4. The Woman Question: The Legacy

In 1866, a full twenty years before the first stirrings of revolutionary syndicalism, and before the industrial revolution had changed the social structure in France, women already comprised 30 percent of the work force.(1) How well did syndicalism respond to women's presence in the labor force? If the syndicalist movement was directed, as it professed itself to be, toward creating a new culture of revolution, the needs of the female proletariat could not be ignored.

Yet, some recent studies of women and the French left have concluded that the tensions between the sexes were not attenuated to any perceptible degree by unionism, and that revolutionary syndicalism followed the model of socialism. Both allegedly did little more than pay lip service to the need to include women in their progress toward socialist revolution. Marilyn Boxer's work notes that political socialists subordinated the question of women's rights to the need to garner electoral support. Hence, their capitulation to political expediency resulted in a step backward for women.(2) Madeleine Guilbert concludes from her study of women and syndicalism before 1914 that women's membership in the unions remained weak relative to their presence in the labor force, and their participation in trade union congresses and strikes was feeble. The primary failure, Guilbert charges, was due to the political orientation of the syndicalist movement. More "preoccupied with agitation than with immediate reforms," syndicalists did not concede first priority to the cause of "the most disinherited [and] least conscious," the woman workers.(3) Michelle Perrot concurs that the workers' movement only slowly became conscious of women because the different currents of syndicalism were too concerned with other things to view women's emancipation favorably.(4)

This work leads to an opposite conclusion. In answer to both Guilbert and Perrot, this study argues that because revolution was defined by syndicalists as incremental, then immediate reform for all workers was a necessary step toward revolution. More important, it was the preoccupation with

internal and external forces threatening unionism that forced anarchosyndicalists to shed the dead weight of the past and deal with the reality of women's presence in the work force. And, although party socialists did abandon women's rights issues in order to build their electoral constituencies, as Boxer points out, this study contends that the opposite occurred within syndicalism. As a result of its commitment to serve as a valid agent of working-class interest, and out of the need to build unionism, French syndicalism moved beyond the paternalistic and antifeminist attitudes inherited from the past to address practically the needs of laboring women.

To evaluate fully the syndicalist response to women, it is necessary to explore the milieu in which the workers' attitudes toward women in the work force were formed. To that degree, one must review the historical presence of women in France, both as an economic factor and as a social being. It is also important to examine the philosophical framework that defined attitudes toward women in France, since discussions in the early workers' congresses often tended to reflect the ideological inheritance of the Utopian Socialists, Marx, and Proudhon. Indeed, some recent analysts, such as Jean Maitron, have concluded that the latter's ideas on the woman question provided syndicalism with its antifeminist stance.(5) This work suggests, however, that philosophy came to play a minor part in syndicalist attitudes regarding women. Far more important to the shaping of workers' ideas were the practical issues formulated in response to a host of variables, including the reaction to such outside threats as the degree to which women constituted a dangerously competitive presence in a particular trade, and the reaction from socialists, feminists, and independent syndicalists. Also formative in syndicalism's response were the internal pressures that produced spasmodic waves of schism during the early years of unionism and remained a threatening force throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century.

THE ROOTS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EXPLOITATION

The advent of large-scale industry in France did not create a new need for women in the work force. Women were employed in a variety of trades throughout the Middle Ages. Some professions were exclusively set aside for women; others were mixed corporations in which men and women worked together. Many women were employed in trades unregulated by the guilds.(6) With the beginning of cottage industry, much of the work carried on by urban artisans came to be the exclusive domain of the peasantry. The extent of peasant involvement in the clothmaking industry, for instance, was noted in the memoirs of an eighteenth-century intendant of Languedoc, who marveled at the fact that there was not a single peasant worker "who does not have in his home a trade . . . which occupies him . . . when the work of the field is

absent; his wife and children card, thread, and prepare the wool chiefly during the winter."(7) The penetration of industrial labor into the countryside in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was accompanied by an increase in the female labor force.(8) Women became an integral part of family industry. The extent to which women participated in home manufacturing partially explains the ease with which large industry in the nineteenth century was able to recruit females.(9)

The gross exploitation of women was not something unique to nineteenth-century capitalism. In all ages women were restricted in the exercise of their trades. In the Middle Ages, for instance, although women might be admitted to the regulated corporations, male preponderance was as solidly established in the professions as it was in family life. In many trades women could not advance to the position of master. In others, although a woman might inherit the mastership, the members of the corporation could severely limit the exercise of her rights.(10) Economic regulations passed by the guilds, in the form of increasingly expensive masterpieces and elevated fees, further tended to prevent women from succeeding to that position.(11)

Exclusion from the head of the corporation was not the only professional inhibition suffered by women. In many mixed corporations work was strictly apportioned on the basis of sex. In numerous workshops women were often assigned the more laborious or monotonous tasks. Women fared little better in the home manufactories, since they had to divide their day between completing their household chores and participating in the family labor process.(12)

With the harnessing of steam to production, the more elementary operations generally performed by women in the home became the most receptive to early mechanization. The use of machinery also meant that work was physically less laborious. As a result, women and children were drawn into the factories and into performing functions hitherto reserved exclusively for men.(13) The early factories to which women and children were called were both badly lighted and vented. The machinery was often so poorly adapted that industrial labor was dangerous in the extreme. Because the work that women performed was so simple, female laborers could be easily replaced. The tenuous nature of their employment made women accept more readily than men the meanest tasks, the crudest conditions, and, of course, the lowest wages.(14)

The great disparity in wages existing between men and women was one of the worst abuses women had to bear, not only in the nineteenth-century factories, but in the shops of preindustrial France. At the end of the fourteenth century, women earned three-fourths of the wages paid men. The development of cottage industry brought women flooding into the labor market. The oversupply of their labor increased the sexual wage gap. With industrialism, the employment of women and children at one-half the wages of men became for the factory owner, according to Madeleine

Guilbert, "the means par excellence of reducing the cost of fabrication, or compensating for the high price of machinery."(15) Women's need to work and their tendency to do so under any conditions guaranteed that their own wages would remain low. Their labor also contributed to the wage depression that would spread to the entire labor force. This reality earned for female workers the wrath of the majority of working men from the mid-nineteenth century onward.(16)

In addition to the changes their labor wrought in the economic life of French society, women's wholesale participation in industrial growth brought into being a new kind of working woman. Now, women's working environment was the workshop or factory rather than the foyer.

A WEB OF WEAKNESSES

Ironically, during the first half of the nineteenth century, when large numbers of women were being funneled into factories, writers on the phenomenon of industrial combination raised no call to improve women's working conditions. Nor did they express much concern over the implications to French society from the fact that women now had to leave their homes in order to work.(17) It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, with the development of working-class organizations, that the woman questions--that is, the question of working women--received a hearing. Labor's initial response, however, was colored by those preconceptions of women that were the dismal inheritance of Salic law, the patriarchal tradition of feudalism, and the misogyny of the Civil Code. The effect of these combined forces had served to deny women their civil and economic rights, and to define them legally as "eternal minors."(18)

By the end of the Old Regime, women's position in civil society had assumed a character that no amount of battering in the following century could effectively erase. Women were forbidden in most cases to exercise any civil functions. Because of their presumed "natural modesty and shame," women were not allowed to be in the company of an assembly of men. When a woman married, the father's tutelage right passed to her husband. Within the family circle the woman exercised no juridic function, not even over her children, whose legal responsibility she did not share with her husband. Cohabitation was her primary obligation, and she could be forced by law to return to her marital bed. Fidelity was the husband's moral right. If the wife was found guilty of adultery, she could be placed in a monastery and be subject to the loss even of her personal property.(19)

With women defined historically as a legal cypher it is not surprising that little attention was paid to their education until the seventeenth century. Under the aegis of the church, several schools for young women were opened in

France. Some of these educational establishments provided vocational training for poor girls needing to earn a living.(20) Others, such as St. Cyr, catered to the educational needs of the daughters of the aristocracy.(21) Regardless of the social background of the student, the curricula of the schools of this century and the next, according to Gustave Fagniez, were based on the same premises: "the mistrust of feminine nature, the preoccupation with warning against zeal, of always keeping the girls occupied, always protecting them against the temptations of idleness, . . . and to keep their place."(22) The end product of such an educational system was the ideal woman who, irrespective of class, "spins, confines herself to her husband, holds her tongue, believes, and obeys."(23)

In the seventeenth century the woman question received a brief hearing by some of the leading lights of French society. Their feminism was inspired by the permeation of Cartesian logic and the rise of a school of Neoplatonism. More practical, seventeenth-century feminism was a response to the very real influence women were exercising on society from the salons of Paris. From Descartes came the notion that men and women were born with the same innate ideas, thereby implying that the sexes were morally and physically equal. The Neoplatonists, with their cult of love, assigned a valued place to the "womanly" virtues of imagination, sentiment, intuition, and a desire for peace. To these thinkers, women's qualities were important commodities, necessary to a future world of peace and harmony.(24)

Such a movement, claiming women's right to free choice and proclaiming the equality of the sexes, seemed to be aimed at the destruction of the social hierarchy.(25) The response to the threat engendered by the feminist writings of the préciosité is valuable for the insight it offers into just how deeply entrenched were the attitudes toward women, and how persistently these attitudes were to remain as common themes in the succeeding centuries.

Opposing any change in women's social role, the seventeenth-century antifeminists fell back upon the traditional Eve theme. Women were composed of "a web of weaknesses" requiring numerous restraints, chief of which was "the salutary yoke" of marriage.(26) The antifeminists glorified marriage and the family, not only as a way for women to achieve social worth and eternal salvation, but as the only sure means by which to preserve and strengthen the nation. As "a little kingdom" the family was a component of the larger kingdom. When the individual family was well-ruled, "the others could not be disordered." Marriage, said one seventeenth-century antifeminist,

> fills cities with citizens . . . kingdoms with subjects. . . . It is this which puts laborers in the country, judges in the tribunal, priests in churches and soldiers in armies. . . . [It makes] arts and sciences flourish, sustains commerce;

> which makes society subsist, and to which one owes most of one's good laws. [Without marriage] the world would be a cavern of brigands.(27)

Concludes Carolyn Lougee on the subject: "the antifeminists' social vision was paternalistic; society was a family writ large, a web of private ties by which all persons were interdependent and through which alone individuals could develop."(28)

THE DEMAND FOR LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY

Swaddled thus in the ideal of the family, the woman question rested for yet another century, until it was revived by the philosophes. In calling for the rule of reason and the establishment of a just society based on the prescripts of natural law, the philosophers of the Enlightenment began to analyze the place of women in eighteenth-century France. Diderot regretted that women were treated as "imbecilic children." D'Alembert noted that women's subservient position was the result of their inferior education. In his Persian Letters Montesquieu espoused the belief that the two sexes were created equal, but men had usurped authority by exploiting women's weaknesses.(29)

Although united in their hatred of the existing regime, the philosophes were not in complete accord on the subject of women. Countering Montesquieu's feminism, Rousseau asserted that because women were weak and fragile in intelligence, they had invented love in order to gain precedence over men. In Emile he set forth the belief that women were only children; in his Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau said that women were made for men's pleasure and for their use. Women were obliged "to love and honor them, raise the young, care for them, counsel them, make their lives agreeable and sweet."(30)

With the beginning of the Revolution in 1789, active elements of political feminism began to appear. Some of the Cahiers de doléances carried pleas calling for the right of women to have a deliberative voice in the political forums of the land.(31) In 1789 a petition to the king asked that women be given equality--even in the pulpit!(32) French feminist Olympe de Gouges submitted to the Assembly a "Declaration of the Rights of Women" in which she declared that women possessed natural rights equally with men. Those rights extended even to the privilege of their entering any trade or profession based on their capability. Further, if women had the right "to mount the scaffold," she asserted prophetically, they must have the equal right "to mount the tribune."(33)

Despite the fact that women's equality was supported by such male worthies as Sieyès, Fouchet, and Condorcet, and that women's participation in the Revolution was lauded by all segments of the political community, little permanent

gain was achieved for women, save for a slight revision of the existing divorce laws.(34) For all the professions of "liberty, equality, fraternity" generated by the revolutionaries, the centuries' long attitudes toward women continued to remain safely barricaded against the onslaughts of those who demanded the erection of a new society built on sexual equality. Indeed, the antifeminist tradition is enshrined in the language of one pamphlet distributed during the Revolution. It cavalierly proclaimed:

> Civil and political liberty is of no use to women and should therefore be kept from them. Since they . . . are born to be dependent from the cradle to the grave, they have been endowed only with private virtues. . . . A woman is acceptable only in the context of her father's or husband's household. She needs to know nothing of what goes on outside beyond what they may see fit to tell her.(35)

Even before the Revolution had merged into the Empire, the woman's movement had lost most of its male supporters. The government abolished women's political clubs, checked their revolutionary ardor, and sent them back to the condition of their former legal estate.(36) This enforced retreat became a rout with the accession of Napoleon to the throne of France. The Civil Code drafted in 1804 not only reflected the prejudices of the codifiers of Roman law, it also bore the traces of the misogyny of the Emperor, who once remarked to his colleagues that "What is not French is to give authority to women. They have enough of it."(37) Reflecting its Napoleonic inspiration, the Code reasserted the principle of the family as a moral person and the male as supreme in the family and society.

A MECHANICAL PIVOT

For all its failure to bring about the reign of liberty, at least for women, the Revolution of 1789 did inspire numerous social theorists in the following century to scrutinize society seeking the roots of oppression that also hindered sound progress. In the process of their analyses, the theorists assigned to women a heightened role in the establishment of a just and equal society for all.

In 1824 the Exposition de la doctrine was published by Saint-Simon. In this document he outlined an ideology of liberation for women that became a source of renewed inspiration for French feminists. Although the Count was interested more in furthering the cause of the transformation of society as a whole, he expressed the belief nevertheless that the liberation of women was a natural outgrowth of the evolution of society. For Saint-Simon the age of militarism, characterized by individualism, was on the wane. This age was to be

succeeded by the reign of peace and love, based on the principle of association and marked by the entry of two groups who had been sacrificed by the military age: the industrial workers, because of their productive capacity, and women, because of their abundance of sympathy.(38) Saint-Simonianism was carried to the point of absurdity by his disciple "Père" Enfantin, who undertook an unsuccessful search for a "female messiah," and was ultimately imprisoned for immorality.(39) Yet Saint-Simonianism in general gave "a vigorous élan to the feminist movement," as Marguerite Thibert points out, because the Count and his followers raised anew the question of sexual equality and depicted women as moral saviors of civilization.(40)

If much of Saint-Simonianism culminated in mysticism, the program of another Utopian Socialist, Charles Fourier, was infinitely more practical. In his Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales published in 1808, Fourier expressed the view that women's present position of servitude was a hangover from the barbaric past. He further suggested that women's subjugation in economic life was a danger to society as a whole because it brutalized both sexes: the man because he alone bore the full responsibility of supporting his family, and the woman because her industrial servitude led her to prostitution.

To remedy the "trickery" being perpetrated on both sexes, and to restore society, Fourier proposed for women, among other things, universal education, full freedom of choice in the selection of a spouse, and the right to work at equal pay. The principle of equal pay for equal work was one which Fourier regarded as a fundamental right. The only free woman was the one who lived by her own labor. Further, the extension of all privileges to women was the general principle of all social progress, for women's liberation, Fourier declared, was the "pivot mécanique" on which revolved the liberation of all humanity.(41)

These Utopian Socialists gained disciples among numerous women, many of whom established newspapers dedicated to advancing women's civil and economic rights, particularly the right to work. One such Utopian feminist was Jeanne Deroin. Devoting her attention not only to feminist issues, but also to the workers' cause, Deroin was instrumental in founding over a hundred workers' associations. In 1849 she formed a "red party," and was proposed as its candidate for election before being arrested and imprisoned for her political activities.(42)

Deroin's colleague and fellow Saint-Simonian, Pauline Roland, was also a proponent of sexual equality. This equality, she believed, must begin with equal education of both sexes, and must end with changed attitudes regarding marriage. When Pauline Roland was brought to trial for her socialist ideas, she shocked the judges by professing that matrimony was little more than "a state of servitude" for the woman. Echoing Fourier, Roland wrote in 1851 that "woman is a free being, equal to men," and must therefore "make her life by her own work, from her own love, by her

own intelligence."(43)

Another Utopian Socialist, who has been called "a bridge between the working-class movement of unions and crafts and the socialist efforts to form a new vision of society," was Flora Tristan.(44) Saint-Simonian in her belief that working men and women were destined to claim their rights, Tristan devoted her efforts to achieving the dual goals of sexual equality and the advancement of the proletariat through the establishment of working-class associations. In accepting the Utopians' assignment to women of the role of moralizers of humanity, Tristan questioned how women could fulfill this task when they were legally subject to their husbands and economically inferior because of their small earning power. Working-class women, wrote Tristan, exist "on a little work, a little thievery, a little begging, and a lot of prostitution." In order for women to assume their place as a moral elite in society, Tristan demanded they be extended their full natural rights, including the right to political representation, the opportunity for increased academic and vocational instruction, and the chance to work in any trade. She also demanded the right for women to be paid on the basis of utility rather than on the supposition of their lesser needs.(45)

In her vision of the future, Tristan regarded feminism and socialism as being mutually dependent. But she believed that women could not hope to free themselves: they must depend on the decision of men workers to accept women as equals. This decision, Tristan supposed, would be motivated by reason and self-interest. Men would choose to work for women's freedom because they would accept the social fact that women's liberation was the prepatory step to the transformation of society. When "the last slaves still remaining in French society" were emancipated, Tristan proclaimed, the social revolution would be complete.(46)

Unfortunately for her grand vision, French working-class men were hardly reasonable about the competition from French working-class women. At the very moment Tristan was preaching sexual equality in her Workers' Union, the working-class newspaper, L'Atelier, published from 1840 to 1850, was expressing in print what male workers were noting in the workshops. It was not mechanization, but the feminization of industry that was the greatest danger to the worker and his family. To halt this blight, workers' associations must try to keep women out of the trades.(47) In regarding the liberation of workers and women as inseparable and the requisite to the liberation of all humanity, Tristan was following the dictates of Saint-Simon. But in attempting to implement the simultaneous liberation of the two, Tristan's philosophy prefigured the same dilemma upon whose horns the leaders of the later workers' movement would be launched.

HOUSEWIFE OR COURTESAN

The activities of these early nineteenth-century feminists are important to the later workers' movement for still another reason: the reaction they provoked in Pierre Joseph Proudhon.(48) It would be a simple matter to dismiss Proudhon's attitudes toward women, as does Marguerite Thibert, as being a mere case of "natural antifeminism," an articulation of "the peasant attached to patriarchal custom, the tradition of the farmer in all his tendencies." There was much of the aura of "the peasant soldier" about Proudhon, to be sure.(49) But his ideas were more than just a reflection of childhood heredity. Inspired with the notion of social change as a result of having read Fourier, Proudhon was initially attracted to the ideas of all the Utopians. He had even been an admirer for a time of Flora Tristan and her project of forming workers' associations.(50) But after the briefest of honeymoons, Proudhon discovered Hegel. Thus, much of his subsequent work is a curious mélange that both incorporates and refutes Utopian teachings.

Along with Fourier, Proudhon recognized that man's passions were the root cause of social malaise. But he quickly came to believe that the Utopian's goal of changing man's institutions in order to deflect his passions was superficial and did not touch the heart of the matter--man himself. "Man is by nature a sinner," he wrote. "That is to say not essentially a wrongdoer but rather wrongly made," so that more than a simple reordering of society was necessary to change man.(51) It was only through the moral reform of man himself, individually, voluntarily, and within the context of the smallest natural unit of society, the family, that human society could be purified. Later Proudhon would reveal the importance of the family to his metaphysic when he would proclaim: "Point de famille, point de cité, point de république."(52)

With the image of the family as the basis of society's restoration continually before him in his writings and in his thinking, it was natural that Proudhon would turn his attention to the cosmic glue binding the family, that is, to the relationship existing between men and women. By the time of his second major work in 1846, Proudhon's discovery of Hegel had gone a long way toward unseating the theories of the Utopians from the throne of his metaphysics. In the Système des contradictions économiques, ou philosophie de la misère, written as an attempt to investigate the economic basis of contemporary society, Proudhon devoted some portion of the work to applying his understanding of the dialectic to an analysis of the relationship between the sexes. The Utopians' tenet of sexual equality was false, he decided. Woman could not be identically equal to man. Rather, she was man's complement, not his resemblance. To the Saint-Simonians the sexual relationship was man and woman. For Proudhon, however, that relationship was the result of a

process that occurred through the conjugal union between man and woman as subject-object. Outside of this relationship woman had no social identity and hence, no social worth. Thus, woman could be "a housewife or a prostitute"--she could assume no middle identity.(53)

It was this pronouncement, repeated against the candidacy of Jeanne Deroin for the legislature in 1849, which Proudhon continued to enunciate, refine, and embellish throughout the remainder of his life.(54) His theories were not so much an attack on women as they were an attempt to overturn the wrongheaded notions of the Utopians, particularly in their Enfantine phase, whose theories constituted for Proudhon a danger to the course of human progress. It was "the sects of the epoch, Icariens, humanitarians, Saint-Simonians, phalanstériens," as well as the assortment of "bohemian artists and litérateurs" who attacked the institution of the family as being only a word, a convention, with no absolute value, and led them to espouse divorce and free love.(55) It was their obsession with the equality of the sexes that had been carried to its most absurd point with the Deroin candidacy. Further, it was the bankruptcy of their philosophy, Proudhon believed, that had been partly responsible for the failure of the 1848 revolution, a revolution that had defeated them all.

Returning again to his theme of the failure of Utopian ideas in response to two well-directed attacks made upon his Justice by women followers of George Sand, Proudhon wrote La pornocratie, ou les femmes dans les temps modernes.(56) This book was the culmination of all his ideas on marriage, the family, and the pernicious effect of Utopian Socialist ideas on society. The events over the preceding thirty-five years, culminating in "the national prostitution" that was the Second Empire, were an indication to Proudhon that society had lost its virility and was now experiencing a fatal decline. This national malaise was the result of the continual absorption by the sects with extremist democracy and its notions of sexual equality. The idea of equality of the sexes, declared Proudhon, was a "sophism" attributed "to all epochs of fatigue, of exhaustion, above all, of oppression and exploitation; when the mass of males have been transformed into beasts of burden, when iniquity renders work less lucrative, life difficult, marriage perilous, the generation onerous, the family impossible."(57)

Women's dearth of moral energy was well-known, he continued, and accounted for a variety of unattractive feminine attributes. Women are given to tears, for instance, "which are as touching as a doll," but hardly denotes the behavior of "a lion or a man."(58) Woman is an idealist, possessed of a kind of "intuitive and divining spirit" that takes the place of "reason and conviction."(59) She has a greater penchant for lasciviousness, and thus struggles less than man against the inclination toward animality.(60) Because women were so frail, to allow them to enter the political arena would be to feminize further a

society already in danger because of its lack of masculine virtue. And when social emasculation, or "pornocratie" occurred, Proudhon cautioned, "then marriage is dishonored by interest; the law of succession is regarded as a spoliation; the family abandoned for the State. Everyone is thrown onto the State. Liberty is disowned. Justice is no longer; it is weakened in the soul."(61)

To halt this decay, Proudhon advocated a return to "the law of the sexes" upon which depended "the family, . . . the order of society, and the constitution of all humanity."(62) For Proudhon the sexual law could be found only in "monogamous and indissoluble" marriage, an institution in which man is tempered by woman.(63) Only through the conjugal union would woman recover her dignity and man develop his "individuality, character, and heroism" and regenerate society.(64) In marriage the spouses became "the representative of divinity" in their completion of each other in a kind of divine dialectic held together by Justice: Proudhon's imminent force moving through history and society and working to elevate humanity.(65) The Utopian Socialists had said that woman was the mechanical pivot upon which rested the perfection of humanity and the freedom of society. To Proudhon that was a false equality, for it was only as long as neither pole--that is, strength-beauty, politics-art, right-ideal, subject-object, man-woman--gained the ascendancy that true equality, and hence Justice, could prevail.

Although his theories seem today to be little more than a paeon to the traditional antifeminist belief in the natural inferiority of woman, for Proudhon his man-woman synthesis was not inequality but the epitome of justice incarnate. "The ancients had personified justice by the idea of God," points out Thibert. But Proudhon symbolized its fullest manifestation in the conjugal couple.(66) Man and wife represented a Hegelian synthesis in which were eliminated the deficiencies of each; the process of their conjugal relationship was one that completed and perfected each. For Proudhon, this was a perfect unity: man represents authority, woman liberty. Masculine force was tempered by feminine beauty. The man rules; the woman obeys. Equality is derived by the tension of opposites. Woman loves man, and he reciprocates that love, so that each sex is equivalent in the love that unites them. In terms of social destiny, Proudhon believed that a complete equality likewise prevailed. To man was given the realm of public life and social labor. To the woman was assigned the private realm, the familial foyer.(67)

PROUDHON VERSUS MARX

In analyzing Proudhon's attempt to use Hegelian dialectics to explain what he believed to be the root of France's decay, it becomes apparent that the object of his wrath was not so much women and feminism as the whole body

of Utopian Socialism. But by applying the tenets of German idealism to the social situation in France, Proudhon was rejecting the more enlightened ideas of the Utopian feminists and providing a solid philosophical sanction to centuries of French paternalism. To conclude, however, that syndicalist attitudes on the woman question were merely variations on a Proudhonian theme is misleading for a number of reasons. For one thing, these conclusions tend to focus on Proudhon's utterances on women outside of their Utopian Socialist context. For another, they fail to consider if Proudhon influenced popular sentiment or merely articulated it. Certainly Proudhon's paternalism represented the bel idéal of a large majority of French men and women, particularly when women were being forced to work outside the home. Also, Proudhon the printer belonged to a profession that by the time of his death was beginning to feel the ravages of "the feminine peril."

More important, conclusions that have hitherto been made posing a straight line between Proudhonian theory and syndicalist practice have been based on conjecture and incomplete evidence. They have not rested on an in-depth look at the position of the French left on the woman question, since such studies have only recently been undertaken. Marilyn Boxer's work deals almost exclusively with the political socialists.(68) Madeleine Guilbert's study and the following chapter of this work examine the position of revolutionary syndicalism on women laborers. Two similar conclusions are drawn from this work and that of Boxer's. One is that positivist and Marxist philosophy vied with the theories of Proudhon on a relatively equal basis in the early discussions on the woman question. Further, Boxer's work on socialism and this study on syndicalism indicate that very quickly, both groups tended to set aside theory in the interest of practical considerations.

Despite the practical thrust of syndicalism, a look at the Marxian inheritance in socialism is important to a deeper understanding of French unionism. Unlike Proudhon, Marx never devoted a whole treatise to the subject of women. But his analysis on the position of women in society, scattered throughout his works, remains relatively consistent, according to Boxer.(69) Marx's theme was that capitalism had caused the degeneration of the family and the degradation of women within the familial structure. He charged the middle class with being responsible for prostitution. Marx also claimed that the family relationship of the proletariat was superior to that of the bourgeoisie. Regardless of ideological consistency, few of Marx's pronouncements were available for popular consumption, except for the Communist Manifesto. In this widely circulated tract, Marx charged the capitalists with exploiting women and destroying the family by reducing all human relationships to a cash nexus. Social revolution would end slavery of class, of generations, and of sexes.

The philosophies of Marx and Proudhon first competed in the International Workingmen's Association. Delegates to

most conferences discussed the role of women in society and in the workshops. Marxists declared that work was "a sacred right" rather than a sin from which women should be excluded. Women were necessary allies in the struggle for emancipation. They further insisted that women's exclusion from the work force was a practical way to prevent wage depression. These views always called forth shocked rejoinders from the Proudhonians. French delegates continued to insist that women had no existence outside the home. Any attempt to go beyond the familial domain would constitute a perversion of womanhood and a potential threat to the continuation of the human species.

No clear-cut decision on the woman question was forthcoming in the IWA, particularly on the notion of how to translate theory into practice. Women were admitted to membership; a woman was appointed to the General Council. Marx called for the organization of women's sections in all the trades. But in the face of Bakuninist onslaughts against his control of the International, Marx subsequently withdrew his motion. One of the last pieces of work to be concluded in the IWA was the exclusion of the American section headed by free-love advocate Victoria Woodhull. In this action Marx concurred with the majority. Woodhull and company were "bourgeois quacks," he declared, and too much involved with feminist nonsense to be useful to the furtherance of the class revolution.(70)

The ideological inheritance of Marx survived the demise of the First International and was transmitted to France by the major leaders of political socialism. Virtually everyone from Paul Brousse to Compère-Morel penned works espousing the equality of women under socialism. The most vocal proponents of feminine equality, however, were the Guesdists. In a series of tracts beginning in 1876, Jules Guesde popularized and refined Marx's theories. The year of the first tract coincided with the assembling of the first of the three congresses serving as forerunners to the establishment of permanent labor organizations. At the outset, Guesde was able to use the woman question as a lesson in capitalist exploitation and as a useful tool against the Proudhonian reactionaries among the left. The question of women's intrusion into the work force could not be divorced from the larger issue of capitalist exploitation, he insisted. Proudhon's sexual equation of "ménagère ou courtisane" was false. "If woman is forced to be a housewife, unable to subsist ouside the household," Guesde lectured, "she must necessarily be a courtesan." Women had an equal right to liberty with men. As with men, women's place was anywhere they wished it to be. The Proudhonians might extol the sanctity of the foyer, but to Guesde, the family was no longer a natural unit. It existed for the development of the husband only. In modern society, therefore, woman was a proletarian, forced to prostitute herself either on the streets or in the marriage bed.(71)

Among the political socialists, Marxian orthodoxy came increasingly to reign supreme over Proudhonian conservatism.

During the decades spanning the first workers' congresses in 1876, to the formation of the SFIO in 1905, while socialism hurdled sectarianism in an effort to build a base within the nation, socialist "feminism" became a useful tool for gaining adherents. With one-third the female population in France employed, as Boxer notes, feminism was certainly fashionable. Socialist deputies fought for protective legislation to ease the burden of the laboureuses, and used the example of women's degradation to lecture on the evils of capitalism. Socialists called for equal representation for women in the party, and punctuated their demands by placing women in highly visible positions within their political organizations.

Such women were particularly useful to Guesde in his drive to build a socialist party around Marxian orthodoxy. He enlisted socialist-feminist Paule Mink to his cause. The famous pétroleuse drew sizeable audiences wherever she went, thereby attracting large numbers of workers to the Guesdist fold. Aline Valette was another prominent and useful woman for the Guesdists. As a teacher professing equal education for women, Valette gained support for socialism among bourgeois feminists. As a factory inspector, she could appeal to working-class audiences whom she enticed by brandishing the party's call for equal participation for women in the workshops and equal pay for equal work. In recognition for her service, she was given membership in the National Council of the POF and was chosen to represent the party at meetings of the Second International.(72)

Perhaps the most vital proponent of women's equality and the Guesdist brand of socialism was Dr. Madeleine Pelletier.(73) It was a result of her powerful lobbying in socialist papers and journals and by organizing street demonstrations that the question of votes for women was finally adopted at the SFIO congress in 1906. Her plea for women's suffrage was grounded in Marxist logic: if socialists were fighting in the political arena, she argued, then women must be enfranchised in order to swell the ranks. By the time Pelletier was able to place her call, the socialists were less concerned with orthodoxy than with building political constituencies. The resolution demanding women's suffrage was never elevated beyond what Pelletier tagged "a platonic wish."(74)

The question of women's emancipation belonged to the heroic period of political socialism, when the sects were struggling for cohesion. Then the socialist message was one based on a philosophy of unity: sexual equality and integral emancipation after the revolution. With union achieved, the demand for women's liberation in the present became an embarrassment outside the inner party circles. The woman's question, as Pelletier so succinctly noted, became "a parenthesis very quickly closed" in order to return to the more vital question: that of winning elections.(75) The need to gain power in the chamber halls precluded fighting for unpopular causes, chief among which was the issue of women's equality. Because of the legacy from the past, any appeal

for female suffrage could only turn away the male electorate. Practical politics rather than philosophical integrity came to define the parameters of the woman question for party socialists.

The legacy of the French past confronted socialists and syndicalists alike in their discussion of the woman question: a long tradition of patriarchy; legal, social, and economic repression; and a well-defined philosophy of antifeminism. But for syndicalists, the tradition also included the historical presence and importance of women in industry, the very real dependence on women's labor to augment the family wage, and a historical liberalism that over the centuries had been used occasionally to justify women's need for freedom. It was a mixed inheritance upon which nineteenth-century workers and working-class leaders could draw when called upon to meet the dual challenge of industrialization and feminization of the trades.

NOTES

1. Madeleine Guilbert, Les femmes et l'organisation syndicale avant 1914 (Paris, 1966), p. 14. That figure increased to 38 percent in 1911. The statistics on women in the work force would be considerably higher if the female agricultural workers were included, since until 1850, agriculture was the largest single employer of women. Another astonishing statistic is that the percentage of male to female workers, excluding agriculture, has remained a constant. In 1866, 31 women to 69 men were employed in industry. In 1968 the figure was 35 women to 65 men. Georges Dupeux, French Society 1789-1970, Peter Wait, trans. (London, 1976), pp. 17-18.

2. Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, "Socialism Faces Feminism in France: 1879-1913" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California, Riverside, 1975).

3. Guilbert, Les femmes et l'organisation syndicale, p. 433.

4. Michelle Perrot, Les ouvriers en grève, France 1871-1890, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974), vol. 1, p. 324.

5. Jean Maitron, "La personnalité du militant ouvrier français dans la seconde moitié du XIX(e) siècle," Le Mouvement Social 33-34 (Oct. 1960-Mar. 1961): 67-86, p. 84.

6. On the place of women in the corporations during the Middle Ages and the early modern period see Madeleine Guilbert, Les fonctions des femmes dans l'industrie (Paris, 1966), pp. 21-28. Also Gustave Fagniez, La femme et la société française dans la première moitié du XVIII(e) siècle (Paris, 1929), pp. 94-114.

7. Quoted in Guilbert, Les fonctions des femmes, p. 29.

8. Besides being involved in textile manufacturing, peasant women made a wide variety of other products, such as tools, nails, and stirrups. Patricia Branca, Women in Europe Since 1750 (London, 1978), p. 26.

9. Guilbert points out that the existence of cottage industry continued far longer in France than in other countries, particularly England, where the enclosure movements produced the great migrations to the cities well before the machines had ruined domestic industry. In France this was not the case. Rather, the development of cottage industry provided the means by which peasants could continue to own their small plots of land or add further to their property holdings. This fact, in turn, served in a circular fashion to inhibit the development of industrial combination because the peasant worker was not driven off the land into the large cities until the eighteenth and even until the nineteenth century. See Les fonctions des femmes, pp. 34-35.

10. Ibid., p. 23; Fagniez, La femme et la société française, pp. 100-102.

11. The sixteenth century onward witnessed the phenomenon of masters closing ranks and tightening up on guild regulations. George F. Renard and G. Weulersse, Life and Work in Modern Europe, Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, Margaret Richards, trans. (New York, 1968). pp. 161-162.

12. Guilbert, Les fonctions des femmes, pp. 24-25, 30-31.

13. Ibid., p. 36.

14. Ibid., pp. 25, 38-39.

15. Ibid., p. 36. The extent to which women were involved in industry is recorded by Yves Lequin, who notes that in mid-nineteenth century Lyon, one of the chief attractions for marriage was the prospect of having a second income. "Rare are the young wives who could say 'housewife' or 'without profession'" he concludes. La formation de la classe ouvrière régionale, vol. 1 (Lyon, 1977), p. 206. There were other reasons than the fact that women would work for any wage offered that made them an attractive commodity in the work force. In her report on "Le travail des femmes en France," Mlle. Schirmacker notes that women were in demand because of their moral qualities, among which were those of "sweetness, patience, politeness, docility, and sobriety." Further, women neither drank nor smoked, and needed less nourishment than men, which was the reason why

they could live on a lower wage. Schirmacker's article appeared in Le Musée Social, Arthur Rousseau, ed. (Paris, 1902): 321-372. See pp. 337-338 for quote.

16. Actually, men's hostility toward women who worked for less than standard wages had a long tradition. The lower salaries accepted by women were the reason in 1675 that the master tailors of Paris protested the establishment of a guild of women dressmakers. In the strikes of 1744, weavers noted, "It is sad to see us on the streets without work, while girls are employed at the loom." See Renard and Weulersse, Life and Work in Modern Europe, p. 194.

17. Guilbert, Les fonctions des femmes, p. 40.

18. Dupeux's term of "eternal minors," French Society, p. 128.

19. See Fagniez, La femme et la société française, see the chapter on "La femme dans la famille," pp. 135-203; and Jane Cerez, La condition sociale de la femme de 1804 à l'heure présente (Paris, 1940), pp. 61-64.

20. Fagniez, La femme et la société française, pp. 30-34.

21. Carolyn C. Lougee, Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France (Princeton, 1976), pp. 173-174.

22. Fagniez, La femme et la société française, pp. 46-47.

23. The definition of "a good woman," according to educational theories of Archbishop François Fénelon, pedagogical director of St. Cyr. See Lougee, Le Paradis des Femmes, p. 187 for quote.

24. Ibid., pp. 15-20.

25. Francis Baumal in Le féminisme au temps de Molière (Paris, n.d.) states that eighteenth-century literature of the eighteenth century betrays the fear that women will organize in resistance to the tyranny of their fathers, tutors, and their husbands; p. 130.

26. Lougee, Le Paradis des Femmes, pp. 60-61 for quote.

27. Ibid., pp. 90-91 for quotes.

28. Ibid., p. 88.

29. Cerez, pp. 114-115. La condition sociale de la femme.

30. Rousseau quoted in ibid., p. 117.

31. Ibid., p. 68.

32. Reported in Theodore Stanton, ed., "France," The Woman Question in Europe (New York, 1884), pp. 235-236.

33. "Prophetically" because de Gouges herself was guillotined. See Louisette Blanquart, Femmes: L'Age politique (Paris, 1974), p. 16.

34. Cerez, La condition sociale de la femme, pp. 73-80.

35. "Révolution de Paris," quoted in Ann Foreman, Femininity as Alienation (London, 1977), p. 11.

36. Blanquart, Femmes: L'Age politique, p. 17.

37. Quoted in Cerez, La condition sociale de la femme, pp. 139-140. Napoleon confessed his aversion to women meddling in politics to Sophie de Condorcet. "You're right, my general," she replied, "but in a country where they cut off your head, it's natural that [women] would want to know why." Quoted in Blanquart, Femmes: L'Age politique, p. 18.

38. For a discussion of Saint-Simon's theories see Marguerite Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme français de 1830 à 1850 (Paris, 1926), pp. 8-14.

39. S. Joan Moon, "Feminism and Socialism: The Utopian Synthesis of Flora Tristan," Socialist Women, European Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quataert, eds. (New York, 1978), p. 27.

40. Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, p. 82. Saint-Simonianism had some practical aspects as well. One follower of the sect, as Minister of Public Education, sought to remedy the imperfections in the law regarding women's education. Another, a wealthy industrialist, gave money to encourage the discussion of equality of women's wages. It was purportedly due to the efforts of Saint-Simonians that women were hired as railroad crossing guards. See ibid., p. 93. On women employed as crossing guards, see footnote on p. 239 of Stanton, The Woman Question. The author adds: "and I never see one of those sturdy women, as the train whizzes by, a baton at her shoulder, without thinking that the eccentric Saint-Simon accomplished some practical good in the world."

41. See Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, pp. 99-145 for a discussion of Fourier's feminism.

42. Blanquart, Femmes, L'Âge politique, pp. 21-24.

43. Edith Thomas, Pauline Roland: Socialisme et féminisme au XIX(e) siècle (Paris, 1956), pp. 116, 124; quote on 155.

44. Moon, in Boxer and Quataert, Socialist Women, p. 19.

45. Ibid. Quote appears on p. 33. Working women's prostitution carried on to compensate for the pitifully low wages they received was commonly referred to as "the fifth quarter of the day." See Edith Thomas, The Women Incendiaries, James and Starr, trans. (New York, 1966), p. 8. This specific practice caused the Procurator of the Appeals Court of Alsace to brand factories dens of "shameless debauchery" in 1855. Quoted in Dupeux, French Society, p. 131.

46. Quoted in Boxer and Quataert, Socialist Women, p. 37.

47. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

48. On Proudhon, see George Woodcock, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (London, 1956); Edouard Dolléans, Proudhon (Paris, 1948); K. Steven Vincent, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism (New York, 1984).

49. Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, p. 185.

50. George Woodcock, Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements (Cleveland, 1962), p. 111.

51. Proudhon in Système des contradictions économiques ou philosophie de la misère, vol. 1, p. 356, quoted in James Joll, The Anarchists (New York, 1964), p. 67.

52. Proudhon, Carnets de P. J. Proudhon, quoted in Dolléans, Proudhon, p. 318.

53. Proudhon, Système des contradictions, quoted in Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, p. 172.

54. In her response to Proudhon's attack, Deroin declared in print on 28 Jan. 1849 that she knew of many women who "became courtesans only to escape the necessity of being housewives." Quoted by Edouard Dolléans, Féminisme et le mouvement ouvrier: George Sand (Paris, 1951), p. 5.

55. Pierre Joseph Proudhon, La pornocratie: Ou les femmes dans les temps modernes (Paris, 1875), pp. 114, 162-163.

56. Jenny d'Héricourt in La femme affranchie, and

Juliette Lamber in Les idées antiproudhoniennes sur l'amour, la femme et le mariage, noted in Thomas, The Women Incendiaries, pp. 21-26. Proudhon's remarks are in La pornocratie, p. 150. Apparently Proudhon's own household was not always harmonious. In a letter to Michelet on 15 Mar. 1860, Proudhon noted that his wife had been ailing, was having trouble sleeping, and was suffering from migraines. She had told him: "You have your ideas, and I, when you are at your work and my daughter is in class, I have nothing." Despite Proudhon's assertion to Michelet that he would rather have to deal with the passions of "combat, rage, [and] hatred," than with his wife's migraines and martyrdom, Proudhon's revelation to another friend indicates that his ideal woman was one who was "simple, obscure, retiring," appears to attest to the fact that Proudhon's confidence to Michelet was made in a weaker moment of temporary frustration. Letter to Antoine Gautier, 20 Feb. 1862, reported in Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, p. 181. See ibid., pp. 182-183 for other quotes.

57. Proudhon, La pornocratie, p. 13. His emphasis.

58. Ibid., p. 161.

59. Ibid., p. 37.

60. Ibid., p. 29.

61. Ibid., pp. 41, 266. His emphasis.

62. Ibid., p. 161.

63. Ibid., p. 19.

64. Ibid., p. 179.

65. Ibid., p. 13.

66. Thibert, Le féminisme dans le socialisme, p. 194.

67. Proudhon, La pornocratie, p. 194.

68. Although her work is concerned with party socialism, Marilyn Boxer deals with syndicalism to a certain extent, particularly with the printers' federation and the Emma Couriau affair. Boxer includes the French left in general when she concludes that the woman question remained only "a superficial accoutrement, grafted onto a socialist program concerned essentially with economic issues." The only problem with her analysis is that she takes the printers as representative of the entire syndicalist movement. "Socialism Faces Feminism in France" (Ph.D. Dissertation) and "Socialism Faces Feminism: The Failure of Synthesis in France, 1879-1914," in Socialist Women; see p. 106 for quote. The findings of Charles Sowerwine, on the

other hand, are more in agreement with my conclusions, presented first as a preliminary study to this larger work: "From Foyer to Factory: French Revolutionary Syndicalism and the Woman Question," Eighth Annual Conference of the Western Society for French History, Eugene, Oregon, October 1980. Sowerwine contends that the Couriau affair forced the CGT "to confront the problem of women's equality in the workplace from the perspective of class struggle." "Workers and Women in France Before 1914: The Debate Over the Couriau Affair," Journal of Modern History 55 (September 1983): 411-440, quote appears on p. 440.

69. Ibid., pp. 11-17. See also Paul Lafargue, La question de la femme (Paris, 1904); Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue, Le programme du parti ouvrier (Lille, 1897); August Bebel, Women and Socialism, Meta L. Stern Hite, trans. (New York, 1910).

70. Boxer, "Socialism Faces Feminism," (Ph.D. Dissertation) pp. 38-51; quote appears on p. 50.

71. See ibid., chapter 3. Quote on p. 71.

72. See ibid., chapter 4 on the Mink-Guesde connection, and chapter 5 on Aline Valette.

73. Pelletier was originally attracted to the Guesdists because of their antiministerial stand; p. 250 in ibid. When the Guesdists became too "reformist" for the radical Dr. Pelletier, she joined Hervé's branch of the party for a time.

74. Chapter 8 in ibid. deals with Pelletier. Quote on p. 232.

75. Ibid., p. 235.