

Union for Women's Equality

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After the Russian Revolution in 1905, many liberal women – especially those who had attended universities – began asking for civil and political rights. From this moment began the second

period of the development of Russian feminism. (The first had started with the philanthropic “triumvirate” of Maria Trubnikova, Anna Filosofova, and Nadezhda Stasova). The women’s movement became more diverse, but the main aim of each association and society was women’s civil and political equality.

In February 1905, a group of 30 liberal women in Moscow declared the formation of a national women’s political organization, the All-Russian Union for Women’s Equality (*Vserossiiskii Soyuz Ravnopraviya Zhenshchin*), whose general aim was “freedom and equality before the law without regard to sex.” Its first act was to petition the city Duma and the local *zemstvo* (the elective district council in pre-revolutionary Russia) for voting rights in those bodies (Stites 1978: 199). The leaders were journalists like Mariya Chechokova and Lyubov Gurevich from St. Petersburg, and Zinaida Mirovich-Ivanova and Anna Kalmanovich from Moscow. Soon two other important figures joined the association and strengthened it: the journalist Ariadna Tyrkova (1869–1962) and Anna Milyukova (1859/1861?–1935), wife of the future leader of the “liberal” Kadet Party (Party of Constitutional Democrats), Paul Milyukov (1859–1943).

Together they organized the first political meeting for women in Moscow on May 7–10, 1905. More than 1,000 participated, and Milyukova presided over the 300 recognized delegates. The charter adopted by the congress provided for an elected central bureau, autonomous local chapters, and special committees for politics, education, labor, and organization. The main points of the program were immediate convocation of a constituent assembly elected by the so-called seven-tailed suffrage (equal, direct, secret, and universal, without any distinctions), national autonomy, equality of the sexes before the law, equal rights for women, and laws for welfare, insurance, and protection of women workers.

Different approaches inside the movement (especially socialist and liberal ones) divided the Women’s Union and at the end of 1907 it collapsed, due to lack of unity and leadership together with official persecution by the social democrats. The congress of women on December 10–16, 1908 signaled the gap between the two main ideologies: liberal (represented by the Kadet Party of Tyrkova and Milyukova) and socialist (represented by Alexandra Kollontai and Varvara Volkova). Kollontai could not read

her essay against a “bourgeois” feminism and was obliged to escape to Germany, where the Russian émigré community was fairly strong.

SEE ALSO: Kollontai, Alexandra (1872–1952); Russia, Revolution of 1905–1907; Society for Cheap Lodgings; Women in the Russian Revolution; Women’s Movement, Soviet Union

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