WOMEN AND CLASS

Towards a Socialist Feminism

Essays by Hal Draper

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Editor's Note

This anthology is based on a draft prepared by Hal Draper in collaboration with Anne Lipow.

No attempt has been made to alter or "correct" the original, a copy of which is available at the Special Collections division of the General Library of the University of California at Davis.

Any differences are a result of errors introduced in transcribing the original typewritten manuscript to digital format despite my best efforts at finding such discrepencies.

A Note on the Cover

The portrait of "lady liberty" on the cover is a reproduction of a United States coin from 1877. The symbol is of a woman wearing the Phrygian cap, a symbol of liberty for both French and American revolutionaries. It played a minor role in the controversy surrounding the Society of Women Revolutionaries of 1793 as described in Chapter 2 of Part 1 of this anthology.

Originally, the statue of liberty was to be wearing such a cap. But, by 1886, when the statue was dedicated, the American capitalist class had decided that liberty was one of those good things which you *could* have too much of.

I have slightly altered the reproduction. Lady Liberty on the coin is looking backward. Presumably indicating that the revolution is in the past. I have reversed the image.

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Part 1
CLASS ROOTS OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The women's liberation movement in the United States today has led to an important and useful interest in the historical roots of the issue and the movement. The desire to understand one's past is a precondition for seriously facing the future; and when a movement matures to the point of asking also where it is coming from, it is more likely to figure out where it is going. In this respect the women's movement, which in some ways arose as an offshoot of the "New Left" of the 1960s, has not only shown more staying power but also more basic seriousness, and maturity.

But the historical concerns which are gratifyingly evident in the literature of the women's movement have been almost entirely limited to the *American* past. The keen interest of today's militants in their national roots and forebears can hardly be faulted, and we would hesitate to raise the question at all if there were a danger of being understood as derogating it. On the contrary, even more historical exploration of the American scene is needed. But we would urge the following proposition: The American springs of the women's liberation movement cannot be wholly understood without a knowledge of its international context, the European movements and struggles out of which it arose and alongside which it developed for over a century. In fact, it is only on this basis that the specifically American elements (for example, the influence of frontier life) can be detected.

While the spate of books, new and reprinted, on this question that have been published in this country in the last ten years is noteworthy, it is surely a rather extreme case that not a single one has paid any attention to the tremendous reservoir of ideas and lessons afforded by a couple of centuries of the women's movement in the rest of the world. The outstanding English-language exception is by a British writer, Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution*. An outstanding exception from a previous decade, Ethel Mannin's Women and Revolution (1939), cannot even be found in retrospective bibliographical lists published in the aforesaid spate of literature; and one wonders.

No doubt, one reason for this situation is the 100% American provincialism which shows up in all our movements; but we suspect there is another reason. The two books mentioned above, as it happens, have very similar titles; both couple "women" with "revolution." To be sure, both authors are socialist revolutionaries in viewpoint, Marxists in fact. But does one have to be a Marxist, or any other kind of socialist, to inquire into the women's movement outside our borders? Logically, no. In practice, the connection is *not accidental* (to coin a phrase). For it would be a little difficult to imagine a reasonably accurate historical article on the movement from an international perspective that would seem at home in (say) *Ms.* magazine; and even more difficult to draw reasonable lessons from the history of un-American humanity that might be adopted by the National Organization for Women as its guidelines. This most bourgeois of countries is likewise graced with the most class-ridden of bourgeois women's movements; and it is an inconvenient fact that the lessons of over a century of the most advanced women's movements are not calculated to paint the prospects of bourgeois feminism in glowing colors. One of the massive facts before us is the fact that the United States of America is the only advanced capitalist country in the world without a mass socialist movement of any kind (as distinct from a plethora of radical sects); and a women's movement that arises in such an exceptional milieu is bound to be one-sided and distorted from the perspective of those outside its borders.

No the fact is that the women's liberation movement arises in history with its roots entwined with the socialist movement. Although from a literary point of view, "precursors"and heralds of women's rights can be found back through the ages, a conscious women's movement arises not as a simply intellectual process but as the response to a shakeup in society. In an earthquake the hot lava rises up from below. Repressed from above , women enter on the stage when the mass of the people do, and along with them, for women constitute half of the mass. Like socialism, a women's liberation movement can be

dated from the French Revolution. But the first socialist movement, which issued directly out of the last stage of the French Revolution, viz. the "Conspiracy of Equals" led by François Noël (Gracchus) Babeuf, while it did not explicitly come out for women's equality, included among its most prominent and active members militant women. In this respect, it was carrying on the tradition of the only organized expression of the *enragés*, the left wing of the French Revolution. That organization was *La Société des Citoyennes Républicaines Révoltionnaires*. Part one of this book is an attempt to resurrect that tradition; its predecessors and its successors in nineteenth century Europe.

Note on Sources

In general there is nothing in English on the European or international origins of feminism — nothing that is adequate for our present purpose. Only one book purports to deal with the subject: Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London, Lane/Penguin, 1972; N.Y., Pantheon, 1973; Vintage, 1974); its first sentence states correctly that "This is not a proper history of feminism and revolution." There are two pop-historical booklets that are not worth recalling: Prof. Trevor Lloyd's *Suffragettes International* (N.Y., American Heritage Press, 1971); and Rose Remain's *The Fight for Freedom for Women (N.Y.,* Ballantine, .1973).There are two compilations of writings supplemented by editorial material: Miriam Schneir, .ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings* (N.Y., Random House/Vintage, 1972); and Julia ,O'Faolain , L. Martines, eds., *Not in God's Image* ,(N.Y., Harper, 1973). All of these appeared in the 1970s; the most elementary interest in the history of international feminism is barely beginning.

The situation is different, of course, with respect to the history of the subject in the U.S. (See, for example, under Barbara Winslow's article below.) With respect to England, which enters into Part I, there are two significant efforts: Sheila Rowbotham's *Hidden from History* (London, Pluto, 1973); and Marian Ramelson's *The Petticoat Rebellion* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1972). In addition there is a volume of

selected writings: William L. O'Neill, ed., *The Woman Movement; Feminism in the United States and England* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1969; Chicago, Quadrangle, 1971); it has a historical introduction which mentions some European connections. Of older books, there is one that needs mentioning in this company: Ethel Mannin's *Women and the Revolution* (N.Y., Dutton, 1939), a spotty collection of vignettes. None of the preceding titles contributed to the contents of this book; they will be mentioned below in other connections.

The main sources used in this section have been Daniel Guerin's masterly work on *La Lutte de Classes sous La Première République* (2v., 6th ed., Gallimard, c1946), especially for the over-all politics of the intra-revolutionary struggle; Albert Soboul's detailed history of the sansculotte movement, *Les Sans-Culottes Parisiens en l'An II* (2nd ed., Clavreuil, 1962); Marie Cerati's *Le Club des Citoyennes Républicaines et Révolutionnaires* (Ed. Sociales, 1966).

Two older works are still worth reading: Leopold Lacour's *Trois Femmes de la Révolution* (Plon, 1900), and the Baron Marc de Villiers' *Histoire des Clubs de Femmes et des Légions d'Amazones* (Plon-Nourrit, 1910).

The best work devoted **to** Jacques Roux is Maurice Dommanget's *Jacques Roux (le Curé Rouge) et le Manifeste des "Enragés"* (Spartacus, 1948), to be supplemented by the collection of his writings, *Acta et Scripta*. R. B. Rose's *The Enragés* (Sydney Univ. Press, 1968, orig. 1965) is useful for stray facts, no more. Leon Abensour's *La Femme et le Féminisme avant La Révolution* (Leroux, 1923) has been duly credited above; the same author's *Histoire Générale du Féminicme* (Delagrave, 1921) is of little use for our purpose. Amédée Le Faure's *Le Socialisme pendant La Révolution Francaise* (Paris, 1867) is good for early feminist tracts. Other sources have been used for some details, like Mathiez's well-known history and Maxime Leroy's *Histoire des Idées Sociales en France* (3v., Gallimard, 1946-62). Cerati's book has a bibliography of French sources, for further exploration.

There is virtually nothing reliable on the subject in English, the least objectionable being an article by Elizabeth Racz on "The Women's

Rights Movement in the French Revolution" *(Science & Society,* Spring 1952). A later article by Jane Abray, "Feminism in the French Revolution" *(American Historical Review,* Feb. 1975), insofar as it purports to deal with matters covered here, is worth much less than the paper it is printed on. There are two rather peculiar books on the women of the French Revolution. One, by Mrs. Serebriakova, wife of the then Soviet ambassador to England, is a *fictionalized* account, very novelistic. Another, by Mrs. Whale, is a journalistic account that reads intentionally like a Sunday Supplement piece; it has its use.

As for mentions of this subject in general accounts of feminist history (in English), the remarks made in the introduction may stand. Prof. O'Neill's statement on Wollstonecraft's book is followed by the bare mention that it came "on the heels of Olympe de Gouges' tract," which he misdates. That is all. O'Neill's book is an anthology (Chicago, 1971; orig. London, 1969), and in such works we have to deal with brief editorial matter. Two others of this type may be mentioned: J. O'Faolain and L. Martines' *Not in God's Image* (N.Y., 1973) represents the French Revolutionary period with two pages of excerpts from Olympe, while Claire Lacombe is not mentioned; this may be fortunate since their remark about the RW is a factual error. M. Schneir's *Feminism (N.Y.,* 1972) represents the "Eighteenth Century Rebels" with Abigail Adams and Wollstonecraft; her note mentions Olympe's pamphlet but not the existence of Lacombe or the RW. Two pop-histories of feminism offer horrible examples: Prof. T. Lloyd's *Suffragettes International (N.Y.,* 1971) has a paragraph on "18th century beginnings" that skips from Rousseau to Wollstonecraft and, under France, highlights Mme. Roland (!), mentions Olympe (but not her pamphlet!) and thinks she was guillotined for her feminist views. Rose Tremain's *The Fight for Freedom for Women* (N.Y., 1973) has a single reference to the French roots of feminism with a mistake in every clause, though only Rousseau and Wollstonecraft are mentioned. Two more serious books on feminist history are unfortunately no better. Most bitterly disappointing is Sheila Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution*

(NY, 1972), which has an inexplicably empty passage on the French Revolution period. Not even Olympe is mentioned, and Lacombe is brought in (without an explanation of who she was and what she did) only for an attack on her alleged "optimism" about women's rights! A such older book still worth reading in spots, Ethel Mannin's *Women and the Revolution* (N.Y., 1939) has a chapter on the French Revolution, in which only Olympe and Theroigne are profiled as the feminists of the age.

Chapter 1
WOMEN IN THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

When and where do we find the first movement for women's rights?

Feminist ideas, the expression of a sentiment, can be traced all the way back. Quite possibly it began with history itself. But if we stress the word 'movement' in the above question, the case becomes much less vague. To be sure, the ancient Greek drama shows women in organized movement (and so *Lysistrata* is justly famous). But if we look for the starting point of an *organized movement* for demands based on women's equality, a movement existing in reality, then the answer is quite clear. The first time this happened was in the Great French Revolution, particularly in the revolution's upswing from 1789 to 1793, and above all on its left wing.

This great revolutionary cauldron, justly called by historians the "mother of us all," was the starting point of modern democratic movements, modern socialist movements, modern nationalist movements and also of internationalism; and it was likewise the incubator of the modern women's rights movement. Feminism has to be seen as one wing of this modern complex, arising side by side with all the rest.

The birth of the feminist movement from revolution later became a shameful fact in its eyes. One way to draw a curtain over this parentage was to drop the history of the French revolutionary women down the Memory Hole. Especially if we limit ourselves to books in English, it is very difficult to find a work on feminist history that does justice to (say) one of the greatest woman leaders in revolutionary history, or indeed one of the leaders of either sex: Claire Lacombe. (See the "Note on Sources" appended to the introduction.)

Another historical problem to keep in mind is that this sector of history, like all other sectors, tends to be seen in historical works through the eyes of the upper classes. And especially in time of revolution, these eyes tend to become red-eyed, inflamed, "seeing red" for more than one reason. There is no better example of this generalization than the period before us. There is more than one book

which, finding it necessary to *mention* the existence of a women's movement in revolutionary Paris, devotes a sentence or two to Olympe de Gouges (who in fact had nothing to do with any women's movement but who published a pamphlet) and does not even hint of the militant movement of women that actually existed.

We see an example of this factor at work when we ask our first question, in the next section.

1. Why No Feminist Movement Before 1789?

Ideas about and sentiments for equal rights, held by women, did not suddenly come into existence in 1789. During the eighteenth century there had been a lively burgeoning of feminist ideas in the vanguard countries prefiguring the development of Western society, France and England. Léon Abensour, one of the most industrious historians of the women's movement, has given us a detailed account, for France, in his *La Femme et le Féminisme Avant la Révolution*: it was in this country that the "movement of ideas" was sharpest. New social forces were stirring; ideas of emancipation applied on a species-wide level were rife. It is true that the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment (male), led by Voltaire and Rousseau, were themselves hostile to women's advanced aspirations; they weren't *that* enlightened. But the old sexual prejudices could not remain untouched by the undermining of all social idols and icons and the discreditment of old shibboleths. As has happened so many times, the work of ideological demolition affected more territory than was intended.

The number of women who raised unanswerable questions, in books or articles or correspondence, mounted to unprecedented proportions. But no *movement* resulted; not a sign or a token of any move for organization. Abensour has the merit of raising the question *Why*? at the close of his work.

The fact itself had not escaped the attention of the women writers who led the "movement of ideas." One of these was a novelist, Mme. de Robert. In one of her books she has her hero remark as follows:

> I am always surprised that women have not yet organized themselves, that they haven't thought of forming a separate body so that they could take revenge for the injustices men did them. How I would like to live long enough to see them make such happy use of their courage! But up to now they have been too coquettish and too given to dissipation to concern themselves seriously with the interests of their sex!

Who are these women? Mme. de Robert speaks of coquettishness and dissipation as if these vices were characteristic of "women," when of course only the females of her own upper-class circle had the wealth and time to be either coquettish or dissipated. Nine out of ten women had all they could do just to keep the family fed. Didn't Mme. de Robert know that? Of course she did. But these nine did not exist for Mme. de Robert's "woman" problem; only the tenth did. It is as clear as day that Mme. de Robert is speaking the mind of a class. It is the feminism of a class.

What about Abensour himself? He discusses Mme. de Robert's statement in his own way:

> In the 18th century, while there were feminist aspirations which were felt and expressed by men as well as women, and while there was a feminist current of opinion in the proper sense of the term, yet, as Mme. de Robert rightly stated, women never got together to carry on the struggle for their rights, with the help of writers favorable to their cause.

I interrupt to point out that Mme. de Robert's protagonist had *not* talked of women organizing to "struggle for their rights"—a formulation smacking of modern democratic ideas—but rather of

"revenge." This was a notion more familiar to the upper-class literati, and with longer roots in prebourgeois society; on the other hand a "struggle for rights" was a socially explosive way of thinking of the problem.

To continue with Abensour, who now asks the central question:

There is a striking contrast with the revolutionary period, when, except for very short periods, as soon as there were feminist ideas there were *feminist movements*. What are the causes of this contrast? First and foremost, the indifference of the majority of women to the amelioration of their lot, an indifference which is the stumbling block of the feminist movement in every era, and which in the 18th century prevented it even from getting started.

This explanation explains no more than the answer given by Mme. de Robert. In her case, even if we accept that "women" are coquettish and dissipated, why was it that the *many* women already conscious of the issue, like Mme. de Robert herself, organized nothing and attempted nothing? The question is only moved back one step. Abensour's answer is just as empty. Does he really know that the "majority" of women were indifferent to bettering their lot? Of course, he has no information on this whatever. (He "knows" the women are indifferent because they don't organize, and they don't organize because, naturally, they're indifferent...) *Yet somehow women who were indifferent to bettering their life suddenly became violently concerned with precisely this issue just as soon as the Revolution broke out*!

The facts are easier to understand if we suppose that the concern was already there, even in massive form, but that it was socially invisible (from above). This suggests that what the Revolution did was to smash the mufflers that kept that concern muted or unheard; or rip through the veils and screens that made invisible to lady novelists what every woman of the people knew. Before 1789 there was no sensitive microphone to pick up the voiced discontents of the mass of women; then the Revolution broke out, and for the first time even the upper

classes could hear the threatening voices from below, from far down the social strata.

We will see what these voices were saying. But even Abensour, our modern profeminist historian, is deaf to them. For this is what he writes next:

> The working woman, on whom the iron law weighed most heavily, was not even conscious of her miserable state. It will be that way for over a century more.

The facts about what these workingwomen *did* give a faint idea of the mind-boggling absurdity of this statement, as we will see. But even without these facts, one can realize that this claim by the most industrious historian of bourgeois feminism has an interesting resemblance to the old claim that the slaves on the antebellum plantations were typically joyous darkies living a good life and devoted to their white masters, or else mindless zombies who could not feel pain. The typical historians of bourgeois feminism can look straight in the direction of massive struggles and see nothing. The working-class woman scarcely exists, or is seen as only a shadowy figure.

To continue with Abensour's explanation, it is good to find that it now improves:

> The déclassée bourgeois woman so numerous in the 19th century, who, moved by a generous feeling of solidarity as well as personal interest, fought for the political and economic enfranchisement of their sisters and tried to draw in the masses, with more or less success—these had not yet made their appearance. The most ardent and thoroughgoing feminists to fight sex prejudice ... were women of privilege whose own lot was a pleasant one; because of aristocratic circumspection, because they were grown accustomed to chains so gilded and so light, they

> refused to do whatever had to be done in order to hasten the day of liberation, and they considered feminism only as a theme that lent itself to eloquent declamation.

Very well: it would appear that these "women of privilege" (the women of the privileged classes) were inhibited from taking organizational steps by their class position, by their class prejudices and class ideas. From the summit of the class society in which they lived, they could see little of the oppression under which the women of the people lived; and there was little they wanted to see. Anyway, what they saw was no skin off *their* class. To be sure, Abensour sees this fairly clearly with reference to the women of the aristocracy, that is, the *old* ruling class, while he refuses to believe that the same pattern applies to the feminism of the new bourgeois rulers.

Abensour has a final reason which is very important:

> ...the great feminist movements of the modern era were aroused by the prospects of political emancipation. But before the revolution, this prospect could not make its appearance. ... It required the spectacle of men's liberation to arouse political aspirations among some women and organize them into groups directed toward a struggle with the stronger sex, in a word, to create a real feminist movement. Nothing of the sort before 1789.

The point about the French Revolution was that it could not be simply a matter of "*men's* liberation." The fact is that it took a mass social-political revolution to bring the women's movement into being for the first time. The danger of invoking revolution even for a class-limited objective is that it suggests to *all* oppressed people that the power on top can be overthrown; in that sense, it is infectious or contagious. This is one reason why revolutions—real revolutions, that is, social upheavals that turn society upside-down—are so often truly

creative, fructifying, and personally liberating for masses of people. This belies the common historical myth that revolution is nothing but a bestially destructive force.

Feminism—after centuries of existence as an idea, a complaint, a servile grumbling—now takes the stage of history as a social-political force, because all of society has been brought under a question mark, not simply by words but by deeds. Women take the stage as an autonomous force at the same time as the masses do; the emergence of their movement is coincident with the surge of popular forces from below. This will be especially plain in the case of the French Revolution, for it is a watershed; but it will be a constant of modern history that everywhere, insofar as a revolutionary upheaval reaches down into the recumbent strata of society to set them into motion, women too are set in motion; and insofar as popular social forces are inert and passive, the women's movement too is quiet or only partial.

2. The Condorcet Connection

Professor William O'Neill begins his introduction to his historical work *The Woman Movement* with this remarkable claim: "All histories of feminism properly begin with the appearance of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792."

And what did Wollstonecraft begin with? Spontaneous generation? There is the old joke about the Russians claiming priority on all inventions from the safety pin to the safety razor, but it is no joke that most American and British writers on feminism think that the first great case for women's rights was published by Mary Wollstonecraft.

But in fact her *Vindication* of 1792 was an English echo of ideas burgeoning on the other side of the Channel, ideas that were given their first great formulation by the Marquis de Condorcet. It was he who, first on the eve of the Revolution and again in 1790, set down the case for women's social and political equality, including the right to vote and hold office. He not only preceded but went farther than Wollstonecraft did later. And while Wollstonecraft's book was published in England

to general apathy, Condorcet's profeminist manifestos were a political scandal that resounded in great publicity.

Condorcet—unfortunately for the prejudices of some historians—was a man; but, all prejudices aside, there was a woman in the picture too. Condorcet, often called the last of the *philosophes*, a living link between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (on the right wing of the latter), was the only one in this intellectual tradition to adopt a profeminist attitude. Why was he different? No doubt one reason is that he lived on into the immediately prerevolutionary period and therefore came under new influences. Secondly, in my opinion, we must take account of the influence of his wife.

As mentioned, it had been especially in the writings of advanced women intellectuals that the 18th century heard open attacks on women's lack of equality. Condorcet married into this milieu, so to speak, in 1786. His wife, Sophie de Grouchy, was a woman of aristocratic family, a person of considerable intellectual attainments; and his relationship with her was one of close collaboration. To be sure, she herself never published any special views on feminism. She apparently accepted the prevalent pattern by confining herself to being an "inspiration" to her husband, and in her own name operated only as the organizer of a political salon rivaling Mme. Roland's in influence on the Girondin side of the Revolution. What gives wings to speculation is a coincidence of dates.

Condorcet's first declaration on women's rights came in the year after his marriage, in 1787. It was rather late in his life; he was 44. Speculative though it be, it is hard to avoid wondering if what we have here is the influence of a strong-minded and intelligent woman on her husband, exercised "underground" in a pattern well known to history and enforced by the mores of the time. If this is so, the break-through must be credited to a collaboration of Condorcet and his wife Sophie.

The declaration was embodied in Condorcet's *Lettres d'un Bourgeois de New-Haven*, the American milieu being used as the stage setting for

the expression of liberal ideas. This was the culmination of 18th century *intellectual* feminism, the feminism which does not demand immediate political deeds of implementation. But deeds were in the offing; the fall of the Bastille was only two years away.

After a year of the Revolution, during which Mme. de Condorcet's salon became one of the best known, Condorcet made a considerable splash by publishing an essay, on July 3, 1790, entitled *Sur l'Admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité* (On Giving Civil Rights to Women). The argument included political rights. To be sure, the reaction in the ranks of the Revolutionary establishment was overwhelmingly hostile, as was to be expected. The important thing was that an eminent thinker had now spelled the issue out and forced it before the eyes of a nation in turmoil, for the first time on a big scale. The historical importance of this event was immeasurably greater than the publication of the book which came out two years later to an indifferent public in another country.

In view of the treatment of Condorcet by what passes for feminist history, we have to make clear that he put forward a view as advanced as anything offered by bourgeois feminism in the next century. Since the material available in English is so inadequate, we offer a summary of Condorcet's then-sensational views. (The framework of this summary is based on that of his biographer, F. Alengry.)

In the first place, Condorcet based his conclusions on the principles embodied in the Declaration of the Rights of Man (August 1789). Since this proclaims that men are born equal in rights, hasn't one "violated the principle of equality of rights in calmly depriving half the human race [of the right] to participate in the making of laws, by excluding women from civil rights?" (Note that Condorcet takes the stand that the word 'Man' in the great declaration is of common gender, not exclusively masculine, thus refusing to hand the declaration over to the enemies of women. This will be a long-standing and confused issue among feminists.)

Men have rights "solely from the fact they are sensible beings, capable of acquiring moral ideas and reasoning on the basis of these ideas." Women have these same qualities, and so necessarily have equal rights. (The philosophic-moral sweep of these principles determine the equally sweeping scope of Condorcet's conclusions.)

He answers arguments that point to female "weaknesses" as making them unfit to exercise political rights. But "why shouldn't beings who are liable to pregnancy and transient illnesses exercise rights that one would not dream of taking away from people who get the gout every winter and who easily catch colds?"

What of the argument that women have less cultivated minds? He replies that in fact "inferiority and superiority are shared equally between the two sexes." (Is Condorcet equating 'cultivated' with 'intelligent'? At best this is not clear.) To show that at least *some* women might equal or even surpass men, he cites Queen Elizabeth, Maria Theresa, the two Catherines of Russia, and the English novelist Mrs. Macaulay—truly a mixed bag.

If "women" let themselves be guided by instinct and sentiment, the fault belongs to the laws, the education, and the social existence imposed on them. If rights are refused to women on this ground, then political rights should also be withheld from the common people, the ignorant in general, and anyone who has not had a course in public law.

Would equal rights only redouble women's influence on men? But, he replies, this influence is "more to be feared when in secret than when exercised in a public discussion."

Would women be taken away from care of the household and family? No more "than laborers will be taken away from their plows..." Anyway, only a small number of women would be called to public office, and he argues this number can be spared. In the background, of course, are the usual assumptions about women's proper sphere. In this connection he remarks: "habit has familiarized us with the idea of a female sovereign but not that of a female citizen."

It would be too much to expect that even Condorcet might be immune from the pattern of implicitly defining 'women' as the females of the upper classes. Women, he argues, are superior to men "in the gentle and domestic virtues." Women's reason is not always that of men; they do not value the same things. "It is as reasonable for a woman to concern herself with the graces of her face as it was for Demosthenes to take care of his voice and gestures."

In a concluding passage, Condorcet records the fact that the antifeminists do not refute arguments but like to treat the question as a joke (*The more things change...*). He does not think it is funny:

I now demand that someone deign to refute these reasons other than by jokes and declamations; that above all someone show me, as between men and women, a natural difference on which the exclusion of a right can legitimately be based. The equality of rights which our new constitution has established among men has gained us eloquent declamations and inexhaustible joking; but no one has yet been able to oppose a single reason to it, and that surely not for lack of talent and zeal. I dare to believe that the same will be true of equal rights as between the two sexes.

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Condorcet's profeminist manifesto aroused great attention—a *succès de scandale*. It undoubtedly must have had considerable impact on the minds of women active in the Revolution. But it did not impel the development of a feminist movement or even a small women's movement. The immediate reason is that Condorcet himself made this unlikely by refusing to propose any implementation of his good ideas. Yet he was in a perfect position to implement them. In 1792 a commission to draft a republican constitution was set up; Condorcet wrote the draft as its dominant member. What did he propose on the rights of women?

Nothing whatever. The liberal historian J. S. Schapiro, who has written one of the important English-language works on Condorcet, considers this a puzzle:

> Curiously enough Condorcet, the pioneer of woman suffrage, did not include votes for women. The only possible explanation is that, just as he was dismayed when *le peuple* appeared in the mobs of Paris, he was disgusted when *la femme* appeared in the *Faubouriennes,* or mobs of market women, who were mobilized by Marat to disturb the sittings of the Convention.

This "only possible explanation" hardly explains why Condorcet's dismay did not operate against the "mobs" of *male* sansculottes, say, by advocating property qualifications. Yet, although he had been in favor of such limitations right up to the Revolution, what convinced him (he wrote) to advocate universal equal suffrage was the role of the masses in taking the Bastille—a "mob" action. Later, Marat mobilized more men than women for the purpose of dismaying Condorcet's liberal soul. Moreover we know that Condorcet's intellectual conviction about woman suffrage remained unchanged.

One fears that the "only possible explanation" left is a simple one, well known to history: an active campaign for women's rights would be so fiercely resisted that Condorcet's own political hopes would be killed. While Professor Schapiro's liberal hero was willing to make impolitic proposals on other subjects, he refused to stick his neck out on the woman question.

Still, it is true that the abstraction Woman did change before Condorcet's eyes in the course of the revolutionary events: not merely into a "mob" but, worse, into the class reality of *workingwomen*. To see this, let us do Condorcet justice by recording two minor matters of women's rights which he did include in drafted documents. In 1789 he drafted a Declaration of Rights which included a proposal for equal

inheritance by all children regardless of age and sex. Later, as a member of the Legislative Assembly, he proposed equal education for women. Equal inheritance, equal education: it will be observed that both issues were then relevant only to the women of the propertied classes. But the right to vote (if not limited by property) would have redounded to the benefit mainly of the mass of workingwomen.

One need not believe that Condorcet reasoned: *Let there be equal rights only for women of my class.* On the contrary: insofar as he reasoned, the answer came out as abstractly nonclass as one of his beloved mathematical equations. But as soon as the abstractions had to be clothed with political reality, class-conditioned mentalities took over.

It would have been totally unrealistic at that time to try to openly draw the class line also for men's suffrage. For one thing, Condorcet keenly realized that property qualifications for voting would shift all power to the rising bourgeoisie, and he was quite sincere in stating that he was against installing a new "bourgeois aristocracy" in place of the old aristocracy. Anyway there was the constraint of the mass movement: the leaders could not have gotten away with a denial of universal suffrage at least as a paper promise (which is all the Jacobins made of it).

Condorcet's conception of how to handle the essentially unwelcome intrusion of the masses into politics was to use them as a counterweight against the bourgeois elements, manipulated in the hands of Statesmen interested only in Justice and Humanity, that is, people like himself. It is enough to mention that he supported Danton as the least evil among the representatives of the Mob because Danton was the man "who, by his leadership, could restrain the very contemptible tools of a revolution that was useful, glorious and necessary." The masses were the "contemptible tools"; it was the Good Leaders who were Glorious and Necessary. That Condorcet looked for this leadership in the Gironde did not prevent the Girondin whip, Mme. Roland, from seeing him as "pathetic"; "a fine liqueur soaked in cotton."

The fine liqueur can still be found in his essays on women's rights. When he addressed paper with his pen, social classes did not exist; when he addressed France with constitutional drafts, class realities got in the way. He was for equal rights for Woman, and deserves honor; what appalled him was the movement of the real women unleashed by the Revolution.

3. The Movement of the Nameless

In point of fact, women played a massive role in the French Revolution. This fact is not often mentioned by historians. A good deal of this role was played out "underground"—not in the sense of being secret or conspiratorial but in the mole's sense: inaccessible to historical documentation except in large terms. All the more reason to give some space to an informed appreciation by the historian Guérin:

In a period of revolution, the popular vanguard is composed indiscriminately of men and women. And the women are not the least resolute. Being responsible for feeding the home, they resent even more directly than the men the sufferings consequent on the rise in the cost of living and the increase of want. More impulsive and more sensitive, they reacted with still more fervor against oppression, from the moment they understood its class character. Since 1789 women had played a role of the first order in all the great revolutionary events. The royalist Duval willy-nilly renders them homage when he writes in his *Souvenirs*, in his insulting language:

> Through the whole course of the Revolution, it was women—in fact women of the most abject class of people—who set in motion the insurrections great and small. From the dawn of that Revolution, you saw them in crowds lending aid and assistance to the brigands who pillaged and burned Réveillon's house. On October 5 [1789] it was women who dragged the men to Versailles to besiege the chateau... It was they too whom you saw

> on June 20 [1791] ... pushing the wheels of the cannon that was lifted into the king's apartments. On August 10 [1792] they finished by killing...the fatally wounded Swiss [in the storming of the Tuileries]... In the September days [1792] it was again women who became accessories to the massacres in the prisons... That is a sad thing to relate, without doubt, but it is nonetheless a fact of history.

Corroborating the malevolent testimony of this royalist from the other side of the barricades, Jacques Roux talked in an article "of those heroines who had such a large part in the taking of the Bastille, who at Versailles made the tyrant's myrmidons eat the dust [October 1789], and who braved all dangers to overthrow the crown; of those brave women who have been at the head of all the revolutionary acts, who effectively prepared the insurrection of May 29 [1793]..." The riots against the cost of living, in February and June 1793, had been above all the work of women. The former priest [Roux] was well acquainted with feminine psychology, and he knew that a revolutionary vanguard needs women's support. On August 23 [1793] he wrote a friend: "Victory is beyond all doubt as soon as the women mingle with the sansculottes..."

The contemporary statement by Jacques Roux about the participation of women in the assault on the Bastille, and other testimony to the same effect, are unaccountably ignored by some historians, who assert that the crowd at the Bastille was almost exclusively male—on the ground that *later*, when participants were asked to register, only one woman responded.

The first mass action of the Revolution powered by women was thoroughly anonymous; that is, there are no known names to attach to it. But it was decisive for the course of events. It came in October, when the king, holed up in Versailles, was clearly plotting counterrevolution, while bread and jobs were growing scarcer for the people.

On October 5 a crowd of women broke into Paris's city hall; the National Guards were in sympathy and offered little resistance. The beadle Maillard, who had taken part in the attack on the Bastille, was taken up by the massed women to "lead" them to Versailles in a massive march. This unexpected intrusion by the people into the many-sided intrigues and maneuvers among the politicians sent the whole pack of cards flying into the air.

Suffice to say, in summary, that after staying on in Versailles until morning, the crowd invaded the palace precincts; the queen fled in terror to the king's apartments in dishabille; some palace guards were killed. Terrorized, the king made an appearance, and, as the crowd shouted "The king to Paris!" announced that he would go there. And he went.

This transfer of the king to Paris—that is to the arena of the revolutionary masses—was (says the historian Mathiez) "even more important than the capture of the Bastille. From that time onwards, the king and the Assembly were in the hands of Lafayette and the people of Paris. The Revolution was securely established." Lafayette soon discredited himself; the second wave of emigration by aristocrats emptied the court; the crucial impulsion was given to send the Revolution on its way.

The women did it. Historians see a puzzle in how this movement got started; if it has baffled research, it is perhaps because there was no mystery such as was being sought. The October 5 throng was organized by high prices and profiteering, by hunger and fear of hunger, by joblessness and despair; all of these conspirators made irrefutable arguments against the meaningless political intrigues that occupied the forepart of the stage. In such elemental movements there are often numerous partial, ad-hoc, local "leaders," none of whom moved to the front in this case. There was no experience of women following women in action, and this is why they asked a man (Maillard) to lead the van, obeying the sex-stereotype.

The royalist press looked for a women's leader to account for this baleful event; it found one, and made her name notorious, even though she had in fact had nothing to do with the movement. Théroigne de Méricourt was a well-known courtesan who had talked about organizing women into armed groups;many other women had talked this idea up as well, for it was a favorite notion about independent women's action in the revolutionary situation. Théroigne had been seen and recognized in Versailles on October 5, and indeed she had been there—because she lived there. Although she spoke kindly to the women marchers, she did *not* participate in the historic movement of women that unfolded on her very doorstep. Their world was not hers, and she kept her distance. (You can see the same gulf today in the feminist historians who glorify Théroigne as a feminist while they ignore the real women's movement.)

Théroigne seems to have had no special views about social or political matters outside of a general sympathy with the Girondins, whose advocacy of war appealed to her. Insofar as she had a feminist idea, it was mainly tied up with her interest in forming a "woman's phalanx" to aid the Revolution. "Women should emerge from their shameful nullity" and show men they are not inferior by taking up arms, like the men.

She made the error of agitating for her "women's phalanx" not among the women of the privileged classes, who might have benefitted from the exercise, but among the workingwomen of the *faubourgs* (working-class "suburbs"), who were growing desperate about being able to find food for their families (spring of 1792). The harassed women of the people, worried not about Amazon armies but about starving children, got fed up with being agitated to spend several hours a day training with pikes. On April 12 Théroigne was roughed up in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine by a number of sansculotte women. In 1793 her pro-Girondin sympathies were even less welcome among workingwomen. That year, Théroigne's pet proposal was the establishment of a special magistrature of Peace and Fraternity composed of women—that is, of certain women; for a mere woman of

the people was not likely to expect a seat among the notables. In May, at the end of which month the Girondins were ousted from power by a sans-culotte insurrection, Théroigne caught a whipping as a Girondin sympathizer from a crowd of sansculotte women. To finish her story: she was arrested in 1794 as the Terror intensified, but released; not long afterwards, her early tendency toward insanity reasserted itself, and she was insane for the rest of her life.

Outside of the free Royalist publicity which made her a Public Character, she played no role of any real interest. What goes to the heart of our subject is the social gulf between the "women's issues" she played with, and the issues that really mobilized a women's movement in 1793—the social gulf between the worlds of Théroigne de Méricourt and of Claire Lacombe.

On the other hand, we will see in the next section that Olympe de Gouges *does* deserve a niche in the history of feminism. But before we turn to her, we must deal with a preliminary question. We mentioned that Théroigne was a courtesan; well, Olympe had also been a courtesan, and quite a successful one, all her working life, before the outbreak of the Revolution. And we will see that Etta Palm, who was more important than both of them, had also been a courtesan. Outside of the Revolutionary Women of Lacombe and Léon (who are controversial for other reasons), the three most prominent feminist figures emerging out of the Revolution were courtesans. A remarkable fact! Could this pattern have been accidental? I don't think so, for the following reasons.

Independent-minded women ("strong-minded females" in the derogatory form) born in the upper classes had an outlet for ambitions and talents through such activities as writing and salon-keeping. They enjoyed a long tether because of their class position. But it goes without saying that women of the people had no such opportunities. Whatever their abilities or potentialities, they had virtually only one future course before them, the respectable interment of their individualities in marriage, or else fossilization in spinsterhood or cold

storage in a nunnery. But there were loopholes. There was, for example, a recognized profession that offered the prospect of a more independent life: the profession of courtesan. To be sure, a courtesan can perhaps be defined as a high-class prostitute, and indeed the class context was a decisive feature; but, besides, a really successful courtesan had to offer more than basic sexual gratification and had to have more than physical endowments. She had to have *esprit*, intelligence, resourcefulness. She usually had a measure of nonconformism to begin with. The courtesan was one of the few independent woman entrepreneurs of the day.

Furthermore, the courtesan's relation to the world of men and its rulers was not such as to inspire her with awe or disabling respect for these pillars of the society; she lived on the side of their weaknesses and follies, on the tawdry side of power. Usually sprung from the lower classes, she typically presented herself as upper-class or a reasonable facsimile thereof; hence the invention of aristocratic names like Olympe de Gouges (by Marie Gouze), or Théroigne de Méricourt (by Anne Joséphe Terwane), or the Baroness d'Aelders (by Etta Palm). The courtesan was the reverse of a déclassée—she was a class upstart from the viewpoint of her clientele. In practice she often lived in the interstices of the class structure, and hence might be one of the few who were neither blinded nor immobilized by it.

We may add that by 1789 two of the three courtesans under consideration were superannuated from the profession. Olympe was 41, Etta Palm was 46; only Théroigne was still operative, at 27, and we have seen she was the least important. Finally, we must note that two of the three had been born outside of France—Théroigne in Luxembourg, Etta Palm in the Netherlands—hence were *outsiders* nationally as well as in a class sense. For that matter, the Frenchwoman Olympe was "foreign" to the Île de France, being thoroughly provincial in birth and upbringing (like Lacombe, for that matter).

At a juncture in history when the past still lay heavy on the mass of women suddenly thrown into the maelstrom, the courtesan type was

peculiarly fitted to take advantage of changing patterns. We will see that this type had limitations.

4. Olympe De Gouges

With the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789, there appeared a number of appeals for justice to the oppressed sex, written by women, published in pamphlets, placards and manifesto-like statements or petitions. The first wave of declarations, judging from the material assembled by Le Faure, was relatively modest in demands, none going as far as the stand taken by Condorcet the following year. Then, after Condorcet, in September 1791, came a pamphlet by a woman which did go as far as Condorcet's advocacy of full equality. Its writer, moreover, tried hard to achieve fame in various ways, and succeeded in attaining a degree of notoriety among contemporaries as a rather "bizarre personality" (to use Le Faure's cautious expression).

Marie Gouze's energetic enterprise had made her a successful courtesan under the name of Olympe de Gouges, though this career had been exhausted by the time of the Revolution. She was a woman whose natural raw talents fought a losing battle against her lack of education and cultivation, a handicap on her ambitions which she never overcame. Before the Revolution, she had set her mind on a literary career, especially in playwrighting, for she had a mind that teemed with ideas and also the ability to talk a streak. Unfortunately she could barely write; she has been called nearly illiterate functionally; it was only with effort that she could put a ragged letter on paper. She had to resort to dictating her profuse literary works, which sometimes rose to the level of the mediocre.

Her first political pamphlet preceded the fall of the Bastille by a year. After the Revolution she concentrated on self-published political pamphlets and political placards which she distributed on the city walls. History has been kind to her in remembering mainly her salvo on the woman question; here at least she had something to say, even though it was not original. Unfortunately she spent most of her energies as a

defender of royalism, even after presumably becoming a republican, and it was as a proroyalist agitator that she ended up on the guillotine of the Terror.

From the real movement of the revolutionary women she recoiled in horror and hostility. When the women of the people took over the streets in October 1789 and set the Revolution on its course by the march to Versailles, Olympe denounced them as "infamous brigands," and wept for the sad fate of the queen who was actually rousted out of her royal bed. Her first pamphlets were enthusiastically royalist with a philanthropic cast, upholding not only the sacred person of the Sovereign but also the system of estates in which the aristocracy ruled. She was as pro-aristocratic as the noble émigrés in Coblenz, whose return to France she pleaded for. This pattern is common enough among the hangers-on of a ruling class, and it must be remembered that most courtesans were as much an appendage of the privileged classes as a château's majordomo.

After the king's flight to Varennes, which made republicans even out of the right wing of the Revolution, Olympe also became a republican formally. But she remained apologetic about the king, and in August 1792 she offered herself as a volunteer to defend him personally before the Revolutionary tribunal. It was either a courageous act testifying to the constancy of her reactionary convictions, or a piece of naiveté showing her inability to understand what was happening in the country. In July 1793 she was arrested for proclamations on the city's walls demanding a plebiscite on monarchic versus republican government; but advocacy of monarchism had been illegalized. When she was guillotined in November, she was one of those executed for actually committing a capital offence in a juridical sense. (This has not stopped feminist historians from portraying her as guillotined for her feminist views.) She came to grief as a militant royalist in open practice—so thoroughly a woman of the Old Regime that one cannot be sure she ever understood the danger she was courting.

From her enemies she received the same boon as had Théroigne: the invention by them of a historically flattering myth, with the intent to slander. For by the time she was executed for royalist agitation, the regime had started cracking down on the women's movement, including women's clubs, because of the activities (still to be recounted) of the Revolutionary Women led by Lacombe. The Jacobins had already started their customary slander pattern: in order to link the leftist women with the convicted royalist, the Jacobins spread the smear-charge that it was Olympe who had organized the first women's society! This may put a fictitious halo around her head for *us*, but its purpose was to discredit the very idea of women's organization by making it the sinister offspring of reaction and royalist plotters. This Jacobin falsification was taken up by historians of the Revolution like Michelet, who were important for the later inflation of poor Olympe's role.

In point of fact, Olympe never dreamed of organizing anything but personal adherents, and did not work with the women's clubs or mixed clubs that existed. (Later we will catch a glimpse of her at a meeting of the Revolutionary Women where the difference between her and the new feminists was evident.) The very idea of a women's movement was as foreign to her as it was repugnant to the antifeminist Jacobins. She shared the established conception of political activism: one put forward proposals which, on being acclaimed by the People, made one a Leader.

She had many proposals to make, spawned by her turbulent mind, and some of them concerned women particularly: for example, the establishment of a national theater for women's productions. She had had difficulty in getting her plays produced, and such an enterprise would provide people like her with a stage for their literary ambitions. She liked to make the kind of "women's" proposal that was supposed to give "recognition" to women in some ceremonial way: for example, a special entourage of women for some notable's funeral; a special women's guard for the queen; that sort of thing. What these ideas had

in common was that they meant kudos for certain female notables, though they meant nothing for the mass of women, who had no time to primp at funerals or wait on the queen. Note the two kinds of approach, the two kinds of mentality, marked by this difference, for this dichotomy will be seen throughout the subsequent history of the women's movement. It is the difference between the feminism of the privileged classes and of the workingwomen.

Olympe went beyond these games when, with an inspirational flash that suited her active mind, she thought of incorporating the general idea of equal rights for women in a "Declaration of Rights" for women and *citoyennes*. Condorcet had put forward this position magisterially, but Olympe usefully did in a propagandistic way what the liberal marquis had refused to do in his own draft of a Declaration of Rights.

It has been conjectured that since Olympe did not mention Condorcet's bombshell of 1790, she did not know of it. This is almost impossible to believe. It requires us to accept that a quick-minded woman with literary aspirations did not know that the most eminent intellectual of the country and the age had recently published a history-making statement on the subject closest to her heart, to the accompaniment of unprecedented public attention to the equal-rights issue. On the other hand, it was scarcely odd for an ambitious publicist to refrain from forcibly reminding the reader that the ideas put forward in the new pamphlet were not altogether original or unique. It is a strange merit that is suggested for Olympe. A similar point will have to be made about Wollstonecraft, who came along the following year and also did not mention Condorcet—or for that matter Olympe.

The Condorcet context also helps to explain why Olympe's "Declaration" seems to have attracted even less attention at the time than it does now. If one stops to think, this was scarcely unexpected. If French society had already spent the preceding year decrying Condorcet's scandalous ideas, it would not have been much interested to find these same abominable notions echoed by a demirep who was mainly known (however unfairly) as an upstart crackpot with no

intellectual standing. Modern feminist historians endow Olympe with a certain retrospective importance insofar as they ignore Condorcet on the one hand and the Revolutionary Women on the other.

Lastly, about Olympe: there is a telltale issue that helps to relate the general "woman question" to the "social question." This is the question of prostitution as a social problem. We saw that the hanger-on of the aristocracy Olympe de Gouges had denounced the women's march on Versailles as "infamous." We can now observe that the high-class prostitute (*a.k.a.* courtesan) Olympe de Gouges proposed that the prostitution problem be turned over to the police, to "sweep the streets clear" of them and herd them into certain quarters to be designated, all under the control of the cops. After all, unlike courtesans, ordinary prostitutes were Low Creatures. In contrast, the Revolutionary Women led by Claire Lacombe also proposed a social plan to deal with prostitutes. They wanted a project for rehabilitating prostitutes in national homes with "kindness and humanity" to make them "good citizens and mothers of families."

5. Etta Palm

We now come to a figure who was more important than Théroigne and Olympe combined and doubled, because with her we have the first steps toward the *organization* of women.

As the Revolution unfolded, the organizations of mass participation from below were the clubs, or societies, in which the republican "patriots" could be active. Most of these were based on the sections; only a few were citywide societies like the Jacobin Club. Paris was divided into forty-eight sections; in each section, the section assembly was the widest form of base organization of the popular masses. Alongside the section assembly, which had its own section committee and officers, there was also a "popular society" or "fraternal society" based on the section. This sectional society functioned as the vanguard organization of the most militant elements, usually standing to the left of the section as a whole and comprising its most active core.

Usually women had no deliberative vote in the sections, but in the course of the Revolution they were accepted as regular members in many (perhaps most) of the popular sections. *This was where woman suffrage had to be implemented first.* There was much variation from section to section; and a whole spectrum of rights was concerned, from the right of women merely to listen to discussions in silence, to the right to speak, to complete equality in voting, and even to quota places on official committees.

It was in the sansculotte-dominated sections, in the working-class districts, that women's right of participation made the most progress. Here the men's resistance to women's rights was weakest. This was not so because workingmen tended to be more profeminist ideologically. The reason for this pattern (which gainsays many myths of feminist history) had to do, rather, with the class structure. The women involved here were workingwomen and wives of the poor, who were actively involved in keeping the family alive, whose social role gave them a measure of independence vis-a-vis the men; women *who were already "voting" every day on the street on the same issues of survival that were being debated in the sections.*

The few clubs that had a citywide scope functioned as political-tendency centers. The most important, of course, was the club of the Jacobins, which operated (to use an anachronistic term) as the "party" of the Robespierrists. The left-Jacobins, around Hébert ("Hébertists), were strong in the Cordeliers club and in the municipal government, the Commune. To the right of the Jacobins were the clubs leaning to the Girondin moderates. And to the left of the Jacobins (all the Jacobins), constituting a sort of left opposition, were a number of able individuals who were otherwise unlinked, but who were influential in the more militant sections and clubs. The best known of this revolutionary wing were Jacques Roux and Théophile Leclerc. Historians have fastened the label *Enragés* (roughly, wild men) on them, in a notable example of antirevolutionary prejudice masquerading as scholarship.

For present purposes, let us direct our attention to the right wing (pro-Girondin section) of this pattern, or rather to one small corner of

it. In historical retrospect, a special place was occupied by a club called the Cercle Social, in which embryonic ideas about social reorganization stemming from Mably and Morelly were heard. (This *cercle* called itself "social" in a sense that later would get called vaguely "socialist.") The club had been founded by the Abbé Claude Fauchet and Nicolas Bonneville, editor of *La Bouche de Fer*. Within the historical socialist spectrum, Fauchet may be considered a forerunner of social-democratic state-socialism. In the French Revolutionary context, he represented a relatively advanced social program; but politically he stood for "moderation," that is, a minimum of political change in the system. His temperament was neither militant-revolutionary nor liberty-seeking. His fate was going to be joined to that of the Girondins.

It was the Cercle Social that provided the forum for the first attempt at an organized women's movement.

On November 26, 1790, the Cercle Social was scheduled to hear a talk by one Charles Louis Rousseau, who hailed from the Chablis-Tonnerre district in central France. It was to be a speech arguing for the equalization of women's rights with men. It was a unique occasion: this was over a year *before* Olympe de Gouges was moved to write her pamphlet, but of course Condorcet had recently published his great essay.

The talk had been well advertised, and even members of other clubs were present. Events do not always measure up to history: the inexperienced Rousseau proved to be a poor and boring speaker. Even so, a part of the audience gave him applause and encouragement; but the noisier part, comprising those who "knew" that talk about women's rights was nonsense, threatened to stop the meeting. The chairman asked the *women* present if they wanted the speaker to continue; the cry was *Yes, yes!* But the disruptive interruptions continued.

A woman rose from the audience, asked for the floor (against precedent), and said:

> Gentlemen, can it really be possible that the sacred revolution, which gives men their rights, has made the French unjust and uncivil to women! The other speakers have been heard patiently; why interrupt this one, who speaks in favor of women? In the name of the *citoyennes* who are here, I ask that the speaker continue.

This received much applause, but the session had to be suspended anyway. The woman who had spoken up was surrounded by the other women present, in praise and support, and she took the opportunity to exhort them: "Since the French have become Romans, let us imitate the virtues and patriotism of the Roman ladies."

Her name was Etta Palm, née Alders. Now 47, born in Holland, she had carried on her career as a courtesan mainly in Paris, using the aristocratic title "Baroness d'Aelders," which resembled her maiden name. The husband who had contributed the name Palm had disappeared decades before.

This was possibly the first time that a woman spoke on the floor of one of the societies. The Cercle Social, like some others, was already allowing women to attend; only later did some admit women to membership. It was Etta Palm who first set about *organizing* the participation of women in the political life of the Revolution. Her own politics were "moderate," like the club's, not going beyond Girondin republicanism. But she understood one thing that had not entered the minds of our previous subjects: namely, women should organize, as men did. In this sense there can be little doubt that Etta Palm gave the first impulse to the modern feminist movement, even though her name has been virtually consigned to oblivion by feminist historians.

On November 26 she had reacted with presence of mind, ability and poise; this was only the beginning. A new lecture meeting with Rousseau was advertised, and held on December 13. Men were admitted only if accompanied by a woman (a device, by the way, that had to be revived in 1848). Rousseau's lecture, an "Essay on the

Education and Civil and Political Life of Women in the French Constitution," spoke out clearly against special privilege for men and called for giving women "all their rights." According to reports, it was otherwise filled with boring details about education, divorce laws, breast-feeding, etc.; it seems that Rousseau's oratory did not sweep even sympathizers off their feet.

The overall effect on the Cercle Social was positive. At the club's request, on December 30 Palm herself submitted a talk "On the Injustice of the Laws in Favor of Men at the Expense of Women." (It was read out by one of the club secretaries.) The club decided to print it immediately at its own expense. At the session the well-known "Anacharsis" Cloots (the self-proclaimed "orator of the human race") lauded Etta Palm as "the divine Hypatia in person."

The printed speech had echoes in the provinces where women were becoming aware. It was reprinted in Caen; in Creil, north of Paris, a National Guard company formed of women voted her honorable membership and a medal. (I know of no evidence that Olympe's *later* pamphlet had such reverberations among women.)

On March 23, 1791, Etta Palm made an organizational proposal to the Cercle Social, or more exactly to its associated Société des Amis de la Vérité.

> The Society of the Friends of Truth is the first which has admitted us [women] into patriotic meetings. Creil, Alais, Bordeaux, and several others have followed your example. Wouldn't it be useful if, in each section of the capital [the forty-eight sections of Paris], there were formed a patriotic society of *citoyennes—Amies de la Vérité*, Women Friends of Truth—whose central federated Circle would be supervised by you, gentlemen, and which would invite all the Fraternal Societies of the 83 départements to correspond with it? ... Each circle would have its own leadership, and they would all meet once a week as a

> general directorate under the supervision of the director of the Friends of Truth.

She went on to present the idea as if the women's work would be mainly social, philanthropic and educational, rather than political. I think she must have been aware this was a façade.

Palm's bold proposal was greeted with applause, and the founding of the central Circle was decided on the spot. Previous preparations had been made to get the enterprise through. The *Bouche de Fer* had already announced the project on February 19, under the bane of the Federal Club of Patriotic Citoyennes. When the decision was clinched at the March 23 meeting, Palm announced that the founding meeting would be held in two days. The minutes show that she read a letter of congratulations from the top Girondin leader, Brissot. It appears evident that the male leadership of the club was cooperating, though none of the leaders had been known as profeminists. Perhaps we have crypto-feminists here who were willing to help in the background, without being publicly "tainted" by the new wild ideas.

The launching meeting took place in two days as scheduled. This March 25 meeting elected Etta Palm its présidente for a short term (the common pattern). The elected secretary was noted to be a *bien-aimée* of C. L. Rousseau, which may indicate that this gentleman was around. The new club planned to meet weekly, with paid-up members only. The dues set indicate the class composition: three livres per month. This stiff tariff was set this high in order to build a charity fund; it certainly excluded women of the people.

This first meeting of the first women's club of the Revolution proved its potential by taking political acts right off, thanking the Senate for a decree, and protesting a law-code article. The issues involved here, by the way, were such as to interest upper-class women.

The club made one noteworthy organizational attempt, one which manifested both good leadership and bad prospects. Palm wrote to the forty-eight sections of the city, each with its popular assembly headed

by a section committee, with the request that two women representatives be added to each leading committee. It was a good "statesmanlike" proposal, in the abstract. Not one section even responded. Of course, hostility to women in politics was operative, but there was another reason for the nature of the response. After all, this fine proposal came to the sections from a right-wing club entity at a time when the Girondins and their allies were increasingly being fought by a sansculotterie that was moving left in response to socioeconomic issues. The sections and elements that would be most sympathetic with the idea of women's representation were precisely the ones that were girding themselves most fiercely to combat the Girondins' political power.

In fact, the parent club, the Cercle Social, and its associated Friends of Truth, along with the *Bouche de Fer*, were coming to the end of their tether, and gave up the ghost by July 1791. Palm, who was secretary of the women's club now, did not let this stop her work, though she publicly complained of the lack of interest by those to whom she had addressed herself, particularly the lack of contributions to the charity fund. This complaint had meaning only with respect to the rich, who could afford to give money. It is too bad that Palm's thinking revolved within this classbound area, and not only in connection with women's work; for example, she gave the Cercle Social a rosy view of society in her native Holland, "which has neither Bastille nor Red Book..."

But within her classbound and political limitations, she still had one more historic move to make, which alone should have guaranteed her a place in feminist history. On April 1, 1792, she led a woman's delegation before the bar of the Assembly to present, for the first time as an actual political demand, the aim of equal rights for women that Condorcet had first put forward literarily, that C. L. Rousseau had first presented oratorically, that Palm herself had first pursued organizationally, and that Olympe de Gouges had publicized with her "Declaration."

"We come," Etta Palm told the National Assembly, "to ask in the name of the [women's] Society that the laws put our sex on the same level as men." Her presentation demanded that women be admitted to all civil and military offices; it demanded "moral and national education for girls"; it proposed legal divorce, and coming of age at 21; it asked "that political liberty and equality of rights be accorded both sexes."

The delegation was politely received, and the petition was formally sent to an appropriate committee, to be buried. The modern reader may fail to appreciate that this reception was a tribute to the careful, effective, responsible work that Etta Palm had performed in getting her women's movement respected in this hostile terrain, at least for a while. She had chosen a course that went through the moderate mainstream of the Revolution, and she did the best that probably could have been done along this dead-end road. We can see only fragmentary glimpses of her work, whereas we know a great deal more about the operations of a Danton or a Mirabeau; but she had a harder row to hoe; and I suggest that Etta Palm was a leader at least as able as some of the (male) giants of the Revolution whose names have become household words.

How highly regarded she had become, in spite of the hostility to her feminist cause, was shown when she was officially sent to Holland to see if her native country was disposed to receive an ambassador from revolutionary France. (It was not.) True, it is likely that this mission was a way of getting her away from the Paris scene; but the maneuver is itself a tribute to her impact, if not to her political acumen.

In her politics lay Etta Palm's basic failure. While she tried valiantly to push women's rights by way of the right-wing mainstream of the Revolution, that stream was drying up in the course of 1792. While the male-counterpart club had given up by July, Palm's women's society probably petered out by autumn. By the beginning of 1793, her right-wing stance, plus her foreign birth, made her increasingly suspect, and she became an émigrée. For two years she lived quietly in Holland, until the French armies took the United Provinces and proclaimed a

revolutionary republic (the "Batavian Republic"). She was arrested, spent three years in prison, and after her release faded from view.

6. The Keralio Type

Another sort of center for women's political activity was provided by the "mixed clubs" that arose: clubs in which both men and women participated on more equal terms than elsewhere.

The first of the mixed clubs came about partly through an accidental conjuncture. Early in autumn 1790 a schoolmaster, Claude Dansard, brought together artisans and shopkeepers in one of the Jacobin halls as a sort of self-educational group learning the Assembly's new decrees. Because of this educational motivation, the members' wives and children were included. The mixed group took on a life of its own as it grew, until Dansard, who had installed himself as "perpetual president," resigned in face of its growing involvement with politics. For him it was a Frankenstein monster.

The short form of its name was Fraternal Society of Patriots of Both Sexes. The word 'fraternal' occurs in the case of other mixed clubs. One gathers that it was considered to be etymologically de-sexed. On the other hand, in many cases women curtailed the Revolution's watchword to Liberty and Equality.

Among the men who took control of the club was François Robert, a republican lawyer, later a law professor, who acted as Danton's secretary for a time. In 1791 he married the club's most active woman, Louise de Keralio, who thenceforward usually used the name Mme. Robert-Keralio.

She had already made a reputation for herself as a writer, editor, and translator, and appears to have been an abler politico than her new husband. She was probably the *de facto* leading force in the fraternal society. In Mme. Robert-Keralio we have the most prominent woman activist who was more or less aligned with the Jacobins, specifically with the Robespierrist leadership.

But it would be inaccurate to equate Mme. Robert-Keralio's role within the Jacobin tendency to that of Mme. Roland among the Girondins. Mme. Roland, no feminist, played the political game by the old rules, and was at one with the Girondin leaders. Keralio, in contrast, was faced with a Jacobin leadership that was the most consistent antifeminist front in the Revolution.

The Jacobins had no profeminist wing. This statement, like every other one about the Revolution, can usefully be modified a little, but not essentially. It is true that Robespierre's righthand man, Saint-Just, did have some mild sentiments on the subject in his book *L'Esprit de la Révolution et de la Constitution*: against the double standard; for mercy and justice for unwed mothers and punishment for the guilty men; equal culpability in adultery, etc. He suggests Fourier's later axiom about civilization when he remarks that "Among people who are really free, women are free and worshiped..." But his statements do not go very far and are not unambiguous; and there is no indication that he resisted the Jacobins' assault on women's rights when push came to shove. Villiers mentions, without much detail, some other elements in the Revolution that showed some sympathy for Condorcet's views. A Jacobin, François Boissel, published a popular *Catéchisme du Genre Humain* in 1789 (with another edition in 1793) which treated marriage as one of the three scourges of humanity, along with religion and property, but it is not clear if he had anything to say about women's rights; and anyway he was far more radical than most Jacobins.

And so we can repeat: the Jacobins had no profeminist wing; and we can add that within their ranks were the most vicious enemies of the women's movement, as we will see. We have seen that there was a profeminist current in a corner of the Girondin tendency; and we will see that to the left of the Jacobins the so-called "Enragés" comprised the best feminists of the age. When some historians make ignorant statements about the unrelieved antifeminism of the French Revolution, they are in fact thinking only of the Jacobins. For example, take the Jacobin club in whose hall Keralio's Fraternal Society met: in

the beginning it even refused to receive the Fraternal Society's delegation unless the delegation was all-male, though subsequently it modified this intransigent attitude.

Keralio was a frequent speaker at the Fraternal Society, and also occasionally showed up on the platform of the Jacobin club, especially as attendance at the Society began to decline in the course of 1792. The Society's political moderation was at least one reason for the decline, especially for the loss of male members. Here is an indication of how far the Society led by Keralio was lagging behind the people: in August 1792 it expelled two women members (described as "colored women," incidentally) for the offence of demanding that all royal statues be torn down and for publicly propagating "turbulent and incendiary proposals." It is true that in 1793 we find the Society, or delegations in its name, attacking the rising cost of living; but actively involved in this work was Pauline Léon, who later that year became a cofounder of the Revolutionary Women. Indeed, when the Revolutionary Women became active, Keralio's Society sought to put notices in the press proclaiming that it should not be confused with the revolutionaries.

Certainly Keralio should not be confused with Léon, and not even with Etta Palm. (Palm had been admitted into the Fraternal Society in 1791 despite Keralio's hostility to her, but apparently she did not become active in it.) Both Léon and Palm, with their different politics, pushed for independent women's political activity. In contrast, Keralio's view was not *very* far from that of Mme. Roland.

Mme. Roland acted on the conception that women's only possible role in politics was to act behind the scenes, not coming into collision with prevailing sentiments. "...I do not believe," she said, "that our mores yet allow women to show themselves. Women must inspire good, and nourish and inflame all feelings good for the fatherland, but not appear to participate in political work. They can work openly only when the French all deserve the name of free men. Till then, our lightmindedness and our bad ways will make whatever they tried to do at least ridiculous..." *Our light-mindedness*—as usual, this woman of the

upper classes substitutes the class for the sex; for the sansculotte women who had to work for a living had no time to be "light-minded," etc. By refusing to confront antifeminist constraints, she made it impossible to change them. By pulling strings from the shadows, she solved her personal problem of participation, but helped reinforce the constraints on others who were less happily placed. In the end her example became an argument against the politicalization of women, as if her influence had been responsible for Girondism.

She wrote: "You [men] have strength,...courage, perseverance, wide perspectives and great talent; it is for you to make the laws in politics: govern the world... But without us [women] you will not be virtuous, or loving, or lovable, or happy. Then keep the glory of authority in all ways; we want domination only through your hearts, and thrones only in your hearts..." This was the typical galimatias which men cheered with a smirk, and which strengthened the sexist stereotypes on the basis of which the political exclusion of women was justified.

No more than Mme. Roland did Keralio approve of raising demands for women's rights. She argued: "The domestic duties of women forbid them all administrative functions," echoing one of the main bases of antifeminism. In her we have the type of woman prominent in the mixed clubs who opposed the new feminism with its political thrust; who were in favor of adapting the old pattern of the woman politico as a manipulator in the salon, corridor, or bedroom. Of course, this role was possible only for a few women of the upper classes.

It is possible, perhaps likely, that the Keralio type was characteristic of the women's movement (or its beginnings) in the provinces. In some cities outside Paris women formed their own societies, but this does not necessarily mean they were advanced beyond the mixed-club type. For we find out that in some places it was the men who preferred that the women meet separately, out of "decency" (prudery or sexism); this was segregation *de facto*. For example, in Lyons an Association of Citoyennes was formed; but it was the local section leader, a

businessman, who laid down its rules as his wife took the presidency—rules excluding politics in favor of charity, religious work, etc. On the other hand, it was in Lyons that the women of the people—not the women of the Association of Citoyennes—took over the city on September 15, 1792, in a struggle against intolerable economic conditions. They dominated the city for three days. "Women police commissioners" established controls over price schedules, which the city authorities were forced to countersign.

Everywhere, above all in revolutionary Paris, the sansculotte women needed a form of organization, comparable to that of the revolutionary clubs formed by men. As long as women's organizations emanated from women of the upper classes, they did not have it. Yet, such was the dynamic drive of the Revolution, before it reached its apogee the prevalent club form of organization did merge with the militant women's movement. The result was the society of Revolutionary Women headed by two of the greatest women leaders in history.

Chapter 2
THE SOCIETY OF REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN OF 1793

The women's movement in the French Revolution reached its apogee with the formation of a unique club, the Society of Republican Revolutionary Women, called for short the "Revolutionary Women" (RW in our English abbreviation).

It was one of the few citywide political clubs, as distinct from section clubs and assemblies. It was the first all-women's revolutionary vanguard association. It was the extreme left wing of the Revolution in organized form. And it made a name for itself in the contemporaneous movement. And yet, despite these unique qualifications, its very memory has been largely suppressed in the writing of what passes for history. Or perhaps *because* of these qualifications...

The life and death of the Revolutionary Women was closely bound up with the left wing in the Revolution, and this needs explaining first.

1. "Wild Men" and Revolutionary Women

The extreme left wing of the Revolution does *not* mean the left wing of the Jacobins. Left Jacobinism was the tendency represented by Hébert, Chaumette, and much of the leadership of the Commune and the Cordeliers Club. Outside of the Jacobin Club and hostile to it, critical also of its left-wing Hébertists, was an unorganized tendency which we can label for convenience the Left Opposition: the revolutionary *anti*-Jacobins.

The leading men of this tendency were Jacques Roux, Théophile Leclerc, and Jean Varlet. Actually they formed no group, club, or organization of their own, and even cooperated among themselves only sporadically. We will see that, organizationally speaking, the Revolutionary Women were well ahead of them; if (say) Jacques Roux had had Claire Lacombe's operational sense, events might have gone a little differently.

The label *Enragés* ("wild men") was pinned on these men by later historians who were as willing to replace science with slander as the Jacobins themselves were ready to replace criticism with calumny in

order to dispose of their enemies. There was nothing "wild" about Roux or Leclerc; they were intelligent, rational, compassionate men in the context of their day, and much more admirable personally than most of the Jacobin leaders who sought to assassinate their characters before they guillotined their bodies. The legend of their "bloodthirstiness" is of a piece with the myth that Lenin ate little children for breakfast. If to this day the real role of these men has to be excavated, all the more is this true of the women who fought for the same goals and ideals, in flagrant disregard of "womanly" stereotypes.

The "Enragés" became enraged around two major issues on which they differed from the Jacobin establishment. One was the embryonic class issue: the socioeconomic needs and demands of the poorest workers, against the economic exploitation of high prices by the rising propertied classes, an exploitation aided or tolerated by the new bureaucrats of the Revolution. The other was the related issue of popular control of the Revolution from below, of democratic rights *in* the Revolution, and eventually of opposition to the forms taken by the Jacobin Terror. On both of these basic issues, Claire Lacombe and the RW stood foursquare with Roux and Leclerc.

At the same time, this oppositional alliance on the left was the most consistent and militant profeminist wing of the Revolution, as the most bitterly antifeminist wing was the Jacobin leadership.

There was a clear social reason for the leftists' innovative attitude on women's rights. Jacques Roux was not primarily a theoretician, nor did he act mainly on the basis of thought-out political generalities. In large part he was responding to the needs and aspirations of the poor sansculottes among whom he lived, articulating their viewpoints. As an ex-priest, he knew, better than most, how the people lived and what women went through. In the poor sansculotte sections, the day-to-day role of women was quite different from what it was in the circles around Mme. Roland or Robert-Keralio or Etta Palm's three-livre club. The workingwomen did not spend time fretting about the innate coquetry or lightmindedness of "Woman," or similar nonsense

characteristic of women who were rich enough to cherish this view of themselves.

They had to feed hungry families. This formed their politics; this *was* their politics in the first place; and so they were not imbued with the superstition that only men could act politically. And in acting on their "politics" they did not typically react to issues by writing declarations or pamphlets; they went into the streets. And in the streets they assumed equal participation in the teeming life of sansculotte politics, without anyone's say-so. From the streets they went into the clubs, the section assemblies, the Revolutionary societies.

It was in the sansculotte-dominated sections and assemblies that the increasing participation of women was most widely accepted, whether in practice or in by-laws — until the Jacobin crackdown on women's rights in 1794.

There is a type of feminist historians who can recognize only their own type of feminism in the events of history — the type of feminism that writes documents, makes public gestures, and strikes certain known postures, while it passes over with a blind eye the mass surge of the sansculotte women into political life. In another part of the forest, the historians (male, anti-sansculotte, pro-Jacobin or counterrevolutionary) tend to regard the political role of the workingwomen as an irrelevant curiosity, since Everyone Knows that only men count historically. As a result, we often have only fragmentary indications of the considerable participation of the sansculotte women in the life of the clubs, as well as the life of the city, especially as hard economic times and a soaring cost of living aroused a turbulent resentment in 1792-94. Historians tend to treat turbulence as engineers treat noise, something that has to be tuned out.

Jacques Roux was, personally, exceptionally sensitive to the important role of women in the Revolution even before he moved to the far left. It is said that it must have been his background as a priest that gave him this insight, and perhaps this helped; but it did not apply to Leclerc's case; and it is not altogether necessary to look for special reasons in the case of men who were immersed in the hard lives of their

sansculotte neighbors. We have seen that it was Roux who, right after the fall of the Bastille, testified to the broad participation of the women of Paris in that first upsurge of the Revolution. In the same printed sermon there is his admiring comment on the new fact of feminine militancy as distinct from the old stereotype of womanly timidity:

> A sex, naturally timid inside and outside the home, almost incapable by nature of warlike enterprise, nevertheless behaves as if brought up on the battlefield, and, in the intoxication of patriotism, exchanges the distaff and bobbin for the glory and perils of combat, the myrtle of love for the laurels of Mars.

The language is very eighteenth-century and early-Roux, but the thought was calculated to make "manly" men shudder. It only led Roux to express added admiration for the women who fought "like roaring lions."

Leclerc's militant profeminism was expressed in his total support to the aspirations and movement of the Revolutionary Women. Young, handsome, brilliant, and bold, he became personally linked with the two outstanding women leaders: he was Claire Lacombe's lover in the spring of 1793, and he married Pauline Léon on November 18 of that fateful year. It is not uncommon for historians and others to assume that women's political activity is conditioned by the men they sleep with; but this chestnut has no application to the present case. Lacombe's and Léon's militancy and views antedate their liaison with Leclerc. On the other hand, Leclerc may well have had his profeminist ideas sharpened up by his friends; his keen mind could have picked up this element of advanced thought as easily as C. L. Rousseau's; and of course another influence may have been his ally Jacques Roux.

The essential fact before us is that the militant women's movement could make an alliance only with revolutionary men, only with the extreme left wing of the Revolution.

2. Two Women

Pauline Léon had become a Revolutionary activist in Paris before Claire Lacombe came to the city. Léon is the only Parisienne in our cast of characters. Born September 28, 1768, her father was a chocolate maker who, though poor, was a liberal *philosophe*-type intellectual in his own way. He educated his daughter in the ideas of the new age, and in fact she became a competent writer. Until her marriage to Leclerc, she worked with her mother in the family trade.

Not yet 21, this chocolate worker became a militant of the Revolution from the first day after the Bastille. In February 1791 when she participated in a demonstration against Lafayette, she was introduced to the leftist Cordeliers Club and the local "fraternal society." She fought in the crucial *journées* of the on-rolling Revolution. In March 1792 — a month *before* Etta Palm's demand to the Assembly — she appeared before that body at the head of a women's delegation to present demands on behalf of the women. The central demand, at this point, was the right of women to arm themselves to defend the Revolution — on the home front and under official command. We have seen that this was not a new proposal, but Léon's address put the matter in a wider context when she said: "You cannot refuse, and society cannot deprive us of, this right that Nature gives us, unless it is claimed that the Declaration of Rights has no application to women..."

The historian Marie Cerati, I think, is right in maintaining that the political meaning of this address went beyond the request for arms; that it utilized the patriotic issue as a vehicle for asserting the more general right of women to an active part in political life. "This petition," says Cerati, "reawakened the people of Paris, who were dozing after the shooting in the Champs de Mars, as was bitterly noted by the president of the Assembly, Guiton de Morveaux. He thought

good to contrast the ardor of the women to masculine apathy; and the Assembly ordered the printing of Pauline Léon's hotblooded address."

Thus Léon was becoming known as a leading woman militant. We have seen that she already had some club experience, by attending the Cordeliers (which was dominated by left Jacobins, with some "Enragé" influence) and by actively participating in Mme. Robert-Keralio's mixed society (which was too moderate for her politically). She may have been the initiating spirit in the founding of the society of Revolutionary Women, along with women militants who had been drawn around her in the course of her activity.

Claire Lacombe was only a little older, born March 4, 1765, in a small town south of Toulouse. Her baptismal certificate does not give her father's occupation or position, and next to nothing is known of her early life. What is certain is that, before coming to Paris, she was an actress in southern France — a modestly successful one according to some indications. It appears that her republican sentiments attracted hostility, enough to cause her to pull up stakes in the spring of 1792, soon after her 27th birthday. She arrived in Paris in April. She did not work on the stage in the capital and, during the following year and a half, lived on her savings and by selling possessions. (This was later verified by hostile investigators who unsuccessfully sought some reason to discredit her.)

Her first appearance on the revolutionary scene was on July 25, 1792, at the Assembly, where she presented and read her petition for a post in the army. As we have mentioned, this was the usual way in which militant women proposed a role for themselves in the Revolution. Lacombe's petition was explicitly put forward as a personal one; she made clear she did not recommend this step for mothers or for women who did not enjoy her own free and unattached status. Politically, her petition was an eloquent paean to liberty, plus a special attack on Lafayette, who represented the last stand of royalist sentiment. The address was officially welcomed, and even ordered to

be printed; but her request for military employment was ignored as usual.

In the next month she showed that her military offer was not mere rhetoric. In the storming of the Tuileries she fought at the head of an attacking corps, and an official citation testified to her role in rallying the Federals under fire. This gave her a burgeoning reputation, which she increased in the next period as her "burning eloquence" was heard in the fraternal societies she attended. There is no sign that she ever took the weak line of being devoted to "women's work" — charity and such — as Etta Palm had done or pretended to do. She addressed herself to the main political issues of the day in the same way as the men did. We know that at a critical juncture, on April 3, 1793, at the Jacobins' meeting, she was heard urging bold measures to combat the Girondin threat represented by General Dumouriez.

No doubt her brunette beauty, attested by all, was no hindrance to her welcome at the political clubs. But she herself addressed political questions as one militant to others. Her public demeanor, reported a contemporary, was imposing, dignified, and majestic. Among the scraps of information that are available about her on the personal side are several testifying to her generosity and warmth of feeling for friends and coworkers, as well as unflagging nobility of heart and courage in the face of often venomous hostility.

In May of 1793 Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon were the leading figures in the founding of the *Société des Citoyennes Républicaines Révolutionnaires* — the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women: called the *Femmes Révolutionnaires*, the Revolutionary Women.

3. The Revolutionary Women and Feminism

The RW was founded on May 10, 1793. The statement of purpose said it was "to deliberate on the means of foiling the plans of the enemies of the Republic" in "a society which only women could join."

The modern reader may not immediately appreciate how provocative these terms were. Etta Palm's women's club had come

forward as a nonpolitical group concerned with special tasks suitable for the Gentler Sex; but the RW bluntly presented itself as a political society concerned with the central issues of the Revolution in the same terms as the Jacobins or Cordeliers. In fact there were only about four societies in Paris which purported to play this role, the other clubs being sectional societies.

The RW was not a sectional club; not a "women's work" group; not a "mixed club" which tolerated women members. It was the first and only organization that openly proposed to organize women for participation in political life on the same terms as men. The RW was the cutting edge of the women's movement in the Revolution.

Some feminist historians have failed to understand this because of their limited conception of feminism. They brush the Revolutionary Women aside as irrelevant to the *ism* because the RW were allegedly concerned not with "women's issues" but with the central questions of the day. Olympe de Gouges is to be celebrated because she had a pamphlet printed on women's rights; the first organization of women militants that ever existed is to be ignored because it did not conform to a certain conception of "feminism." Let us examine the facts.

It is true, as we know, that the RW did not base the programmatic crux of their existence on special women's questions. They chose to *assume* their rights, and thereby forced everyone else to react to this assumption. Their stance said to the people: *We do not counterpose women's rights to the central needs of the Revolution; we use women's rights to achieve the Revolution.*

The RW did not stop at advocating women's rights or demanding rights that did not yet belong to them. *They took those rights*, rights that women were not supposed to have. In this way they did not present men with the prior necessity of agreeing to or dissenting from the granting of women's rights to organize and act in politics; they did not ask for prior permission. The men were confronted with a different decision: whether to deal with the *fait accompli,* whether or not to recognize and deal with the RW as an independent revolutionary

society. The RW did not rely on argumentation to give them this right to participate in politics in an equal manner; they demonstrated their right to participate *by participating*, by working for the Revolution. Men affected to scorn the ability of women to deal with politics clearheadedly. (As if most men did that! — but this is another matter.) Claire Lacombe did not have to *argue* that women could do this, because she dazzled them by her actual political work in both talk and action.

The result was that the RW could not be, and were not, refuted by argumentation, either. The Robespierrists had to deal with them as with other dangers to their rule. On the one hand, Olympe de Gouges had put the slogan of equal rights on the banner of a reactionary, and she could be cut down without any popular reaction at all. On the other: the RW made women's rights an instrument of revolution, and in order to bring them down (as we will see) the authorities had to mount their first organized attack on feminism. This would be hard to explain if the impact of the RW was irrelevant to feminism.

What the foregoing discusses is a question of programmatic emphasis: the RW's way of implementing women's rights by putting the general needs of the Revolution in first place. But there is also a question of fact. Some feminist histories assume that the Revolutionary Women were not *concerned* about women's rights and feminist issues as such. This is not true.

The minutes and papers of the society are not extant. (As has happened to so many other daring dissidents, documentation about them has disappeared or been destroyed, while their victorious enemies feel free to spread uninhibited lies about them; the transmission of this sad state of affairs is called historical research.) We have few details about the day-to-day life of the society. Often the information is fragmentary, and the fragments come from bitterly hostile reports and statements by venomous enemies. But despite these difficulties, *we do know that the RW concerned themselves importantly with the question of women's rights*. It could hardly be otherwise.

For example: we learn from Soboul that in some of the section assemblies the more militant women were not content with having their votes accepted *de facto* but wanted explicit recognition of their right to vote. In September 1793 — at the high point of the RW's impact — the women of the Droits-de-l'Homme section denounced the prejudice that would make "passive, isolated people" out of half the population, the female half. *To make this protest, they went to the Revolutionary Women:*

> And should women who are endowed with the ability to feel and express their thoughts pronounce their exclusion from public affairs? The Declaration of Rights is common to both sexes.

The same month, a contemporary report by one Latour-Lamontagne noted that "feminine pride" had struck a new chord: the women were being told they should demand the same rights as men. This report may refer to the demonstration at the RW, or indeed at a second demonstration.

It happens that we have only one extensive account of a meeting of the RW. It is as if we are allowed to sample one meeting of the society by chance, one meeting and only one. It happens that *this meeting was entirely devoted to the issue of women's rights at large* — precisely the issue which the RW is alleged to have ignored.

This account comes from an acridly hostile source. A certain Proussinalle one day took an English aristocrat slumming; to titillate the visitor's noble sensibilities, he was taken to see that entertaining curiosity — a club of women who were actually pretending to be a political society. Proussinalle's account explains that he split his sides laughing at the very idea. But the fact that the narrator was an ass in no way obscures the main point: the meeting thus fortuitously chosen was on the subject the RW are supposed to have spurned.

Claire Lacombe, in the chair, asked reporters on the subject to present their findings. A report was read by "Sister Monic" which

astonished even Proussinalle's bird-brain by its "superb flight" over the facts of women's history. (He concluded it must have been written by a man; for Monic was only a woman of the people who ran a little mercer's shop on the Petite-Rue-du-Rempart: how could she know about these things?) Monic argued: we need not bog down in the dust of history; we have seen the valor of women in our own Revolution and before our own eyes. Here she referred among other things to the women's march on Versailles, and, "despite the modesty of the présidente [Lacombe]," she recalled the latter's role in the storming of the Tuileries "at the head of a corps of Federals."

The second part of Monic's report took up "the aptitude of women in government." After another historical survey, she ended as follows: "From this it can be concluded that women are worthy of governing — I would almost say, better than men. I ask the Society in its wisdom to consider the place that women should have in a republic, and whether they should be excluded from all posts and administrations." Vigorous applause. Then other members made proposals for continued consideration, including admission of women into all places in government. (This makes it clear that other meetings on allied subjects were held or scheduled.)

Then, apparently after the end of the members' discussion period, Proussinalle reported surprisingly that Olympe de Gouges was present and asked for the floor. (This is the only known contact of Olympe with any of the revolutionary clubs.) Proussinalle devoted almost as much space to reproducing Olympe's talk as he gives to all the rest of the proceedings, although he makes no mention of her pamphlet; for she was Personality.

Olympe set out to add certain "essential proposals" that Monic had left out of her admirable report. Were these omissions perhaps related to a program of women's rights? Not in the least. Olympe added these "essential" thoughts:

(1) *Women are important in inspiring their warrior men.*

(2) *On a one-to-one basis, women can dominate their lovers; men's "pride" becomes dominant only in the mass.*

(3) *Women's costume is their greatest obstacle.*

And a final smashing proposal:

(4) *Women should be in charge of — holiday celebrations.*

It is painfully clear that Olympe's head is back in Old France, which she had never left, and that her conception of women's role was that of the old regime.

For the reason explained, we do not know how often such discussions were held at formal meetings, still less how much discussion took place off the floor. But one thing is certainly clear: the RW was definitely *not* a "consciousness-raising" klatsch. The Revolution was raising consciousness all about the society. *If the RW had been mainly a forum for talk about equal rights, it would have been far more easily tolerated, and Robespierre's men would not have been moved to suppress it.*

4. The First Month of the RW

This point reminds us of an episode which may indeed have contributed to the formation of the RW in the first place. It took place three months before its founding.

A deputation of women from one of the sansculotte sections asked the Jacobins to be allowed to meet in their hall, to fight profiteering and rising prices. (These objectives mean they were sansculotte women of the sort then following Pauline Léon.) When it looked as if the request might be granted, Robespierre intervened to stop it, on the ground that such meetings might cause alarm (that is, trouble for the leaders). The women thereupon denounced the Jacobins for sheltering profiteers in their own ranks. (This is an accusation later raised by the RW.)

One of the Jacobins responded: "*If we permit the citoyennes to meet here, thirty thousand women might get together and whip up a Paris movement disastrous for liberty.*" (That is, disastrous for the Jacobins.) It is a startlingly frank admission of how much the Jacobins feared the mere fact of sansculotte women organizing — on their left flank.

When, three months later, the RW decided to form their society and meet on the premises of the Jacobin Club, they did not apply for permission; they simply met, and then announced their presence to the men. They later had to move to other quarters at Sainte-Eustache.

The Jacobin leaders were not the only ones alarmed by women's organization. We saw in Chapter 1 that Etta Palm had gotten some discreet encouragement from the Girondin leader Brissot; but it was another matter with Brissot when it came to the "pushy" women of the people, who attacked propertied gentry. Brissot denounced them as "wild women" — "bacchantes." Danton joined in heaping execrations on the heads of the militants. Crooks and graft-takers (who were going to be exposed) like Fabre d'Eglantine cursed the "emancipated hussies." It must be understood that these hussies were not busy *advocating* emancipation. Much worse: instead of advocating rights, they took them. *This* is what sent a special thrill of alarm through the body politic.

The RW did not inspire fear by its vast size. It probably had about a hundred members or so on the books; Proussinalle's account showed about 70 members at the meeting he attended. This was neither extremely large or small. The strength of a society was importantly reckoned in terms of the numbers it could mobilize for an action; in the case of the RW, this was sometimes said to have mounted to thousands of women in particular junctures, but it no doubt varied considerably.

The RW started with pro-Jacobin sympathies, as evidenced by its proposal for affiliation. There is also Lacombe's statement that at first she and her friends were politically "infatuated" with Robespierre. The club wanted to operate in effect as the women's section of the Jacobin

tendency. It was the Jacobin leadership that withheld its hand because of the potential danger.

For the first months of its existence — say, May to August the RW's activity was hailed even in Jacobin ranks and in the Convention. The women, for example, participated prominently in the civic celebrations that had become an important part of Paris's revolutionary life. They were certainly not yet dismissed as "wild women"; this smear spread as they went into opposition to the Revolution's establishment. Indeed, at one point, in June, they sought to calm excited spirits and restore order as women began reacting tumultuously to the economic squeeze.

Above all, during this period their militancy was directed mainly against the danger which they saw coming from the right wing of the Revolution, the Girondins, whose fall came on June 2. During this phase, the Revolutionary Women took the Jacobins' enemies to be their own; still they differentiated themselves from the Jacobins in practice by the greater aggressiveness and boldness of their proposals. The men of the Jacobin tendency were more cautious (the pejorative synonym is pussyfooting) and provided a more shilly-shallying sort of leadership, they felt.

Two days after the founding of the RW, their delegation at the Jacobin Club made proposals for tougher action against the Right, as well as for heavier taxes on the rich; they asked for the formation of women's battalions, as had other women before them. A few days later, they made common cause with the Cordeliers on similar proposals, combining demands for stepped-up action against the Girondins with plans for crushing profiteers and for mass arming of the people. On May 27 an RW delegation at the Jacobins promoted the women's program; the spokesman told the men that her comrades "were not domestic animals" and were ready for action against the enemies of the Revolution.

Already in this first month of existence the Revolutionary Women organized women's demonstrations — the first overtly *organized* mass

actions by women — directed against the Girondins' attacks on the sansculotte left. They raised a row about being admitted to the Convention sessions on the same terms as men. One day an RW group created a disturbance after being barred; one of them was arrested; a crowd of women tried unsuccessfully to snatch her from the gendarmes, and then packed the courtroom as she was arraigned. In one melee around the Convention doors, a guard asked the women who had given them permission to gather there. A woman snapped back: "*L'égalité!* Equality did! Aren't we all equal?"

Politicians and papers began to comment with increasing frequency that assemblages ("mobs") of women were exercising pressure by their presence on the Assembly and on the Jacobin Club. The erroneous belief was expressed that they were being egged on by Robespierre and his friends; for *men* had to be behind this new development — women could not organize women, could they? By the end of May, only three weeks after the founding of the RW, the Girondins were indignantly calling on the Paris authorities to repress "the women who call themselves revolutionaries" and who were "running around the streets yelling like mad," "steel in one hand and the banner of revolt in the other," and so on.

The Girondin Buzot even stated, in his memoir of the time, that Lacombe as the head of the RW had become so important that her support could swing the balance in the conflict between Robespierre and Danton. Perhaps this was an exaggeration, but it at least reflects the extent to which the RW quickly became bogeys to their enemies. Certainly, in the course of the campaign that led to the elimination of the Girondins from the Convention, the RW were so much in the forefront, so much in the public eye, that Buzot's memoir wonders whether the Girondins should not have saved themselves by seizing those two foci of subversion, "the Jacobins and the women's club."

It was in the course of this period that the Girondins, facing defeat, sought to use the last shreds of their power to strike at the left wing of the Jacobin tendency, around Hébert. On May 26 the RW under

Lacombe's leadership organized a street demonstration in support of Hébert; sixteen sections also backed him. The hesitating Robespierre (Mathiez tells us) now swung over to take the lead against the Girondins. The Girondins were finished when a sansculotte-organized insurrection temporarily took over Paris.

The Revolutionary Women were totally involved in this movement, along with other left forces. On May 27 one of the Revolutionary Women, speaking before the Jacobin Club, told them that the women's society was gearing to join in the imminent insurrection: "We have sounded the tocsin of liberty in all hearts. We want to back up your zeal and share your perils. Tell us where our presence is needed." The Jacobin chairman congratulated the speaker and applauded the women's zeal.

Once the Girondins had been eliminated and the Jacobins ensconced in power on a national scale, it was inevitable that the Robespierre leadership should look on the RW with a wary eye. It resisted the pull to the left. No matter how the RW regarded themselves, Robespierre understood that they were a potential threat on his left.

The threat from the left became real in conjunction with the worsening of the economic situation of the mass of people during 1793.

5. Choosing up Sides

During 1792 and 1793, soaring prices of staple goods made hunger a reality for the Paris poor. Scarcities, real or induced, added to the economic nightmare of the mass of people. Profiteering in the crude sense was only one part of the economic picture, but it was rife — in the circles of the new bourgeoisie; in the ranks of the little shopkeepers; and also in the ranks of the leading political parties, Jacobins included, as subsequent trials proved.

The term profiteering was not yet in use, but it best suggests what the people saw as the enemy. In the contemporaneous language, the devils were the "speculators" and commodity cornerers and hoarders

who were blamed for hoisting prices. The main drive behind the movement of discontent was simple want and privation, the spur of starvation. This was also one important reason why the issue pushed the sansculotte women of Paris to the fore.

This is not the place to discuss whether the programmatic demands then raised by the left were economically and socially sophisticated enough to be effective. It should not be surprising to find that all sides were unenlightened and naive about such matters. *But that is not how the real issues were posed before the people.*

To the women of the people who saw their children going hungry, political lines resolved into social essentials. The basic divide was between two kinds of actors in this social drama: on the one hand, those who wanted to help the poor sansculottes, and on the other, those who wanted to sacrifice them to what they called the "higher interests" of the Revolution. In social reality, sacrificing the interests of the mass of people meant sacrificing them *to the interests of some other social stratum*. In terms of the ongoing social struggle, one either helped the poor to smash the profiteers, or else one sheltered the profiteers (naturally, in the interests of the Revolution) and helped to smash the movement of discontent.

Actually, there was a third approach, or rather a two-and-a-half approach, as always: there were those whose hearts bled for the poor people as profusely as was practical, but who, when push came to shove, dragged their feet and pulled their punch at every point, because they could not resolve to break with the responsible authorities, whom they accepted as incarnations of the Revolution.

The main dichotomy stated above described the antagonism between the Revolutionary establishment behind Robespierre and the sansculotte left — the latter being represented in unorganized fashion by the leftists who have been given the pejorative tag of Enragés. The Jacobin leadership, no more than the Girondin leadership before them, could not cross the magic line constituted by the interests of property. Robespierre was impelled along this course not by sympathy with

profiteering, which of course he execrated, but by the social realities: the class forces on which the Revolution balanced, and which set its limits.*

To be sure, it is strenuously argued — by historians like Mathiez and Soboul, for example — that the Revolution had no "realistic" alternative to the Robespierrist course; that the mass of people had to be condemned to hunger and exploitation, in the "higher interest" of the Revolution; and presumably that the Enragés *had* to be framed up and assassinated... For present purposes I merely want to point out that it has always been hard to convince the victims that this course is reasonable and moral. For the participants actually involved on the social scene, the real question before each one is not "Whose victory is inevitable?" (whatever that means), but rather: "Which side are you on?" Historians who cannot distinguish between these two questions may sometimes deserve our sympathy but never our respect.

Therefore we wish not to examine rationales but to exhibit the nature of the social struggle that was powered by the victims' resentment. In this framework, the two-and-a-half approach (in later political jargon sometimes called "left centrism") was represented by the faction of left Jacobins around Hébert, Chaumette and the leaders of the Commune (that is, the city government as distinct from the national). This was the vacillating center, capable of sincerely making ferocious noises against the profiteers and convulsively making efforts to do something about it, until they were swung back to the safer ruts of political "realism" by the equally sincere desire not to break the "unity of the Revolution," i.e., not to break the ties binding them to the establishment.

Such sociopolitical antagonisms cannot easily be blurred over as long as the people are in motion below, spurred by privation. The

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* This is a highly controversial subject, indeed an inflammatory one, that obviously cannot be argued here. For the point of view expressed here, we refer the reader to Guérin's monumental work (see *Note on Sources*).

j*ournée* of February 25 witnessed a riotous pillaging of food stores and other shops. There is no evidence that Roux, unlike Marat, egged on such mob actions. What Roux and the sansculotte militants agitated for was government action to enforce price ceilings on staples (the "Maximum"), fixed price schedules, stern enforcement at the source by store visitations, jail for offending profiteers, and similar measures to keep down the cost of living. What they got, even as discontent increased, was half-hearted "Maximum" laws that were not enforced. Thus sides were chosen up for the struggle.

It is not true that the approach of the left — of the Enragés or the RW — was narrowly "economic" in some simplistic sense. The issue constantly tended to spill over into a more general one. This general issue was *the social extension of the Revolution*: the extension of its social benefits downwards, down through the lower strata of society. We are now touching on (but of course cannot deal with) the embryonic beginnings of modern socialism; specifically with the precursors of the Babouvist movement of 1796, which was the first form in which an *organized* socialist movement appeared. The echoes of this social issue can be heard not only from the Enragés and the RW but even at times from the Commune centrists of the Hébertist faction.

The Commune naturally became the transmission belt between the economic pressures below it and the National Convention leadership. On April 18 an address by the Commune to the Convention sought to draw the latter's attention to the food question:

> The people...are asking you for bread... It is a question of the poverty-stricken class for whom legislators have done nothing... Let no one raise objections about the right of property. The right of property cannot be the right to starve fellow citizens. The fruits of the earth, like the air, belong to all men.

In June, Roux and his friends presented an economic program to the Convention. They said: Your new constitution does not proscribe the profiteers; you have not done all you have to do. "Watch out: how long will you suffer the rich to suck the blood of the poor?"

For raising these accusatory questions they were angrily expelled, and the Jacobins set in motion the drive to crush their accusers instead of crushing the profiteers. But it was only because of this pressure from the lowest strata of the hurting people that the Maximum was voted at all — in May, then extended in September. The fine words were not enforced; *let them eat words*! Getting the Maximum onto the books only shifted the focus of the social struggle to the question of enforcement. In October, the Commune's Chaumette even went so far as to propose nationalization of enterprises; this was his irritated reaction to the difficulties of controlling the profiteering enterprisers.

In his history of the Revolution, the early state-socialist Louis Blanc, who was of course hostile to the Enragé left, pointed to the Maximum issue as a measure that "implied a vast social revolution." If we highlight the word 'imply,' this was also the implication of Roux's June address, which has become known as the "Manifesto of the Enragés." It presented a program for shifting the center of gravity of the Revolution toward the interests of the poor sansculottes and away from the interests of the men of property.

The Enragés (as has been often pointed out) were not socialists — if by socialism one means the presentation of a definite plank for the introduction of a new social order based on the abolition of the capitalist system. This is not to be found in the "Manifesto of the Enragés" or other writings of the left. But the criterion itself represents a misunderstanding of how the history of socialism really developed. What the Enragés — and the Revolutionary Women too — proposed was more fundamental than a proposal about social orders: carrying on the class struggle for the interests of the mass of people *regardless of the interests of property and the ruling classes.* The sansculotte demands could not be carried out within the framework of the new or old propertied

classes; they therefore bore within themselves the "vast social revolution" that Blanc recognized. This is why the Enragés were the heralds of modern socialism.

Struggle for the sansculotterie *regardless*... This is the socioeconomic issue that united the individuals who have been given the Enragé tag (Jacques Roux, Leclerc and Varlet in particular) and that united them politically with the Revolutionary Women. In this way the RW, who had started by wanting to be the women's section of the Jacobins, became in fact something like the women's section of the unorganized Enragé tendency — in fact, the only *organization* of the revolutionary left in Paris.

The Robespierre establishment had to remove this pressure from its left flank. It had two weapons to use against the Enragés: (1) slander, especially the charge that these leftists were really agents of the counterrevolution — a system of big lies later plagiarized by the Stalin regime for its Moscow Trials; and (2) the political argument resting on an appeal to the "unity of all revolutionary forces," meaning that the poor had the duty to starve quietly without making trouble for the leaders. (The "unity" appeal was the prime method used by the Stalinist forces in the Spanish Civil War to crush their left opponents within the anti-Franco front.) While wielding these lethal weapons, sharper than the guillotine, the Jacobins did what they could to pretend that they were acceding to the leftist demands, such as the Maximum laws.

Jacques Roux was arrested on August 22, temporarily released on the 27th, arrested again on September 5, and this time sent to the Sainte-Pélagie prison. He remained in prison until he committed suicide in protest, January 12, 1794. From September on, successively, the Jacobin power struck at Leclerc, Claire Lacombe, and Varlet, until all were eliminated. When the Jacobins thus destroyed the pressure on their left flank, the Thermidoreans were enabled to strike from the right, without effective resistance.

6. The Fight for the Sansculotterie

Since there was no *organized* force behind Jacques Roux, the Jacobins felt confident enough to strike at him by arbitrary arrest, relying on the two weapons described. In the case of the Revolutionary Women, *two* frame-up attempts were necessary in the ensuing two months before the Jacobins could properly utilize a split in the ranks of the sansculotterie. This pattern requires some preliminary explanations.

After the fall of the Girondins, and as the cries of the needy became louder, the activity of the RW concentrated increasingly on economic issues, as described above. But it must be understood that they had paid attention to economic issues from the beginning of the RW's existence. We have already mentioned some incidental examples. The historian Cerati says that a number of the Revolutionary Women were recruited to the club from the women's demonstrations and food riots of February.

On May 19, accompanied by a Cordeliers deputation, Claire Lacombe had lectured the Jacobins in these terms: "Legislators, strike at the speculators, those who corner the market on products, and the egoist-tradesmen. There is a terrible plot that is starving the people by pushing provisions to enormous prices... Our hearts are torn by the sight of the people's poverty. Our aim is to save Man..."

In July, besides the Maximum the RW were demanding relief measures for the poor such as the organization of public aid to the indigent. By this time, if not before, it was Claire Lacombe who was recognized as the outstanding leader and speaker of the RW; throughout, Pauline Léon stood at her side.

At the beginning of August, their main ally Leclerc, in his paper *L'Ami du Peuple*, published a ringing tribute to the revolutionary work of the RW. He hailed the women as virtually the main driving force of revolutionary courage and energy: "You have merited the priority" in sounding the tocsin of liberty. By the same token, as the RW's left-opposition role became increasingly clear, Claire Lacombe's eloquent speeches for aid to the poor were being received with increasingly

hostile faces — at the Convention, for example. RW delegations were turned away unheard, to keep these troublemaking women silent.

At the end of August, Lacombe presented an important petition to the Assembly which summarized the common programmatic ground of the revolutionary left. Leclerc devoted a whole issue of his paper to this démarche by the women. Through September, also, in spite of the harassment to be described, the RW continued to present concrete, practical programs of measures to be taken in the interests of the people.

If this has to be emphasized, it is because the "wild women" slander still obscures the fact that there was not a single political club of the Revolution which acted more responsibly as serious revolutionists than did the Revolutionary Women. It was because they were too serious as revolutionists that they had to be cut down.

The job was done through the agency of the very profiteering elements who were the targets of the RW's campaign. Involved here were two species of profiteers — big and little — corresponding to the two coming assaults on the RW.

The big ones were the relatively large manufacturing and trading enterprisers, processors, and merchants, whether supplying the government (wartime needs being swollen) or selling to small shopkeepers and enterprisers. The new slogans about Freedom meant, to them, freedom to trade as they pleased, without the restraints that the royal power had formerly imposed to impede business. One can be very sure that they were sincerely opposed to royal oppression; the Revolution had indeed brought them *la Liberté* to follow profit-making norms without inhibition. By September 1792 popular pressure had forced some regulatory action by the government, but the Girondin leader and economist Roland had taken the first opportunity to abrogate these measures.

If Roland supported the new men of property by conviction, Jacobin leaders could be found who were both persuadable and corruptible. We will be concerned with three in particular who took

leading and initiatory roles in the drive to destroy the RW: François Chabot, Claude Basire, and François Desfieux. The first two were exposed as crooks before the year was up, and they were executed for enriching themselves in corrupt money deals. Corruption is one of the main forms in which money exercises political power.

Before going to the guillotine Chabot wrote in a memoir: "Around the middle of September, I was denounced by Hébert, by the Revolutionary Women, and by Dufourny." Of these it was the RW who were most vulnerable. If these leading Jacobin profiteers were anxious to take the lead against the women and to fabricate the case against them, the main body of the Robespierrists (who were not simple crooks) could then join in the hue and cry in order to eliminate the women as a *political* danger.

The small fry were small shopkeepers and such, like the market-stall women. The latter were commonly called *poissardes*, "fishwives." The Jacobins utilized a classic split in class interest within the vague social stratum called the sansculotterie, that socially heterogeneous aggregation of "little people."

The poissardes, to be sure, were by no means the main villains in the profiteering pattern; they themselves were squeezed from above as they squeezed an extra sou or two out of their poor customers. But they were the most visible, the most accessible to defence measures by the increasingly desperate people; hence the harassment from mob action like the June food riots, which the RW had sought to restrain. Many of the proposals for price control had the well-known defect of involving control only at the outlet level; the big operators were less vulnerable to simple means of regulation. The poissardes, even though they may have pushed their little exactions as boldly as anyone else, were themselves victims of this situation.

Thus an antagonism was created between different parts of the sansculotte population. The wage-workers, not yet numerous, were in an especially disadvantageous position. There was a Maximum on wages too, and, as always, *this* Maximum needed no special government

action to enforce it; it was enforced by employers, who were only too glad to hold wages down even as they evaded enforcement of the Maximum on their own prices. In private businesses, wage-workers in demand might possibly insist on and get more than the Maximum, while the authorities turned a blind eye; but in the factories supplying war goods, under government control, the condition of the workers was less favorable. Soboul writes:

> The government, paying suppliers at the rates fixed under the maximum, imposed a fixed wage schedule on the workers, under penalty of favoring inflation. Using the traditional methods of the Old Regime, which the Constituent Assembly had confirmed by the Le Chapelier law — prohibition of strikes and prohibition of workers' organizations — the Committees could silence the workers' demands. Thus the general system of fixed prices accentuated the differentiation in the people's condition; it tended at the same time to divide the sansculotterie and set them up, for various reasons, against the revolutionary government which the sansculotterie itself had brought to power.

The wage-workers, says Soboul, were the principal component in the demonstrations of September 4. But it was the master artisans, shopkeepers, market sellers, etc., whether or not they were also small employers of labor, who could and did exercise the decisive pressure on the authorities. The national authorities (dominated by the Jacobins) and the city authorities (the Commune, dominated by left-Jacobin types like Chaumette) were torn between the necessity for rhetorical radicalism and the practical necessity of appeasing the shopkeepers and stall keepers.

To the women of the poor, the most visible price-hikers were the poissardes. To the poissardes, the most visible enemy (of their ability to charge as much as they could) was the Revolutionary Women. These women, wearing the tricolor cockade which was flaunted by militant patriots, carried on their agitation against profiteering right in the marketplace, denouncing the catastrophic rise in the cost of living and also the government authorities who failed to stop this rise effectively.

On their side, the RW, like Jacques Roux and Leclerc, turned more than ever to appealing to the revolutionary democracy of the masses against the hardening bureaucracy of the Jacobin committees. The very democratic constitution of 1793 had been put on paper by the Jacobins and then put on ice; it had never been put into effect. One of the basic demands of the Enragés was that this constitution be instituted immediately, not in the dim future. This step would give the people down below a greater leverage over the government authorities who did not respond to their needs now.

Leclerc demanded in his paper: "The Constitution, the whole Constitution, nothing but the Constitution." He wrote: "People, do you expect that the revolutionary shakeup in which you put your hope of salvation will come from the constituted authorities? No, they are only the passive organs of the law; they can only preach its execution." The people can expect help only from a "spontaneous movement" to achieve that revolutionary shakeup. In this way he was, in effect, appealing for mass intervention from below to put the Revolution on a new track.

The Enragés and the Revolutionary Women were one on the concrete proposal of what should be done immediately: *Institute the democratic constitution now*. It was not a demand for abstract democracy; it was a way of implementing the struggle for the people's interests. In this framework of ideas, they also denounced the Jacobin system of terror, which (they saw) was the instrument of a bureaucratic apparatus far removed from the people. The Enragés had been, and still were, in favor of stern repression of the pro-aristocratic and

counterrevolutionary forces; but they wanted this basic function of the revolutionary state performed under the open control of the people — as provided in the democratic constitution.

The answer of the Jacobin authorities was to denounce Roux and Leclerc as "anarchists," "disorganizers," etc., thereby providing us with an early collection of such antileftist cusswords.* Roux's incarceration was approved not only by the Robespierrists but also by the Hébertists and Commune shilly-shalliers. Still, Leclerc's paper was making its way. One hostile report of the time said: "his subscribers increase daily and his journal is grabbed with an avidity which proves only too well the principles of disorganization it advocates." (That is: the more the paper appealed to the democratic masses the more "disorganizing" its impact.)

The Revolutionary Women, under Lacombe's leadership, proposed measures along the same lines as Leclerc. On August 26 the RW's petition demanded the application of the constitutional laws. "Organize the government in accordance with the Constitution," it said, "and then we'll believe that ambition does not reign in your Committees." In this way they connected the fight for the Constitution with the fight against bureaucratic careerism and corruption." *What do you suppose the crooks Chabot and Basire really thought of the "disorganizers" who wanted immediate application of the democratic constitution*?

In short, the RW sought a renewal of the Revolution on a new track, one that recognized the overriding social interests of the poor through a political shakeup: "organization of the executive power [constitutionally], destitution of the nobles of all functions, purge of the administrations, creation of extraordinary tribunals." (Soboul's

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* It is little known that, at this late date in the twentieth century, the government spokesmen of the East European Stalinist states routinely denounce demands for democracy as "anarchist." The "anarchist" label for the Enragés is still sometimes encountered in modern historical works, purely as a mindless reflection of the Jacobin slander machine. It pays to lie, despite copybook maxims.

summary.) The Revolutionary Women turned against the worshipful cult-of-the-individual that had formed around the person of Robespierre; in fact Lacombe was going to be accused of actually referring to that idol as "*Monsieur* Robespierre." The RW denounced the "dangers of idolatry":

> Some of our public men are like petty tyrants; they would like to be flattered... Since the Revolution there have been seven or eight main idols all of whom betrayed the interests of the people who burned incense to them.

By September the popular movement against profiteering was at its height, and the authorities were between a rock and a hard place. The Jacobins had to free themselves from this bind by striking either right or left. Of course they responded by smashing the popular movement on the left.

With Jacques Roux already in jail, the assault proceeded against the Revolutionary Women and Leclerc, with the crooks Chabot and Basire acting as impresarios. Next came the entire women's movement; then the whole structure of the popular section societies, in which the people were organized independently of the state apparatus. And so on down the line. We know the rest.

7. The September Assault: At the Jacobins

The first general attack on the Revolutionary Women was made in the middle of September 1793. Like the October frame-up described in the next section, the triggering incident *may* have been some spontaneous happening, with the authorities jumping in to take advantage of a situation handed to them, or which they may have been waiting for. The celerity and dispatch with which the apparatus acted makes this the *less* likely possibility. The probability is that the scenario was arranged from the start.

We need only consider how it began. At a meeting of the RW society, a woman named Gobin made a speech with a slanderous attack on Leclerc. That is, the target she chose for mud-throwing was the man who was the society's main ally and cofighter! It was a most peculiar choice of place and target, for a simple woman of the people... unless we assume that what happened was what she intended to precipitate. Viewed as a provocation, it was an infallible move, for it could not be ignored. Claire Lacombe called on the speaker to present proofs of her allegations, or suffer the usual penalty of exclusion. Instead of presenting any evidence, even alleged evidence, *the woman Gobin instantly went to the Jacobins to lodge a complaint against the RW*.

Not to the Commune authorities; she went to the Jacobins, the political enemy, who were getting ready to smash the left. The RW instantly understood what this meant; as Lacombe said sarcastically at the time: "To prove she isn't a slanderer, she denounces us to the Society of Jacobins!"

At the Jacobins, on September 16, one of the leaders was all ready with a response to the Gobin complaint. It was Chabot, the crook under fire. He immediately announced that he would unmask the intrigues of the "alleged revolutionaries" of the RW, and, on the spot, related a fiction linking Lacombe with royalists, as well as with a remark disrespectful of Robespierre.

Who followed Chabot? It was his fellow grafter Basire, who took the line that the leadership of the RW was bad and had to be purged, though the society itself was "pure." That is, the RW would be cured by being beheaded.

Other Jacobin notables proceeded to insert their daggers, on general political grounds. (There was little pretence that the performance had much to do with the Gobin complaint.) It was charged that the RW were on the side of "Leclerc, Jacques Roux's friend." This at least was true, for the purposes of a political lynching. An accusation was raised against Lacombe: she was charged with wanting to have a delegation check the prisons for unmotivated arrests,

to prevent injustices: this, mind you, was an *accusation*. Taschereau complained that "Citoyenne Lacombe pushes her way into everything." Another Jacobin stalwart cried: "The woman who is being denounced to you is very dangerous because she is very eloquent; she talks well at first, and then attacks the constituted authorities... She fires with red cannonballs...against both the Jacobins and the Convention." By this time no one was pretending that the anti-RW pogrom was due to the Gobin provocation.

Claire Lacombe was present. Firm and courageous as always, she asked for the floor to reply. The response was a lynch-mob tactic that had already been used effectively against Jacques Roux at the Cordeliers. The tumult and commotion that broke out from the assembled Jacobin bravos was so strong that the chairman threatened to suspend; Jacobin onlookers shouted the dirtiest insults they could think of, including "Down with the new Corday!" (Charlotte Corday was the pro-Girondin woman who had assassinated Marat.)

Some of the more valiant Jacobins left their seats to threaten Claire Lacombe personally. She faced them down firmly and boldly: "The first one of you who dares advance — I'm going to teach you what a free woman can do." A voice cried out that she went about armed (this being one of the standard myths), and the heroes of the Jacobin Club contented themselves with making sure that she was not allowed to speak.

Lacombe was duly arrested; her lodgings were searched for incriminating papers and belongings at least suitable for a frame-up; but nothing was found except correspondence "breathing the purest patriotism" (according to the report rendered). She was freed during the night. Whatever Chabot and Basire had sought to accomplish, the Jacobin leadership was ready at this point only for an attempt to scare her out of the way. They had reason to fear that more drastic steps might evoke a mass protest from the women. But the scare tactic did not work — quite the contrary; and so preparations had to be made for a more ambitious frame-up.

The Jacobin efforts did achieve one positive result: Leclerc's journal went under, from the day of the aforementioned Jacobin meeting. Soboul, though a Robespierrist historian himself, says with justice: "with him [Leclerc], the advanced sansculottes lost their most combative spokesman, the government Committees lost their most dangerous adversary." Jacques Roux, in jail, learned of the attack on the RW and wrote indignantly that "now that the Society of Revolutionary Women who rendered so many services to liberty has been denounced in the Jacobin Club," it was clear that the scoundrels who were supposed to have been suppressed with the Girondins had revived from the ashes.

> The hypocrites — they used men like Leclerc, Varlet, Jacques Roux... They used the Revolutionary Women, like Lacombe, Colombe, Champion, Ardoin, and so many other republican women in order to break the tyrant's scepter, after which they aspired to overthrow the Statesmen [Girondin] faction, who exercised the despotism they thirsted for... Today they trample underfoot the instruments of revolution.

The Revolutionary Women redoubled their activity. On September 20 they asked the Cordeliers for affiliation; but the Hébertists, dominant in that club, had no stomach for an alliance with the revolutionary opposition against the Jacobins. The next day, an RW delegation came before one of the sansculotte sections with an explanation of their overall economic and political program. The delegation also denounced the plans being laid for the arrest of the RW, thus linking their self-defence with (in Soboul's words) "a veritable program of public safety bringing together the main demands of the sansculottes." The defence campaign was programmatically based. In contrast, they could read in a Jacobin organ the announcement, gleeful

but premature, that Claire Lacombe had been put in jail, along with the usual spate of Jacobin slanders of an odorous personal nature.

On September 30, Lacombe headed an RW delegation to the general council of the Commune, presenting a program to enforce the Maximum through domiciliary visits among the tradesmen, who were generally suspected of keeping the prices of staples high by an artificial scarcity. The Council actually decided to present the RW petition to the Convention as its own. The pressure from below was mounting.

That same day, at the Convention, the Jacobin crook Chabot sought to launch another pogrom against the Revolutionary Women. His speech tried to smear the RW with charges of Girondin and aristocratic connections, with "sowing division," and so on. (Today this may strike us as old and tired chicanery, like the above-mentioned Moscow Trials' effort to make Trotsky an agent of Hitler's; but it was then still original.) The attempt did not succeed on that day; the Jacobin leaders were not yet ready to move. On October 5, an RW delegation to the Convention protested against the freehanded spewing of slanders by the Jacobin paladins, and challenged them to produce evidence for anything. No evidence was ever adduced; the campaign to discredit the RW was fueled purely by mudslinging.

As Guérin puts it, the drive against the RW had to be orchestrated, that is, organized with some semblance of verisimilitude. An important step was taken on October 6, when one of the fraternal societies, the "Men of August 10," was gotten to come out with a public demand for the dissolution of the RW. The next day Claire Lacombe came with a women's delegation, and was allowed to speak. She took the opportunity to flay the "Corday" slander, and took the offensive by explaining the RW political program. She asserted their aims: "Our rights are the people's rights, and if we are oppressed we will know how to meet oppression with resistance."

The day after this, October 8, Lacombe went to the heart of the cabal by appearing before the Jacobin Club itself, again accompanied by a delegation. This time she got the floor; and after delivering a

refutation of the charges, *she was received by the audience with applause*. What accounted for this sea-change between the Jacobin lynch mob of September 16 and the applauding hearers of October 8? In the first place, the fact that Lacombe got an opportunity to present her RW ideas, and that she could not be booed into silence. We can conjecture that the Jacobin crooks felt good reason to fear that maybe Lacombe and the RW were turning the tide of opinion in their own favor, by the power of their argumentation and the appeal of their activity. To the Jacobin leadership, this meant that the RW was even more of a threat than before! (If we reject all conjecture, this is still the basic conclusion; and so it is not conjecture that is our main guide.)

Besides, there was another threat intensifying, with the same RW in the center of the threatening picture.

It looked as follows. On October 9, the day after the RW success at the Jacobin Club, an RW delegation appeared at the Commune's General Council to protest the failure to execute and enforce the Maximum laws. "Trouble" started among the sansculotte women. On the 12th, a gathering at one grocer's door demanded that he sell sugar at the price set, though the price schedule had not yet been published. Alerted immediately, and hoping to defuse the situation, the General Council decreed that the Maximum schedules be published the next day. The shopkeepers reacted with hostility; on October 14 the Council was told that some shops had closed up and others claimed to have no supplies. On the 17th the Council went so far, under pressure of the sansculotte women, as to accept the measure that the RW had been demanding to deal with this problem: domiciliary visits. This remained on paper, for the Council was in fact unwilling to crack down on the commercial elements. On October 25 the RW again came before the Council with an exposure of the situation confronting the poor. Critical voices were likewise raised in the national government: on October 26 the commissioners who were supposed to be fighting profiteering complained they had not been paid for three months, and

publicly called on the Convention to apply the new laws. *The pressure was getting heavier and heavier.*

When some of the local section committees decided to proceed with domiciliary visits — i.e., real steps toward enforcement, favored even by the *local* Jacobins — the central administration stepped in to stop them from doing so. When the sections proposed to name two commissioners simply to look into ways and means of providing subsistence goods for the people, the government's reaction was prompt: it quashed the plan. It made this decision on October 30, and in the next section we will see that on that same day the Convention was going to order the RW dissolved. *During the two-three days before that day, something had finally been done to get rid of the troublemakers...* Let us see what it was.

8. The October Frame-Up — And The End

On October 28, some poissardes in the market section picked a brawl with a member or members of the Revolutionary Women, or with persons purporting to be RW members. (Since the engineers of the frame-up never bothered to identify these women, there is no way of knowing.) According to people who were going to *immediately* demand that the RW be suppressed for this misconduct, these alleged Revolutionary Women insisted on the poissardes' wearing not only the tricolor cockade (which was required by the Convention) but also the red cap of liberty, the Phrygian *bonnet rouge*. The charges were also going to allege that these odd RW members even insisted that the poissardes had to wear pants — *pants*! — and, in one version, that they had to wear pistols!

In short order, an army of nearly 6000 poissardes descended on the nearby RW hall at Sainte-Eustache, intent on breaking up the women's meeting in the name of the sacred "freedom of costume" issue which had just been discovered to be one of the inalienable rights of humanity. The breakup of the RW was accomplished "legally" when a government official, who came along ostensibly to restore order,

proclaimed that the RW meeting was at an end and that entrance to the hall was now open to everyone — that is, to the waiting lynch-mob of vandals. The poissardes took over the hall and did their job of wrecking it. During the melee itself, one of the RW members (it was reported) cried out to her comrades that this was a put-up trick to bring about the dissolution of the society.

Since nothing is known about the initiation of the brawl, it can be conceded, as one possibility among many others, that it *may* have started with some careless statement by an overenthusiastic RW member, trivial in itself. Such speculation is virtually meaningless, since vituperative arguments were standard stuff in the market area and elsewhere. No one, in particular none of the authorities that hastened to suppress the RW in double-quick time, ever bothered to point to any known (or unknown) RW member as having precipitated the affair. All that the officials had was a claim by poissardes, long enemies of the RW, that some unknown, unnamed, alleged RW member or members had made patently ridiculous demands on them about dress — demands that had never been heard from the RW before or after.

It was not just of matter of the RW's repudiating these absurd demands as soon as they were alleged. The story about the start of the brawl was obviously a clumsy invention — as far as the *bonnet rouge* tale was concerned. Here's why.

To the Revolutionary patriots, the red cap was *not* the symbol of patriotic citizenship (this was the tricolor cockade); the red cap was the symbol of revolutionary *honor*, reserved for those who deserved such honor. The Revolutionary Women themselves did not regularly wear the red cap, let alone insist that it be worn by the most antirevolutionary women in the neighborhood. Even at formal RW meetings, it was the présidente and the secretaries in charge who wore the red cap, in accordance with RW statutes; it was not prescribed for ordinary members, nor worn by them — even at meetings, let alone on the street. According to Proussinalle's account of an RW meeting, *some* of the members present wore the red cap.

So much for its use by RW members. But the ridiculous accusation had to do with insistence that *others* had to wear it. Yet the preceding year a proposal to make the wearing of the red cap compulsory *for all Jacobins* had been quashed by Robespierre. A month after this, the Commune's General Council made it compulsory for the red cap to be worn *by Council members*. In general, the patriotic attitude was that the red cap was to be used as a symbol or badge of office, duty, and ceremony.

It is therefore difficult to believe that even an unusually stupid RW member could get the idea that poissardes *had* to wear the red cap; the market women would more likely be seen to be tainting it. When to this improbability one adds the charges about insistence on wearing pants or pistols, one has left the area even of fantasy. Something else is involved here. This part of the fable reflects the time-honored sexist conviction that any female so unwomanly as to want to act like a man in political life *must* surely aspire to other coveted masculine attributes. The attribution of this view to the people who suppressed the RW is not conjectural; it can be read in the Assembly speeches made by these same men as they justified their suppression of the women's movement in general (as we will see below).

If any altercation of any kind had taken place in the market area, the subject of angry words would have most likely been the wearing not of the red cap but of the tricolor cockade. But the RW could not have been suppressed on *this* charge, for the simple reason that the wearing of the tricolor cockade had been legally prescribed *not by the RW but by the Commune and the National Convention*. And this patriotic requirement had been supported by elements as far right as (for example) Mme. Keralio, let alone the Jacobin Club. On September 13 the Commune had decreed that cockadeless women would not be admitted into certain public places; and in truth this decision had already touched off street brawls. On September 20, in the very district now involved (according to a police report), angry poissardes had "whipped some patriotic women of the Sainte-Eustache market" because of this decree.

(There is no record that the RW was involved in this or similar events.) These current happenings might well have suggested elements of the frame-up; for a frame-up could count on this sort of thing taking place with little or no extra provocation; for the poissardes' anger against cockade wearers was the symbol of their anger against the militants who were pushing for price controls.

But as the destruction of the RW was carried out in the next few days, the absurd "freedom of costume" scenario was seriously acted out. The Convention solemnly adopted a decree to ensure said "freedom" — even as it simultaneously destroyed women's freedom to organize.

From the undocumented brawl in the market area between unknown women on an unlikely subject, events moved speedily (as we have seen) to the sacking of the RW meeting hall with the blessings of the authorities. How speedily? The same day, the Jacobin-run committee of the section reported the event to the Commune and *immediately* proposed that the RW should be prevented indefinitely from meeting again. It was a fast deduction from facts never brought out! The next day it was the attackers, not the victims, who came before the Convention with their declamations about "freedom" — i.e., "freedom of costume." Already one of the petitioners demanded "the abolition of all the women's societies in the form of clubs..." What was the connection between the sin of demanding the wearing of the red cap and the right of women's societies *to exist at all*? No word on this was added; what followed, rather, was this telltale observation: "*because it was a woman who had brought about France's misfortune*." From wearing red caps to Charlotte Corday, all in one leap! This reflected the mind of the Jacobin men at work; this leap had already been observed in the lynch mob at the Jacobin Club; and this mind was already quite unconcerned with the pretences about "freedom of costume."

On this day, the dissolution of the women's societies was supported by a speech by the Dantonist grafter who was shortly to go down in a money scandal: Fabre d'Eglantine. He was as qualified an

expert on the RW as Chabot and Basire had been. "I have particularly observed," he said, "that these societies are not at all made up of mothers, daughters, sisters concerned with their brothers and sisters of lesser years, but of adventuress types, female knights-errant, emancipated hussies, female dragons [*grenadiers femelles*]." The Assembly asked the Committee of Public Safety to bring in a report, after it had made France safe for "freedom of costume."

The next day the National Convention decided on dissolution of women's societies. This was October 30 — two days, no more, after the frame-up about "freedom of costume" had been acted out by the poissardes. What blinding speed! It is hardly necessary to know anything more than this to see through the poissarde comedy.

The dissolution was decreed on the basis of a report by J. P. André Amar for the Committee of Public Safety. Amar did his best to puff up the issue of "freedom of costume" with some rhetoric. But the enormous leap from defending "freedom of costume" to wiping out women's organizations was too awkward. Amar had to drag in other considerations, particularly old slanders about sinister connections between the RW and counterrevolutionists. Let no one think that Amar, or any other speaker, bothered to adduce the slightest smidgen of evidence for the smear. There was no time to concoct any evidence, and anyway the Jacobins did not usually operate that way; slander was enough.

But even this was not enough: the slanders might justify suppression of the RW, but why suppress all women's organizations? Amar had to broaden the basis for the decree by going to the fundamental issues of women's rights. He gave a violent tirade against feminism in general and women's right to participate in political life.

Should women take part in governmental affairs? No, answered Amar; they were not capable of showing the "extended knowledge, strict impartiality, and self-denial" necessary to govern wisely; the natural weakness and gentleness of women suit them only for the family role; "each sex is called to a type of occupation appropriate to

it," etc. This was the first time this well-known exercise in rhetoric was set down in more or less organized form in the course of a real political struggle.

Ironically, the antifeminist argumentation unleashed by the Jacobins applied not so much to the RW as to the "mixed societies," insofar as women there enjoyed equal rights with men. After all, in the RW women organized with other women: shouldn't women at least be allowed to meet among themselves? Amar actually had to argue even against this; he had to claim that women violated Nature by sacrificing their family roles, and so on. Naturally, no one wondered whether the high-born dames who ran the political salons were violating nature by their unwomanly conduct. Behind the moral rhetoric was the class reality, which everyone knew then better than now.

The objection of a single deputy cut through the fog of Amar's antifeminist moralizing. This deputy, Charlier,* stood up to question it: "Unless you deny that women are part of the human race, can you deprive them of this right [of association] common to every thinking being?" In response, the wise men of the Convention muttered into their cravats nothing intelligible, thereby demonstrating the "knowledge, impartiality and self-denial" that made them so superior to mere women. The grafter Basire was then impelled to stand up and tell the Assembly in effect not to pay too much attention to high-flown rationalizations. The "revolutionary regime" sometimes had to "throw a veil over principles" (he explained) for fear they might be abused; the only question before the house was whether the women's societies were "dangerous"; the events have shown they were bad for public tranquillity (that is, they made trouble for Jacobin crooks and bureaucrats). Thus the voice of Realism, Practicality and Corruption

* I find him called Charles Charlier of Laon in some reference works, and Louis Joseph Charlier of Châlons-sur-Marne in others. Both places are in northeast France. He seems to have been on the leftish side of Jacobinism though hostile to Jacques Roux.

urged them to stop maundering on about principles and get on with the job of smashing the women's movement in order to preserve their own power, which they had nicknamed "The Revolution."

Now that the biggest guns of the Robespierrist regime had been mobilized against them, all resistance attempted by the RW was in vain. On November 5 they sent a delegation to the Convention. One of the women, attempting to present a petition on "an urgent need," declared that the society, "composed in major part of mothers of families," had dissolved. The Convention delegates demonstrated their superior masculine intellect and grasp of political affairs by hooting them off the floor like hoodlums.

On the 17th a women's delegation appeared at the Commune, and the left-Jacobin Chaumette demonstrated that he was no different from Amar. The pattern having been set from above, Chaumette too launched into a virulent harangue against feminism, in terms even more stupidly vulgar than Amar's; he did not neglect to intimate, also, that the "viragos" were "paid by foreign powers." Again the RW, gagged from speaking themselves, had to hear how Nature assigns to women "the tender care of children, the details of the household, the sweet disquietudes of maternity." What poetry! In prose, it was decided to hear no more women's delegations.

"Since when," raged Chaumette, "is it permitted for women to abjure their sex, to make themselves into men?" The question *Since when*? is a good one at this point. *Since when* had these self-styled revolutionaries decided that women had to be banned from political life? The answer is: Only since the Revolutionary Women had shown that equality of rights for women required revolutionary democracy from below, for both sexes; that revolutionary feminists had to make common cause with the movement that fought the good fight for the interests of the mass of people; that women's cause was also the cause of social revolution.

There is a brief epilogue.

The independent women's movement of 1793 was indeed destroyed. We know how the Robespierrists chopped down all the forces to their own left, until they stood exposed to the right in the days of Thermidor 1794. For a time women continued to play a considerable role in the life of some popular societies and section assemblies; no doubt the women who had been members of the dissolved RW made themselves heard and felt in other ways. Then, in May 1794, two months before Thermidor, a decree of the still-Jacobin-dominated Convention forbade admission of women into the section assemblies. This took place after the Hébertists — the left Jacobins, including Chaumette — had been eliminated.

There is one last incident to record, taking place in the middle of the drive against Hébert. Claire Lacombe made one brief reappearance on the historical record. At this time she was again working as an actress; it appears that she was still a rank-and-file member of a section club, her support of the Revolution unchanged. On April 2 the regime had her arrested, apparently in the belief that she was close to the Hébertists; perhaps out of reminiscences of fear. She was eventually released, on August 20 — that is, after Thermidor — and this was the last we hear of her.

Leclerc and his wife Pauline Léon had also retired into inconspicuous service to the Revolution. Leclerc had enlisted as a simple soldier in the 17th Division, in the Aisne. The couple were arrested one day after Lacombe was arrested; and both were released in August one day before her. Leclerc went back to his post on September 5, and was not heard from again.

The Revolution was over.

Chapter 3
THE MYTH OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

While the French Revolution was going through the paroxysms of 1793, and while the first militant women's movement in world history was fighting for life, one of the foreigners then living in Paris in the midst of the events was none other than Mary Wollstonecraft.

Her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* had been published in England in early 1792, and it had already appeared in French translation when she arrived in Paris in December of that year. From the mansion in which she was staying, she could see the king brought past on his way to trial; at the end of October 1793 she read in the papers that the women's societies were banned; and she was herself engaged in writing a history of the Revolution.

At this moment in history there was a confrontation, it would seem, between the Vindicator of women's rights, who is regularly celebrated nowadays as the wellspring of feminism, and the militant women of Paris, who were in fact engaged in the first movement for women's rights. It is the sort of confrontation that historians like to imagine: *What would Lincoln have said about Reconstruction? What would Julius Caesar have thought of Napoleon's campaigns?*

What actually happened is something of an anticlimax: with one exception, Wollstonecraft paid no attention whatever to the women's issues and movements of the Revolution, and appeared to be personally unconcerned. Of the remarkable women who were then fighting for and exercising women's rights in France biographers have been unable to find any mention whatever in Wollstonecraft's writings public or private, in articles or letters about the events swirling around her.

There was no mention by Wollstonecraft even of the notorious Olympe de Gouges; no mention of the women, like Etta Palm, who were collaborating with Wollstonecraft's own Girondin friends; no mention of even the most respectable figures, like Mme. Robert-Keralio. Not that she was unconcerned about all aspects, if the level was high enough; for we find that when the Assembly's education committee, on which Condorcet was active, invited her to contribute a paper on women's education, she worked on it, though it seems it was

never delivered. Her closest French friend was Mme. Roland, who, though opposed to feminist views, was as well-acquainted as anybody with everything going on. No one can believe that her silence was due to ignorance.

There was one exception, we said; and it proves the rule. The silence was broken in her book on the French Revolution itself, of which she wrote and published the first volume only. It goes up only to the time of the so-called Women's March on Versailles, which we described in Chapter 1. What it shows is that Wollstonecraft was a savage, indeed bloodthirsty, *enemy* of the women's movement.

It will not detract from the honor due to her as a pioneer of feminism if we tell the whole truth about her social views—for the first time.

1. Ferocious Condemnations

This book appeared in 1794 as *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*. It ends with the removal of the king and the Assembly from Versailles back to Paris (October 1789) as a consequence of the Women's March, which is discussed at very great length. It is a thoroughly political-ideological work, not merely a narrative of events. The narrative, what there is of it, is often overwhelmed by her accompanying criticism of the historical actors, and by her exposition of what they *should* have done in accordance with her views.

There is no other work in which the sociopolitical views of the author are exposed half so clearly. It casts a fierce light backwards on the ideological context of the earlier book about women's rights, the *Vindication* of 1792.

Her major biographers, Tomalin and Flexner, are frankly puzzled by the book on the Revolution, and therefore give it scant attention. Both of these biographers are naturally taken aback by the blatant passage that savagely condemns the Women's March on Versailles in October, but they solve the problem of explaining it to the reader by

refraining from presenting it to the reader in the first place. Here, for example, is some of what Wollstonecraft wrote:

> [The march] consisted mostly of market women, and the lowest refuse of the streets, women who had thrown off the virtues of one sex without having power to assume more than the vices of the other. ...[T]hey were strictly speaking a mob, affixing all the odium to the appellation it can possibly import; and not to be confounded with the honest multitude, who took the Bastille.—In fact, such a rabble has seldom been gathered together...

They were "a gang of thieves," "a set of monsters," "criminals," senseless "brutes," "assassins," and so on—for several pages. In other words, they were "hyenas in petticoats": the edifying epithet that Horace Walpole notoriously applied to Wollstonecraft herself. (One can set up a socio-mathematical proportion: if we designate the Versailles women as *VW*, then *VW*:*MW*=*MW*:*HW*.)

Flexner quotes only the first sentence given above, and calls it "incredible" and "unperceptive." Tomalin, who quotes none of it, says the condemnation is "inexplicably ferocious." Inexplicable? Both biographers plainly assume that Wollstonecraft *should* have been sympathetic with the women demonstrators, and that her venomous hostility to their enterprise is a mystery. They also imply that the "incredible" and "inexplicable" opinion constitutes an isolated remark by Wollstonecraft. This is completely false, as even a fast reading of the history would show.

Wollstonecraft's "ferocious" condemnation would have been less inexplicable if one understood the frame of mind in which she went to France. To be sure, she went as a "radical" (that is, liberal) sympathizer with the Revolution, exuding praises and phrases about its "philosophical" ideals, which reappear in the 1794 book by the bushel.

She certainly would have been delighted with the Revolution if it had limited itself to orations on ideals; what she could not handle was the reality of a social struggle to realize ideals by means of unseating Her Kind of People, that is, the classes whose God-given mission to rule she never questioned. After all, the *Vindication* never gave the slightest countenance to subversive conduct on the part of exploited women or anyone else; on the contrary it squarely directed its appeal to the clemency of the male powers-that-be. Her biographers had no right to expect sympathy for subversives and seditionists. She had never expressed sympathy for revolutionary action, and if she reacted to a real revolution with antirevolutionary hostility, it is not she but her biographers who are being "unperceptive."

But Wollstonecraft's book went beyond mere antirevolutionary malice. We must fill out our description by noting contents which the biographers do not even hint at.

In the first place, her condemnations of "incredible" ferocity apply to much more than revolutionary action. For example, take her condemnations of the French nation *in toto*. The "complete depravity" of the French people is not only repeated dozens of times, it is her basic explanation for everything that happens. There is a passage condemning the whole nation for "disgusting conceit and wretched egotism ... [and] imbecility" that is almost raving in its intensity. The chauvinism of her constant smug comparisons with the English is obsessive. And not only the French are systematically derogated: "we are compelled to remark, that flagrant follies and atrocious crimes have been more common under the governments of modern Europe, than in any of the ancient nations, if we except the Jews."

If the French as a whole are depraved imbeciles, the women are the worst. Almost every reference to women is a slap. 'Effeminate' and 'effeminacy' are repeatedly used as standard cusswords for the depraved French or the aristocracy; indeed, "a variety of causes have so effeminated reason, that the French may be considered as a nation of women." Invective can go no further.

The obloquy she heaps on the French is not limited to the workingwomen of the October march on Versailles. The lower classes in general are routinely blackguarded, often in brackets with the aristocracy: "All lived by plunder... Thus the rich necessarily became robbers, and the poor, thieves"—and so on. It is the city poor that she execrates particularly; in comparison, the peasant mobs are virtually excused: Paris mobs "lift up their reptile heads," but rioting villagers are merely driven by "rich exuberance." She points with special horror to the "associations of men" arising due to "large work-shops."

The class conception of society which produces this red-eyed view of France is not left to conjecture; *Wollstonecraft spells it out for us.* The trouble is that in France the nobility formed an aloof caste "whilst in England they intermingled with the commercial men" who were just as rich. "This monied interest, from which political improvement first emanates, was not yet formed in France"—hence the unrelieved depravity. She states the underlying theory: "It is the nature of man, either in a savage state or living in society, to protect his property; and it is wise in a government to encourage this spirit." Everything depends on the interests of the propertied classes.

The trouble in France, then, is that the "commercial" propertied classes are not dominant; or as later pens would put it, the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie is not in power. Wollstonecraft's concerns about women are entirely within the framework of this all-compassing issue, and subordinate to it.

Not that Wollstonecraft, in Paris, found herself completely insensible to the discreet charms of the nobility. Despite her bitter condemnations of the (as yet unbourgeoisified) aristocracy, we eventually discover, in her book, that "Yet some few really learned the true art of living." These words introduce a dithyramb on the idyllic family life of a certain "rational few" (whom Tomalin justly identifies as meaning Mme. Roland's circle). "In the summer, when they retired to their mansion houses, they spread gladness around, and partook of the amusements of the peasantry, whom they visited with paternal solicitude."

Happy masters, happy hinds! She wrote this in the Paris mansion house which friends (no peasants they) had put at her disposal together with its servant staff, whose spirit of obedience she found wanting. To continue with her musings: "It is, perhaps, in a state of comparative idleness—pursuing employments not absolutely necessary to support life, that the finest polish is given to the mind, and those personal graces, which are instantly felt, but cannot be described."

It is worth mentioning that there is a similar remark in her subsequently written (and unfinished) novel *The Wrongs of Women*, put in the mouth of a not unsympathetic character. He says he did not like the large towns in America, where wealth was used only for the pleasure of ostentatious display—"for the cultivation of the fine arts, or literature, had not introduced into the first circles that polish of manners which renders the rich so essentially superior to the poor in Europe."

In revolutionary France, Wollstonecraft was also willing to exempt the king from her wholesale condemnations. In letters she drips sympathy for the sad lot of the poor king and queen, hustled about by the rabble. In her book we are invited to be overcome with "compassion" for Louis, for "we sympathize with the man in adversity, whose prosperity was pestiferous." There is an extensive passage about the king's "courage," "sagacity," "instinct of propriety," and good will for the people, and much suggestion that his misfortunes were due to the sinister "cabal" of advisors despite his virtues.

This is how Wollstonecraft orients with respect to the social forces of the Revolution. It gives us the first step toward explaining the "inexplicable."

2. The Monsters

Wollstonecraft's political views, expressed at very great length, are of a piece with her social orientation.

On the personal level, the unbridled hatred she feels for the majority of the revolutionary Assembly breaks out in constant imprecations, in "ferocious" language: for example, "a race of

monsters, the most flagitious that ever alarmed the world by the murder of the innocents" (the innocents are not identified but are presumably the nobles). They are "sanguinary brutes," "those monsters who are meditating the violation of the sacred ties of honour and humanity..." These pleasantries dot her "reflections" on the Assembly majority of 1789 (which, remember, was still far from being Jacobin-dominated). But it is not always easy to know who or what she is cursing at, in a given passage. When she refers clearly to the leftists, they are "the popular promoters of anarchy, to serve their private interest," and so on (as distinct from her friend Mme. Roland's circle, who are interested only in the Good of Humanity).

Her serious view is that the Revolution already went to a monstrously ultraradical extreme early in 1789, and that the October march on Versailles by the women turned the revolution into "anarchy." The basic mistake was this: after the fall of the Bastille, the course should have been very slow, slowly effecting gradual reforms that took away a minimum of power from the throne.

This position is repeated over and over (the repetitive style is characteristic of the book). She especially condemns any wish to attack the system at the roots: "instead of looking for gradual improvement, letting one reform calmly produce another, they [the people] seemed determined to strike at the root of all their misery at once," with "hasty measures." Anyway, the aristocratic system was "rapidly wearing itself out" by itself. "But...the misery of France has originated from the folly or art of men, who have spurred the people on too fast; tearing up prejudices by the root, which they should have permitted to die gradually away." The evil was that the people were demagogically led to "expect the most unbridled freedom, detesting all wholesome restraints." The terms 'citoyen,' 'égalité,' 'sans-culottes' were devised "in order to cajole the minds of the vulgar."

Now it is obvious that many others shared this predilection for reforms that changed as little as possible, as if France could remain stuck in a half-way position; but we must stress that Wollstonecraft

attacks most of the French political spectrum that started from precisely that premise. She has a very lengthy denunciation of the Assembly for depriving the king of too much power in the proposed constitution. If the king had been allowed an absolute veto, not merely a suspensive veto, he would have been willing to "submit patiently." The political simplemindedness of this position is not the point at issue; rather, it must be understood that Wollstonecraft thus separated herself even from *the proroyalist moderates* of the Assembly. Even Mirabeau, who supported the absolute veto, is later criticized by Wollstonecraft for being too radical.

Another long polemic by Wollstonecraft advocates an upper chamber (Senate) to check the lower, and thus enforce only gradual change. Violent change favors measures that are not wise but merely popular, "being adapted to the foibles of the great body of the community." The aim that Wollstonecraft sets, in effect, is how best to frustrate the great body of the people. Leaders of "popular governments" mislead men most easily by dwelling on "the equality of man"; they take advantage of "this infirmity of our nature" and prove destructive to society or "end in the most dreadful anarchy." Indeed, freedom of the press grows "licentious," that is, the Assembly was unwise in not curbing it. The trouble with the Assembly majority is that, with overweening arrogance, it wants to institute a better system than the English or Americans have done:

> And this self-sufficiency has produced those dreadful outrages, and attacks, made by the anarchists of that country, on personal liberty, property, and whatever else society holds sacred.

Now, perhaps, we can better appreciate Wollstonecraft's horror at the Women's March to Versailles, and why she devotes the last three chapters of her book to this monstrous event and its fearful

consequences. (Yes, three chapters, and not merely an "inexplicable" sentence or two!)

These three chapters are filled with warnings against revolutionary changes such as we have already quoted. Another element is introduced: the whole episode was a sinister conspiracy by the Duke of Orleans to get the king and queen killed by herding the women-monsters to Versailles together with "hired assassins." The fact that these women were "famished" is only mentioned incidentally in connection with the plot. (Eventually she remarks: true, there is no evidence for this theory of conspiracy, which proves what evil intriguers these French are!) One can easily imagine who stuffed this mishmash into her head.

In these chapters Wollstonecraft goes from mere invective to new heights of vituperation against the women-monsters; but, without repeating, there are four new points that can be usefully made.

(1) Part of the "proof" that the whole affair was whipped up by "designing persons" is her argument that independent movement *by women* is unthinkable:

> That a body of women should put themselves in motion to demand relief of the king, or to remonstrate with the assembly respecting their tardy manner of forming a constitution, is scarcely probable...

A "body of women...in motion": this is the women's movement, and if Wollstonecraft argues that it cannot exist, she means *it cannot exist within the framework of her views*. Whatever her feminism is, it is in fundamental opposition to a women's movement.

(2) When Wollstonecraft relates how Marie Antoinette was actually forced to flee from her bedroom when the women-monsters invaded

the palace, her solicitude for the poor queen reaches such supernal heights that pure poetry results (perhaps explaining the odd syntax):

> The sanctuary of repose, the asylum of care and fatigue, the chaste temple of a woman, I consider the queen only as one, the apartment where she consigns her senses to the bosom of sleep, folded in its arms forgetful of the world, was violated with murderous fury... Yet these brutes were permitted triumphantly to escape...

She regards the queen as only another woman, our author says, while she curses at the women of the people who disturbed "the chaste temple *of a woman*." It would be hard to find a passage in political literature that more blatantly reflects internalized class hypocrisy.

(3) Wollstonecraft lengthily laments that the soldiers allowed the "criminals" to escape, since impunity will encourage their evil souls to commit "still more atrocious crimes" and encourage "the brutality of their sanguinary dispositions." And the Assembly was just as remiss: it should "have smothered in embryo that spirit of rebellion and licentiousness, which [was] beginning to appear in the metropolis..." whereas they "permitted that gang of assassins to regain their dens..." She plainly thinks there should have been a blood-bath of repression directed against the women.

(4) Most important is Wollstonecraft's denunciation of the Assembly for acquiescing in the transfer of the king to Paris as a result of the women's march. By yielding to the mob it furthered the coming anarchy.

> It is in reality from this epoch...that the commencement of the reign of anarchy may be fairly dated.

The Assembly "surrendered their authority" and went "into the heart of a city, which could be suddenly agitated" by "any desperate or factious leader of the multitude." It "almost surpasses belief," she cries. The volume ends soon after.

Wollstonecraft's cry of incredulity is, as we have seen, matched by her biographers' opinion that it is "incredible" that she should have held opinions like this. If Wollstonecraft not surprisingly understood little about the Revolution, her biographers clearly understand little about the workings of her mind, social consciousness, and political views. There is a reason for this.

3. The People of the Limbo

To begin with Wollstonecraft in France, as we have just done, is to begin with her limitations. This would be unfair if her pioneer contribution to feminist consciousness were less celebrated; but there is little danger in that direction. Especially in the last two decades there has been a flood of biographical and historical literature, from full-length biographies to articles; whereas the revolutionary women she contemned have been pushed into the shadows. In part it is a question of turning the helm the other way. In any case what concerns us is not the fact of her limitations but their nature and source. This too has been pushed into the shadows.

Mary Wollstonecraft was brought up in a social limbo which has no established sociological tag because it is seldom distinguished from the basic counterposition of bourgeoisie and working class, with the old ruling class of the landed gentry in process of fusing into the former. This limbo is the uneasy twilight zone between two societal worlds—the shining world of the affluent bourgeoisie with its aristocratic partners and allies, on the one hand, and on the other the dark abyss of the working poor. This zone of betweeners is alien to both worlds. Its inhabitants fear the abyss above all—the slide down into the hopeless world of propertyless labor; they fear it like sin. They long for the upper regions above them with a longing that is the very

hope of salvation. It is no use muttering the label "petty-bourgeoisie," which is too restricted, for reasons not germane here; the limbo is a junkyard of social fragments, one of them called the *shabby-genteel*.

Naturally the limbo took shape as the bourgeoisie itself came to term; and so Mary Wollstonecraft's case, coming at the threshold of the nineteenth century, was one of the earlier prominent examples. It is a very clear case.

Her paternal grandfather, whose will overshadowed the family for two generations, was a successful capitalist who rose from among the master weavers, one of the few to make his way up from that decaying trade. He left a third of his estate to Mary's father, and another third to her brother, who eventually became a lawyer and moved out and up. Both windfalls eluded Mary herself; for her father used the money in an attempt to become a gentleman farmer, and as he lost his money he steadily went down in the world. Still, during the *upper* phase of the family's descent, it knew what it was to have servants. Her mother, who came from an Irish family of genteel status based on money gained in the wool trade, even talked about employing a governess for her daughter, this being a necessary adjunct of gentry condition. For a period they moved in the same social circles as friends who were really rich, and maintained a suitably high style of life. As the family slipped in the social scale, in proportion to the slippage of its ready cash, it moved from one district to another, putting down no roots.

As Mary grew up, she was a Young Lady to some, an impoverished inferior to others: one of the social-schizos of the limbo. The balance kept shifting toward the lower end of the scale, nearer the lip of the abyss. By the time she reached eighteen, she moved inexorably into one of the three main occupations available to females who (1) were not so declassed as to have to work with their hands, but (2) were not so well-off as not to have to work at all. That is, she took employment as companion to a wealthy widow. Then, for a while, she and two sisters carried on the second of these three occupations: work in a

small teaching establishment. At 26 she moved to the third occupation: governess in a wealthy household.

So far, the characteristic course of the people of the limbo. But at 28 her talents made it possible for her to slip out of the class structure altogether by one of the few side doors: she became a professional writer. Thus she entered that parallel social formation of inside Outsiders which accompanied the development of the bourgeoisie as the remora accompanies the shark: the intelligentsia.

One of the main virtues of Tomalin's biography is that she does not turn her heroine into an icon. In this spirit, the book provides interesting glimpses of the specific sort of class feeling that informed Wollstonecraft. This may sometimes appear as snobbery, but its essence is not lofty superiority but rather apprehension and insecurity (the Angst of the Abyss). Tomalin uses the bad word 'snobbery' only in connection with Wollstonecraft's tendency to adopt an air that "looked down on the manners of social superiors." This was the self-defensive side.

There was another side. When her father took a second wife, Mary's hostility to the newcomer was expressed by regarding her as something like "an artful kind of upper servant." She was embarrassed by her sister's marrying a mere boat-builder. When, in the *Vindication*, she complains justifiably about the narrow occupational possibilities open to women, she lists the occupations of companion, schoolteacher, and governess, and then adds that others are "certainly not very respectable." Other occupations probably meant working with one's hands at some "menial" employment, like "milliners and mantua-makers," who are "reckoned the next class" just above prostitutes. The reckoning was, of course, by her as well as other respectable women.

While she was governess in the wealthy household of Lord and Lady Kingsborough, she wrote her sister, with hands-high virtuousness: "Thank heaven I am not a Lady of Quality." That was the defensive side of snobbery. It would have been demeaning even to write, *Thank*

heaven I am not a seamstress—or a scullery maid—or a spinning-jenny attendant... For *that* would be the world of the abyss.

As far as socioeconomic roles go, this limbo has been marginal, but it has been the incubator of a whole race of bourgeois critics of society prominent in the intellectual history especially of the nineteenth century. In large part the essential characteristic of this type is given by their aim, which is to renovate or refurbish the rulers; the people in control are taken to task for not being worthy of the scepter; they should be reformed so as to be *fit to rule*.

This intelligentsia's style may vary from soft-spoken admonishments to fiery philippics. As the spectrum moves to the latter end, as language grows more indignant, these missionaries to the bourgeoisie may get mistaken for real radicals, mistaken even by themselves. But it is precisely the *roots* of society that they have no wish to tear up. They would prune branches, fluff out blossoms, weed out rotten shoots, and improve the breed. Some of the cases are easy to recognize, like that other historian of the French Revolution, Thomas Carlyle, who made rebellious noises up to 1848; some are more disguised, like the alleged French "syndicalist" Georges Sorel. The same incubator later went on to produce figures who advocated a kind of anticapitalism, like H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw; but Wollstonecraft was an early model and cannot be mistaken for the late Fabian model.

The author of the *Vindication* acted out her missionary reform role with respect to the contemporaneous English women of fashion and leisure. Her role was to make them worthy of being accepted as coequal partners of the master class, fit to share the rule. It was an aim that had no relevance whatever for the majority of women, that is, the women of the abyss. This is written large all over Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

4. The Invisible Women

The social mark of the limbo defines the limitations of her pioneering tract about women's rights. All that has to be understood is *which* women she was writing about.

It has been observed often enough that the *Vindication* is intensely personal in its expression of its theme—most personal in its generalities. Apropos of the question of female employment just mentioned, Wollstonecraft poignantly notes how sensitive the déclassée has become:

> But as women educated like gentlewomen are never designed for the humiliating situation which necessity sometimes forces them to fill, these situations are considered in the light of a degradation; and they know little of the human heart, who need to be told that nothing so painfully sharpens sensibility as such a fall in life. *[222]**

And elsewhere she conjures up the sad picture of girls with inadequate education who are "left by their parents without any provision" and depend on "the bounty of their brothers," even though they have an "equal right" to the family fortune. (This is a good example of the reformulation of autobiography as philosophy.) This "humiliating situation," she goes on to say, is bad enough even when it remains comfortable, but when the brother marries, the sister becomes an unwelcome intruder. The author then cries: "Who can recount the misery, which many unfortunate beings, whose minds and bodies are equally weak, suffer in such situations — unable to work, and ashamed to beg?" *[111]* This is the nightmare of the betweener.

The page number in brackets refers to the edition listed in the Bibliography, for readers who may want to follow the argument in Wollstonecraft's book.

From this vantage point, Wollstonecraft's view of society is one-way: up. Although she constantly refers to her subject with the common phrase describing womankind as "one half the human race," the large majority of this half of the human race is invisible to her. The word 'women' in her vocabulary means the women of the Classes, not the Masses. A few examples will suffice, for this mode of thought is evident on every other page.

On the first page of the book (after the Dedication) we find that "The conduct and manners of women" are "not in a healthy state" because they sacrifice strength and usefulness to beauty. What "women" do this? It is an absurd statement to make about the women of the laboring classes, weighed down and worn out by the same work as the men, plus the added burdens of household tasks and family raising. She writes on the next page: "The civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love..." She could not be thinking of the mass of women who were being recruited into the factories as cheap labor by the new industrialists. It is the industrialists' wives alone that exist for her, and the women whom *they* envy.

"Women," she writes, "live, as it were, by their personal charms," as distinct from men, who perform a task in society. In actuality, of course, most women lived (and died) doing much of the tasks of society on a par with men. They lived and died not only in the fields and on the machines but on the gallows (one of the most nonsexist institutions of the day), for women were hanged without discrimination for more than two hundred offences, including simple theft, even if they were pregnant. Wollstonecraft can see only "personal charms."

Men, wrote Wollstonecraft, try to keep "women" in a state of childhood. *[50]* Nothing could be more cruelly false, if one is really thinking of *women*. The women of the people, contemporaries reported, were already looking like faded crones in their twenties, exhausted by hard labor and regular pregnancies to keep the labor supply up. The truth indeed was the other way 'round: childhood was treated as

womanhood, for children's cheap labor was preferred by the mill and mine owners.

The set of Wollstonecraft's mentality becomes even plainer when she *specifies* that she is speaking of "the whole sex," as she does more than once. Take a passage in which she laments that women are preoccupied with frivolities, "running from pleasure to pleasure," and that, since they "seek for pleasure as the main purpose of existence," "the love of pleasure may be said to govern them all." *All.* The highly moral complaint ends with this:

> In short, women, in general, as well as the rich of both sexes, have acquired all the follies and vices of civilization, and missed the useful fruit. It is not necessary for me always to premise that [I] speak of the condition of the whole sex, leaving exceptions out of the question. *[104-05]*

Needless to say, the "exceptions" are women like herself—not the women of the impoverished smallholders and tenant farmers, who when not working in the fields might be employed in the manor house washing the lady's fine linens. The *ladies* were the "women in general."

Today this may sound like an indictment of Wollstonecraft; but it is not so intended. It is a manifestation of a not uncommon type of bourgeois mentality. To say this is to condemn not Wollstonecraft but her uncritical celebrants, who refuse to take her for what she is: not a pioneer of feminism in general but of a specific bourgeois feminism.

Let us fill in some distinctive features of this type.

5. Vindication—Of Whom?

Wollstonecraft is not insensitive to class distinctions. On the contrary, at several points she undertakes a class analysis so openly presented that it might be damned as "Marxist" today. She even offers a class analysis of breast-feeding: it is wealth, she says, that makes

women spurn breast-feeding because their only aim is "to preserve their beauty." *[214]* Such class analyses were common in the early literature of the bourgeoisie.

It is when she claims to be taking account of class differences that her class-blinkered view becomes plainer—something like what happened when she claimed to be speaking of "the whole sex." *Her* class-analytical view is limited to the following pattern: (1) society divides between the Classes and the Masses, and the Classes divide only between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy; (2) in this counterposition, she lines up with the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, women included, all other women outside these two upper classes being written off as usual.

Her Introduction makes the same point that I have made here about the restricted use of the word "women," only she does this within her own class framework. That is, she demonstrates that certain other writers are really only speaking of the women of the upper-class rich when they say "women." They address themselves to "women," she points out, but their advice is really applicable to *ladies*. (The ironic italics are hers.) In contrast, she states, "I pay particular attention to those in the middle class,* because they appear to be in the most natural state." She attacks the artificiality and false refinement of the women of the rich, which corrupt society. "As a class of mankind they have the strongest claim to pity; the education of the rich tends to render them vain and helpless..." *[33]*

This is a straightforward expression of a probourgeois viewpoint, an open declaration of hostility to the old ruling class above the

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"Middle class" here means the bourgeoisie; it is seen as being in the middle between the aristocracy and the lower orders. Wollstonecraft usually uses 'the rich' to mean the old landed ruling class, even though the bourgeoisie was rich too. That is, in her usage 'the rich' means the idle rich, those who are *merel* rich, who do nothing for their wealth, unlike the hard-working capitalists. She eschews the term 'aristocracy.'

bourgeoisie—the "superior ranks" of society, in her usual phrase. Thus Wollstonecraft announces that she purposes "taking a separate view of the different ranks of society, and of the moral character of women, in each." This aim of differentiated class analysis is carried out most fully in Chapter 9, according to her lights, but it crops up in other places too.

The context is always a class attack on the aristocracy as a corruptive force: the corrupter of its own women and of the bourgeois women who model themselves on it. At the end of Chapter 3, she argues that "the superior ranks of life" have seldom produced "a man of superior abilities, or even common acquirements," because they are born into an "unnatural" state.

> The human character has ever been formed by the employments the individual, or class, pursues; and if the faculties are not sharpened by necessity, they must remain obtuse. The argument may fairly be extended to women; for, seldom occupied by serious business, the pursuit of pleasure gives that insignificancy to their character which renders the society of the *great* so insipid. (The italics for *great* reflect irony.)

We see in this passage that "women" are *defined* by "the pursuit of pleasure." This is likewise true in several other places: "Pleasure is the business of woman's life..." "Confined then in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves..." *[97-98]* Incidentally, there are perhaps two or three sentences in the whole book in which the laboring poor are mentioned as existing; one of these is even complimentary about the devotion of women "in low life" to their families. *[126, 220, 251]*

This question gets serious discussion in Chapter 9, which is entitled "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society." She begins by indicting "property" understood in a limited way *á la* Rousseau:

> From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene to the contemplative mind *[that is, to the intelligentsia*].

The main indictment, however, is of landed property (the class property of the gentry); it still dominates her thought (if not economic reality) as the only "real" property. "Property" evokes the old ruling class as "money" evokes the new. Her very next sentence links the indictment to "the most polished society," previously identified as the society of the hereditary and titled rich. In fact, on the same page, "hereditary wealth and titles" are further linked to "property" as the *poisoning* factor of this world. (But the wealth earned by hard-working businessmen, like Mary's grandfather, is *not* evil.)

While the aristocracy is an element of corruption and empoisonment, the bourgeoisie is (as we have seen) "in the most natural state." It is not one of the "unnatural distinctions established in society"; it is the natural class distinction. But Wollstonecraft is not simply a vulgar apologist for the bourgeoisie; she is critical of this new, raw ruling class. She is not critical of its right to rule, but of its *fitness to rule* as presently constituted. This is why it needs to be reformed along the proper philosophical lines. And at this juncture we must remind that her point of view is not wholly from within the bourgeoisie itself, but rather from the standpoint of the parallel formation, the betweeners' limbo, and particularly the intelligentsia. This is what she writes:

> One class presses on another; for all are aiming to procure respect on account of their property: and property, once gained, will procure the respect due only to talent and virtue.

If one had to choose a passage from the body of English social thought which most frankly asserts the claim of the intelligentsia within the existing class system, this might be it.

It asserts that "respect"—which of course includes proper rewards—is due *only* to those attributes which happen to be the special distinctions of the intellectual claimants. Talent and virtue—intellectual and moral value—may also distinguish the good hard-working bourgeois, who therefore are also entitled to respect and rewards; but the formula cuts out entirely the "idle" class, who need no talent except being well-born and whose way of life undermines virtue.

Thus Wollstonecraft not only draws the class line between the "natural" class rulers and "unnatural distinctions," but among the "natural" recipients of respect and rewards it points straight to the bourgeoisie's companion formation, the intelligentsia. What better class theory could there be?—for a propertyless and moneyless intellectual laborer in limbo who is hanging onto the lower rungs of those who claim talent and virtue.

It is in this context that Wollstonecraft lays down the grandiose generality that "There must be more equality established in society." *[213]* We must not suppose that this means what it may seem to say to modern ears; for that would unfairly convict Wollstonecraft of hypocrisy. She was not demanding equality of rights for all women, or even giving lip service to the view that women of the Masses were relevant to the "equality" she was concerned with. It would be unfair to expect from her a social radicalism that was far from her convictions or even comprehension. She wrote that there must be *more* equality—and she was understandably concerned especially with "more" equality for the social formation for which she had trained herself.

She is quite aware of what we called a side door by which the intelligentsia could get outside of the class system; her term is a "loophole":

> Still there are some loopholes out of which a man may creep, and dare to think and act for himself; but for a woman it is a herculean task... *[217]*

She did manage to find the "loophole" by which to creep out of, or escape from, the class *cul de sac* which her family situation had boxed her into; and she is a hundred times right in recognizing that she had performed a herculean task—by dint of talent and virtue. So far, so good for her.

Yet so class-egocentric is her social viewpoint that she works herself up to the astonishing statement that the women of her own bourgeois world are the most oppressed of all! She actually writes: "The most respectable women are the most oppressed." *[223]*

Was she so totally unaware of the life-crushing oppression of hundreds of thousands of her sisters among the half of the human race?—like the good Germans who lived around the corner from Dachau and managed to remain oblivious to what was going on, they claimed? Perhaps; there may be no limits to the capacity of the bourgeois feminist to complain self-righteously of her own oppression while turning a blind eye to the oppression of the majority of womankind. Sisterhood may be powerful, as the feminist slogan has it, but class blinkers are more powerful.

The most respectable woman, continues Wollstonecraft, is "the woman who earns her own bread," but—"I sigh to think how few women aim at attaining this respectability by withdrawing from the giddy whirl of pleasure..." *How few*—only the great majority! Even the simple thought of *women who work* fails to turn her eyes to the Invisible Women of the masses. By *women who work* she is thinking solely of her own type of dropout from the "giddy whirl." She virtually says so, a second time, by making clear she is thinking of women who might aspire to business and professional vocations—"who might have practised as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop."

These "respectable" women ("the most oppressed") aspire to *manage* the shop; the female drudges who will wear themselves out by working there are the Invisible Women. In more modern parlance, Wollstonecraft speaks and thinks as the champion of the aspiring business and professional career woman, who has essentially the same attitude toward the mass of the female sex as have the male exploiters in the dominant society. She is just as determined to get *her* rights over their backs.

In celebrating her pioneer achievements, we should not go beyond the truth. Her pioneer contribution was a Vindication of the Rights of *Certain Women* She was not concerned about "one half of the human race," despite the feminist rhetoric, but about her sector of the upper tenth. Her plea was that the natural masters of society should accept *their* women into the ruling circles as partners. She belongs on the list of those reformers who importuned the ruling classes to reform themselves in order to be fit to rule.

This is the meaning of bourgeois feminism, and Wollstonecraft was its great herald. That is honor enough for anyone.

Chapter 4
SEX AND SECTS: THE TROUBLE WITH THE UTOPIANS

The women's movement that blossomed in the upswing of the French Revolution, and that was crushed by the Jacobins before they were in turn crushed by the Thermidorean reaction, had no visible continuator in the postrevolutionary period.

The last gasp of the Revolution, which was also the first breath of the modern socialist movement, was the so-called Conspiracy of the Equals in 1796. Led by "Gracchus" Babeuf, it came to grief quickly, and its leaders were executed. This Babouvist movement did not raise the question of women's rights; the Equals were not *that* equal. Yet we learn incidentally that there were women militants among these rebels. At the end, a woman named Sophie Lapierre went on trial along with the men, and gave a better account of herself than most of her comrades. I wish we could find out more about this remarkable woman, but it is characteristic that historians are not very interested.

By that time it was perfectly clear that the Rights of Man meant the rights of men — not only in the Constitution of 1793, which was the formal platform of the Babouvists; not only in the minds of the leaders whom the Babouvists glorified, such as Robespierre and Marat; but also in the minds of the Babouvist revolutionaries themselves.

In fact, an especially reactionary blast on the question came from one of the prominent Babouvists who survived the 1796 debacle: viz., Sylvain Maréchal, the man who had actually drafted the "Manifesto of the Equals" for Babeuf's band. "Maréchal l'Egalitaire" he was called, but it was not surprising that the Manifesto — which eloquently denounced all "revolting distinctions between the rich and the poor, the great and the little, masters and servants, *rulers and ruled*" — had nothing to say about half of humanity.

Worse: by 1801, with the old century and the old revolution both dead, Maréchal came out with an antifeminist attack on the main issue still agitating what remained of the so-called Woman Question. This issue was: Should women be educated, or should they be kept in pleasing ignorance the better to perform their womanly duties? This question concerned upper-class women who had a chance to get an

education; the workingwoman majority had long since sunk back into its customary invisibility. It was the educated bourgeois women who justly denounced Maréchal. Others, men *and* women, giggled in prose and in verse to make such powerful arguments as this:

> Do not betray your charms
> That are so very inviting.
> Do you want to resemble the Muses?
> Then inspire, but refrain from writing!

In the days of counterrevolution, male chauvinism descends to a sophomoric level.

The confluence of socialism and feminism, which had been heralded by the "Enragé" wing of the Revolution, was certainly not brought to realization by the Babouvists. Where then was a *socialist feminism* first encountered? The answer is: in an unlikely man named Charles Fourier. After Fourier, the cause of women's rights and female emancipation was intertangled with that of socialism, right, left and center.

1. Fourier: The Pioneer

Fourier's name is embalmed in histories of socialism with the label Utopian Socialist; but his utopianism was only one aspect of his significance. We are here concerned with another.

In modern terms Fourier was not very socialistic; his utopian blueprints did not entail the abolition of capitalism, and did not call for the elimination of private property in production. Indeed, he assumed the continued contrast of rich investors of capital on top and poor people on bottom, in almost as hierarchical a structure as the society he detested. What his New Order aimed at was particularly social *rationality*, as against the unreasonableness of a society based on hypocrisy, disorder, and planlessness. What he counterposed to the

incoherent status quo was an alternative society invented freehand inside his own skull, down to small details. This was the utopian side of his lucubrations.

But Fourier's blueprinted renovation of society was not limited to its social and economic arrangements. He had range. For example, as a patriotic Frenchman he was interested in reforming the gastronomic customs of his countrymen. And he also looked to a complete transformation in sexual relations as an accompaniment of social progress.

In this respect he was a pioneer in the history of social thought. At the same time — and this will have to be made clear in the pages to follow — his achievement in this field has often been overpuffed. There is a problem of balance.

Fourier's most attractive statement of ideas is in his first book, which is darkly entitled *Theory of the Four Movements*. Here he polemizes, sometimes brilliantly, against many of the hypocrisies and inconsistencies of the sexual mores of the present "Period" of "Civilization" (both of these quoted words are technical terms in his ideological schema). His exposure of the institution of marriage as an oppressor of women and a form of licensed prostitution is so modern that you may read it without appreciating its originality, because it is so familiar today. His cry is freedom:

> If God has given amorous customs so much influence over the social mechanism and the transformations it can undergo, this was a consequence of his horror at oppression and violence; he wanted the happiness or unhappiness of human societies to be proportional to the constraint or freedom they allow. Now God recognizes as freedom only that which extends to both sexes and not one alone...

Real freedom would mean that women's innate superiority to men would have a chance to flower. It is wrong to "judge women by their present ways, by the pretences they are driven to by our customs, which deny them any freedom..." Harem odalisks regard themselves as "automatons created for men's pastime," but "how much greater a difference would there be between our ladies and those of a well-ordered nation in which the sex would be elevated to full freedom!"

This leads Fourier to his famous thesis about the relation between women's freedom and the level of civilized advancement — the thesis that Marx and Engels liked to quote, along with many other socialists. "It has been seen," wrote Fourier, "that the best nations were always those that gave women the most liberty... It can likewise be observed that the worst nations have always been those that subjected women the most..."

> As a general thesis: *Social advances and changes in Period are brought about in proportion to the progress of women toward liberty, and declines in the Social Order are brought about in proportion to the decrease in the liberty of women.* These political changes are influenced by other events, but no cause so rapidly produces progress or social decline as a change in women's lot. ... In summary, *the extension of women's privileges is the general principle of all social progress.*

The main qualification to be made is that this statement does not distinguish clearly between the role of women's "liberty" (equality of rights) as a direct cause of progress and as a sensitive barometer of progress, or of course a mixture of the two.

One of Fourier's strongest suits was his exposure not only of marriage but of the many and various hypocrisies of contemporary society. In general, it was his critical side that had the most lasting impact on the development of socialist feminism, not his utopian blueprints.

Typical of Fourier is his biting dissection of the traditional male libertine pattern: the man spends his youth seducing as many women as possible; then, grown older and perhaps less robust, he looks to make a "good" marriage and "settle down," but naturally the favored woman must be chaste and pure and guaranteed to remain so indefinitely. Fourier asks:

> On retiring from the social world, why don't men take women matured by experience, like themselves? ... It is amusing that Civilized men, who pride themselves on surpassing women in rationality, demand that at the age of 16 women should possess the rationality which they themselves do not acquire till they are 30 or 40, after wallowing in debauchery during their golden youth.

He attacks the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, including by name Rousseau, "who spouts about relegating women to housewifery," yet in his *Confessions* celebrates the "courtesans and complaisant charmers" he ardently pursued. "How would he have gained these diversions if all the ladies had followed his precepts and lived only for a husband? That's philosophers for you: they declaim against wealth, honors and pleasures, and go after them like mad, under the pretext of reforming the world and its morals." These philosophers "concern themselves about the Domestic Order only to rivet tighter chains on the weaker sex." They denounce young people who can still do what age now denies them, like the envious oldsters cited by Horace, who "*Disqualified from pleasures that youth abuses, / Condemn them for the boon that age refuses.*"

This is Fourier at his best.

2. Fourier: The Short-Sighted Visionary

Fourier's superiority to the prejudices of his day may make us charitable toward his weaknesses, but we must see what his weaknesses

are. For in the end Fourier will capitulate to those prejudices. The root of his failure was that he approached the question of equality for women from the side of the problem of *sexual freedom, not equal rights* — and he stuck there.

These two questions have been intertwined throughout the history of the so-called "woman question," mostly from the male viewpoint. It is the old society that insisted on linking them inextricably. The philistines always had the smirking conviction that sociopolitical rights for women could not be separated from sexual freedom, and that sexual liberty meant sexual libertinism; hence freeing women from even the worst legal chains meant taking a first step toward moral anarchy.

Social radicals have therefore always faced the need to distinguish. There is a vital distinction between concern for women's rights (or liberty), founded on the aspiration for human freedom, and rejection of all restrictions on sexuality imposed by current social mores. This distinction is clearer in our day than ever before. Precisely because so many veils have been lifted, we plainly see the contemporary phenomenon of "sexual freedom" advocates who are only a new type of oppressors and exploiters of women. Many of the latter deserve the Male Chauvinist Pig of the Year award — from the Henry Miller type, whose anti-establishment rebellion masks the fact that he regards women as sexual objects only, to the Playboy Club sexploiter. To these champions of sexual freedom, women's emancipation operationally means their emancipation from sexual inhibitions the better to make them available to "emancipated" men for purposes that have nothing to do with social equality.

Even in Fourier's first book — which we quoted above, and which is easily his best on this issue — his views on women's *rights* were embedded in, and almost incidental to, his exposition of the coming delights of sexual permissiveness in his utopia. In this and later books, he devoted most space not to women's rights and social equality but to such burning questions as the sixty-four varieties of cuckoldry in

modern society. This may make amusing reading, but it reflects his distorted emphasis.

Much more important to Fourier than women's equal rights were his blueprints for sexual life in his utopia. In *Theory of the Four Movements* he describes a rather complex and perfectly arbitrary pattern of male-female living groups, where sexual relations resemble group marriage; and he freely lays down restrictive patterns and regulations for various pairing relationships. This is the sort of social engineering he delights in working out on paper, with artificial detail piled on detail — all "logically" deduced from abstractions about human nature. His phalansteries (blueprinted communities) wind up being a variation on the medieval monastery or convent pattern which practised the opposite of his precepts.

That this was what Fourier was mainly interested in became even more evident after his first book. Women's rights and equality were more and more muted; the blueprints for the sexual revolution of the New World of Love filled an ever larger portion of his mental horizon. The result was seen in a book whose bulky manuscript he left unfinished, *Le Nouveau Monde Amoureux*. After his death, his cautious disciples suppressed it, being apprehensive enough about bourgeois indignation at the "immoral" material Fourier had already published. (It appeared in print only in 1967.) In all its 500-odd printed pages, there is next to no attention paid to the social problem of women's equality.

Here is a political portent. In our own day, the anthology of Fourier's writings, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, edited by Beecher and Bienvenu, pays much attention to the "sexual freedom" side of Fourier and includes many excerpts from his unfinished manuscript; but it neglects precisely those writings by Fourier on women's emancipation that were famous among his contemporaries and most influential for generations. This same pattern is reflected in the editors' Introduction, a substantial essay. It does not contain a sentence devoted to Fourier's views on women's sociopolitical freedom and the

influence of his views for the history of the issue. This contrast speaks eloquently about the various guises of sexism.

The change in Fourier's writings does not necessarily mean that he changed his views; it is a question of what he thought important. He needed hundreds of pages for his loving concentration on varieties of sexual encounter, "orgies," incest, polygamy, and other fascinating questions, and none to mention whether women really had equal rights in his Nouveau Monde Amoureux. It is a testimonial to the ambiguous meaning of "sexual freedom." Freedom for what and whom?

What Fourier sees in central place is not freedom *for women* but, rather, freedom of *access to women* -— for emancipated men like himself, who rightly rejected the contemporary patterns of both libertinism and decorous morality. In this sense, for all his advanced contributions, Fourier remained within the boundaries of sexism.

This motive drive is one of two reasons why his *Theory of the Four Movements* addressed itself to men, and to men's interests, in proposing its reforms. The other reason was that it is the Master Sex that had to be convinced, since it controlled society. Fourier, we know, had a broad streak of cunning-opportunist practicality alongside his visionary fancy. His catalogue of the defects of the marriage institution very systematically lists its disadvantages for *men*.

This appeal to men's interests was not simply a tactic, for it merged into his tendency to soft-pedal all issues of women's rights. If he began by subordinating women's interests, he ended by rejecting them in practice. Already in *Theory of the Four Movements* he assured his readers that *at present* he proposed no demands for women's emancipation or equality of rights. Indeed, he began to say that he strongly opposed any such changes or reforms in present society, as distinct from the beautiful future.

After having made a strong argument for women's "freedom" in his first book, he appeared to be alarmed by his own daring, and hastened to assure that he had no unorthodox proposals for *now*:

> I do not mean to...suggest that the spirit of liberty should be instilled in women. To be sure, it is necessary for each social period to mold youth to revere the dominant absurdities... [J]ust as I would condemn a Barbarian who raised his daughters in the ways of Civilization though they would never live under it, I would likewise condemn a Civilized man who raised his daughters in the spirit of liberty and reason appropriate to the 6th and 7th Periods [of the happy Fourierist future], which we have not reached.

From his analysis of how society has made women "weak," he concludes that since they *are* weak, they need masters at present. Since he has proved that women *are* thoroughly rotten creatures, how can such rotten products of this society be granted freedom? Changes in their lot are scheduled only for the happy tomorrow after the Fourierist phalansteries have operated for generations. Let the spirit of liberty be "instilled" in women only after society has been revolutionized -— by the men, of course.

It is easy enough to show how this practical conclusion collided with arguments adduced in other chapters; for Fourier was two-headed on the subject. He did have a passage in his first book which implied that his proposed sexual revolution was an immediate objective. Its "various delights" for the *voluptueux* were promised for "the present generation," as soon as the New Order was organized. "I insist on the nearness of this good fortune; for in matters of pleasure one does not like delays." He tells the reader titillatingly that he has refrained from giving the whole picture, "lifting only a corner of the curtain," because a view of the whole picture "would cause too much enthusiasm, especially among the women." It is the language of the carnival barker. Later on in the same book, his other head tells him to stress the remoteness of the prospect in order not to *épater la bourgeoisie* more than it can stand.

In later books, especially under the increasingly cautious influence of disciples who were more interested than he in total respectability, he wrote more than once that the aforedescribed delights could not be expected for as much as a hundred years after the coming of the New Order. He assured his public that the new "extension of liberties in love" which he had committed to paper "will be introduced only *by degrees* and not suddenly..." It will have to be "voted for by the fathers and husbands over the entire globe." Still later, he asserted that "I have often said: the innovations will never take place except after unanimous votes of the fathers and husbands." The thing is now only a visionary fancy.

Visionary indeed: for Fourier the emancipation of women was a vision — a vision to dangle before dazzled eyes, not a programmatic plank to fight for. The utopianism of this utopian was not a matter of his visionariness but of his shortsightedness; he could not see the realities of *political* struggle.

Fourier's great thesis — that social progress is proportional to women's liberation — may have been exaggerated in form but it had the merit of pointing to a cogent conclusion: the condition of women is not only a barometer of social progress but also a lever. It follows that there is good reason to fight for women's liberation now — especially now. Fourier did not understand the contradiction between his historical thesis and his practical operation precisely because of his utopianism; he understood only dangling visions.

There is a related contradiction, common to prophets who denounce the status quo. Fourier "proves" so thoroughly that contemporary society debases and corrupts women that it becomes impossible to see how the degenerate and mutilated products of the system can change it. Yet he exhorts them to do so; he wants them to rise up as soon as they read his consciousness-raising revelations about their own stultification. In effect he tells women*: Poor women, you have been degraded into animals. It's not your fault, but you're pretty worthless creatures,*

you know. And now that I have told you this, I can't understand why you female canaille don't immediately turn into Joans of Arc.

The necessary result of this nonsense is, first, disillusionment; next, the conclusion that salvation can never come from the debased canaille themselves, but from above — that is, from those who did the debasing. To save the victim there is only the executioner. This is illogical, but it has the advantage of being an easy delusion to hang on to; for this solution requires only one messiah, one enlightened Teacher, one Good Despot, one progressive capitalist, or one Maximum Leader.

There is a straight road from the one-sided and mechanical thesis of the debasement of the victim by society to the authoritarian solution of the Savior from Above. It was Marx who offered the solution to this dilemma: the victimized mass becomes *fit to rule* only through the process of its own struggle against victimization. The social and political class struggle is a school, not merely a battlefield. But utopianism has no solution to the dilemma, no matter how pleasingly it dangles its visions.

Finally, let us give the helm a turn or two the other way, in the name of balance.

While it is superficial to hail Fourier uncritically as a modern prophet, I think it is no better simply to condemn him for his inadequacies. The historical fact is that it was the strong side of Fourier that, in fact, had the most impact on the socialist movement as it converged with feminism. Fourier's queasy arguments against women's-rights-now were pushed into the background in the furor over his powerful exposure of the moral hypocrisy of society.

It was not Fourier's disciples who were responsible for this development. On the contrary: these followers soon developed into a pinkish reformist sect under Victor Considérant, and did their utmost to conceal or gloss over their founder's deviations from respectable morality. No, it was the Establishment itself that ensured Fourier's influence by making him the target of their outraged denunciation. This is a historical service that the ruling elements in society have rendered time and again. Fourier became a *révolutionnaire malgré lui.* Socialism, done in by its friends

again and again, can often depend on its enemies to keep it in the ways of truth.

3. The Saint-Simonians: Into the Bog

If Fourier's feminism was not carried forward by the Fourierists, who did? The answer is: this was done by the Saint-Simonian group which developed in the late 1820s.

It is ironic that the founder of Saint-Simonianism, Count Claude Henri de Saint-Simon himself, had virtually ignored the issue. The two tendencies, Fourierist and Saint-Simonian, went in opposite directions on this point as they developed: in the one case the Founder had pushed the issue to a high point, and his followers tried to bury it; in the other, this pattern was reversed.

True, Saint-Simon had once made a passing allusion to admitting women to membership in one of his hierarchical ruling bodies; but in fact he had no interest in women's rights, and little interest in anyone's rights. Saint-Simon was the most authoritarian of any of the early socialistic ideologists. This characteristic was carried over to the circle of followers who grouped themselves after the Founder's death around the periodical *Le Producteur*, with Olinde Rodrigues as editor and Saint-Amand Bazard and Prosper Enfantin as its leading thinkers. "We call for order and proclaim the strongest and most unitary hierarchy for the future" — this is what they taught when they started giving lectures in 1828. If there was no question of equal rights for men, there was hardly any reason for equal rights for women, except insofar as equality was furthered by equally subjecting both sexes to the demands of hierarchical power.

Bazard, who was the dominant mind in the first period of the group's existence, was strongly influenced by Fourier's ideas on the woman question. It was under his leadership that the Saint-Simonian disciples became both semisocialistic and profeminist. In particular Bazard adopted a number of Fourierist doctrines: that the real unit of society was neither the man nor the woman but the couple, the Male-

Female unit; that the present marriage institution was an instrument for the subordination of women, and that marriages should be freely dissoluble; and that the double standard in sex morality should be rejected. These views went far to condemn women's unfairly subordinate role in present society. But Bazard was for monogamous marriage, meaning the equal obligation of both partners to maintain fidelity unless the bond was dissolved.

Bazard started talking about these issues in the lectures of 1828-1830 which were later published as the *Exposition de la Doctrine de Saint-Simon*. They had not been mentioned in *Le Producteur*. In general, the social-political content of Saint-Simonianism as a movement reached its apogee in Bazard's lectures, and the influence of the tendency in France and in nearby countries mounted especially after the impetus given by the "July Revolution" of 1830, which shook up all of politics. By November of that year, the group acquired a daily paper when Pierre Leroux's *Globe* went over to Saint-Simonianism. In fact, almost everything that is positive in the blossoming of this early socialist tendency was associated with the leadership of Bazard.

But when in late 1829 the group had organized itself as a "Church," a religion, it had consecrated two popes to head its hierarchical structure: Bazard and Enfantin. This was one pope too many. This is not the place to review the whole story, but, in brief, Enfantin reached out for sole power and made a successful takeover coup in November 1831. *The issue on which Enfantin based his coup, and on which the movement was wrecked, was the woman question.*

Anyway, Enfantin claimed it was the woman question. In fact, the issue had nothing to do with women's rights or freedom except in rhetoric. The issue was Enfantin's proposal to recast the movement to subordinate social-political issues, and put something else in first place: viz., rejection of the conventional sex morality of society, "sexual freedom."

Enfantin's leadership increasingly subordinated the movement's concerns with human exploitation and economic rationalization to the

watchword of "Emancipation of the flesh," which became probably the best-known slogan promulgated by socialists in the first half of the century. A month before the crisis and coup, in October 1831, Enfantin had proposed breaking out of the monogamous restriction advocated by Bazard. Those men and women, he said, who possessed a "mobile" nature foreign to "constancy" should not be bound by the restrictions of conventional mores. On November 21 he announced his takeover to the group as a *fait accompli*, take it or leave it: "I am not a presiding chairman, nor even a tutor or teacher. I am not even *a* priest — I am THE Father of Humanity!" Some dissidents walked out on the messiah.

At the same session Enfantin made clear that the issue had nothing to do with advocating more rights for women or greater equality for them than Bazard was willing to countenance. What he aimed for was the emancipation of *men*, primarily, from restriction to one sexual partner at a time. He revealed that this was the key to all problems of society.

In a speech *ex cathedra*, Enfantin informed the flock that the Saint-Simonian women would henceforth have a new status. Since "woman is still a slave" and we men must liberate her, Saint-Simonian women will no longer be eligible for the higher degrees in the hierarchy. The whole movement must revolve around the "Call for the Woman," that is, the mystical search for The Woman who would occupy the supernal throne alongside the Father of Humanity — some day. But pending the discovery of this paragon, the unliberated women who were actually there in the unemancipated flesh were to be second-class sisters. "Our Apostolate is an apostolate of men," he proclaimed; only men can be *classé* in the hierarchy because men "have long had their complete liberty with respect to women" but not vice versa.

"There is our new position with respect to women," he summed up. No woman could any longer appear on a Saint-Simonian platform as its preacher; no woman could now be a part of the elite leadership (called The Family). Their consolation was, however, that they could

consider themselves to be leaders of all the rest of the women in the world (who of course paid no attention).

Woman was henceforth "enthroned" beside Enfantin — on an empty chair. There has never been a more blatant case of the Pedestal Ploy.

The new line was announced at a public rally on November 27. Enfantin made his speech, beaming on his audience from his divine cloud: "Our Apostolate can be exercised as yet only by men; the Free Woman has not yet spoken..." Of course, "the moral law of the future is the equality of men and women," but the audience had no reason to hold their breaths waiting for the great moment. Then Rodrigues made his pitch for money contributions with an appeal to "Bankers, capitalists, workers!" in that order, and they proceeded to incorporate a Saint-Simonian financial institution to handle their business interests.

This was the beginning of the end for Saint-Simonianism. Another great event took place that same month. During the "three glorious days" of November 21-23 came the uprising of the *canuts* (silk-weaving workers) of Lyons — the first great revolt of the modern proletariat in Europe. At the time, the Saint-Simonians sincerely deplored this movement. While expressing sympathy with *canut* grievances, they condemned not only the weavers' resort to force but also their defiance of high authority (a serious offence in the framework of Saint-Simonian ideas). Editor Michel Chevalier averred truthfully: "we are and we have been the firmest supporters of real order in France." But the truth was of no avail. The government authorities had found disturbing evidences of Saint-Simonian sympathies among the Lyons workers, and this fact impressed them much more than Saint-Simonian protestations. The government set out to persecute the sect out of existence.

Having adopted this aim, the Paris government seized on the handiest pretext for a witch-hunt: not the Saint-Simonians' real social and political views which had "corrupted" the Lyons workers, but a more sensitive issue: the issue of sex morality, which Enfantin was now handing them gratis.

The day after the November 27 rally, the government moved for an indictment. In January the police raided the Saint-Simonian premises, closed its rallies, and arrested a group of leaders, including Enfantin. During the ensuing trial in August 1832, Enfantin — instead of seeking to keep the spotlight on the radical social views which were the real reason for the crackdown — made the prosecution's job easy by his grandstand plays against sex morality.

Enfantin believed in symbols, as we have seen — especially empty and dramatic ones. He came into court, refusing to accept defence attorneys, with two Saint-Simonian women whom he pretended to introduce as his counsel. But he was quite willing to assert in court that he stood for the political superiority of men over women. Reason: men think of the Big Family (society) while women are concerned with the small family, with domestic life... The prosecution, on its part, made a big thing of an article in the Saint-Simonian *Globe* advocating that men and women should "without jealousy, give themselves to several," and so on.

As the public ate up all this spicy stuff about Free Love (it was still spicy in those days), the government did not have to worry about criticism of the social order or the lot of the weavers.

So in the course of a few months under the Father of Humanity, the Saint-Simonian movement was sidetracked into a bog; turned toward the issue of "sexual freedom" instead of women's rights; set up for an easy government crackdown; and cast in the public mind as a circus for crazies.

Of the subsequent history of the Saint-Simonian sect, I think the most often quoted fact is this: the disciples wore a special kind of garment that buttoned down the back to symbolize the need of brothers to help each other, since one could not button it oneself. As we saw, Enfantin was great on symbols. One remembers that the best-known garment answering this description is — the straitjacket.

4. The Two Faces of Cabet

By the 1840s, as we will see, there were other socialistic tendencies of interest in the history of women's rights; but of the utopian sects there is a last one to be considered before we end this chapter.

Among the French sects, the banner of feminism seemed to be taken over by the movement founded by Etienne Cabet, which he called "Icarian Communism." Cabet had published the most detailed utopian blueprint of all, in his novelistic *Voyage en Icarie* (1840); on the other hand, Cabet (not personally a fantasist) proceeded to organize the most down-to-earth social-political movement around his ideas. He was very much aware of the value of the woman question in gaining adherents from half the population, and he wanted to use it for all it was worth.

The result was a series of contradictions between word and deed which force us to make a cynical but justified explanation: Cabet himself did not favor a single concrete step of any importance that would increase women's rights, but he tried to write and speak so as to give women the impression that he did. He had a good deal of success in this exercise in doubletalk: Jeanne Deroin (whom we will meet later) looked on Cabet as the left's leading proponent of women's rights. She was taken in.

To be sure, by the 1840s there was no vast number of people who even pretended to be for advances in feminist rights. The Saint-Simonians had collapsed, and anyway their crackpottish transformation of the issue was not a help but a hindrance. The Fourierist group under Victor Considérant was doing its best to be as respectable as possible. At least Cabet made noises about women's rights; this was the homage he paid to feminism.

Cabet's exercise in two-facedness started in his movement bible, the *Voyage to Icaria* itself. The book contains a direct statement that in Icaria "husband and wife are equals." But many pages away, it also has the nearest thing to an Orwellism that I have seen written down in complete seriousness: the husband is more equal. This is what Cabet

writes: "I should like the law to proclaim, as in Icaria, *equality between husband and wife*, only making the voice of the husband the preponderant one..."

In fact, wherever Icaria gets concrete, women's role and rights get to look more and more like the existing society. Women cannot vote, or hold office, or participate in the political life of this utopia. The typical family is patriarchal: a grandfather orders everyone around like the patriarch of a French peasant family. While women may work at outside jobs (this is a bit of modernism) they are still responsible for the household chores. Icarian morality is *more* prudish and hidebound than advanced French society of the time. The Icarians boast that there are no cabarets, taverns, or other dens of iniquity, but instead there are fine public privies everywhere. Typically, we are *told* that education is the same for boys and girls, but when we learn the details we find that after adolescence girls are taught the "womanly" arts (housework, cooking, specializations like dressmaking, etc.). There is actually a "cult of woman" in Icaria — it was enjoined by the Founder in just those words — but this is only the Pedestal Ploy again.

This two-timing two-step, or sex shuffle, was continued by Cabet all through his subsequent political movement. Again it must be emphasized that his distinction lay in the assiduity of his lip service; few others bothered to deceive feminists in this fashion. C. H. Johnson has documented this aspect of the Icarian movement; for example, he describes how at a meeting in the midst of the 1848 revolution Cabet managed to avoid coming out for woman suffrage while Jeanne Deroin came away from the meeting believing that he had endorsed the cause. His organ *Le Populaire* had a regular feuilletonist who was a woman and a feminist (writing under a masculine name), but eventually this Jenny d'Héricourt broke with Cabet and told the truth about his views.

Yet, for all that, it would be superficial to dismiss Cabetism as simply a matter of hypocrisy, though it *was* hypocritical. In a way we have already seen, Cabet served *malgré lui*. Illusions too are social realities in a sense; they have an effect. Jenny d'Héricourt, even in her

denunciation of Cabet, was probably right in maintaining that Icarian Communism as a doctrine was responsible for advertising the "great truth ... that the liberty of woman is identical with that of the masses." We have seen how Reaction itself made the views of Fourier and the Saint-Simonians into a cause célèbre; we can also see that political hypocrisy gave some valuable cover to militant women in the period leading up to the revolutions of 1848-1849.

What we have not yet seen is any political basis for *integrating* socialist and feminist ideas — other than Fourier's general formula. And we have not yet met anyone who advocated complete equal rights for women *now*. Nothing like this emerged from any of the utopian movements despite their reputation for vision and visionariness. But by Cabet's time it had already been done in England — by a man and a woman who were not utopians.

Chapter 5
JAMES MORRISON AND WORKING-CLASS FEMINISM

According to the mythology of much feminist history, advocacy of women's rights was the doing of certain enlightened intellectuals almost exclusively — Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and so on. An accompanying tenet, implicit or explicit, has it that resistance to sexism can come only from the "educated classes," while the working classes necessarily remain a hotbed of male chauvinist attitudes and practices.

It is beyond question, of course, that most sectors of *both* the upper and the lower classes have been rife with sexist prejudices. It is the counterposition that is in question. Note that this counterposition contrasts enlightened individuals of the bourgeoisie with the mass ranks of sexist proles, whose enlightened individuals are seldom mentioned.

This is methodologically invalid. One reason for this pattern is that the aforesaid enlightened individuals in the lower classes, however numerous, have not tended to write and publish books (which after all is the mode of existence of intellectuals virtually by definition). Wollstonecraft and Mill published books. The influence of the others must be sought in other activities, if it is not to be misleadingly ignored.

The name of Wollstonecraft deserves special honor precisely because *there was not even a tiny minority of her class that constituted a simulacrum of a movement for her ideas.* From her class's point of view she was a pariah; this very fact adds to her stature historically, for all her limitations. We have seen that in revolutionary France there was *no* social tendency in the upper classes that spoke up in support of Condorcet, and that Olympe de Gouges was another pariah among her kind; while in contrast the women of the sansculottes took a large measure of revolutionary equality-in-action into their own hands en masse, that is, as a whole social stratum. For a short period the Revolutionary Women could be upborne on their surging movement as a vanguard, and represent a power even in high politics.

This contrast is instructive in the following way. In practice, the women of the people in Paris were far in advance of their educated "betters" *not* in the first place because their state of consciousness and enlightenment was higher, but because their actual social situation

pushed them to assume equality in struggle. The social struggle itself was far more enlightening than any consciousness-raising lecture could be.

Historical experience (when it is not suppressed) tells us this: that when exploited classes and sectors of society emerge into view from below, take the public stage in times of crisis and upset, there also tends to be a sharp upsurge in the social forces militating against sexism. *Under conditions of social upheaval, all social ideas have a question mark placed over them;* and the state of women's rights is no exception. *Upheaval* must be understood literally: the social ground is heaved up and exposed to the eye; it is overturned; it is this social overturn that reveals what was concealed before from the sight of historians. In "normal" times, which means nonrevolutionary times, the dominant ideas are the only ones usually heard aloud because they are the dominant ideas of society. This is why revolutions are not simply suspensions of normality but tests of what has been going on molecularly in the invisible depths of the social order.

If we assume that in normal times the vast majority (of all classes) internalize the conventional sexist patterns, then as soon as cracks start appearing in the social fabric, *in what strata of society do women's interests in sex equality begin to show up most prominently?* This, of course, is a subject on which serious work still has to be done. This chapter has only a contribution to make. It concerns the hidden history of early working-class feminism in England.

1. A Trade-Unionist in the 1830s

When William Thompson died in 1833, a period of intense working-class struggle was under way that would shortly lead to the organization of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, the English workingmen's first attempt at general union. It was an effort that momentarily swept even Robert Owen into the movement. Cruel exploitation in the mills and workshops was producing millionaires and misery, vast masses of capital and vast reservoirs of distress. The workers started organizing trade unions for elementary resistance.

One of the centers of trade-unionism in the early 1830s was Birmingham, where the key group was the Builders' Union. From 1831 on, it grew rapidly and was on the road to becoming a national organization. The leading voice of this workers' movement was a painter by trade who had made himself what would later be called a "worker-intellectual" (so called by intellectuals). In September 1833, with strikes breaking out everywhere, James Morrison founded *The Pioneer, or, Trades' Union Magazine*. Of the trade-union organs that sprang up, this was probably "the best of the bunch" (to quote G. D. G. Cole). It quickly grew in influence as the authentic spokesman of the embattled workers.

In view of what we are going to find out about Morrison and his *Pioneer,* it must be emphasized that it was no hole-in-the-corner operation by some pariah intellectual. On the contrary. Morrison was hip-deep in the regional life of the working-class movement. Besides being himself a member of the Painters' Union (a component of the Builders' Union), he had been active in the cooperative movement, in workers' education, and in the unstamped press agitation. Naturally he considered himself a disciple of Owenism, which had no rival in England within the framework of the New Order ideas; he had been active in swinging the Builders' Union to support Owen's ideas.

The *Pioneer* got so warm a reception regionally that in a couple of months Morrison moved his center of operations to London. Beginning in February 1834 his paper became the official organ of the newly founded "Grand National." This brought Morrison in direct conflict with Robert Owen himself, for to Owen the spirit of trade-union militancy that filled the columns of the *Pioneer* was anathema.

True, Morrison wrote sincere editorial statements *in favor* of class collaboration and peace between Masters and Operatives, as a consummation devoutly to be wished. He wanted to convince employers to make such collaboration possible by voluntarily moderating the excessive brutality of their exploitive practices. It would be easy to show that Morrison's *ideas* were not much more

revolutionary than Owen's.* There is a lesson here on the relation between ideas and social struggle; for with similar ideas, formally speaking, Owen deprecated militant trade-union struggle while Morrison helped carry on such struggle, as a journalist. He transmitted journalistically the pressures that heated up the workers' life-situation.

At any rate, by the summer of 1834, Owen, whose prestige was still unchallengeable in the leading councils of the Grand National, got Morrison's *Pioneer* dropped as official organ, after Morrison had rejected the cool proposal that he simply hand over his paper to the Grand National leadership. The *Pioneer* came to an end in July. Soon the Union started to break up too. Morrison came out of this racking experience broken in health. He died suddenly in August 1835, only 33 years old.

Among the most frustrating of historical accidents are the two premature deaths we have had to record in the last pages: namely, the deaths of William Thompson and James Morrison, who both might have been able to offer a healthier alternative to Owen's leadership of the new socialist movement, and who did in fact start to offer this alternative. They died soon after coming into conflict with Owen, who lived on long after his positive impetus to the movement had turned into a fetter on it.

2. The Feminism of the Class Struggle

Let us make an interim contrast.

If one judges by a typical work such as W. L. Blease's *The Emancipation of English Women*, socialist feminism did not exist. Blease is more interested in admiring such giant strides toward women's freedom as the conquest of the right to ride a horse sitting astride, i.e., the great Right to Be Bifurcated. Naturally, this achievement was relevant only to rich women. Yet, despite this bifurcation in historical concerns, it is

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* For more information on the nature of Morrison's ideas, see the Special Note appended at the end of this chapter

possible to find out that *the working-class and socialist movements of the early nineteenth century were centers of the advocacy of women's equality*.

This sort of feminism arose, as it had done in France, out of a life-situation of struggle. Women workers began to organize in the first trade unions as the century got started; women demonstrators were killed, along with men, in the 1819 Peterloo massacre; women operatives in the mills formed Female Reform Societies about the same time, for electoral reform. Women went on strike along with men or by themselves; and in the trade-union movement, when resolutions and decisions were up for consideration, *they voted*. Women's suffrage began inside the working class, just as it had begun inside the sansculotterie of the French Revolution. If we compare these workingwomen with the image of "Woman" portrayed in Wollstonecraft, we might be on a different planet.

Since this working-class feminism was not a theory or ideology but an accompaniment of real life, it could and often did coexist with conservative notions about "woman's place" and about the family. In a way the case is similar to the two sides of Morrison's ideas on class struggle and class collaboration: we are not dealing with intellectuals caught in the act of cerebrating, but with ideas and attitudes under pressure that were not necessarily congruent or consistent. In the real social struggles that went on, feminism was not primarily an *ism* but a condition.

This point, as it happens, was made in his own way by G. J. Holyoake, an Owenite organizer in the 1830s, who later authored a fat history of the movement from a standpoint hostile to socialism. He testified:

> To the honour of co-operators [Owenites], they always and everywhere were friendly to the equal civil rights of women. The subject is never obtruded and is never long absent. It continually recurs as though women

> were an equal part of the human family and were naturally inclined in Co-operation.

There was no comparable state of mind about women's equality in any other section of society. This happened not primarily because the Owenite workingmen were Advanced Thinkers, as Wollstonecraft had been an Advanced Thinker even among bourgeois women. It happened because the women were in fact involved in the social movement of struggle on an equal basis.

It did not happen because of Owen himself. Owen spent his life opposing the social and political powers that be and, in addition, fighting against the religious institutions of society; and this is enough courageous oppositionism for any one person. But he never made the woman question — the special oppression of women, and the program of women's equality — a part of his various crusades.

However, we must add that Owen did challenge the conventional marriage institution, with its underlying sexual prudery and its double standard. (Read, for example, his *Lectures on the Marriages of the Priesthood of the Old Immoral World*, 1835.) He was much concerned to plan for the emancipation of women from household drudgery; and he attacked the family as a basically evil institution. Thus he made it easier for elements in the Owenite movement to go beyond his own limited views.

There is no record, in any case, that Owen ever advocated social and political equality *now* in the field of women's rights, as William Thompson had done in 1825 under Anna Wheeler's influence. But the more advanced ideas, having been loosed, were rife in the movement that went by Owen's name — at a time when histories of feminism view these ideas as virtually unknown except among some marginal littérateurs.

To find even a marginal advocacy of something approaching thoroughgoing support to equal rights, we must look ahead to John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* of 1869. It is no derogation of the great importance of this work, especially for bourgeois feminism, to

reveal where the younger Mill got his ideas. Certainly not from his father, as we have seen! But he also knew the man who had attacked his father... Holyoake's history added the following to the passage quoted above:

> Mr. J. S. Mill frequented their [the Owenites'] meetings and knew their literature well, and must have listened in his youth to speculations which he subsequently illustrated to so much effect in his intrepid book, "Subjection of Women."

This passage in Holyoake's history took off from a mention of Mrs. Anna Wheeler's advocacy of women's participation in political affairs. But in fact the young Mill's youth was even better spent than Holyoake remembered. Mill tells in his *Autobiography* that he, together with a circle of young Benthamite-Utilitarian disciples whom he frequented, regarded his father's article on "Government" as "a masterpiece of political wisdom," but disagreed with its paragraph on women's rights. (A good trick, and not the product of pure logic, since this paragraph laid the basis for the rest, as we have pointed out.) He recalls that Bentham himself also disagreed, though at the time none of them ever disagreed publicly, this absence of dissent being one reason why Thompson undertook his own book.

Half a chapter away from this passage in the *Autobiography*, we learn that precisely in 1825 — evidently soon after the publication of Thompson's *Appeal* — this Benthamite youth section led by the junior Mill sallied into the meetings of the Owenite society in London and engaged in a series of debates, faction against faction, over a period of some months. Mill's memoirs tell us:

> ...the principal champion on their side [the Owenites'] was a very estimable man, with whom I was well acquainted, Mr. William Thompson, of Cork, author

> of a book on the Distribution of Wealth, and of an "Appeal" in behalf of women against the passage relating to them in my father's Essay on Government.

So, over four decades before he wrote his own book on the subject, John Stuart Mill was very well acquainted indeed not only with the Thompson-Wheeler pioneer work but also with Thompson's personal conversation and argumentation on the subject. Besides the debates mentioned in the *Autobiography*, there was a more personal connection; for the very estimable Thompson was not only a personal friend of Bentham's but had lived at Bentham's house for several months up to the spring of 1823. One may wonder whether the young Bethamites' disagreement with the "masterpiece of political wisdom" on women's rights *preceded or followed* Thompson's demonstrations-in-debate that it was a masterpiece of antidemocratic muddleheadedness.

Given these educational experiences of the young Mill, and the nature of his relations with the Owenites, one can perhaps assume that he must have also read what Morrison's *Pioneer* was writing on the woman question. These were writings about sex discrimination and sexism such as Mill himself could not rival even when he screwed his courage to the sticking point and published his opinions in 1869, that is, on the eve of their becoming respectable.

To this remarkable organ of trade-unionism we now turn.

3. Morrison's Pioneer

The weekly *Pioneer* lasted for only forty-four issues, from September 7, 1833 to July 5, 1834, and so the relatively large amount of material devoted to the woman question hits the reader's eye as a substantial proportion of the whole. Nor did this emphasis blossom in early issues and fade away as the paper's scope enlarged. Just the reverse: the first seven numbers had little of this material, and the subject grew in importance as the paper went along.

In February a "woman's page" was announced, described as "a page for women's rights," not as a page "of interest to women"; and this department was continued to the end. It was first entitled "A Page for the Ladies," but in April Morrison criticized this designation (as quoted below), and adopted the rubric "Woman's Page."

Morrison's first substantial statement came in No. 8 as he greeted the formation of a women's union in Leicester. Apparently this union had had to be organized at first in secret, and he congratulates the women on how well they carried it through: "you have shewn your self-styled lords and masters, that you can keep a secret as well as they can." He generalizes:

> It is in this, as it is in everything appertaining to general improvement; for after all the boasted refinement of higher society, the working classes are the first to cast away long standing prejudices.

You will be called "blue-stockings," Morrison warns the Leicester women, but this epithet "which has been thrown at every intelligent woman who happened to have more sense than her stupid husband, has not deterred the ladies of Leicester from uniting to obtain the advancement of themselves and their kindred."

Morrison makes a criticism: the Leicester lodge consists entirely of women, with the exception of two posts occupied by men, that of "protector" (sergeant-at-arms?) and secretary. You should not make these exceptions, Morrison advises: "you are able to fulfil those duties yourselves." Again he generalizes:

> Then do, we beg of you, feel the pride of your own strength, and lose the habit of leaning so much on the judgment of the other sex. ...[W]e would recommend that the women of Leicester do assert their own dignity, and have a secretary of their own sex, and be

> self-protected. Do not let us for ever see woman looking up to man for anything which needs so small acquirement. The very habit of doing a little duty like this for themselves, will create a spirit of independence which will rise to things of greater magnitude, and when women acquire freedom their children will never more be slaves.
>
> It is much to be regretted, that you have so long succumbed to the insolent despotism of man.

This is remarkable advice, indeed amazing — for the 1830s! It is far more hostile to the mind of the contemporary society than the advocacy of this or that programmatic point, though Morrison was not behindhand on program, as we will see. He did not merely advocate equality *for* women; he advised them to take equality — and there is a great difference.

Before we go on to Morrison's main writings, a possible misunderstanding must be anticipated. I have emphasized that we are not dealing here with an isolated individual who is so far ahead of his times that he or she can be admired for uniqueness. Morrison's articles were published as the official editorial expression in an organ of a mass working-class movement. One must wonder: these editorial attacks on the "insolent despotism of man" and exhortation of women to quit listening to men as masters — these sentiments which notoriously fly in the face of the stereotype of working-class sexism — didn't they elicit indignant protest and resentment from most of Morrison's readers and subscribers, upon whom he had to rely for the paper's very existence, namely, the men?

There is no sign that this was much of a problem for the paper. The *Pioneer* solicited and published critical dissents from its worker readers; it particularly solicited dissent from its views on the woman question, and it sounded as if it had trouble getting as much of it as it

wanted for discussion purposes. Morrison did print, and discuss, a dissenting critique by a master tailor, as we will see.

But where was the storm of indignation that should have greeted the *Pioneer*'s militant undermining of male supremacy in the family and everywhere else? Did editor Morrison conceal the onslaught that came in, that is, suppress its publication? There is not the least indication, direct or indirect, that anything like this happened. There were no overt or covert references to any such problem. Certainly Holyoake's memory, while not favorable to Owenism, held no such recollection. Morrison's enterprise came to grief in London, not in Birmingham; and not from lack of support by his base, but rather from the rebuff administered on top, by the Owenite leadership.

In fact, the internal evidence argues that Morrison continued to write along these lines of feminist militancy just as if he felt that this line was reason for the paper's popularity, not a source of weakness. Announcing the woman's page, he wrote congratulatingly that

> The men have done their duty in throwing to the dogs the barbarous prejudices that women had no right to meet in council, nor take a mental part in human life; and from this movement greater goodwill will ultimately follow than any other step the men have taken.

To be sure, I doubt that *all* the barbarous prejudices were thrown to the dogs; the point is that the militant profeminist viewpoint of the *Pioneer* constituted not a pariah obsession but the accepted public opinion of this workers' movement. In any other milieu in England at this time or in any other country, an editor who published this stuff in issue after issue would have been fired, stoned, or institutionalized. These facts stand on their head the whole traditional stereotype of where the class roots of profeminism lie.

Morrison wanted his woman readers to use the *Pioneer* as their own outlet; he printed a rather large number of letters from women, especially woman unionists, inspired by his own articles. He first broadcast an appeal for letters in the Leicester article quoted above. "We hope then to hear from the sisterhood: but now ladies, mind and write it yourselves..."

> ...we [men] do not know how to write like you; our thoughts are not your thoughts, nor our ways your ways. — A man cannot feign a woman's feelings;— he does not know her wrongs;— he wrongs her most himself. — He is the tyrant,— she the slave. — How can *he* portray *her* smothered thought, or write *her* anxious wish? Write yourselves, then, write yourselves.

A few months later, Morrison devoted a whole "Woman's Page" to this same theme, beginning with the sentence: "Ah no! we cannot write as women feel!"

The letters from women published in the *Pioneer* are often of great interest, and I scant them here with reluctance. They tell us a great deal about the women's trade-union activities that were going on. Women wrote in announcing the formation of militant women's groups, mostly trade-unionist. From Derby, scene of a bitter turnout/lockout struggle, a woman's letter appealed for the formation of a "female union": "Let the first lispings of your innocent offspring be *union! union*!" A "London Mechanic's Wife" made a point that historians should take to heart:

> Shall the idiot-like, the stupid and usurious capitalists, tell us to look to our domestic affairs, and say, *"these we understand best*," we will retort on them, and tell them that thousands of us have *scarce any domestic affairs to look*

> *after,* when the want of employment on the one hand, or ill-requited toil on the other, have left our habitations almost destitute...

A woman's letter echoed Fourier's great thesis, perhaps without having heard it before. Arguing for the proposition that "both sexes shall enjoy an equality of rights and privileges," she added: "Certain it is, no change for the better can take place in society, unless the emancipation of women is agreed upon... [I]n proportion as woman is made a full sharer of the benefits of 'Union,' in such proportion will man discover his ultimate success will be hastened or retarded."

But now let us focus on Morrison's own writings.

4. A Synthetic Essay by James Morrison

Instead of pasting together a series of excerpts from Morrison's essays and exhortations, let us ask the following question: *Suppose Morrison had edited his writings on the woman question into a pamphlet or fly sheet*, wouldn't it be one of the great landmarks in the literature of the subject? Let us imagine that he did so: selected passages to make his various points, avoided repetition, eliminated some excess verbiage, emphasized his main themes, and, of course, not bothered to show excisions and jumps with suspension points and bracketed interpolations.

In the following "synthesized" essay, every sentence and every word is Morrison's own. I have added or changed nothing; only rearranged. I have altered the language in no respect, not even in spelling or punctuation. I have interpolated no comments or interpretations of my own. Let us imagine that it is entitled —

THE SUBJECTION OF WORKINGWOMEN
The Views of
James Morrison

Does man think, or does woman think, that women are free, because they can go out to church or market, lecture-room, assembly-room, theatre, or ball-room at pleasure? They are as much domesticated in all these places as they are at home.

What do they hear at church? A man *haranguing the two sexes; and though he did address himself to woman only, what does he know about woman, of whose feelings he has no experience? If woman go to market, a theatre, a ball-room, a lecture-room, these everlasting men are for ever around her. They are her teachers, her counsellors, her politicians, her pastors, her agents, her every thing.*

In fine, the whole business of society is so evidently in the hands of man, *that a queen is almost necessitated even to look upon her own footman as her superior, merely because he is a man; and man is enabled, merely by the deceitful spell of this nominal supremacy, to exercise a species of control over woman, which does not result from real superiority of intellect or morals, but, like the spiritual authority of ancient priests, from some fancied excellence, which is supposed to be peculiarly and exclusively the inheritance of the male.*

Men have their public meetings, their social meetings, their newspapers, their magazines, their male speakers, and their male editors, and men with men correspond in all quarters of the world; but woman knows nothing of woman, except through the medium of man — a dense medium, which distorts her native character, and bedaubs it with the false colouring of the sex whose feelings, on a thousand delicate subjects, must be the very reverse of her own.

How can woman redeem herself from such shackles of ignorance and mental slavery? By application to man? Fool she must be, if she apply to man to get a knowledge of herself, and the interests of her own sex. Men have nothing to do with women; they are two distinct animals altogether; they have each a sphere of their own, with which the other cannot, without creating mischief, interfere. Therefore, we say, let woman look to herself; allow no male to enter her meetings, until she has obtained sufficient skill and experience to act in public, and then let her assembly rooms be thrown open.

Some women say they are free; they do not want to be redeemed. But if they be free themselves, will their freedom bestow liberty upon the rest of their sex? Yet where is the woman who can say she is free? Why are the ladies so very reluctant to

go out alone? Because, by going free, *they subject themselves to reproach. But we do not call that freedom which carries reproach along with it.*

*Is woman free to speak or to act as her feelings prompt her? But the laws of the land have doomed her to inferiority and political annihilation! The very being or existence of a woman is supposed to be extinct during marriage; she is called a "*feme covert*" — that is, a woman whose being is not acknowledged — an invisible woman — a species of ghost, who haunts her husband, and only becomes half solidified when he is no more.*

An unmarried woman is a ghost as well. Thus, for instance, if an unmarried woman should be so unfortunate as to have a child, that child can inherit nothing, because, as the law says, "he is the son of nobody*." Now nothing can be more clear than this: "a woman is* nobody*." And when she has a husband, he is her all in all; she takes his name; she becomes his property; she cannot inherit individually; she is his subject; he is her sovereign.*

Think of this, till your spirits are roused to a determination to compel the law to regard you as somebodies. But how will you do this, for the law won't hear you? You have no voice, no vote, no influence on legislation. Then make a legislation for yourselves, a woman's law. We shall no longer trample upon your rights; we shall acknowledge your equality; we shall divide the kingdom with you; and, each embracing that species of employment which is suited to the sex, with no political distinctions of first or last, greater or less, we shall remove the curse which was inflicted upon woman, "Thy desires shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule *over thee."*

Woman *is an endearing, social name; but* lady *has something shockingly aristocratic and unequal about it; it conveys the idea of superiority and control; it is the counterpart of lord. Whatever was its original meaning, it implied the same kind of inequality which is included in the counter-title "lord"; and it almost looks as if it was bestowed upon woman as a kind of soothing, flattering title, to atone for the deprivation of the real authority which the name implies. Man is the lord, without assuming the title. Woman has got the title, but wants the authority.*

A tailor has been rebuking us very severely for our preposterous absurdities about the women. This unionist scouts the idea of women's rights and privileges, and of their associating together to demand them of the male, and he says, that though not

a profligate himself, if his wife were to go to legislate, it would be a certain way of making him a profligate. It is out at last. This is the spirit of the male. We wanted to draw it out, in order that it might be exposed.

The working-men complain that the masters exercise authority over them; and they maintain their right to associate, and prescribe laws for their own protection. But speak of any project which shall diminish the authority of the male, or give him an equal, where once he found an inferior, and then the spirit of Toryism awakes that has long been dormant. All men are Tories by nature. Even the unionists themselves, who rail against tyrants and oppressors, have the blood of the aristocrat flowing in their veins.

Our correspondent says that according to the Bible, women must be "discreet, chaste, and keepers at home, not gadding about or busy bodies; and how can this be exemplified if they go out to legislate*?" This is the opinion of a male unionist. It only belongs to men to* gad about *and be* busy bodies. *Women have nothing to do but to keep at home, and remain in ignorance of everything but cooking, washing, scrubbing pots, &c. Now the Bible, which has been quoted against the women by a master, may be quoted with equal authority against the men. It says, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear." If our opponents quote from the master's page, let them quote from the servant's page also, or we shall do it for them.*

We do not want to set women a-gadding, but to prevent their gadding and their tattling. What is it that makes woman a tattler and a busy body, but the confined sphere in which she moves? She is individualised by the narrowness of her knowledge and experience. What is it that makes a villager less liberal than an inhabitant of the city? His confinement certainly. The only way to cure women of tattling and gadding is the way by which men are cured, enlarging their views and widening their sphere of activity.

Our correspondent would have each woman subject to her own husband. He may go to a coffee-house every night. He has a right to do this, *for he makes the money. But what is the woman doing? She is working from morning till night at house-keeping; she is bearing children; she is cooking, and washing, and cleaning. And all this for nothing; for she gets no wages. Her wages come from her husband; they are optional. If she complain, he can damn and swear. And it is high treason*

in women to resist such authority, and claim the privilege of a fair reward of their labour!

Good God! if we thought that the sex woman *could patiently endure such a yoke of bondage, we should hate her most heartily! But how is she to prevent it? Why, by the very same means by which the men will prevent the tyranny of the master. Women will save themselves abundance of labour by association.*

Because we advocate the cause of female associations, do we therefore advise woman to cast off her feminine character, and assume the effrontery of man? If union is to produce such a corrupting effect, then, for heaven's sake, let the men beware of it; for man and woman are one nature, and are refined or corrupted by the same means.

We assure our correspondent we are more and more convinced, that he has too much of the spirit of the master *in him; a spirit which we are determined to resist, wherever we find it. But it is degrading to human nature to admit the superiority of one being over another, merely because the* gender *is different. What is this but aristocracy? If we admit the right of man to rule over woman, merely because he is* man, *then we may, upon the same principle, admit the authority of one man to tyrannize over another, merely because he is of noble blood,* high born.

Certainly, nothing can be more unjust than that law of public opinion and of political jurisprudence which gives a fool (merely because he is a man) a political and domestic authority over a woman, who may, in every other respect except the circumstance of sex, be his decided superior. It is a tyrant's law, and is destined, for the good of both sexes, to be for ever annulled. Now is the day of general redemption for all. Black slaves and white slaves, male slaves and female slaves, must all be freed.

We warn all our sisters against every attempt in the male to scatter women and prevent their communion. Men will attempt it under every guise — the guise of love, of modesty, of religion, of chastity; in fine, every guise under which the male contrives to woo the female. But what is the consequence of your yielding to their insinuations? Why, you see the consequences already. The practice has had a fair trial. Woman is a slave, a servant to man. We burn, we weep to see her, as she appears to us daily. We know how to cure the evil; but man, man, and she herself,

deceived by men, *resist our endeavours, and cry out, like the landowners and the clergy, against all innovations.*

Man is stronger than woman by nature. What is the conclusion to be deduced? Is man therefore demonstrated superior to woman? Then, by a parity of reasoning, a black bear or a wild buffalo is superior to man. But it is by this argument of the strongest alone that the doctrine of male superiority is defended. Yet man must admit that, if superior to woman in physical strength, there is a delicacy about the female character to which the male can never attain; in fine, that there is a characteristic difference between the two sexes, so peculiar to each that the one would suffer deterioration by being invested with the character of the other.

Now the query is, which of the two characters is the most valuable? A fine artist is much more highly regarded than a sturdy artizan; but the selfish male has not yet learned to apply the principle of action to his treatment of the female. A woman's wage is not reckoned at an average more than two-thirds of a male, and we believe in reality it seldom amounts to more than a third (and wives have no wages at all). Yet, is not the produce of female labour as useful?

There are many departments of the arts which are peculiarly suited to the female hand, which is much lighter in execution; and by the skillful combination of the properties of each sex, the finest results in the department of human industry may be accomplished. But the discovery of this sexual difference of handicraft will only tend to bring the two sexes to an equality.

This is the grand conclusion to which we must finally attain — that the two sexes are each distinct in their kind; that an equal proportion of both is necessary for the perfection of social happiness, and that the industrious female is consequently well entitled to the same amount of remuneration as the industrious male.

The women have always been paid worse for their labour than the men; and, by long habit and patient acquiescence, they have been taught to regard this inequality as justice. The consequence is, that men are either obliged to work for women's wages, or lose their work. It is to prevent this diminution of wages that the male tailors have declared war against the female tailors. They do not want to deprive the women of their means of living; they would have a woman's work to be valued by the same standard as that of a man's, and equally well paid. This at least is the professed reason which the tailors give for their proposed system of exclusion. Were this to

have the effect of raising the wages of the women, and still preserving to them their employment, we should give the tailors our hearty support; but where they wantonly throw out of employment a number of females, merely because they were women, we think this an encroachment on the liberties of humanity, which is too much to be tolerated.

Has woman a right to reduce the wages of man, by working for less than man? Certainly not, were women considered equal to man, and did she enjoy the same rights and privileges; but since man has doomed her to inferiority, and stamped an inferior value upon all the products of her industry, the low wages of woman are not so much the voluntary price she sets upon her labour, as the price which is fixed by the tyrannical influence of male supremacy; therefore any attempt to deprive her of labour, because she works at a reduced price, is merely punishing women for the cruel and pernicious effects of male supremacy. To make the two sexes equal, and to reward them equally, would settle the matter amicably; but any attempt to settle it otherwise will prove an act of gross tyranny.

If the principle of resistance be justifiable in the male, it cannot be reprobated in the female. If women are compelled by want to leave their homes, and give their services for money, we cannot see that any law of sound morality or legislature can put an interdict upon them. Such an interdict is a war against liberty itself, and though it may do partial good to some, the general good can amount to nothing.

Arbitrary laws will never save us. The last smuggler will survive the last exciseman, and if the women be prohibited from producing wealth, they will speedily become outlaws, and raise a sexual war. If women be prevented from making clothes, binding shoes, spinning, weaving, &c., what shall they do? They must haunt the street and prowl for prey, and then be reprobated by pious magistrates and other godly censurers of public morals, who devour their own children in punishing the crimes which they themselves create.

We have to reproach women for many of our young faults. They encourage the masculine habits, as they are called, of the boys, and train them from infancy to domineer over poor little miss. Now, if women were uniformly to check this spirit of control when they have the little rogues under their immediate direction, it would encourage a respect for the sex, which in time would grow into a fixed habit; and if

they treated the seducer *with as much cruelty and bitter persecution as they do the* seduced, *they would save thousands of the sex from the horrors of prosecution.*

We have little esteem for unfeeling prudes: they are the occasion of more vice than the unhappy frail ones, for they are often the cause of her abandonment. Not that we wish to lay the whole of the blame on the sex whose interests we profess to advocate, but to show that women are in some measure the perpetuators of their own slavery.

There is a nominal respect paid to the women of this country, but it is in most instances only nominal. How often have we been disgusted with the hackneyed, common-place "compliments," as they are called. The reform of these abuses must begin with the women themselves; they ought to train their little male brats to think properly of their mothers, and sisters, and aunts, and the whole of their feminine acquaintance, and to instruct the little Pollys and Sallys at the same time not to be quite so afraid of masters Jackey and Tommy.

However loudly the men may bellow out for their own liberties, they will never bestow what they obtain upon women until she demands it from her masters, as they were done for theirs; and whenever that struggle arrives, the men will be as tenacious of giving up their absurd domination as is any other power which exists of relinquishing its authority.

It is fortunate, however, that the male part of the population cannot progress in real civilization without imparting the value of independence to those whom they at present consider their inferiors. A writer on the Rights of Women observes, that marriage seems ordained exclusively for the comfort of the man. Yes, and he has taken care to make the law as well as custom support him in his tyranny; for an operative may thrash his wife with impunity, and be in little danger of punishment for his brutality. Indeed, if the law were to punish him, the poor woman would become a victim for want of the means of his support.

In making these remarks, we do not wish a thought to be entertained that we desire to set the sexes at variance with each other; we only hope that, for the mutual happiness of both, the women will endeavour to create a public opinion among themselves sufficiently strong to command fair play, and the respect and kindness which is due to them, and which they will never obtain but by their own exertions and determination. Women would be no less amiable for being more independent,

and mankind would be none the worse for a little of their gruffness being rubbed off to give place to the natural rights and privileges of woman.

5. Afterword: The Male-Female Unit

When I first read Morrison's essays on his "Women's Page" in the *Pioneer*, there was one feature that became more and more puzzling as I read on. Some of this feature peers through the "Synthetic Essay" above, but a full appreciation would require reading the material in greater bulk. It is not merely the sustained vigor and even passion of his defence of women's rights; this is surprising, given our stereotyped view of the time and place, but it presents no unanswered puzzle.

The puzzle is the fact that — at least here and there, and not infrequently — the language of Morrison's "Women's Page" sounds to me as if written by a woman, that is, from a woman's slant. This is not because of any particular opinion it presents; it is, frankly, an impression, and a matter of tone. Perhaps it emanates simply from the fervency of Morrison's advocacy?

Perhaps; and in any case it is difficult to find out much about Morrison personally. There is a brief reference to him in Holyoake's history mentioned above. Holyoake remarks: "His widow was long known at the Social Institution, Salford, for activity and intelligence nearly equal to his own. She was one of the lecturers of the society." Typically, Holyoake thereupon does not even tell us her name! Morrison would have had a pungent comment on this characteristic treatment.

We can add little more information. Her name was Frances Morrison; she was active in the Owenite movement; in 1838-1839 she was lecturing in Owenite institutions in Lancashire and the North; and she published a booklet on *The Influence of the Present Marriage System* (Manchester, 1838).

At any rate, we can see that at Morrison's side was a woman of political intelligence and a comrade, herself a speaker and writer on socialism and the woman question. It becomes easier to speculate that Frances Morrison could have participated — must have participated — in

the writing and preparation of at least some of the Women's Pages in the *Pioneer*.

As in the case of William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, whom the Morrisons must have known, we have at work what the Saint-Simonians called the Male-Female Social Unit: not merely a cooperation of two individuals, but the integration in their life work of a thinking man and woman in association. At this point it is possible to get lost on the seas of speculation, well out of sight of facts; but is it too speculative to wonder if the female part of the unit was instrumental in turning the male half toward his passionate identification with the cause of women's rights?

Here is another corner to be lifted on the Hidden History, the underground life of socialist feminism.

Chapter 6
1848: A TALE OF TWO SISTERS

If this were a complete history of socialist feminism, we would have to devote a great deal of space to the age of the Revolution of 1848-1849, including the years leading immediately up to it. This chapter offers a view of one facet only.

For most of the nineteenth century, the synonym in the popular mind for feminist rebellion and women's emancipation was the great French novelist who wrote under the pen name George Sand. Her eighty-odd novels, plus some dozens of volumes of autobiography and correspondence, made her the best-known woman writer in the world during her own lifetime. Her open defiance of conventional sex morality, her famed liaisons with famous men, her cigar-smoking and pants-wearing, all are now immortalized; her novels are largely unread. Though her fictional characters are mostly forgotten, she is now herself a Character in the annals of feminist history.

Her feminist reputation, if not her literary standing, is green to this day. On the other hand, in all likelihood you have never heard of Jeanne Deroin.

The difference between these two women, the one world-famous and the other near-buried in oblivion, goes to the heart of a problem in the history of the women's movement.

1. The Forty-Eighters in France

The "July Revolution" of 1830, which overthrew the Bourbon monarchy for good and established the "bourgeois monarchy" of Louis Philippe on the throne, acted like a warm rain on the seeds deposited by the Fourierist and Saint-Simonian socialistic movements. In its wake there sprang up not only socialist activities but also a new feminism, that is, a new wave of concern for women's equal rights. The first years of the "July monarchy" saw the first proliferation of women's organizations and journals. Then the government banned the organizations in 1834, and the journals declined; finally, there was a revival in 1848, under the stimulus of the great upheaval. Once again,

feminism was born and reborn and reborn again, with revolution as its dam.

Like the socialisms from which they sprang, these early feminists were not yet social-revolutionaries. But during the age of Louis Philippe (1830 to 1848) there were good militants like Eugénie Niboyet.

Originally a Lyons teacher, Niboyet became perhaps the first "professional feminist" in the world, devoting her life full-time to the cause. Her appeals were directed to the respectable world dominated by the bourgeoisie, as were those of most of the other socialists of the day. Her journal proposed to "ameliorate the situation of women of all social ranks." One of Niboyet's contributors wrote that solidarity among "women of all classes" was necessary to emancipation, but in fact her articles on "Women's Future" were mainly directed to the interests of upper-class women. It could hardly be otherwise in nonrevolutionary times, before the lower classes were "upheaved."

"Emancipation" was summarized as *access to all careers*, so as to permit women "to become truly the companions of the superior man, scientist, artist or magistrate." It was naturally the feminism of the bourgeois "career woman," which was long to be so prominent in the women's movement — even though *these* women mostly considered themselves to be socialists (a vague term then as now) and regarded themselves as sympathizing soulfully with the lot of the working classes.

During this period there was an outright, or self-proclaimed, organ of bourgeois feminism established in France, lasting from 1836 to 1838. It was quite class-conscious, too. The *Gazette des Femmes* systematically proposed equal social and political rights for women of the privileged classes only, within the framework of the oligarchic status quo embodied in the Charter of 1830. It was (for example) uninterested in the issue of workingwomen's wages, but it conducted businesslike propaganda for the admission of women to the Bourse and other such career opportunities. Its editors begged the king to declare himself not only *Roi des Français* (the current formula) but also *Roi des Françaises.*

As the impulsion given by the 1830 revolution languished, the new bourgeois monarchy quashed the women's clubs that had arisen. Feminism faded for a while, as normalcy vegetated. From 1832 on, George Sand published one best-seller after another around a single theme — a theme which had been *one* of those that the feminists had begun to explore. This theme was women's right to free choice and free action in love, particularly in the marriage relation, together with the need to reform the marriage institution in the direction of equality. From the grocer's wife to the *baronne*, from the modiste to the bourgeois madame and the marquise, women read these books and wept over Lélia and her sisters; and so did many a man, too.

Then came the February Revolution of 1848, and again — not out of the emancipated women of the upper classes but out of the impulsion of the revolutionary upsurge in the lower strata of society — a new New Feminism broke out. The outward sign was the unprecedented proliferation of women's clubs, women's journals, women's meetings, women's demonstrations, and women's demands. This feminist movement was virtually entirely socialist in orientation. Furthermore, its active and militant ranks consciously oriented toward building a movement of and for *workingwomen*. While Niboyet remained an active figure, the leading role in this phase passed to Jeanne Deroin, whom we will shortly meet close-up.

It is this movement that presently confronted George Sand.

The new feminist journals, often with interlocking writers and editors, were especially concerned with workingwomen's issues like laundresses' wages, unemployment, participation in management of the National Workshops, day care for the children of woman workers. But they were not narrowly confined by this orientation; they were all-sided. They also agitated for complete social and political equality — for *all* women; for women's suffrage; for the right to divorce; for the education of women; for support to the democratic struggles going on in other countries. The range and democratic fervor of these socialist

feminists was very great. There was no bourgeois-feminist wing to speak of.

Socialism and feminism went together in the general movement also. Virtually all of the various socialist journals, with one exception, were profeminist. (The exception was Proudhon's, as we will see in the next chapter.) To be sure, the socialist tendencies, under the leadership of men, were often more cautious and even more lukewarm in their support to the women's cause than the women were; but these were gradations in *support*. On the other hand, outside the socialist ranks there does not seem to have been any paper that was profeminist, even among the radical bourgeois democrats of *La Réforme* or *La Liberté*.

The women's clubs that sprang up were in good part offshoots of the journals. Of the over 300 revolutionary clubs that were launched in Paris in March, few were open to women. The exceptions were the socialistic clubs, like the central Blanquist club; the left-Jacobin club, Club de la Montagne, was a mixed (male and female) enterprise; Cabet, who headed an important socialist group (which called itself "communist"), was hospitable to propaganda for women's rights.

But to build independent influence the women had to organize themselves. Of the several women's societies formed in the course of a couple of months, the most important stemmed from the main feminist journal *La Voix des Femmes*, edited by Niboyet. Its best successor was headed by Jeanne Deroin, with Niboyet's collaboration. A Club des Femmes was formed as a sort of propaganda forum; it was eventually wrecked by well-dressed (male) hooligans. A Union of Workingwomen was attempted. All this suggests briefly the scope of the activities that went into this movement, loosely held together under the impulsion of a limited number of socialist women activists.

There was another current in this turbulence: the so-called *Vésuviennes*. It was a (male) crackpot named Borme who first proposed this "regiment of women" between the ages of 15 and 30; but is unclear what he actually organized, if anything. There was at least one band of women which defiantly adopted this much-publicized name for

a sort of barracks-style community living group. Or perhaps the Vésuviennes group was just another one of the workingwomen's organizations that sprang up.

It is not clear if it was "Vesuvians" who published a much-quoted anthem in a feminist satirical journal called *La République des Femmes*. This anthem had the distinction of telling the antifeminist world that the new women's movement was just what the male chauvinists always said it was: a "war on men" by absurd cranks. Modeled after the Bonapartist battle hymn, the anthem made explicit one of the traditional antifeminist stereotypes: the feminist woman is a castrator. It declared for the supremacy of women over "the bearded sex," and sang: "*Let us make war on the beard, / Cut off the beard, cut off everything.*"

All this is worth mentioning only to explain that it was the semimythical Vesuvians and castrator-crackpots who were inflated by the general press into the very image of feminism and women's emancipation. To be sure, this proves that the yellow press has not changed in a century and a half; but we must remind that the crackpot stereotype had received a strong impulse from the antics of the Saint-Simonian group. In any case, "public opinion" (such as it was) was under the pressure of this stereotype, transmitted through a variety of popular channels: the journalistic pundits, the feuilletonists, the satirical caricaturists (led by the great Daumier), the boulevard wits and the political half-wits. None of these had to take up Jeanne Deroin's unanswerable argumentation or Niboyet's gentler expositions as long as they could think up endless drolleries about eccentrics and oddballs, existent or nonexistent.

This has to be understood to appreciate the task that faced a woman like Jeanne Deroin, even vis-à-vis a lady like George Sand.

2. George Sand in Politics

George Sand considered herself a socialist. She was very class-conscious, though her class was not that of the workers; she was exceedingly proud of her aristocratic descent from "kings of France."

Independently wealthy through her writings, she lived on her estate at Nohant as the Lady Bountiful.

Her heart sympathized with the oppressed and downtrodden. Introduced to socialistic ideas especially by Saint-Simonian literature and Pierre Leroux, she eventually discovered the little world of working-class (artisan) poets and writers. She helped them publish; she supported them with her own articles and also with money. In 1840 she wrote a novel about artisan life, which has been called the first novel with a worker as hero (an artisanal journeyman, not a modern wage-worker). She even began to develop something like a theory of literature which might be called, in up-dated terms, a theory of "proletarian" literature as the destined successor to bourgeois literature. A series of "social" novels with a more or less socialistic message followed.

Nor did she confine herself to fiction. In collaboration with Leroux, she helped set up the *Revue Indépendante* as a forum for most of the socialisms and communisms of the day; she herself wrote articles on equality, socialist politics, and the future of Humanity. In 1848 she — like Pierre Leroux and other quite mild socialists — even called herself by the relatively new label "communist," which was especially popular among the workers. She explained that communism was nothing more than the abolition of *extreme* inequalities in wealth.

When the February Revolution broke out in 1848, she was transported with joy: "*Vive la République*!" She flew to Paris, where her friends were now in power: the politician-poet Lamartine, Louis Blanc, Ledru-Rollin, and the rest. She put her pen at the service of the new republic, with a series of propaganda "Letters," published during March; she wrote articles for the government's official *Bulletin de la République*. As a close daily collaborator with the new governmental leaders, she became almost the equivalent of propaganda minister without portfolio — for a couple of months.

George Sand's life had been shaped by constant conflict with the status quo. But now, faced by social upheaval, she latched onto a

different sort of revolutionary recipe: *now there must be no conflict, as everyone united behind her republican friends in single-hearted harmony without dissensions or social struggles.* The working classes had made the revolution, as everyone knew; now they must retire from the stage and leave the power where it belonged, to the new rulers.

She kept writing about this because she knew, from her working-class connections (which were much better than Lamartine's) that the Lower Orders were discontented with the empty bag the republic was handing them. Her March "Letters" appealed eloquently, and in excellent prose, for the Union of All Classes:

> Fraternal unity will destroy all the false distinctions and will strike the very word *class* out of the books of the new humanity...
> It is a question of making the people understand the greatness of their mission, to enlighten the middle class, to reassure the rich.

Her "Letter to the Middle Class" did indeed seek to enlighten that class, even if it made no contribution to striking the very word *class* off the books:

> The people in power...are disposed to grant all their power to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie will not abuse it. ... The people will be just, tranquil, wise and good, while the middle class will show them an example...

Her "Letter to the Rich" did indeed seek to reassure them. She explained that the "specter" they called communism was really only "true Christianity" and "a threat neither to the Bourse nor to anyone's life..." No one can deny that she had a workable formula for class harmony: the tranquilized people will hand over "all their power" to

the bourgeoisie, and the enlightened bourgeoisie will refrain from grinding them down too harshly. No threat to the Bourse, this point of view, as she said.

She temporarily became a serious political activist. "Here I am, busy as a statesman," she wrote her son. With Leroux as associate, she founded a weekly *La Cause du Peuple* which expounded the need for gradual social reform by slow increments, without violent conflicts, to do away with scandalously big fortunes and other injustices. But as the euphoria of February-March faded under the bleaker skies of April, she began to discover that none of the social forces in action wanted to behave according to her plot line.

To her credit, she discerned quite quickly that the new bourgeois rulers of government and society had little intention of giving an inch to the pressing needs of the workingpeople, despite all the people pullulating in the councils of government who considered themselves socialists. In a flare-up of angry despair that set her apart from many of her friends, she even wrote in one of the *Bulletins de la République* about "breaking the resistance" to the republic, and hinted about a new rising against the growing reaction. That was a momentary reaction. When the first elections to the Assembly failed to give a majority to the good Republicans, she packed up paper and pen and retired to her country estate at Nohant.

Let no one think she was thus behaving like a "weak woman." History has its antidote for this kind of sex-stereotype thinking: who wants to see the "weak woman" stereotype acted out need only look at the top of the government, Alphonse de Lamartine. But George Sand, product of a certain kind of struggle, could not face struggles outside of one aspect of the sex struggle. She fled the capital in May. But the workingpeople, whom she knew were being squeezed more and more by the new masters, had no country estates to retire to. In June the looming insurrection broke out in Paris; and her Republican friends massacred the workers of Paris by the tens of thousands, in the streets and even after the fighting was over. She was overcome "by such

horror on learning the dire news about June that I was sick and like an imbecile for many days."

Neither the sickness nor the imbecility prevented her from making peace with the regime that came to power first over the slaughter of the Paris working class, and then on the subsequent destruction of the movement of her Republican friends, itself. Six months after the June Days, she was not disturbed when Louis Bonaparte won the presidency. (After all, well before 1848 she had complimented this pretender on his social-demagogic book *L'Extinction du Paupérisme* in spite of her own socialist friends' distrust of the already well-known political adventurer.) When Bonaparte's coup d'état smashed the remnants of the republic, she did not react with hostility.

It took Bonaparte's systematic arrests and persecutions of her political friends to cool her off; and even then she did not emulate the moderately liberal Victor Hugo, who had gone into conscientious exile in order to speak his mind. Ignoring the pleas of her friends who told her she was compromising and dishonoring herself, she established a relationship with the despotism which is well-known to the history of intellectuals: she was allowed to beg off a jail sentence for an individual now and then in exchange for acting as an intellectual fig leaf for the Second Empire. By 1860 she was lamenting (privately) that "the coup d'état, which, in the hands of a truly logical man" could have led to progress, had instead only led to turbulent weakness and corruption. That is: the trouble with this Bonapartist despotism was that it was so illogical as to refrain from Saving Humanity...

On the other hand, when the Paris Commune of 1871 was fighting for its life against the troops of the Thiers variety of Republicans, she wrote in her journal that it was all "deplorable and incomprehensible... Paris is mad... horrible adventure..." One of the Commune's crimes was singled out for specific mention: "They have exacted a million from the Bank [of France], 500,000 francs from Rothschild." Horrors! (In point of fact, the Commune left the Bank of France untouched, but this is not to its credit.)

On June 5, when the victorious government was engaged in killing, jailing and deporting hundreds of thousands of French men and women, she wrote in her journal: "The executions continue on course. It is justice and a necessity; but what happens to civilization..." One detects the mark of the sensitive mind: *Butcher them, yes, for they have presumed; but don't feel happy about it . . .*

In short, George Sand was a good liberal.

3. Lady with Knife

Let us now return to the month of April 1848, when George Sand was still *the* influential woman *par excellence* in the high councils of the republic. The active movement of the new feminists was still important. The women activists of this movement were bound to look for some help from the very Symbol of Emancipated Womanhood herself, the famous writer who was spending her lunchtimes advising Lamartine on what to do.

To be sure, so far George Sand had done nothing to encourage the feminists. In fact, just then she published an article in No. 12 of the *Bulletins* — unsigned as usual — flatly condemning the movement for women's rights, in particular the Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists. "Lately, several women impelled by a sect spirit have raised their voices." she wrote rather snidely.

Her method here was to give "radical" reasons for this hostility to radical feminism: "Granting that society would gain much by admitting some able members of the sex to the conduct of public affairs, the mass of poor women, deprived of education, would gain nothing." Thus she seemed to sneer at *bourgeois* feminism, because of its class limitation — how advanced! But it was a purely demagogic ploy, even apart from the fact that the actual women's movement did raise good demands for workingwomen. Did she, George Sand, then propose something in the interests of *poor* women? No: for them she had nothing. It was intellectually dishonest.

How, asked George Sand, could women hope to be "free" since men are not free? This argument too had a "radical" aura. She had another ploy. The important thing, she argued, was to "abolish the lack of education, the neglectfulness, depravity and misery which weigh on women in general even more than on men..." Niboyet, not knowing the article was by George Sand, protested its antifeminist line in a letter to Ledru-Rollin: it "gives us an appearance of absurdity which is far from true," she said.

Sand's demagogic-radical approach was not original with her; as we will see, even the phobic antifeminist Proudhon took a similar tack in his journal, especially when he was hypocritically concealing his real views. What this approach boiled down to, whether worded leftishly or rightishly, was the idea that women must not get political or social rights until all other political-social issues had been solved (by men, naturally). *Women's rights were wiped off the agenda.* There was a loophole: in any case, such rights could be realistically considered only for "educated" women (which meant bourgeois women). George Sand's own journal *La Cause du Peuple* was filled with pleas for all sorts of equality, but there was not a word devoted to one kind, the equality of the sexes.

We know all of this in hindsight. But the women militants thought they had good reason to turn to George Sand with hope, when in April 1848 Eugénie Niboyet took up plans for the coming Assembly elections, at the Society of the *Voix des Femmes.*

The women decided to support a number of the socialist and radical republican candidates in the elections, including even some known antifeminists like Proudhon. But Niboyet and other leaders wanted to establish a precedent and break a new path for the republic: *by running a woman for election.* Niboyet proposed that the name of George Sand be put on the electoral lists, and that the various "Democratic and Socialist Committees" (electoral committees) be persuaded to support her.

The appeal for George Sand's candidacy was published in *La Voix des Femmes* on April 6. Essentially it said that she would be one woman who would be acceptable to men because of her genius. The intent was to run a practical and realistic, down-to-earth propaganda campaign, to put George Sand's fame to use as the standard-bearer of women's rights.

We who know that George Sand was the author of the anonymous antifeminist article in the *Bulletin* will not be surprised to learn that she refused to run. But she did not merely refuse. The Symbol of Emancipated Women took the opportunity to kick the feminist women in the teeth, and then knife them with as many thrusts as she could manage.

To begin with, to show her mighty disdain she refused to direct her reply to *La Voix des Femmes*. Instead, she sent her open letter of rejection to a number of other papers, including those of the bitter antifeminists.

Secondly, she did not merely reject the honor of running as a candidate. In the haughty tone of a *grande dame* whose skirt has been tugged by a tiresome beggar, she proclaimed her hostility to the feminist movement that had issued the proposal.

Thirdly, she made clear that she also rejected the view, underlying the projected campaign, that women should have the right to participate in political life. (Outside of herself, naturally.)

Fourthly, as if seeking a reason not only to repudiate but also to discredit these importunate upstarts, she seized a thin pretext to charge that *La Voix des Femmes* had used her name dishonestly. This was the least important part of her reply, but the most despicable. She charged that "her" initials had been signed to some articles in order to imply her collaboration; but G.S. were the initials of a regular contributor of the journal, Gabrielle Soumet, whose name was well known to its readers and not unknown in literary circles.

The historian Marguerite Thibert gives an accurate summary of her open letter.

> It was a letter written in a tone of insolent arrogance, in which she declared that she would not let people believe by her silence that she adhered to the principles which this journal tried to represent; she had not, she said, any relation "with the ladies who form clubs and put out periodicals," and she was not acquainted with a "single one of them"; she refused "to serve as a banner for a feminine coterie"...

Eugénie Niboyet replied, in a dignified and moderate rejoinder, that George Sand's reaction was regrettable but would not stop the movement: "The Republic has not abolished the privileges of talent, but it has limited them by imposing duties on them."

A year later, the Democratic and Socialist Electoral Committee moved to put George Sand's name on the ballot, and she sent a letter again condemning political rights for women. This time it was not a women's group importuning her, and her tone was less insulting; but the antifeminist content was worse. There was even a repeated invocation of women's domestic duties as a bar to rights. The apostle of emancipated love now made an appeal to "a deep feeling for the sacredness of marriage, conjugal fidelity, and the future of the family" which, in this context, might have made Lélia and Indiana puke. Women should participate in political life "some day"... "But is this day near? No, I do not believe so." Society must be transformed "radically" *before* women's position can be changed. "Under present-day conditions, women are incapable of fulfilling political functions." Women may rightly be doctors and such, "for public morals and decency seem to demand that girls and young women should not be questioned, examined or touched by men." In fact, only one women's issue was on the agenda: women's civil rights in marriage, abolition of the wife's legal subordination to the husband. *That is all.*

The picture is a little grotesque and more than a little illuminating. Behold this sensitive writer, whose pages trembled with a fine

sensibility to the soulful nuances of the human heart and woman's lot, who thought of herself as a champion of universal justice, human equality and international emancipation — and who in actuality could not respond to any interest of women other than the interests established by the needs of her own social class and by the thinking that emanated from her own social situation.

This episode was not a momentary aberration for George Sand. It was the revolutionary ferment that had brought out in public the truth about *the nature of her emancipation.*

Some years before, when Saint-Simonian women had congratulated her on having helped the cause of women's liberation with her novels, she had in effect privately repudiated the praise: she had written an admirer that she was merely writing literature and had no personal views on the subject, even adding as a further rebuff that "women still have nothing to say, it seems to me."

In 1844, when Flora Tristan died, the outpouring of grief from workers' circles and the leftist intelligentsia was quite unprecedented. A subscription was launched for a grave memorial. No other woman should have touched George Sand's heart as intimately, for, besides being a fellow socialist, Tristan had likewise revolted spiritedly against a galling marriage and spoken out of her experience for women's freedom from marital oppression. The mildly pink novelist Eugène Sue was one of the first to respond to the memorial fund. And George Sand?

George Sand wrote coldly that Flora Tristan had neglected her daughter Aline, who was "as tender and good as her mother was imperious and irascible," and that one should concern oneself with ensuring a future for the daughter rather than "raise a monument to her mother, who has never been *sympathique* to me, in spite of her courage and conviction; there was too much vanity in her." This letter is simply ignoble.

The historian Marguerite Thibert is right in believing that George Sand's weakness was in considering herself "a brilliant exception to her

sex," and believing "that the bold morality underlying her novels' plots was a morality for the masters, to which the vulgar herd had no right." Her summary of Sand's relation to the woman question is stern but just:

George Sand's feminism stops with the question of woman's inequality in marriage and above all of her amatory freedom. She is not concerned with the material difficulties into which women are driven by their political and social inequality. This woman writer, who called herself a socialist, is blind to the afflictions specially besetting the women of the people, or to the precarious economic position of the workingwomen making inadequate wages and driven by poverty to moral degradation. It is always for herself that she pleads, or for those who resemble her like sisters, for the superior woman...

She was "not really a feminist," says Thibert, but this is a matter of terminology. George Sand *was* a kind of feminist, as Thibert's first sentence (above) states. Hers was the kind of feminism that was class-limited, class-bound, and class-bounded; but we have already seen other examples, like Mary Wollstonecraft's bourgeois feminism.

George Sand's sympathy, Thibert writes, "could not extend to all women." But history — in particular the present history — shows that the only feminism that extends down to embrace all classes of women is the feminism that *starts* with the interests of the lowest classes. In that sense, working-class feminism is that type of class movement which is alone capable of embracing all women.

4. Jeanne Deroin

The campaign that George Sand had refused to undertake, the first electoral campaign in which a woman's movement ran a woman candidate in spite of the law's discrimination, was carried out a year later by Jeanne Deroin.

The historical facts give the lie to the attack which had been leveled in 1848 against the women's movement by the Superior Woman's railings, that is, by George Sand's invective. "In vain will they assemble in clubs," the novelist had scolded, "in vain will they engage in

polemics, if the very expression of their discontent proves that they are incapable of managing their affairs well and governing their actions well." This complaint by the writer simply reflected the vicious slanders against the militant women that abounded in the general press. A similar slander, by the way, came from the second-ranking woman novelist of the day, "Daniel Stern" (Comtesse d'Agoult), also an enthusiastic republican, who wrote a history of the 1848 revolution.

In truth, in terms of organization, this historic enterprise of the women's movement was better planned and executed, against heavy odds, than anything the general movement was able to do. It was the common pattern: to be taken seriously, the women's movement had to be twice as competent as the men's.

The feminists' plans began to take shape in November 1848 with the holding of a very successful "banquet" (the common form of political organizing meeting) attended by about 1200. It was overwhelmingly socialist in its composition, sponsored by the "Democratic and Socialist Women," with Pierre Leroux and Barbès on the presiding committee. Another banquet, with several hundreds participating, was held on Christmas Day.

But by 1849 the revolution was on the downslide and reactionary clouds were gathering. In February the *Démoc-Soc* movement was no longer including women in its political affairs. The *Démoc-Soc* women met again at Easter time to consider the situation.

It must be understood that by this time the feminist journals were sporadic and chancy in their issuance, for lack of financial support; the club movement that paralleled the women's journals was getting to the point where it would soon begin to peter out. Indeed, the new electoral movement was one of the last forms of feminist activism in this period of the revolution's downturn. It was a difficult situation to operate in.

Nevertheless, in April, Jeanne Deroin decided to make the run in the Assembly elections, including the waging of a propaganda campaign to gain the support of the *Démoc-Soc* electoral committees behind the women's candidate..

There is little information on the life of Jeanne Deroin before 1848, when she first became prominent. Born in Paris on the last day of 1805, she worked mainly as a teacher, though she was herself self-taught. After the 1830 revolution she became acquainted with Saint-Simonianism, especially through Olinde Rodrigues (who, now a progressive-minded banker, became one of the largest contributors to *La Voix des Femmes* in 1848). Deroin studied the ideas of all the socialistic schools and sects of the time, including the tendency of Fourier and especially that of Cabet, as well as their forebears Mably and Morelly. In fact, she was outstanding in the movement for her "great socialist erudition" (in the words of the government organ reporting her subsequent trial). But she probably never became a member of any group, and the socialist views she propagandized for were always an eclectic combination. In short, she learned what could be learned from all, but never tied herself to a sect.

Her kind of socialism was characterized by three things. (1) Her socialism was essentially reformist, and became increasingly pacifistic, like most of the socialisms of 1848, but it was also firm and militant. (2) Her socialism was working-class in content and orientation, to a far greater extent than the sects that had helped to educate her. Her aim was the organization of workingwomen. (3) Her approach to socialism was modern and down-to-earth, entirely devoid of the Saint-Simonian bizarrerie. She had little in common in style with the Saint-Simonian female disciples who had attended "Father" Enfantin's entourage as second-class priestesses. Of the latter, for example, Susanne Voilquin went off to Egypt on a mystic wild-goose chase, and Clair Demar committed suicide; but *Jeanne Deroin organized.*

What helped to make her an outstanding woman leader in the 1848-1849 upheaval was her combination of unusual organizational ability with sheer guts. It is too often true, in the history of the socialist and radical movements, that a high degree of hardness directed against the status quo is achieved only by figures that are personally alienated and eccentric, as if the choice were between philistines and crackpots

— especially when socialism is doing badly. Jeanne Deroin escaped those alternatives. She was of the straight working-class militant type, serious and dedicated, practical and rational in the best sense of those abused words. Her personal life was a token: as Mme. Desroches she had a successful and stable marriage. As a mother of three, she argued energetically that women's rights were entirely compatible with women's special tasks. She had met her husband at a socialist meeting, and we know little about him except that he gave her complete support without himself taking a prominent part.

On the outbreak of the revolution in 1848, she gave up the little school she had established for poor children, and plunged into the whirl of revolutionary activity. It was at this point that she resumed the use of her maiden name. At her trial she gave two reasons: to avoid involving her husband in direct responsibility for her own political activity, and to protest against the institution of marriage as "a state of servitude for women." Unlike the then notorious cases of Flora Tristan and George Sand, she proclaimed that she had no personal complaint, that she herself was a lucky exception. "As the happy wife of a man endowed with a noble heart and a lofty mind," she said, "we have obtained reciprocity in marriage; no personal reason motivates us..." It was for her sisters that she fought. She therefore represents the exact opposite of George Sand, who could feel only the wrongs that affected her own personal interests. History slyly gives us a confrontation between these two women as a case in point.

Jeanne Deroin came forward from the first day of the revolution as a militant feminist as well as a socialist propagandist. Obviously she had worked out her views on the women's movement long before this. She entered the movement along with a group of socialist women who had already been involved in activity; the names of Pauline Roland and Désirée Gay deserve to be remembered among her comrades. Some men's names also appear among the aiders and abettors, such as the aforementioned Olinde Rodrigues and an obscure Dr. Malatier. It is

clear that the women's movement got help from time to time from socialist men active in their own movement.

Eugénie Niboyet has been mentioned as the women's leader whose seniority and experience had put her in the van of the movement even before the revolution. Jeanne Deroin first appeared in her *Voix des Femmes* with an appeal "To French Citizens" for women's equal rights:

> Women must be called on to take part in the great work of social regeneration that looms ahead... Do you want them to be the helots of your new Republic? No, citizens, you don't want that; the mothers of your sons cannot be slaves.

In another article she forcefully repudiated the common tie-up of women's rights and political-social equality with the Saint-Simonian image of "free love." In April she became the champion of the feminist position in a series of press debates and polemics with opponents, especially with the bourgeois-republican *La Liberté* and with Proudhon's *Le Peuple*. She became the outstanding educator of the movement, writing a course on social rights for women. When *La Voix des Femmes* foundered as a daily, it was Deroin that put together its replacement, the weekly *L'Opinion des Femmes* (initially called *La Politique des Femmes*). Because of the usual difficulties, she was unable to inaugurate regular publication until the beginning of 1849.

The election of 1849 was due in April. This time the activist core of the socialist feminists did not look for a literary "star" to carry the banner. Jeanne Deroin did it herself.

5. The First Feminist Electoral Campaign

Jeanne Deroin had no misconceptions about the purpose and place of her electoral campaign. It was simply a useful framework for socialist feminist propaganda and education, a way of organizing.

The immediate audience, to begin with, was not the general public but the broad movement itself; for her formal objective was to be placed on the ballot by one of the *Dém-Soc* committees, and to mobilize support in the Republican clubs. The very first task was to get the floor at these clubs.

Having gotten the floor, she told the committees: *You may not see fit to place my name on a list — all right — but do not omit my name simply because of my sex.*

The main thrust of her campaign in these circles was the integration of feminism and socialism. That is, her central proposition was that all socialists had to be for women's rights — for the good of society, for the good of socialism. She explained that she was going through it all "not only in the interests of women but in the interests of all of society, and in the name of a principle involving the abolition of all privileges" — sex privileges included. The placard announcing her candidacy offered this challenge:

> I present myself for your votes out of devotion to the observance of a great principle, the civil and political equality of the two sexes... A legislative assembly composed entirely of men is as incompetent to make laws governing a society composed of men and women as an assembly of the privileged would be to discuss the interests of the workers, or as an assembly of capitalists would be to uphold the honor of the country.

She launched her campaign on April 10, and during the subsequent weeks covered one center after another. A biographical memoir by a contemporary, Adrien Ranvier, summarizes as follows:

> Her courage seems redoubled; nothing fazes her. At the clubs, at meetings, at all gatherings, republican or

> reactionary, she presents herself to defend her program. She strongly demands the rights of women as well as of the workers, for, as we have already seen, she does not separate them in her own thinking. She takes the floor and develops the thesis that the Republican saga will be a lie as long as woman is a slave. Women, says Jeanne Deroin, have the right to the complete development of their moral and intellectual faculties as much as men; and through such development they can, like men, become useful defenders of those who labor and those who suffer. That is her only ambition...

The responses to her whirlwind campaign, of course, were as varied as the political tendencies that existed. The surprising thing was how much she accomplished, at a time when the surrounding climate of opinion permeating the bourgeois and conservative press was one of hostile jeering rather than serious refutation.

If she was refused the floor as a candidate, she tried to get it under some other head. If not that, she might get some licks in by posing questions. If the club administration shut her up altogether, she was quite prepared to make trouble; some stormy sessions resulted. She was especially insistent when appearing before clubs that called themselves socialist.

For example, at one club the chairman had supported her right to speak but the membership were more hostile. Deroin took the floor and berated them:

> We are amazed to see men, who call themselves men of the future and declare themselves to be socialist-democrats, who reject the logical consequences and application of the principles that are at the foundation of socialism; who shrink from practising it, and who

> do not have the courage of their convictions, who demand the abolition of privileges and yet want to keep the one that they share with the privileged...

In this discussion, some speakers agreed with her; one argued against sex equality; another said he agreed but only for the future; and so on. Deroin's success consisted in this, that such a discussion finally took place at all. It could happen only in the socialist club movement.

At one of the electoral committees she was twice refused the floor; then she returned on a third day and this time succeeded in speaking. Moreover, she compelled her audiences to listen to her with attention and interest; these men were having their consciousness raised for the first time. As happened not infrequently, this committee finally decided *not* to put her name down, but only on constitutional grounds, not through lack of sympathy (they said).

On April 20 Jeanne Deroin brought off her most notable success. It was in the Saint-Antoine district, in the heart of working-class Paris. She addressed an audience of artisanal workers such as had been the core of the June uprising a few months before. After she presented her case, sympathy was general; even her leading opponent argued only on constitutional grounds. A near-unanimous vote was registered here in favor of women's rights and women's emancipation. The chairman, J. L. Delbrouck, informed her that her candidacy was being proposed by about fifteen delegates, and George Sand's candidacy by about forty. (This was what occasioned Sand's aforementioned letter of rejection.) Delbrouck himself, by the way, was shortly to become Jeanne Deroin's coworker in socialist activity and codefendant before the court.

Let us pause for a moment on the class pattern, which must remind us that it was the militant sansculotte sections of Paris that were most hospitable to women's political participation in 1793. The reason here was the same: these workingmen of 1849 had just gone through a revolutionary struggle in which women fought alongside men, or in front of them. The advance in consciousness of sex equality stemmed

not from ideology but from social struggle. It is often difficult for intellectuals to understand this.

Thus April 1849 saw not only the first electoral campaign by a woman, but the first intensive propaganda campaign of any kind for a feminist program of women's rights. No one can calculate how many minds were moved for the first time, not only men (to whom this campaign was necessarily directed in the first instance) but also women, who were spurred to thought and rebellion by this example of logic and courage joined with knowledge.

William Thompson and Anna Wheeler, a quarter century before, had first integrated socialism and feminism on the terrain of political thought. In this campaign of 1849, socialism and feminism were first integrated in a practical movement — under the leadership of a great socialist woman.

6. Jeanne Deroin and the Workers' Union

The journal *L'Opinion des Femmes* folded in August 1849 when the increasingly reactionary government demanded an exorbitant security deposit which it could not pay. This crackdown, however, was not motivated in the first place by the paper's feminist propaganda. It came in response to Deroin's publication of her proposal for an all-inclusive federation of workers' associations. It must be borne in mind that Jeanne Deroin was not merely a feminist.

We cannot do justice here to this aspect of her activity as a leader of workingpeople, even though labor history has never given her adequate recognition for an important pioneer effort. Even before 1848, and especially after the revolution of 1830, large numbers of workers' organizations had been formed in all trades. (For example, Pauline Roland was one of the leaders in forming the teachers' association, with Jeanne Deroin's help.) In most cases the aim of these associations was mutual insurance and self-help, perhaps with cooperative production in mind: the modern trade-union aspect was in the background. Most of them also adopted programs in favor of

socialism and democracy in one form or another. They intended not so much to organize for better conditions in a struggle against employers as to construct some alternative to the system of employment. In 1843, as we have seen, Flora Tristan's plan for a "Workers' Union" had already brought up the idea of linking (not merging) the existing workers' organizations into an umbrella association, a sort of labor federation.

What Jeanne Deroin did, in the August issue of her paper, was to take this sort of idea and *flesh it out with practical organizational detail.*

Her plan for a Union of Workers' Associations was especially noteworthy for the highly democratic structure that was proposed. With the important support of Delbrouck, who became one of the prime movers, a large number of associations accepted the idea quickly. A series of delegated meetings took place through August and September, which modified and recast the original plan; and at the beginning of October, delegates from 104 associations voted unanimously to set it up.

One of the marvels of what passes for socialist history is the fact that Flora Tristan's rather vague adumbration of the idea is often referred to, yet the remarkable fact that Jeanne Deroin actually put it together and made it a reality, if only briefly, is virtually impossible to find even in multitome works on socialist and labor history, in English or French. Conventional history is mainly interested in what Leading Thinkers thought, not in what workers did, or how the movement moved.

Jeanne Deroin was a doer and a mover. The Union she helped build was a remarkable accomplishment, doubly so because she was a woman.

The fate of this movement was sealed by the steady swing of the French state toward despotism. The Union was intended to be entirely legal, not conspiratorial. Since the law outlawed political groups, it presented itself as an economic ("commercial") organization. But the government had no compunction about smashing it on any grounds;

there were stoolpigeons handy to swear that the Union was spreading socialist writings.

On May 29, 1850, at 9:45 p.m., a police commissioner with a small army of eighty agents descended on the Union's headquarters, where delegates were meeting. They found Auguste Billot in the chair, flanked by a presiding committee of three, including Jeanne Deroin. They arrested all present, including nine women. Thirty workers were held for trial, three of them women: Deroin, Pauline Roland, and Louise Nicaud of the laundresses. They were all held in detention for five months; for two months, in absolute secrecy and incommunicado.

The trial took place in November, lasting through three sessions. Deroin was refused the right to present her own defence. During the interrogation, she stoutly explained socialism to the examining magistrate — who however was more interested in the police claim that Mme. Nicaud possessed a picture of Robespierre. (It turned out to be a picture of Eugène Sue.) Deroin furthermore protested the whole procedure on the ground that she could not recognize the validity of laws that had been made by men only, without the participation of women. She explained her views on marriage; as always, she attacked the effort to confuse the feminist political program with sexual promiscuity; she demanded "absolute equality between the two sexes," and "a state of society in which marriage is purified, moralized, and equalized." But she insistently separated these opinions off as personal ones, not held by the Union nor necessarily by other defendants.

Delbrouck read a long statement for the defence in the name of all the defendants, but the verdict was already in the cards. Before the sentence was passed, Delbrouck also made an attempt to take all the guilt upon his own head and ask for the acquittal of his codefendants: he "declared that ... as founder and initiator of the association he claimed the privilege of being condemned alone..." It was useless. Five men were given the longest jail sentences, plus fines. Most of the other defendants, including the three women, got six months. Only four were acquitted.

While serving her time, Jeanne Deroin not only continued writing courses for socialist education; she was the only one to send a formal protest to the Assembly when it considered a bill to ban all petitions by women. Released in June 1851, she went right back to activity in the movement. After Bonaparte's coup d'état in December of that year, she was active in helping the victims of the regime's persecution. On the eve of her own arrest in August 1852, she fled to England.

In London, over the next years she published three feminist annuals, or Almanacs. After 1855 she more or less retired to private life, though her socialist and feminist views remained unchanged. When she died in 1894, at the age of 89, William Morris spoke at her bier to pay tribute to her courage in defending her ideas and her fidelity to socialist convictions in spite of the inroads of age.

7. Sisterhood

I have not concealed my admiration for Jeanne Deroin and lack of it for George Sand; but I must admit that historical understanding requires that admiration be properly seasoned. *Peace to George Sand's ashes*: despite all the negative things one must say about her real relation to feminism, one hard fact remains unaltered — unalterable by anything she actually said or believed or did.

This is the objective fact that, through her writings and her personal impact on her society, she made the idea of the emancipation of women — some kind of emancipation of women — more thinkable, more acceptable, more fashionable, more respectable, if you will. The timid bourgeois dames, or the petty-bourgeois ladies, or for that matter the workingwomen, who devoured her novels and wept over her heroines: they had daughters who therefore were raised in an altered milieu. In her own way George Sand became part of the social winds that blew old prejudices into disarray.

This impact was partly unwitting, partly intended, and partly something else: it was the result not of what she wrote or communicated wittingly or unwittingly, but of *what the public was told she*

stood for by all of those clever littérateurs and boulevard jesters and cartoonists and mudslingers who ridiculed the emancipation of women. It may be that her enemies did more for her feminism than her friends.

She also served. But we have a right to ask more from one to whom so much was given. What if this woman of talent had been great-hearted enough, or clear-headed enough, to have put her abilities to unstinting service in the cause of her sisters, as Jeanne Deroin did? It might have made a difference; but this is what she did not do.

George Sand may have been a great writer, but she was not a great woman like Jeanne Deroin. As we saw, the historian Marguerite Thibert put it that the novelist was "incapable of feeling feminine solidarity." This leads to an apparent paradox, for it was George Sand who was convinced that *she* thought in terms of Woman whereas the feminists whom she scorned were detestably narrow.

The paradox lies in the very notion of "sisterhood" as a mystic solidarity of women regardless of social position. It has often seemed as self-evident as the radiant word Fraternity was in 1789. Both have represented an aspiration, a potentiality — and a myth. The Fraternity of the great revolution could not be realized by the narrow people who invented it as a slogan; it could be realized — at times and in places — only in the context of the movement that took a revolution in humanity as its goal. And this was the allegedly narrow movement of socialism, the champions of struggle by the classes on bottom, whose revolt upheaved all other strata.

The feminist militants of 1848 believed that sisterhood could be a reality rather than a myth only if it was based on the mass of women, *who are always workingwomen* — not on the thin layer of Superior Women of the privileged classes. Did not events confirm this belief?

The embattled feminists of 1848 could stretch out the hand of sisterhood to George Sand, despite the latter's limitations — *because George Sand's cause was subsumed in theirs.* The reverse was not true; this is what shows that it was the novelist who was the narrow one. The feminists of the privileged classes have tended to set up the simulacrum

of Sisterhood as a fetish, concealing narrower social interests — just as, after all, their menfolk have used invocations of Brotherhood as a code word for their own narrow class-bound conceptions of a good society.

It was the socialist feminist Jeanne Deroin who stood for sisterhood. True, there is no word for "sisterhood"— in the French language, but she was not thereby greatly incommoded. She knew of a greater solidarity than that of a sex; she aspired to a future in which sexual equality could become real for the first time because it was embraced in a wider human community.

Chapter 7
PHOBIC ANTIFEMINISM: THE CASE OF THE FATHER OF ANARCHISM

Throughout modern history, feminism and democracy are twins. It has to be consistent democracy. It stands to reason: acceptance of democratic rights and equality for the entire human race implies democratic equality for "the Half of the Human Race" that the earliest feminists appealed to.

We have also seen that feminist ideas arose most consistently out of the socialist movement. Feminism and socialism: are these twins also?

No, they are not. We are in process of exploring the relationship, but part of the answer can be set down now: not all varieties of leftists have been proponents of women's rights. We will see some examples later, for instance the German Lassalleans. The present chapter is on the special case of the most viciously antifeminist thinker in the annals of the left. This was P. J. Proudhon, the ideological father of anarchism.

But does not anarchism mean the very apotheosis of Freedom? What current has produced more rhetoric about Liberty? It seems to be a confusing sort of exception.

The confusion lies in the prevalent illusions about anarchism in general and Proudhon in particular. The fact is that Proudhon was not only antifeminist but one of the most thoroughly authoritarian types ever to arise on the so-called left.

It is quite likely, dear reader, that you will have to be liberated from the myth of anarchist "libertarianism" before you can tackle the question of Proudhon's mind-boggling form of antifeminism. But this job cannot be accomplished here. I strongly recommend that you attend to it first, even if you have to skip to the next chapter in the meantime.*

***** The basic study of Proudhon's authoritarian ideology was published by the liberal historian J. Salwyn Schapiro, first in the *American Historical Review*, then as

(continued...)

Towards a Socialist Feminism

Proudhon's extreme antifeminism has sometimes been mentioned, though never presented fully, and when mentioned it is commonly treated as an odd personal aberration, unrelated to his overall social theory. To see the weakness of this interpretation, we must first lay out Proudhon's views on women in all their incredible ferocity. Readers who find this unnecessary may skip the first two sections.

1. The Patriarchal Master

> "I regard as baneful and stupid all our dreams about the emancipation of women; I deny her any kind of right and political initiative; I believe that for woman liberty and well-being lie solely in marriage, motherhood, domestic concerns, fidelity as a spouse, chastity, and seclusion." So Proudhon, or a brief taste of him.

Woman's role was only that of "nurse and child-bearer." Proudhon's "Marriage Catechism" laid it down that her role had to be limited to: "Care of the household, rearing of the children, education of young girls under the supervision of the magistrates, service of public charity." The last item was her only possible connection with the world outside the home. She "is inevitably and juridically excluded from any political, administrative, doctrinal, industrial leadership, as of any military action."

His writings proclaimed, from at least 1846 on, that she could be nothing but "Courtesan or housekeeper... I see nothing in between."

(...continued)
a chapter in his *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism* (1949). After four decades, no one has even tried to refute it. Schapiro did not know Proudhon's *Carnets* (Notebooks), which were first published in the 1960s, with intimate proof of what this great "libertarian" really thought. Schapiro, then, should be supplemented with chapter 5 of vol. 4 of my *Karl Marx's theory of Revolution*.

Even earlier, in 1845, when a liberal friend argued against relegating women to housekeeping only, Proudhon kept saying, "I don't understand you."

Above all, the "law" had to be that "the man will be the master and the woman will obey." In relations with a woman, a man must always keep in mind that for her he is "a father, a chief, a master: above all a master!" The wife could not be the husband's "associate": "Woman was given to man to serve him as auxiliary..."

To an extent, certainly, Proudhon was just articulating the view of woman's subordination that was prevalent in mid-nineteenth century. If that were all, he would not be interesting. The fact is that this "libertarian" went far beyond even the most conservative versions then current on the place of women. It is this extremeness we want to focus on first.

It was not Proudhon's argumentation that merits attention. Although he wrote profusely on the subject, he mainly embroidered the standard rationalizations or invented arguments of special absurdity. To be sure, those who are bemused by his "libertarian" label may be shocked by the chief rationalization, the main one of the times and the main one in Proudhon: *Men are strong, therefore men must rule.* As a "moral philosopher" (a title often conferred on him by admirers) his main effort was represented by this ratiocination: "Why is marriage indissoluble?—Because the conscience is immutable." (That's all.)

In method he differed in no way from any of the contemporaneous deep thinkers: everything was proved by dint of assuming in advance that men and women are *defined* in terms of convenient abstractions. Men = strength; hence force, ability, and all associated virtues. Women = beauty and grace at the best, and nothing else but baby machines and unpaid servitors. He did not even give a nod to a conception that was already commonplace among socialists: that women were driven to prostitution not by their "female" natures but by social conditions.

Proudhon himself understood that his antifeminist views were *more* reactionary than even the upholders of the status quo—reactionary in the literal sense of wishing to return to a more patriarchal past. Public opinion and government had to be convinced, he proclaimed, "that the father of the family should be re-established [*sic*] in his domestic jurisdiction, honors and authority." A propaganda campaign was needed against the current degenerate state of affairs, "against the licentiousness of young people and feminine rebelliousness." Women "have nothing to gain by education."

This reactionary yearning was not simply a personal aberration. The first point to be made about this is that our "advanced thinker" remained a peasant mentality at bottom. Even his admiring anarchoid biographer George Woodcock, terribly embarrassed by his hero's views, suggests the following as extenuation:

> Even his domestic pattern was that of a peasant. ... He liked to rule the household in the manner of a Judaic patriarch, and few French farmers would disagree with his view of the functions of women.

Proudhon's peasant mentality was honestly come by. His parents were peasants of the Franche-Comté, who provided the "rustic blood" he liked to boast of and the "pure Jurassic limestone" of his nature. (The Jura mountains on the Swiss side later also provided Bakunin's best recruiting ground.) This side of his family changed over from peasant life to that of urban artisans and small traders, thereby combining the class characteristics of the French peasant with the town shopkeeper. His father having gone bankrupt as a tavern keeper, the family went back to the land; young Pierre Joseph began his working life as a peasant boy in the Juras. As a young man he attained to artisan life, becoming a journeyman printer.

"Back to patriarchy!" was the banner he raised himself. "It is to a new *patriarchate* that I would like to invite all men," he wrote. It was in

this peasant yearning, articulated by a citified self-made intellectual, that we get one clue to the connection between his antifeminism and his anarchist standpoint, that is, his blind resentment against the organization of modern society and a longing to return to the small-unit society of the past, where a patriarch *could* rule.

Out of this peasant soul of his came even part of his vocabulary and the brutal viciousness of some of his formulations, as we will see. A favorite swearword of his, reserved for effeminate men and "masculine" women, *femmelins*, came from the peasants of the Franche-Comté; so he told us. He liked to use the peasant expression that a "strong-minded female" (his ultimate horror) was a "hen trying to crow like a cock." He quite consciously linked the peasant's concern for preserving seed with the "virile" man's need to retain *his* seed in order to conserve strength and intellect. Women, eunuchs and children were inferior because they lacked this conservation of the "seed." This hayseed notion may remind you of the General in *Dr. Strangelove* who worried about the health of his "body fluids"...

Proudhon's desire for a return to the patriarchate of the past even impelled him to make common cause with the institution he often execrated, the Church—an alliance against women's pretensions. On women, family and sex he expressed the most complete agreement with the most reactionary strictures of the Church, objecting *only* to signs of liberalization in the Church's attitude. His chapters on women in his book *De la Justice* were even publicly presented with a bow of agreement to the Archbishop. Above all, he insisted constantly and at length on the utter rigidity of church and state laws on the indissolubility of marriage and the absolute impossibility of divorce, qualified only by a rather reluctant acceptance of the few exceptions historically recognized by the papacy.

2. *The Female Enemy*

Proudhon founded his antifeminism completely on the proposition of woman's inferiority, "physical, intellectual and moral"—but this common starting point led him in a far from common direction.

Again, it is useless to seek in Proudhon's voluminous works for any reasoned case trying to establish this inferiority. You will find only the assertion that, since men are "stronger," they are necessarily stronger in all respects, hence superior in all fields and professions. This "enemy of the state" next reasoned that since "all legislation is an inference from the right of force," those who lack force *should* have no legal rights. His obsession with strength in a personal sense was symbolized when, on going into exile in 1858, he assumed the name Durfort ("hard-strong").Women's inferiority was *organic*; it was inherent in her sex. A key word was "virility"; maleness was superior by definition; femaleness was "irrationality." This state of affairs was "organic and inevitable."

These jejune thoughts led Proudhon to sweeping social and political conclusions. First of all, they led to the sexist equivalent of the "white man's burden." Woman was inherently and eternally the *ward* of the man—some man, any man.

> That is why, in principle no woman should be regarded as being *sui juris sui compos*; she is presumed to be eternally [*sic*] in a state of tutelage to a father, brother, uncle, husband, even indeed a lover wherever concubinage is recognized by the law. If there is no natural-born guardian indicated, the law has to appoint one among the persons officially designated for family counsel: mayor, judge, head of the workshop, etc.

Inside a family, the woman's role—outside of reproduction—was that of the housekeeper: "The household is the complete manifestation of the woman."

Now the plot thickens. Again and again Proudhon exhorted the man to be the Master in the house. He kept on saying, "the first condition, for a man, is to dominate the woman and be the master."

> If she has a good mind or is a talented woman, etc., you have to be *seven times* stronger than she; if not, no marriage. There is no peace for a man in feeling himself criticized; no dignity in being contradicted; this raises the imminent danger of cuckoldry, which is the worst of shames and miseries. Rather the frequentation of courtesans than a bad marriage.

In the great tradition of the cracker-barrel sexist, he assured young men that they must learn "that a woman wanted to be dominated." Now observe the next step.

Make her jump, he counseled (using an expression applied to dogs jumping for a tidbit). Never tell her any secrets, even such as you might confide to a friend (i.e., a male friend). "Never forgive her for grave faults: she will disdain her husband so much the more." Let her get out of hand in any way and she will not only start to "affect equality," she will "make jokes about her *master*." That is horrible enough, but, worse still, she may even grow so degenerate as to dare to make a complaint against her master.

> It is a shameful thing for our society, a mark of decay, that a woman should be able to ask divorce on grounds of *incompatibility* in *temperament* or *the use of violence by the husband.*

The last phrase already indicated that, for this libertarian, wife-beating was as guiltless an occupation as house-breaking a dog. In the same passage he himself made the link with the Law of Strength. "If he [the man] has been endowed with superiority in strength, it is also in

order that he exercise its rights. Strength has right, strength has its obligation." (This phrase is modeled on the axiom *Noblesse oblige*.)

Women like to be roughed up now and then by their master: they positively like it. This old chestnut of the barnyard sages was repeated by our anarchist theoretician, in mild forms and in virulent forms. He bade men remember this "aphorism": "that the men most beloved by their women are those who know how to make themselves respected, even a little feared."

> The man has *strength*, in order to make use of it. Without force, the woman scorns him; and making her feel he is strong is also a way of giving her pleasure, fascinating and captivating her.

Finally, a gemlike formulation: "A woman does not at all hate being used with violence, indeed even being violated." Whether "by reason or force," a woman has to be bent and broken to the master's will. "If the woman resists you to your face, it is necessary to beat her down at any cost."

Even to the power of life and death: violence in dominating the woman is not to be limited. Proudhon demanded that society return to the Patriarchal Law.

The simplest case was death out of hand for a wife taken in adultery. A man who did not immediately stab an unfaithful wife to death simply lacked elementary self-respect. "Murdering an unfaithful wife is an act of marital justice," said the philosopher of Justice. On the other hand, what if the wife caught out an adulterous husband? It was her duty, indeed her "triumph," to take him back lovingly in her arms.

Proudhon also spelled out a wider range of reasons for which a husband might kill his wife "in accordance with the rigor of paternal justice." Besides adultery, the list included "lewdness, treason, drunkenness and debauchery, squandering money and theft," and, last

but not least, "obstinate, peremptory, disdainful insubordination." His rights over her "are almost unlimited."

In fact, the more one dives into Proudhon's writings on the question, the clearer is his psychopathological obsession with bloodthirsty visions of revenge against women for the slightest infraction of real or fancied male prerogatives. There is an incredible passage about a woman who gave a successful literary talk while her husband sat by and beamed. Proudhon's pen whipped itself up into a frenzy; he gave a detailed account of what *he* would have done if his wife had dared to make such a public spectacle of herself against his wishes. At the first sign of disobedience, he would tell her that he would fix her so that she could not do it again. "And as I would have spoken, so would I have acted. In a society [France] where the law does not protect the dignity of the head of the family, it is for the head of the family to protect himself. In such a case, I consider, like the Roman, that the husband has the right of life and death over the wife."

In a similarly obsessive vein, repeating his slogan of "Courtesan or housekeeper—nothing else!", he added as part of the same thought: "Better death!"—better death for the woman who ignores this law than suffer her to live a "prostituted" life outside the household chores. In these passages, he added another slogan: "Imprisonment rather than emancipation!"

The case of the literary lady indicated what it took to rouse his most murderous responses. When it came to the best-known woman writers of the day, his pen turned into an SS trooper's truncheon. Naturally his most bestial imprecations were reserved for the greatest woman writer that France had produced, George Sand. To the offence of writing books she also added the crime of advocating "free love." To give an adequate sample of the vulgarity and coarseness of Proudhon's invective would take more space than it is worth, for it can be appreciated (clinically) mainly in its bulk.

At this point we are mainly interested in his repeated screams threatening physical beatings or death as a punishment for such

writings. His response to George Sand's autobiography was this: "how could she have failed to reflect that, by tucking up her skirts before the public that way, she authorized the first-comer to flog her without her having any right to complain?" This cogent criticism was actually published in his book *De la Justice*. To one of the women who dared to attack this work in a pamphlet, he replied: "I do not have the right of force with regard to you, madame; if it were otherwise, you can be sure that never in your life would you ever touch pen again."

To paraphrase a noted saying: when Proudhon hears the phrase *woman writer* he reaches for his knout. But women writers were only the most notorious cases of the larger world of degeneracy, i.e., "emancipated women." To them he directed these words: "when men recover their sense of shame, they will drown you and your lovers in a pond."

Male writers who countenanced "obscenity" were equally proscribed. In his Notebooks he raged against the "obscenity" in the novels of Dumas: "prostitution everywhere, prostitution always! Death, massacre for the *infâmes*!" Later he mused in the same pages: "After the Revolution, we will have to condemn some millions of individuals of both sexes to forced labor!—prostitutes male and female, pimps and procuresses, rapists, seducers, violators of young girls, thieves pointed out by public opinion and remaining unpunished, etc., etc."

By "prostitutes" Proudhon did not merely mean prostitutes. In this Liberty-loving plan for prisons for millions, a "prostitute" was any woman who went outside the sphere assigned her by our Moral Philosopher, or who even thought about doing so. "Promiscuity in ideas ends in promiscuity of love affairs, and vice versa," he wrote in capitals and italics. "What is called her [woman's] emancipation is the same thing as prostitution," he repeated in various ways.

The equation was this: emancipation = free love = prostitution = degeneration = collapse of society, and so on *ad infinitum*. A father who took his wife or daughter to a theater thereby put them on the road to prostitution. Proudhon demanded that the theater be purged of its

immorality. Actresses who portrayed love on the stage acted like tarts. "The most obscene and the vilest names would hardly suffice to give an idea of these mores." When it came to vile names Proudhon did his best: George Sand, "who pisses phrases as much as Dumas does dialogues," is an "old harlot," etc. Women artists were all the same: the courtesan of antiquity "was, in her way, an artist" after all," he mused. "The dancing girl of India, the Egyptian dancing woman, the teahouse women in Japan, are also artists." QED: artists were courtesans, proved by history in Proudhon's customary caricature of erudition on the half-shell.

It should not be thought that Proudhon made no concessions to the usual platitudes about kindness to women, as to dumb animals. In one of his dithyrambs to Justice we learn that Justice "tells the man *Command, in order the better to serve*; it tells the woman *Obey, in order the better to reign*." It is well known that all authoritarians insist on despotic rule solely in order to Serve the People.

3. *The Anti-Sex Appeal*

We have not yet plumbed the depths of Proudhon's ideas on women's place. You have already no doubt noticed that those ideas were closely associated in his own mind with his views on sexual behavior, and we have to probe into this area. You may come to the conclusion that the problem was more psychiatric than political or social. Without denying this, we want to round out the facts before going on to the relation between Proudhon's antifeminism and his anarchism.

To begin with: behind Proudhon's antagonism to feminism was his psychopathological hostility to and fear of *women*; and behind this, his overt and obvious antagonism to *sex*.

Glorification of chastity was not unusual, either as an attitude or an attitudinization. But the substance was quite different when Proudhon wrote, "What is chastity? The highest expression of love." The usual bows to chastity meant that suitable forms and rituals made sex *pure*.

For Proudhon, love was pure only when it was completely devoid of sex both in act and thought. The only pure woman was the chaste (continent) woman --one who felt no sex urge whatever and preferably remained virgin. Thus she could approach the moral heights enjoyed by the male. "It is by chastity that women can draw closer to men, that is, by stripping off their sex." The function of chastity was to defeminize the woman; woman minus sex became almost tolerable.

Proudhon applied the demand for chastity even more strongly to men, though not for the same reason. His frequent injunction to men is: abstain, be continent. Sometimes this was connected with the need to remain master in the household; for the sexual urge represented a weapon of power in the hands of the woman; it might make the man capitulate to her. There were other reasons.

> An old man said: It is unfortunate that we could not do without women to preserve society. He should have said: It is unfortunate that we cannot abstain from love.—Love is a mystical thing, irrational, even incomprehensible.

This sort of thought may also be found among men who have wondered at the "mystical" power of love (or sex) to sweep them off their feet. Proudhon was not one of these. All biographical evidence as well as his Notebooks and other writings indicate that his own sex drive was not exactly sweeping, and—perhaps more important—what there was of it was seen as a great annoyance. "For men," he wrote, "women are an affliction of the spirit, whether he resorts to them [sexually] or whether he abstains."

He therefore convinced himself that "nature" (which always commanded men to do whatever the philosopher Proudhon decided was right) has made man, *not woman*, the prototype of chastity. The desexed, nonsensual love of Judith and Manasseh was, in fact, "the love that is really felt by every virtuous young man and which animates so

many young girls." Later he modified this only to exclude females more generally:

> The woman—and this is remarkable—ascribes no chastity to the man, does not make it his obligation, doesn't worry about it with regard to him, would even be annoyed if he were chaste. [*How convenient for the double standard!*]—The man to the contrary. This...is a law of nature. Chastity has its principle in the man; it applies only to him, emanates only from him.

Our libertarian notes that once in power, he would, in order to encourage chastity, "proscribe any depiction or description of physical and platonic love."

Proudhon then moved further to proscribe love itself as an immoral emotion. His demand for the purification of sex became a demand for the suppression of sex—even in wedlock, even between newlyweds. Since the only moral passion is the passion for Justice--

> Any other passion is egoistic: love is egoism. The just man is passionate, but passionate against all love... The love of a father of a family for his children is...odious to the just man...

and so on *ad furorem*. He wrote: "I have always said, in a sense, that between decent people there is no talk of love, and that the less love plays a part in existence, the more chance of happiness there is."—"In all love, there is defilement and prostitution of the body." The Church's blessing of the nuptial bed, Proudhon maintained, had to be conditional only, because what went on there was inherently "shameful," unless decontaminated by a complete absence of any pleasure in the shame. Marriage was different from prostitution only if the partners remained "chaste in marriage as in love"—limiting sex to a

minimum performed as a pleasureless duty. To marry *for* love was whoredom. Any woman who felt "love for love's sake, love for pleasure's sake" was a whore. "She is chaste who feels no amorous emotion for anyone, not even for her husband." Two who married for sensual pleasure were simple fornicators, debauchees and libertines. Once the children were grown up, sex relations between man and wife must cease. These instructions were detailed in Proudhon's fantastic "Marriage Catechism."

There was another element involved, besides the purely "moral" one. Sex relations between fiancés, or even between man and wife, were "destructive to domestic respect, love of work, and the practice of social duties." It got in the way of the proper relation of serf to master. By engaging in love with the woman, the Master will "lose respect in her eyes." This line of thought leads back to the motivation of despotism.

4. *The Dirty Mind*

Behind all his talk about morality, purity and chastity, Proudhon's gut-feeling about sex was that it was dirty and devilish; this hardly needs to be argued today. He more or less said so more than once. "Everything written on this subject fills me with a deep disgust," he wrote a friend. The association of any thought of sex with "disgust" keeps recurring. "Woman solicits, arouses, provokes man; she disgusts him, annoys him." (As usual, the abstraction "man" was actually named Pierre Joseph.) The sex act itself was one of the "most shameful things." The "mysteries" of reproduction were "all very ugly"; a boy should be told to read a botanical textbook—"that is enough, nothing more."

In *De la Justice* he propounded one of his moral principles:

> If anything is made to reveal to man his dignity, it is certainly the coupling of animals, the most repulsive of

> all spectacles: the sight of a corpse is less shocking. Now the shame which a man feels in the solitude of his dignity is redoubled under the eyes of a bystander; hence he has a new duty which we formulate as follows: *Do not do in private what you would not dare to do before others; do not do before others what you do not want them to do before you.*

This was surely one of the most remarkable of golden rules. But it is an illuminating statement psychologically. In the above-mentioned letter to a friend, he made clear that the whole modern world was filthy-dirty, polluted with sex like a barnyard. Some day the "spirituality" hinted in Plato and in Christianity might be realized.

> I regard our present-day lasciviousness as altogether contrary to nature; all these displays of tenderness, even when honest and delicate, these expressions of ardency about women, that fill modern works, seem to me to be the result of a disordered erotic excitation, rather than a symptom of legitimate tendencies.

The sickness in his soul he projected onto the world, and demanded that the human species be psychically castrated. Sex was literally of the devil. This bitter despiser of women wrote, "In principle there is no ugly woman; all partake more or less of that ineffable beauty that people call *beauté du diable*." One of the women who polemized in a pamphlet against his 1858 book showed exceptional insight in pointing out Proudhon's "tendency to obscenity."

His Notebooks were replete with vituperation against the Fourierists and the Saint-Simonians because of their favorable attitude toward women's rights and "free love." His notes could not be mistaken for simple political comments; they were usually more like retchings. After a denunciation of the Fourierists as glorifiers of

sensuality, he grated: "*You are disgusting!* This is my last word." It was also often his first word.

He put his demand for sexual abstinence to work politically. It was his one and only solution of the overpopulation problem, for it was the only method of birth control that was not immoral. The way to enforce abstinence was to make men and women work so hard that the "erotic appetites" were restrained. To put it in popular parlance: comes the revolution, we libertarians will work your balls off!

Taking Proudhon not as a political type but as a clinical case, one would have to investigate the personal origins of his obviously sick mind. Though this is not my subject, there is enough data lying on the surface to make clear that the task would not be in vain. Some remarks may be useful simply to supplement the picture.

For one thing, there is no doubt that his fear and detestation of sex went back to his earliest known years, in a fairly conscious way. "I am not particularly amorous," he wrote a friend as a young man. As a young printer apprentice in his master's home, he would flee to his own room when visiting young people "became flirtatious," a contemporary recalled. In later life he wrote about falling in young love, and rejoiced that he had retained his pristine innocence: "What a memory for a man's heart in after years," he rhapsodized, "to have been in his green youth the guardian, the companion, the participant of the virginity of a young girl." Explaining "I am chaste; I am naturally so, by inclination," he later stated that he was a virgin until "ten years after my puberty." His biographer Woodcock thinks the experience of losing his virginity was probably unpleasant for him.

In any case, there was no record or hint of any other relationship with a woman in Proudhon's life until a mind-boggling episode which might be rejected in disbelief if it were not vouched for by Proudhon himself. One day in 1847 he accosted a stranger on a street in Paris. It was nine days before his 38th birthday. He had decided to get married: typically, a completely abstract decision, detached from any flesh and

blood, let alone glands. "The presence of a woman at my hearth has become necessary to me," he explained to a friend.

The young woman he accosted was completely unknown to him, except that he had observed her before. He quizzed her on the spot, and got (so to speak) her name, rank and serial number: *Euphrasie Piégard, 24, lace worker.* Then and there he abruptly proposed marriage. The next day he sent her a long letter expounding his reasons for wishing to marry her. A slight idea of the oddities contained in this composition may be gained from the following: "I had in principle resolved to settle down. Reasoning on this question, I told myself that if I took a wife I would wish her to be young and even pretty..." (and so on). Then he signed a false name to the letter.

Actually he was unable to make a final decision for marriage for almost two years, by which time he was a political prisoner in Sainte-Pélagie, the well-known Paris jail. But living conditions for political prisoners in those innocent days were not much more arduous than living in a mediocre hotel as a shut-in, except that he could leave the premises only once a week. The marriage took place on the last day of 1849. Two months later he noted in his daybook: "In all, after six weeks of marriage, I have slept with my wife three times: a thing I am far from complaining about. It is not good, in my opinion, to be always together." Sainte-Pélagie was good for his soul.

It must be recorded that this marriage worked out very well—at least for Proudhon. After three months of marriage he rhapsodized that his selection was "the simplest, sweetest, most docile of creatures." There was no danger of her developing intellectual ambitions, since she barely knew how to write, never read books, and showed no interest in her husband's intellectual pursuits. As Proudhon said of a friend's marriage: "How happy he is—his wife is not so foolish as to be ignorant of how to make a good stew, nor intelligent enough to discuss his articles!"

5. Homosexuality and Fear

Within the limits already mentioned (that is, without getting into psychiatric depths), it is possible to point to some elements that played a part in shaping this teratological phenomenon.

One, no doubt, was his relationship to his mother. Biographer Woodcock tells us that the son's "admiration" for the mother was lifelong. She worked like a dog for her family and unquestioningly accepted her place. We are told that this revered mother was the mirror in which Pierre Joseph saw all women; and this claim raises obvious questions about the source of the hatred and disgust of women that filled him from youth. When he wrote in his Notebook, "If I ever get married, I wish to love my wife as much as I loved my mother," one must wonder about this expression of model filial piety. He said she had counseled him, "Never speak of love to a girl, even when you propose to marry her," and one may ask what had led her to conclude that love and marriage must be strangers.

Another element, not a matter of speculation, was his latent homosexuality. To be sure, he condemned homosexuality like all other detestable sexual practices; in fact, his genial plan for the new Proudhonian social order was so libertarian that he had a whole list of sexual crimes for which offhand murder was justified. Any homosexual taken *in flagrante* might be freely killed by anyone who came along. He freely echoed the peasant's rustic sneers at *femmelins* and *ambigus*; for example, the Girondins were *femmelins*, the Jacobins were *castrati*, etc.

The starting point was an extended argument by Proudhon that women were not only physically and morally weaker than men but "hence also less beautiful."

> The woman's beauty, besides being infinitely less in *expression* than men's, is of much shorter duration. And whatever is not always beautiful is less beautiful.—No sexual illusion can destroy this reasoning.—Besides, if men because of passion find

> women more beautiful than themselves, it is likewise true that women find men more beautiful than themselves.

He listed some classical statues of male figures, and asserted they "are more beautiful than the Venuses of Medici, Milo, and all the Venuses in the world." Women's figures had only one note, "the rounded contour," whereas men's had many esthetic aspects. Pygmalion was himself more beautiful than the statue he made. Then:

> And why shouldn't love, something more than friendship, exist between men of different ages, at least in platonic form? All of us feel it unawares. We all love to see and caress young boys, when their faces are attractive. Pederasty comes much less from privation or abuse of conjugal enjoyment, as is thought, than from that vague intuition of masculine beauty which suddenly enamors the heedless heart with an incomprehensible love.

This, one of the closest approaches in Proudhon to a poetic flight, was followed by more on the patterns of homosexuality.

> Every man is susceptible at a given moment to loving his friend's son, or his neighbor's, and becoming a pederast. It is a somnambulistic erotic outburst that no one can resist; and if the man who is hit in this way, seduced by his imagination, gives way to his disordered senses, he is lost. The pederastic furor increases with time and satisfaction. The most terrible penalties can no longer stop it. A man should therefore watch without relaxation over his heart and senses; master his flesh by work, study and

> meditation; above all, make moderate and discreet use of the fine arts, all of which are the fascinator-agents of lust and sensuality.

It is clear that Proudhon saw this "pederastic furor" as related to his justified contempt for women, who, being supernally inferior, had to be inferior also as objects of love. All very classical.

Homosexuality was closely associated *in Proudhon's mind* with another type of sexuality, which the textbooks call *bestiality*, and which usually surfaces in the form of jokes about peasants and rustics. On the page after the last extract quoted above, we can read the following:

> *Love for animals.* I have no more doubt about this love than of homosexual love, though it is perhaps rarer.—I speak of a love with *sensual delight*, as in the case of pederastic and conjugal love.

Both forms of sexuality were associated in his mind for purposes of vituperation as well. In one of his monotonously regular denunciations of the Fourierist group, he frothed: "You are pederasts, and 7 out of 8 of you fondle your dog or your mare." A little further on, the reference to masturbatory bestiality was made explicit.

In still another Notebook entry, Proudhon unleashed a long argument in which his sexism and racism were wrapped up in one package with the specters of sexual perversion. The male white Frenchman, lord of creation, might consort with lesser breeds—like women—just as savage races might crossbreed with monkeys. He set up a continuous gradation, all under the heading, "Women.—Omnigamy." It started with a news report that a female monkey in the Paris zoo was to be "crossed with a man, like a Negress with a white." He opined that the savants would be better advised to use an Australian native. Then the next step could be to breed

monkeys with dogs, showing that Man was cousin-german to all animals. Hence--

> Hence it is not natural history that separates us from animals; it is not the *divine order*. *Bestiality* is the inspiration of God himself. It is the *human* way, the *human* order, it is the law of purity or nobility which is manifested among the people by *feudality* and *caste*.

Religious miscegenation has always been equated with bestiality (so continued Proudhon's reasoning). The higher races of Man were saved from this, nature's sexuality, by the advance of Chastity, until "absolute virginity" became "the supreme law, the final state of being," as expressed in the Catholic mass.

> So two forces solicit the human soul: natural sensuality, which pushes to the point of universal bestiality, practised by the ancients (cf. Minotaur, Pasiphae", Mendes goat [etc.]...); and human chastity, which refines sensuality and purifies love to the point of complete abstinence.

By providing the death penalty for sodomy and bestiality alike, "Catholicism has given expression to the real human tendency."

Do you understand? *It is these forms of sexuality, homosexualism and bestiality, that express the "real human tendency," not that filthy-dirty business with women.*

In this context Proudhon—who could usually hardly write Fourier's name without foaming at the mouth—set down the following decree of nature:

> In résumé, in the order of nature marriage is only a word, the supreme law is omnigamy. Fourier is right.

This is one of those dialectical transformations that justify Hegel's birth. Our enemy of sex, our glorifier of chastity, super-prude and ultra-prig, turns before our very eyes into the philosopher of an orgiastic "omnigamy" (sexual congress of all with all) which sees bestiality as the most genuinely human form of sex, whereas the love of women is disgustingly "contrary to nature"...

It should be evident that some of Proudhon's most extreme imprecations against women were not merely name-calling. Women were simply animals, subhuman creatures—*literally*: "Woman is a nice animal, but she is an animal. She is greedy for kisses [*baisers*] as the she-goat is greedy for salt."—"She is, in short, a domesticated animal, who at times reverts to her instincts."

Naturally this had to be "proved" by the usual Proudhonian decree of nature, a little more absurdly than usual. Only the male is a "complete human being" because the woman "lacks an organ." Woman is therefore a passive being, a receptacle for the man's seed, a "place of incubation" only, etc. Hence "woman has no reason for existence: she is the instrument of reproduction that nature has chosen. She is "a sort of intermediate term between him [Man] and the rest of the animal realm." Nature decrees that "the male sex...is the final product in embryonic development *for a superior goal*."

With this wonderful theory virtually expelling women from the human race, all kinds of political and social problems were solved. Antifeminism, or sexism, was reduced to a subheading under racism (and, by the way, Proudhon was one of the most virulent racists of the day). A certain sense can be made of denunciations that sounded like insane ravings—as when he wrote that the natural female state, unleavened by Man's beneficent influence, was "loquacious, lewd, lazy, dirty, perfidious, debauching agent, public poisoner, a locust, a plague on her family and society." *I suggest that these burbling sounds translate into a scream of fright.*

There was no question that he was filled with fear. His rantings about women were full of expressions of panic fear of mere association

with women—even apart from sexuality and even with the best women—put in terms of the deleterious effects of such association on the *women*.

This fear was fused with hatred.

> ¶ In proportion as the two sexes become close, they care nothing for each other.—The man hates the woman. All erotic manifestations prove this...
>
> ¶ In short: scorn, derision or despair, these are the three characteristics of love.
>
> ¶ Women.—The more one knows them, the less one loves them.
>
> ¶ A woman becomes worse as she gets older.

There were some "good women" in existence, but these were "only the elite of the sex, few in number, overwhelmed in the mass." But was it reasonable for males (man, this climactic product of cosmic progress), to *hate* a poor domesticated animal whose "threefold and incurable inferiority" reduced her to "nothingness," as Proudhon insisted? The answer was that this hatred was really fear. This complex of hate and fear, strident contempt and vituperation, was the characteristic product of a Master Race psychology that felt itself at bay before its "inferiors."

For Proudhon this was overtly fear and hatred *of women's sexuality*. Woman was inherently a sexual monster. We have already seen that it was men and not women who are by "nature" chaste and pure. He stressed this many times. Women's tendency was to "lasciviousness, license, obscenity, anything lewd." Rousseau was wrong: "no woman ever said: enough!" More about this monster:

> The woman lets the law of chastity be imposed on her, accepts it, unreflectingly submits to it with a sort of indifference, with the same docility that she gives herself to sensual pleasure, capable of passing from one to the other, of being in turn Venus or the Virgin Mary.

A magic monster like this, whose like can be found in the myths of various peoples, was an object of fear, not a mere target of scorn. Women were sexual entities *only*: "the amorous obsession is constant with woman... she cannot speak or think of anything else... woman has no other inclination, no other aptitude except love."

There is an interesting offering of "examples," which should probably be taken autobiographically: "Examples are not rare, either, among civilized women [as well as savages]; in the countryside, in town, everywhere that little boys and girls mingle in games, it is almost always the lubricity of the latter that provokes the coldness of the former."

So much for Proudhon's views. The reader may ask wonderingly: "How can a Liberty-loving anarchist, self-proclaimed Champion of Freedom, be so vilely reactionary?"

6. The Anarchist Rationale

A heavy fog of rhetoric and myth has hung around anarchism; the social nature of this tendency has generally been misunderstood. One misconception is that this *ism* is an organic part of the political left in modern society.

But the first key to anarchism is that it is not *of* modern society at all, even though it appears *in* it in some form. One of its important components is a yearning for a simpler world antedating bourgeois society, industrialization, and urbanization. It arose in part as a reaction *against* this modern development. Historically, it has often been a reflection of aspirations emanating from certain peasant conditions of

life and (at its most advanced) from individual-artisan occupations carried on under nonfactory conditions.

A second key to demythologizing anarchism is the special meaning of the word 'liberty' or 'freedom' in its jargon. Anarchist dithyrambs on this great word do not refer to freedom *in* the state—which to most people, especially the left, means complete democratic control by the people in some form. Anarchists mean freedom *from* the state—in fact, from all manifestations of *social authority*, no matter how democratically organized.

Anarchist "freedom" has no meaning other than the unqualified freedom of the individual from all trammels of any sort emanating from society—called "authority" in anarchist manifestos. Hence its superficial charm and essential absurdity.

The standpoint is, and can only be, that of the atomic individual, confronting organized society as an enemy. Impulses in this direction are not rare, of course; we all feel hampered by social restraints; but this tendency can harden into a systematic ideology only under special conditions hostile to modern reality. Above all, it flourishes in the world of the peasant, whose livelihood is gained by personal labor on his land, while the outside society (the state, etc.) intrudes only to collect taxes, conscript his sons, and otherwise deprive him of his God-given freedoms.

In Proudhon's case, the atomic individual was the individual family, which was the only natural unit of the species. Proudhon's need for patriarchalism was not simply a personal aberration. *The family was the only meaningful unit of society, and the family was necessarily an autocracy*: this was the crux of Proudhon's view of the world. The outside society was a matter of relations among the individual autocrats, an adventitious growth.

Proudhon understood quite clearly the connection between his view of women's role and his view of the patriarchal autocracy (family) as the unit of society. His ideal picture of society was one in which the family autocrats lived "free," that is, untrammeled by restraints of any

kind. Hence his occasional attempts to state a theoretical reconciliation between his elocution about "liberty" and his demand for the complete subjection of women. Here is one:

> The real *husband*, the PATERFAMILIAS, is the strongest man. In a state composed of real heads of family, no tyranny.

He means, of course, no tyranny *by the state* over those heads of family, the Strong Men. *Within* the family, however, the Paterfamilias exercises an unqualified tyranny over all its members—a tyranny which is a decree of "nature," therefore not subject to question.

I invite you to peer into Proudhon's mind, where society was portrayed with stark simplicity. There were so many families; each family lived in its own stronghold (or its own cave, so to speak); each lived under its own Patriarchal Master, picking its own berries (metaphorically speaking). Around each family reigned Freedom—unless, of course, the Paterfamilias was not as strong a Strong Man as the next one down the bush. *Inside this stronghold of Pure Freedom, in the patriarchal family, reigned pure despotism.* All of Proudhon's theoretical equipment was only a labored sophistication, adulteration, or camouflage of this idyllic state of affairs. All anarchism posits a similar counterposition between an atomic individual (not necessarily the Proudhonian family) and the enemy, which is the enveloping society.

Proudhon's most considerable effort to think out this matter resulted in the following passage, which rewards a careful analysis.

It started with "political society, of which the family is only the embryo." The aim of this society, Proudhon stated forthrightly, was to increase "dignity and masculine [*virile*] liberty" as well as wealth.—Not human liberty, only masculine liberty? The rest of this passage was a direct attempt to put into words his reasons for excluding half the human race from the blessings of anarchist liberty. This is how it went:

> The relation of families to the state, in short the *Republic*, is, for the male sex, the problem to be solved. Women are involved only in an indirect way by means of a secret and invisible influence [on their masters]. How could it be otherwise? As the embryonic organ of justice, man and wife make up only one body, one soul, one will, one intelligence; they are dedicated to each other for life and death; how could they have different opinions or interests?

Political affairs aim to establish family solidarity and assure "liberty, property, labor, commerce, security, education, information, circulation that they require—all the things that depend exclusively on the attributes of the man."

> How would women be personally consulted? Suppose a woman could, in an assembly of the people, vote contrary to her husband: that is to suppose them to be in disagreement and to prepare their divorce. Suppose that the wife's judgment could be counterpoised to the husband's: that means going against the will of nature and degrading masculinity. In short, to admit to the exercise of public functions a person whom nature and the law of marriage has, so to speak, consecrated to purely domestic functions is to strike a blow against family decency, make the woman a *public* person, proclaim the confusion of sexes in practice, community of love, abolition of the family, absolutism in the state, enserfment of individuals and the feudalistic subjection of property.

All of Proudhon's mentality lies open to view in this exercise. But we are concerned here only with its anarchist conception of freedom.

Unless women were enserfed to men, terrible things would happen, including "absolutism in the state." He meant, as we have seen, "absolutism" *over the despots* in the family, infringement on *their* freedom to be despots. Unless women were enserfed to men, there would be "enserfment of individuals"—that is, of the individual little despots whose liberty must not be trammeled from the outside. Every right for woman means diminishing the God-given "rights" of the Strong Man, his "masculine liberty" to do what he pleases—against women. To upgrade women would "degrade masculinity."

This anarchist-type Freedom is the freedom to be a despot over others, the right to be the Strong Man glorified by Proudhon. In this case it is explicitly the freedom of the man to enserf the woman.

Now in real society not every man can really be an autocrat, an untrammeled Strong Man. This reality is the difficulty that makes childish fantasy out of much of anarchist literature. That is, not every man can be an autocrat *as against other men*. But every man *can* become an autocrat as against the rest of his family. Behold one way of realizing the anarchist dream: *the family is the only social context where this anarchist ideal of untrammeled despotism can be achieved. By the men.*

This was the meaning of the phrase "masculine liberty" that came off Proudhon's pen. Here in the family microcosm of society, Freedom and Despotism could and did exist as two faces of the same medal. Proudhon's view of the enserfment of the woman in the family was the only anarchist utopia ever put on paper that was entirely workable—as long as the women cringed properly before their Master.

Proudhon was quite sincere when, in his own jargon, he raged against women's liberation as a profanation of "Justice." You must not think of justice *to women* because that is Against Nature. You must think of it in Proudhon's way, as he addressed advocates of women's emancipation:

> You attack everything I love and revere, the only one of our old institutions for which I have kept any

> respect [the family] because in it I see an incarnation of justice.

This was why any impairment of the patriarchal marriage institution and the family was "destructive to society and the state." Marriage and the family formed the "natural organ of justice" (which meant: justice as dealt out by the Strong Man), the fountainhead of "liberty and the Republic." Pages of rhetoric can be quoted from Proudhon asserting that any infringement of the Master's rights over the family was "a profanation of Justice," but the crux was an aphorism that he wrote into his notebook one day: "The family is the subjection of women."

Within this anarchist stronghold of Freedom, the family despotism, the full powers of police authority had to be used against any "insurrection" by the subjects. Violent, and if necessary bloodthirsty, repression of dissent was a necessity for the preservation of "masculine liberty." Proudhon's savage calls for violence against women can now be understood in their anarchist context.

It was a question of preserving the Freedom of the despot. All contrary doctrine, wrote our libertarian, "must be prosecuted and punished." For it was the nature of woman to want domination over us men, and in this they were merely testing us to see if we are "worthy of their love." The test of masculinity was passed by beating them down.

This forcible domination had to be socialized. The heavy hand of the police were a proper instrument for men to "prosecute and punish" those pretensions by women which were exploratory tests of masculinity or (when they went beyond this) degenerate expressions of prostitution.

We have seen Proudhon's pattern of dichotomies: "courtesan or housekeeper—nothing in between," and so on. In the same way, the political choice he presented was between his Liberty-Justice-Anarchism and, on the other hand, what he labeled *pornocracy*. This

pleasant invention, meaning "government by whores, was exhumed by Proudhon from the days of the Byzantine empress Theodora.

There is no use looking for a reasoned explanation, though Proudhon himself thought that spewing out this cussword was a "profound" political thought. He wrote that "pornocracy" had been destroying "public decency" in France *since the 1830s*. The date was telltale: it marked the end of the Bourbon restoration and the installation of the "bourgeois monarchy" of Louis Philippe. More to the point, it marked a great leap forward of the most distinctively modern ideas of society, including the advance of democratic tendencies and the first lasting socialist movements. For Proudhon it meant the "end of society," the reign of all imaginable vices, the rule of the "secret power" of women, domination by a new ruling party he called the "bohemians," promiscuity holding sway over all, and the apotheosis of a terrible maxim, "Work very little, consume very much, and make love"—a summary of horror. Everything was now "vice, immorality, political degradation, that is, pornocracy." The tone was not that of Jeremiah but rather of our right-wing Fundamentalists.

Perhaps Proudhon's views should be dismissed as a psychopathological aberration? Perhaps he merely had a "blind spot" on this question, as we have been told many times? The "spot" was much larger than the apologists seem to know. This libertarian was capable of decreeing despotism for half the human race: well, what of it? In the first place, the figure should be immediately raised from half of humanity to perhaps as much as three-quarters if we include the patriarchal oppression of children. In the next place, we should not be surprised to find Proudhon extending the same view of social authority to other sectors of the human race,.

It happens that in the midst of one of his tirades on "pornocracy" we run across one of the many examples of the virulent racism that went with Proudhon's sexism. If "nature" decreed male superiority, was it a startling leap to adopt the equally common notion that the

same benevolent "nature" also issued a decree guaranteeing the superiority of the white race?

White-superiority racism was as deep-rooted in Proudhon's mind as sexism. "The Hottentot Venus never gave birth to *love*. The strong, beautiful races will absorb or eliminate the others; it is inevitable..." His writings were peppered with expressions of white-racism, stated as an eternal verity, like all his other opinions.

His response to the American Civil War, for example, was that the black race was fated to remain in slavery and *should* remain in slavery. In fact, if his ideas on women eliminated half the human race from the benefits of anarchist Liberty, his racist views removed nine-tenths of the planet's population even from the delights of his "masculine liberty."

Well then, at least white Europe will enjoy the libertarian Eden? Not so fast. This libertarian was also a fire-eating French chauvinist, who virtually foamed at the mouth when he thought of Britain's power, who would have gladly put the civilizing Gallic yoke around every English (or German, etc.) neck.

Perhaps then, at least, he would vouchsafe the blessings of Freedom to everyone with guaranteed French blood and certified male gonads? Well, we will be disabused of this notion in the next section, but besides, there was a long list, literally pages long in his Notebooks, detailing the countless types of political enemies and evil persons for whom, comes the Proudhonian revolution, he decreed death, jail, or forced-labor camps. By his own count, this added up to "millions." This didn't leave very many Free people—maybe one.

But when Proudhon wrote his declamations about Liberty, he meant every word quite sincerely. All you have to do to agree is use the same vocabulary. He meant the Liberty whose visage we have seen: the untrammeled liberty of the Patriarch, the Strong Man, to rule his autonomous horde as a despot unrestrained by evil Authority.

7. The "Libertarian" Negation

In a remarkable passage of self-revelation, Proudhon himself erected a bridge between his frank program for the total subjection of women and his submerged program for the total subjection of society to the libertarian Strong Man.

This occurred in the midst of his disquisition on "pornocracy," beginning with the aphoristic statement, "The French people are a feminine people"—*un peuple femme* (a "woman-people"). A long passage then "proved" the proposition in the usual thin-spun Proudhonian manner. As it went along, it pointed in a clear direction:

> ...it is positive that the French, always prompt to do things and get stirred up, to run riot and emancipate themselves, like women, do not have a lofty sentiment of liberty, of civil and political liberty. They do not understand it and are not very much concerned about it, like women.

The French people easily "wallow in prostitution, like women." They have to be kept in line by "caresses and authority, like children and women." And so on and on. Conclusions:

> Napoleon...could say that the French people were not ripe for liberty; they were no more ripe in 1814, or 1830, or 1848; they do not appear to be any more ripe in 1860: they will never be ripe... France will never become free. She is incapable of it, her democracy forbids it.

How does "democracy" forbid it? "Democracy" makes liberty impossible, because the rule of the people means the rule of these hopeless degenerates who can do nothing without the Strong Man, like women. Proudhon's views on the subjection of women could not

remain in a watertight compartment unrelated to his views on power in society, as his acolytes have sometimes claimed. In this passage Proudhon made a notable effort to weld them together.

On record is his meditations on how to improve this degenerate breed of French people. It occurred in the manuscript of his posthumous book, and it was of a piece with many passages in his Notebooks where he fantasized on how he would transform society with an iron hand as soon as he got power. The passage began with a program of extermination, not unlike his Notebook plan for the total extermination of the Jews.

> It is necessary to exterminate all the bad-natured ones, and to renovate the [female] sex, by eliminating vicious individuals, just as the English remake a race of oxen, sheep or pigs, by nutrition. ...
> It is necessary to study races and find those that produce better wives, the most useful housekeepers: the Flemish, Swiss, English, Russian woman, etc.—It is from this standpoint above all that crossbreeding has to be studied.
> Discard mercilessly the creatures that are insolent, given to vice, lazy, made for luxury, dressing-up and love.

Here the peasant patriarch was worrying about improving the breed of his barnyard fowl. Its overtones are familiar to us from some of the manifestations of Nazism. The Nazis thought along these lines with respect to Jews, "degenerates," etc., but the Nazi prescription of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* for women was not enough for the Father of Anarchism.

It may perhaps be thought that Proudhon's red-eyed hostility at least distinguished between upper-class women idlers and workingwomen. For he was some kind of radical or leftist, wasn't he?

He often did make such a distinction: workingwomen were necessarily *worse* than their upper-class sisters.

To begin with, for Proudhon workingwomen had no more right to equal pay than to any other principle of equality. Reason: they were inherently incapable of equal work. Besides, women who worked should also have to "feel the superiority of the man" rather than independence; she must have "the feeling of receiving protection."

> For the rest, nature [and] universal practice have thus willed it. Women's wages are generally much below those of men... It would be impossible to go back on this practice.

A Notebook entry as early as November 1846 stated:

> *Woman*.—It is a law of nature that the labor of *women* is less productive than men's, and consequently must be paid less (about half or one-third): because women give nothing and always receive, consume less in every way, and save better.

This was the "scientific" side of the matter, that is, the decrees of "nature." What stirred Proudhon to raging vituperation was the "moral" side. Immediately after the extract cited above, he added: "The woman worker, like the woman author, the woman of the theater, and the public woman [prostitute], is a whore."

Why? Above all, because a woman in the working world was forced into associations that were inherently unclean, disgusting, immoral, vile and degraded—namely, the whole world outside the kitchen and the home. The most disgusting and shameless feature of all this is that the workingwoman is forced to associate with *men*.

There were some specially horrible occupations for women: midwifery, for example! A hospital that trained midwives was "a

veritable school of prostitution and pimpery." He asked, "Really now, how can you expect a young woman to entertain certain subjects in her brain without her imagination taking fire and her poor head getting stirred up?" Could any "man of taste" ever marry such a one? Physicians should carry on "this scabrous science," it should not be taught to young peasant girls.

Midwifery was an especially shameful occupation because it involved the indecent subject of reproduction. His thoughts went back to his farm days, back to farm girls whose fathers owned stud bulls. In their father's absence, they did the job

> without the least embarrassment. *Honni soit qui mal y pense.* What these country virgins did with their hands is indescribable. Curious thing: they did not seem to get the least bit aroused by it; on the contrary. As for me, a young fellow, I can tell you I never felt a thing for these hussies.

He excused himself for bringing up such indecencies with the observation that he merely wanted to illustrate cases where "the woman goes outside the bounds assigned her by nature" and thereby became vile and depraved. In another fast sentence he wrapped this case up with the market woman worker, the courtesan, and the learned woman. The female market workers "are more terrible than their husbands"; and we already know what he thought of learned women.

He shuddered just as much at *any* work done by women outside the home. Since the "real" woman was weak by nature, she was too weak to work at a real job. Proudhon stresses that, in the barbarous spheres and societies where women work, and work hard, they become ugly and unsexed. By "nature" women cannot run well; they even *walk* badly; how could they do anything useful?

Now note how far Proudhon had moved from the simple peasant mentality! It was in peasant societies that women typically worked as

hard as men or harder—this was a law of "nature," to use Proudhon's favorite all-purpose proof. In fact, hadn't he admired his own mother, who had worked like a horse?

But our ex-peasant-artisan had long been away from any contact with the earth, which keeps peasants sane. Anarchist notions did not arise from normal peasant conditions; they arose, most typically, as a distorted reflection of the *uprooting* of the peasant-artisan mind from the conditions that once gave it a solid reality, when everything residually healthy in peasant life had withered, and what was left was exposed to the blasts of an alien bourgeois society. Divorced from the real world of the soil, it combined with reminiscences of the bourgeoisie's early hostility to state power (which meant the power of the absolutist state) and yearning for cheap government. The combination fed on the cancerous growth of bureaucracy in the state which accompanied the consolidation of the bourgeoisie, nowhere more virulently than in France. Being essentially a negation and a snarl of impotence, it had some possibility of appeal to social elements that were being excreted from modern society, like the early artisanate, or that otherwise had no future before them.

Part 2
WOMEN AND CLASS: THE DEBATE IN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Introduction

This Part has the aim of reviving acquaintance with a revolutionary women's movement which was undoubtedly the most important one of the kind that has yet been seen. Yet it has been so thoroughly dropped down the Memory Hole that even mention of its existence is hard to find.

Nowadays, references to Marx and Marxism show up rather frequently in women's liberation literature as a fashionable ingredient. This literature, however, seldom makes contact with Marx and Engels' real views on the issues involved, and takes even less notice of the fact that they helped to put these views into practice. By the 1890s, Engels together with a close disciple August Bebel helped to inspire and encourage a socialist women's movement that was militantly Marxist in leadership and policy.

The name associated with this women's movement is above all that of Clara Zetkin, its best political leader, organizer, theoretician, and publicist. After a quarter century or so of effective leadership in the women's struggle of the international socialist movement in its heyday, this same great woman also became one of the leading figures in the leftwing opposition to the First World War and eventually in the women's movement of the early Communist International. It would seem she did something.

But try and find some notice of the great movement she led — either in contemporary feminist historical literature or in alleged histories of socialism! It is not impossible but very difficult.

1. The Socialist Women's Movement in Germany

The scene is Germany, and the time is the period of about three decades before the First World War.

There is no other country or period in which the issues of socialist feminism were so clearly fought out and worked out. This Introduction cannot hope to present a historical sketch of this movement or an adequate summary of all the issues involved. Fortunately, there is a

work which partially provides this, W. Thönessen's *The Emancipation of Women*, and any reader who is at all seriously interested in revolutionary feminism must read it. Here we concentrate, as in Part I, on the theme of this book:

the class line that runs through feminism from the start, and in particular the relations between socialist feminism and bourgeois feminism. The German movement is especially instructive on the latter aspect.

The Marxist women of the German movement had to carry on a war on two fronts — just as all socialist leftists have always had to combat not only the direct enemy capitalism but also those reformers who offer substitutes for the socialist alternative. In the women's field, the direct enemy was, of course, the anti-feminism and sex oppression of the established powers and institutions; but alongside this conflict was the associated need to counteract the influence of bourgeois feminism.

For some preliminary light on this issue, let us start with what appears to be a problem in translation but which actually involves an important Marxist concept. The revolutionary socialist women of the German movement took over a favorite label for the bourgeois feminist types: *Frauenrechtlerinne*. A more or less literal translation is "women's-rightsers." Dreadfully awkward, obviously, though no more so than in German. The common translation "suffragettes" is misleading and often downright wrong; "bourgeois feminists" is usually better but misses the point. The significance of "women's-rightsers," as the Marxist women used it, is that such feminists make women's juridical rights (under the existing social order) the be-all-and end-all of their movement and program, *by detaching the question of women 's rights from the basic social issues, by making it a separate question.*

This is the characteristic which is the target of much of Zetkin's argumentation in the following sections. But it was made most explicit by Eleanor Marx, in the course of the first article she wrote for the Vienna socialist women (quoted in §5 below). She hits the nail on the head. It is so basic that we present the central passage here, even

though it will be met later in its context. The Socialist International had recently voted complete equality for women as its programmatic aim, and Eleanor Marx explains why this program has nothing to do with the "women's-rightsers":

> Just as on the war question the Congress stressed the difference between the ordinary bourgeois peace league, which cries "Peace, Peace" where there is no peace, and the economic peace party, the socialist party, which wants to remove the causes of war, — so too with regard to the "woman question" the Congress equally clearly stressed the difference between the party of the "women's-rightsers" on the one side, who recognized no class struggle but only a struggle of sexes, who belong to the possessing class, and who want rights that would be an injustice against their working-class sisters, and, on the other side, the real women's party, the socialist party, which has a basic understanding of the economic causes of the present adverse position of workingwomen and which calls on the workingwomen to wage a common fight hand-in-hand with the men of their class against the common enemy, viz. the men and women of the capitalist class.

The analogy which E. Marx makes here, to bourgeois pacifism, is so close that still another point emerges. For there were not only bourgeois pacifists but also socialist pacifists, who likewise wanted to detach the question of war and peace from that of the over-all social struggle. This is the strong tendency of all socialist reformism, part of its"common ground with bourgeois reform. Much will be understood about the women's movement if this basic pattern is applied to it. Just as the issue of pacifism (pacifism understood in the above scientific sense) divided the socialist movement between right and left, so also the question of an attitude toward bourgeois feminism divided socialist women (and men) of the right and left wings.

This helps to explain why the Marxist women's movement that Zetkin led was also ranged, by and large, on the revolutionary left wing of the German Social-Democracy, while the reformists (Revisionists) tended to come out for accommodation with the bourgeois women's-rightsers. The first half of this statement is well known historically; for example, when the Social Democracy collapsed at the onset of war in August 1914, the cadres and main leadership of the socialist women played an important anti-war role. Long before this, Zetkin had aligned herself strongly in the party debate on the side of the enemies of Revisionism.

The second half of the proposition is not as well known. This is what lends special interest to our §3 below, where we see a peculiar polemic launched by the party organ editors against Zetkin, precisely on the issue of attitude toward the women's-rightsers, shortly before Revisionism appeared as a public tendency.

Note that, in this exchange with Zetkin, the party editors — without as yet quite knowing how to define their uneasiness — are bridling above all at Zetkin's air of hostility toward bourgeois feminism. And down to the present day, this is the often amorphous form in which basic issues have been fought out in various forms for most of a century, Marxists tried to pin the discussion down to politics and program, while the liberalistic right wing preferred to keep the controversy in the airy realm of attitudes: "don't be so harsh on them; after all we agree on many things. It's the powers that be we should fight, not our friends the woman's-rightsers. . .Don't be dogmatic, doctrinaire, rigid!, unrealistic, and hard. . . "

These half-truths were not peculiar to the women's question. On the contrary, the whole pre-1914 debate between Marxism and Revisionism was not usually favored with clearcut argumentation about principles (such as tends to be the. summary content of later histories) but rather with dreary polemics about attitudes, the function of which was to inculcate an attitude of soft accommodation to liberal capitalism. The Social-Democracy did not march into the arms of reformism; typically

it backed into it. It stumbled backward as bogeys about doctrinairism and electoral realism were brandished before it.

So also with the question of the socialist women's hostility to the women's-rightsers of bourgeois feminism. The reformists did not have great objections to raising their hands in favor of Marxistical formulations in resolutions about the women's movement and socialism; it was another thing to countenance hostility to bourgeois liberalism in practice.

This is how the right-left split on feminism stood by the l890s, when Zetkin's work began to take effect. But it had looked very different at the inception of the German movement. Let us go back a way.

2. Lassalle

The German socialist movement was organizationally founded in the 1860s not by Marxists' but by Ferdinand Lassalle and his immediate followers.

The Lassallean tendency was essentially a type of reformist state-socialism, which persisted in the movement long after its surface Marxification. Perhaps the clearest expression of Lassalleanism was in Lassalle's secret negotiations with Bismarck, in which the would-be "workers' dictator" (as Marx called him) offered to help the Iron Chancellor establish a "social monarchy" (a presumably anti-capitalist despotism) using Lassalle's working-class troops as its mass base. Bismarck turned down the offer, and naturally headed toward a united front with the bourgeoisie instead; but this perspective remained the Lassallean trademark. The aim was the organization of workingclass cadres as an instrument of policy by leaders who had mainly contempt for the class on whose backs they sought to ride to power. Thus the Lassalleans developed as a "working-class" sect, that is, one oriented toward a proletarian membership composition as its power base.

This is what helps to explain the position on the "women question" first adopted by the Lassallean movement. It recruited its cadres from the first organizable workers, already conscious of their immediate

demands, and it directed these demands into an interest-group program. As an interest group, these organized workers, still a small minority of the class, were immediately threatened by the competition of cheaper female labor, used by capital to keep wages and conditions down. This posed the usual choice for self-styled socialists. Should they, in the teeth of pressing but short-range interests of (a part of) the working class, insist on the overriding need to "always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole," as the working class passed through different stages of consciousness and struggle? Or should they go along with the immediate pressure of narrow group-interest demands, paying little attention to the needs of the class as a whole — which means, the long-range needs of the entire class, including its as yet unorganized sectors?

In 1867, four years after its founding, the Lassallean group came out directly against the industrial employment of women and in favor of measures to keep women out of the factories. The motivation was to reduce (men's) unemployment and keep wages up. While economically motivated, the demands tended to take op a high moral tone, for obvious reasons: arguments about preserving the family and defending female morals could appeal to circles beyond the interest group.

Was this movement to limit female labor due to something called "proletarian anti-feminism," or was "proletarian anti-feminism" the ideological form taken by the exigencies of the economic struggle? In fact there was the common intertwining of economic impulsions and ideological constructions, reinforcing each other in the short run. But the basic drive was evident as further developments changed the interest group's immediate perception of its own interests. For the number of women workers increased despite all moralizing, and this created a new reality. The aim of keeping women out of the factories was not only reactionary but utopian, that is, unrooted in the real tendencies of social development.

Capitalism saw to it that female industrial labor went up by leaps and bounds, despite the outcries. In the 1870s the number of female

workers passed the million mark, and a decade later was reaching six million. The immediate pressures changed on even the most shortsighted. There was a *fait accompli* to be reckoned with: if all workers' immediate interests were to be protected, these new workers had to be organized in trade unions too.

If the women workers were to be included in the trade-union movement, then appeals had to be made to their interests. An interesting reversal now took place. The "pro-feminist" employers, who had produced stalwart proponents of women's right to work for a pittance (in the name of justice and equality), became alarmed at the Dangers to Morality that would result from women joining men's organizations (unions). The state responded to this new threat against public morals with laws that restricted women' s right of association and assembly.

From the beginning in the 1860s, a fundamentally different approach came only from the first Marxist spokesmen, especially August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht. In their view the interests of women as a sex and workers as a class were integrated. Their starting-point was the direct opposite of the shortsighted "workerist" hostility to female industrial labor.

Their first proposition was that women could be genuinely independent of men and equal in rights only insofar as they achieved economic independence.

Economic independence meant not only the abstract right to work but the real possibility of doing so outside the home. This was the way to go, because it provided the only possible foundation for the whole long road to sexual equality. To the Lassalleans, the integration of women into industry was a scandalous abuse; to the Marxists, it was the first condition for progress .

Here was the first right-left split on the women's question in the socialist movement.

In the Marxist perspective, the entrance of women into industry was not itself the solution; it merely posed the right questions for solution.

It provided the necessary starting-point for struggle. The struggle had to include a fight against the abuses of female labor along with other working-class struggles. Once one saw the female half of the human race as an integral part of the great social struggle, everything else followed. Just as the Lassalleans had extended their rejection of women's employment to rejection of women's suffrage and political rights, so also the Marxists' approach pointed in the diametrically opposite direction, to the integration of women into every aspect of the social struggle, including the political.

3. Bebel and Zetkin

Integration is the key word. As we have seen, this is what basically distinguishes Marxist feminism from *Frauenrechtlerei*, which divorces the demand for women's rights from the general struggle for social emancipation.

But integration does not mean that the women' s question is simply swallowed up under the rubric socialism, any more than trade-unionism is.

In general, Marxism seeks to integrate reform and revolution, to establish a working relation between immediate demands and "ultimate" program; it does not substitute one for the other.* There is a contemporary myth, widespread in feminist literature, that Marxism merely announces that "socialism will solve the women' s question" and that's that. It is a very convenient myth, since it is so easy to ridicule that it becomes unnecessary to get acquainted with what the founders of Marxism really advocated and how the Marxist women really organized.

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* To be sure, there have been "Marxist" sects that repudiated reforms on "principle," even though Marx and Engels denounced this sort of sectarianism unmercifully. But such sects are irrelevant to everything, including our subject. The same goes for alleged "Marxists" nowadays who apply this sectism to the women's question. One should read Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform and Revolution.*

Women and Class: The Debate in the Social-Democracy

The socialist women's movement led by Zetkin gave strong support to all the democratic demands for women's equal rights. But this movement differed from the bourgeois feminists not only in the programmatic context in which it put these "democratic demands," but also — as a consequence — in its choice of immediate demands to emphasize. It viewed itself, in Marxist terms, as a class movement, and this translates into workingwomen's movement. The immediate demands it emphasized corresponded to the needs of women workers in the first place. The socialist women fought for immediate economic gains for women workers, including legislative gains to protect women workers' interests — just as every militant organization of male workers did the same. But this simple fact produced a controversy which is as lively today as when it started, one that provides a touchstone of the class difference between socialist feminism and bourgeois feminism.

In the case of male workers, the question of "special" protective legislation has been so long worked out that it no longer seems to be controversial. It is almost forgotten that, once upon a time, the legislative imposition of (say) a minimum wage was attacked within the labor movement on the ground that it would redound against labor's interests. A common argument was that a minimum wage would tend to become the maximum wage, thereby hurting better-paid workers even if it improved the position of the lowest strata. There was a kernel of truth to this fear: this special protective legislation could be used by employers for their own purposes. In fact, there is no conceivable labor legislation which cannot be turned against workers as long as the labor movement is not organized to effectively police the way the law is used. In more modern times, experience has shown countless cases in which basic labor gains, painfully acquired by decades of struggle, have been latterly used by employers (and their allies in the tradeunion and government bureaucracies) to discriminate against minority workers for the benefit of an entrenched job trust.

None of these real problems, past and present, would nowadays be used to argue openly that "special" protective legislation for men workers has to be thrown out holus-bolus, turning the clock back a hundred years. The problems are met in other ways, especially when immediate legislative devices get in the way of larger concerns, and when the particular devices have to be subjected to review and modification; but this is scarcely new or startling.

The picture is altogether different when it comes to special protective legislation for women workers. What is taken for granted on men workers' behalf is not accepted as a principle for women workers as well. Why?

The difficulty comes not merely from employers (who are understandably reluctant to improve working conditions for any "special" group) but also from the bourgeois feminists. Historically speaking, the reason for this state of affairs is quite plain. The hard core of the bourgeois feminist movements has typically been the "career women" elements, business and professional strivers above all. Protective devices for the benefit of women workers in factories help to make life more bearable for them, but they are usually irrelevant to upper-echelon women trying to get ahead in professions. Worse, they may introduce restrictions which get in the way. At the very least, the "pure" feminists demonstrate their social purity by rejecting the idea that the women's question has something to do with class issues. Protective legislation for women workers is, abstractly considered, a form of "sex discrimination" — just as legislation for men workers is a form of "class legislation" and was long denounced as such. The bourgeois feminists are better served by making feminine equality as abstract an issue as possible, above all abstracted from the social struggle of classes.

To the socialist women, however, "special" legislation for women workers is far more important than (say) opening up medical colleges to female students. This implies no hostility to the latter goal; the socialist women enthusiastically supported such efforts. But a law requiring (say)

the installation of toilet facilities for women workers affected a mass of women, not merely a few aspiring professionals, even though it was unlikely to become the subject of a romantic movie. The socialist perspective on social struggle extended from the "lowest" concerns to the highest, and integrated them. The few women who, rightly and bravely, aspired to crash into the medical profession were to be applauded for their striving; but at the same time one should not conceal that most of such types tended to look on the "lower" interests of workingwomen as an embarrassment to their own high aspirations. Objectively, like most aspirants from the upper strata of society, they were quite willing to get ahead over the backs of the mass of their sisters; the best of them explained that as soon as they made it they would do some good for the less fortunate.

While the socialist women's fight for protective legislation for workingwomen could not be accommodated among the abstractions of the women's-rightsers, it integrated perfectly with the general social struggle of the working-class movement. Gains made by women workers often tended to become the opening wedge for the extension of similar gains to all workers. Thus the men in the factories were also beneficiaries.

The result was, and still is, that there are few questions in which the class struggle more nakedly inserts itself into abstract arguments about justice and equality. But the naked framework of class interests usually has to be clothed in more acceptable clothing — by both sides. One does not often find Ms. X arguing that the law which gives women farm workers a toilet in the fields has to be smashed so as not to get in the way of the strivings of women professors for full tenure. And on the other side, the argumentation for special legislation for women workers was often peppered with highminded appeals to morality in various senses.

Appeals to morality figured prominently in the 1860s in Germany. When the Lassalleans opposed the entrance of women into industry, it was convenient to prop up the economic demand with

backward-looking rationalizations about "women's place" in the home. The reactionary demand imposed a reactionary ideology as its justification. The workingwomen's movement often argued for special protective laws on the ground that they promoted social goods like the health and wellbeing of working mothers as well as moral protection. Still, it was the relation of women to the working class that was the crux.

4. The Gotha Congress

The Marxist wing's position on the women's question won only a partial victory in 1875, when the Lassallean and semi-Marxist groups united at the Gotha congress to form the German Social-Democracy. It was not until 1891 (at the Erfurt congress) that there was a complete programmatic endorsement of militant support to a consistent position for women's equality. This party, the nearest thing to a Marxist party that had been formed, was the first one to adopt a thoroughly pro-feminist position.

There was another unusual feature: the undisputed party leader, Bebel, was also its foremost theoretician of socialist feminism (until the socialist women's movement developed its own leadership). The publication of Bebel's great book *Woman and Socialism* in 1878 was, as Zetkin said (see page), an "event" in itself, a revolutionary coup, with a tremendous impact that reverberated through scores of editions and translations for a half century and more. Six years later, Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* came along to give a further impulsion. Both books put the immediate issues of women's rights in their context as part of a broad historical canvas of societal development, part of a social struggle in which were integrated the militant aspirations of an oppressed sex and an oppressed class.

The socialist women began to move toward self-organization at the start of the 1890s. In 1890 a prominent socialist activist, Emma Ihrer, headed the effort to set up a propaganda center in the form of a socialist feminist organ, *Die Arbiterin* (The Workingwoman). When it

foundered financially, Zetkin and Ihrer founded *Gleichheit* (Equality) in 1891, and this remained the center of the movement right up to the end of the era marked by World War I and its aftermath.

The circulation of *Gleichheit* increased from a few thousand at the beginning to 23,000 by 1905; then it doubled in a year, and kept mounting steadily until it stood at 112,000 in 1913. This growth coincided with the recruitment of women to the trade unions and to the party. There were about 4,000 women in the party in 1905, but this number grew to over 141,000 by 1913. The contemporary reader must remember that this took place in a society where the very act of a woman's attending a meeting was not yet exactly "respectable," even after it became legal.

The German Marxist women also became the main force in the international socialist women's movement, organizationally and administratively as well as politically.

This growth provided the context for the antagonistic tension, which we have mentioned, between the socialist women's movement and the reformist tendencies within the mass party. This antagonism was closely related to another one: that between the socialist women and the bourgeois feminist movement. It was the reformist ("Revisionist" from 1896 on) wing of the party that pressed for a soft attitude of collaboration with the women's-rightsers. The tendency of the reformists to avoid a clearcut political confrontation manifested itself here too. For one thing, it was easier and quieter to insert the right-wing line not as a viewpoint to be considered but as the "practical thing to do. When in 1896 Eduard Bernstein gave reformism its theoretical form as "Revisionism," the party' s org-bureau man, Ignaz Auer, told him he was making a tactical mistake: this sort of thing, he wrote Bernstein, is not something to talk about but simply to do.

Similarly, the right wing's uneasiness about the course of the socialist women's movement was expressed by indirection; typically it did not attack but sniped away. One push against *Gleichheit* took the form of complaints that it was "difficult to understand" — that is, that it was

not written down to the level of the least-common-denominator woman. Zetkin's conception of the magazine was that its function was to educate and develop the leading cadres of women comrades, and that the important job of reaching down agitationally could be accomplished by other channels, including pamphlets and leaflets and pro-feminist material in the many Social-Democratic newspapers that reached a mass audience. By attacking *Gleichheit* for the higher level of its approach, the right wing was really saying that there was no need for any organ to deal with the women's question on this level; it implied the intellectual subordination of the women's movement.

But the party congresses voted down these sallies when they were clearly presented. In 1898 the party congress rejected the proposal that the ownership of *Gleichheit* should be transferred to the party itself and the editorship moved from Stuttgart to Berlin, where it could be controlled more directly. It was only after the world war had formally split the party into left and right that the new reformist party, the "Majority Social-Democrats," was able to gut the contents of *Gleichheit* and then kill it.

Thönessen mentions another ploy of the reformists, more difficult to pin down. This was the use of "malicious witticisms" in party discussions to trigger well-known stereotyped attitudes about women who meddle in "men's affairs." These attitudes were openly expressed everywhere else; in the party they could only be suggested by "jokes." It is Ignaz Auer who provides the examples for Thönessen. This device was still new because it was only just becoming necessary for sex-chauvinism to hide its face; and it was because the Marxist women were playing a new social role on a mass scale that innuendo had to be substituted for traditional derision.

There is another consideration which throws light on the difference between the reformist and Marxist wings. The women's question gave rise to articles not only in the women's press but also in the main party organs.

Thönessen compares the articles which appeared in the theoretical organ of the more-or-less Marxist wing Die Neue Zeit and in the right-wing magazine Sozialistische Monatshefte over a period of forty years, mainly pre-war.

For one thing, the Marxist organ published about four times as many contributions on the subject as the other. The reformist magazine tended "to provide relatively little concrete material on the real situation of .women workers," but was more interested in "questions of the organization of the women's movement" and "philosophical and psychological reflections on the nature of woman and her emancipation," along with vague speculations about the "problems of women's life."

Alongside all this was also the fact that in the general party struggle the outstanding women leaders were important advocates of the left. This was true of Clara Zetkin above all. In addition, the outstanding theoretician of the left was a woman, Rosa Luxemburg. Though Luxemburg's activity was not in the women's movement, one can be sure that the witty Ignaz Auer did not think it altogether funny that these rambunctious women were causing his comrades so much trouble.

In the following sections, the emphasis is on the attitude of the Marxist women toward the bourgeois-feminists, the women's-rightsers. To be sure, this did not occupy the bulk of the socialists' attention, but for us today it is of special interest. Above all, this is the side of Marxist feminism that has been largely ignored.

All of the material in Part II appears here in English for the first time, with the exception of the excerpt from Bebel in §1 (which, however, is given here in a new translation).

Chapter 1
AUGUST BEBEL: THE ENEMY SISTERS

Bebel's epochmaking book Woman and Socialism *did not include a separate discussion of the feminist movement, which was not far advanced when the book was first published in 1878; but its introduction did make some germinal remarks on the differences between socialist feminism and the bourgeois women's movement. Following is a short passage from this introduction. It emphasizes above all the principled basis for the counterposition.*

The phrase "enemy sisters" (in the fifth paragraph below) became well known to the socialist women. How it jarred on some sensibilities may be seen, in a way, in the major English translation of Bebel's book, by the American socialist Meta L. Stern. This English version sought to dilute the impact of the phrase by rewriting the sentence a bit, so as to change "enemy sisters" to "sister-women": "Still these sister-women, though antagonistic to each other on class lines. . . "

Our Introduction to Part II has already stressed Bebel's important aid to the women's movement. His encouragement came from four directions: from his writings, from his help as head of the party, from speeches in the Reichstag, and also from personal support. One of the leading people in the Austrian socialist women's movement, Adelheid Popp, relates in her autobiography how, one day, both Bebel and old Engels came to visit her mother to try to make the old lady understand what her daughter was doing, in order to help a promising woman militant.

If we assume the case, which is certainly not impossible, that the representatives of the bourgeois women's movement achieve all their demands for equal rights with men, this would not entail the abolition of the slavery that present-day marriage means for countless women, nor of prostitution, nor of the material dependence of the great majority of married women on their husbands. Also, for the great majority of women it makes no difference if some thousands of tens of thousands of their sisters who belong to the more favorably situated ranks of society succeed in attaining a superior profession or medical practice or some scientific or official career, for nothing is thereby changed in the over-all situation of the sex as a whole.

The female sex, in the mass, suffers from a double burden. Firstly, women suffer by virtue of their social and societal dependence on men;

and this would certainly be ameliorated, but not eliminated, by formal equality of rights before the law. Secondly, they suffer by virtue of the economic dependence which is the lot of women in general and proletarian women in particular, as is true also of proletarian men.

Hence it follows that all women — regardless of their position in society, as a sex that has been oppressed, ruled, and wronged by men throughout the course of development of our culture — have the common interest of doing away with this situation and of fighting to change it, insofar as it can be changed through changes in laws and institutions within the framework of the existing political and social order. But the huge majority of women are also most keenly interested in something more: in transforming the existing political and social order *from the ground up*, in order to abolish both wage-slavery, which afflicts the female proletariat most heavily, and sex-slavery, which is very intimately bound up with our property and employment conditions.

The preponderant portion of the women in the bourgeois women's movement do not comprehend the necessity of such a radical transformation.

Under the influence of their privileged position in society, they see in the more far-reaching movement of the proletarian women dangerous and often detestable aspirations that they have to fight. The class antagonism that yawns like a gulf between the capitalist class and the working class in the general social movement, and that keeps on getting sharper and harsher with the sharpening of our societal relations, also makes its appearance inside the women's movement and finds its fitting expression in the goals they adopt and the way they behave.

Still and all, to a much greater extent than the men divided by the class struggle, the enemy sisters have a number of points of contact enabling them to carry on a struggle in which they can strike together even though marching separately. This is the case above all where the question concerns equality of rights of women with men on the basis of

the present-day political and social order; hence the employment of women in all areas of human activity for which they have the strength and capacity, and also full civil and political equality of rights with men. These domains are very important and, as we will show later, very extensive.

In connection with these aims, proletarian women have in addition a special interest, together with proletarian men, in fighting for all those measures and institutions that protect the woman worker from physical and moral deterioration and insure her physical strength and capacity to bear children and initiate their upbringing. Beyond this, as already indicated, proletarian women have to take up the struggle, along with the men who are their comrades in class and comrades in social fortune, for a transformation of society from the ground up, to bring about a state of affairs making possible the real economic and intellectual independence of both sexes, through social institutions that allow everyone to share fully in all the achievements of human civilization.

It is therefore a question not only of achieving equality of rights between men and women on the basis of the existing political and social order, which is the goal set by the bourgeois women's-rightsers, but of going beyond that goal and abolishing all the barriers that make one human being dependent on another and therefore one sex on another. This resolution of the woman question therefore coincides completely with the resolution of the social question. Whoever seeks a resolution of the woman question in its full dimensions must therefore perforce join hands with those who have inscribed on their banner the resolution of the social question that faces civilization for all humanity — that is, the socialists, the Social-Democracy.

Of all the existing parties, the Social-Democratic Party is the only one that has included in its program the complete equality of women and their liberation from every form of dependence and oppression, not on grounds of propaganda but out of necessity, on grounds of principle. *There can be no liberation of humanity without the social independence and equal rights for both sexes.*

Chapter 2
CLARA ZETKIN: PROLETARIAN WOMEN AND SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

The following short pamphlet contains Clara Zetkin's most general discussion of the class lines running through women as a social group and through their movements as ideological expressions. We therefore present it here first, although chronologically it was preceded by the discussion in §3. There is a connection between the two which must be mentioned.

In §3, Zetkin is taking aim at the weak position taken up by the editors of the party organ; it is already critical in tone, on the subject of the editors' soft attitude toward the bourgeois feminists. Less than two years Later, Zetkin came to the party congress prepared to plumb this question in the movement. Her main statement was not presented in the resolution on the subject (which naturally had to be voted on) but in a speech to the congress which she made on October 16, 1896. A motion was then made and carried .,-hat her speech be printed by the party as a pamphlet, and this was done. Thus her views appeared under the party imprint, but not as an official party statement.

The pamphlet was declaratively entitled "Only with the proletarian . woman will socialism be victorious!" — with the subtitle "Speech to the Gotha Congress [etc.]." Here we have conferred a somewhat shorter title on it. it is translated from Zetkin's Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften (Berlin, Dietz, 1957), Volume 1.

Zetkin's main concern in this pamphlet is social analysis. We can guess that most of it was presented with the pamphlet publication already in mind, not simply as a speech to the delegates. However, its later part also presents some proposals on forms of propaganda which should be considered as more directly tied to the Congress's considerations of the moment.

Through the researches by Bachofen, Morgan and others, it seems established that the social subjection of women coincided with the rise of private property. The antagonism inside the family between the man as owner and the woman as non-owner was the foundation for the economic dependence of the female sex and its lack of social rights.

"In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat."* Nevertheless there could be no talk of a women' s question in the modern sense of the term. It was the capitalist mode of production that first brought about the social transformation which raised the modern women's question; it smashed to smithereens the old family economy that in precapitalist times had provided the great mass of women with the sustenance and meaningful content of life. Indeed, we must not apply to the old-time household work of women the conception that is linked with women's work in our own day, *viz.* the conception that it is something petty and of no account. As long as the old-time family still existed, within its framework women found a meaningful content of life in productive work, and hence their lack of social rights did not impinge on their consciousness, even though the development of their individualities was narrowly limited.

The age of the Renaissance is the Sturm und Drang period in the growth of modern individualism, which may work itself out fully in different ways. During the Renaissance we encounter individuals — towering like giants for good or evil — who trampled underfoot the precepts of religion and morality and looked on heaven and hell with equal scorn; we find women as the focus of social, artistic and political life. And nevertheless not a trace of a women's movement. This is especially distinctive because at that time the old family economy began to crumble under the impact of the division of labor. Thousands and thousands of women no longer found the sustenance and content of life in the family. But this women's question, far from coming to the fore, was resolved to the extent possible by cloisters, convents, and religious orders.

Then machines and the modern mode of production little by little knocked the bottom out of household production for use. And not for thousands but for millions of women arose the question: Where are we

*Engels , Origin of the Family f&c. , near end of Chapter 2.

to get the sustenance of life, where are we to find a serious content of life, an occupation allowing for the emotional side also? Millions were now told to find the sustenance and content of life outside in society. There they became aware that their lack of social rights militated against the defense of their interests; and from that moment the modern women' s question was in existence.

As to how the modern mode of production operated to sharpen the women's question further, here are some figures. In 1882, in Germany, out of 23 million women and girls, 51/2 million were gainfully employed; that is, almost a quarter of the female population could no longer find their sustenance in the family. According to the 1895 census, taking agriculture in the broadest sense, the number of women gainfully employed in it increased by more than 8 percent since 1882; taking agriculture in the narrower sense, by 6 percent; while at the same time the number of men gainfully employed decreased 3 and 11 percent respectively. In industry and mining, gainfully employed women increased by 35 percent, men by only 28 percent; in commerce, indeed, the number of women increased by over 94 percent, men by only 38 percent. These dry statistics speak much more eloquently on the urgency of a solution to the women' s question than the most effusive orations.

But the women's question exists only inside those classes of society that are themselves products of the capitalist mode of production. Therefore we find no women' s question arising in the ranks of the peasantry, with its natural economy, even though that economy is very much shrunken and tattered. But we do indeed find a women's question inside those classes of society that are the most characteristic offspring of the modern mode of production. There is a women' s question for the women of the proletariat, of the middle bourgeoisie, of the intelligentsia, and of the Upper Ten Thousand; it takes various forms depending on the class situation of these strata.

What form is taken by the women' s question among the women of the Upper Ten Thousand? A woman of this social stratum, by virtue of

her possession of property, can freely develop her individuality; she can live in accordance with her inclinations. As a wife, however, she is still always dependent on the man. The sexual tutelage of a former age has survived, as a leftover, in family law, where the tenet "*And he shall be thy lord*" is still valid.

And how is the family of the Upper Ten Thousand constituted so that the woman is legally subjected to the man? This family lacks moral premises in its very foundation. Not the individuality but money is decisive in its dealings. Its law reads: What capital brings together, let no sentimental morality put asunder. ("*Bravo*!") Thus, in the morality of marriage, two prostitutions count as one virtue. This is matched also by the style of family life. Where the wife is no longer forced to perform duties, she shunts her duties as spouse, mother and housekeeper onto paid servants. When the women of these circles entertain a desire to give their lives serious content, they must first raise the demand for free and independent control over their property. This demand therefore is in the center of the demands raised by the women' s movement of the Upper Ten Thousand. These women fight for the achievement of this demand against the men of their own class — exactly the same demand that the bourgeoisie fought for against, all privileged classes : a struggle for the elimination of all social distinctions based on the possession of wealth.

The fact that the achievement of this demand does not involve individual personal rights is proved by its espousal in the Reichstag by Herr von Stumm. When has Herr von Stumm ever come out in favor of individual rights? This man stands for more than a person in Germany; he is flesh and blood turned capital personified ("Very true!") , and if he has come forward as a friend of women's rights in a piece of cheap mummery, it is because he was compelled to dance before the Ark of capital . This same Herr von Stumm is indeed always ready to put the squeeze on his workers as soon as they stop dancing to his tune, and he would only grin complacently if the state, as employer, put a bit of a squeeze on the professors and academics who dare to get involved

in social politics. Herr von Stumm strives for no more than a kind of entail on personal property with the right of females to inherit; for there are fathers who made fortunes but carelessly had only daughters for heirs. Capital makes even lowly women sacred, and enables them to exercise control over their wealth. This is the last stage in the emancipation of private property.

And how does the women's question manifest itself in the ranks of the small and middle bourgeoisie, and in the bourgeois intelligentsia?

Here it is not a matter of property dissolving the family, but mainly the phenomena accompanying capitalist production. As the latter completes its triumphal progress, in the mass the middle and small bourgeoisie are more and more driven to ruin. In the bourgeois intelligentsia there is a further circumstance that makes for the worsening of the conditions of life: Capital needs an intelligent and scientifically trained labor force; it therefore favored overproduction in proletarian brain-workers, and contributed to the fact that the previously respectable and remunerative social position of members of the liberal professions is increasingly disappearing. To the same degree, however, the number of marriages is continually decreasing; for while the material bases are worsening on the one 'hand, on the other the individual's demands on life are increasing, and therefore the men of these circles naturally think twice and thrice before they decide to marry. The age limits for starting one's own family are getting jacked up higher and higher, and men are pushed into marriage to a lesser degree as social arrangements make a comfortable bachelor existence possible even without a legal wife. Capitalist exploitation of proletarian labor power ensures, through starvation wages, that a large supply of prostitutes answers the demand from this same section of the male population. Thus the number of unmarried women in middle-class circles is continually increasing. The women and daughters of these circles are thrust out into society to establish a life for themselves, not only one that provides bread but also one that can satisfy the spirit.

In these circles the woman does not enjoy equality with the man as owner of private property, as obtains in the higher circles. Nor does she enjoy equality as a workingwoman, as obtains in proletarian circles. The women of these circles must, rather, ,first fight for their economic equality with the men, and they can do this only through two demands: through the demand for equality in occupational education, and through the demand for sex equality in carrying on an occupation. Economically speaking, this means nothing else than the realization of free trade and free competition between men and women. The realization of this demand awakens a conflict of interest between the women and men of the middle class and the intelligentsia. The competition of women in the liberal professions is the driving force behind the resistance of the men against the demands of the bourgeois women's-rightsers. It is pure fear of competition; all other grounds adduced against intellectual labor by women are mere pretexts — - women's smaller brain, or their alleged natural vocation as mothers. This competitive battle pushes the women of these strata to demand political rights, so as to destroy all limitations still militating against their economic activity, through political struggle.

In all this have indicated only the original, purely economic aspect. , We would do the bourgeois women's movement an injustice if we ascribed it only to purely economic motives. No, it also has a very much deeper intellectual and moral side. The bourgeois woman not only demands to earn her own bread, but she also wants to live a full life intellectually and develop her own individuality. It is precisely in these strata that we meet those tragic and psychologically interesting "Nora" figures, where the wife is tired of living like a doll in a doll house, where she wants to take part in the broader development of modern culture; and on both the economic and intellectual-moral sides the strivings of the bourgeois women's-rightsers are entirely justified.

For the proletarian woman, it is capital 's need for exploitation, its unceasing search for the cheapest labor power, that has created the

women's question. . .* This is also how the woman of the proletariat is drawn into the machinery of contemporary economic life, this is how she is driven into the workshop and to the machine. She entered economic life in order to give the husband some help in earning a living — and the capitalist mode of production transforms her into an undercutting competitor; she wanted to secure a better life for her family — and in consequence brought greater misery to the proletarian family; the proletarian woman became an independent wage-earner because she wanted to give her children a sunnier and happier life — and she was in large part torn away from her children. She became completely equal to the man as labor-power: the machine makes muscular strength unnecessary, and everywhere women' s labor could operate with the same .results for production as men's labor. And since she was a cheap labor force and above all a willing labor force that only in the rarest cases dared to kick against the pricks of capitalist exploitation, the capitalists multiplied the opportunities to utilize women's labor in industry to the highest degree.

The wife of the proletarian, in consequence, achieved her economic independence. But, in all conscience, she paid for it dearly, and thereby gained nothing at the time, practically speaking. If in the era of the family the man had the right — think back to the law in the Electorate of Bavaria — to give the wife a bit of a lashing now and then, capitalism now lashes her with scorpions. In those days the dominion of the man over the woman was mitigated by personal relationships, but between worker and employer there is only a commodity relationship. The woman of the proletariat has achieved her economic independence, but neither as a person nor as a woman or wife does she have the possibility of living a full life as an individual . For her work as wife and mother she gets only the crumbs that are dropped from the table by capitalist production.

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* These suspension points are in the text.

Consequently, the liberation struggle of the proletarian woman cannot be — as it is for the bourgeois woman — a struggle against the men of her own class . She does not need to struggle, as against the men of her own class, to tear down the barriers erected to limit her free competition. Capital's need for exploitation and the development of the modern mode of production have wholly relieved her of this struggle. On the contrary; it is a question of erecting new barriers against the exploitation of the proletarian woman; it is a question of restoring and ensuring her rights as wife and mother. The end-goal of her struggle is not free competition with men but bringing about the political rule of the proletariat. Hand in hand with the men of her own class, the proletarian woman fights against capitalist society. To be sure, she also concurs with the demands of the bourgeois women' s movement. But she regards the realization of these demands only as a means to an end, so that she can get into the battle along with the workingmen and equally armed.

Bourgeois society does not take a stance of basic opposition to the demands of the bourgeois women's movement: this is shown by the reforms in favor of women already introduced in various states both in private and public law. If the progress of these reforms is especially slow in Germany, the cause lies, for one thing, in the competitive economic struggle in the liberal professions which the men fear, and, secondly, in the very slow and weak. development of bourgeois democracy in Germany, which has not measured up to its historical tasks because it is spellbound by its class fear of the proletariat. It fears that the accomplishment of such reforms will advantage only the Social-Democracy. The less a bourgeois democracy lets itself be hypnotized by this fear, the readier it is for reforms. We see this in England. England is the sole country that still possesses a really vigorous bourgeoisie, whereas the German bourgeoisie, trembling with fear of the proletariat, renounces reforms in the political am: social fields. Moreover, Germany is still blanketed by a widespread

petty-bourgeois outlook; the philistine pigtail of prejudice hangs close on the neck of the German bourgeoisie.

Of course, the bourgeois democracy's fear is very shortsighted. If women were granted political equality, nothing would be changed in the actual relations of power. The proletarian woman would go into the camp of the proletariat, the bourgeois woman into the camp of the bourgeoisie. We must not let ourselves be deluded by socialistic outcroppings in the bourgeois women's movement, which turn up only so long as the bourgeois women feel themselves to be oppressed.

The less bourgeois democracy takes hold of its tasks , the more is it up to the Social-Democracy to come out for the political equality of women. We do not want to make ourselves out to be better than we are. It is not because of the beautiful eyes of Principle that we put forward this demand but in the class interests of the proletariat. The more women' s labor exerts its ominous influence on the living standards of men, the more burning becomes the need to draw women into the economic struggle. The more the political struggle draws every individual into real life, the more pressing becomes the need for women too to take part in the political struggle.

The Anti-Socialist Law has clarified thousands of women for the first time on the meaning of the words *class rights*, *class state* and *class rule*; it has taught thousands of women for the first time to clarify their understanding of power, which manifests itself so brutally in family life. The Anti-Socialist Law has performed a job that hundreds of women agitators would not have been able to do; and we give sincere thanks — to the father of the Anti-Socialist Law [Bismarck] as well as to all the government agencies involved in its execution from the minister down to the policemen — for their involuntary agitational activity. Arid yet they reproach us Social-Democrats for ingratitude! (*Laughter.*)

There is another event to take into account. I mean the appearance of August Bebel' s book *Woman and Socialism*. It should not be assessed by its merits or defects; it must be judged by the time at which it

appeared. And it was then more than a book, it was an event; a deed. ("*Very true*!")

For the first time, in its pages it was made clear to the comrades what connection women' s question had with the development of society. For the first time, from this book issued the watchword: We can conquer the future only if we win the women as co-fighters . In recognizing this, I am speaking not as a woman but as a party comrade.

What practical consequences do we now have to draw for our agitation among women? It cannot be the task of the party congress to put forward individual practical proposals for ongoing work, but only to lay down lines of direction for the proletarian women's movement.

And there the guiding thought must be: We have no special women's agitation to carry on but rather socialist agitation among women. It is not women's petty interests of the moment that we should put in the foreground; our task must be to enroll the modern proletarian woman in the class struggle. ("*Very true!*") We have no separate tasks for agitation among women. Insofar as there are reforms to be accomplished on behalf of women vithin present-day society, they are already demanded in the Minimum Program of our party.

Women' s activity must link up with all the questions that are of pressing importance for the general movement of the proletariat. The main task: surely, is to arouse class-consciousness among women and involve them in the class struggle. The organization. of women workers into trade union runs into exceedingly great difficulties. From 1892 to 1895 the number of women workers organized into the central unions rose to about 7000. If we add the women workers organized into the local unions, and compare the total with the fact that there are 700,000 women working in large industry alone, we get a picture of the great amount of work we still have to do. This work is complicated for us by the fact that many women are employed as home-industry workers, and are therefore hard to draw in. Then too, we have to deal with the widespread outlook among young girls that their industrial work is temporary and will cease with their marriage.

For many women a double obligation arises: they must work both in the factory and in the family. All the more necessary for women workers is the fixing of a legal working-day. While in England everybody agrees that the abolition of the homework system, the fixing of a legal working-day, and the achievement of higher wages are of the greatest importance in order to organize women workers into trade unions, in Germany in addition to the difficulties described there is also the administration of the laws limiting the right of association and assembly. The full freedom to organize which is guaranteed to women workers, with one hand, is rendered illusory by national legislation, with the other hand, through the .decisions of individual state legislatures. I won't go into the way the right of association is administered in Saxony, insofar as one can speak of a right there at all; but in the two largest states, Bavaria and Prussia, the laws on association are administered in such a way that women's participation in trade-union organizations is increasingly made impossible. In Prussia, in recent times, whatever is humanly possible in the way of interpreting away the right of association and assembly has been done especially in the governmental bailiwick of that perennial cabinet aspirant, the "liberal" Herr von Bennigsen. In Bavaria women are excluded from all public assemblies. Herr von Feilitzsch, indeed, declared quite openly in the Chamber that in the administration of the law on association not only its text is taken into consideration but also the intention of the legislators; and Herr von Feilitzsch finds himself in the fortunate position of knowing exactly the intention held by the legislators, who died long before Bavaria ever dreamed of someday being lucky enough to get Herr von Feilitzsch as its minister of Police. This doesn't surprise me, for if God grants anyone a bureau he also grants him mental faculties, and in our era of spiritualism even Herr von Feilitzsch received his bureaucratic mental faculties and is acquainted with the intention of the long-dead legislators via the fourth dimension. (*Laughter.*)

This state of affairs, however, makes it impossible for proletarian women to organize together with men. Up to now they had. a struggle

against police power and lawyers' tricks on their hands and, formally speaking, they were worsted in this struggle. But in reality they were the victors; for all the measures utilized to wreck the organization of proletarian women merely operated to arouse their class-consciousness more and more. If we are striving to attain a powerful women's organization on the economic and political fields, we must be concerned to make possible freedom of action, as we battle against the homework system, champion the cause of the shorter working-day, and above all carry on the fight against what the ruling classes mean by the right of association.

At this party congress we cannot lay down the forms is, which the women' s activity should be carried on; first we have to learn how we must work among women. In the resolution before you it is proposed to choose field organizers [*Vertrauenspersonen*] among women, who shall have the task of stimulating trade-union and economic organization among women, working consistently and systematically. The proposal is not new; it was adopted in principle in Frankfurt [1894 congress] and in several areas it has already been carried out with excellent results. We shall see that this proposal , carried out on a larger scale, is just the thing for drawing proletarian women to a greater extent into the proletarian movement .

But the activity should not be carried on only orally. A large number of indifferent people do not come to our meetings, and numerous wives and mothers cannot get to our meetings at all — and it is out of the question that the task of socialist women's activity should be to alienate proletarian women from their duties as wives and mothers; on the contrary it must operate so that this task is fulfilled better than before, precisely in the interests of the emancipation of the proletariat. The better relations are in the family, and the more efficiently work is done in the home, so much the more effective is the family in struggle. The more the family can be the means of educating and molding its children, the more it can enlighten them and see to it that they continue the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat

with the same enthusiasm and devotion as we in the ranks. Then when the proletarian says "My wife!" he adds in his own mind: "my comrade working for the same ideal, my companion in struggle, who molds my children for the struggle of the future!" Thus many a mother and many a wife who imbues husband and children with class-consciousness accomplishes just as much as the women comrades whom we see at our meetings. (*Vigorous agreement.*)

So if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain: We must bring socialism to the women through a systematic agitational activity in published form. For this purpose I propose to you the distribution of leaflets; not the traditional leaflets which cram the whole socialist program onto one side of a sheet together with all the erudition of the age — no, small leaflets that bring up a single practical question with a single angle, from the standpoint of the class struggle: this is the main thing. And the question of the technical production of the leaflets must also be our concern. . . [*Zetkin here discusses these technical aspects in more detail.*] . . .

I cannot speak in favor of the plan to launch a special women's newspaper, since I have had personal experience along those lines; not as editor of *Gleichheit* (which is not directed to the mass of woman but to the more advanced) but as a distributor of literature among women workers. Stimulated by the example of Mrs. Gnauck-Kühne, for weeks I distributed papers to the women workers of a certain factory and became convinced that what they get from the contents is not what is educational but solely what is entertaining and amusing. Therefore the great sacrifices that a cheap newspaper demands would not pay.

But we must also produce a series of pamphlets that would bring women nearer to socialism in their capacity as workers, wives, and mothers . We do not have a single one that meets requirements, outside of Mrs. Popp's vigorous pamphlet. Moreover, our daily press must do more than heretofore. Some of our dailies have indeed made an attempt to educate women through the issuance of a special women's supplement; the *Magdeburger Volkstimme* has taken the lead with a good

example, and Comrade Goldstein in Zwickau has forged ahead along these lines with good fortune end good results. But up to now our daily press has been concerned mainly to win proletarian women as subscribers; we have pandered to their lack of enlightenment and their bad, uncultivated taste instead of enlightening them.

I repeat: these are only suggestions that I submit for your consideration. Women' s activity is difficult, it is laborious, it demands great devotion and great sacrifice, but this sacrifice will be rewarded and must be made. For, just as the proletariat can achieve its emancipation only if it fights together without distinction of nationality or distinction of occupation, so also it can achieve its emancipation only if it holds together without distinction of sex. The involvement of the great mass of proletarian women in the emancipatory struggle of the proletariat is one of the preconditions for the victory of the socialist idea, for the construction of a socialist society.

Only a socialist society will resolve the conflict that comes to a head nowadays through the entrance of women into the work-force. When the family disappears as an economic unit and its place is taken by the family as a moral unit, women will develop their individuality as comrades advancing on a par with men with equal rights, an equal role in production and equal aspirations, while at the same time they are able to fulfill their functions as wife and mother to the highest degree.

Chapter 3
CLARA ZETKIN ON A BOURGEOIS FEMINIST PETITION

The special interest of the following material is that it is a controversy between Clara Zetkin and the editors of the central party organ Vorwärts, *published in the columns of the party newspaper, hence a public intra-party argument — but the subject of the controversy is the socialists' attitude toward the bourgeois feminist movement.*

The date, January 1895, precedes the invention of Bernstein's "revisionism," for Bernstein was going to publish his first articles along those lines only the following year.

The issue that triggered this argument was, as often, minor in itself. German law prohibited meetings and organizations by women, and this anti-democratic restriction was one of the main targets of the socialist women. Full democratic rights for women had already been proposed in the Reichstag by the Social-Democratic Party deputies. To the socialist women's movement, the right to organize was above all bound up with the fight for workingwomen's demands. Now along came a petition sponsored by three individual women to ask for this right — in a framework which, in Zetkin's view, was entirely adapted to the bourgeois women's attitudes and unacceptable to the proletarian women's movement. She argues that socialist women should not give this petition their signatures or support. At first Vorwärts *had also criticized the petition along the same lines, but then made a change of front (without consultation) and indicated that there was no reason why socialist women should not sign it. It was apparently enough for the editors that the petition's sponsors had included one Social-Democratic woman (not chosen by the socialist women themselves) and that they had stated they wanted socialist signatures. Zetkin argues that what is decisive is the political grounds given in the petition itself, which deliberately ignores the point of view of workingwomen.*

Vorwärts *published Zetkin's protest in its issue of January 24, 1895, and replied in a peculiar way. It did not append a systematic refutation but rather peppered Zetkin's article with editorial footnotes. These footnotes are not included with the article below but are discussed following it. Zetkin sent the paper a rejoinder the next day — that is, a comment on the editorial footnotes — and this, published on February 7, was itself peppered with footnotes again.*

On the publication of Zetkin's protest in Vorwärts, *Engels sent an enthusiastic hurrah to an Austrian comrade: "Clara is right. . .Bravo Clara!"*

It is interesting that the more or less official biography of Zetkin published in contemporary East Germany, by Luise Dornemann, is rather apologetic about its subject's "harshness" toward the bourgeois feminists — a bit like the Vorwärts *editors, rather, though Dornemann does not mention this 1895 polemic at all. Still, Dornemann's emphasis on the other side of the coin is valid, and we quote it to round out the picture. Dornemann writes:*

> *"If Clara's attitude toward the bourgeois women's movement, particularly at the beginning of the 1890s, was occasionally harsh, this was conditioned on the need to work out the class character and independent character of the socialist women's movement. Taking it as a whole, however, the bourgeois women hardly had a better helper than Clara Zetkin. There was no problem of the women teachers, or actresses, or women trying to study and work in medicine and law, that was not dealt with in Gleichheit, no significant literature which it did not take a position on. There were no congresses, campaigns, or big events organized by the bourgeois women that Gleichheit failed to report on."*

Dornemann further emphasizes that Zetkin had friendly relations with a number of bourgeois women's-rightsers, "the best of them"; though, to be sure, "she found more to, criticize in the bourgeois women's movement than to approve. " In other words, Clara Zetkin was altogether willing to unite forces with the bourgeois women for common objectives, but not to subordinate the workingwomen's movement to the aims and style of the women's-rightsers.

We here present Zetkin's first protest to Vorwärts*, Followed by a summary of the main points and passages in the subsequent exchange. The source of the text is the same as for §2.*

Last summer 22 women's rights organizations joined in an alliance which, in a petition to the kaiser, "most humbly" implored the legal prohibition of prostitution and severe punishment of prostitutes,

pimps, etc. by means of a cabinet order by the kaiser and allied princes. The lackey-like tone favored in the petition was worthily complemented by its sociopolitical ignorance, redolent of a beggar's plea, and by the presumptuousness with which the organizations "dared" to beg because their representatives would be accepted as "authorities on women's affairs."

Now we find three whole women who ask in a petition for the right of assembly and association for the female sex. Three whole women have taken the initiative, on behalf of bourgeois women's circles, to win a right whose lack is one of the most significant features of the social subordination of the female sex in Germany!

The petition addresses itself to women "of all parties and all classes." Even the signatures of proletarian women, of Social-Democratic women, are welcomed.

I will not raise the question whether it is necessary for proletarian women to sign a petition for the right of assembly and association at a point when the party, which represents their interests as well as the male proletariat's, has introduced a bill to this end in the Reichstag. As we know, the Social-Democratic Reichstag group has proposed that the laws on association and assembly now existing in the individual states be reorganized on a national legal basis, and that equal rights for both sexes be included in this reorganization as well as legal guarantee of the unrestricted exercise of freedom to organize. So it demands not only what the petition requests but much more besides.

It may well be that to some people, perhaps even many, support to this petition by organized workers and its signing by proletarian women appears "expedient" — expediency certainly smiles more sweetly for many in our party than principle does. Such a petition supported by a mass of signatures seems to them an excellent demonstration in favor of the Social Democratic proposal, a proof that the widest circles of women as a whole feel the pressing need for the right of association and assembly.

From my point of view, even without the petition such a demonstration has been given once and for all; the proof that the reform demanded is a just one was given long ago, permanently and emphatically, in the form of the dogged and bitter struggle carried on for years against the right of association and assembly by the allied forces of police and judiciary.

In this struggle the police actively showed the full vigor which has .earned the highest respect for the German officialdom' s loyalty to duty in the eyes of the possessing classes . The judiciary, for their part , show an interpretive skill which ordinary human understanding has not always been able to appreciate. One dissolution of a proletarian women's organization follows upon another; one prohibition of a women's meeting follows upon another; the exclusion of women from public meetings is an everyday affair; penalties against women for violating the law on association simply rain down. From October 1, 1893 to August 31, 1894, proletarian women had to pay 681 marks worth of fines for such offenses; and this only in cases that came to my knowledge. Despite all, new associations regularly rise in place of the organizations that were smashed; over and over again women throng to rallies, over and over again they organize new ones.

The proletarian woman, living in straitened circumstances if not bitter poverty and overburdened with work, continues to make the sacrifices of time and energy required by organizational activity; bravely she exposes herself to the legal consequences and accepts the penalties that hang over her head "in the name of the law." These facts are to my mind the most indubitable proof that it is an urgent interest of life itself which makes the possession of freedom of association necessary for the proletarian woman and not a desire for political games or club socializing. If the Reichstag and the government do not understand the urgent language of these facts, they will bend their ears even less favorably to a petition.

Here it will perhaps be objected: "Well, even if the petition is of no use, still it does no harm. It is a question of broadening the rights of the

disfranchised female sex, therefore we will support it and sign it." Very nice, I reply; but if this approach is taken, the petition must still somehow jibe with the bases of our proletarian viewpoint, or at least — to put it moderately — it must not stand in sharp contradiction with our viewpoint. This is not at all the case, on the contrary. The petition stems from bourgeois circles, it breathes a bourgeois spirit throughout — indeed in many details, even a narrowly bourgeois spirit.

It baffles us, then, why Social-Democratic papers should push this petition and quasi-officially urge organized workers to support it and proletarian women to sign it. Since when is it the habit of the Social-Democratic Party to support petitions that stem from bourgeois circles and bear the marks of a bourgeois outlook on their forehead simply because such petitions ask for something valid, something the Social-Democracy also demands and has long demanded? Let us suppose that bourgeois democrats had put forward a petition whose purpose was the same as or similar to that of the women's petition under discussion, of the same character.. The Social-Democratic press would criticize the petition but would in no way encourage comrades or class-conscious workers to trail along after bourgeois elements. Why should our principled standpoint with respect to the politics of the bourgeois world change because by chance an example of these politics comes from women and demands not a reform on behalf of the so-called social aggregate but rather one on behalf of the female sex? If we are willing to give up our principled attitude for this reason, we likewise give up our view that the women' s question can only be understood, and demands raised, in connection with the social question as a whole.

In No. 7 of January 9, *Vorwärts* took a thoroughly correct attitude to the petition. It took notice of it, criticized it, and pointed out that it took up an old socialist demand. Unfortunately, and to my great amazement, *Vorwärts* changed its line overnight. Why? Because it was given to understand that the motivating preamble of the petition did not deserve the criticism made of it. That this assurance and an allusion

to remarks in a "communication" decided *Vorwärts* to make a change of front — this I must emphatically deplore. And in spite of the "communication, the charge made against the petition — that its motivating preamble is most defective — remains in full force. The "communication" in fact has not the slightest thing to do with the petition and its preamble. It is nothing but an accompanying note, a circular letter to people whose signatures are solicited in support of the petition. It says: "Among the 'special interests' of women which are not detailed in the petition for the sake of brevity, the job situation of women especially requires a legislative bill in line with the petition."

Should this passage be taken as a statement of advice on the value .of freedom of association and assembly for proletarian women? We say thanks for this information but we don't need it. The proletariat recognized, much earlier than the authors of this petition, the value of freedom of organization for all its members without distinction of sex. And in conformity with this recognition the proletariat fights for the conquest of this right. Should the passage be taken as an assurance that the maternal parents of this petition are themselves conscious of the significance of this right and its basis? We hopefully note this token of a socio-political comprehension that is commonly lacking among German women's-rightsers. But this passage has no significance as far as the petition itself is concerned. As far as the petition and its possible consideration are concerned, it is not a matter of what its sponsors and signers had in mind for its preamble but rather what grounds they put forward in its favor. In the preamble of the petition there is not a word about the fact that for the interests of independently employed women the possession of the right of association and assembly is an imperative necessity. The petition lacks precisely the ground on the basis of which the proletariat espouses the demand. It lacks the ground which is so essential for this legislative reform that — according to uncontradicted newspaper accounts — in Bavaria Center Party people will introduce a bill in the next session of the state Diet which will demand the right of

association and assembly. for the female sex out of consideration for women's economic situation.

There is an air of embarrassment in the statement of the accompanying note that the pertinent ground was not introduced into the preamble of the petition for reasons of space. Indeed — then why didn't the saving consideration of brevity prevent the preamble from making the special point that one of the effects of women on legislation duti to freedom of association is urgently presented as being on the "morality question." What the bourgeois women want from the lawmakers under the head of the "morality question" is made sufficiently clear by the abovementioned petition to the kaiser [on prostitution].

In my opinion, proletarian women, politically conscious comrades least of all, cannot sign a petition which on the 'pretext of "brevity" passes over in silence the most important ground for the reform demanded from the proletarian standpoint, while regardless of "brevity" it stresses a ground which would be laughed at from a halfway clarified socio-political viewpoint, as the product of a very naive ignorance of social relations. Proletarian 'circles have not the least occasion to pin a certificate of poverty on their own socio-political judgment by solidarizing themselves with a petition of this content:

Still another reason makes it impossible for the socialist movement to come out in favor of this petition. The petition does not call on the Reichstag or a Reichstag group for a bill along the lines of the reform in question; it simply requests the Reichstag to send the plea for such a bill to the federated German governments. The petition therefore ignores the competence of the Reichstag to introduce bills on this subject itself and assigns it the modest role of a porter who opens the door for the petitioners to the higher government authority. The Social-Democracy cannot support such a procedure and cannot join in it. The Social-Democracy has at all times fought the duality of the legislative power as it exists in Germany thanks to the fact that our bourgeoisie has not broken the power of absolutism but made a cowardly deal with

it. The Social-Democracy has to put up with the fact that this duality exists; indeed, that the legislative authorities — the government and the people' s representatives — do not confront one another as factors of equal power but that the latter is subordinate to the former; whereas the Social-Democracy has always fought with every legal means at its disposal for the people's representatives to be what they should be. Among the few rights and powers that parliament possesses in the noble German Reich is the right to introduce proposals that make demands in the name of the people instead of addressing pleas to the government. The petition, however, avoids the only straight route to the Reichstag. Proletarian women can have nothing to do with this and don't want to. Anyway, at the very least, not at this moment when the governments are launching the sharpest battle against the organizational activity of proletarian women and when the federated governments have introduced the Anti-Subversive bill . Proletarian women who expect a reform of the laws on association and assembly in accordance with their own interests to come from our governments would try to pick figs from thorns and grapes from thistles .

If the bourgeois women wanted temporary collaboration with proletarian women for a common goal on behalf of the petition, then it is evident that the petition would be formulated in such a way that workingwomen could sign it without compromising themselves and their aims. Such a formulation would have been premised on a prior understanding with the representatives of the class-conscious proletarian women. As the sponsors of the petition well know, there is a [socialist] Commission on Women' s Work in Berlin.

Why didn't the petition's sponsors come to this commission with the following two questions: (1) Are you perhaps prepared to support the planned petition? and (2) How does this petition have to be put so that it can be supported and signed by proletarian women without abandoning their own viewpoint?

Such a mode of procedure should have been self-evident and would have been dictated by good sense and courtesy if one wanted the

signatures of proletarian women. The formulation of the petition and its sponsors mode of procedure are characteristic of the outlook of bourgeois women and their relationship to the world of proletarian women. One is humanitarian enough to do something for one's "poorer sisters" under certain circumstances, and one is smart enough under all circumstances to accept their menial services, but to work together with them as if with a coequal power — well, that's an altogether different matter, you yokel .

The sponsors of the petition will refer to their "good intentions" and insist they were very far from having any conscious antagonism to the outlook of the proletarian women. But that cannot induce us to take a different view of their mode of procedure. In the name of good intentions people have long committed not only the greatest crimes but also the grossest stupidities. And the fact that the thought processes of the petition's sponsors instinctively and unconsciously ran in a direction diametrically opposed to the proletarian outlook is indeed a sign of the gulf that separates us from them.

I believe that I speak not only in my own name but in the name of the majority of class-conscious proletarian women when I say:

Not one proletarian signature for this petition!

THE EDITORS' REPLY AND ZETKIN'S REJOINDER

The refutatory footnotes appended by the Vorwärts *editors had the advantage of telling the reader what was wrong with Zetkin even before the article itself was read. A footnote hung from the title announced: "We are giving space to the following article without being in agreement with everything in it. We remark above all that we are as concerned about fidelity to principles in the party as Comrade Zetkin and* Gleichheit. *The sharp missiles hurled by Comrade Zetkin do not seem appropriate for the fight she is carrying on; they should be reserved for weightier targets."*

> *This was in part the usual recommendation that leftists should go expend their energies on the capitalist class (only) instead of bothering party leaders. The injection of* Gleichheit *was more malicious, for Zetkin had written in her personal capacity; in effect the editors indicated that they viewed* Gleichheit *as an oppositional organ. Zetkin took note of this at the end of her rejoinder.*
>
> *This first editorial note also adduced the information that one of the three petition sponsors was a Social-Democratic Party member and that the petition had been signed by some women party members before the offending* Vorwärts *article was published. To this, Zetkin replied that . . .*

. . .the fact that the petition was coauthored by a member of our party and that some comrades have signed it does not make it any better or above criticism. We do not form an opinion of a public question and especially not of a party question on the basis of individuals and their intentions but rather on the basis of whether or not it tallies in essence with our fundamental standpoint. That comrades have signed the petition is easily enough accounted for.

The special disfranchised position of the female sex, which is exacerbated for proletarian women because of the social subordination they suffer as members of the proletariat, leads one or another good comrade to assimilate the class-conscious female proletarian, the female Social-Democrat, with Woman. Far be it from me to cast a stone at her for that, but far be it from me likewise to approve her attitude, or, above all, to elevate this attitude to a level by virtue of which any criticism of the petition must not hurt a fly. I confidently leave it to the comrades of both sexes to draw the conclusions that would follow from generalizing the standpoint from which *Vorwärts* here counterposes my article to the petition.

The last sentence points to the analogy with Social-Democratic Party attitudes toward bourgeois liberalism, on the general political scene.

In their second note, the editors brought out the time-honored "step forward" argument. It is appended to Zetkin's most cogent passage on the basic politics of the whole thing, emphasizing that "the women's question" can only be understood, and demands raised, in connection with the social question as a whole. The editors answered: "We cannot recognize the grave offense that Comrade Zetkin constructs here." Women are entirely disfranchised; bourgeois women are politically untrained; "hence every step toward independence is a step forward." A minister, von Köller, had attacked the petition "as a sign of growing 'subversive tendencies"; presumably, the minister's attack proved that socialists should support what he disliked. Zetkin replied:

Certainly, every step by the bourgeois woman in the direction of independence is a forward step. However, the recognition of this fact must not, in my opinion, lead the politically developed proletarian women's movement to go along with the vacillating, inept and groping bourgeois women's-rightsers or even overestimate their significance. If Herr von Köller treated the petition as marking the growth of the danger of revolution and attributed a great significance to it, we have to put that down to a minister who is officially responsible for laboriously sweating to scrape together evidence of the growth of "subversive tendencies."

Perhaps the most significant admission came in the editors' attempt to answer one of Zetkin's most telling points. The petition sponsors gave brevity as their reason for omitting the motivating grounds important to workingwomen — namely, their economic situation; but, Zetkin pointed out, brevity did not prevent these women from including their own bourgeois considerations, like the "morality question." The editors replied in a footnote: "We too criticized this, but

we found that one excuse — even though not an adequate one — was the fact that the original authoress of the petition, on tactical grounds, did not want to forgo the signatures of bourgeois women, and [note this!] she would have had to forgo them if this had been the leading ground given in the petition as published." So — bourgeois women would have refused to sign a petition which gave space to workingwomen's economic needs, even though it also emphasized their own motivations! Very class-conscious indeed. But the workingwomen, in contrast, were expected to be so alien to class-consciousness that they would sign even if their own considerations were nowhere included. Little else was needed to bring out the conscious class character of the petition. Zetkin commented:

I quite understand that for the authors of the petition "tactical considerations" with respect to bourgeois women were decisive in many ways. But why did they not let themselves be swayed by similar "tactical considerations" with respect to proletarian women? Why did they make all concessions to the biases of bourgeois women, and why did they demand of the proletarian women that they give up their own views? What is right for the one must also be fair for the other if they wanted their support.

Zetkin's rejoinder summed up a number of questions as follows:

As for the sharp tone which I adopted and which *Vorwärts* objected to: I considered it necessary for a special reason. The appearance of the most recent tendency in bourgeois feminism, which I would like to call the "ethical" tendency,* has here and there caused some confusion in

* At this point the editors appended a footnote protesting that "No party paper has drawn the line of demarcation more energetically than *Vorwärts* between the ethical movement and the Social-Democracy which bases itself on the class struggle." But Zetkin was explaining why some woman comrades were being

(continued...)

the ranks of our women comrades. This new tendency raises more demands in the field of women's rights than its sister tendencies and does so more energetically, and in its social understanding, its recognition and critique of social wrongs and its espousal of certain social reforms, it stands a step higher than the others. And it is for this reason that there are various illusions movement in the socialist camp concerning the character of this tendency and its significance for our proletarian women's movement. Not long ago, indeed, I got letters from party circles saying that "these women are essentially striving for the same goal as we are"! In view of the wobbliness that is spreading in our estimation of the abovementioned bourgeois tendency, the sharpness of tone seemed to me to be required. At present, I hope, all these illusions have once and for all been ended by [the bourgeois feminist] Mrs. Gizycki's explicit protest against the report that she had declared herself in support of the Social-Democratic women's movement. (*Vorwärts*, 23rd of last month.)

Since none of *Vorwärts*' footnotes is directed against the actual, essential views of my article, but simply against incidental points, I believe I may take it that it too agrees with the gist of my exposition. In any case, in view of the present state of the matter, it would be a good thing if it stated clearly and forthrightly whether it recommends that women comrades sign the petition or not. With that the matter would be settled for me, at least as far as the petition is concerned.*

(...continued)
taken in by the new bourgeois feminists, who counterposed their broad ("ethical") non-class motivations to the "narrow" class position of the socialist women, in the usual fashion.

* To this paragraph, the editors appended two footnotes (one to the first and another to the second sentence) in which, in effect, they threw up the sponge, without having the candor to say so. The first note read: "We don't mind agreeing
(continued...)

In conclusion, however, an important personal observation. My remarks consisted of nothing but a statement about *Vorwärts*' change of front in the matter of the petition and the expression of my regret over it. No sharp attack. The only somewhat sharper passage against *Vorwärts* that was originally in my article was stricken by the editors. In my exposition I neither pointed to *Gleichheit* nor even mentioned it, in general, nowhere and never have I played *Gleichheit* off against *Vorwärts* as being specially faithful to principle. How did *Vorwärts* come to drag *Gleichheit* into the debate? And when and where have I, after the fashion of *Vorwärts*, given myself a testimonial in self-praise of my special fidelity to principle? To the self-serving testimonial which *Vorwärts* confers on its own attitude I have duly given the same attention with which, out of a sense of duty, I follow all of *Vorwärts'* pronouncements.

Whether, however, this attention has produced any change in my opinion of *Vorwärts* is another story, but this is the least opportune time to write it and *Vorwärts* is the least opportune place.

(...continued)
that Comrade Zetkin is right in principle, but we believe that she makes too much to-do about a mere nothing." The second note: "It is self-evident that , in accordance with the statements of the Commission on Women's Work which *Vorwärts* published along with other papers, *Vorwärts* has no occasion to recommend signing the petition." What was now "self-evident" to the editors was that the women of the movement were against them, and that the *Vorwärts* position had no other party sanction. So Zetkin was right in principle and right in the specific proposal to boycott the bourgeois-feminist petition. Having exhausted their good nature in making this confession, the editors then appended a final Parthian shot to the last word of Zetkin's rejoinder: "With this, we can and must leave Comrade Zetkin in peace." This was simply a parting snarl — which, furthermore, would probably have been restrained if its target had been a male leader of the movement.

Chapter 4
ROSA LUXEMBURG — WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND CLASS STRUGGLE

The following article by Rosa Luxemburg was published in 1912 in a collection on women's suffrage issued by her friend Clara Zetkin, on the occasion of the Second Social-Democratic Women's Day in May of that year. As the circumstances indicate, it was a question of a general propaganda article only. But the brief essay is of special interest to us for more than one reason.

It is one of the myths of socialist history that Rosa Luxemburg had no interest in the women's question. The kernel of truth is that Luxemburg certainly rejected the idea that, simply because of her sex, she 'belonged' in the socialist women's movement, rather than in the general leadership. In rejecting this sexist view of women in the movement, she performed an important service. Yet – without adducing a line of evidence despite the detailed nature of his two-volume biography – J.P. Nettl writes: 'Rosa Luxemburg was not interested in any high-principled campaign for women's rights – unlike her friend Clara Zetkin. Like anti-Semitism, the inferior status of women was a social feature which would be eliminated only by the advent of Socialism; in the meantime there was no point in making any special issue of it.' This statement about Luxemburg's views is quite false. The fact is that Luxemburg herself made a 'special issue of it' on at least a couple of occasions when she wrote propaganda pieces for the socialist women; but it is not her own degree of personal participation that speaks of her point of view. Her friend Zetkin and others were taking care of the women's movement; it did not need her, and women were not required by their sex to confine their activities to it. We may also anticipate a side-point: it is true that 'Rosa never wanted either to claim women's privileges or to accept any of their disabilities' (Nettl) but in this she was no different from other revolutionary women of the time or today.

Another reason for the special interest of this piece is that it handles a question which, still in our own day, bedevils would-be socialist feminists sometimes, especially some who try to work out a Marxist analysis while under the impression that no one had ever contributed to it before. This is the question of the class position of women, particularly working women. Luxemburg's remarks on the 'unproductive' character of housework should be especially noted. Of course, attempts to put a separate-class label on women as a sex will not thereby be impeded, since most such efforts do not try to work with a rational definition of class, but we hope it will be harder to present such theorizing as Marxist. There is a nuance of difference between

Luxemburg and (say) Zetkin which is directly traceable to Luxemburg's lack of personal participation in the women's movement and her lack of direct experience with its conditions and problems. This suggests another kernel of truth in Nettl's sweeping statement, particularly his comparison with the mechanical-Marxist attitude toward political issues (anti-Semitism in his example). Luxemburg, looking at the bourgeois women's movement from a great distance, grossly underestimated the appeals of abstract feminism. While this tinges the 1912 article given below, it is stated most plainly in a very short piece which Luxemburg wrote for International Women's Day in March 1914, published as The Proletarian Woman.

In this 1914 piece, which has a mainly exhortatory tone, analyses are naturally not featured. Here Luxemburg's summary of the class situation of women is telegraphic: 'As bourgeois wives, women are parasites on society, their function consisting solely in sharing the fruits of exploitation. As petty-bourgeois, they are beasts of burden for the family. It is as modern proletarians that women fist become human beings; for it is struggle that produces the human being – participation in their process of culture, in the history of humanity.' The thought which is telescoped here assumes that by the 'modern proletarian women', it is the woman militant that is understood, not simply any woman of the working class in any social situation. In any case, from this analysis Luxemburg goes on to assert: 'The bourgeois woman has no real interest in political rights because she exercises no economic function in society, because she enjoys the ready-made fruits of class domination. The demand for women's rights, as raised by bourgeois women, is pure ideology held by a few weak groups, without material roots, a phantom of the antagonism between man and woman, a fad.' This is an example of the abstract deduction of political analyses to which Luxemburg was sometimes prone; her greatest mistake of this sort was a similar dismissal of nationalism as a political issue. Zetkin did not make Luxemburg's mistake.

The article that follows (as well as the excerpts cited above from the 1914 piece) are translated from Luxemburg's Gesammelte Werke (Berlin, Dietz, 1973) Volume 3.

'Why are there no organizations of women workers in Germany? Why is so little heard of the women workers' movement?' – These were

the words with which Emma Ihrer, one of the founders of the proletarian women's movement in Germany, in 1898 introduced her book on *Women Workers in the Class Struggle* [*Die Arbeiterinnen im Klassenkampf*]. Hardly fourteen years have passed since then, and today the proletarian women's movement in Germany has developed mightily. More than 150,000 women workers organized in trade unions help to form the shock troops of the militant proletariat on the economic field. Many tens of thousands of politically organized women are assembled under the banner of the Social-Democracy. The Social-Democratic women's magazine has over a hundred thousand subscribers. The demand for women's suffrage is on the order of the day in the political life of the Social-Democracy.

There are many who, precisely on the basis of these facts, may underestimate the significance of the struggle for women's suffrage. They may reason: even without political equality for the female sex, we have achieved brilliant advances in the enlightenment and organization of women, so it appears that women's suffrage is not a pressing necessity from here on in. But anyone who thinks so is suffering from a delusion. The splendid political and trade-union ferment among the masses of the female proletariat in the last decade and a half has been possible only because the women of the workingpeople, despite their disenfranchisement, have taken a most lively part in political life and in the parliamentary struggle of their class. Proletarian women have up to now benefitted from men's suffrage – in which they actually participated, if only indirectly. For large masses of women, the struggle for the suffrage is now a common struggle together with the men of the working class. In all Social-Democratic voters' meetings, the women form a large part of the audience, sometimes the preponderant part, and always an alert and passionately concerned audience. In every election district where a solid Social-Democratic organization exists, the women help carry on the election work. They also do much in the way of distributing leaflets and soliciting subscriptions to the Social-Democratic press, this being the heaviest weapon in the electoral battle.

The capitalist state has not been able to keep the women of the people from undertaking these burdens and duties of political life. It itself was, step by step, forced to ensure and facilitate this possibility by granting the rights of association and assembly. Only the final political right – the right to cast a ballot, to directly decide on popular representatives in the legislative and executive bodies, and to be elected a member of these bodies – only this right does the state refuse to grant to women. Here only do they cry 'Don't let it get started!' as in all other spheres of social life.

The contemporary state gave ground before the proletarian women when it allowed them into public assemblies and political organizations. To be sure, it did this not of its own free will but in response to bitter necessity, under the irresistible pressure of an aggressive working class. The stormy thrust forward by workingwomen themselves was not the least factor in forcing the Prussian-German police-state to give up that wonderful 'women's section' at political meetings [1*],* and to throw the doors of political organizations wide open to women. With this concession the rolling stone began to gather speed. The unstoppable advance of the proletarian class struggle pulled workingwomen into the vortex of political life. Thanks to the utilization of the rights of association and assembly, proletarian women have won for themselves active participation in parliamentary life, in the electoral struggle. And now it is merely an inescapable consequence and logical outcome of the movement that today millions of workingwomen cry with class-conscious defiance: *Give us women's suffrage!*

Once upon a time, in the good old days of pre-1848 absolutism, it was commonly said of the whole working class that it was 'not yet

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* In 1902 the Prussian Minister of the Interior had issued an ordinance requiring women at political meetings to sit only in one special section of the meeting hall, the 'women's section'.

mature enough' to exercise political rights. Today this cannot be said of proletarian women, for they have demonstrated they are mature enough for political rights. Indeed, everyone knows that without them, without the enthusiastic aid of the proletarian women, the German Social-Democracy would never have achieved the brilliant victory of 12th January [1912] when it got four and a quarter million votes. But all the same, the workingpeople had to prove they were mature enough for political freedom every time through a victorious revolutionary mass movement. Only when God's Anointed on the throne together the noblest Cream of the Nation felt the calloused fist of the proletariat on their eye and its knee on their breast, only then did belief in the political maturity of the people suddenly dawn on them. Today it is the turn of the women of the proletariat to make the capitalist state conscious of their maturity. This is taking place through a patient, powerful mass movement in which all the resources of proletarian struggle and pressure will have to be brought to bear.

It is women's suffrage that is in question as the goal, but the mass movement for this goal is not a women's affair only, but the common class concern of the men and women of the proletariat. For in Germany today women's disenfranchisement is only a link in the chain of reaction that fetters the life of the people, and it is very closely bound up with the other pillar of this reaction-the monarchy. In the contemporary twentieth-century Germany of large-scale capitalism and advanced industry, in the era of electricity and airplanes, women's disenfranchisement is just as reactionary a relic of an older and outlived state of affairs as the rule of God's Anointed on the throne. Both phenomena – the Instrument of Heaven as the dominant power in political life, and the woman sitting demurely at the domestic hearth, unconcerned with the storms of political life, with politics and the class struggle – both have their roots in the decaying social relations of the past, in the era of serfdom on the land and the guild system in the cities. In those days they were understandable and necessary. Both of them, the monarchy and women's disenfranchisement, have been uprooted

today by modern capitalist development, and have become ridiculous caricatures of humanity. If they will nevertheless remain in modern society today, it is not because we have forgotten to get rid of them or simply because of inertia and the persistence of old conditions. No, they are still around because both of them – the monarchy and women's disenfranchisement – have become powerful tools of anti-popular interests. Behind the throne and the altar, as behind the political enslavement of the female sex, lurk today the most brutal and evil representatives of the exploitation and enserfment of the proletariat. The monarchy and the disenfranchisement of women have taken their place among the most important tools of capitalist class domination.

For the contemporary state, it is really a question of denying the suffrage to workingwomen and to them alone. It fearfully sees in them, rightly, a threat to all the institutions of class domination inherited from the past – such as militarism, whose deadly enemy every thinking proletarian women must be; the monarchy; the organized robbery of tariffs and taxes on foodstuffs, and so on. Women's suffrage is an abomination and a bogey for the capitalist state today because behind it stand the millions of women who will strengthen the internal enemy, the revolutionary Social-Democracy.

If it were a matter of the ladies of the bourgeois, then the capitalist state could expect only a real prop for reaction from them. Most of the bourgeois women who play the lioness in a fight against 'male privileges' would, once in possession of the suffrage, follow like meek little lambs in the wake of the conservative and clerical reaction. Indeed, they would surely be far more reactionary than the masculine portion of their class. Apart from the small number of professional women among them, the women of the bourgeoisie have no part in social production; they are simply joint consumers of the surplus value which their men squeeze out of the proletariat; they are parasites on the parasites of the people. And such joint-consumers are commonly more rabid and cruel in defense of their 'right' to a parasitic existence than those who directly

carry on class domination and the exploitation of the working class. The history of all great revolutionary struggles has borne this out in a horrible way. After the fall of Jacobin domination in the Great French Revolution, when the cart carried Robespierre in fetters to the guillotine, naked prostitutes of the victory-besotted bourgeoisie shamelessly danced with joy in the streets around the fallen revolutionary hero. And when in Paris in 1871 the heroic Commune of the workers was crushed by machine-guns, the wild-raving women of the bourgeoisie exceeded even their bestial men in their bloody vengeance on the stricken proletariat. The women of the possessing classes will always be rabid supporters of the exploitation and oppression of working people, from which they receive at second hand the wherewithal for their socially useless existence.

Economically and socially, the women of the exploiting classes do not make up an independent stratum of the population. They perform a social function merely as instruments of natural reproduction for the ruling classes. The women of the proletariat, on the contrary, are independent economically; they are engaged in productive work for society just as the men are. Not in the sense that they help the men by their housework, scraping out a daily living and raising children for meager compensation. This work is not productive within the meaning of the present economic system of capitalism, even though it entails an immense expenditure of energy and self-sacrifice in a thousand little tasks. This is only the private concern of the proletarians, their blessing and felicity, and precisely for this reason nothing but empty air as far as modem society is concerned.

Only that work is productive which produces surplus value and yields capitalist profit – as long as the rule of capital and the wage system still exists. From this standpoint the dancer in a café, who makes a profit for her employer with her legs, is a productive working-woman, while all the toil of the woman and mothers of the proletariat within the four walls of the home is considered unproductive work. This sounds crude and crazy but it is an accurate expression of the crudeness and

craziness of today's capitalist economic order; and to understand this crude reality clearly and sharply is the first necessity for the proletarian woman.

For it is precisely from this standpoint that the working-women's claim to political equality is now firmly anchored to a solid economic base. Millions of proletarian women today produce capitalist profit just like men – in factories, workshops, agriculture, homework industries, offices and stores. They are productive, therefore, in the strictest economic sense of society today. Every day, the multitude of women exploited by capitalism grows; every new advance in industry and technology makes more room for women in the machinery of capitalist profit-making. And thus every day and every industrial advance lays another stone in the solid foundation on which the political 'equality of women rests. The education and intellectual development of women has now become necessary for the economic machine itself. Today the narrowly circumscribed and unwordly woman of the old patriarchal 'domestic hearth' is as useless for the demands of large-scale industry and trade as for the requirements of political life. In this respect too, certainly, the capitalist state has neglected its duties. Up to now it is the trade-union and Social-Democratic organizations that have done most and done best for the intellectual and moral awakening and education of women. Just as for decades now the Social-Democrats have been known as the most capable and intelligent workers, so today it is by Social-Democracy and the trade unions that the women of the proletariat have been raised out of the stifling atmosphere of their circumscribed existence, out of the miserable vapidness and pettiness of household management. The proletarian class struggle has widened their horizons, expanded their intellectual life, developed their mental capacities, and given them great goals to strive for. Socialism has brought about the spiritual rebirth of the mass of proletarian women, and in the process has also doubtless made them competent as productive workers for capital.

After all this, the political disenfranchisement of proletarian women is all the baser an injustice because it has already become partly false. Women already take part in political life anyway, actively and in large numbers. Nevertheless, the Social-Democracy does not carry on the fight with the argument of 'injustice'. The basic difference between us and the sentimental Utopian socialism of earlier times lies in the fact that we base ourselves not on the justice of the ruling classes but solely on the revolutionary power of the working masses and on the process of economic development which is the foundation of that power. Thus, injustice in itself is certainly not an argument for overthrowing reactionary institutions. When wide circles of society are seized by a sense of injustice – says Friedrich Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism – it is always a sure sign that far-reaching shifts have taken place in the economic basis of society, and that the existing order of things has already come into contradiction with the ongoing process of development. The present powerful movement of millions of proletarian women who feel their political disenfranchisement to be a crying injustice is just such an unmistakable sign that the social foundations of the existing state are already rotten and that its days are numbered.

One of the first great heralds of the socialist ideal, the Frenchman Charles Fourier, wrote these thought-provoking words a hundred years ago:

In every society the degree of female emancipation (freedom) is the natural measure of emancipation in general.

This applies perfectly to society today. The contemporary mass struggle for the political equality of women is only one expression and one part of the general liberation struggle of the proletariat, and therein lies its strength and its future. General, equal and direct suffrage for women will – thanks to the female proletariat – immeasurably advance and sharpen the proletarian class struggle. That is why bourgeois society detests and fears women's suffrage, and that is why we want to win it and will win it. And through the struggle for women's suffrage we will

hasten the hour when the society of today will be smashed to bits under the hammer blows of the revolutionary proletariat.

Chapter 5
Eleanor Marx — Working Women vs. Bourgeois Feminism

In this section we present some little-known articles by Eleanor Marx written for the Austrian socialist women's movement, with the direct encouragement of Engels, as part of a project to "straighten out the socialist women's attitude toward bourgeois feminism.

As we have seen, the German socialist women's movement got under way by the early 1890s. In spite of Zetkin's influence, it should not be supposed, of course, that its ranks were as consciously Marxist as most of its leadership. On the contrary, there was inevitably a considerable impact on its newly organized women by the bourgeois feminist circles outside. Later on, this was most clearly expressed within the socialist women by Lilly Braun, the leading Revisionist supporter among the women in the party. But in 1891-92 the Revisionist tendency had not yet taken open form.

The establishment of Gleichheit *in 1891 was a great help. The Austrian socialist women, too, planned to establish their own organ by autumn of that year, but in fact the first issue of their* Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung *(Workingwomen's Journal) did not appear till January 1892. During the preparatory months one of its important collaborators was Louise Kautsky (now divorced from Karl Kautsky but retaining the name), who was presently established in Engels' London household as sort of general manager for the old man. Besides writing for the* Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung *herself, Louise together with Engels also worked at drumming up contributions to the paper from abroad.*

During the preparatory months of 1891, Louise worked at getting contributions from two of the Marx daughters, Eleanor (Landon) and Laura Lafargue (Paris). From a letter by Engels to Laura, we see that the three women planned to use their contributions to the Vienna paper to clearly counterpose their own view of socialist feminism against the bourgeois-feminist influences of the day. Engels' letter of October 2, 1891 chortled that their articles "will create a sensation among the women's rights women in Germany and Austria, as the real question has never been put and answered so plainly as you three do it." German workingwomen, he added, were "rushing" into the socialist movement, according to Bebel's reports, "and if that is the case, the antiquated semi-bourgeois women's right anesses [*asses*] *will soon be ordered to the rear."*

All three did in fact write articles for the Vienna paper during 1892. Of greatest interest to us today were those written by Eleanor Marx. The most

prominent issue all three addressed, in one way or another, was that of the bourgeois feminists' hostility to protective legislation for workingwomen. Then, as now, this gave concrete substance to the class differences in the movements for women's rights: which women? which rights?

The contributions of the three women were largely reportage, in form, not programmatic or analytical articles. Therefore they are best presented in the form of excerpts. Before getting to Eleanor Marx, we give an example from a piece by Louise Kautsky.

1. Reduction of the Working-Day for Women

Louise Kautsky here reports on an issue raised in the American feminist movement.

Although she was writing from Engels' household, as it were, and no doubt discussed it with him, it is well to stress that Louise Kautsky was her own woman. We know incidentally that Engels worked at getting her the materials, from a letter he sent to his chief American correspondent, Sorge. There Engels conveys a request from Louise for the Boston Woman's Journal, *which Louise will quote as her main source. Engels writes:*

> She needed it for the Vienna *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung* (she, Laura, and Tussy [Eleanor] are the chief contributors) and she says it could never occur to her to force the drivel of the American swell-mob-ladies upon workingwomen. What you have so kindly sent her has enabled her to become well-posted again and has convinced her that these ladies are still as supercilious and narrowminded as ever...

Louise's immediate subject was the bourgeois feminists' attack in Massachusetts on a bill to reduce the working-day for women factory workers.

The Woman's Journal, which is published in Boston and for 22 years has successfully defended the rights of the women of the bourgeoisie, has a little article in its last issue (January 16, 1892) on the working-hours of female workers.

The reason these women concerned themselves with their proletarian sisters was a crying injustice done to them by the Massachusetts senate. A proposal was introduced there to reduce women's work-day in the factories while leaving the men to work the usual hours. The *Women's Journal* writer states that:

> There can be no doubt," states the *Women's Journal* writer "that the proposal's sponsor means well. But it is clear that the factory owner, who wants full use of his machines, will hire only workers who work the longest hours. If however the women's work-day is to be arbitrarily *reduced, all the women will be thrown out on the street.* Women who work in the factories work there because they are forced by necessity to earn a living, and they want to earn as much as possible. It would therefore be good, before anything is done, to ask the female Factory Inspectors to consult with the female workers."

So goes the article. I am quite sure that the women workers acclaimed the reduction of the work-day, for they know from practical experience that, in every factory where men and women work together, the number of women is much bigger; hence the reduction of their work-day necessarily brings in its train the reduction of the men's hours too.

In England the first factory law protecting women workers over 18 dates from June 7, 1844. In *Capital,* Vol. 1 [Ch.10, §6], Karl Marx quotes a Factory Report of 1844-45, where it is said with irony: "No

instances have come to my knowledge of adult women having expressed any regret at their *rights* being thus far interfered with."

The pained cries of the propertied women in America that their working sisters might not be ruthlessly exploited comes as a worthy close to the debate in the English lower house that took place on February 24. It was on the second reading of a bill about all persons employed in retail stores. Mr. Provand, the bill's sponsor, pointed out that the only law dealing with retail employees and regulating their working hours dates back to 1889 and applies only to young people, not adult women. His bill would include the women workers in these enterprises under the coverage of this law, *i.e.* limit their work-day to only twelve hours.

Louise Kautsky then relates that this mild proposal met with opposition—from a number of honorable supporters of woman's suffrage, who rose to explain that, being for women's right to vote, they wanted women themselves to determine their working hours "as they themselves wished, and without any legal limitations." The hours bill would take away women's rights to do whatever they wanted to do; the opponents stood for freedom; of course. Viscount Cranborne said that a number of women had pointed out to him that the bill meant employers would hire men to fill women's jobs, and that these women were better off working hard than not working at *all. It was further argued that it was unjust to reduce women's working hours before giving them the vote; the priorities were first women's suffrage,* then *cut hours.*

The difference between the bourgeois women's movement and the working-women's movement is as clear as day. We are not hostile to the "women's movement," but we also have not the slightest reason to give it support.

It is not my intention, and it would be absurd, to belittle the work burdens of women of the bourgeoisie, or to forget the difficulties with which Mrs. Garret Anderson worked to open the medical schools to English women, or to forget the women who fought for women's rights in the courts and on the platform, and forced the abolition of many laws that put women in an inferior position.

But all the benefits thus achieved always redound only to the privileged classes; the working-women get little or no benefit out of them; they can be unmoved spectators to the war of sexes in the upper class. But when these women use their preferential position to hamper the development of our working-women's movement, then we are duty-bound to say: So far and *no further*.

2. Eleanor Marx — How Should We Organize?

In the February 5, 1892 issue of the paper, Eleanor Marx started a series of four articles, which began by posing the problem of how women should organize and then reported on how English working-women were organizing in trade unions.

In their last session the 400 delegates to the International Socialist Congress in Brussels [1891] adopted the following resolution:

We call upon the socialist parties of all countries to give definite expression in. their programs to the strivings, for complete equalization of both sexes, and to demand first of all that women be granted the same rights as men in the civil-rights and political fields.

This resolution and this position on the suffrage gain even more meaning through the fact that in the first session of the Congress it was expressly declared that a socialist *workers'* congress had absolutely nothing to do with the women's-rightsers. Just as on the war question the Congress stressed the difference between the ordinary bourgeois peace league, which cries "Peace, peace" where there is no peace, and the economic peace party, the socialist party, which wants to remove the causes of war, — so too with regard to the "woman question" the Congress equally clearly stressed the difference between the party of the "women's-rightsers" on the one side, who recognized no class struggle but only a struggle of sexes, who belong to the possessing class, and who want rights that would be an injustice against their working-class sisters, and, on the other side, the real women's party, the socialist party, which has a basic understanding of the economic causes of the present adverse position of working-women and which calls on the working-women to wage a common fight hand-in-hand with the men

of their class against the common enemy, *viz.* the men and women of the capitalist class.

The Brussels resolution is excellent as a declaration of principle —but what about its practical execution? How are women to achieve the civil and political rights it demands? For, so long as we do not soberly and realistically consider what must be done, nothing will come of theoretical proclamations on what-ought-to-be. It is not enough to point to the class struggle. The workers must also learn what weapons to use and how to use them; which positions to attack and which previously won advantages to maintain. And that is why the workers are now learning when and where to resort to strikes and boycotts, how to achieve protective legislation for workers, and what has to be done so that legislation already achieved does not remain a dead letter. And now, what do we women have to do? One thing without any doubt. We will organize — organize not as "women" but as *proletarians;* not as female rivals of our working men but as their comrades in struggle.

And the most serious question of all is: *how* should we organize? Now, it seems to me that we must commence by organizing as *trade-unionists* using our united strength as a means of reaching the ultimate goal, the emancipation of our class. The job will not be easy. In fact, the conditions of female labor are such that it is often heartbreakingly difficult to make progress. But from day to day the job will become easier, and it will begin to look less and less difficult in proportion as the women and especially the men learn to see what strength lies in the unification of an *workers.*

> *The Austrian working-women (Eleanor Marx went on to say) are showing they know how to organize, but they can learn from what their sisters are doing in other countries. In a series of articles reporting on women's unions in England, three conclusions will emerge:*

1) Wherever women organize, their position improves--that is, wages go up, hours are reduced, working conditions are improved.

2) It works to the advantage of the men at least as much as of the women when the latter organize and their wages are regarded as real *workers'* wages and not as little supplements to the general household fund.

3) Except in quite special trades, it is essential, in the case of unskilled workers especially, that men and women be members of one and the same trade-union, just as they are members of one and the same workers' party.

3. On the Workingwomen's Movement in England

In her next letter Eleanor Marx started her account of women's trade-union organization in England and its problems.

The article begins with a summary of the progress made by women's trade-unions since the start of the "New Unionism," marked by a match workers' strike, the founding of the Gas Workers Union [*of which Eleanor herself was an organizer and Executive member*], *the great dock strike, etc.*

Although we are happy to see this progress and also recognize the progress made by the organization of the workers, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that women still remain considerably behind and that the results actually attained by years of work are pitifully small.

Even in the textile industry, the first site of women's trade-union organization, there are still great inadequacies. Firstly, in many cases women still remain unorganized, though this situation is becoming less frequent; for the unions see how unorganized women workers become the employers' weapon against them. (Two examples are given.) *Secondly, the women unionists often have no voice in the administration of their union:*

For example, in Lancashire and Yorkshire, where the women almost without exception belong to unions, pay regular dues and of course also draw benefits from them, they have absolutely no part in the leadership of these organizations, no *voice in the administration of their*

own funds, and up to now have never become delegates to their own unions's congresses. Representation and administration lie wholly in the hands of the men workers.

The main reason for this apparent indifference and apathy on the part of the women can easily be discerned; it is common to a large part of all women's organizations and we cannot ignore it here. The reason is that even today women still have two duties to fulfill: in the factory they are *proletarians* and earn a daily wage on which they and their children live in large part;, but they are also *household slaves,* unpaid servants of their husbands, fathers and brothers. Even before going *to the* factory early *in* the morning, women have already done so much that if the men had to do it they would consider it a right good piece of work. Noon hour, which promises the men some rest at least, means no rest for the women. And finally evening, which the poor devil of a man claims for himself, must also be used for work by the even poorer devil of a woman. The housework must be done; the children must be taken care of; clothes must be washed and mended. In short, if men in an English factory town work ten hours, women have to work at least sixteen. How then can they show an active interest in anything else? It is a physical impossibility. And yet it is in these factory towns that on the whole women have it best. They make "good" wages, the men cannot get along without their work, and therefore they are relatively independent. It is only when we come to the towns or districts where woman labor means nothing but sweating work, where a great deal of *home work* [done at home for an employer] is the rule, that we find the worst conditions and the greatest need for organization.

In recent years much work has been done on this problem, but I am duty-bound .to say that the results bear no relation to the efforts made. However, the relatively small results, it seems to me, are not always due to the miserable conditions under which most of the female workers live. I think, rather, an important part of the reason is the way most of the women's unions, have been established and led. We find that most of them are led by people from the middle class, women as

well as men. No doubt these people mean well up to a certain point, but they cannot understand and do not want to understand what the movement of the working class really is about. They see the misery about them, they feel uneasy, and they would like to "ameliorate" the conditions of the unfortunate workers. But they do not belong to us.

Take the two organizations in London that have worked hard to help build women's unions. The older one is the Women's Trades Union Provident League; the newer one is the Women's Trades Union Association. The latter's aims are somewhat more advanced than the former's, but both are organized, led and supported by the most respectable and ingrained bourgeois types, men as well as women. Bishops, clergymen, bourgeois M.P.'s and their even more petty-bourgeois-minded wives, rich and aristocratic ladies and gentlemen — these are the patrons of a large number of women's unions.

Such shameless exploiters of labor as the millionaire Lord Brassen and such "ladies" as the wife of the arch-reactionary Sir Julian Goldschmid hold salon tea-parties to support the Women's League, while Lady Dilke utilizes the movement for her husband's political interests. How little these people understand about labor is evidenced by their amazement that the women at one meeting "revealed a very intelligent interest in...the wise counsels of their economic superiors"!

We hope and believe that working-women will take an equally "intelligent interest" in their own affairs and that they will take them over themselves, and above all that they will form a large and lively sector in the great modern movement of the proletariat. To a certain extent they have already done so.

4. A Women's Trade Union

In two ensuing letters in this series, Eleanor Marx continued her sketch of the English working-women's movement, describing the impact of the "old unionism" and the "new unionism," and a number of industries and situations involving

women's activity. The following extract is from the fourth letter, published May 20, 1892; it deals with an all-women's union:

The new Union of women cigarmakers, which I mentioned in my last letter, was founded about three years ago. Its members do not belong to the men's union, although the two unions work together. To the outsider it seems deplorable that the two unions do not wholly merge, albeit working together. The reason adduced by the men against amalgamation is that the women almost always view their work as a temporary thing and regard marriage as their real *trade,* one that frees them from the need to earn their own living. Of course, in the vast majority of cases marriage does not reduce the woman's work but doubles it, since she not only works for wages but also has to do hard unpaid "household" labor into the unholy bargain. In spite of all this, the women unfortunately do look on their work as temporary all too often, and defend this attitude of the who regard their wage-labor as "lifelong" and are therefore much more eager to improve the conditions they work under.

In London, explains the article, the women cigarmakers make 25-50% less than men, especially because they are kept in the lowlier kind of "preparation work"; and men workers complain when employers give women better jobs at lower wages, thus undercutting the general wage-rate. The remedy, however, is not to oppose such jobs for women but to demand equal pay. After discussing the work of the laundresses' union against horrible conditions, Eleanor adds a comment on two kinds of bourgeois women. The Laundresses had sent a delegation to Parliament to demand coverage under the Factory Act —

It is worth while to make the point that immediately Mrs. Fawcett, the reactionary bourgeois advocate of women's rights (of the rights of property-owning women), *who has never worked a day in her life*, along with Miss Lupton, an anarchist (likewise a woman of the middle class), sent a counter-delegation to protest against this intervention on woman labor!

To be just, I must mention another woman of the middle class, May Abrahams, the indefatigable secretary and organizer of the Laundresses Union. It is largely thanks to her that these women now

clearly understand the urgent question of governmental limitation of the work-day.

5. Women's Trade Unions in England

This was a polemical reply to an article, which the Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung *had reprinted from another periodical, by a Mrs. Ichenhauser, dealing with the above subject. Most of the long reply is a very factual exposure of the distortions and poor information in Ichenhauser's account, which was mainly a glorification of the Women's Trades Union Provident League (which had been discussed in the second article of the series). In the course there is a trenchant picture of what it means when the lords, ladies and bishops of the charitable League hold their tea-parties for their working-women wards. We here excerpt passages in which the article generalizes on the relation between bourgeois feminism and socialism.*

An old proverb says, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions." Women workers can well understand the demands of the bourgeois women's movement; they can and should even take a sympathetic attitude toward these demands; only, the goals, of the women-workers and the bourgeois women are very different.

Once for all, I would like to present my standpoint clearly, and I think I speak for many women. As women we certainly have a lively concern about winning for women the same rights as men, including working men, already possess today. But we believe that this "women's question" is an essential component in the *general* question of the emancipation of labor.

There is no doubt that there is a women's question. But for us—who gain the right to be counted among the working class either by birth or by working for the workers' cause — this issue belongs to the general working-class movement. We can understand, sympathize, and also help if need be, when women of the upper or middle class fight for rights that are well-founded and whose achievement will benefit working-women also. I say, we can even help: has not the *Communist Manifesto* taught us that it is out duty to support any

progressive movement that benefits the workers' cause, even if this movement is not our own?

If every demand raised by these women were granted today, we working-women would still be just where we were before. Women-workers would still work infamously long hours, for infamously low wages, under infamously unhealthful conditions; *they* would still *have only the choice* between prostitution and starvation. It would be still more true than ever that, in the class struggle, the working-women would find the good women among their bitter enemies; they would have to fight these women just as bitterly as their working-class brothers must fight the capitalists. The men and women of the middle class need a "free" field in order to exploit labor. Has not the star of the women's rights movement, Mrs. Fawcett, declared herself expressly in opposition to any legal reduction of working hours for female workers? It is interesting and worth mentioning that, on this question, the orthodox women's-rightsers and my good friend Mr. Base, the weak epigone of Schopenhauer's, both take absolutely the same position. For this women's-Rightsers as for this misogynist, "woman" is just woman. Neither of them sees that there is the exploiter woman of the middle class and the exploited woman of the working class. For us, however, the difference does exist. We see no more in common between a Mrs. Fawcett and a laundress than we see between Rothschild and one of his employees. In short, for us there is only the working-class movement.

The articles makes a short digression to pay tribute to a little-known woman. Eleanor relates that when her father wrote a reply to an attack on the International by a labor leader named George Howell, the "respectable" magazines refused to print it--

...so my father had to turn to a working woman who at that time edited a little weekly freethinkers' paper. She was pleased to print Karl Marx's reply to Mr. George Howell. The connection between Ms.

Ichenhauuser, my father, and the aforementioned Mrs. Harriet Law is not so far outside the scope of this article as it appears. Mrs. Law was the only woman who sat on the General Council of the International; she had already worked for years for her sex And class, long before the distinguished Mrs. Paterson who is credited by Ms. Ichenhauser with starting the movement. Mrs. Law was one of the first to recognize the importance of a women's organization from the proletarian point of view. Few speak of her today; few remember her. But one day when the history of the labor movement in England is written, the name of Harriet Law will be entered into the golden book of the proletariat.

Near the end of the article is another short summary passage. Eleanor has just made the point that the lords and ladies of the charitable Women's League are trying to "mend the decayed and rotten conditions of today" whereas "we *stand on the class-struggle viewpoint."*

For us there is no more a "women's question" from the bourgeois standpoint than there is a men's question. Where the bourgeois women demand rights that are of help to us too, we will fight together with them, just as the men of our class did not reject the right to vote because it came from the bourgeois class. We too will not reject any benefit, gained by the bourgeois women in their own interests, which they provide us willingly or unwillingly. We accept these benefits as weapons, weapons that enable us to fight better on the side of our working-class brothers. We are not women arrayed in struggle against men but workers *who are* in struggle *against the exploiters.*