European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,

MARILYN J. BOXER and JEAN H. QUATAERT, eds., New York: Elsevier, 1978, Pp. 266

This collection of eight essays examines the relationships between socialism and feminism by means of brief biographies of twenty-six outstanding socialist feminist women in France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Russia. The biographical sketches permit the authors to rescue some remarkable women, such as the early utopian socialist, Flora Tristan, from relative oblivion, as well as explore the processes of politicization to socialism and feminism. Seven of the essays, each dealing with a particular country in a particular period, provide the data for cross-national and temporal comparisons. Unfortunately, the methodology and organization of the book hinder systematic analysis and comparisons. Only the Quataert essay, "Unequal Partners in an Uneasy Alliance: Women and the Working Class in Imperial Germany," attempts a small-scale prosopography or group biography. Only the editors' introduction, "The Class and Sex Connection," and, to a lesser degree, their prefaces to the other pieces discuss the similarities and differences between countries and epochs.

Part of the problem derives from the collection's origins in a series of papers presented to two annual meetings of the American Historical Association (1973 and 1975). Furthermore, the editors explain that the book is intended for "the classroom, the general reader, and all interested in the . . . movements of the dispossessed." The book will introduce the non-specialist to an unusual group of women (and, incidentally, an intriguing male-feminist, Dr. Pierre Bonnier) and their problems reconciling socialism and feminism. The student of socialism and/or feminism will be grateful for the wealth of detail in one source, as well as the insights into politicization and political compromise sprinkled throughout the essays. But they will be disappointed if they look for any new general analysis.

For the historian of women and especially of the Women's Movement, the basic problem is familiar: how to define feminism, a movement without a single over-arching ideology and organization, broadly enough to incorporate all groups labelled feminist without declining into meaningless generalities. The editors definition--"all those. . . who supported express efforts to ameliorate the conditions of women through public, organized activity"--seems to offer plenty of latitude yet does not cover the phenomena. One of the editors, Marilyn Boxer, in "Socialism Faces Feminism: The Failure of Synthesis in France, 1879-1914," ques-

tions whether Louise Saumoneau, who "more than any other woman, put her stamp on French socialist feminism," fits the description, since "she proposed no ameliorative action beyond supporting the socialist program."

The definition of socialist feminism is more appropriate: "women who saw the root of sexual oppression in the existence of private property" and considered the feminist program "a means to hasten the advent of socialism." All the essays address the tensions engendered by a dual commitment to class and sex and the need to establish priorities; all show that socialist women subordinated the emancipation of their sex to the struggle of the working class.

The authors account for their subjects' capitulation in various ways. In "From Separation to Socialism: Women in the Russian Revolutionary Movement of the 1870s," Barbara Alpern Engel argues that the Chaikovskii circle, the first Russian radical association in which women played a central role, used separatist feminism as a means to attain personal autonomy, which, when attained, gave precedence to the end of social revolution. Quataert adds to the traditional interpretation that German (and other) Marxist feminists were "victims of their Marxist ideology that posited the inevitable evolution of the family to a higher moral unit based on full equality," her explanation about inhibitions derived from the women's ambivalence about the family. In "Bolshevism, the Woman Question, and Alexsandra Kollontai," Beatrice Farnsworth suggests that Kollontai abandoned her opposition to the 1925 family code, even contributed to the myth that the revolution liberated women, because she was socialized to care about her comrades' contempt.

While the authors interpret the socialist feminists' betrayal of the women's cause biographically and historically, hence sympathetically, they do note the negative consequences. Barbara Alpern Engel concurs with her subjects' shift from feminism to radicalism because the "woman question offered no solution to the inequities that pervaded Russian society," but concludes that the left, by subsuming women's issues to working class concerns, ceased to "deal creatively with these personal issues." In "The Marxist Ambivalence Toward Women: Between Socialism and Feminism in the Italian Socialist Party," Claire LaVigna weighs the advantages of Anna Kuliscioff's adherence to Marxism, notably access to a ready-made program and the ability to work for reform without abandoning revolution, against the disadvantages of exclusively economic preoccupations and ignoring inequality in the labour market.

At the turn of the century, as socialist parties put more effort into

parliamentary politics, the practical need to win the votes of men--especially working class men--attached to the patriarchal family shunted aside theoretical commitments to women's rights. Marilyn Boxer draws the broadest conclusion: "In a historical situation. . . in which the socialist party chose in practice to support the bourgeois state, there was no chance it would work for radical change in the lives of women who, through their role in the family, were seen to be the sinews which held the body politic together." Ingrun Lafleur, in "Five Socialist Women: Traditionalist Conflicts and Socialist Visions in Austria, 1893-1934," has a more nuanced view. She argues that the Austrian socialist women's movement obtained the first endorsement by a political party of legal, free abortion and birth control (1926) because the Social Democratic Party had to emphasize personal and cultural issues to combat the "massive influence" of the Church. This and other essays in Socialist Women indicate that more attention should be paid to the particular political and cultural setting to understand the socialists' positions on feminism.

Engel's study of four Russians, Lafleur's five Austrians, Boxer's six Frenchwomen, and Quataert's eight S.P.D. women hint that working class and peasant women came to socialist feminism for different reasons than bourgeois or aristocratic women. Despite the editors' claims, though, the book focuses on upper class socialist feminists. Much more must be done on working class socialist feminists and on working class women's attitudes toward socialist feminism. Boxer does speculate that socialist feminists' failure to push for concrete reforms--other than so-called protective labour legislation--may have lost them the support of working women. Her speculation deserves further, more specific study.

In general, this pioneering collection opens up new lines of inquiry for the specialist without losing its suitability as an introduction to socialist feminism.

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Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Feminity and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women, 1893-1914 WAYNE ROBERTS, Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976, Pp. 60

Honest Womanhood is a resourceful package of information that allows the reader to see exactly how far women