

# MARXIST WOMEN VERSUS BOURGEOIS FEMINISM\*

by Hal Draper and Anne G. Lipow

## *Introduction*

The texts presented here are intended to revive 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, organiser, 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 left-wing 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.

## I

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

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partially provides this, W. Thonessen's *The Emancipation of Women*, and any reader who is at all seriously interested in revolutionary feminism must read it. Here we concentrate 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 favourite label for the bourgeois feminist types: *Frauenrechtlerinnen*. A more or less literal translation is 'women's-rightsters.' 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-rightsters', 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 programme, *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 programme has nothing to do with the 'women's-rightsters':

**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 rightsters' on the one side, who recognised 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 workingclass sisters, and, on the other side, the real women's party, the socialist party, which has a basic understanding of the economic causes**

on 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 overall 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 programme, 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 women'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 favoured 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 socialists women's *hostility* to the women's-rightsers 'of bourgeois feminism. The reformists did not have great objections to raising their hands in favour of Marxistical formulations in resolutions about the women's movement and socialism; it was another thing to concentrate hostility to bourgeois liberalism in practice.

This is how the right-left split on feminism stood by the **1890s**, 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.

## II

The German socialist movement was organisationally 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 organisation of working-class 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's question first adopted by the Lassallean movement. It recruited its cadres from the first **organisable** workers, already conscious of their immediate demands, and it directed these demands into an interest-group programme. As an interest group, these organised workers, still a small minority of the class, were immediately threatened by the competition of cheaper female labour, 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 unorganised sectors?

In 1867, four years after its founding, the Lassallean group came out directly against the industrial employment of women and in favour 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 on 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 labour 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 moralising, 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 labour 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 organised 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 'pre-feminist' employers, who had produced stalwart proponents of women's rights 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 organisations (unions). The state responded to this new threat against public moral 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 labour. 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 **integra-**

tion 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 labour 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.

### III

*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' programme; 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 organised.

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—and consequently—in its choice of immediate demands to emphasise. It viewed itself, in Marxist terms, as a class movement, and this translates into *workingwomen's movement*. The immediate demands it emphasised 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

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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*.

to protect women workers' interests—just as every militant organisation 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 labour movement on the ground that it would rebound against labour'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 labour legislation which cannot be turned against workers as long as the labour movement is not organised to effectively police the way the law is used. In more modern times, experience has shown countless cases in which basic labour gains, painfully acquired by decades of struggle, have been latterly used by employers (and their allies in the trade-union 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 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~~ 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 **rationalisations** 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 well **being** of working mothers as well as moral protection. Still, it was the relation of women to the working class that was the crux.

## IV

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 below), 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-organisation at the start of the 1890s. In 1890 a prominent socialist activist, Emma Ihrer, headed the effort to set up a propaganda centre in the form of a socialist feminist organ, *Die Arbeiterin* (The Workingwoman). When it foundered financially, Zetkin and Ihrer founded *Gleichheit* (Equality) in 1891, and this remained the centre 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, organisationally 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 agitationaly 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.

Thonessen 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 Thonessen. 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. Thonessen 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' 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-righters. 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 this material appears here in English for the first time, with the exception from Bebel in §1 (which, however, is given here in a new translation).

## I

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 emphasises 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 sisterwomen, 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 or tens of thousands of their sisters who belong to the more favourably 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 *overall 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 to 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 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 civilisation.

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 civilisation 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 programme 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 of both sexes.*

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 in 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 16th, 1896. A motion was then made and carried that 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 *Gotba* Congress [etc.]'. Here we have conferred a somewhat shorter title on it. It is translated from *Zetkin's Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* (Berlin, *Bietz*, 1957), Volume I.

*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 latter part also presents *some* proposals on forms of propoganda 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 *pre-capitalist* 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 *hkaven* 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 labour. 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

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\*Engels, *Origin of the Family*, near end of Chapter 2.

thousands but for millions of women arose the question: Where are we 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 defence 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, **5%** 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 doings. 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 centre 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 favour 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 labour force; it therefore favoured over-production 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 labour power ensures, through starvation wages, that a large supply of prostitutes answers the demand from this same aspect 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 realisation of free trade and free competition between men and women. The realisation 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-righters. It is pure fear of competition; all other grounds adduced against intellectual labour 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 I 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 'Neva' 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-righters are entirely justified.

For the proletarian woman, it is capital's need for exploitation, its unceasing search for the cheapest labour 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

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\*These suspension points are in the *text*— *Ed.*

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 labour-power: the machine makes muscular strength unnecessary, and everywhere women's labour could operate with the same results for production as man's labour. And since she was a cheap labour force and above all a willing labour force that only in the rarest cases dared to kick against the pricks of capitalist exploitation, the capitalists multiplied the opportunities to utilise women's labour 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 same 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.

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 realisation 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 favour 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 hypnotised by this fear, the readier it is for reform. 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 and 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 it is 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 labour 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. And 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 the 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 recognising 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 within present-day society, they are already demanded in the Minimum Programme 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 organisation of women workers into trade unions runs into exceedingly great difficulties. From **1892** to **1895** the number of women workers organised into the central unions rose to about 7,000. If we add the woman workers organised 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 organise 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 organise 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

organisations 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 some day 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 utilised to wreck the organisation of proletarian women merely operated to arouse their class-consciousness more and more. If we are striving to attain a powerful women's organisation 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 in which the women's activity should be carried out; first we have to learn how we must work among women. In the resolution before you it is proposed to choose field organisers (*Vertrauenspersonen*) among women, who shall have the task of stimulating trade-union and economic organisation 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 moulding 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 moulds 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 programme 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 favour 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 women 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 and 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 pre-conditions 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.

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 **Vonwärts**, 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 organisations 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 organise 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 **criticised** 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.*

***Vonwärts** published Zetkin's protest in its issue of January **24th**, 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 7th, was itself peppered with footnotes again

On the publication of Zetkin's protest in **Vorwärts**, Engels sent an **ehthusiastic burrah** 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 on 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 helped 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 organised by the bourgeois women that **Gleichheit** failed to report on.'

Dornemann further **emphasises** that Zetkin had friendly relations with a number of bourgeois **women's-righters**, 'the best of them'; though, to be sure, 'she found more to **criticise** 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 working women's** movement to the aims and style of the **women's-righters**.

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 organisations 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 favoured in the petition was worthily complemented by its socio-political ignorance, redolent of a beggar's plea, and by the presumptuousness with which the organisations 'dared' to beg because their representatives would be accepted as 'authorities on women's affairs.'

New 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 recognised on a national legal basis, and that equal rights for both sexes be included in this reorganisation as well as legal guarantee of the unrestricted exercise of freedom to organise. 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 organised 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 of favour 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 rights of association and assembly by the allied forces of police and judiciary.

In this struggle the police actively showed the full vigour 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 organisation 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 1st October, 1893 to 31st August, 1894, proletarian women had to pay 681 marks worth of fines for such offences; and this only in cases that came to my knowledge. Despite all, new associations regularly rise in place of the organisations that were smashed; over and over again women throng to rallies, over and over again they organise new ones.

The proletarian woman, living in straitened circumstances if not bitter poverty and overburdened with work, continues to make the sacrifice of time and energy required by organisational 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 **socialising**. If the Reichstag and the government do not understand the urgent language of these facts, they will bend their ears even less favourably 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 organised 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 **criticise** 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, *Vomarts* took a thoroughly **correct** attitude to the petition. It took notice of it, criticised 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 change 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 recognised, much earlier than the authors of this petition, the value of freedom of organisation 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 favour. 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 Centre 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 due 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 solidarising themselves with a petition of this content.

Still another reason makes it impossible for the socialist movement to come out in favour 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 had 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 organisational 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 **working-**women 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 petitions' 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 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 generalising the standpoint from which Vorwärts here counterposes my **article** to the petition.

*The last sentence points to the analogy with Social-Democratic Party attitudes towards bourgeois liberalism, on the general political scene.*

*In their second note, **the** editors brought out the time-honoured 'step forward' argument. It is appended to **Zetkin's** most cogent passage on the basic politics of the whole thing, **emphasising** 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 recognise the grave offence 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 Koller 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 labouriously sweating to scrape together evidence of the growth of 'subversive tendencies.'

*Perhaps the most significant admission came in the editor's 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 **criticised** 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 **working-women's** economic needs, even though it also **emphasised** 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**,<sup>1</sup> has here and there caused some confusion in 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 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. **Gizyeki'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**.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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 women comrades were being 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 **candour** to say so. The first note read: 'We don't mind agreeing that Comrade Zetkin is right in principle, but we believe that she makes too much **to-do**

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? The self-sewing 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.

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*

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about a mere nothing.' The second note: 'It is self-evident that, in accordance with the statements of the Commission of 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

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 **theorising** 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 first 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 organisations 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 Arbeitennnen 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 organised in trade unions help to form the shock troops of the militant proletariat on the economic field. Many tens of thousands of politically organised 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 organisation 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 benefited 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 organisation 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 organisations. 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,\* and to throw the doors of political organisations 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 utilisation 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 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

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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'.

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 woman must be; the monarchy; the organised 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 defence 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 machineguns, 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 workingpeople, 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 meagre 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 modern 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 cafe, who makes a profit for her employer with her legs, is a productive workingwoman, 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 workingwomen'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 organisations 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 cofounder 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

5

Eleanor Marx

**Workingwomen** 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 **organised** 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 **Arbeiterinnenzeitung (Workingwomen's Journal)** did not appear until 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 **Arbeiterinnenzeitung** 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 (London) 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 2nd October, 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 rights **ânesses** [asses] will soon be ordered to the rear.'

All three did in fact **write** 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)

**Louise Kautsky****The Women's-Rightsers and 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 *Arbeiterinnenzeitung* (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 narrow-minded 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* Women'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 (16th January, 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. 'There can be no doubt,' says the Woman'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 7th June, 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 Tights 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 24th February. 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 those enterprises under the coverage of this law, *i.e.* limit their work-day to only 12 hours.

*Louise Kautsky then relates that this mild proposal met with opposition—from a number of honourable supporters of women'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 do 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. Garrett 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 profit 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)

**How should we organise?**

*In the 5th February, 1892 issue of the paper, Eleanor Marx started a series of four articles, which began by posing the problem of how women should **organise** and then reported on how English working-women were **organising** 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 programmes to the strivings for complete equidisation 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 womens-rightisers. 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-rightisers' on the one side, who recognised 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 organise—organise 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 organise? Now, it seems to me that we must commence by organising 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 labour 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 *all workers*.

*The Austrian working-women (Eleanor Marx went on to say) are showing why know how to organise, 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 organise, 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 organise 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 organisation 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 organiser** and Executive member], and the great dock strike, etc.*

Although we are happy to see this progress and also recognise the progress made by the organisation 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 tradeunion **organisation**, there are still great inadequacies. **Firstly**, in many cases women still remain unorganised, though this situation is becoming less frequent; for the unions see how unorganised 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 organisations, no voice in the administration of their own funds, and up to now have never become delegates to their own union'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 organisations 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 labour 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 organisation.

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 organisations 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 Trade Union Association. The latter's aims are somewhat more advanced than the former's, but both are organised, 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 labour 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** utilises the movement for her husband's political interests. How little these

people understand about labour 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 20th May, 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' labour 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 men, who regard their wage-labour 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 equalpay. 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 labour!

To be just, I must mention another woman of the middle class, May Abrahams, the indefatigable secretary and organiser 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 Arbeiterinnenzeitung had reprinted from another periodical, by a Mrs. Ichenbäuser, dealing with the above subject. Most of the long reply is a very factual exposure of the distortions and poor information in Ichenhüusen'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 generalises 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 labour.

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, sympathise, 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 our 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 unhealthy 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 labour. 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-rightser and my good friend Mr. Base, the weak epigone of Schopenhauer's, both take absolutely the same position. For this women's-rightser 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 make 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 labour leader named George Howell, the 'respectable' magazine 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. Ichenhauser, 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 recognise the importance of a women's organisation from the proletarian point of view. Few speak of her today; few remember her. But one day when the history of the labour 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.