

KS3 History

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4 lessons.

Alexandra Kollontai and Social Change

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Social policies

Following the October Revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks began to introduce changes to how Russians lived their lives. When these kind of changes are introduced by a government we call them “social policies”. After their victory in the Civil War in the early 1920s, the Bolsheviks had enough control to implement large changes to society. They wanted people to believe that the past was no longer relevant and that the Bolsheviks would build a new world for them. Some of these changes affected the lives of women and the family. The Bolsheviks also put a lot of effort into educating workers and peasants on communism and the Revolution.



The role of women

The **empowerment** of women was a goal for the Bolsheviks following the October Revolution. Prior to 1917 some wealthy women were educated but most poorer women were not educated and many were **illiterate**. Although women over the age of twenty had gained the right to vote in July 1917, they had not played a significant role in politics before the Russian Revolution.

Women gained greater freedom after the Revolution as the Bolsheviks declared women and men were equal. Women could now also own property. Under the Bolshevik Family Code of 1918 women could obtain a divorce from an unhappy marriage and **abortion** was made legal. Although these policies were introduced partly to encourage women to enter the workforce, they also attacked the traditional role of women as mothers and wives.



Alexandra Kollontai

Alexandra Kollontai was a leading female figure in the Bolshevik Party and was responsible for social policies. She was a feminist and wanted to completely transform the role of women in society. She wished to free women from the struggle of family life by setting up nurseries for childcare and canteens and laundries. She believed women would have more freedom if the state took on the responsibility of raising children. This would also allow women to have a job and earn their own money. Kollontai also believed in sexual freedom for women. However, some more traditional Bolsheviks - including Lenin - were fearful of Kollontai's ideas believing they were too **radical**.



The family

Bolsheviks, like Kollontai, viewed “the family” as outdated and believed it should be swept away. However, the policies the Bolsheviks introduced on divorce had some negative consequences. By the mid-1920s Russia had the highest divorce rate in Europe and many divorced women did not receive financial support to raise their children. So, although divorce was meant to make women independent, in practice it made some women poorer.

Up to 80,000 women supported the Reds during the Civil War, mostly in support roles as doctors, clerks and nurses. Following the Civil War, some Bolsheviks thought social policies had gone too far. Reforms were slowed down and abortion was restricted again in the 1930s. Although the Bolsheviks had wanted to empower women by the late 1920s only a small proportion of the Communist Party members were women.



Education

The Bolsheviks put a lot of effort into ensuring children were fed and had schools to attend. As much of the population were illiterate before the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks started a literacy programme to teach workers and peasants how to read. Free education was provided to children up to the age of 17 and working people were given access to universities. This was important as the Bolsheviks were aware that they were a small group controlling a large country. Therefore propaganda was used to educate the population about communism. Trams, trains and boats were painted with images and the key messages of the Revolution. The Communist Youth League was also created to help spread the ideas of communism and encourage people to engage in education.



Glossary

Abortion: a medical operation to end a pregnancy

Empowerment: to give someone the power and skills to do something

Illiterate: not able to read or write

Radical: favouring extreme political change



Comprehension questions

1. What conflict ended in the early 1920s?
2. Which Bolshevik wanted to transform the role of women in Russian society?
3. Describe two ways the lives of women changed during the 1920s.
4. Why did the Bolsheviks consider education to be a priority in the 1920s?
5. Challenge question - In what ways did the Bolsheviks change Russian society during the 1920s?



Return to the enquiry



Return to the enquiry

What were the Bolsheviks trying to achieve?

Sentence starter options

Following the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks tried to achieve multiple aims. For example, ...

The most important motive for the Bolsheviks was...

This is because...

This was more important than ... because...

- To spread communism
- To create a more equal society
- To hold onto power
- Radical change to society

