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’A Proletarian From a Novel’: Politics, Identity, and Emotion in the Relationship between Alexander Shliapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai, 1911-1935

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"A PROLETARIAN FROM A NOVEL": POLITICS, IDENTITY, AND EMOTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALEXANDER SHLIAPNIKOV AND ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI, 1911-1935* 

The love affair between the aristocrat Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai (1872-1952) and metalworker Aleksandr Gavrilovich Shliapnikov (1885-1937) intrigued both their contemporaries and historians of the Russian Revolution. When debating the role of trade unions at the Russian Communist Party’s Tenth Party Congress in 1921, Lenin drew snickers from delegates when he called Workers’ Opposition speakers Shliapnikov and Kollontai “class united,” reminding all of their past relationship as lovers. Robert Daniels, Leonard Schapiro and Richard Pipes, when discussing the Workers’ Opposition, identified Kollontai as “Shliapnikov’s mistress.” Daniels added that she had been the mistress of other men, “as she practiced the free love which she preached” and Schapiro explained further that she was “a colourful if somewhat unstable figure.”¹ There is no evidence that Shliapnikov and Kollontai were still lovers in 1921. Their relationship, which began in 1911, encompassed romantic partnership, political collaboration and friendship.²

* This article is based on research I conducted in Russian archives and libraries in 1991 and 1995, with funding from IREX and Fulbright-Hays. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2004 convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies in Boston, Mass. I would like to thank the following for their advice: Sally Boniece, Barbara Clements, Vladimir and Rita Kollontai, Lars Lih, Adele Lindenmeyr, Alexander Rabinowitch, David Ransel, Irina Shliapnikova, Victoria Tyazhelnikova, and anonymous readers.


Shliapnikov and Kollontai ceased being lovers in 1916, but remained political allies and friends for much longer. Thus, their relationship offers interesting material for considering the interplay between politics, identity, and emotions in history. Kollontai’s construction of her femininity and Shliapnikov’s identity as a worker-intelligent or “conscious” worker and professional revolutionary influenced their personal and working relationship. Moreover, communication between them reveals different emotional repertoires.


4. A “worker-intelligent” was a person whose main profession was manual work, usually skilled, but who also engaged in writing polemical articles or fiction. Such a person, according to Reginald Zelnik, existed “not so much in but at the margins of the intelligentsia world, where they always differed to some degree from other intelligence, even those of plebeian origin,” Law and Disorder on the Narova River: The Kreenholm Strike of 1872 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 225-26. Mark D. Steinberg’s Proletarian Imagination: Self. Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2002) comprehensively treats Russian “worker-intellectuals.” Zelnik judged “worker-intellectuals” to be a more exclusive group than “conscious” workers. Lars T. Lih, Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done? In Context (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007) has provided a new definition of soznatel’nyi rabochii as “pur- poseful worker.” He also redefines our understanding of Lenin’s conception of “professional revolutionary” as a “revolutionary by trade.” The opposite of soznatel’nyi was stikhiniyi, translated as “elemental” or “spontaneous.” Anna Krylova offers the concept of “class instinct” as an alternative to “spontaneity” in “Beyond the Spontaneity-Consciousness Paradigm: ‘Class Instinct’ as a Promising Category of Historical Analysis,” Slavic Review, 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1-23. Krylova cites Kollontai’s Voprosu o klassovoi bor’be (1904) to bolster her argument. Here, according to Krylova, Kollontai “argued that ‘proletarian ideals’ and ‘proletarian interests’ first manifested themselves in the worker as ‘instinctual’ forms.” See also Reginald Zelnik’s reply to her in “A Paradigm Lost?: Response to Anna Krylova,” Slavic Review, 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 24-33. All these terms of identity involve not only the attempt to translate rationally ordered and defined categories, but also the feelings associated with them. The boundaries between “instinct” or “spontaneity” and “consciousness” might not be so rigid as the categories suggest. According to Reddy, “The boundary between what counts as conscious or controlled and what counts as unconscious or subliminal seems to shift with great sensitivity to the precise test procedures and contexts . . . Evidence continues to mount . . . that emotions operate very much like overlearned cognitive habits” (The Navigation of Feeling, p. 20). Reddy’s contribution throws into doubt the juxtaposition of “conscious” or “purposive” to “spontaneous” or “instinctual.”

article relies on much new information to reconstruct the relationship and attempts to convey its nuances in a way that offers material for reflection on the uncomfortable relationship between "the worker" and "the intellectual" in early Soviet political and cultural history.

Shliapnikov played an important role in early Soviet political history as leader of the Metalworkers’ Union from 1917-1921, Commissar of Labor in 1917-18, and leader of the Workers’ Opposition within the Russian Communist Party. A metalworker from provincial Russia, he became a factory worker in his teens and a revolutionary in 1901. By 1905, he had joined the Bolsheviks. While he perfected his skills as a metalworker, he also attended Sunday school and read independently. Optimistic and energetic, Shliapnikov possessed a dry and caustic wit. He is perhaps best known for his sarcastic retort to Lenin at the Tenth Party Congress (1921) about the Bolsheviks being the "vanguard of a nonexistent class," which underlined his disagreement with Lenin’s pessimistic evaluation of Russian workers’ capacity for initiative after the Russian Civil War. Shliapnikov also had a reputation for being honest, kind and even-tempered, a Bolshevik who usually preferred persuasion to coercion. A police informant described Shliapnikov in 1915 as "a worker-intelligent" who was "a very talented metalworker," could "perform special assignments," and was "very careful and conspiratorial."
Kollontai was from a noble family and had been well educated at home and abroad. She was thirteen years older than Shliapnikov, she gravitated toward Marxism in the late 1890s and became a Menshevik after the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party split in 1903. She participated in the 1905 Revolution and was a well-known speaker and writer on issues relating to socialism and women. She advocated a new type of relationship between men and women as a part of the general project of women’s social emancipation and the construction of “a new woman,” who would conquer her own tendency toward submissiveness and would manage to reconcile her needs for autonomy and femininity. Kollontai struggled to reconcile these needs, as she interpreted them, in her own life.

Shliapnikov and Kollontai were lovers from 1911 to 1916. Their political collaboration began in 1914, when Kollontai joined the Bolsheviks, swayed by Lenin’s position on the war, and lasted until after the Eleventh Party Congress in 1922. Their friendship, although strained at times by political differences, continued into the early 1930s. In the early years, Kollontai constructed their relationship on metaphorical terms, as part of her quest to make...
intimacy compatible with autonomy. Moreover, she interpreted Shliapnikov’s identity rather simplistically, as an ideal proletarian who inevitably fell short of her expectations, as the actual proletariat failed to fulfill the idealistic dreams of Russia’s revolutionary intelligentsia. Shliapnikov appears to have been more consistent than Kollontai in placing their relationship on individual human terms. Eventually Kollontai appreciated him as a longstanding friend.

Kollontai deposited extensive materials in Russian archives (notably materials in her fond 134 in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History – RGASPI), but her most intimate diary entries and correspondence with male lovers were restricted until the mid-1990s. Therefore, these materials were unavailable to her biographers. New memoirs and diaries by Kollontai have been published recently, but they do not include some important archival materials, which shed much light on her relationships with men. This article relies largely on Kollontai’s and Shliapnikov’s correspondence and Kollontai’s diary entries about Shliapnikov and the Workers’ Opposition. Most of these materials are in the Kollontai fond in RGASPI, but a few letters are in the personal possession of Shliapnikov’s daughter, Irina. Shliapnikov was more circumspect than Kollontai in disposing of personal correspondence in his possession; although much related to his political activities and views survived, he destroyed most correspondence related to intimate person-

10. Kollontai’s personal fond 134 in Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’nopoliticheskoi istorii (hereafter RGASPI) contains four opisi, the last of which was opened to researchers in 1995. Kollontai’s handwritten diary entries in RGASPI about her romantic relationship with Shliapnikov and her participation in the Workers’ Opposition have not been published. The archived diary entries are not entirely trustworthy, however, because there are signs that after Kollontai wrote the originals, she altered some of them in order to conform to dictates of the Stalinist personality cult (see below for further discussion).

11. Only Arkady Vaksberg has explored these materials for his novel about Kollontai, Val’kiriia revoliutsii (Smolensk: Rusich, 1997). Written to entertain a popular audience, the novel fictionalizes many aspects of Kollontai’s life and lacks citations.

12. During the late 1940s and up to her death in 1952, she prepared typed memoirs of her life. In 2001 and 2004, these were published as Diplomaticheskie dnevniki, 1922-1940 v dvukh tomakh (Moscow: Academia, 2001) and Letopis’ moei zhizni (Moscow: Academia, 2004). These offer insightful reflections on Soviet and world political and social history as well as on Kollontai’s intellectual development as a socialist and feminist, but include almost no discussion of Kollontai’s romance with Shliapnikov and contain only brief references to her participation in the Workers’ Opposition. The preparation and publication of the “Diplomatic Diaries” is discussed in O. V. Chernysheva’s and V. V. Roginskii’s “Sud’ba ‘Diplomaticheskikh Dnevnikov’ A. M. Kollontai,” Novaia i noveishaiia istoriia, no. 5 (2002): 171-85. According to Kollontai’s grandson Vladimir and his wife Rita, Letopis moei zhizni was intended for adolescent girls to read. Thus, it would have been inappropriate for Kollontai to discuss her love life in it in detail (interview, New York City, March 25, 2006).
al matters. Thus, the picture of their relationship emerges chiefly from records Kollontai preserved.

When Shliapnikov and Kollontai first met, in Paris in late 1911, she was thirty-nine and he was twenty-six. Both traveled in socialist circles, although Kollontai was a Menshevik and Shliapnikov a Bolshevik. Such distinctions were not always fatal before the Russian Civil War, as members of different revolutionary factions and parties often found common ground on which they could work. Ivan Maiskii had written of Kollontai the preceding year: “She was thirty-eight at that time, but she looked like a young girl. Beautiful, intelligent, energetic, full of a spring-like joy in life, Kollontai drew many people to her.”\(^{13}\) Kollontai was very attractive, well-known, an intellectual, and a charismatic speaker. Shliapnikov in 1911 cultivated the refined dress and manner of a worker-intellectual. He was fit, mustachioed, and had receding, dark hair. The Finnish socialist Karl Wiik remembered Shliapnikov as “quiet and good-natured, never boisterous, never gesticulating or gushing, always dependable, clear-headed and tireless ... not like a Russian at all.”\(^{14}\) Kollontai and Shliapnikov first became acquainted after one of Kollontai’s speeches (“I spoke with passion, ... giving the best that was in me”). They met again at the funeral of the Lafargues and at Lenin’s apartment.\(^{15}\) At their third encounter, they decided to become better acquainted. After attending the theater together that evening, they took a stroll around Paris and talked for several hours. Kollontai carefully described this encounter in her diary. She was impressed that Shliapnikov, a worker, was capable of engaging her in debate. She described him as a “nice, cheerful, direct and strong-willed, ” a “proletarian ... from a novel.” Despite or perhaps because of the great differences between them in social origin and upbringing, when they began conversing that evening in Paris there was a “spark” \([zazhglóz’,] Kollontai wrote.\(^{16}\) Kollontai spent that night with Shliapnikov in Asnières, the working-class suburb of Paris where he lived.\(^{17}\)

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15. Paul and Laura Lafargue, who were prominent French socialists (Laura was the daughter of Karl Marx), committed suicide on November 26, 1911.
16. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 7-9, November 1911. Arkadii Vaksberg describes the encounter in Val’kiriia revoliutsii, but his description is fictionalized. My description here is based strictly on archival sources. I did not find any archival confirmation of the conversation Vaksberg describes as having occurred between Shliapnikov and Kollontai.
17. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 4, l. 4.
Corresponding to the importance she placed on personal autonomy, Kollontai's interpretation of the affair centered on herself as its initiator and as the one who would decide when to end it. At the time, she was on the verge of withdrawing from her longtime relationship with the Menshevik agrarian specialist Petr Maslov, as she felt his interest in her was "only sexual" and that he did not see her as an "intellectual equal." On the morning after she met Shliapnikov, in fact, Kollontai returned to her pension to find Maslov waiting by the door with a crushed expression (vid ubityi). To Maslov, who noticed she had not spent the night in her room, Kollontai announced that she had found a new lover and wanted to break off their relationship. According to Kollontai, Maslov was upset by the news (rasterialcia). Thus, Kollontai's affair with Shliapnikov served as the catalyst for a decisive break with Maslov. Kollontai's early diary entries and letters to her close friend Zoya Leonidovna Shadurskaia indicate that she did not expect the relationship with Shliapnikov to be enduring. The "boy" was only a symptom of her wish to part with Maslov, nothing more. Shliapnikov attributed more significance to the affair, as soon would become clear.

From the start, Kollontai interpreted the affair through the lens of her ideas about female autonomy. To Zoya she wrote:

By the way, if you haven't discarded my letter with the description of "our romance" with that one from Murom (Muromets) — return it to me, please. I am writing "notes of a single woman" and would like to include something from there. [She added] I want to be free! But that one from Murom will not give freedom, oh no! Indeed he's a man and would present his right as "husband". Where are those men of whom we dreamed, we single women, men as comrades, men as lovers...? 

18. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 7-9, November 1911, from Paris; Clements, Bolshevik Feminist, 69. Barbara Clements wrote of the affair: "A scholar of some reputation, Maslov was also a married man with a sickly wife and five children. He and Kollontai had been colleagues for years, but in 1909 they apparently became lovers. They managed to meet at conferences, during her many trips. The affair lasted about two years, until she ended it, even though he offered to divorce his wife. Kollontai told him that she could not take on the responsibility of someone else's children, and she cabled him not to follow her to Paris." (Clements, Bolshevik Feminist, p. 68, citing Po rabochei Evrope, p. 32).

19. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 4, ll. 4-5.

20. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, l. 9, November 1911. A. V. Belova has noted the intensely emotional charge of Kollontai's letters, which, she argues, reflected a broader tradition of correspondence among Russian gentry women. A. V. Belova, "Pis'ma A. M. Kollontai i traditsii "zhenskogo pis'ma" v russkoi dvorianskoi kul'ture," Aleksandra Kollontai: Teoriiia zhenskoi emansipatsii v kontekste Rossii v gendernoi pol'tske, p. 196.

Kollontai considered the details of her first meeting with Shliapnikov important to preserve, but as material for her literary attempts to present the woman as “subject” rather than “object” in relationships with men, not in order to preserve a complete historical record. Another letter from Kollontai to Shadurskaia (ca. 1911-12) reveals a selective approach to document preservation: “Dear one, have you received my long letter about [marked out word]? Tear it up. I now am terribly afraid of documents.22

At the time Shliapnikov and Kollontai met, he had already been living in Paris for three years and working in Parisian factories; he was also deeply involved in Bolshevik party politics and trade union organization. Kollontai had come to Paris in the spring of 1911 to work on her book, Po rabochei Evrope, and she remained there until January 1912, when she left Paris for Germany.23 After spending some time in Sweden in the spring, she joined Shliapnikov in Germany and spent the summer working on her book Obshchestvo i materinstvo. They resided in a metalworker community near Berlin.24 In a semi-autobiographical short story called “Thirty-Two Pages,” written during her and Shliapnikov’s sojourn in Germany in 1912, Kollontai described an educated woman’s relationship with a worker. Although Shliapnikov was in many ways different from the male character in the story, there were similarities between the conflicts the female character felt and those Kollontai felt between love and work in her relationship with Shliapnikov.25

For Kollontai, the relationship with Shliapnikov was appealing in that he was not better educated than she nor better versed in political or economic theory; also, he was kind and emotionally stable. Barbara Clements thought that Kollontai hoped Shliapnikov would not “attempt to dominate her,” as other men had.26 Nevertheless, Kollontai’s need for autonomy drove a wedge between her and Shliapnikov. Her diary entries and letters to her friend Zoya demonstrated ambivalence toward their apparently monogamous relationship from 1911 to the time she broke it off in July 1916.27

Despite the ambivalence with which Kollontai discussed the relationship in her diary and in letters to friends, the language in their correspondence was tender and affectionate. The emotions expressed in their language could

22. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, l. 25.
23. Kollontai, Iz moei zhizni i raboty, p. 32.
24. Ibid., pp. 34-35.
27. Irina Shliapnikova found references in Kollontai’s diary to affairs with one or two other young Russian SD worker-intelligentsya during her relationship with Shliapnikov, but I have not seen those references. I know of no evidence that Shliapnikov had other romantic or sexual relationships while he was involved with Kollontai from 1911 to 1916.
transform as well as nurture the relationship. William Reddy has advocated that historians pay more attention to emotions and has suggested that the expression of emotions can affect how they are experienced. While some have asserted that emotional discourses are of interest because they “establish, assert, challenge or reinforce power or status differences,” others have suggested that the history of emotions is more complex. Thus, surveying the forms of address that correspondents use can reveal much about their relationship, including the balance of power between them, their degree of closeness and perceptions of one another.

In Kollontai’s and Shliapnikov’s letters, unsurprisingly, both used the familiar pronoun ты (you) in letters from the period 1911-1916. Kollontai often referred to herself as бабен’ка (little woman) in letters to Shliapnikov, and called him her муж (husband), or by the nicknames “Саня” or “Санячка.” Shliapnikov called her by various affectionate nicknames (бабуш, бабь, чукхна, бабенка, and милая Шурка). Kollontai once expressed to Zoya annoyance that Shliapnikov called her бабушка (old woman), which had unpleasant connotations related to the age difference between them. Shliapnikov referred to himself as муж (husband) or by his nicknames (Саня, or Сания) in letters to Kollontai. In her diary during 1911-1916, Kollontai referred to Shliapnikov as “Алеk, Ай.,” and in her letters to Zoya, early during the relationship, she jokingly referred to Shliapnikov as “Avvakum” (a stubborn seventeenth-century Russian religious dissenter and a reference to Shliapnikov’s upbringing as an Old Believer), as Муромец (that one from Murom) or as мальчик (the boy). Such terms conveyed, even if playfully, that his social origins, his age and his provincial birth and upbringing made him the inferior of Kollontai, who was born into a noble family and brought up in St. Petersburg.

In some letters from 1914-15, Kollontai used a more intimate tone, calling Shliapnikov “sweetie,” “little dove,” “dearie” (милушечка, голубчик, дороугуля) and referring to herself as чукхна (the Russian slang term for Finns) or as бабен’ка (little woman). She combined discussion of work with motherly advice (“you must buy a coat, yours has worn out, and here one must be warmly dressed”) and a lover’s urgings for Shliapnikov to “hurry” from Stockholm to her in Copenhagen. When Shliapnikov apparently responded to her urgings with an explanation of further work to be done before he could leave, she conceded, “Чукхна не капризничает бол’шее. Простите. Милый Саня, буду терпеливо ждать’’ (“Чукхна will end her caprices; I will wait patiently, sweet Sanya”). Her acceptance of the affectionate term

29. Lutz and Abu-Lughod, in Language and the Politics of Emotion, p. 14, are among the former, while Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” is among the latter.
"Chukhna" acknowledged that she also was in some sense an outsider, due to her partially Finnish roots. By nationality and gender, Shliapnikov had some advantages over Kollontai when it came to the perceived balance of power in the relationship. In correspondence written in the mid-1920s, long after their relationship as lovers was over, both reverted to the formal pronoun Vy ("you") and used abbreviations of first names and patronymics in address. Such formality was due not so much to a change in intra-party relations, but instead to the end of intimacy in their relationship. 30

The early correspondence from Shliapnikov to Kollontai offers a perspective on his personality unavailable from other records. As one would expect of a "worker intellectual," Shliapnikov dressed well, read extensively, enjoyed cultural outings, and abstained from alcohol. Such workers, according to S. A. Smith, also "strove to forge a new model of masculinity," which "valorized self-control, the assertion of reason over emotion, autonomy in personal relations, and a more respectful, but not necessarily egalitarian attitude toward women." Although some of these men "reject[ed] family life as a distraction from the all-embracing demands of the struggle," others aspired to "an ideal of companionate marriage . . . based on emotional intimacy." 31

Shliapnikov never explicitly contemplated his masculinity in his writings, but the documents he left do reveal much about his self-identity. He was an active and practical revolutionary, who concentrated his energies on organizational work. He also had a quick, dry wit and a well-developed sense of irony, demonstrated in one instance in a short story he wrote, "Aviatory," about a worker who became a pilot, which led his fellow workers to regard themselves as "born aviators" as well. In attempting to form an "aviators' club," they met with various misadventures. 32 Most of his writings before the revolution consisted of revolutionary appeals, reports about the revolutionary movement in Russia, and about industrial practices and trade union organization, and letters to socialist leaders about organization, strategy, and his views on contentious matters of theory and tactics. He wrote only two short stories and no poetry, which set him apart from those workers who gravitated more fully toward the creative intelligentsia. 33

30. The letters from which these terms are taken include those located in Kollontai's fond 134 in RGASPI, as well as a few in the possession of Irina Shliapnikova.
33. Aside from the story mentioned above, Shliapnikov wrote about a young boy's decision to go to work in "Na fabriku," which was published in *Biblioteka proletariia, no. 8: sbornik* (Minsk: Zvezda, 1917), pp. 1-8.
Despite the rarity of his forays into fiction, Shliapnikov wrote letters to Lenin, Krupskaia and other Bolshevik leaders about organizational matters. These were mostly matter-of-fact, but at times he expressed in them frustration or optimism. He did not hesitate to take Lenin and other intellectual leaders to task when he thought it necessary to do so. For example, in March 1916, Shliapnikov chided Lenin for making unreasonable commands: “In the future, refrain from making sudden changes, otherwise it will be impossible to organize anything.”34 In March 1916 letters to Lenin and Zinov’ev, he criticized the “excessively abusive character” of some of Lenin’s articles in Sotsial-Demokrat and noted the potential harm of Lenin’s vitriole:

His attempts to dissociate himself from any Bolshevik because of the smallest disagreement have made practical people shun us. Pawns, ready to carry out Ilyich’s will, are not valued there. . . . [Ilyich] should not fly off the handle over trivia. He should use evidence, not curses, as the basis of his theses, and should not separate Bolsheviks into sheep and goats.35

Thus he behaved assertively not only toward Kollontai, but also toward male SD leaders. He saw himself as a revolutionary by trade and a purposive worker (Lih’s terms) with the duty to enlighten other workers and help them realize their individual and class potential.

Shliapnikov was reticent about his private life in public sources, but his letters to Kollontai reveal that he had a rich emotional life and did not shun emotional intimacy. Early in their relationship, Kollontai told her friend Zoya that Shliapnikov, with the “naïveté of youth,” sent her “crazy” love letters strewn with French phrases. A June 1913 letter expressed his torment over his perception that Kollontai wished to end the relationship. She had left a note telling him that she would be going to London to a conference. He followed her there, after telegraphing her the hour of his expected arrival. Disappointed not to find her waiting at the railway station, he then discovered that she had not even collected his letters. Moreover, none of his socialist comrades knew anything about the conference Kollontai had claimed to be attending. Shliapnikov suspected she had made up the entire story in order to escape him and he explained his anguish to her:

34. RGASPI, f. 2, op. 5, d. 674, l. 1, May [March] 4 (17), 1916, from Shliapnikov in Stockholm to Lenin. (This letter is labeled as “May” by the archive, but Shliapnikov wrote the month “mars” in French, indicating the letter actually was written in March.)
35. RGASPI, f. 2, op. 5, d. 660, l. 2, February 27 (March 11), 1916, from Stockholm; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 1, ch. 4, d. 1787, II. 1-2, March 12 (25), 1916, from Shliapnikov in Christiania to Zinov’ev.
I still very much love you and want to preserve in you a friend. I don’t want to kill in myself this beautiful feeling and I cannot bear to see and feel that you are now killing this love toward me, and only in service of some preconceived notion of “inability to unify love and work.” How false now these words sound and what am I supposed to think.  

Shliapnikov found it difficult to understand the conflict Kollontai perceived between “love and work” and interpreted her argument as one of personal dissatisfaction with him, as loss of love. He pled with her to maintain communications with him in the interests of friendship and to meet with him: “Don’t be afraid of me or of meeting me. It seems you know me? It’s not ‘heroism or magnanimity’ that speaks in me but love and friendship.”  

He asked her for a clear message: “But if I’m already so repulsive to you then send a small word — “n’aime pas” — this will be enough for me to leave you alone.” A postscript, although surely intended humorously, failed to acknowledge her need for autonomy within the relationship: “Perestan buntovat’ bednaia babenka, beloglazka! Vozvratis na ‘svoe mesto!’ (“Cease your rebellion poor woman, white-eyed one! Return to ‘your place’!) . . . Your Sanka, whom you’ve treated reprehensibly and hurtfully.” This is the only surviving document by Shliapnikov that expresses such raw emotions, conveying the sense of emotional suffering about which Reddy wrote: “When and in what ways ought one to seek out the loved one in order to bring about a change of heart? When and in what ways ought one to accept the loved one’s expressed aversion for oneself?” Most of Shliapnikov’s letters to Kollontai were calm and slightly humorous. In one, he wrote that not only he but also the cat missed her. He discussed politics and party organizational matters with her, assured her he was following a healthy diet, and painted pictures of landscapes and peoples he encountered in his travels. From New York he wrote, “In the port, when they held us all night, I fell in love with the skyscrapers, poking through the evening haze. . . . such strength, energy, enterprising spirit. . . . I feel that life in this country would not be so disagreeable as in Scandinavia.” Their romantic relationship continued for several years and their friendship lasted long after their relationship as lovers had ended, testifying to the importance of friendship to both of them.

36. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 1-3, June 15, 1913.  
37. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 1-3, June 15, 1913.  
38. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 1-3, June 15, 1913.  
39. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 1-3, June 15, 1913.  
41. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 17, July 14, 1916, from New York.
Shliapnikov’s and Kollontai’s political collaboration lasted from 1914 to 1922. He aspired to bring the Menshevik Kollontai over to the Bolshevik camp and he acted as her intermediary with Lenin’s circle. At one point, Shliapnikov wrote to Krupskaia: “On several matters she [Kollontai] will have to get in touch with you, about which I forewarn you and advise you to use these steps of hers for bringing her into our work. From my observations, I have made the conclusion that she has many points of convergence with us.”

During World War I, Kollontai’s and Shliapnikov’s relationship acquired greater political significance, as the war forced many socialists to change party or factional affiliations. In his correspondence with Kollontai and Shliapnikov, Lenin repeatedly pressured them to come out unambivalently for transformation of the war into a revolutionary struggle against imperialism, and strongly condemned their Swedish left socialist friends, such as Zeth Höglund, who took a pacifist stance. Shliapnikov expressed his complete agreement with Lenin’s views in the fall of 1914. Kollontai, who at first favored an end to the war, joined them in summer 1915. Their political collaboration facilitated the continuation of their romance, and vice versa. Lenin sometimes suspected that Shliapnikov subordinated party operations to his desire to be closer to Kollontai, allegations which Shliapnikov contested.

The relationship between Shliapnikov and Kollontai began passionately, but as the relationship continued, Kollontai felt increasingly as a tutor and maternal figure to Shliapnikov. In December 1914, for example, she wrote of Shliapnikov, “I help him much in his work. I’d like to help him get ‘on the path’. From him a leader could emerge.” In January 1915, she expressed weariness with their romantic relationship: “Oh, I even love Al., completely tenderly love. But how happy I would be, if he met a nice young thing who would be compatible.” Shliapnikov’s demands on her time and resources became too much for her. She wrote in April 1915, “Today I saw Alek off to London. . . . I can rest. [lines marked out] as always in his presence I worked on nothing, neglected even my clothes and sit without money [word marked out] (we live the two of us on those sums that I earn alone). . . .” And in

42. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 1, ch. 4, d. 1398, l. 7, April 25, 1914, letter from Shliapnikov in Berlin.
43. RGASPI, f. 2, op. 5, d. 484, ll. 3-4, October 24-25 (November 6-7), 1914, letter from Shliapnikov in Stockholm.
44. Farnsworth, Aleksandra Kollontai, pp. 47, 50-51, 55.
45. RGASPI, f. 2, op. 5, d. 495, l. 1, December 14 (27), 1914 and RGASPI, f. 2, op. 5, d. 496, December 15 (28), 1914, l. 1, letters to Lenin from Shliapnikov in Copenhagen.
46. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 6, 8, 9, 13-14, 18; RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 15.
47. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 83, ll. 26-28.
48. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 31, April 11, 1915.
March 1916, not long before she broke off the relationship, “Al. arrived on the third day. And in the first hours my heart was filled with purely maternal tenderness toward him. I was angry at myself, almost surprised: how could I again allow myself to make such a fundamental mistake – not to be candid.”

In particular, his presence severely curtailed the time she had available for her own work as a writer. In one case, Kollontai reported that just when she had collected her thoughts (several hours after telling Shliapnikov to leave her in peace) and started to compose, Shliapnikov appeared and urged her to go for a walk. When she protested that she had only begun to write, Shliapnikov admonished her for “dawdling.” Underscoring the social distance between them, Kollontai sarcastically retorted that writing was not the same as factory work. Besides distracting her by his presence, Shliapnikov also earned Kollontai’s resentment by prevailing upon her to translate his correspondence with socialist leaders of other countries (she was proficient in a half dozen European languages). Nevertheless, Shliapnikov tried to assist her by gathering material about the women’s movement wherever he traveled and by ensuring that publishers fulfilled their agreements with her, when she was unable to do so. His letters were supportive of her literary work, indicating that he valued and admired it and that he saw her as a companion. Shliapnikov attempted to fulfill the role of equal partner that Kollontai claimed she desired in a husband.

Kollontai, on the other hand, was long unable to move beyond her construction of Shliapnikov as an ideal proletarian in order to perceive him as a real human being with both strengths and flaws. When she became disappointed with the relationship, she also felt compelled to tear down her idealized image of Shliapnikov, yet she could not completely divorce him from the proletariat. Kollontai’s dissatisfaction with their personal relationship translated into disillusionment in Shliapnikov’s potential as a political leader. Kollontai still praised his qualities: “dedication to the cause, the bravery of youth, courage.” However, she was discouraged by her perception that Shliapnikov’s capacity for abstraction and generalization was not as well developed as she felt it should be:

I feel that as a politician Al[exander] is helpless and clumsy. ... What will become of him? I am afraid that he has been deflected from his path, he is no longer a “proletarian,” a worker with above-average qualities, but has not become a politician. For this he has too little knowledge, little habit for intellectual labor. ... He can [identify and overcome] ex-

50. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 3, l. 19, August 12, 1912, letter to Zoya Shadurskaia.
51. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 36, March 23, 1916.
ternal obstacles, but he does not have enough self-discipline for systematic organization of political work. I suppose it is my fault that he rose too quickly. He became a central committee representative too easily, without effort. 52

Kollontai based her evaluation chiefly on the lack of results from Shliapnikov’s trip to Russia in the winter of 1915-16. Kollontai’s intellectual disappointment with Shliapnikov contributed to her decision to end the relationship.

Kollontai’s decision to leave Shliapnikov arose from and provoked an array of emotional responses in her. In summer 1916, Kollontai’s doctor informed her she was undergoing menopause (she had thought she might be pregnant). Kollontai responded with surprise and defiance: “Already? This means the ‘crossing-over’ has come? No, I don’t sense old age upon me” (Uzhe? Znachit pereval? Net ne chuvstvuiu starosti). 53 Her awareness of imminent physiological changes influenced how she evaluated her relationship with Shliapnikov. Kollontai wrote, “It’s awful to me to lose in Sanya the last link with that page of life, which testifies that I am still a ‘woman’. . . . Not just female, but precisely a woman. . . . A woman whom a man can still love.” 54 She also wrote that she worried about offending Shliapnikov, since “Sanya for me is not simply Sanya, but a sort of collective part of the proletariat, a personification of it.” 55 Leaving a romantic and sexual relationship with a man who to her represented the proletariat, she also left Europe for the United States, to renew her relationship with her son, who had gone to the USA to work. Thus, at a time when she was questioning how biological changes and the end of her relationship with a lover affected her femininity, she found refuge in her role as a mother.

In the late 1940s, Kollontai recalled her break-up with Shliapnikov. At this point in her life, she explained to herself that her decision to leave Shliapnikov was that of a mother devoted to her child. Kollontai had arranged in 1916 for her son Mikhail and other Russian students to avoid conscription by going to the United States to work on Russian orders from U.S. factories. She decided to join her son, but was annoyed by Shliapnikov’s insistence on joining them. He had refused to understand her desire to spend time alone with her son and, according to her, had accused her of being like “a hen sitting on an egg.” Moreover, he had told his plans to Lenin, who naturally gave Shliapnikov assignments to carry out in the US. Kollontai resorted to subter-

52. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 37-38.
53. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 53.
54. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 70.
55. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 10, l. 70.
To prevent Shliapnikov from joining them (while he was away, she changed her own and Misha’s tickets to an earlier date). Kollontai explained her avoidance of a direct conflict with Shliapnikov by claiming, “To break Avvakum’s will directly was impossible.” She left a break-up letter behind for him in Scandinavia. This departure was remarkably similar to the way in which she left her first husband, Vladimir Kollontai. They met again in March 1917 in Petrograd, when Shliapnikov as a member of the Petrograd Soviet greeted Kollontai at the train station. Later, they had a long private discussion; Kollontai recalled that Shliapnikov “rebuked” her for having broken off with him so “rudely and hurtfully.” Remembering this in the late 1940s, she mused, “men do not forgive and don’t understand when a woman chooses her grown son over her husband.” This was not the last personal relationship that Shliapnikov would have with a noblewoman. In 1918, he had an affair with Kollontai’s friend Zoya Shadurskaia; in addition, the woman he eventually married (Ekaterina Sergeevna Volkovich-Voshchinskaia) had gentry origins, but like Shliapnikov had to make her own way in life through work. Kollontai’s next relationship would be with the Bolshevik sailor of Ukrainian peasant origins, Pavel Dybenko.

Even as their romantic relationship waned in 1915-1916, Shliapnikov and Kollontai continued to collaborate in arranging Bolshevik émigré communications with party activists inside Russia. Moreover, they shared faith in a revolution that would enable workers to take control of their own social and economic existence. Kollontai’s emphasis on personal autonomy resounded with Shliapnikov’s devotion to the role of the working class vis-à-vis the intelligentsia in carrying out the revolution. Kollontai as well as Lenin and Krupskaiia encouraged Shliapnikov to develop his abilities as a writer and as a politician, as a result of which Shliapnikov acquired a stronger identity as a “worker-intellectual.” Kollontai’s role as intellectual mentor, first to Shliapnikov and later to the Workers’ Opposition, was significant due to her gender

56. Kollontai, Iz moei zhizni i raboty, p. 45; RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 7, l. 15, July 9, 1916, letter from Kollontai to Shliapnikov. Unfortunately, I found this letter to be mostly illegible.


58. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 22, II. 1-6.

59. According to Irina Shliapnikova, who saw archival correspondence between Shadurskaia and Shliapnikov in 1918, Zoya broke off her romantic relationship with Shliapnikov because he was reluctant to openly acknowledge that they were lovers (she was his secretary at the time).

60. Dybenko (1889-1938) was of Ukrainian peasant origins, had been schooled up to age fourteen, worked as a stevedore in Riga, participated in strikes in 1910, and joined the Bolsheviks in 1912, after being conscripted into the navy. He led the Kronstadt strikes in 1917 and became the Bolshevik Commissar of the Navy (Clements, Bolshevik Feminist, p. 134).
and social origins, but the tensions between her and Shliapnikov mirrored those between the Russian intelligentsia and working class organizers.\textsuperscript{61}

Shliapnikov was already on the scene when the February 1917 Revolution toppled the tsar, but Kollontai was abroad, and sped to Russia as quickly as she could. Shliapnikov helped arrange the sealed train that transported Lenin and the other Bolshevik émigrés across Germany, Sweden, and Finland to Petrograd and he was one of a group of leading Bolsheviks in Petrograd who greeted Lenin at a railway station on the Russian border.\textsuperscript{62} Both he and Kollontai were very close to Lenin in his views on the Provisional Government and the war, but for Shliapnikov, this was far less a matter of following Lenin’s orders than sharing his general outlook. Still, there were differences of nuance in their views. Lenin’s views, outlined in a set of theses and a series of letters he wrote in early March 1917, consisted of opposition to the Provisional Government, a call for Soviet rule, and opposition to the war. Shliapnikov supported forming a provisional revolutionary government by means of negotiation with other parties in the Soviet.\textsuperscript{63} Lenin’s “April Theses” called for transformation of the world war into international proletarian revolution, for a policy of opposition to the Provisional Government, and the total rejection of any efforts to heal the schism in the Social Democratic Party. Nevertheless, Lenin did not endorse appeals of Bolsheviks on the far left who called for an immediate seizure of power. At first, Kollontai was the only one to support the “April Theses.” Nevertheless, Lenin quickly convinced a majority of party members to support his views, including Shliapnikov.\textsuperscript{64}

In the spring and summer of 1917, Shliapnikov placed priority on organizing metalworkers into a union and negotiating a wage agreement with employers, while Kollontai worked on the Bolshevik women’s journal \textit{Rabotnitsa} and was involved in organizing women workers and supporting women

\textsuperscript{61} Underground worker-revolutionaries doubted intellectuals’ dedication to the cause, a skepticism strengthened by the behavior of many intellectuals during and after the 1905 revolution, when the violence of mass demonstrations and strikes repelled some intellectuals from revolutionary social democracy and others were driven away by tsarist repression. See Ralph Carter Ellwood, \textit{Russian Social Democracy in the Underground: A Study of the RSDRP in the Ukraine, 1907-1914} (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), p. 61. Worker-activists felt that intelligent leaders of socialist democratic circles excluded workers from decision-making and they “resented the ability of the \\textit{intelligency} to fly into town and expect a leadership position.” Wynn, \textit{Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia, 1870-1905} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 149-50.


laundry workers in their strike movement. Both supported the October Revolution, but did not back a Bolshevik monopoly on power. After the October Revolution, both joined the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), Kollontai as Commissar of Social Welfare and Shliapnikov as Commissar of Labor. Archival records from meetings of Sovnarkom in late 1917 indicate that both Shliapnikov and Kollontai were willing to show some mercy to "enemies of the revolution." Both were far less likely than Trotsky to rely on arrests to ensure their control of their commissariats and they expressed opposition in November 1917 to Trotsky's policy of arresting recalcitrant tsarist generals. 65

From 1918 to 1919, Kollontai and Shliapnikov were infrequently in the same location at the same time. Kollontai worked in Zhenotdel and Shliapnikov served on the Caspian-Caucasian front. While Kollontai aligned herself with the Left Communists who opposed Brest-Litovsk in spring 1918, Shliapnikov did not get involved in this dispute. Nevertheless, they collaborated in labor organization and protection. Kollontai consulted with Shliapnikov's Commissariat of Labor on protection of women working in industry and she went to the All-Ukrainian Congress of Trade Unions in Kharkov in April 1919 as a delegate from the Metalworkers' Union (which Shliapnikov chaired). 66 There she helped to organize working women. 67 During the civil war, Kollontai often intervened on behalf of the arrested, while Shliapnikov believed indiscriminate arrests to be unnecessary and harmful. 68 Both were struck by disease during the civil war; Shliapnikov contracted Menière's syndrome, which would afflict him with episodes of vertigo and ringing in the ears for the rest of his life, and eventually periodic deafness. Kollontai suffered from a heart attack and typhus.

After the end of their romantic relationship, Shliapnikov not only continued to work with Kollontai productively, but he also confided in her and sought her advice. Political discussions with Shliapnikov in early 1920 provided a stimulating outlet for Kollontai's mental energies at a time when she was too unwell to undertake systematic work and when her relationship with Dybenko was foundering. There is no evidence, however, that she and Shliapnikov resumed a romantic relationship. Instead, Kollontai became an early confidante and supporter of the "Workers' Opposition," which sought

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65. GARF, f. 130, op. 1, d. 1, I. 8, 12, November 19 and 21, 1917. See also Clements, Bolshevik Feminist, p. 123.  
trade union management of the economy within the framework of a Communist dictatorship and democratically elected trade union leadership. In the winter of 1919-1920, Shliapnikov opposed Trotsky’s proposals for “militarization of the working class” and he discussed these views privately with Kollontai. When he and other trade union leaders formed the Workers’ Opposition in early 1920, he brought a draft position statement for her to read and comment upon.69 Given her revolutionary romanticism and idealization of the proletariat, Kollontai was sympathetic to the Workers’ Opposition.

Records of private meetings of the Workers’ Opposition show Kollontai assuming a role like that of mentor for the group, but she was not the initiator of the group’s proposals, as she has sometimes been presented.70 Although no women signed the theses of the Workers’ Opposition, the group did have some working-class female supporters. Nevertheless, the aristocratic Kollontai was the only woman who played a prominent role in the Workers’ Opposition at a national level. Kollontai was a charismatic speaker; Shliapnikov and other male working-class leaders of the Workers’ Opposition valued her contribution to the group as an orator, publicist, and advisor. Nevertheless, as an intellectual woman from the pre-revolutionary aristocracy, she was neither metalworker nor trade union leader, therefore tensions between her identity and that of the group persisted. The relationship between Kollontai and others in the Workers’ Opposition reflected the often strained relationship between workers and intelligentsia within the Russian revolutionary movement as a whole.

Illness (a heart attack in November 1919) and preoccupation with work in Zhenotdel contributed to Kollontai’s initially low profile within the Workers’ Opposition. By the Ninth Party conference in September 1920, however, Kollontai was ready to speak on behalf of the Workers’ Opposition and she did so forcefully. Joining with Sergei Medvedev and Ivan Kutuzov, she demanded guarantees that workers would comprise at least half the places on regional party committees and that those who criticized would not be sent to “eat peaches.” (Kollontai was referring to the dispatch of troublesome party members to warmer climes, far from Moscow.)71 Despite the fact that Kollontai

69. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 34, II. 3-4, February 5, 1920: Arkady Vaksberg, in Val’kiriia revoliutsii, inaccurately represents Kollontai as the moving force behind the Workers’ Opposition. The records of the Metalworkers’ Union, however, show that the Workers’ Opposition was not Kollontai’s creation.

70. Tsentr’nyi arkhiv Federal’noi Sluzhby Bezopasnosti (TsA FSB), R33718, d. 499061 (materials relating to the investigation of the Workers Opposition – Moscow group, 1935-37), volumes 42-43, materials confiscated from S. P. Medvedev. NKVD files contained 56 volumes of material on the Workers’ Opposition; I saw 15 volumes.

71. Deviataya konferentsiya RKP(b), sentiabr’ 1920 goda: protokoly (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1972), pp. 175-76 (Medvedev), pp. 186-87 (Kutuzov), and pp. 187-88 (Kollontai).
only began to actively participate in the opposition in late 1920, she has been widely viewed as one of the leaders of the Workers’ Opposition. This impression is bolstered by her pamphlet *Rabochaia oppozitsiia* for the Tenth Party Congress (1921).

At the Tenth Party Congress, Kollontai’s pamphlet came under particularly vicious attack, by Lenin and other party leaders. For Kollontai, however, these attacks were less distressing than the way in which Shliapnikov and Medvedev distanced themselves from her. When at the congress the party Central Committee convened a “private conference of underground Bolsheviks,” Shliapnikov and Medvedev told Kollontai she could not attend because she was “not an underground Bolshevik.” She discovered later that the entire agenda of the meeting “was dedicated to my brochure,” and that Shliapnikov and Medvedev had renounced the brochure, Medvedev affirming that he had not even read it. Kollontai felt betrayed by their action:

This I didn’t expect at all! Wasn’t it their theses and thoughts I was expressing? Wasn’t there here the fruit of many discussions? Didn’t they get angry at me when I didn’t speak at meetings with them (I had no time). They nearly rebuked me of cowardice – and now, at the congress, after V. I.’s speech – into the bushes.  

It is likely that male leaders of the Workers’ Opposition were ambivalent about allowing Kollontai to represent them. Shliapnikov’s decision not to take responsibility for Kollontai’s brochure never changed. At his 1932 Gosplan purge session in 1932, Shliapnikov insisted, “A. M.’s book was written about the Workers’ Opposition,” not in its name. He emphasized that it had not been signed by members of the Workers’ Opposition, therefore was not an official document of the group. Before the purge committee, Shliapnikov said he would “answer fully” for his own publications, but would not answer for Kollontai’s. One might interpret his words variously as political cowardice or as justifiable refusal to take responsibility for another’s words, which perhaps were not agreed upon in advance. It is also possible that Shliapnikov was protecting her by refusing formally to link her publication with his own proposals. Unfortunately, I am aware of no sources that explicitly spell out the Workers’ Oppositionists’ disagreements with Kollontai’s portrayal of them in her pamphlet. Although Kollontai claimed to be expressing the views of the Workers’ Opposition in her pamphlet, she may instead have made an original theoretical contribution with this work that differed from Shliapnikov’s proposals.

72. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 2, March 23, 1921.
Although the Workers' Opposition was banned and its program characterized as anarcho-syndicalist, Shliapnikov and other leading members were elected to leading posts in the Party. Kollontai felt that Shliapnikov had betrayed not only her, but also "the workers":

The workers, those who sincerely wanted to do something, to change something — are dismayed and perplexed. I went home with a heavy heart. ... All this is very difficult. I don't go to visit Shl. He meets me on the stairs: "Why don't you drop in on me?" "I don't have time, A. G." ... It's amusing: "the apparat" immediately changed its attitude. ... I can't get a car, when I call to the garage. I had a special order for the ration of a sick person — but then it was cancelled and so forth. But this is not painful! What is painful is disappointment in my comrades, in such a friend as Shl. 74

Just as in 1916, her disagreement with Shliapnikov's political behavior led her to mentally remove him from the proletariat. Moreover, despite Shliapnikov's refusal to defend the Opposition to the end at the Congress and his willingness to enter the CC, she wrote, she was well aware "that in the evenings they [members of the Opposition] still meet in Shliapnikov's room and again 'criticize' and again 'crack jokes'." 75 Kollontai saw his actions as hypocritical, while he thought he was making a strategic retreat. She responded to the Opposition's defeat with emotions of disappointment and frustration, while Shliapnikov deflected disappointment with sardonic humor and overly optimistic hope that he might accomplish something significant through his new posts as a member of the Central Committee and the central purge commission and as chairman of the commission to improve workers' living conditions.

Shliapnikov and many of his colleagues, galvanized by their distrust of the New Economic Policy, fully intended to continue organizing and winning supporters for their views after the Congress ended. Shliapnikov instructed his followers among trade unionists to take over party organizations at the local and regional level. 76 Kollontai was not a trade unionist and so could not take part in this struggle, even if she had so desired. It is unlikely she desired to do so, since after the discouraging defeat at the Tenth Party Congress she took solace in her work among women: "among women it's always easy for

74. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, II. 3-4, March 23, 1921.
75. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, II. 3-4, March 23, 1921.
me. Among them I know how it's necessary to act, what will help work, what to avoid. And their attitude toward me is warm.\textsuperscript{77} Friendship with Shliapnikov and other trade union leaders had played a role in her initial involvement with the Workers' Opposition, but when politics strained those friendships, she retreated to the stronger bonds of female companionship and work among women.

Nevertheless, by July she had forgiven Shliapnikov and tried to help him and his supporters by speaking on their behalf to the Third Congress of the Comintern on July 5, 1921. Again her eloquence was more than Shliapnikov had bargained for, even though her appeal was made at his urging.\textsuperscript{78} Claiming to speak in the name of a "small minority" of the Party (which Russian party leaders immediately understood to mean Shliapnikov and his supporters), Kollontai warned that NEP threatened to disillusion workers, to strengthen the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie, and to facilitate the rebirth of capitalism. Like Shliapnikov in his private speeches and reports to the politburo, Kollontai complained that NEP ignored the "creative energy of our working class" as an instrument to resolve economic problems. In a conclusion that invited a fierce counterattack, Kollontai declared that the only recourse was to maintain within the party a "strong core" of Bolshevik stalwarts, who in the case that NEP killed communism in Russia, could undertake a second worker revolution. In her words, this legion "would take the red banner of revolution into their hands, in order to secure the victory of communism in the whole world."\textsuperscript{79}

In their replies, Trotsky and Bukharin attacked Kollontai, as Shliapnikov's surrogate. Almost certainly, she was stating aloud the secret thoughts of Shliapnikov, Medvedev and other Workers' Opposition leaders. Even so, Shliapnikov criticized her for delivering "too hasty" and unpersuasive a speech. Kollontai later wrote with some regret of her speech, which she in retrospect felt was somewhat quixotic: "But again 'my friends' led me into this. Shl. and Medv. pestered me: Won't you speak? Won't you say that not all support the course to NEP?\textsuperscript{80} Shliapnikov's unwillingness to stand by Kollontai when she was under attack made the barbs and insults more difficult for her to withstand.

Kollontai's devotion to worker empowerment and her friendship with Shliapnikov were strong enough to withstand her 1921 disappointments and defeats. In early 1922, when Shliapnikov and twenty-one other Russian trade

\textsuperscript{77} RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 15 July 30, 1921.
\textsuperscript{78} Tretii vsemirnyi kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala. stenograficheskii otchet (Petrograd, 1922), pp. 367-69. The congress was in session from June 22 through July 12, 1921.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, II. 21-24, August 2, 1921.
union leaders decided to appeal to the Comintern to protest the Party's clampdown on heterodoxy among workers. Kollontai and her friend Zoya Shadurskaia were persuaded to add their signatures to those of the twenty-two male trade union leaders. Kollontai had not collaborated with Shliapnikov in opposition since summer 1921 and there is no evidence she was present at any of the private meetings Shliapnikov held with other original signatories in February 1922. Nevertheless, she shared Shliapnikov's concerns, as well as his hopes for the Comintern's impartiality and his sense that appeal to it was the only route that remained. Moreover, Shliapnikov and Medvedev had always valued her persuasive rhetorical talents and hoped she might sway an international audience. Shadurskaia was motivated to sign the letter both by the ideals she shared with Kollontai and Shliapnikov and by her friendship with both of them.

The Twenty-Two signed and presented their appeal to the Comintern on February 26, 1922, but Russian Communist Party leaders prevented Kollontai from speaking on behalf of the Twenty-Two and persuaded Comintern leaders to condemn the appeal. Kollontai's assessment of the appeal weakly underlined a vague hope in its significance as a principled act: "At least someone decided to speak the truth. And I think, that this act will not pass in vain, it will force some to think, to understand that it is not possible to continue so further." By the time the Eleventh Party Congress convened in March 1922, there was much talk of excluding Kollontai, Shliapnikov, Medvedev and other signatories of the letter from the Party. Nevertheless, Kollontai sensed "vacillation" and a "wait-and-see attitude" at the top. Facing a combined threat together, Kollontai, Shliapnikov, and Medvedev gave eloquent and moving speeches at the closed session of the party congress. The delegates by a narrow margin decided not to exclude Kollontai, Medvedev, or Shliapnikov (two other signatories were excluded) from the party. Not only was Kollontai overjoyed by the decision itself, but also by how Shliapnikov and Medvedev had stood with her this time, not abandoning her.

After the Eleventh Party Congress, Shliapnikov continued to participate in intraparty political struggles. He expressed concern that during NEP the party gave insufficient attention to developing industry and that the party leadership stifled discussion. He was implicated in the investigation of the "Workers' Group" in 1923-1924 and in investigations of oppositionist groups in Baku in 1926 and Omsk in 1930. Kollontai dabbled in politics related to the

81. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 37.
82. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, l. 9-10, 13.
83. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 36-39, March 12 - April 11, 1922. At the beginning of this section of the diaries (l. 32), Kollontai wrote, "This is all not for publication."
84. Barbara C. Allen, "Transforming Factions into Blocs: Alexander Shliapnikov, Sergei Medvedev, and the CCC Investigation of the "Baku Affair" in 1926," in "A Dream Deferred:
"Workers' Group" affair in 1923, but she soon tired of political struggle. She kept in touch with Shliapnikov and others of her former co-Oppositionists, but for political and personal reasons accepted diplomatic work that took her abroad after 1922. Personal reasons included a wish to leave Russia after Dybenko's failed suicide (brought on because Kollontai broke off her relationship with him after finding out about his mistress). In addition, she had come under fire from party leaders who thought her work on behalf of women was too inflammatory and threatened the consolidation of socialist government in rural and minority nationality areas.

Infrequent visits to Moscow and the unreliability of international communications meant that Kollontai for the most part was isolated from internal party struggles after 1922. Kollontai noted that whenever she returned to Moscow in the 1920s, she met with her old friends, including Shliapnikov and Medvedev, and discussed politics with them. In August 1923, it vexed her that they addressed her in an ill-natured ironic tone, accusing her of enjoying her "honorary exile" and of not having time for old friends. By the time she returned to Moscow in December 1923, however, she noted that her meeting with Shliapnikov and Medvedev was "good, comradely" and Shliapnikov was more like his old self from the emigration days when she and his friends called him zolotoe serdece ("golden heart"). She blamed Medvedev for Shliapnikov's earlier ironies.

Kollontai attended the Fourteenth Party Congress where Stalin thwarted Zinov'ev and Kamenev in their attempts to use Lenin's last testament against him and where evidence of Stalin's personality cult first began to appear. She referred to the congress as "nervous, difficult" and expressed surprise to see Zinov'ev in opposition. She saw many old comrades of hers among the Leningraders (supporting Zinov'ev and Kamenev). Although she recognized discontent among the "masses of workers," to her the factional struggle appeared motivated by personal rivalries between Zinov'ev and Stalin; she criticized Trotsky for advocating extraordinary measures. She said she thought that none of the factions had the support of the masses but that it was not clear what the masses wanted. She praised Stalin as the "personification" of the party "as Lenin was," as "stronger and more courageous" than Zinov'ev and Kamenev. She wrote that Shliapnikov and Medvedev "lean toward

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85. RGASPI, f. 76, op. 3, d. 296, II. 25-44, Dzerzhinsky's speech to the politburo on September 19, 1923.

86. Diplomaticheskie dneviki, 1: 156-57 and 182-83. See footnote 14 above for discussion of this book.
the Leningraders" but that the "Stalinists" were "closer personally" to her.\textsuperscript{87} The antipathy she expressed toward Zinov'ev was characteristic of her earlier relations with him. Her relations with Trotsky had been tense at times too. Her disagreement with Shliapnikov, however, signified a change in their political relationship.

Kollontai wrote more ambivalently about Shliapnikov than about Stalin's other opponents. In \textit{Diplomaticheskie dnevni}ki Kollontai referred several times to Shliapnikov and included some of her letters to him (without naming him). To her credit she refused to vilify her old friend and former lover who was executed in 1937 as an "enemy of the people." Instead, she recalled fond memories of their pre-revolutionary relationship, although she discussed only their working relationship, not their romantic partnership. She and Shliapnikov collaborated in economic work, particularly when he worked on a board for the import of metals into the USSR from Europe in 1927-1929. Kollontai helped him with trade agreements, musing wryly in a letter to him that if anyone had told them in 1911 as they strolled in Asnieres that sixteen years later they would be corresponding about the quality and price of iron, they'd have considered it to be the ravings of a lunatic.\textsuperscript{88} In a 1927 entry she expressed deep disappointment that Shliapnikov regarded her as a "careerist" for her attacks in \textit{Pravda} on Trotsky's opposition in 1927; after this she went for a short vacation to Holmenkollen to the same tourist hotel and the same room where Shliapnikov had resided in 1915. This was to "ease" her soul.\textsuperscript{89} The nostalgia in which Kollontai indulged was typical of Russian intellectuals who survived the 1930s, according to Fitzpatrick.\textsuperscript{90}

Besides including a few of her letters to him in her diplomatic diaries, Kollontai preserved some of Shliapnikov's letters to her.\textsuperscript{91} These letters discussed mostly nonpolitical topics, making only brief allusions to internal

\begin{itemize}
\item [87.] These short notes were not included in the diplomatic diaries published in 2001. The first part appears to have been edited and the second part, which includes fulsome praise for Stalin, could have been added later (RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 44 ll. 6-10, February 3, 1926, Oslo). From 1922, entries in Kollontai's diaries and published reminiscences become more suspect, especially in their assessment of Stalin and his opponents within the party. For example, in a section of her archival fond, there are typed pages about her decision to leave Russia; according to these, when she decided to seek assignment abroad she wrote to Stalin rather than Zinov'ev, because she did not get along with Zinov'ev; here she calls Stalin a "responsive comrade" (otzyvchivyi tovarishch); strikingly, after these typed pages follow handwritten pages (perhaps the original draft) that seem to relate the same events, but with much less written about Stalin (RGASPI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 15).
\item [88.] \textit{Diplomaticheskie dnevni}ki, I: 310, May 15, 1927, letter "to an old comrade."
\item [89.] \textit{Ibid.}, I: 328-29, December 20, 1927.
\item [90.] "Happiness and Toska," p. 360.
\item [91.] RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, A. G. Shliapnikov's letters to A. M. Kollontai, November 23, 1925-May 11, 1932.
\end{itemize}
party politics. Shliapnikov traded ideas with Kollontai on literary work, he informed her of his children’s development, his family’s health, and his work, and made requests. 92 One particularly long and detailed exchange regarding a favor reveals much about the methods Shliapnikov employed to persuade Kollontai. Explaining that doctors had advised he take up boating to relieve the symptoms of Menière’s disease, he requested that she send him a Swedish motor. When she seemed reluctant to become involved in the details, he promised she only needed to take care of the formalities involved in sending the motor to the USSR, that he would send all specifications to friends in Stockholm who would procure it. Despite these good intentions, however, she did become involved in the details, to her frustration. Shliapnikov wrote at one point:

"You give yourself many unnecessary worries... It would have been better if you’d just picked a motor based on the specifications I provided rather than treating it as a matter of critical discussion. Here every Swede and Norwegian has his sympathies and in general all types are about the same. So the summer has passed, and the boat stands without a soul. Your pace is Norwegian (Tempy u Vas norvezhskie). [And later:] As you see, in our conditions even kindness can turn into obligation. But however sad this is, one must drink the bitter cup to the end, since it’s too late to turn this over to other people and other countries. 93

While acknowledging her kindness, he with gentle irony chided her for inefficiency and reminded Kollontai of the need to follow through on her commitment.

Stalinist ostracism of dissenters limited Shliapnikov’s social circles and his participation in work. The Menière’s disease that afflicted him produced noise in his ears, which was amplified by the urban noise of Moscow and of harangues at official meetings. He found solace in writing. In Shliapnikov’s later letters to Kollontai, one finds a reflection of the tranquility he sought.

92. His son Yuri was born in 1926 and his daughter Irina in 1930; the letters end before Shliapnikov’s third child, Alexander, was born in 1932. His requests included: reading material in French and German, medicines and medical supplies which could not be obtained in Russia (including a surgical corset for his wife after delivery of their daughter in 1930), a typewriter, baby food and formula supplements for his daughter, and a floored camping tent for four.

93. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, ll. 11-27, nine letters from Shliapnikov to Kollontai, May 15 through October 24, 1930. He finally did receive the motor. When Alexander Shliapnikov was in forced internal exile in Astrakhan in 1936, he requested his family send him the motor so that he could sell it for funds to help a co-exile, evidence that Shliapnikov used his resources to help others as much as he requested help from those with greater resources than he (interview with Yuri Alexandrovich Shliapnikov, Lawrenceville, NJ, summer 2004).
during times of political turbulence. To Kollontai, across the border, he could safely write about family life, especially about the interests of his son, Yuri, born in 1926.94 Reporting to Kollontai that he was teaching his son at age four to shoot from his rifles, Shliapnikov joked that Yuri was “experiencing the stage of ‘primitive militarism’.”95 Shliapnikov often wrote of the difficulties in obtaining children’s consumer items.96 Kollontai’s grandson Vladimir was born in 1928, so the presence of small children in their lives provided a means of personal connection.

Understandably, Shliapnikov wrote to Kollontai during these years without mentioning the political investigations of him in 1926 and in 1930. His letters to her were sent through official routes. Sometimes he only cryptically informed her that there would be much of interest to discuss with her upon her next arrival in Moscow. Police surveillance meant he could write about current events only in letters sent through trusted friends. The letters Kollontai preserved did not include any sent by this route. Shliapnikov found it possible to make brief references to controversies regarding his books. His last letter to Kollontai, written February 21, 1932, reported the fate of his memoirs of 1917, which had come increasingly under attack since Stalin’s 1931 letter to the editors of Proletarskaia revoliutsiia outlining an exclusively ideological approach toward writing history. Shliapnikov expressed ironic surprise that in Sweden his works were still popular, for in the USSR the interest was “dual”: “some zealously seek them out and don’t find them, since they apparently are sold out” and others subjected both the memoirs and the author to “medieval” forms of criticism. Nevertheless, he continued to write, despite knowing that his works were “already out of fashion” and “without any real hope that [they] will see light anytime soon.” His melancholy was as unfashionable as his historical interpretation.97 In February 1932, the Party Orgburo decided to stop publishing Shliapnikov’s memoirs and demanded that he publicly confess and refute the “errors” in his books. His “confession” was printed in Pravda in March 1932. In 1933, he underwent a grueling series of party purge interrogations, culminating in his exclusion from the party for “double-dealing.” During the course of these, his irony was on display. Accused of having “struggled with the party,” Shliapnikov retorted that he “struggled more with the capitalists.”98

94. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, l. 4, letter from Paris, November 13, 1928, and l. 5, letter from Moscow, January 14, 1929.
95. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, l. 13, Moscow, May 24, 1930.
96. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, l. 19, Moscow, August 30, 1930.
97. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 1, d. 437, II. 30-31, Moscow, February 21, 1932. Fitzpatrick in “Happiness and Toska” and Steinberg in Proletarian Imagination explore the expression of melancholy.
98. RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9103, vol. 5, l. 33.
accusations, Shliapnikov finally vented a rare emotional outburst: “My nerves are sufficiently shattered. Do you think it is easy to endure this nervous strain? I am losing my hearing. You know about my moral state.”

Kollontai did not mention Shliapnikov by name in her diplomatic diaries or in her unpublished archival diary entries after 1927. When she visited Moscow in July 1932, she only mentioned that she found “discontent, grumbling” among old party members, but not oppositions. Her fate diverged from that of many of her friends, as she was one of the few Old Bolsheviks not to suffer arrest or execution during the Terror. Kollontai tried as well she could to help her friends, appealing to Molotov and others, but with fewer and fewer results: “Tears and woe . . . cut-off people innocently fell beneath the wheel. . . . And you know – you beat your head on the wall – you won’t break through. . . . Politics has its own laws. Merciless. . . . Will it really be so forever?”

There is no documented explanation for why Kollontai escaped the Terror. Nevertheless she felt trepidation in 1938: “If I don’t fall “underneath the wheel,” it will be a miracle. I know there are no deeds [deiatel’nosti], no real reasons for me to. But in this period of history – deeds are not necessary: there are other criteria. Will future generations understand this? Will they understand all that is occurring?”

Shliapnikov was arrested in January 1935 in connection with the investigation of Kirov’s assassination and he was shot in autumn 1937. Neither he nor Kollontai betrayed close friends during the Terror. Kollontai tried as well as she could to help her friends, appealing to Molotov and others, but with fewer and fewer results. Her grief for lost friends was assuaged through the joy she took in the progress she thought women had made under Soviet power, a typical emotional juxtaposition of the 1930s. In the 1930s in her personal writings, Kollontai balanced the emotion of despair with feelings of hope and joy. Nostalgia for quieter and more hopeful prerevolutionary times also provided comfort to her in times of arbitrary and unpredictable political repression.

99. RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9103, I. 122-123.
100. Diplomaticheskie dnevnik, 2: 115.
102. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 62, I. 6, March 25, 1938. Barbara Clements conjectured that Kollontai might have saved herself in 1937 by publishing an article in which she denounced Zinov’ev, Kamenev and Trotsky and praised Stalin (Clements, Bolshevik Feminist, p. 255). Kollontai’s grandson Vladimir and his wife Margarita told me secondhand information that Kollontai’s name had been on an arrest list and that an order had been issued for her arrest. Nevertheless, before the order could be implemented, the NKVD official responsible was arrested. Kollontai left Moscow for Scandinavia before a new official could be assigned to the case. Then the Terror came to a close. Interview, New York City, March 25, 2006.
Both Shliapnikov’s and Kollontai’s identities changed during their lifetimes. Kollontai was born into the nobility and became a revolutionary and intellectual, while Shliapnikov emerged from the industrial working class to become a revolutionary and trade union leader. Both became administrators and political leaders after the revolution. By the 1930s, they had acquired new layers of identity, Kollontai as a diplomat and a grandmother, Shliapnikov as an historian and a father. While Kollontai became a privileged yet still vulnerable member of the Stalinist diplomatic corps, Shliapnikov became increasingly isolated from the heights of political power. Located abroad, Kollontai also stood apart from the major socialist projects of the 1930s within Russia. New identities built upon but did not replace the identities of their youth. Although their identities underwent transformation, Kollontai’s and Shliapnikov’s emotional repertoires remained constant and continued to influence their complex relationship. Although Kollontai sometimes divorced politics from compassion, she interpreted political events through the lens of emotion. Shliapnikov was usually even-tempered, but perceived injustices angered him and he was not immune to emotional outbursts under extreme pressure. The irony he expressed in jokes was rooted far more in his character than in literary conventions to which he had been exposed. Although Shliapnikov and Kollontai saw one another infrequently in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they maintained a relationship. No longer was Kollontai an intellectual mentor and Shliapnikov an upstart proletarian; no longer were they lovers or political allies, but instead they were colleagues and friends with a shared past that was interwoven with their identities and emotionally meaningful for both of them.