

8. BRUSSELS & ZURICH 1897: THE FREEDOM OF WORK

Within trade unions, different economic pressures forced a similar conclusion. Fear of competition from women and reluctance to invest in organizing them led trade unionists to distinguish sharply between men and women when it came to legislation.

Alice Kessler-Harris, 1982

In 1897 a World Fair was held in Brussels, Belgium with more than seven and a half million visitors. To organize congresses at great expositions had become common. Two of the 23 official international congresses in Brussels became arenas for discussions on women, work and legislation.¹ They were heard at one feminist congress and at one men's congress on protection of workers. At the men's congress, there was an open discussion for or against general protective labor legislation. A special protection of women was not important; for most participants it was just a matter of course. The women's congress in Brussels had an altogether negative view to all kinds of protective labor legislation and especially concentrated on how bad such legislation so far had hit working women. For that congress, the theme of prohibition or protection of women was urgent and important.

That very same year, the European labor unions met in Zurich - both Socialist and Catholic unions - to positively discuss how to internationalize a general protective labor legislation for workers. At that congress, there was raised a broader discussion on women's right to work for wages as a whole, especially but not only concerning married women.

At all of these three congresses the discussions were referring to "freedom of work" or "freedom of labor", with shifting meaning. The concept could be tied to the opinions to special legislation for women in the labor market. The French representative Jules Simon had, at the Berlin conference of 1890, given a speech with references to this concept. He had put forward, that women could not be

¹ The World Exposition of Brussels in 1897 gathered almost 8 millions visitors. It was open from the 10th of May to the 8th of November. 22 nations took part. Schroeder-Godehus - Rasmussen 1992:128ff.

considered individuals, in the same way as men; thus women could not be seen as concerned by the same legislation. His evaluation was shared by most men.

The question of "freedom of labor" was not gender neutral. It seems to go back to a discussion on "freedom of work" ("liberté du travail") with roots in the French revolution and the abolition of the guild regulations. Freedom of work was when anybody was free to sell his labor on a free market, without special rules or examinations. Free competition on a market, was the first meaning and intention of the expression.

But there were other interpretations of "the freedom of work". At the congresses of 1897 some other such interpretations can be found, from men's point of view. Two of them were liberal and two were socialist. The two liberal concepts were clear and contradicted each other, whereas the socialist interpretations are vague. Women had their own understanding of the concept, related to their attempts to have a right to an economic independence of their own. Women's wish was complementing the liberal and socialist ideologies, adding gender equality

Liberal interpretations

In the simplest liberal thought on "freedom of work", the right to ones own property was central. A property owner, who might be an employer, was considered the foremost driving force in the society, because of his initiatives to make investments and start new projects. As such, he ought to be given the freedom to look out for his own interests, all according to the logic that this in the end was best for all people and the whole society. The invisible hand should order everything to the best, if not immediately, certainly in the longer run. Thus, no protective labor legislation was needed. Still the state should have certain power, some duties. These duties were discussed eagerly even among representatives of trade and industry at the men's congress in Brussels. Very few supported a simple night-watchman state. Louis Strauss from Antwerpen, member of the "Conseil supérieur de l'industrie et du commerce" was in principle against all state regulations, when talking at the International Congress for Labor Legislation/ Congrès International de Législation du Travail in September of 1897. He argued that if you put a state bureaucracy to decide over the freedom for trade or industry, it would end up in state socialism. He considered protective labor legislation and protective custom tariffs as introduced by Germany as the

same kind of policies regulating a free market. It would lead to less production of goods, raising prices and as a consequence get a lower standard of living for everyone. A shrinking market and unemployment should follow. The well-being of the workers depended on a flourishing industry. From the very beginning, freedom not restrictions, had been behind the good results of industrialization. Even so, Louis Strauss wanted to burden the state with rather big duties. He wanted the state to introduce obligatory schooling of all children and he did not want to see any children working in the factories. And on top of this, he wanted workers to organize in unions, so that employers should be able to close binding contracts with the unions. The duty of the state would be to see that such contracts were honored.²

The other liberal interpretation of "freedom of work" was put forward by national economists from Germany, so called Katheder-Socialists. According to them the process of industrialization had some unpredicted negative consequences. Therefore, the state had to legislate to protect the freedom of the individual person at work. The state should take on the responsibility to legislate in such a way that the economy of the society was not to the detriment of any person.

Both of these strands within liberalism hold that they were defending "freedom", which shows the very high ranking that concept had, loaded with political implications. The discussion was about the definition. Whose freedom was at stake? The roots of the definition go back to the motto in the French revolution : liberty, freedom and brotherhood.³ This kind of freedom was acknowledged by the welfare liberals as their heritage. The concept had probably had its value revived by the commemorations of the centenary of The Revolution, recent in time. For liberals "freedom" was at the center of their verbal understanding of their ideology.

A general labor protection had the support of a majority at this men's congress, despite Strauss defense of a simple, but not uncomplicated, form of liberalism. Almost all of the delegates were liberals of some sort. But there was hardly any mentioning about equality between men and women. An overwhelming majority was of the opinion that women ought to be treated

² "... l'ouvrier ... brisera les chaînes au moyen desquelles on a voulu ligotter le travail et demandera la liberté."(626) Bruxelles Sept 1897: 621ff, XVII och XXXI.

³ Bruxelles Sept 1897: 628 & 641ff.

differently. The agenda pointed towards a state interference to warrant labor legislation and its internationalization.

An ideological dispute evolved around the interpretation of freedom of work. Professor Lujo Brentano, München, a famous Katheder-Socialist, defended regulations of the labor market against the attack by Strauss. Brentano refused to be called a state socialist. He said he was pro freedom, the freedom expressed in the constitutions of France and Belgium. For such a freedom, protective labor legislation was a precondition. The freedom of work had to be understood thus, said Brentano, that it gave the worker a rather great freedom versus the employer. To sell ones work capacity was not equal to selling any other commodity. The worker had to endure dangers, could not decide about where to perform his work nor chose his fellows at work. The employer decided thus over his life even outside of the workplace.⁴

But the state should also protect women, but in another way and because of other reasons than those of freedom. Lujo Brentano altered his argument when talking about, from the worker's freedom to the interest of the nation. In that interest the state should especially protect the weak, and among them were women.⁵ Then, it was no longer the individual worker's freedom at stake, but the needs of the nation. Implicit was a perception of women as mothers, spoken out so often on other occasions. We will soon see it developed again and clearly in Zurich that same year. Brentano's view on women was shared by others. The chairman Hans von Berlepsch praised the steps forward, taken in Germany, where women's work was limited to 11 hours per day, night work was forbidden and four weeks absence from work at childbirth was common. Despite such regulations, women's work in industry was increasing which, according to Berlepsch, showed that legislation did not limit women's possibility to get paid work. The last comment about the raising amount of working women can be seen as a way of answering the critique, which said that a night work prohibition and a shorter day for women would make women less attractive as labor. However, Berlepsch did not mention any critique whatsoever. He chose to say that the public in Germany was pleased with special legislation for women. The professor of industrial legislation, Paul Pic, Paris, wanted to widen the protection of women to include pregnancy and also deplored that women were not getting

⁴ "La liberté du travail"(629) Bruxelles Sept 1897: 629f.

⁵ Bruxelles Sept 1897: 631ff.

paid when forced to stay at home at childbirth.⁶ But this question was not taken further by any other man at the congress, despite the fact that all of the discussions about special legislation for women were based on her role as a mother, the caretaker of a new generation of workers.

Two, but only two, speakers at the men's congress in Brussels in 1897, the French lawyer Hubert Valleroux and his compatriot the liberal Yves Guyot (now not minister any more but chief editor of the daily *Le Siècle*), raised a critique of special legislation for women. They spoke from the liberal point of view of a society, that should be better without any regulations at all in the labor market. That was their reason for not limiting women's working hours. Guyot mentioned that a number of strikes by women had taken place in France because of the night work prohibition. He, who also had been engaged against regulations of prostitution and been a usual and dear visitor to women's congresses in Paris, disliked the night work prohibition because no one had asked women if they wanted to be "protected". The state used women's weak constitutional position. Yves Guyot, was especially upset about the socialists, who since 1868 had demanded a regulation of women's work, because they were said to compete with men. Socialists had argued about morals and health, which Guyot considered to be pure hypocrisy. It must be added that Guyot was against all kind of regulations of work; he did not even consider it necessary to regulate child work.⁷ In that case he went even further as a liberal than the representative of the industrialists Strauss.

The two strands of liberalism at the congress considered that they were pleading for the real freedom of work. The freedom of women had not played any role in the discussions.

Socialist and Trade Union interpretations

The socialist interpretation of "freedom of work" was twofold. In both cases freedom of work meant a right for the individual to choose its own work, as well as the right to have a work and the right to earn enough to live a decent life.

In the first socialist interpretation freedom of work meant state ownership of all the means of production and a fair division between all citizens of

⁶ Bruxelles Sept 1897: 615f, 637ff; see also Pic 1909a och 1909b.

⁷ Bruxelles Sept 1897:616-629 & 643ff and XIIIff; Seilhac 1898:20f & 27f; Guyot wrote an introduction to Butler memories (eng 1896, 1898), published in France in 1900. He wrote himself *La Prostitution* 1882, dedicated to Mme Joséphine Butler.

possibilities to work and of resources. In that vision, the state had an overall responsibility for economy. The dream was a totally planned economy.

In the second socialist interpretation freedom of work meant that all people (which mostly meant "all men") should own the means of production via cooperatives, via other workers' managed companies or even as owners of their own small businesses. The state should be - as in one of the liberal views - foremost a guarantee for order, surveying that contracts and rules were upheld.⁸ Thus, there existed two relatively different socialist perceptions of freedom of work, where the one trusted initiatives by individuals and the other did prefer collective solutions for the best of everyone by a state that looked further than any individual could.

In the international socialist movement a consensus had developed: women should be allowed to earn money by working for wages even if this (by many) was considered less appropriate for married women. But women needed a stronger legal protection against exploitation than men because they were or might become mothers and also did not have the same organizing powers as men. Behind the view lurked an opinion that the misery of capitalist society became evident when married women had to work away from their families. A worker's wage should be able to support a whole family. But as the capitalist society was still the rule, women should be allowed to work for wages -- for the time being. The socialist trade unions and the whole socialist movement had also to relate to the Catholic trade unions. These had a more conservative view and were against married women working outside the home. They were influential and strong in the South of Europe. Catholics thought that a married woman's place was in the home and a good husband should earn money enough to support her. The Catholic trade unions were even not very happy with unmarried women's work outside of a family, but could accept their work as servants, thus inside a family.

The two different trade unions thought they had different views on women's waged work and duties. But basically, they did not essentially differ. The vision for the future was similar: a married man should be able to support his wife and children. A practical difference was how the two strands looked upon women working for wages at the present stage of capitalism.

⁸ Baudrillart 1865:52ff; Senech 1903, bokens titel var *Liberté du Travail*.

Differences and similarities were exposed at The International Congress for Protective Labor Legislation /Der Internationale Kongress für Arbeiterschutz , taking place from the 23rd to the 28th of August in Zurich. The Swiss delegates Jean Sigg and Margarete Greulich proposed a document for labor legislation for women, similar to what socialists had accepted at the congress of the Second International in Zürich four years earlier, in 1893.⁹

Immediately Carton de Wiart, delegate from the Belgian Christ-Democratic Social Workers Party came with a counterproposition:

Women's work, and especially married women's work, should gradually be forbidden in all kind of mines and also in big industries.¹⁰

The proposition set off an agitated discussion on principles. Focus of the debate quickly changed from the regulation of women's waged work to a total prohibition of such work. It became a dispute about the family. The future of the family was of utmost concern for the Social Catholics. The socialists were quickly on the defensive and revealed their split feelings and unclear analysis of woman's role in the family. Both sides asserted that facts, rationality and science were on their side.

The socialist women present at the congress, saw it as their task to defend two "rights": a woman's right to economic independence and at the same time her special duties in the family. Their conclusion was that a night work prohibition for women would help to combine these. In the vivid debate on women's right to waged work, several women spoke and this at a congress, where women usually did not utter a single word.

Carton de Wiart spoke first. He stressed woman's biology. In her role as mother she needed a strong body, not worn out by industrial work. The consequences of women's work outside the home, was not only dangerous for the not yet born. Its result was also that the family was dissolved and the whole structure of society was undermined. If his warning was not heard, "decadence" was soon to be the end of society.¹¹

⁹ *Der Internationale Kongress für Arbeiterschutz in Zürich vom 23. bis 28. August 1897*. Amtlicher Bericht des Organisationskomitees. Zürich 1898:198-206, later = Zürich Aug 1897; Maier 1897:22.

¹⁰ "Die Frauenarbeit, namentlich die Arbeit verheirateter Frauen in Bergwerken, Steinbrücken und in der Grossindustrie, soll allmählich abgeschafft werden." Zürich Aug 1897:206.

¹¹ According to some French delegates the proposition of Wiarts was put forward with the cause of pointing out the differences between Catholics and Socialists. *Musée Social Bulletin* 1897:419 not 1 & 421.-

Another Catholic speaker underlined that "the family was like a small state in which the minister of the interior had other duties than the minister of foreign affairs".¹² Private and public should not ever be mixed, neither in the state nor in the family; this was often pointed out and was a verbal help in constructing different male and female spheres.¹³ It was often used the other way around; the state should be seen as a great family. This symbolic language went hand in hand with the fear of a total disintegration of the nation, if the family was not a traditional one.

Social Democrats such as Lily Braun, Clara Zetkin and August Bebel defended women's right to work, especially in industries. They expressed their belief in the future and that women's paid work was part of it. Lily Braun answered the attack on women's waged work with that "a woman is not at first a woman and a man is not at first a man but each one of them is first of all human a being". A woman could not demand her rights as a human being if she was not economically independent. To forbid women to work for wages should lead to prostitution and an increase of children born out of wedlock. For the very purpose of saving the family, married women should be allowed to work in industries. But, as workers, they ought to be protected by special legislation.¹⁴

Clara Zetkin argued in another way. Her wish was that a working class woman should have her own experience of capitalist exploitation. That should make her more class conscious than if she was Nothing but House Wife ("Nichts-als-Hausfrau"). As Braun, she stressed that a happy family life was based on an economically independent woman. On the other hand, socialists were *not* fighting for a mechanical equality between women and men but for an harmonic individual development of women as wives and mothers. Thus Zetkin moved the discussion over to the side opened by the Catholic orators, taking back the right of speaking about the family as a unit. The wife was the other half of the husband. The complementary of the sexes became even more obvious, if the woman was economically independent.¹⁵ The two socialist women were following the party line, being positive to special legislation for women. They also pointed

¹² "... die Familie ist ein Abbild des Staates im Kleinen, auch dort muss der Minister des Innern etwas anderes thun als der des Aeussern." Maier 1897:24.

¹³ Landes 1998.

¹⁴ "Die Frau ist doch nicht in erster Linie Frau, wie der Mann nicht im erster Linie Mann ist, sondern Mensch, und hat die Berechtigung, als Mensch zu leben. Das könne sie jedoch nur dann, wenn sie ökonomisch selbständig ist."(207) Zürich Aug 1897: 207f.

¹⁵ Zürich Aug 1897: 210ff.

out that woman's economic independence was positive for the family. Braun put stress on woman as a human being whereas Zetkin preferred to see her as a wife and mother.

A final verbal duel took place between the leaders of the two opposing movements, between Leopold Decurtins and August Bebel. Decurtins defended the view that a woman should stay at home, doing her work as a mother. He used many arguments, from both natural science and sociology, and also referred to Friedrich Engel's book on the conditions of the working class in England and *The Capital* by Karl Marx, to reach the conclusion that industrial work was a threat to the family. A Christian family should remain the smallest building stone of society: equality between man and woman was a sign of a dying culture.¹⁶

Clara Zetkin and Lily Braun had underlined the importance of woman's economic independence. Clearly the socialists were under attack on the question of the family and had to explain their position. August Bebel, the leader of the German Social Democrats had a good reputation as a spokesperson for women through his book *Woman and Socialism*. In Zurich he did not live up to that fame. He did not speak of woman's economic independence. He did not mention any good sides of women's waged work. Instead his speech became an act of balance between different opinions, which he was aware of existed in his own party as well as among trade unionist, at the same time as he tried to answer and contradict the Social Catholics. As a result Bebel defended the family; socialists were not at all out to destroy the family. Bebel expressed his regret that millions of married women *had to* work outside of their homes. But Bebel added that to forbid them to work should not at all improve the conditions for them and their families. They needed to earn money. Bebel labeled his opponents petit bourgeois reactionaries. Contrary to them, socialists were going forwards and should change the capitalist society and take it to a higher level, the socialist society.¹⁷ He avoided to talk about the role of married women and waged work in this ideal society of the future. But it was possible to understand as a subtext that in such a dream society one man's wage should be enough to support a whole family.

¹⁶ Zürich Aug 1897: 215ff.

¹⁷ Zürich Aug 1897: 217ff; compare Bebel 1883.

After this long debate focusing on the family, there was no time left to look closer at the proposition of protective labor legislation; the demand of a special legislation for women was accepted without any scrutiny. After the proposition to forbid all women all waged work, the proposition that every woman should be "protected" must have seemed modest indeed.

Thus the congress agreed to a resolution, recommending the introduction of far reaching labor protection for women, in small and big industries, in workshops, in trade, transports and communications, as well as in so called home industrial work. The delegates agreed on acting for the introduction of a maximum of eight hours per day for women and a work week of 44 hours, free Saturday afternoons, and a non-working period of 42 hours every week-end. They also agreed on demanding a period of eight weeks free time for giving birth, with a state guaranteed payment during those weeks, and equal pay for equal work. The demands were exactly the same as presented at first.

In a later special resolution, the congress also demanded a night work prohibition. In principle, the demand was for such a prohibition for both men and women,¹⁸ connecting to the formulations of the night work prohibition taken in Paris in 1889. If possible, such a prohibition should encompass also men but if it was impossible to protect all, women should be protected first. Thus the demand of equality lived on but more as a possibility in the future than as a priority. The socialists were in the majority at this congress, thus decided the outcome.

Feminist interpretations

You could also find a feminist interpretation of freedom of work, also divided in two. One could be considered liberal and the other socialist, even if they are hard to relate directly to the one or the other male views on women and waged work. Feminists belonging to either of these ideologies tried to be allowed into the general debate about citizen rights that was held around the concept of freedom of work. But they were mostly left to debate between themselves. The feminist ideology, as it was expressed at international congresses, was demanding an equal treatment of women and men. But the frame for this equal treatment was differing.

¹⁸ With 165 votes against 98. Zürich Aug 1897: 98, 198ff, 227ff.

One of the feminist strands was joining the one that extremist liberals supported: no regulations whatsoever in the labor market. It was strongly present at Le Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles, held from the 4th to the 7th of August. This was by the way the first expressly *feminist* congress to be accepted as an official congress at a World Fair. In the French-speaking region, the word "feminist" was by now an established concept. The organizer, doctor of law Marie Popelin, expressed that her congress was positive to "a free labor market and (women) being welcome at all professions" as the only way of tackling the "two most burning questions for feminism", poverty and prostitution. In her summary of the congress she concluded that its view had been: what was called protecting laws were in fact a subordinating legislation.¹⁹ Even if no resolutions were taken, her summary of the opinions at the congress was overall correct even if some disagreeing voices had been heard.

During a session on Work, the words of "freedom" and "freedom of work" were reappearing and honored. They were used to underline that women should have the same rights as men. "Economic independence" was said time and again as something positive and as a matter of course. A consciousness that a political citizenship was not enough for women but that they needed an economic citizenship as well to become independent, was heard in several speeches. Equal treatment, no regulations, were demands raised in the name of equality.²⁰

Few of the speakers turned to the concrete problem of how to earn your own living. They were also expressing the socialist feminists' demand of equality. The editor of *Journal des Femmes*, Maria Martin, gave a speech titled "Freedom of work", in which she explained her socialist analysis of society, referring to working class woman and their conditions. She was of the opinion that a better education for women was behind the growth of feminism. With education came

feminism, meaning that for a woman it became a necessity to create for herself an independent position and be prepared for a struggle of life on the same conditions as men.

Maria Martin defined "feminism" as putting economic independence, general independency and equality first. Feminism was a consequence of the changes in

¹⁹ "... l'opinion générale du Congrès s'est prononcée en faveur de la liberté du travail et de l'accès à toutes les professions: la limitation et la réglementation ayant produit les résultats désastreux de misère et de prostitution, qui sont les deux questions brûlantes de féminisme" Bruxelles Aug 1897:III.

²⁰ See also the description of the congress by Potonié-Pierre in 1897.

society. But a positive change in society was hindered by new legislation for women, such as the French night work prohibition of 1892. It, on the contrary, increased oppression of women. Men got the benefit of such a prohibition.

Such were the consequences of legislation to protect women. It protected work to the benefit of men. Protection of women was nothing but oppression.²¹

Marya Chéliga from Paris joined her in saying that male comrades were not showing any solidarity, when they allowed the "freedom of work" for women to be diminished. As a good socialist this was as far as she went in criticizing men as oppressors of women. Instead she went on talking about the ways employers and foremen exploited women as labor force. She mentioned the sexual oppression at workplaces as well as the economic and connected them. Chéliga considered feminists as outside of classes. She hoped for a cooperation between women from all classes to put an end to their oppression by men. She could even consider a Feminist Party, unclear how political or serious. But at the same time she did judge women after which class they belonged to: women of one class were victims while other women were capable actors. As a socialist she spoke in terms of class oppression. And she put her faith in that women of the higher classes as feminists would organize women in the lower class.²² Her vision of a leading avant-garde of women was similar to that which was being realized in socialism, where men from middle or upper classes did side with the working class and in many cases became the leaders.

Marya Chéliga's view on feminism and working class women was not only a vision of leadership. The feminist movement (or Party?) should get new strength by an engagement for women from the working class.²³ Without connection to broader masses of working women, feminism should have no real future and remain an exclusive ideology for the higher classes. Much of her speech might be interpreted as a valid attempt to place the socialist analysis onto the reality of

²¹ The title was "Liberté du travail" "...la question féministe..."(56) ... "...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."(56)"...la femme au foyer..."(57), "Voilà les résultats des lois pour la 'protection du travail des femmes'. Le travail, en effet, est protégé pour le réserver aux hommes, mais la protection de la femme n'est que de l'oppression."(58) Bruxelles Aug 1897: 56ff.

²² The title was "L'indépendance économique de la femme"; in this protocol Chéliga-Loévy was only called Chéliga. "...la liberté du travail..."(62) " Je pense qu'il est possible de créer un parti féministe (63), "...les classes dirigeantes..."(64) Bruxelles Aug 1897:60ff.

²³ Bruxelles Aug 1897:64.

women's special oppression. As workers in the world should unite, so should women.

At this congress, these two French women came forward with the demand of an equal protective labor legislation for everyone, men as well as women, right in the middle of a congress of liberal women, who did not like any protection at all. Such a demand was also heard from the socialists Paule Minck and Eugénie Potonié-Pierre.²⁴ The French socialist feminists did their best to spread their view internationally, even at congresses where such thoughts were not appreciated.

To sum up, the majority of feminists gathered in Brussels did agree on a liberal society with few state interferences. The main thing for them was equality, and economic independence. The family was not in focus in a discussion on waged work. We have seen the differences between liberal and socialist feminists. There were also similarities. The most important was a wish for legislation with no gender differences at all. All of these feminists did agree on that women were biologically different to men. They never ever spoke about being physically equal when asking to be treated the same as men. Equality for them was not the same as similarity. On top of that, many of these feminists did feel that married women had special duties. But despite this, they did not want any special legislation for women. A woman's legal freedom to work should be the same as that of a man. How that freedom then was used, depended on the individual.

For the socialist feminists it was not an easy task to launch their model of equal treatment with men and thus protective labor legislation equal to all. They were hardly appreciated by the liberal feminists. And the socialist feminist equality demand was not either appreciated by the male socialists, even if the socialist feminists most of all wanted to be accepted by them. A clear socialist denial of the feminism in its socialist form, had been shown at the trade unions' congress in Zurich in 1897. One woman alone, the French Marie Bonneval, had in Zurich tried to question the recommendation of the congress to have a night work prohibition for women accepted and internationalized.

²⁴ Bruxelles Aug 1897 & Lacour 1897.

Marie Bonneviel took part in Zurich as a delegate for a teachers' union she herself had founded. Earlier in her life, during the 1870s, she had been forced to leave France because she was not longer allowed to work as a teacher for political reasons: she refused to teach religion. She had lived in exile in Istanbul and earned her living as a private teacher. She was a free-thinker and now a secretary in La Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes. During the men's congress in Zurich, Marie Bonneviel alone had the courage to demand women's right to work on the same conditions as men. This gave her the somewhat doubtful honor to be mentioned as the only one who had "raised the feminist flag" at the congress. This classification was done by compatriots.

Zetkin and Braun had not, of course not, raised "feminist" demands. They had not asked for legal equality, on the contrary. And they despised "feminists", as bourgeois. But Bonneviel, at two different instances, had raised her voice alone to express that she did not want any difference to be made between adults, men or women, concerning legislation. She spoke against all forms of limitation of women's right to work.²⁵

Her twice uttered demand have not been easy to reconstruct, because they have only come down to us today, as shortened summaries or second hand reports. In the official printed protocol, her contributions were considered as of less importance than the ones made by Lily Braun and Clara Zetkins, whose speeches were rendered word by word. In an unofficial French report, written by a delegate from Musée Social in Paris, it says that Marie Bonneviel spoke "in general words about women's work and women's emancipation". The official report, in German, renders hardly that much, but gives a remark about that she had been speaking in favor on an international coalition of working women.

After Bonneviel's second contribution in plenum, the president Leopold Decurtins commented , and his sarcasm is evident, that only his chivalry had stopped him from interrupting her much earlier. Also women must learn to keep the time they had been allotted now when they were going to be emancipated. Bonneviel had gotten ten minutes to argue her unpopular opinion and she spoke longer. Her speech was summarized on four lines. The same amount of lines were given the comment on it by Decurtins.²⁶

²⁵ "...tient le drapeau des revendications féministes"(404), in the journal *Musée Social Bulletin* 1897; Zürich Aug 1897: 220.

²⁶ *Musée Social Bulletin* 1897:404, 406, 417, 424; Zürich Aug 1897:220f.

The compatriots of Marie Bonneviel called her demands "feminist" and most certainly she called herself a feminist with pride. She had been active at two international feminist congresses in Paris, those in 1892 and 1896. Both of them had taken resolutions against protective labor legislation for women only and instead demanded them for men and women equally. Bonneviel had been the one and only to raise the socialist feminist demand of an equal legislation in Zurich. Her brave attempt had been censured and almost hidden from history.

My scrutinizing of the discussions at the congress in Zurich supports the analysis that Sabine Schmitt did in her dissertation on German conditions. Socialist women had been more or less pressured to accept the night work prohibition for women and other special laws for women in a delicate situation. They found themselves between a critique by their own party comrades, accused of competing with men for work and of being bad mothers on the one side and on the other side was a critique from the Catholic trade unions because women were working outside of their homes.

The socialists had to deal with the Catholic view on the family, while shaping a policy of the labor market. And it was also clear that the Catholic view on women's special duties was not at all alien to many men engaged in socialist trade unions. This view of woman's place in the home and family was not only valid in Germany but was generally held in many other countries' socialist parties, which were in an early vulnerable state of being built up and growing. In France the heritage from Joseph Proudhon and his view of woman as harlot or housewife was alive. Without ever mentioning "freedom of work" the congress in Zurich had taken the decision to support and try to implement different conditions for men and women as workers. Marie Bonneviel's courageous intervention had been in vain.

Freedom of work for women, the feminist freedom of work, seemed more and more an illusion. An increasing number of women did put their belief and hope in political citizenship to put an end to their oppression. The expectation was, that the right to vote should be the final key to equality, give women other rights, as them in the labor market, and thus be the solution of the whole Woman Question.

But at the woman congress in Brussels in 1897 a Dutch feminist wanted to warn against this new craze, the illusive faith in the political citizenship for

women. Her name was Wilhelmina Drucker. She was a socialist and journalist from Amsterdam. For her the right to work for wages on the same conditions as men was the most important for emancipation of women. Drucker spoke about both the vote and the right to work, doubting that the first right should lead to the other. Also she thought that it should be much more difficult for women to reach an economic citizenship than a political:

Woman's total emancipation depends on two factors: in the political sphere on the right to vote and in the social sphere on the right to work. These two important spheres have its opponents, but the first sphere has fewer opponents than the latter.²⁷

Wilhelmina Drucker herself had a poor upbringing as a child born out of wedlock. For periods she had been working as a seamstress. Via a remarkable life story, through a novel based on her own life, she had been lucky and had part of the heritage from her rich father. Late in life she had become economically independent. Her own experience of poverty and what money could mean might have played a role in her analysis, in combination with her ideology of reform socialism.²⁸

She came forward with the opinion that the vote would be far easier to get than the right to work on equal conditions. This was an unusual way of thinking in a time when no European woman had the right to vote. She stressed that woman's freedom to work for wages was neither accepted by the "masses" nor by men in power. Drucker did a radical analysis of men's resistance to women's waged work, in which she remarked that a certain kind of power consists of being able to benefit from the work of others without even paying for it:

We must be aware of, that women's right to vote is not a threat to man's economic interests. It is the other way around with waged work. The person, who has the income, the money, he has the power; men realize this more by pure instinct than by reason. But he realize it well enough for not wishing woman into a sphere he considers his own. And in his own personal situation, he is totally right; at the same time as he himself is always paid for his work - certainly more or less well, but still paid - he can benefit from a labor force he does not have to pay. He gets a double profit.²⁹

²⁷ "L'affranchissement total de la femme dépend de deux choses: sur le terrain politique, du suffrage des femmes; sur le terrain social, du travail payé. Ces deux points essentiel de la liberté des femmes ont leurs adversaires, mais le premier beaucoup moins que le dernier." Bruxelles Aug 1897:70.

²⁸ On the life of Druckers, Everard 1998; Everard and Aerts 1999.

²⁹ ". C'est à comprendre; le suffrage de la femme n'atteint pas les intérêts pécuniaires de l'homme; le travail payé, au contraire. Qui tient la bourse, est le maître; l'homme, par instinct plus que par calcul, le comprend assez bien et ne veut pas que la femme entre dans le domaine qu'il s'est réservé. A son point de vue personnel, il a tout à fait raison; parce qu'en même temps qu'il voit payer toujours son travail - plus ou moins bon, c'est vrai

The analysis of Wilhelmina Drucker make me think of, among other associations, the USAmerican economist Heidi Hartmann and her classic contribution written in the end of the 1970s, showing how men of all classes benefited from the fact that women continued to be segregated, split into on the one side paid work, on the other unpaid work at home.³⁰ In Sweden Eva Moberg had made the a similar point in an article published in 1962.³¹ We might read the same structural analysis by Drucker, when she said that men were not acting by "reason" but rather by "pure instinct". She saw men as being victims of the norms they were surrounded by. The unfair gender division of work and the wage discrimination was not a conspiracy on the part of men, not meanness or ill will. Men were just stuck in the web of the norms of society.

Old radical fighters for the women's cause, as the USAmerican Elizabeth Cady Stanton were also beginning to doubt that the vote should be enough. Earlier she had seen it as the central and most radical demand. Maybe this change of some women's understanding of reality happened, when more and more women entered the labor force and it became known what happened at the workplaces?

Wilhelmina Drucker had a historical underpinning of her view on women and waged work behind her pessimism of the future. As many historians on women and work, she was conscious of the fact that women had always worked, not only without pay but also earning money. Also, women had earlier done more qualified work than what they were allowed to do at the end of the 19th century, when they got hindered by legislations aiming at diminishing the possibilities to take part in qualified work.³²

Looking at the three congresses of 1897, it is clear that a special construction of femininity at the workplace was eagerly and successfully pursued at the two gatherings dominated by men. Different sex should result in different legislation. As opponents to this, women sounded all the more resigned, some almost in despair, as Drucker. Freedom of work was not for women, not

- il tient à sa disposition un autre travail, qu'il n'a pas besoin de récompenser. C'est un double profit."
Bruxelles Aug 1897:71.

³⁰ Hartmann (1979) 1981. Other researchers have during the end of the 20th century made similar analyses.

³¹ Moberg, "Kvinnans villkorliga frigivning" article in *Liberal Debatt* 1962

³² Bruxelles Aug 1897:70ff.

according to the ideologies developed by men, neither liberal nor socialist. Men debated freedom of work as if it had only relevance to men. Women should be treated differently and protected legally, when they entered the labor market, because they were seen as part of a family.

The socialist feminist demand of a protective labor legislation equal for men and women had been raised but it was not respected, not even at the woman congress. It had not had any voice at all in Brussels at the men's congress, and only one voice had been raised but not heard for equality in Zurich. All men and most women at the big and unique trade union congress in Zurich as well as the representatives for liberal ideologies at the men's congress in Brussels, did agree to protect working women but yet to allow them to work for wages outside their homes. Thus a gender division of labor got a legal basis.