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Women in Soviet mathematics.

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The article under review contains what surely must be the first mention of Aleksandra Kollontai in any publication of the American Mathematical Society. Kollontai, a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee during the October 1917 Revolution, advocated sweeping changes in sexual and social relationships between women and men. A discussion of her influence on Soviet women in the pre-Stalinist period appears in the paper under review as part of an excellent summary of the “woman question” in Soviet history (not mentioned in the article is that Kollontai’s writings had another period of popularity—with American and British feminists in the 1970s).

After describing the general situation of women in Soviet society, the authors focus on women mathematicians. The first two generations of Soviet mathematicians included four outstanding women—N. K. Bari, L. V. Keldysh, O. A. Ladyzhenskaya and O. A. Oleĭnik. The 1960s, a time when Soviet mathematics flourished, produced only one woman of comparable stature—G. N. Tyurina. In an attempt to analyze the underrepresentation of women among the top Soviet mathematicians, the authors delve into the process of becoming a mathematician in the Soviet Union. They find several features of Soviet mathematical culture that may tend to discourage talented women from pursuing careers as research mathematicians. The authors also compare Soviet mathematical culture to American mathematical culture, noting that some of the difficulties faced by women mathematicians (and prospective women mathematicians) differ in the two societies. The paper contains several perceptive insights into mathematics as a social phenomenon.

{For the collection containing this paper see [MR1204947](#)}

Sheldon Axler