
A good deal has been written by now about women’s struggle for equal rights in early twentieth-century Russia, much of it authored by Rochelle Ruthchild, a pioneer in the field of Russian women’s history. *Equality and Revolution* represents an important contribution to this historiography, offering not only insightful analysis but also significant new evidence drawn from both published and archival sources. Ruthchild’s principal argument here is that second-generation Russian feminists, collaborating at times with socialists, and inspired and encouraged by the international women’s movement, had considerable success in achieving their goals. This stands in contrast to the oft-advanced view of Russia’s women’s rights activists as well-meaning but largely ineffectual.

Analyzing feminist organizational and publicistic efforts during the 1905 revolution, Ruthchild points out an important early achievement. Noting that the Liberation movement did not initially make women’s rights an explicit part of its agenda, and that Liberationist demands for “universal suffrage” generally meant universal manhood suffrage, she observes that “In less than a year, by the beginning of 1906, largely as a result of feminist lobbying, representatives of the rural and urban local governments, the professional, trade, and peasants unions had included women’s suffrage planks in their platforms,” while “all the liberal and left parties were at least on paper supporting women’s suffrage and women’s rights” (p. 71). The author further demonstrates that, while socialist parties were often far from sympathetic to the demands of women’s rights, meaningful collaboration between socialist organizers and feminists did occur in these years, revealing a greater permeability in the boundaries between Russian socialism and feminism than is generally recognized.

Turning her attention to Russian parliamentary politics after the revolution, Ruthchild recounts feminists’ success in keeping equal rights issues, particularly the demand for enfranchisement, a focal point of the first two Russian Dumas through persistent lobbying, petitioning and other tactics. The formation by the First Duma of a commission on equal rights crowned the feminist leaders’ early efforts. And while subsequent attempts to push legislation through the Second Duma bore little fruit, women activists nevertheless won substantial support for their cause: “by 1908 on the left-liberal spectrum no significant opposition to women’s rights remained; the feminists had won a consensus if not in active support, at least in tacit acknowledgment of women’s rights” (p. 101).

The 1908 All-Russian Congress of Women, which marked a shift from the mass-movement phase of the women’s rights struggle to a period of “small deeds,” represented another major success for feminist activists. Convened despite increasing government repression and declining feminist resources, it was the largest legal assembly of women before 1917. Subsequently, its “participants presented the most comprehensive record of the overall status of women in the tsarist empire, spurred a pro-women’s rights sentiment in society, won recognition within the global feminist movement, sparked changes in socialist organizing strategies, and even caught Nicholas II’s attention” (p. 104). Following the Congress, a determined core of feminist leaders, inspired by the vitality of the global women’s movement, successfully adapted to declining suffrage prospects and growing disarray within the women’s movement to keep their cause alive and visible. Even in these difficult years, Ruthchild notes, activists won small but significant legislative victories from the Third Duma, including favorable changes to the country’s passport and inheritance laws; the certification of women’s higher educational curricula and degrees as
equivalent to those men could obtain at universities; and the same examination, pension and job rights for female as for as male middle-school teachers.

Between 1912 and 1914, the author argues, the growing divide between progressive society and the repressive regime meant that support for women's equality became an important means of expressing opposition to the autocracy. As a consequence, the limited collaboration between feminists and socialists characteristic of the earlier period of the women's rights struggle expanded. Workers and socialist party members joined with feminists at the First All-Russian Congress on Women's Education during the winter of 1912-13, for example, in demanding factory inspection reform. Feminist-socialist cooperation was evident as well in the separate organizations for women workers established within the socialist movement, and in the creation and commemoration of International Women's Day in Russia. Indeed, Ruthchild observes, “despite much [socialist] rhetoric about the 'bourgeois feminists,' many feminists defined themselves as socialists, many socialists defined themselves as feminists, and cooperation between activists across the spectrum was far greater than has generally be acknowledged by historians” (p. 194).

This cooperation was another measure of feminist leaders' success, as it greatly facilitated their efforts—through meetings, the press, and lobbying—to keep women's rights issues discernible in the politically repressive and disheartening years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War.

While remaining differences between feminists and socialists were exacerbated by the war, as Ruthchild observes, she focuses more on the convergence of interests that culminated in the events of the February Revolution when, on two major occasions, “women flocked to the streets, occupying public spaces and changing history” (p. 218). The first occasion, the International Women's Day demonstration in February, is well known; the second, the suffrage demonstration organized in March by the Women's League for Equal Rights, as the author points out, remains largely forgotten. Yet it was the latter protest, she contends, the largest women's demonstration in Russia’s history, that persuaded the Provisional Government not merely to endorse but to actually enact women's suffrage. Ruthchild shows further how Russian feminists reinforced their victory at the All-Russian Congress of Women the following month by adopting resolutions to ensure the government's compliance with its promise of enfranchisement. They also established a new coalition, the Republican Union of Democratic Women's Organizations, which at long last fulfilled the dream of many feminist leaders of a united women's organization. If the world war and the revolution that grew out of it had created the opportunity for the Provisional Government to grant Russian women suffrage as well as other equal rights, concludes Ruthchild, “ultimately women had to act to push their demands forward” (p. 240). In the final analysis, she clearly demonstrates, the success of Russian feminists' struggle for equality was due to their own energy, determination and political savvy.

Beyond its persuasive central argument, *Equality and Revolution* has a number of additional strengths. In tracing the course of the women's rights struggle, it provides a comprehensive account of the organizational, publicistic and myriad other activities of Russia’s leading feminists. As a study of women’s agency, it incorporates a careful examination of the political aims and strategies of such familiar actors as Anna Filosofova, Liubov Gurevich, Alexandra Kollontai, Maria Pokrovskaya, and Ariadna Tyrkova, as well as of less familiar figures, including Margarita Margulies-Aitova, Liudmila fon Ruttsen and Poliksena Shiskina-lavein. The book elucidates, in nuanced and fascinating detail, the often acrimonious divisions among feminist activists (as well as differences separating them from many socialist women), explaining how such divisions sometimes obstructed feminist work in the late imperial period as much or more than did government