

## **The concept of feminism at early international women´s congresses in Europe, 1890-1900**

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The definition of "feminism" has, for as long as it has been used, also been discussed. Nowadays there are several bids for a definition. There are scholarly definitions and layman definitions. The latest vulgar definition in Sweden is "ethical feminism", launched by the bourgeois christian party Kristdemokraterna; it is signifying a feminism that evaluates all the traditional female virtues. It should be understood in the Swedish political context of a fairly high estimation of the word, in which a number of political parties are putting the word feminism into their party declarations. The popularity of the concept is at the same time pointing to its decay.

Even among scholars of feminism, the concept has been used in many ways. We all know about discussions around radical feminism, social feminism etc. In the name of postmodernism, I cannot object to any of them. It is good if the person using "feminism", also know what she or he wants to signify, and scholars usually do. It is of course not possible to take out a patent on the word. Thus this article will object to one thing; that the early history of the word "feminism" is used to argue that a special contemporary interpretation of it should be more relevant than any other today.

Firstly, a word and a concept is undergoing change. A historian´s job is not to decide for ever the best or correct interpretation of a word, but to analyse how it has been used in the past, in the special historical period we are studying. Thus "feminism" has had different meanings and has been used in many ways, but not in any way.

Secondly, a word in itself - here "feminism" - has a special history, which is worth a study; the story of the word "feminism" is not the same as the history of

women's struggles for new and better conditions. It is simply the story of a word and its different meanings, when used by different persons.

Thirdly, "feminism" has by historians been used as a concept in connections of writing the history of women's struggles for better or changed conditions. That is another story altogether, which I am not in disagreement with, as long as it is clear what the concept "feminism" is chosen to embrace. I am not hostile to or arguing against those, who has later on used the concept of "feminism" for periods long before the time when the word was invented; they are mostly very aware of such an anachronism and have chosen the word conscious of this.

This article will only bring up the historical period and the special circumstances, in which the word "feminism" was first launched, and show how it was taken up and used by organising women. I will not say anything generally about its use and meaning, for any other time or place(s). This article is about how "feminism" was used at international congresses around 1900, by women gathering there or connected to these congresses. My interest is to follow how "feminism" was used by the women who were the first to apply it to their own deeds and wishes, in trying to organise women for a Cause. I think that it is of interest to see the early development of the word "feminism"; its roots, its early meanings and its spread to other languages. And this is so far a sketch, not even a full study. I am most interested in information about when and in what circumstances the word was first used around the world.

Which is the origin of the word "feminism"? It was invented in France, from where it during the 1890's started to be dispersed into other languages. Geneviève Fraisse, French historian and expert on nineteenth century literature on woman's role in democratic society, has traced the word to a French medical student, Ferdinand-Valère Faneau de la Cour. In 1871, de la Cour published a medical thesis with the title *Du Féminisme et de l'infantilisme chez les tuberculeux* (eng. On Feminism and Infantilism Among Tuberculosis Patients). "Feminism", in this context, denoted a change which came over male tuberculosis patients, giving them so-called feminine characteristics. The word has the same construction as "infantilism" and "infantile" which has kept its original, negative connotations of abnormal, even sickly

childishness, mainly in adults. "Feminism" was, thus, originally a term for a man who was unhealthily feminine.

In 1872, Alexandre Dumas Jr., the author of *The Camelia Lady*, used the word "feminist" in his *L'homme-femme* (eng. The Man-Woman), a pamphlet directed against women's new demands. His use of "feminist" was derogatory to women, not to men. Feminists, according to Dumas, were those women who protested against the sexist disparity in laws and moral codes concerning adultery and divorce.

In medical terminology, feminist thus started as referring to a feminine man; but the word quickly served as an abusive term for those women who, because they defied contemporary feminine norms, were considered masculine.<sup>1</sup> It would have been linguistically more logical to call such women "masculinists". But it was probably unacceptable to endow that word with negative connotations, in a time when virility and masculinity had highly positive resonances. Women who demanded more social influence and more equality were categorized by the medical term "feminist." They were considered to be as abnormal for their sex, as were feminine men for theirs. Women probably had this word hurled at them during debates and in the streets. It was also used without discrimination by some socialists in the late 1880's.<sup>2</sup> But in 1890 - if not earlier - the women picked up the derogatory word to refer to themselves. By calling themselves feminists, they ennobled the word and emphasized that they were proud of what others considered as a shameful affliction.

In 1890 the socialist Marya Chéliga-Loévy, a woman of Polish origin, since long living in Paris, used the word feminist positively in her new journal *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle de Femmes*. She formulated an early definition of the concept. She did so in the process of giving a critical account of discussions in the National Assembly. She wrote that "independent *feminists*" never affiliated themselves with any political party, because history showed that women who fought together with men were always

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<sup>1</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, writes in her book *Muse de la raison. La démocratie exclusive et la différence des sexes*, that the French philosopher and social critic Fourier erroneously has been credited with introducing the word "feminism." Even though Fourier was a great advocate of women's emancipation, this is not true, according to her. Fraisse 1989: 198f

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. *La Revue Socialiste* No 40 (Avril) 1888: 421

returned to their "subordinate position" after the political battle was over.<sup>3</sup> She supported women's forming separate organizations to demand their rights, by which she meant equal legal rights. Since she saw women as being "subordinate," she called them that in wordings similar to the ones used by Maria Desraimes in 1878, at the first international congress for women's rights, *le Congrès international du Droit des femmes* (the International Congress for Women's Rights).<sup>4</sup>

In 1892, a women's congress was held in Paris. For the first time ever, a congress named itself "feminist". *Le Congrès générale des Sociétés féministes* (The General Congress of Feminist Societies) was a follow-up to the rights congresses earlier held during World Expositions in Paris in 1878 and 1889. Its tendency was towards feminism and equal rights, and the leaders were socialists. But in France, a split between socialism and so-called bourgeois feminism was not finalized until the socialists' unification in 1905, so women of other political views were also present. Like French socialists, French feminists were divided into smaller groups during a time when the political activities among radicals and socialists created many new groups not only among women. The feminists took part in a discursive struggle about how to define socialism in a dialogue with socialist men, which partly was taking place at the feminist congresses of 1892 and 1896. They were eager to merge socialism and feminism, both demanding equality for subordinated people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "... Nous sommes franchement et indépendamment *féministes* (marked out in original). L'histoire nous a montré plus d'un exemples, qu'après avoir été exploitées comme instruments d'action, après avoir servi avec un zèle incomparable, les femmes ont été repoussées par les politicien vanqueurs au fond de leur ancienne servitude." *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle de Femmes (B d UU d F)* No 1890: 6 - the word "feminist" recurred on page 11 of the same issue.

<sup>4</sup> *B d UU d F* /more/ ; Cf *Congrès international du droit des femmes, ouvert à Paris, le 25 Juillet 1878, clos le 9 Août suivant. Actes. Compte-rendu des séances plénières*. 3me livraison. Paris: Auguste Ghio, editeur, sans date, probably 1878

<sup>5</sup> No minutes or shorthand newspaper reports were printed after this congress, but newspapers and journals wrote about it. These have given me the bulk of the material I have used in my reconstruction of events and debates. Among these publications were, of course, *Le Journal des Femmes*, but I have also drawn, upon *Le Temps*, *Le Matin* and *Le Figaro*.; It was called the Third Women's Rights Congress in the papers, as the earlier ones which had taken place in 1878 and 1889, *Le Temps* May 14, 1892; *Le Figaro* May 13, 1892; it was arranged rather hastily. Not until March it was announced in *Le Journal des Femmes* no 4, March 1892. *Journal des Femmes* was a 4-page monthly journal which had been established recently and was edited by Maria Martin.; in Germany, a split between radical and bourgeois women happened as early as the mid-nineties and was demonstrated at the international women's congress held in Berlin in 1896, Sabine Schmitt 1995a: /page?/; Klejman-Rochefort 1989: 210f samt /page?/ Om splittringen i den fr kv rör/ Livet 1897

The 1892 congress was thus an attempt by women to show how socialism and feminism could be united. In this context, "feminism" meant the demand for a radical change in existing power relations between women and men. The agenda embraced both the socialist demand for justice for all classes, and the feminist demand for equality between the sexes. Equality was to be achieved through changing state policies, particularly legislations.<sup>6</sup>

The congress was organized by *La fédération des Sociétés féministes* and *l'Union universelle des Femmes*. It had two goals; one was to unite all French feminist groups in *La fédération des Sociétés féministes* (the Federation of Feminist Societies), founded as an umbrella organization for French feminist groups in 1891 by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin. The congress was the first manifestation of this national coalition. The other goal was to unite feminists internationally in *l'Union Universelle* (the Universal Union)<sup>7</sup> which had been established at the Rights Congress in Paris in 1889.

The Universal Union published the journal *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle de Femmes*, where the word "feminism" had already been used. During its two-year life, the journal expressed sympathy for Yves Guyot's defense of women's labor-market freedom, during his dispute with the socialists in the National Assembly. It was not always siding with socialists but was concerned with conditions for working women. It published articles about the low wages and hard conditions of female laborers. The journal had good contacts in Scandinavia, not least in Sweden; at two occasions it presented the *Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundet* and published its statutes. The leader of the union was Marya Chéliga-Loévy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Klejman-Rochefort 1989: 95; *Journal des Femmes* No 8 July 1892

<sup>7</sup> The congress met in the great hall of the arrondissement Saint-Sulpice's town hall, in the same place as the official congress in 1889; *Le Figaro* May 13, 1892; Krakovitch 1980: 28; *Bulletin de l'Union universelle des Femmes* no 17 (May) 1891; Klejman-Rochefort 1989: 95-96; Sowerwine 1978: 67; The congress also had a much longer title, "Le premier congrès annuel de la Fédération des Sociétés féministes jointes à l'Union universelle des femmes." This title shows a dual purpose of the congress: to further national as well as international cooperation. *Le Temps* May 14, 1892.

<sup>8</sup> *Bulletin de l'Union universelle des Femmes* no 3: 8; see also *B d UU d F* no 17 (May) 1891 where its foundation is described; cf Lacour "L'assemblée des femmes," *Le Figaro* May 13, 1892

The leaders of the 1892 congress, Eugénie Potonié and Maria Martin, were socialists who had collaborated, since 1889, in running *La Ligue socialiste des femmes*; since 1891 it was renamed, *La Solidarité des Femmes*. Did they drop "socialist" from the title because they were disappointed with their male comrades? The new group had certain difficulties establishing itself on equal terms with the socialists, although reformist French socialists gave Eugénie Potonié-Pierre a platform from which to argue for her version of socialist equality, in, for example, the journal *La Question Sociale*.<sup>9</sup> *La Revue Socialiste* also had an open attitude to feminists at least until 1894 but some contributors were rather irritated by the feminist interpretation of equality, as equal with equality between men.<sup>10</sup> The boundaries between feminists and socialists were not yet delineated.

The senior Maria Deraismes still played an important role at the 1892 congress, together with feminists such as Aline Valette, Marie Bonneval, Léonie Rouzade, Mme Vincent, Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin. With the exception of Deraismes, they all called themselves socialists.<sup>11</sup> Marya Chéliga-Loévy was a feminist since long also moving in socialist circles.

Thirty-five delegates came from abroad. Northern and Central Europe were best represented. Few people came from the U.S. or Britain, and of these, few were well-known women activists. One exception was the socialist Dora Montefiore from England..

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<sup>9</sup> The congress took place May 13-15, 1892, Krakovitch 1980: 28; Klejman-Rochefort 1989: 95; *Le Figaro* May 13, 1892; Jami 1981: 126; Sowerwine 1978: 66; i *La Question Sociale* March 15, 1893: 77f; Eugénie Potonié-Pierre, in *La Solidarité des Femmes*, pleaded with her socialist comrades, urging them to work for absolute equality between the sexes when political nominations were made ("l'égalité complète des deux sexes"). The group wanted the socialist party to start a campaign of protest against a growing inequality between the sexes. E.g., the articles by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre, who was a steady contributor, *La Question Sociale* May 15 & June 15 & November 15, 1892.

<sup>10</sup> Gustave Roanet had written a serie of articles about labor legislation, with demanded special legislation for women and children already in 1886, before the French legislation in 1892. And he got a sharp reply, showing disappointment that more groups than the one inspired by Proudhon could ask for such "élimination" of women's work conditions, *La Revue Socialiste*, Roanet No 15, 18, 20, 21, 1886 and the published letter from Nathalie Lemel No 16 (Avril) 1886: 345

<sup>11</sup> M D died in 1894, *Maria Deraismes* 1980; *Le Matin* May 14 and 16, 1892; Krakovitch 1980: 28; Sowerwine 1978: 67; Eugénie Potonie-Pierre was a socialist. *La Question Sociale* September 15, 1893 and Jan.-Febr. 1896: 321- 322; Compère-Morel 1924 about E P-P; Sowerwine 1975: 90 & 1978: 46ff

The young socialist Georges Diamandy, leader of a recently founded socialist students' union disturbed the congress. He wanted it to discuss the link between women's emancipation and the victory of the proletariat. His challenged angrily the congress's attempt to integrate the woman's question with socialism and upset many participants. He could not stop the congress from accepting a resolution which stated that every child had a claim on its father, as a majority wanted to abolish the legal prohibition to search or even mention the name of the father, if the mother was not married to him.<sup>12</sup>

The congress had sought, to use modern terminology, to put the social question into a gender perspective. A group of recently organized students considered such an effort irrelevant to socialism. They were annoyed at women's presumption in dictating what socialism ought to embrace. According to them, socialism should focus on the class struggle, not on equality between women and men.

The problematic question of how to deal simultaneously with gender relations and class relations became an open dilemma at the 1892 congress. Women tried to solve the problem through compromise and integration, without abandoning the idea that women's aspirations must be respected. They thought to have found an ideological basis in the socialist ideology of equality, recently expressed at the Second International in 1891. But how to define equality, when it came to child-bearing, which embodied a biologically determined inequality? Paternity was, according to French law, determined not biologically, but legally; it existed only *within* the marriage; it was only socially constructed. Feminists requested that biology be merged with legality, in determining paternity, but socialists objected.

The 1892 congress received quite a lot of attention from the radical press, it reached beyond French borders, and it adopted a number of interesting resolutions which later international women's congresses would sponsor and develop. But a great debacle broke out over the question of paternity. The incident can be seen as proof of how difficult it was for women to win respect for their demands for equality within the

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<sup>12</sup> Lacour i *Le Figaro* May 13, 1892; *Le Matin* May 16, 1892; *Le Temps* May 17, 1892; *La Lanterne* May 17, 1892; Livet 1897; Sowerwine 1978: 67

socialist movement. On the other hand, liberals like Yves Guyot and Clémence Royer openly supported the congress's feminist views. Liberals often favored a completely unregulated labor market. This was a view, however, which socialist feminists did not share. Feminists' attempts to balance between socialism and liberalism would be fraught with difficulties, and remain problematic to this day.

Clemence Royer was a feminist, a liberal and also the translator of Darwin into French. How could she combine her belief of a biologically decided human nature with a resistance to special legislation for women, when most social darwinists were very much in support of different treatment of women? Her view was evolutionistic in so far that she thought that the societies, which did not observed and developed women's capacities, were bound to degenerate and disappear. Such a interpretation wanted equal labor legislation and suffrage for all. Thus Social Darwinism did not always had to lead to demands an unequal but complementary relations between men and women.<sup>13</sup>

*Le Matin* recapitulated the demands made at the 1892 congress: "...a synopsis of what was wished for is, equality in everything that concerns women and men." Equality and feminism were placed within the framework of humanistic socialism, the heir to libertarian socialism, with Saint-Simon as one main figure. His movement had envisioned the future as one of organized cooperation, preferably through regulated cooperatives.<sup>14</sup> The 1892 congress was demanding suffrage for women, which was expressed in in various resolutions.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in the 1890s, a French feminist was someone who supported women's equality before the law and who - somewhat contradictory - felt that the best means to fight for women's social integration was to set up all-women organizations.<sup>16</sup> Feminists

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<sup>14</sup> "...égalité en toutes choses de l'homme et de la femme, tel est, en résumé, son desideratum." *Le Matin* May 14, 1892; on "Saint-Simonists", see e g Taylor, 1983; Sowerwine 1978: 6-71 does not even mention the fact that it is an international congress and Klejman-Rochefort 1989:95ff hardly discusses it as such; "Cahier de doléances féminines, Rédigé conformément à la decision prise ou Congrès international féministe tenu, les 12, 13 et 14 mai 1892, ... etc " reprint i Diebolt & Zylberberg-Hocquard 1984: 145-150, confirms the stress on equality at this congress.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Journal des Femmes* No 7, June, No 8, July 1892; *Le Temps* May 15, 1892; *La Lanterne* May 15, 1892; *Le Figaro* May 17, 1892

<sup>16</sup> The dual meaning of the word "feminisme", as a political as well as a medical term, is still to be found in a dictionary. *Petit Robert. Dictionnaire de la langue française.* 1990: 768



have often adopted a strategy of separate organizations and this has sometimes been characterized as a policy of women's voluntary self-segregation. But such a segregation was never, at this early stage, rigid; there were always some men in the international women's congresses in Paris. All of them were not hostile as the students. Alliances were eagerly sought with influential men. Segregation was more or less forced upon women by the structure of society, which generally denied them the right to be socially integrated as individuals, most often excluding them only because of their sex. The leading feminists, such as Marie Bonneval, Léonie Rozade and Chéliga-Loewy belonged to French reformist socialists around Benoît Malon and his journal *La Revue Socialiste*,<sup>17</sup> which made them well known by and cooperating with men.

In 1896, an other international women's congress, *Congrès féministe internationale* (International Feminist Congress) was held in Paris, a follow up of the one in 1892. The word "feminist" had now become entrenched in France and again was put in the title.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of her participation in the congress, as a reporter for *Le Figaro*, the journalist and ex-actress Marguerite Durand turned into a convinced feminist. She became an important person in the French women's movement and participated in subsequent international women's congresses in Paris. She soon founded her own daily newspaper, *La Fronde*. The newspaper became important in forming opinion on the woman's question. Durand's equality-oriented feminism did not prevent her, as a former actress, from wearing beautiful clothes, or from other things that made her, according to the norms of the time, attractive and "feminine."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. *La Revue Socialiste* No 30 (Juin) 1887: 519-534, No 36 (Dec) 1887: 635-651, No 92 (Sept) 1892: 242

<sup>18</sup> Dissard 1896: 537 ff; Vincent 1898: 2; *Le Journal des Femmes* No 49 January 1896; as was the case with its predecessor in Paris, there were no printed book of minutes from this congress, but accounts of the congress could be read in many newspapers, Dissard 1896: 537; the congress minutes were published in *Le Journal des Femmes* and had been compiled by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre. *Le Journal des Femmes* No 52 April to No 55 July 1896. She describes "séances" on April 8, 9, and 11; her minutes are summaries, not the detailed documentation one finds of other congresses, where each remark and each report of the congress is covered. I supplemented it with other newspaper accounts; Program, Congrès féministe international de 1896, and Vœux adoptés par le Congrès féministe international: Congrès 1896 - Paris, Dos 37 BMD; *Le Journal des Femmes* No 49 January 1896; the name *Congrès internationale des Sociétés féministes* also occurred, Berlin 1896: 2

<sup>19</sup> December the following year, 1897, Marguerite Durand started to publish her own daily newspaper *La Fronde*, which was to work for the women's cause and at the same time be a regular newspaper

Marie Bonneval, an active socialist attached great importance to the Parisian congress of 1896. She saw it as a turning point for French women's political awakening and considered its feminist perspective to be socialist in nature. Also socialist, Paule Mink, had a very positive opinion on its influence on debates on women, especially on suffrage.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the concept and word "feminism" had been introduced by Parisian women with strong socialist attachments. The ideal of an equality continued to offer a point of discursive resistance to proponents of women's essential difference, voiced at other congresses both in Paris and at other places

The 1896 congress in Berlin (*Internationale Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen*<sup>21</sup>) shows how both the socialist women's movement and the bulk of the bourgeois women's movement were indifferent to talk about "feminism" and hesitant to focus on equality. At that congress the word "feminism" was not used.

By the end of the 1890s, it is in the Francophile area that we find the word "feminism" frequently used by the women's movement. At the 1897 world exhibition in Brussels,<sup>22</sup> *le Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles* (the Brussels' International Feminist Congress) was held in the beginning of August.

It was proud to be the first *feminist* congress to be officially accepted as part of a world exposition. The previous *official* women's congress, held at the world exposition in Paris in 1889, had not used the word. Now "feminist" had become a fairly established and popular word, even if it had not penetrated into the Anglo-Saxon linguistic sphere.

The congress's general secretary and organizer was the lawyer Dr. Marie Popelin, chairperson in *La Ligue belge du droit des femmes* (the Belgian League of the Rights

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publishing all kind of news. In the beginning it was written and printed entirely by women. *Fronde* September 6, 1900; Grinberg 1926: 84-85; Jami 1981: 10; Cf Rabaut 1996

<sup>20</sup> See for example *La Petite République* October 2, 1900; Paris September 1900: 503f; *La Revue Socialiste* No 36 (Dec) 1887: 635-651; Mink 1897:339;

<sup>21</sup> It was held from the 19th to the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1896, Berlin 1896

<sup>22</sup> The exposition drew just over 7,500,000 visitors, Schröder-Godehuve - Rasmussen 1992: 128ff

of Women).<sup>23</sup> The invitation had been directed to "all feminist groups in Belgium and abroad," and about a hundred delegates appeared. Only about half of these were from Belgium, which made the proportion of foreign delegates large. The congress met in the great hall of Palais des Académie, a locale of high status. The congress was held in French, which may explain the lack of interest among many Belgians, as well as the low number of British participants.<sup>24</sup>

This congress addressed a limited group of women. The invitation, addressed to "all *feminist* groups," may have been meant to repel undesirable groups. Some socialists felt themselves unwelcome. Marie Popelin's welcomed representatives of all tendencies within the woman's movement in her introductory speech, except for those who believed in the necessity of class struggle.<sup>25</sup> This must be understood in the context of the disagreements which had arisen in Paris between young, male socialists and feminist socialists. Yet female socialists from France, if not from Germany, attended the congress. To be socialist - in a time when the discussions were vivid about what this meant - did not necessarily mean to be a proponent of class struggle; one could be a reformist. The French socialism was still filled with discussions over the meaning of socialism.

Socialist feminists from France included Marya Chéliga-Loévy, Mme Vincent, Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin. The congress also attracted non-socialists such as Maria Deraismes's sister Mme Féresse-Deraismes, Mme Bogelot and Maria Pognon. There were few well-known women's movement activists from England, although socialist Dora Montefiore was one of the honorary chairwomen.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of August. Bruxelles Aug 1897; Caine 1997: 143 "feminist" was used for the first time in England in 1898 by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy. It only came to the U.S. sometime in the new century. //kolla Rendall 1985

<sup>24</sup> "... tous les groupes féministes du pays et de l'étranger," Bruxelles Aug 1897: Avant-propos (quote), 50; A report in the Swedish women's movement's periodical *Dagny* maintained that "a women's question scarcely exists in Belgium" ("någon kvinnofråga knappast existerar i Belgien"). The same report said that local newspapers showed almost no interest in the congress. *Dagny* 1897: 230-31; Vincent 1898:2; Flemish-speakers probably felt excluded. UW

<sup>25</sup> Schapiro 1897: 512 note

<sup>26</sup> The Swede Hilda Sachs, who had been stationed periodically in Paris as a journalist, and was known for her stress on equality, had participated in the organizational commission. Also from Germany were among others Minna Cauer, Lina Morgenstern, Hanna Bieber-Böhm, Anita Augspurg, Marie Stritt and Käthe Schirmacher. The congress started on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, "Congrès Féministe International de 1897 ..." "Programme" four-paged, Mapp, Congrès 1897 -- Bruxelles Dos 36, BMD; Bruxelles Aug

Marie Popelin summarized the congress as approving of "a free labor market and [women's] access to all professions." Legal limitations and regulations had created two of "feminism's burning questions," poverty and prostitution. But the congress was not hostile to all kinds of state intervention. On the contrary, Popelin said that the congress had shown broad sympathy to suggestions that different government ministries - such as departments for education, trade and industry - be augmented by committees on women's work, in order to improve women's position in the labor market.<sup>27</sup>

Maria Martin, editor of the French *Journal des Femmes*, presented in Brussels a socialist-influenced analysis of society entitled "The Freedom of Work." "The feminist question," she held, had made substantial gains. The demand for equal rights had resulted in women's increasing access to education in areas which had once been all-male reserves. This education had resulted in feminism, that is, "the necessity for the woman to create an independent position for herself, and to be prepared for life's struggle, just as the men".<sup>28</sup> Her definition of feminism prioritized independence and self-reliance. In this women were hindered by male definitions of "women in the home" - a slogan taken from the anarchist Proudhon - to erect both legal and political barriers for women's work. But real women - including married women - were forced to work more than ever before, only now hampered by regulations and excluded from education.<sup>29</sup>

Marya Chéliga-Loévy's regretted women's economic dependency. Their male comrades at work treated women as intruders. Chéliga-Loévy envisioned a feminist political party, which would help female workers to understand that they must defend *their* work and careers. An *avant-garde* of feminists would improve the lot of female

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1897: page without pagination; the only Scandinavian country which had a participant was Finland, represented by "the well-known Finnish authoress, Miss Maikki Friberg, Ph.D." (Aden kända finska författarinnan fil dokt fröken Maikki Friberg). *Dagny* 1897: 230ff (231 quote)

<sup>27</sup> There were no resolutions taken at this congress, as a policy decision from the organisers. "... la liberté du travail et du l'accès à toutes les professions:", and "... les deux question brûlantes du féminisme." Bruxelles Aug 1897 Avant-propos (quotes III); Vincent 1898: 4

<sup>28</sup> The title of the lecture was "Liberté du travail" Bruxelles Aug 1897: 56ff ; "la question féministe" "...le féminisme, c'est-à-dire la nécessité pour la femme de se faire une position indépendante et d'être préparée pour la lutte de la vie comme le sont les hommes." Bruxelles Aug 1897: 56

<sup>29</sup> "...la femme au foyer..." Bruxelles Aug 1897: 57

workers: " I think it is possible to create a feminist party...".<sup>30</sup> In a time when no woman in Europe had the right to vote, she contemplated a feminist party. It was probably a segregated trade union that was her concern.

Chéliga-Loévy recognized the class oppression of which socialists spoke, and hoped that upper-class women would organize women from the lower classes. The thought of an *avant-garde*, a leading elite, was no doubt inspired by the socialist example. Some feminists would save their less fortunate sisters; but the feminist movement would also find new strength through its battle for working-class women.<sup>31</sup> She did not like the thought of a feminism, which would face a future as an exclusive, upper-class ideology. Chéliga-Loévy was a good socialist, insofar as she seldom observed antagonism between working-class men and women, emphasizing, instead, women's exploitation by employers and foremen. She identified sexual as well as economic oppression, and recognized their interrelationship. But she was also very critical of male trade unionists and socialists.

Wilhelmine Drucker, Amsterdam, emphasized that women had always worked in paid as well as unpaid work. Recent legislation further barred women's access to skilled labor, which had been easier before. "I consider woman's economic independence to be the foundation of her emancipation."<sup>32</sup>

Drucker proclaimed herself to be a "militant feminist".<sup>33</sup> Maybe her choice to add "militant" to "feminist" shows that other groups had started to call themselves "feminists" without as fargoing demands as Drucker? As a militant feminist she demanded that all women be treated as legal equals, and have rights to equal education. Her and other feminists' views of woman as biologically different, and not seldom of the married woman's particular duties, did *not* incline them towards demanding special treatment aimed at protecting that special female nature.

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<sup>30</sup> "la liberté du travail" ( "Je pense qu'il est possible de créer un parti féministe, ..." 63) Bruxelles Aug 1897: 62-63

<sup>31</sup> Bruxelles Aug 1897: 64

<sup>32</sup> Ivy Pinchbeck, Alice Clark and others began this way, I believe...//Kessler-Harris Out to Work ; "Je considère que la base de l'affranchissement de la femme est sa liberté économique." Bruxelles Aug 1897: 74

<sup>33</sup> For instance "...nous femmes militantes, disons que..." by Wilhelmine Drucker, Bruxelles Aug 1897: 70ff (quote 74)

At this congress, the common meaning was that adult people - men and women - should be equal before the law, and that this made the congress "feminist". The congress clearly favored equality between the sexes when it came to wage labor; women ought to be *allowed* to perform the same tasks as men. The position of married women remained unclear, although the congress majority believed that although most married women would choose to stay home, they should be given the option of waged work. Perhaps the debaters wanted to avoid dwelling on the highly controversial issue of married women.

An incident at an other congress in Zürich this summer of 1897, at *Internationale Kongress für Arbeiterschutz* (the International Congress for Protective Labor-Legislation),<sup>34</sup> shows the way the term "feminist" was used by men. The congress was an attempt to bring together all trade unions - socialist as well as Catholic - which favored protective labor legislation, in order to discuss common strategies to expand protective regulations internationally.<sup>35</sup>

Among the French delegates was Marie Bonneviel, as delegate of a teachers' union. Altogether there were about thirty women, as delegates or as guests, and more than five hundred men.<sup>36</sup> Few women spoke at all. Marie Bonneviel raised her voice and claimed that women had the right to work under the same conditions as men. This gave her the dubious honor of being termed the only congress participant who "held the feminist flag flying."<sup>37</sup> She condemned all differentiation between adult men and women in the matter of protective labor legislation as both sexes needed protection. She also advocated an international coalition of working women. The first time she raised her voice, she was completely ignored, the second she was ridiculed by the

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<sup>34</sup> 23<sup>rd</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1897 Zürich Aug 1897, engl. Version; Zürich Aug 1897; cf. Wecker 1995

<sup>35</sup> Zürich Aug 1897: 3; Social democrats had earlier refused invitations to meetings which included the Christian trade unions, but had accepted as long as they were allowed to be in the majority. *Musée Social Bulletin* B No 14 1897: 402.

<sup>36</sup> Maier 1897: 4; Zürich Aug 1897: 261-278; Bonneviel also belonged to the organization *la Ligue pour le droit des femmes* (the Association for Women's Rights) in Paris.

<sup>37</sup> "... tient le drapeau des revendications féministes," was how her performance was described in a report to a French periodical, *Musée Social Bulletin* B No 14 1897: 404 (quote), 414

chairman.<sup>38</sup> Her exclusion was explicit but she had had the courage to raise the feminist demand of equality and of women's organisation.

Marie Bonneval's countrymen termed her contribution "feminist," and she most certainly would identify herself as such. She had been active at the two Parisian international women's congresses of 1892 and 1896 and in Brussels a few weeks earlier.<sup>39</sup>

"Feminist" had by 1900 become an entirely accepted word in France and in French. It is clear from its use by the press, which reported on the The World Exposition (*L'Exposition Universelle*) of Paris, 1900.<sup>40</sup> As usual, many congresses took place during the exposition. The socialist daily *La Justice* emphasized that several of these congresses were influenced by "feminists". It mentioned the ninth world peace congress,<sup>41</sup> the international socialist congress, the congress for women's conditions and rights, one congress for social education and one on humanity. At the last of these, several feminist resolutions had been proclaimed, along with the desire to realize "complete equality between man and woman." /a note

*La Justice* did not, however, call *le Congrès Catholique International des Œuvres des Femmes* feminist. Nor did that newspaper term the *Congrès International des Œuvres et Institutions Féminines* feminist. These congresses themselves avoided the label "feminist," choosing, instead, to emphasize womanliness and femininity.

"Feminism", as *La Justice* used the term, meant equality between women and men.

But one sees that the word "feminism" was becoming more diffuse as it gained international currency and moved into other languages. The German Marie Stritt had

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<sup>38</sup> In the official protocols, her contribution was summarised on four lines. She spoke for more than ten minutes. *Musée Social Bulletin* B No 14 1897: 220f, 404ff, 424; Zürich Aug 1897: 220

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Wikander 1992; Bruxelles Aug 1897, and L. Lacour, 'Le congrès féministe de Bruxelles', *Le Journal* 3, 4, 9 & 10 August 1897

<sup>40</sup> It was the largest of all the 19<sup>th</sup> Century exhibitions and also all the coming ones during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with its 50 million visitors.

<sup>41</sup> "le neuvième Congrès universel de la Paix" (*La Justice* 5.10. & 11.10.1900) led by Frédéric Passy; it was preceded by a women's peace congress, "Le Congrès international de l'Alliance universelle des femmes pour la paix," 27-29.9.1900, arranged by Princess Wisniewska (both mentioned in *La Justice* 6.10.1900); about the women's congress, arranged by *Alliance universelle des femmes pour la paix*, 30.9. - 5.10. Led by Marya Chéliga, *Dagny* 1900:365-366; *La Justice* 5.10.1900: "le Congrès de l'éducation sociale" at Musée Social; "à la réalisation de l'égalité absolue entre l'homme et la femme" *La Justice* 6.10.1900

used it to describe the two international women's congresses (*Congrès International des Œuvres et Institutions Féminines* and *Congrès Internationale de la Condition & des Droits des Femmes*), and the Catholic congress mentioned above. She also used the word "feminist" in her description of the International Council of Women's influence on the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine. The Council, said Stritt, aspired to "the shaping of an intimate connection between all the feminist organizations in all countries."<sup>42</sup> Thus she was having a more contingent definition, more connected to "women" than to the demands put.

Thus there might be seen a diffusion of the word "feminism" to include less radical parts of the women's movement but that was not a clear tendency. The word still was used by the radicals as theirs and it was also not easily used in other circles without additional adjectives as we will see.

Originally, in the 1890's when activist women picked the word up, "feminism" meant women's legal emancipation including equality in the labor market. The word maintained its radical meaning in turn-of-the-century France in all but a few cases. But it became progressively diluted as it found its way into other countries and languages. There was not ever a single European usage or definition of the word. Indeed, that would have been odd, at a continent with so many different political and economic situations, different languages and different stages of development of the women's movement. Yet "feminist" was still well into the new century in France the word used for self definition by groups working for what historian Alice Kessler-Harris has later called "economic citizenship", then most often called economic independence.<sup>43</sup>

The question of women's participation in waged work came into conflict with two different ideologies of equality. One, socialism, was based on an analysis of class; the second, feminism, on gender. Socialists not infrequently blamed a part of working-class poverty on women's waged work; that women competed with men for work, kept wages low. Meanwhile, some feminists who endorsed labor market equality in general

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<sup>42</sup> *Die Frau* 1900: 641; "... formation d'un lien intime entre toutes les *Union Féministes* de tous les pays ..." Paris June 1900 Vol I: 343; Cf. Paris Sept 1900 Préface and later in this chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Offen 1988 says that there was a European definition which was vague and linked with motherhood; I maintain that this is incorrect; Kessler-Harris 1996: 411ff



had difficulties understanding how equality could be extended to domestic servants. Their class position and self interest made this difficult.

But in the 1890s, French feminism was sympathetic to socialism, and many women made serious attempts to combine the two ideologies. These attempts were opposed, primarily by socialists of both sexes. The question remained unsolved and ideologically intricate, burdened, as it was, by the general consensus of the complementary nature of femininity to masculinity. Feminism was, eventually, incorporated into the mainly bourgeois suffrage movement. It lost its focus on the labor market and on social justice.

The International Congress on Women's Conditions and Rights (*Le Congrès international de la Condition & des Droits des femmes*) held in 1900 was officially recognized by France's leading male reformist socialists. The chief editor of *La Petite République*, Gérault-Richard, wrote a supportive article entitled "Féminisme." He viewed women as more oppressed than men; "she is more a slave, more oppressed, more humiliated than we". He felt that woman should be allowed waged work in order to achieve economic independence. It was a socialist duty to help her free herself from the masculine egoism.<sup>44</sup>

The article by Gérault-Richard defended the leading socialist René Viviani's engagement in the feminist congress in a way that makes it clear that feminism was a provocative issue *within* the working class. But René Viviani<sup>45</sup> and the reformist circle around Jean Jaurès, still wished for a cooperation with feminism without distinguishing it in two fractions as bourgeois and socialist. Accordingly, in France, socialist feminists could still enter into alliances with individual socialist men, and even with established socialist politicians.

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<sup>44</sup> "Socialist" is used with the reservations concerning the term's nebulous denotations of the word at this time, and without trying to give the word any definition other than that used by participants. UW; a much-noticed speech for women's suffrage was held by René Viviani at this congress. Pauline Savari's article "Le dernier congrès" in *Le Voltaire* 18.9.1900, cited in Klejman - Rochefort 1987: 586f;

"...elle est plus esclave, plus opprimée, plus humiliée que nous." *La Petite République*, 8.9. 1900

<sup>45</sup> Paris Sept 1900: 311

The congress's message was that woman's economic liberation was the basis for her emancipation. This made the congress *feminist*, in accordance with the meaning given the word during the 1890s. And the congress organizers indeed emphasized that this was the first time an *official* congress in France addressed purely "feminist" issues.<sup>46</sup> Feminist demands had survived. Almost all the questions at the congress were linked to the demand for equality. They concerned women's need for economic independence, equal wages for women and men, and women's suffrage. All were to be solved by legislation. The injustice of treating women as children was emphasized.<sup>47</sup> The congress demanded "married woman's economic equality," common schooling of boys and girls in order to establish the "principle of the equality of the sexes," "the same morality for both sexes" and the related demand for an end to the regulation of prostitution. It also demanded certain motherhood and children's rights.<sup>48</sup> These last two were the only resolutions which were not formulated in terms clearly based on equality.

The journalist Camille Bélilon felt that the discussion on socialism and feminism was getting off track. The socialist participants wanted to regulate women's as well as men's work when the liberal side desired labor market freedom. In her view the congress should not commit itself to the one or the other, since this would split the women's movement. *Feminists could be either for or against state regulation, as long as they did not distinguish between the regulation of women and men* according to her.<sup>49</sup> She represented the pure form of equality-feminism, neutral to state intervention

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<sup>46</sup> PR 8.9. 1900 (first page); *La Grande Revue de l'Exposition 1900*: 257; "Pour la première fois, un congrès officiel va traiter des questions féministes," Printed pages, "Congrès international de la condition et des droits des femmes (Paris, 1900)" (No 314): 1, F 12 4319, AN; the observation about official congresses concerns primarily those congresses which were held in conjunction with the world exhibitions of 1878 and 1889. In 1892 and 1896 no exhibitions were held which could have provided "official" status. UW ; *La Fronde* 6.9.1900, on suffrage.

<sup>47</sup> "Soumise à des lois à l'élaboration desquelles elle n'a aucune part, la femme, quelles que soient son intelligence et ses capacités, est traitée en mineure et souffre de la condition misérable qui lui est faite dans la société." Printed pages, "Congrès international de la condition et des droits des femmes (Paris, 1900)" (No 314): 1, F 12 4319, AN

<sup>48</sup> Printed *Bulletin d'Adhésion*, Mapp: Congrès 1900-Paris DOS 84, BMD; *Les Droits de la Femme* Nr 17, 8.9.1900: 1 //kolla citaten

<sup>49</sup> Camille Bélilon was a writer for *La Fronde*. Since the newspaper's start in 1897, she had composed the daily column "Cronique féministe" /not; *La Fronde* 6.9. 1900: 2 column 6; Paris Sept 1900: 47

or not. We could see this as the development of a new pure definition of a feminism of equality, better suited to be embraced by women from upper classes.

At the congress in 1900, a few female and male socialists tried to establish a division between "bourgeois feminists" and "socialist feminists", mimicking the German tactics but with the intent to reserve the word feminist for revolutionary socialism. They utilized the term "bourgeois" in verbal debates which were designed to establish political distinctions. Groups, such as Renaud's *Groupe féministe socialiste*, were taking the name "feminist." This demonstrates left-wing endorsement of the attractive word. But this leftist group was eager to mark its *distance* to the bourgeoisie and claimed the word "feminist" for a revolutionary left-wing movement.

In Germany, revolutionary socialists' attitudes to the word "feminist" were different. The German social democrats - talking in terms of class struggle - laid no claim to the word. Instead, leading socialist women such as Clara Zetkin used their tactical skills to link the term "feminism" solely to the bourgeoisie. German female socialists wanted to distance themselves from the bourgeoisie and used the word "feminist" to this purpose. The German definition of "feminism," as typifying the bourgeois-dominated women's movement, was eventually to triumph, in the longer run. But the conservative German women's movement was at this period in history also dubious about the term. It was, after all, a French word. In Germany, as a result - with only a few exceptions - the term "feminist" was rejected by both socialist and bourgeois women.<sup>50</sup>

In Paris in 1900, both male and female socialists still worked to integrate feminism with socialism. The congress's concluding banquet toasted René Viviani as "the able and extremely eloquent defender of the cause of feminism."<sup>51</sup>

In the preface to the printed congress minutes, Marguerite Durand gave her definition of feminism. She said that the word was misunderstood as creating discord between men and women. Her hope was that the "baneful antagonism between the

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<sup>50</sup> There was, however, a group of women who liked to call themselves feminists in Germany, see for instance Hedwig Dohm's book *Die Antifeministen. Ein Buch der Verteidigung*. Berlin 1902?; Dohm stood for equality before the law and was critical towards publications which characterized women as different; for instance, she categorized the Swedish Ellen Key as anti-feminist.

sexes"<sup>52</sup> would disappear if men and women received the same education and rights. Women and men were fated to experience similar tribulations, the same suffering, and the same joys in life. Durand was convinced that feminism would ultimately triumph.<sup>53</sup> Suffrage was to be the great lever.

It is also clear from Durand's discourse that the word "feminism" had become contested by 1900. She mentioned two schools within feminism, both in connection with women political maturity. The first was the "nice feminism,"<sup>54</sup> which said that women were not yet ready to vote, that the women's movement should progress gradually, through persuasion, and that women should content themselves with small gains now, in order to ensure greater gains later. The second school held, according to Durand, that everyone who had to obey laws should have the right to co-determine their content, as long as that person had not done something to disqualify him- or herself. This was clearly her favorite. Durand cited politician René Viviani, who had pointed out that legislators only passed those laws which pleased their voters. She also cited August Bebel, who had written that systems of slavery which persisted for centuries had been seen as natural. That gave her an explanation to women passively accepting their subordination. "Feminism demands that women show what they are, and not what they have been made,"<sup>55</sup> was a remark which shows that an opinion near to today's social constructionism was not alien to feminists in 1900. At the same time, there is also a current of essentialism in the formulation that women should "show what they are". This was not seen as a paradox. Society was seen as suppressing women's true nature as long as women were not treated equally; feminists were not saying that men and women "were" alike, as meaning the same. Equality, not sameness, humankind not femininity and masculinity were the early meanings of "feminism" at international congresses, an interpretation of the word "feminism" that

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<sup>51</sup> Paris Sept 1900: 311

<sup>52</sup> "Le néfaste antagonisme des sexes n'a pas d'autre cause que la divergence de leur éducation." Paris Sept 1900: IV

<sup>53</sup> Paris Sept 1900: V

<sup>54</sup> "le Féminisme sage," Paris Sept 1900: V

<sup>55</sup> "Il [le féminisme] leur commande de si montrer ce qu'elles sont et non ce qu'on les fait," Paris Sept 1900: I-VI (quotation VI)

was mixed with but gradually excluded from the overall demand of universal equality, raised during the French Revolution.

#### Appendix 1 Congresses mentioned or implied in the article

- 1878 **Paris**, *Le Congrès international du droit des femmes*, July 25-August 7
- 1889 **Paris**, *Le Congrès français et international du droit des femmes*, June 25-29
- 1889 **Paris**, *Le Congrès international des œuvres et institutions féminines*, July 12-18
- 1892 **Paris**, *Le Congrès général des sociétés féministes*, May 13-15
- 1896 **Paris**, *Le Congrès féministe international*, April 8-12
- 1896 **Berlin**, *Der Internationale Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen*, September 19-26
- 1897 **Brussels**, *Le Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles*, August 4-7
- 1897 **Zürich**, *Der Internationale Kongress für Arbeiterschutz in Zürich/ The International Congress for Protective Labour-legislation*, August, 23-28
- 1900 **Paris**, *Le Congrès international des œuvres et institutions féminines*, June 18-23
- 1900 **Paris**, *Le Congrès international de la condition & des droits des femmes* (official congress at the World Fair), September 5-8