppressed than European women. In some matters, such as property rights, they were better off. The birth of dissatisfaction resulted not so much from objective oppression as from the perception of injustice. It happened that educated Russian women became aware of their inequality just at the moment (1855-1861) when the intelligentsia was dividing into liberal and radical wings; the women, according to their temperaments, reading habits, associations, and even personal relations with their parents, divided also into moderate reformers and radicals (though it goes without saying that a large segment of them became neither). These two traditions, coalescing on rare occasions, continued along opposing paths until the Revolution of 1917.

I have described elsewhere how the “woman question” was introduced to the Russian reading public in the years following the Crimean War. The first to react to the problem were the counterparts of the Western feminists, women like Anna Filosofova and Nadezhda Stasova, well-born, educated, and past their first youth. Their approach to the problems of poverty, gross inequality, and ignorance among women was the dual one of education and philanthropy. Through the former they could push open the gates to professional and skilled-labor opportunity for those ready to qualify; through the latter, they could, in the meantime, care for urban victims of the system—peasant immigrants to the city, sweated dressmakers, prostitutes, and abandoned girls. In regard to philanthropy, the results were meager. Organizations financed and staffed by “charity ladies” from 1860 to the Revolution managed to care for only a minute fraction of destitute women. But in the process, these philanthropic societies gave their directors invaluable experience in organization which enabled some of them to become leaders in the suffrage struggle of 1905-1917. And in the matter of women’s education, the results were truly spectacular. Within twenty years, they had pressured the government of one of the most backward societies in Europe to open not only advanced high schools for girls of every social class, but women’s universities and medi-