WOMEN AND THE FRENCH FEMINIST, LABOR, AND SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS 1879-1919

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Introduction

Between 1879 and 1914, the French feminist, labor and socialist movements congealed in national organizations with clear programs, membership, and social bases. But as socialism wove stronger ties with the trade union movement, it became less feminist.[1] Conversely, as feminism gained a greater hearing among the established Third Republican elites, it lost its socialist and radical overtones.

The movements only overlapped on rare occasions and among narrow social layers: where feminists tried to create unions of women workers, among feminists disillusioned with piecemeal reform of capitalist society, where unions addressed the needs of their female members, and when socialists tried to recruit women. However these convergences remained sporadic and restricted to small numbers. No durable socialist-feminist-labor, feminist-labor, or socialist-feminist organizations emerged during that period.

Several historians have noted the divergence of the socialist and feminist movements during those years, describing it as the "failure of a synthesis", "missed opportunities", or "missed appointments".[2] They have assumed a natural affinity between the two movements for a number of

reasons. First, the utopian socialist tradition of Saint-Simon and Fourier had closely intertwined socialism and women's liberation; that early vision had found its fullest expression in the socialist feminism of Flora Tristan.3 Second, a wide current of French socialism--the Guesdistes--accepted Marx', Engels', and Bebel's theories on the existence of a primordial matriarchy, the large-scale integration of women into socialist industrial production, and the consequent equality of women and men under socialism. Finally, the socialist parties were the only major political force supporting women's right to vote and accepting women into membership.

Historians investigating the failure of a socialist-feminist synthesis have rightly focused on the socialist parties' attitude towards the "woman question". Theoretically of course, such a synthesis could have emerged from the lessons of feminists' involvement in the struggles of women workers, or of labor unions' attempts to defend the rights of women. In fact, that outcome was unlikely because both the feminist and union movements were ill-suited to take the necessary steps, i.e. deliberately politicizing the issues raised by women's struggles, generalizing the demands of those struggles through nation-wide periodicals, assemblies, propaganda campaigns and mass actions, and elaborating a program and theory capable of orienting organizations in national political debates and sustaining activists' commitment over long periods of time. Such efforts were more

consonant with the mission socialist parties assigned to themselves.

That the socialists failed to carry out that early promise is obvious enough. Determining the extent of their failure, however, requires a study of the social and political context, and the organizational choices available to socialists. The purpose of this paper is to sort out the differentllevels of causality discussed by various authors who, directly or indirectly, have addressed this problem.

The first set of works I turned to were those of historians of the feminist movement and women's status. Geneviève Gennari's Le Dossier de la Femme[4] barely addresses the question of socialism and feminism. More recently, Maïté Albistur and Daniel Armogathe's Histoire du Féminisme Français, du Moyen Age a Nos Jours contains some thoughts on "how women received Marxism". Jean Rabaut's Histoire des Féminsmes Français deals more extensively with the problem. I have examined these and other works not only for their direct feferences to "socialism and women", but also to elucidate the reasons why some authors seemed to find socialism unworthy of more than passing references in their studies of feminism.[4]

Another approach was to investigate the potential politicization of working women by feminist movements or labor unions. Studies on the nature and impact of women's work such as Evelyne Sullerot's very general Histoire et Sociologie du Travail Féminin, Patricia Branca's "A New Perspective on

Women's Work: a Comparative Typology", and Madeleine Guilbert's more specific Les Femmes et l'Organisation Syndicale avant 1914 fill in one aspect of the context.

The broad social and ideolggical pressures drawing working women away from potentially politicized autonomous social action are another aspect of the context. These would include the conception of family, the institutions of the Church, the teachings of the educational system, the feminine press and the model of femininity. Barbara Conrado Pope's "Angels in the Devil's Workshop: Leisured and Charitable Women in Nineteenth Century England and France", touches on certain aspects of the Catholic Church's influence. Nicole Benoît, Edgar Morin, and Bernard Paillard discuss the evolving relationship between femininity models and the impact of feminism and socialism on women, in La Femme Majeure.

Within this sociological-historical context, Marie-Hélène Zylberberg-Hocquard measures the feminists' and unionists' success in organizing working women in her study, Féminisme et Syndicalisme en France.[5]

The final set of works I sought out were histories of socialist women and the socialist movement's position on women's liberation. Charles Sowerwine's Women and Socialism In France, 1871-1921, and Marilyn J. Boxer's collective biography of French Socialist women were most informative. I also referred to studies of socialist women's organizations in other European countries for comparative purposes.[6]

Only the last-mentioned set of authors explicitly addresses the failure of a socialist-feminist synthesis. Nonetheless, the others investigate levels of social reality which determine the social and political limits within which a socialist and feminist confluence could take place. Using both sets of authors, I have distinguished five factors which affected the potential and actual overlap and combination of feminism and socialism. I will review them from the most "objective" and general to the most "subjective" and particular. They can be seen also as the more or less easily removed obstacles which socialist-feminsit leaders encountered. Briefly stated they are:

-the nature of women's participation in the economy;

-the hold of institutions drawing women away from, or providing substitutes for, autonomous social or political action;[7]

-the extent to which the potential for autonomous organization of workingwwomen was realized in fact;

-the coherence and accuracy of the program combining the women's liberation and class struggles;

-the success of organizational forms, policies, and individual leaders of the socialist parties.

Women in the French Economy and Society

All the studies mentioned earlier assumed some connection between women's economic role, their status in society, and

their outlook on social questions. One need not be a vulgar Marxist or an economic determinist to seek what types of material conditions favored a rejection of the status quo, rebelliousness, social involvement, political reflection, confidence in struggle, organization, union consciousness, feminist consciousness, in a word the preconditions for a socialist-feminist outlook.

Female movements of revolt do not depend on women's presence in factories. They antedate or exist alongside factories in pre- or non-industrial cities and villages; bread riots, anti-draft protests, participation in communal insurrections are well-known instances of such movements.

Socialist feminism is a specific ideology of revolt, and Marilyn Boxer and Jean Quataert see its origin as follows:

> Socialist feminism owed its social genesis to the growth in industrial female labor, even though throughout the period under investigation, the component of the total female workforce in factories was less than in agriculture, domestic service, and the home industries.[8]

Whether in large-scale industry or not, women witnessing and undergoing drastic social changes would tend to question the status quo and look for overall explanations. It is reasonable to speculate that socialist feminism though not necessarily originating in their own economic situation, could aspire to answer their questions and win their allegiance.

In this sense, the questions asked by students of the economic and sociological history of women are relevant to our inquiry: what was the role of women in the different

sectors of production? Did major changes in women's position in the workforce take place between 1879 and 1914? Did major changes in women's education, role in the family, and role in society take place?

In a comparative study of women in European economies, Patricia Branca has suggested that the most significant changes occured in the late XIXth and XXth centuries rather than during the classical period of the industrial revolution. She also proposed classifying European countries in two models based on women's place in production: England and Germany typified Model I; France, Belgium, and Northern Italy, Model II.[9] Compared to Model I's, Model II's female work force included more older and married women, and therefore constituted a larger percentage of the total female population. Branca's insights emphasize the importance of the period we are considering for a study of changes in the French female work force.

Zylberberg-Hocquard supplies some statistics which help us gain a sense of proportion.[10] In 1866, there were 12.3 million women between 15 and 65 years old. Of these, 5 million or 40% were considered "active". The definition of "active" probably excludes a wide spectrum of domestic tasks performed by women and is subject to some variation in the different censuses. By 1906 the respective figures were 12.8 million and 7.7 million or 59%. The number of women working had grown faster than that of men, since women were 30% of the "active"

population in 1866, and 37% in 1906. This represents a comparatively high female involvement in the workforce, consonant with Branca's observation.[11]

The breakdown by broad occupational category of the 7.7 million "active" women of 1906 gives a clearer picture of the situation. 3.3 million were in agriculture; 2.2 in industry; .9 were professionals or service, retail, and white-collar employees; and .8 were domestic servants.

By comparison with 1866, women in 1906 composed a larger share of workers in agriculture; a lesser one in mines, quarries, chemicals, rubber, cardboard, leather, and heavy metallurgy(due to protective legislation); a slight one in other industries(the average female percentage in all industries taken together increased from 30% in 1866 to 37.7% in 1906); a slightly lesser percentage of domestic servants; but most importantly, a much larger percentage of white collar and professional jobs(25.5% in 1866, 38.5% in 1906).

Let us review the different occupations of women with an eye to their possible effect on social consciousness.

The works I consulted say relatively little about the 3.3 million women in agriculture. Traditional rural domestic manufacture was declining, but women were finding new substitute articles to manufacture at home. Day-laborers, servants, and participants in family farming probably accounted for the bulk of "active" women in agriculture. No doubt these rural women held many grievances against bourgeois society and

their place in the family. They probably also belonged to networks of kin, neighbors, and mutual aid. But their dispersal and relative isolation from the mainstream of social change limited their ties to urban-based feminist, socialist, and even labor activities.

Women in industry included those who worked at home, in small sweatshops, and in large factories. Sweatshop and factory conditions might have given rise to job-centered social consciousness and organization. However, two factors mitigated that trend: 1. the abominable wages and working conditions of women reduced their ability to resist economic blackmail and spend time organizing, and 2. the conception of factory work as a temporary evil to be endured by young women until marriage or motherhood, and by widows, single mothers, and older women, only until they could find a better situation. Theresa McBride states:

> Because work for women comprised only a temporary stage, they did not feel the same stake in improving their economic position by striking as did male workers.[12]

Women who worked at home(seamstresses, etc.) would probably orient towards neighborhood or city-wide activities, rather than organization by job category.

Domestic servants tended to be young, to change jobs often, and came from distant areas. Several writers suggest that they tended to be the more enterprising elements of their home communities, willing to endure hardship and separation in order to make a new life for themselves. McBride writes:

> The preference of women for domestic service over industrial work suggests that women's dispersion throughout the economy had much to do with their own attitude about work.[13]

After putting together some savings and learning some skills, servants could open small shops(laundries, eating places, retail stores, boarding houses), take on work at home, and/or marry an artisan or worker. The radicalism they might have felt as servants would then find expression, later, when they acquired some modicum of independence, in neighborhood activities and support of labor organizations. However, individualist ideologies of "lifting oneself up by one's own bootstraps", and "maternalist" relations between employer and maid, might act as countervailing trends.

The most dynamic sectors of female labor were bank clerks, department store salespeople, accountants, teachers, postal and otehr state employees. Althought these sectors were small compared to their size today, they were the most important outlet for the newly educated women. Many positions were considered life-time careers, and as a result, women in these branches placed greater emphasis on job-related organization.

Finally, many liberal professions opened to women in this period. Writers and journalists were now joined by professors, doctors, lawyers, social workers, scientists. Reform feminism found its best reception among them.

We have considered women's role in production as a potential source of radicalism. Let us now consider their role in

reproduction of the labor force. Did changes in family arrangements raise broad questions about women's status in bourgeois society? Did these changes favor social action by women?

Our period saw the beginning of pompulsory public primary education for girls. However, the curriculum was designed to prepare them for slightly updated versions of traditional female roles: the understanding companion of a Republican husband, the patriotic mother offfuture French soldiers. In the family, the daughter was expected to help her mother serve both her father and brothers.

Young women remained under familial supervision until they married. Even when they worked away ffom home, they usually did not retain control of their wages.

Given the greater availability of schools, a mother could now send some of her children away for part of the day. This was a mixed blessing since she thereby lost the help they were expected to provide. A few appliances such as the sewing machine also introduced some change in the household. However, little or no progress was made to alleviate women's role as baby-sitter, cook, cleaner, and healer; child-care centers, low-cost laundries, low-cost restaurants, and health care facilities remained as distant a dream as ever. It is interesting that in 1848, various categories of workers had demanded that national laundries and restaurants be set up; moreover, 500 midwives had proposed that they be hired by the state and

dispense their services gratuitously.[14] Such demands do not appear directly in the works on the peridd we are considering. However, it is possible that cooperatives, protests over prices, anti-militarism, and charity were all responses to these needs of working-class women.

Finally, women's problems as potential child-bearers are alluded to by demographic studies.[15] These seem to indicate a usually unspoken, but major grievance centered around a woman's right to control her body through the availability of legal contraceptives, abortion, and pregancy rights. Demographers point to a stagnation of the population, later marriages, and fewer children per family. They infer the existence of a deliberate will to control births. This is confirmed by the spread of illegal contraceptive devices and abortion advertisements.

To conclude, between 1879 and 1914, wom n's position in the French economy and society did undergo deep changes, leave crying needs unmet, and provide a base for socialaaction. However, the various situations in which women found themselves--age, class, occupation, rural/urban, marital status-- did not generate the same feeling of urgency about all points of a socialist feminist program. Meliorative measures could be sought, other forms of revolt resorted to. Socialist feminism would do best among permanent factory workers, skilled workers, working women in working class neighborhoods, teachers, and public employees. Permanent and reasonably paid

female factory workers were still a minority among their underpaid and temporary sisters. Female teachers, public employees, and white collar workers were growing in numbers.

Obstacles and Alternatives to Social Action

Economic, sociological, and demographic studies only reveal potential bases for social action by women in response to unmet social needs. A number of institutions operated to prevent social struggles and autonomous movements from actually developing. Their hold on women varied, but over a 40-year period, they drastically circumscribed the sphere of action and appeal of feminist, labor, and socialist movements.

The very structures of the French state acted to remove women from centers of power and political life. Civil laws bound them to their father and husband. Denial of suffrage made political debate seem irrelevant. Exclusion from the armed forces reinforced the image of women as weak, and served as a justification for denial of political rights--membership in the polity was a reward earned by military service. The state educational system maintained separate classes for girls; their curriculum was designed to prepare them for a subordinate role. The police and courts actively suppressed women activists of the Commune, women's strikes, and women agitators, as they suppressed their male counterparts.

Although the Church is often mentioned in women's history, the nature and extent of its actual hold on women is seldom

detailed. Radicals', Free Masons, and Socialist deputies' fears that women's vote would increase clerical political influence is discussed. But none of the essays I read seriously analyzed the role of the parish church in women's lives: how often did they congregate there, what social contacts did they make through it, what services did they provide? As for the regular clergy, according to Barbara Corrado Pope, "in France as many as 150,000 women entered the convent in the last fifty years of the century".[16]

The Catholic Church was very active in charity work. The Society for Maternal Charity aided poor pregnant women. The Saint Regis Society urged common-law spouses to regularize their union in religious weddings. Other agencies provided orphanages, schools, sewing classes, clubs for poor and working women, hostels for young women, visits to the sick, to prisons and hospitals, employment in religious enterprises, and placement as maids or workers. Interestingly, the Catholic associations also provided childcare centers (creches) "by the end of the 19th century, thousands of creches existed throughout the country."[17]

All Catholic institutions cannot be classified as obstacles to social action by women. Some were also alternatives, and a few, usually for short periods, avenues towards self-organization. Of course, the fundamental teachings of the Catholic Church directed women towards purification in

the holy orders, or as a second choice, towards marriage, motherhood, and the home. However, when women had to work outside the home, the Church advocated protective measures. Especially after the encyclical "De Rerum Novarum"(1891) and the Catholic ralliement to the existing republican regime, Catholics were engedraged to take on social responsibilities --in large part to combat the influence of godless materialism and socialism. In 1891, Count Albert De Mun, associated with the Catholic Right, spoke in the National Assembly in support of a ban on night work by women. Thereafter lesiured Catholic women's traditional charity work was expanded. The new Catholic social doctrine led to missionary efforts among workers of both sexes, and to the formation of mixed unions (uniting Catholic employers and their workers). Ultimately some of these unions could be conquered by their rank and file, buttthis was the exception. Pope comments:

> When Catholicism did not dominate philanthropy, municipalities often did, for the government traditionally intervened in charity work in France. Needless to say, men commanded the power structures of both Church and state institutions.[18]

Domination by employers and male overseers thus seriously lessened the chances of these Catholic women's groups evolving towards autonomous social action arganizations. However, as Zylberberg-Hocquard points out, their success in recruiting women workers eventually stimulated the class-struggle unions to compete with them by opening real unions to women workers.

The impact of the Church on French women was obviously enormous and diversified. It deserves to be studied in great detail.

The press and literature also drew women away from social action. Two new ideas about the "modern woman" are discussed by several authors I consulted: romantic marriages and fashion. Newspapers, magazines, popular literature, and novels promoted the concept of marriage based on love over marriages of convenience and family-arranged alliances. Marriage based on love was presented as an individual and free decision: it bound women all the more powerfully to the family and home they had "freely" chosen. In its new psychological guise, the economic and social compulsion to assume the role of underpaid temporary worker, housewife, and mother, was harder to identify.

The "modern woman" was also duty-bound to keep up with the latest fashion and household management methods. An array of new women's magazines disseminated the new model of femininity. Genevieve Gennari cites Le Moniteur de la Mode with 200,000 subscribers in 1890, and Edgar Morin Le Petit Echo de la Mode with 250,000 copies in 1893, designed for masmass readership.[19] These magazines reduced women's isolation in home, small towns, and separate neighborhoods, and integrated them in a national market of things and ideas. At the same time, they diverted women's little free time and margin of independence within the home, away from social action.

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of these various institutions in the abstract. For example, denial of the right to vote could either depoliticize women or unite them against a crying injustice. Organizing women into Catholic associations could either enhance the Church's influence or provide a milieu in which working women could begin to formualte demands and fight for their own interests. Homogenizing the model of femininity could either turn women away from social action or create an awareness of common difficulties in achieving the expected norm. Both processi could occur in succession within the same layer, or at the same time among different layers. One could make the dame observation about the opening of the liberal professions to women: it could either totally absorb them in privileged careers, or gove them greater leverage in advancing the cause of all women.

It seems that the impact of these institutions would depend to a large extent on the overall ppbitical climate, and the specific organizational efforts of competing social forces. Unfortunately, the period studied--1879 to 1914--is bounded by,but excludes two great rises of the French working class: the Paris Commune of 1871 and the post-war upsurge of 1977-1920. It would be useful to examine what happened to these institutions during these momemts of heightened class struggle: were they bypassed, transformed, or did they effectively block women's participation?

Autonomous Social Action by Working Women

We have assumed that socialist feminism was an ideology that grew out of, and could most easily strike a chord in, women working outside the home and involved in autonomous social action. The range of such autonomous action is quite broad. Union organization stands somewhere in the middle of a spectrum, between on the one hand, cultural manifestations, consumer movements, cooperatives, unaffiliated neighborhood meetings and clubs, demonstrations, and on the other, membership in permanent political organizations, whether socialist, anarchist or feminist.

We will deal with the political movements later. As for women's demonstrations, cooperatives, and clubs, they receive little attention in the literature I reviewed. Obviously, insofar as such activities existed, they prepared and facilitated working women's membership in trade unions and political leagues. Theresa McBride mentions a study by Alan Binstock on the role of women in the 1900 strike of the shoemakers of Fougeres, a stronghold of syndicalism in Normandy.[20] It will be necessary to bear such movements in mind as factors which could affect women's participation in unions.

In addition to their own traditions of struggle, women's membership in unions depanded on the efforts of the CGT and others interested in organizing them. Marilyn Boxer summarizes the overall situation thus:

> Unionization of women proceeded at an infinitesimal pace, reaching scarcely 5% of syndicated workers in departments where the syndicates were strongest, despite the fact that women made up roughly 30 to 40% of the working force in these areas. The ineffectiveness of this solution is underscored by the recognition that in 1900, only some 3% of all French workers belonged to the syndicates.[21]

Zylberberg-Hocquard shows that although the numbers remained small, unionization of women increased substantially between 1900 and 1911, when it culminated at the figure of 101,049 members of the CGT, and 7,566 members of mixed unions. Table 1 shows the increase in greater detail:[22]

Table 1

Overall union strength	1900	1911
%of CGT members in active population	2.49%	4.45%
number of CGT members	492,645	1,029,238
Unionization of women		
% of women in active population	34.5%	35.8%
number of women in CGT	30,975	101,049
number of women in mixed unions	4,791	7,566
% of women in CGT	6.3%	9.8%
% of women in mixed unions	16.2%	18.8%

Zylberberg-Hocquard lists four types of unionization of women:

-into class-struggle unions

-into unions of feminist origin

-into mixed(company or yellow) unions

-into Catholic unions.

Women's membership in class struggle unions--almost always affiliated to the CGT-- arose either by the opening of previously all-male unions to female workers, or by the affiliation of all-women's unions to the CGT. The small number involved was due to several obstacles.

The influence of Proudhon's anti-feminism remained strong among CGT members. According to the apostle of mutualism, a woman was either a prostitute or a housewife ("Courtisane ou Menagere"). Proudhon's followers at first squarely opposed women working outside the home, and called strikes to exclude them from their trades. The union of typographers, led by the reformist Keufer, was typical of this trend based mainly among skilled workers in small workshops. Later they supported the demand for "equal pay for equal work" and protective legislation, in the hope it would drive women out of industry.

Independently of Proudhon's influence, male CGT members were generally pessimistic about women joining unions. Zylberberg-Hocquard mentions the following complaints:

-women considered their work temporary,

-women considered their wage a mere addition to the basic wage of the head of the household,

-women were unskilled workers,

-women worked mainly in small enterprises,

-women's duties at home left them no time for union business,

-women were too poor to pay union dues

-women were too closely chaperoned by their employers

-women heads of households were terrified of loeing their income.

Female CGT organizers like Marie Guillot, Louise-Marie Compain, and Marcelle Capy pointed to the obstacles erected by male workers: women often needed their husband's permission to join a union; union halls appeared as violent, chaotic places; union members often met in all-male environments like drinking and smoking joints; women were told voting was not their business.

According to Zylberbegg-Hocquard, women joined CGT unions during strikes--and often left shortly thereafter-- or during campaigns for concrete reforms like the 8-hour day or the English Week. Most were workers with few skills. The CGT did not finally decide on a major effort to recruit women until 1914 when it launched the Ligue Féminine d'Action Syndicaliste.[23]

As a whole, the feminist movement was not particularly interested in women workers. Its mainstream currents relied on contacts with, and pressure on, bourgeois political formations(Opportunist Republicans, Radicals, Free Masons) to achieve reforms in civil law, education, and the franchise. Only the more intransigent feminists called for immediately granting the suffrage to all women. The others accepted the argument that the move should be postponed until Republican schools for girls has reduced clerical influence. The

intransigent wing was inclined to arouse mass support for its goals from women outside the elite. Thus in 1897, Marguerite Durand founded a mass-appeal women's daily, La Fronde. In April 1914, a mock election organized by Le Journal drew 505,912 ballots from all corners of France in favor of women's suffrage. At the same time, a demonstration was scheduled in Paris, at the statue of Condorcet, an 18th century supporter of women's rights.

Feminist involvement with working women ranged from typical charity efforts, to sponsorship of reform legislation, and "maternalist" organization of workers. Unions were set up to help women workers find jobs, develop skills, and improve their lived. Zylberberg-Hocquard mentions a "union of women cashiers and accountants", a "union of florists, feather-workers, and allied professions", a "union of steno-dactylographers", a "union of midwives", and a "union of women typographers". She describes these unions as reformist, often really placement and reference services, attracting mainly active petty-bourgeois women and white-collar workers. These unions were not necessarily for class peace and collaboration with their employers, but they did view rich women as potential allies, and male unions andpotential enemies. Their success was due to the lack of organizing efforts by the CGT, or in the case of typographers, by the exclusion of women from the CGT affiliate.

One wing of social Catholicism supported unions which excludd employers from membership. Some of these were

composed of women. The "syndicats Rochebillard" were founded in 1898 in Lyon among retail clerks, needle trades, and silk workers. The "syndicats professionels feminins de l'Abbaye" were founded in 1902 in Paris, by Sister Milcent of the order of Saint Vincent de Paul. By 1912 they had about 4,500 members.

Some of the unions created by moderate feminism and social Catholicism included employers. These mixed unions were most numerous in the departments of the Seine(Paris) and the Nord(Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing), based mainly in small fgarment and textile shops.

On the whole, Catholics and feminists were not much more successful than the CGT in organizing women workers. They fared better among educated white-collar workers, women excluded by the CGT, and in very small shops. However their publicizing and organizing efforts eventually stimulated the CGT to enter the field of women's unionism. The extreme conservatism and lack of democracy in Catholic unions tended to dampen the militancy and social awareness of their members. By contrast, feminist unions aspired to be "real unions". Their hostility to the CGT was not as deeply rooted and could be overcome through experiences of class solidarity and overtures by the CGT.

On the long run, the bourgeois feminist movement was not primarily interested in organizing effective unions of workers. Unions initiated by feminists were too few and short-lived to evolve a labor-feminsit synthesis. The CGT teachers union was the main labor organization where such a synthesis did

develop. Here, women workers fought for equal pay, unionization of working women, the right to vote, and against war. Although some were probably members of the socialist party, they were mainly active as syndicalists and feminists. The socialist party failed to provide them with a forum.

An Undeveloped Program

We have so far discussed the most likely social bases of socialist feminism. Female trade unionists of the CGT could combine their syndicalist vision with a fight for women's rights. Feminist specialists of labor questions and union organizers could extend their fight against women's oppression to a fight against all social injustice. Women involved in socialist activities could be encouraged to emphasize issues of immediate concern to women. But none of these approaches necessarily led to a rounded socialist-feminist outlook.

In fact, each movement focused more and more narrowly on one aspect of women's liberation. Moderate feminists emphasized the fight for civil, juridical, and educational equality. Intransigent feminists considered the right to vote more decisive. Feminsit labor efforts were directed at improving the professional skills and opportunities of working women. CGT trade unions demanded "equal pay for equal work", protective legislation, the 8-hour day, and the English Week. Socialist women, as we shall see in more detail in a later section of this paper, believed in drawing women into political action through socialist organizations. Finally, only the

neo-Malthusian movement spoke to the issue of contraception and abortion.

Few thinkers had discovered a fundamental unifying point of view underlying these diverse aspirations. In this sense, the basic question of this paper could be anachronistic, for it assumes the existence of a program which only the current socialist wing of the women's liberation movement has fully elaborated, a program combining demands for equal political rights, equal education, equal pay, affirmative action, socialized childcare, laundry, eating, and health facilities, free contraception and abortion, with demands for public ownership of industry, planned production, and self-management. However, some isolated precursors had combined some or most of these ideas.

Bernard Paillard points out that the political, economic, and sexual themes of women's liberation had been united in pre-industrial feminism:

> On the eve of the French Revolution, philosophical feminism had forged its ideal: identity and equality of man and woman... it was founded on a global human nature in which man and woman partook equally.[24]

After the revolution of 1830, when the effects of Jacobin and Bonapartist repression had worn off, this unity was developed by the utopian socialist continuators of the Enlightenment:

> At the heart of the Saint-Simonian feminism, the three great tendencies towards which feminist strategies would evolve, still mingled. The one was political, juridical, intellectual, and bourgeois; the other economic, social, and popular; and the third, marginal, romantic, and sexual.[25]

After the workers uprisings of 1848 and 1871, and their

ruthless suppression by bourgeois armies, utopian socialism divided into working class socialism and bourgeois republicanism. In a parallel evolution bourgeois liberal feminism and worker socialist feminism increasingly drew apart; a handful of anarchists and neo-malthusians continued the romantic trend.

Each of these three movements gradually narrowed its scope. Bourgeois feminism pushed for reforms to defend and improve the status af bourgeois and professional women. Workers' feminism abandoned its original call for socialization and collectivization of domestic and mothering taaks. Instead it fought for legislative regulation of women's work, equal pay, defense of the child and family. Paillard comments:

> Thus as the emancipating Saint-Simonian utopia exploded into a double female trade-unionism, it not only dissociated but narrowed ideologically. The first advances reduced the origibal virulence of the demands. The Saint-Simonian utopia held an extraordinary corrosive power and revolutionary potential, overthrowing at once marital situation, domestic condition, wage exploitation, and political-juridical subordination. But resting in idealist fashion on the image of a "univerdal woman", the Saint-Simonian utopia disintegrated upon meeting a complex female condition stamped with all the oppositions and antagonisms of society. It was grafted and split on the two main female layers which had formed separately: the wage-earning mass and the liberal intelligentsia. Far from interpenetrating and cross-fertilizing, these layers further accentuatdd their particularisms as they evolved. Each drifted towards a spetific reformism.[26]

transThemhng-Lalthusiahomavementlynpeamnhgd movementevPaitland concludes:

> Radical at the outset, the three tendencies became reforming. The female question rose, full of promise,

at the dawn of the bourgeois era: confronted with the social question, it dispersed and drowned in it.[27]

Paillard's observations are quite useful. The problem was not so much that each movement fought for limited reforms that would immediately improve the lot of the people it represented. Rather it was the fact that these reforms were being pursued within a narrow ideological framework which countered any tendency towards generalizing, politicizing, and class solidarity.

Moderate feminists were willing to subordinate working women's political rights to the fears of Opportunist and Radical politicians. Schemes for a limited women's franchise based on education, propeety, or widowhood were discussed.

Anarchists and syndicalists professed contempt for the right to vote. CGT spokespeople mocked bourgeois" women's aspiration for dignified work when working class children were left unattended. Socialists dropped or de-emphasized the pland on women's rights in their election programs.

The Marxist program more or less adopted by the Guesdistes included some general bases from which a socialist feminist synthesis could evolve.[28] It included:

-a refutation of women's "natural" inferiority based on the demonstration that primitive communist societies were matriarchal;

-an explanation of women's oppression as linked to the rise of private property;

-advocacy of immediate equal political rights for women, and membership in the party;

-the promise of complete equality under socialism.

Engels' and Bebel's works were translated into French, and popularized by Lafargue and others. But the Germans' French followers added a veneration of maternity quite alien from the original analysis. Aline Valette, the national secretary of the Parti Ouvrier Français, deepened this emphasis on motherhood in her theory of "Sexualism".[29]

It must be added that the recent experience of the Paris Commune made proletarian revolution seem realistic and not too distant. The fourth point mentioned above, complete equality under socialism, therefore could be a potent argument for feminists enlisting as revolutionary educators and agitators. In this regard, the socialist parties' appeal would decrease as they became more parliamentary and gradualist.

The milieu in which socialist feminist ideas developed furthest was among the already mentioned revolutionary syndicalist teachers, insurectionary socialists, and anarchists. The official socialist women's group which came to be dominated by Louise Saumoneau, made little theoretical progress.

L'Ecole Emancipée, the periodical of syndicalist teachers, carried articles by Marie Guillot and others strongly arguing for a women's right to work, economic independence, and sharing of domestic chores.[30] A letter in the syndicalist review, La Vie Ouvriere, of January 5, 1913, exclaimed:

> Women are missing at La Vie Ouvriere, can't you see! Do you think you can make the revolution or carry out an economic transformation without the participation of women?

Marie Guillot was to lead the feminists in the CGT in forming the women's division in 1914.

The independent socialist La Revue Socialiste kept good relations with the feminist movement and regularly reviewed theoretical works on the condition of women; it carried some articles by MadeleinedPelletier and Paule Mink. Paule Mink had been a leader in the Paris Commune. Madeleine Pelletier consistently tried to join the most radical faction ofthe SFIO. She sided first with Guesdistes, then with the reputedly insurectionist Herveistes. She also had ties to the anarchists. Perhaps more than any other figure of the period, she embodied the unity of socialist feminist themes. She was a medical doctor and scientific lecturer on women's equality. She supported a women's right ot abortion and contraception. She actively campaigned for the right to vote. She helped recruit to, and ran in election campaigns of the socialist party. But, although born in poverty, Pelletier shared a weakness with the whole milieu of left socialists, theoretical syndicalists, anarchists, and neo-malthusians, i.e. tenuous ties with organized women workers. At the 1909 Saint Etienne Congress of the SFIO, she argued:

> The Socialist Party must not be a party of social peace, but a party of social revolution, a party of revolt into which, alongside the working class, we enter, we the déclassés. 31

According to Sowerwine, she "often argued that the working

class would be the last to come to feminism".[32]

Angus McLaren has examined the pronouncements of French socialist and union leaders on birth control, and concluded that it was universally rejected by the mainstream.[33] He adds that feminists also opposed birth control. Only anarchist and liberal fringes endorsed neo-Malthusianism, while rank-and-file workers practised its precepts.

Focusing on the grass-roots level, Francis Ronsin concludes that neo-Malthusianism was actually quite widely supported.[34] Several union bodies officially endorsed it, more urged their members to investigate it individually. Union headquarters often made available a desk to the neo-Malthusian movement for informational brochures and sale of contraceptive devices. However, from reading Francis Ronsin's article, it seems that neo-Malthusianism did not deal with contraception and abortion from the poitn of view of a woman's right to control her body, but rather from the point of view of enhancing males' access to intercourse and ability to adjust family size to their income.

In at least one case though, neo-Malthusianism fused with feminism and social revolution. The "integral feminsim" of Nelly Roussel led her to preach birth control, sharing of domestic chores, women's suffrage, women's right to work and union rights, and ti-clericalism and anti-militarism.[35]

It seems that by 1913 and 1914, the narrow reformism of the bourgeois feminist, union and socialist feminisms, and

neo-Malthusianism, had begun to arouse some opposition. The radicalization of these opposition currents was temporarily halted by the war. But it emerged with redoubled force under the impact of the Russian Revolution and the 1917-20 strike waves. For a brief moment, former civil libertarians like Severine, former insurectional socialists like Madeleine Pelletier, former syndicalists like Marie Guillot, former socialist women like Louise Saumoneau, converged in the nascent Communist Party. The convergence was too brief to produce a milieu in which a real synthesis could develop. While it lasted, Alexandra Kollontay's ideas were imported and diffused by Communist propagandists.

But prior to 1914, even when a militant working woman radicalized in opposition to mainstream feminism, syndicalism, or socialism, the chances of her being presented a socialist feminist analysis were close to nil. Such an analysis only existed in sporadic underdeveloped form in the writings of a few leaders.

Organizational and Leadership Problems of the Socialists

A comparative approach to the failure of synthesis helps to grasp the dimensions of the problem. According to Charles Sowerwine, between 1879 and 1914, the female membership of the French socialist parties always oscillated around 2 or 3%; it never reached the figure of 1,000. By contrast the figures for German Social-Democrats are 16% or 175,000 members.

This startling comparison must be placed in context. Since the German SPD controlled the unions, the transition from union to party was easier. In France, the Guesdiste plan to affiliate the unions to the socialist party had been defeated. The CGT was independent, more revolutionary, and proportionally smaller in numbers than the mass German unions. Thus, while the 101,000 female members of the CGT in 1911 might have been less numerous than the German female union members, they were probably also more consciously revolutionary but nonetheless less likely to join a socialist party. This qualification however, does not remove the whole problem of the great discrepancy.

Sowerwine offers three reasons for the relative success of the German SPD.[36] First, until 1890, women were legally prohibited from joining the socialist party, and the socialists formed all-women'ssgroups to get around the law. Second, the socialists maintained these independent socialist women's organizations even after the law was repealed, and reinforced tham with a central newspaper. And third, the political genius of Clara Zetkin breathed life into the organization.

By contrast, in Frnace women were immediately admitted into membership in the party in 1879. Nevertheless a few socialist women's groups existed and were represented in congresses along with socialist clubs, cooperatives, etc...

After the unification of 1905, the party shifted to an entirely territorial structure, excluding representation for non-party organisms. Deprived af an independent base, women found it more difficult to get elected to leadership positions.

Furthermore, the party doctrine more and more clearly opposed independent socialist women's groups. The independent Union des Femmes(UDF: 1880-1884) , and Groupe Feministe Socialiste(GFS: 1899-1902) had been relatively successful. But after 1905, the new organization, the Groupe des Femmes Socialistes(GDFS) was formed as a subcommittee of the party. To join the GDFS, women had first to join the SFIO. This was an unlikely step because most SFIO meetings were consumed with preparations for elections in which women could not vote. Many observers also observed that a woman without prior political experience was likely to be made to feel uncomfortable in all-male meetings.

Only a small minority of women members of the SFIO participated in the GDFS. The group was small enough that personality conflicts to matter. Madeleine Pelletier never joined it. A conflict emerged between the "pro-feminist" socialists led by Elizabeth Renaud, and the hard-line "proletarians" led by Louise Saumoneau. When the latter finally triumphed in 1913, the group refused to get involved in the national campaign tho reinstate Louis Couriau in the typographers union. (He had been expelled for allowing his wife to work and urging her tao join the union). In 1914, the GDFS began to grow and formed a few new chapters in the

Paris area and the provinces. Prodded by the Second International, the SFIO gave a little more support to the GDFS. The GDFS modeled itself on Clara Zetkin's organization, put out a newspapar, La Femme Socialiste, and actively built the International Women's Day of March 8, 1914.

7 The GDFS' approach was to build support for socialism among women. Unionists who wanted labor legislation initiated, and feminists who wanted a bill for women's franchise, could contact socialist parliamentarians directly. If there was to be mass action on behalf of these goals, it would be conducted through the CGT or feminist movements; at any rate it was not the province of the socialist party organizations. The GDFS' self-definition fitted neatly in that schema. As the SFIO did not organize rank-and-file socialist militants in the unions to challenge the CGT leadership, so it failed to urge socialist women to challenge bourgeois feminists for leadership of the suffragist movement. The parliamentary parliamentarians' friendly relations with feminist and CGT tops illustrated well the peaceful coexistence of these three leaderships on the eve of the war.

Several other organizational problems related to the social base of socialist women deserve mention.

The studies on the feminist, ulabor, and socialist movements, mention almost no attempts to reach peasant women. Sowerwine makes two references to such attempts.[37] He describes thelecture tours of Gabrielle Petit, an

unaffiliated working-class socialist-feminist agitator, in 1907, and the conditions of he arrest in the small country town of Raon-l'Etape(in Lorraine). He also writes that, at the SFIO congress of Strasbourg in 1920,

> ...it was urged that the CAP choose a woman among the several paid propagandists("delegues permanents a la propagande"). Saumoneau was a logical choice, particularly as she was known for her good relations with the peasants, towards whom Leon Blum insisted that more propaganda be directed. Saumoneau was duly chosen by the CAP, and took up her duties in April, touring the Lot-et-Garonne to explain to peasants(and particularly to women) that the era of revolution had opened.

This passge suggests a prior history of contacts with peasant women which apparently left no permanent organization. It indicates neit neither the place of opposition to war and the military in the propaganda towards peasant women, nor the other issues discussed. On the whole it is very difficult to evaluate the potential receptivity of peasant women to socialist and feminist proposals on the basis of the sources I read.

The short-lived GFS founded in 1899 counted several seamstresses among its members.[38] Saumoneau herself had been a seamstress before tutoring French. The GFS helped form a small all-women union of seamstresses whioh later merged with a larger union that included men and women.

The GFS met first in the 5th arrondissement of Paris, the Latin Quarter. One of the members who ran a boarding house offered her living room as a meeting hall. In 1900, two new groups were formed in more proletarian. One group met in a cooperative, functioned as a circle for informal

discussion between women of the neighborhood, and held occasional concerts, dances, and lectures. It had some problems excluding anarchist men who wanted to object to all-women's groups. The other group was by Adele Kassky, a Communard and a laundress, and two friends. It was open to men and more feminist than the original GFS. It held fetes including speeches to recruit new members.

There were other attempts to establish socialist women's groups of the SFIO, but they lacked continuity because the socialist party gave little support. Their newspapers were irregular. City-wide groups that met in a central neighborhood, usually the Latin Quarter, attracted a high percentage of women already involved in politics of one kind or another. Saumoneau treid to set up groups in the Paris proletarian suburbs, and occasionally succeeded.

One other organizational experience produced interesting results: the election campaigns of Madeleine Pelletier, Caroline Kaufmann, and Elizabeth Renaud, on a SFIO ticket in 1910 and 1912.[39] All three women were given districts where the SFIO had no chance of winning. Pelletier, speaking in the very wealthy 8th arrondissement of Paris, aroused domestic servants against their employers with some success, according to one journalist. Reanud ran in a district on the outskirts of Vienne, in the Isere. She was supported by a strong socialist daily in Grenoble, and a strong feminist teachers organization, and managed to win over a large number of peasants.

These examples show that in every instance where the socialists seriously set out to recruit and organize women, they found some measure of success. The potential support though, was barely tapped. For a long time the socialists downgraded the urgency of women's right to vote and the demand for equal pay. Individual female militants found little concrete support from the party hierarchy. As a result, the lessons of their efforts were not shared and passed on. Female leaders of the party had no base in the membership from which to wage even the most modest struggle for party reform. The separation from the VGT made matters worse as it deprived socialist women of contact with, and support from, active women workers.

Conclusion

Sowerwine contrasts France, Germany, and other countries of continental Europe with the Anglo-Saxon countries. The latter produced large feminist movements, which focused on women's suffrage and cut across class lines. The former produced small feminist movements and deep division between socialist women and bourgeois feminists. Sowerwine suggests that in the continental countries, class conflict, the memory of revolution, and struggles for national unification, dominated the political arena and overrode women's concerns.

Fear of social revolution may explain bourgeois feminism's underdevelopment in France. After the Paris

Commune, the French feminist movement split between partisans of the policy of the "breach"(piecemeal demands) and partisans of the policy of the "assault"(broad demands). The partisans of the "breach" came to dominate the movement and refrained from appealing to lower-class women and organizing mass action. The main bourgeois parties periodically granted minor reforms which sealed their compact with moderate feminism.

But the acuteness of class conflict doesn't explain the small size of socialist feminism. Insofar as class conflict mobilized working women, its effect would seem to be the reverse. Rather the answer must be sought in organizational and programmatic questions. After 1900, the workers movement became entrenched in organization by trade(CGT) and organization by electoral districts(SFIO). The first mode might reach a few permanent skilled women workers; the second could involve only a handful of already political women. Neither could attract the bulk of working women. Prior to 1905, when the socialist parties were still small and engaged mainly in education and propaganda, women had participated in a more equal footing in lecture tours and neighborhood meetings. They continued to do so, insofar as the socialists carried out such work and appealed to them. But the big missing link was mass action: strikes, demonstrations, mass rallies, barricades or insurrections.

Finally, the program of the workers' movement was tailored to its organizational base. Aside from the revolutionary

rhetoric, the CGT more and more centered its demands on wages and working conditions, the SFIO on legislative reform. In both cases the result was to sacrifice the struggle for women's rights, and weaken the attractiveness of the promise of equality under socialism.

Marilyn Boxer sums up the problem well:

> Failing to see the struggle for freedom as a total revolution encompassing personal as well as political, sexual as well as economic, and private as well as public, dimensions of human experience, it would not truly incorporate feminist goals. Feminism, in order to achieve a fully functional equality between the sexes, would require revolutionary changes in all aspects of society. Therefore the "synthesis" of socialism and feminism in France, begun by the utopian socialists, remained an ideal and an illusion.[40]

FOOTNOTES

1. "Feminist" is used in this paper to indicate active advocacy of women's equality, not nedessarily a belief in the solidarity of all women.

2. Marilyn Boxer in "Socialism Faces Feminism", and Yvette Roudy, La Femmeren Marxe, p. 135. The full reference for these and other sources in this paper, is listed in the section entitled "Works Consulted". The focus on the relation between feminsim and socialist parties dictated the choice of chronological limits of this essay. Boxer uses 1879(the first socialist congress) as a beginning date. Sowerwine use 1871(after the Paris Commune). Boxer ends with 1914; Sowewine with 1920, but doesn't deal with the war-time and post-war social situation of women.

3. See Jean S. Moon, "Feminsim and Socialism: the Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan".

4. See the books and articles listed under "Works Consulted. On French Feminism".

5. See the books and articles on women's work, socialization, and unionization listed under "Works Consulted. On Women's Work and Unions in France".

6. See books and articles listed in "Works Consulted. On French Socialism and Women".

7. I will use "autonomous" not to refer to actual consciousness of independent, antagonistic social interests, but to describe a definition of the constituency appealed to, and a measure of rank-and-file control which might lead movements to evolve towards class consciousness.

8. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, "The Class and Sex Connection: An Introduction", p.

9. Patricia Branca, "A New Perspective on Women's Work".

10. Marie-Helene Zylberberg-Hocquard, Feminisme et Syndicalisme en France, p. 16-23.

11. See footnote #9.

12. Theresa McBride, "The Long Road Home", p. 290.

13. Ibid.

14. Jean Rabaut, Histoire des Feminismes Francais, p. 132-4.

15. Angus MacLaren, "Sex and Socialism"; Francis Ronsin, "La Classe Ouvriere et le Neo-Malthusianisme"; Rabaut, op. cit., p. 245-260.

16. Barabara Corrado Pope, "Angels in the Devil's Workshop", p. 318.

17. Idem, p. 319.

18. IIdem, p. 318

19. Genevieve Gennari, Le Dossier de la Femme, p. 93, citing Evelyne Sullerot, La Presse Feminine, Paris: Colin, 1963, p. 11; and Edgar Morin, "L'evenement et l'avenement feminin", p. 140.

20. Theresa McBride, p. 19, cites Allan Binstock, "The Shoemakers of Fougeres, PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975.

21. Boxer, "Foyer and Factory", p. 197.

22. Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 205-206.

23. Idem, p. 274

24. Bernard Paillard, "Feminite et Feminisme: Des Utopies aux Crises", p. 13.

25. Idem, p. 15.

26. Idem, p. 20-21.

27. Idem, p. 24.

28. See Charles Sowerwine, Women and Socialism in France, p. 70 and following, "Paul and Laura Lafargue and the Theory of Matriarchy".

29. Sowerwine, Women, p. 91-92.

30. Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 179-182.

31. Sowerwine, Women, p. 251-252.

32. Idem, p. 255.

33. See Angus MacLaren, "Sex and Socialism".

34. See Francis Ronsin, "La Classe Ouvriere".

35. See Rabaut, p. 250-251; and Albistur, p. 385-387.

36. See Charles Sowerwine, "The Organization of French Socialist Women".

37. Sowewine, Women, on Gabrielle Petit, p. 212-232; on Louise Saumoneau, p. 415.

38. Idem, p. 161-165.

39. Idem, p. 259-262.

40. Boxer, "socialism Faces Feminism", p. 106.

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