

11. LONDON 1899: PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND WOMAN'S PECULIARITY

The idea of special labor legislation for women is an outcome of the old principle that women must have privileges, not rights, that they must be protected instead of having the power to protect themselves, that they are - as the national economists say - 'A people's most precious property', instead of forming a part of the people itself.

Alexandra Gripenberg 1899

The question of suffrage caused a split in the women's internationalism, which had begun to unite in the International Council of Women (ICW). The Council had been planned at a congress in Washington in 1888. ICW had then been formally constituted in 1893 at another international women's congress in Chicago, held during the World Fair. The organizers in 1893 wanted to show the progresses made by women. Representatives from women's organizations as well as individual women had been welcome into the broad arms of the International Council of Women. The aim was to support "the advancement of the common interests of women everywhere".¹ Suffrage was not on the agenda, as a conscious policy, not to touch upon controversial questions. The new organization wanted to reach out to as many women as possible. This cautiousness provoked radical women, and their discontent came to the surface at later ICW congresses in Europe, in London in 1899 and Berlin five years later.

The radicals started to plan a new international organization, which was to take up suffrage, and only suffrage in London. An organization for that purpose was realized in Berlin in 1904, just days before a ICW congress. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance came into being as a reaction to the neutral position on suffrage by the leaders of ICW.²

¹ "... and all distinguished women, whether they belong to any particular organization or not, will meet on absolutely equal terms for the advancement of the common interests of women everywhere ..." signed by Bertha M H Palmer, President Ellen M Henrotin, Vice-President, Woman's Branch World's Congress Auxiliary, ICW Chicago 1893: xxii.

² Rupp write in depth about ICW. Rupp 1997, for this see Rupp 1997: 20ff.

About the question on women's waged work, conflicts and difference of opinions were rampant at the two congresses mentioned. Vivid debates were heard about the night work prohibition. Some participants went so far as to say that the position taken to special legislation for women would be decisive for the future of the women's movement as a whole. At these congresses - especially the one in Berlin - "motherhood" and "peculiarity/ "Eigenart" became words of honor when female activists were discussing the conditions of women and waged work. The majority inside the women's movement valued motherhood and women's special duties in society higher and higher. Demands for equal legal treatment were substituted for demands of special legislation for working women.

The Anglo-Saxon dominated International Council of Women managed to engage many women's organizations in the industrialized countries. National Councils were founded and were supposed to bring together all women organizations in each country. They were to function as national umbrella organizations. Only as a united Council were they allowed into the International Council. England and Sweden attached their councils in 1898, Canada and Germany had done so the year before. At that time the International Council consisted of five countries, including the USA. In 1899, at the time for the congress in London, three more countries had joined. Five years later, when the German Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, as the National Council of Germany, arranged the congress in Berlin, the number of member countries had increased to fifteen.³

Already before Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine had joined ICW, BDF obeyed the idea of limiting the international congresses, to take place only every five years. This was stirring one of the conflicts with the Left Wing in the BDF in Berlin concerning the congress held there in 1896. The German Bund was to host the congress in Berlin in 1904. The French feminists, who founded a National Council in 1901⁴ with time also accepted the rule of five years intervals,

³ The Swedish National Council was founded in 1896, the English in 1895. Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine was founded in 1895 and joined in 1897. Newer were in 1899 Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands. In 1904 Italy, New Zealand, Argentina, France, Austria, Schweiz, Hungary and Norway joined. Lefauchaux 1966: 203ff, 209, 213, 216, 219, 234ff, 350; *Dagny* 1898:481; Some countries, who should join later, had sent observants without the right to vote at the internal meeting in London. International Council of Women *2nd quinquennial meeting, London, July 1899*, edited by the Countess of Aberdeen, retiring President. London: T Fisher Unwin, 1900:11f, after this = ICW London 1899:11f.

⁴ Lefauchaux 1966:243.

but before this, they arranged a congress at the Exposition in 1900, at which women's economic citizenship was defended.

The International Congress of Women, in London in 1899

The international gathering of women in London in 1899, had a double character: it contained two kinds of meetings both in connection to The International Council of Women. First was the Second Quinquennial Meeting, the second of its internal meetings. The First had been in Chicago in 1893 at the start of the organization. To a quinquennial, every member country sent three official delegates, so that every country, disregarding its size, had the same number of voices. Together they were the decision-making assembly of the ICW, and chose its board. Leila Rupp, who wrote an important book on how the women's movement got organized internationally, points out that it was in London in 1899 that "(t)he international structure begun to solidify".⁵ The observant reader has remarked that six, not five, years had passed between the first meeting in Chicago and the second in London. The delay shows that the organization was not efficient in this stage of its growth.

A larger meeting beside the quinquennial was called the International Congress of Women, to which participants were welcome from all over the world. The London congress was arranged by the board of the ICW. An opening ceremony was held in Westminster Town Hall. Many delegates to the congress were present, among them well over one hundred guests from more than 20 countries. The intention was that in the future, the National Council should arrange a congress, near in time to the quinquennials. Every congress should be a national responsibility. As the quinquennial meeting and the congress in London were held during the same time, later the two have sometimes been conflated. They were different events.⁶

The Quinquennial Meeting, the policy-making body of the ICW, avoided sensitive questions. As an organization for cooperation and coordination it wanted to represent all women's organizations, who chose to attach themselves via National Councils. It did not take a stand in controversial questions.⁷ The aim was neutrality: all sides, all female voices, should get a hearing.

⁵ *Dagny* 1899:270; quote from Rupp 1997:19.

⁶ *Dagny* 1899:223f, 271; Malmberg 1899:216; Hainisch 1900:9.

⁷ In 1899 board of ICW was Comtesse of Aberdeen, president; Mrs May Wright Sewall, vice president; baronessan Alexandra Gripenberg, accountant, miss Teresa Wilson, corresponding secretary and mrs Maria

The advantage with a congress beside the quinquennial, was to have an arena for exchange of opinions outside the core of the organization. Resolutions à la French congresses were not taken at a ICW congress, because it had no powers to decide any policy. In advance invited speakers were supposed to cover all sides of a problem or theme. After this start, a short and orderly discussion took place without conclusion. At the congress were all speakers, according to Finnish Alexandra Gripenberg, "strictly told that only turn to the president of the meeting, they should never say anything but 'madame president', absolutely not 'ladies and gentlemen', neither in the beginning nor in the end." Such was the habit in England to "avoid exciting the public or to get unwanted interferences from the audience".⁸

The political equality became controversial at the congress because ICW insisted on neutrality. General feelings among the participants were pro suffrage and many wanted to see a manifestation of this. The congress arranged three meeting open to the public, among them one on peace and one very successful on the "Political Enfranchisement of Women". Beside this and totally outside the congress, a local organization arranged a public meeting demanding suffrage. It was arranged in opposition to the coward congress. In addition Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg, well-known suffragists in Germany, summoned women to a small alternative meeting to prepare the foundation of an international organization for woman suffrage. They were supported by the U.S. National American Woman Suffrage Alliance.⁹ The more radical women in London were rather subversively preparing a fighting organization, daring to stand up for an equality question. They choose a question that was very much on the agenda at the time. Why should women be silent about suffrage, while that

Martin, archival secretary (represented by mrs Oddo Deflou, who suggested that mrs Willoughby Cummings, Canada, as temporary archival secretary). In London a new board for the next five years was elected : mrs May Wright Sewall became president and Lady Aberdeen, vice president; mrs Jeanette Schwerin, accountant, who then was followed by Helene Lange, Berlin; mess Teresa Wilson, corresponding secretary and miss Vidart, Geneva, archival secretary. ICW London 1899: VII, 320; *Der internationale Frauen-Kongress in Berlin 1904*. Bericht mit ausgewählten Referaten. Hrsg. im Auftrage des Vorstandes des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine von Marie Stritt. Berlin 1905: Vol 2:171ff, the congress after this = ICW Berlin 1904; *Dagny* 1899:223, 271ff, 311; Rupp 1997:21f.

⁸ Sheet of Program "International Congress of Women" no dates, Mapp: Congrès 1899 - Londres, Dos 38, BMD; quotations from letters fr Alexandra Gripenberg t "H. E. Kära ni!" 23/6 1899, AG 304:4:27 s 7.

⁹ ICW Berlin 1904 Vol 2:172; "a public meeting ... to deal with the Political Enfranchisement of Women" (29/6), two other meetings, on "International Arbitration" (27/6) and on "Temperance, Industrial Problems and so on" (30/6) were held in the evenings Sheet of Program "International Congress of Women" no dates, Mapp: Congrès 1899 - Londres, Dos 38, BMD; *Dagny* 1899:310f; Carrie Chapman Catt, president for the U.S. National American Woman Suffrage Alliance, was already in 1901 active in implementing the international suffrage organisation. Rupp 1997:21f.

question was more and more prominent among men. Men's campaign for suffrage became an incentive for radical women, who for a long time had demanded equality in every aspect with men. They understood that without their own activities, men should forget about women's political rights.

The congress program had five themes: education; women's work; laws and industrial questions; politics; and social conditions. Sessions were arranged simultaneously in five different halls. Many participants came to the congress to listen. People were impressed by its good organization. More than 300 speakers could be heard and almost 500 delegates were packed together with approximately 2 500-3000 attending persons.

The generosity towards the invited delegates was huge: they got invitations to dinners, receptions and tea parties. The most important got invitations to stay in luxurious private homes. The appreciated Finnish Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg was one of them. She was pleased but at the same time excited to live in a room, which was bigger than all of her own flat in Helsinki. Despite her noble birth, she had no fortune. She had spent it travelling around Europe, since the 1890s, to gather information for a book in three volumes, the first published in 1893. It was called *Reformarbetet till förbättrandet av kvinnans ställning* / The reformwork to improve the position of woman. Alas, it is only available in Swedish, but it added to her importance in the international women's movement. She knew "everybody". In London, Gripenberg not only got a magnificent room, she got a maid servant to dress her and was met by a caretaking butler, however late she arrived back to her dwelling. Her letters home tells vividly about the overwhelming care she got as a guest. Then again, she was one of the foremost prominent women at the congress.

The French-Polish Marya Chéliga-Loéwy, an activist for woman's emancipation at least since 1878, was not totally happy with the congress and complained of the Anglo-Saxon dominance. At this time, she must have realized that the French attempt to become leading in a radical internationalization of the women's movement, by the Union Universelle des Femmes, was a definite failure.¹⁰ The moderates were wining the international field.

¹⁰ The congress was held the 26 June – 4 July 1899. London 1899 Vol 1-6 (together 1350 pp); *Dagny* 1899:269; Chéliga, "Congrès International des Femmes" in *Petit Bleu* 11/7 1899 & "Savioz (Avril de Sainte-Croix) "Congrès international des femmes" ii *La Fronde* 7/7 1899, both in Mapp: Congrès 1899 – Londres Dos 38, BMD; Gilman 1899; Hainisch 1900; Correspondance of Gripenberg AG 304:4:27ff.

The night work prohibition for women was eagerly debated and shows the many facets of women's opinions and how they were not easy to categorize by simple concepts as bourgeois or socialist. The title in the program "Special Labor Legislation for Women" was evaluated as "... one of today's most burning questions in many countries abroad" by the Swedish delegate Gertrud Adelborg. On the one side, the topic was important and on the other, the speakers for or against protective workers' legislation for women only had shown strong emotions. Both proponents and opponents were sure that they were arguing for the best of women. According to Adelborg, those negative to special legislation belonged to the older women in the movement whereas socialists were mostly positive. Swedish Maria Cederschiöld had the impression that this debate got most attention of all debates in London. Her estimation was that a majority was positive to such legislation,¹¹ but that is not evident when you read the printed protocol. This might say something of the atmosphere in the audience, which Cederschiöld as a participant felt, herself being against a night work prohibition for women only. Or there might have been exclusions or correction in the written protocols to correct its profile.

The session on Special Labor ... was divided into two meetings, one for "practical aspects" and the other was to discuss "the attitude of different schools of thought". The arguments for or against seem more and more stable, they were just repeated again.¹² Both sides wanted better conditions for women. But the disagreements were about the consequences. On both sides speakers were threatening that prostitution should be more common if their solution was not accepted. It was a heavy argument because prostitution was a serious problem at the time and upsetting all in the women's movement.

All nuances possible on special legislation for women were to be brought up during the debate. The positions for or against would put engaged women against each other without the political left or right positions. Socialists were both for and against legislation; its positive side was represented by Beatrice Webb together with Amie Hicks and Margaret MacDonald. On the socialist side negative to legislation were feminists as Harriot Stanton Blatch and Dora

¹¹ *Dagny* 1899: 275f ("... en av dagens mest brännande frågor mångenstädes utomlands" quote from article by GA); *Dagny* 1900: 178 (art by MC, who was a good friend of Gripenbergs and against special legislation for women.); Gilman 1899; see also Gripenberg 1896, lecture against the attack on the women's movement by Ellen Key.

¹² The meeting was Tuesday June 27 afternoon in St Martin's Town Hall. Lady Laura Ridding was president. "A) Practical Aspects" and "B) The Attitude of different Schools of Thought"(7ff), London 1899 Vol 2: 36ff.

Montefiore, who wanted that also men should be included in the prohibition. Swiss Gertrud Guillaume Schack, who had organized working women in Berlin and lived in exile in London, can also be counted into the latter.

Camille Bélilon was in the forefront for the independent pure feminist opinion. She wanted legal equality, protection or not. She thus was placed outside of both the bourgeois and socialist ideology although her intention was to unite them through feminism. The bourgeois radical woman, who was for protective legislation for women only was represented by Alice Salomon, belonging to the Left Wing of the Germany bourgeois women's movement and also to the leading group of the ICW. The bourgeois opposition against special legislation was articulated by Alexandra Gripenberg, leader of the Finnish-speaking women's organization in her homeland and also she belonging to the leadership of the ICW. As have been demonstrated, the question of a night work prohibition for women was not in a fixed way related to other political positions; it was fleeting free inside the women's movement.

Alice Salomon from Berlin and Beatrice Webb from London defended in prepared contributions protective laws for women, especially the night work prohibition. Salomon underlined that in industrial countries "the States try to protect the life and health of women in their special capacity as women and as mothers of the future generation" with such legislation. In her own country, Germany, it was supported by the Social Democrats as well as by social reformists in the liberal parties. Women from all classes wanted protective laws and Factory Inspectors would like them to be stricter.¹³

In the midst of her praise of this state intervention, Alice Salomon changed her angle and warned for "... a movement which aims at the complete interdiction of employment of married women in factories". Such demands had been heard at the congress in Zurich two years earlier. This "... sprang from the wish of withholding social equality from women, and restricting them to home and household work", said Salomon.¹⁴ Then she argued in detail against a denial to let women work for wages. Some of these arguments could have defended equal treatment of women as well; she wanted all women to have a possibility to earn money and work outside of their homes. But she stressed woman's "special qualities"; those had to be protected. Protective legislation had positive

¹³ Quote p 36, London 1899 Vol 2: ix & 36ff.

¹⁴ Both quotes , London 1899 Vol 2: 38.

consequences and should soon result in a shortening of men's working hours as well, was her hope. Thus she used a socialist argument, which was not very frequent among socialists any longer, that protective laws for women should pave the way for such legislation for everyone. Alice Salomon was not a socialist but a socially engaged reformist.

There was no real danger for restrictions of women's waged work, Salomon thought, because the gender division of labor was already well established. That was good:

Women will not be worked out of the labor market on account of such restrictions, because employers cannot spare them any more. Their peculiar skill in certain trades and occupations will compel the employers in many trades to manage their business according to the terms which the law appoints for the employment of women. *Moreover, such legislation will produce for the labouring classes what we must struggle to attain for all classes of humanity - a division of work according to sex on account of special qualities; it will put in place of a mechanical or organic division of work, a division according to characters and constitutions!* (Italicizing UW) Also the sphere of industrial work has space for the peculiarities of both sexes, and we hope that special labor legislation for women is one of the means for securing influence for these peculiarities in daily life.¹⁵

When Salomon stressed that the legislation would not decrease women's work possibilities, she answered an argument that opponents often claimed. Her vision of a better society contained a gender division of labor according to men's and women's differences. From this might be understood that competition between men and women in the labor market should come to an end if women's "special qualities" and "peculiar skill" were used. If these were biological or socially acquired she did not say. The comment that "we must struggle to attain for all classes" a gender division of labor, shows how unsecure Salomon herself was about this. She shows a consciousness of social and cultural condition that might influence. She was not an essentialist in her view on women but yet sure that a different treatment was positive and should stabilize a gender division of labor, to the benefit of society.

Also Mrs Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, social investigator since approximately ten years, spoke in favor of special legislation. Webb called attention to that such factory legislation since long existed in England and "... is taken up by the English Factory Acts, supported by the trade unionists, both men

¹⁵ London 1899 Vol 2: 39.

and women, and now generally accepted by progressive public opinion". As a member of the Fabian Society in London she had published a brochure, *Women and the Factory Acts* in 1896. The Fabians were a group of intellectuals, with a keen interest in socialist theory, with many internal discussions. The Society's scope was national, founded in the 1880s to advance the ideas of socialism and support its implementation via gradual reforms. It had not any significant interest in political socialism or its internationalisation. Its members were busy in public debates and convinced that socialism would win slowly, grounded in its logical analysis of society. They were not revolutionaries. Both the state and democracy were positive for most of the Fabians. To women's emancipation, this Society had a reluctant attitude and Beatrice Webb personally showed little interest for it at the time.¹⁶

One of Beatrice Webb's arguments for special laws for women, was that they were more easily accepted by parliaments than a general regulation of working conditions. She did not shrink from repeating the socialist view that women were competing with men for jobs but above all she said that women competed with each other, thus hurting themselves. She was class conscious in an unconventional rather pseudo socialist way. Women as a group, by Webb called "women as a class" did place themselves in the lowest class of all through the competition between themselves in her analysis. To talk about "women as a class" seems influenced by socialism but she used it in a sense that transgressed class. She took "class" and used it instead of "sex" in a non specific way:

... so we progressive women are prepared to accept for our sex regulations which we cannot at present enforce on men. What injures women as a class in their struggle to obtain employment, is not their occasional competition with men, but their reckless underbidding of each other. It is this reckless underbidding of each other, as regards hours of work, conditions of work, and wages of work, which makes women-workers as a class underfed, overdriven, untrained and incompetent. And this, therefore, is why they find themselves, as a class, relegated to the inferior grades of work.¹⁷

Webb spoke about "we progressive women" thus letting the audience feel as if the speaker and her public were those women, even if they were not the industrial worker the laws aimed at. She included all women in this "we", defining women as a unit, a collective. Soon after this, she spoke about female

¹⁶ Webb spoke under the title Special Legislation for women. Quote p 40, London Vol 2, 1899: 40ff; jfr Webb & Hutchins 1909; Cole 1961:45, 51ff, 80, 127; Lewis 1991: 104.

¹⁷ Quote p 42, London 1899 Vol 2:42.

workers, "women-workers as a class". Thus Webb sometimes considered all women "as a class" but also considered industrial workers as special, in need of protection. It is hard to understand what she meant with "women as a class". Women's bad conditions were according to her, mostly their own fault. She spoke with authority.

Webb wanted special laws for women workers. She was sure they should pave the way for the same laws for men, exactly as Salomon. But she contradicted herself when she later on said that protective legislation never ever could become general. It had to be introduced for special cases: sometimes for women, sometimes for machinery or special work conditions. To exemplify why protection was good for women, she chose the period around childbirth. She wanted legal free time for women when they gave birth, and compared that legislation without any reluctance with laws covering all women at every occasion. She saw no distinction between protection for all women as potential mothers and protection of a female individual, when in special need. For her, motherhood was an argument for protection of all women at all times.

Beatrice Webb also assessed that women's bodies were weaker than men's. In a series of rhetorical if-sentences, hinting that they were a description of reality, she said that *if* it was proved that women could not work at certain work places, then it was logic to introduce special laws for them. *If* women could not ... habitually work in underground mines, or take the night-shift in a factory, without serious deterioration of health and character, whereas men can do so and yet retain a high standard of citizenship, it is not in the interest of women to insist that they should be free to do whatever the men do.¹⁸

Unclear is what Webb meant with men's "high standard of citizenship". However it was one of her arguments for men's higher pay. She compared conditions in the labor market between different professions/jobs to them between the sexes and the result was that the differences were reasonable. She defended the different levels of pay between men and women with "... the particular minimum conditions which their particular circumstances render necessary". The meaning of that sentence is hard to understand even in its context. It could be interpreted as men's higher living standard should be seen as a norm for men. But women, already used to a lower standard, might as well

¹⁸ London 1899 Vol 2:43.

keep lower wages. Differences in wages thus became impossible to change. Webb sided with male typographers, working in a trade often criticized by feminists because of its misogynist unions. She demanded an end to "this idea of sex rivalry" in the labor market.¹⁹

Yet Beatrice Webb pointed to the competition between men and women as negative. Maybe it was only the "idea" of such a rivalry between men and women that she disliked? The practice of this was by her seen as a reality that had to be accepted. Workers' protection of women was good because the strength of the nation was connected to the health of women. This reminds of the Social Darwinist ideas about a sound population, born by strong women. Webb was a believer in these modern ideas, influenced by Herbert Spencer.²⁰

How was the reception of her speech? What did the audience hear? Some testimonies are left to us and they show that the main lines of her speech were hard to catch. Gertrud Adelborg, from Sweden, got the impression that Webb spoke for equal pay for equal work, as well as special legislation for women but only when such laws were necessary. Such an interpretation is not in accordance with the protocol: Webb wanted special legislation for women in all conditions. In the protocols she defended different wages. But she had spoken for an introduction on minimal wages for women.²¹

The three speeches against special legislation for women were held by Camille Bélilon, French journalist at *La Fronde* in Paris, Alexandra Gripenberg, Finnish activist for women's cause from Helsinki and Harriot Stanton Blatch, American, married and living in London. Blatch was practically born into the women's movement. Her mother was Elisabeth Cady Stanton. Her brother Theodore spoke already 1878 at the first international women's congress in Paris.

Camille Bélilon must be seen as answering Beatrice Webb. Her talk was permeated with a fervor for equality. She claimed that men of all classes tried to forbid women certain work, as women more and more worked for wages. Bélilon gave some examples from the higher classes but attacked more the trade unions for their "misogynic spirit". Concerning the typographers she used the strong

¹⁹ London 1899 Vol 2:43.

²⁰ Beatrice Webb was influenced by Herbert Spencer's thoughts on "evolution and progress". Lewis writes that Webb "never demonstrated any awareness or understanding of the kind of obstacles women faced in the labor market". Lewis 1991:113ff.

²¹ *Dagny* 1899:275; Lewis 1991:118f.

word "hate" to describe their feelings for women.²² The syndicates in France had deceived their representatives in the National Assembly, so that they had worked for restrictions of women's work, according to her. The trade unions were behind the night work prohibition. Their object was to keep good work for men. The members of parliament had been convinced by talk about mortality among children and the future of the nation. It was all empty talk. Special legislation made a woman economically dependent on a man. It was unfair and would lead to immorality and violence. This injustice was worse than the injustice between the classes:

What is it, to make woman dependent on a man? Of all injustices, it is the most horrible! Well, because the inequality existing between the classes is unfair, but it is not more unfair than the one between the sexes, and that injustice is highly immoral, both as such but also because it results in immoral acts. Yes, it is not only an attack on the principle of freedom, ... it is to put depravity before competence and virtue. To force the woman to ask the man for bread, that is to introduce prostitution or as giving power to the prostitute. We have really had enough of this continuous humiliation.

Camille Bélilon's indignation was high pitched in her appeal for woman's right to earn her own bread on the same terms as a man. She looked upon the woman who was economically dependent on a man as humiliated. The married woman was compared to a prostitute: both of them had to sell their body for money.²³ Analysis comparing the woman as wife and mother with a prostitute had been done before, for example by the couple Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling. In 1885 they wrote about the bourgeois marriage as prostitution.²⁴ Bélilon used the radical thoughts of her time in her feminist analysis.

Without directly mentioning the name of Beatrice Webb, Camille Bélilon accused her, first for blaming women for accepting low wages, secondly for supporting legislation which made women less attractive as labor. For Bélilon, the rational deed would be to open all work and professions for women; wage

²² Title "Sur le Travail des Femmes"; "esprit misogynique" (43); "haine" (44) London 1899 Vol 2:43ff.

²³ "Faire dépendre la femme de l'homme, sait on bien ce que c'est? De toutes les iniquités, c'est la plus odieuse! oui, car si l'inégalité qui existe entre les classes est injuste elle n'est qu'injuste tandis que celle que l'on a établie entre les sexes est, avec cela, profondément immorale, et à part qu'elle est immorale, en soi, elle entraîne avec elle l'immoralité. Oui, ce n'est pas seulement un attentat contre le principe de liberté, ce n'est pas seulement la force primant le droit c'est encore la toute puissance de la femme par la faveur de l'homme, c'est le vice primant le mérite et la vertu. L'obligation pour la femme de demander son pain à l'homme, c'est le règne de la prostitution et ce qui est pire, le règne de la prostituée. Ah! nous avons assez de ce régime d'abjection."(44f) London 1899 Vol 2:43ff.

²⁴ DuBois 1997:66; see also Hamilton (1909) 1981.

differences should in the longer run disappear. For feminists equality was the main principle:

Faithful to our principle, we do not want to speak out for or against a regulation of working hours. We do not abandon our feminist point of view but cling to the demand of the same freedoms for the woman as for the man.²⁵

Here Bélilon presents *her* definition of "feminism", which was strict legal equality. As we already know, she was to speak about it also in Paris in 1900. According to Bélilon equality was most important, with or without protection of workers. She was appreciated for this by very few, not by bourgeois feminists and certainly not by the socialist feminists. The independent equality feminists, the real purists, here represented by Bélilon, remained a few odd persons, hardly even a group.

Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg was seen "during the whole of the congress as the darling of the public". She must be regarded as a bourgeois feminist. Her career abroad was inside of the International Council of Women. As young she had been at the international women's congress in 1888 in Washington. She befriended Elizabeth Cady Stanton and travelled around in the United States of America during half a year on a lecture tour. About it she wrote a book. She was writing the history of the whole of women's movement, in three volumes. Two already published. She was rumored to be the next president of ICW at the ongoing quinquennial. The Swedish Gertrud Adelborg said she was the best of the speakers *against* special legislation. A compatriot said that her speech "generally was considered one of the best at the congress"²⁶ which Gripenberg reported back to her readers with national pride.

Alexandra Gripenberg's demands were equal rights and no privileges. Women should be citizens on the same conditions as men. She pointed to the ongoing fight between the sexes when she said that women were embittered by always being under male control. She launched a hardly hidden threat; men should work for women's emancipation for their own good:

Has not the constant guardianship under which women have been compelled to live hitherto produced fruits so bitter that friends of women

²⁵ "Fidèle a notre principe, nous ne nous prononçons point au sujet de cette réglementation, nous abandonnons pas le terrain féministe et nous nous bornons à réclamer pour la femme la même liberté que pour l'homme."(48) London 1899 Vol 2:47f.

²⁶ The title on Gripenberg's speech: "The Drawbacks of Special Legislation", London 1899 Vol 2:48ff; the whole speech see *Dagny* 1899: 273ff; *Malmberg* 1899: 217f (quote); Gripenberg's correspondens, AG 304:4:27 and other letters; Gripenberg 1889; see Gripenberg 3 volumes, 1893-1903.

ought to take care before they should dare to support it in any shape? With what right do we interfere with grownup women at every step of their lives?²⁷

She spoke as some socialists, who lifted up revolution as a verbal threat, but rather not wanted it to become a reality. Violence had not been unusual in attempts to reach political change during the late 19th century. Gripenberg spoke up about her historical analysis of women as workers; she meant that industrialism had chased women away from their earlier domains of work. Protective legislation, creating unemployment among women, was part of an ongoing exclusion of women if put in a historical perspective. Every special law for women was negative. Gripenberg recommended better education for women in trades and professions and for both men and women strong hygienic regulations at work places.²⁸

Harriot Stanton Blatch was the last speaker. She was a member and activist in the Fabian Society in England since the beginning of the 1890s. In that society she had tried to introduce another view on special legislation for women than that of Beatrice Webb. She had been in a leading position in a group of women "who identified openly with women's rights and wanted the society to debate and support issues of sexual equality", according to her biographer Ellen Carol DuBois. For these women, the question was central to how socialists should look at the tendency that more and more women went out to earn money. Blatch and other less known "women's rights Fabians" were positive to women's waged work, even that of married women, and wanted women to achieve economic independence. Other Fabians stressed that wage work was "wage-slavery".

In 1894 Harriot Stanton Blatch got an assignment by the Fabian Society to formulate its first official declaration of women's rights and women's work. She worked on it for six months, got criticism and altered it accordingly. But she never wavered her view that protective labor legislation should be the same for men and women. The assignment finished in an ideological schism and the

²⁷ Quote *Dagny* 1899: 275ff; "Has not the constant guardianship under which women have been compelled to live hitherto produced fruits so bitter that friends of women ought to take care before they should dare to support it in any shape? With what right do we interfere with grownup women at every step of their lives?" London 1899 Vol 2:49.

²⁸ "... Women were driven away from home work when factories and workshops took up the greatest part of the manufacture hitherto carried on at home. Now they are being driven away, slowly but surely, from the factories and workshops."(49) London 1899 Vol 2:49f

official line became the one Beatrice Webb supported. With that the Fabian Society demanded an extension of the labor legislation of 1895 in England, which included a night work prohibition for women.²⁹ Now, at the London congress, Harriot Stanton Blatch got a possibility to confront Beatrice Webb in front of an international audience, and put forward her reform socialist view on women and the labor market. Her opinion was the same as that of other socialist feminists. At this congress, she was the first to speak up for them and their view.

Blatch stressed -- and she advanced the arguments she had tried to get a hearing for in the Fabian Society -- that the special factory laws for women had (a) "handicapped the evolution of women's economic position" (b) , meant an increase in child workers and (c) did lead to an "indifference to the interests of men, and helped to destroy the balance in the numbers between the sexes".³⁰

The printing trade gave her an example. Changes there showed how legislation had forced women away from good work:

... in printing offices of daily papers, women in any number cannot be employed, forbidden as they are to work Sunday, Saturday afternoon and at night. I agree with Sidney Webb when he speaks of these regulations as 'obvious disadvantages'.

To quote Sidney Webb *against* special legislation was to quote her own husband against Beatrice Webb. But this married couple did not really disagree in this question and the quotation must be seen as a polemic one. Blatch saw unequal regulations as a hinder for women and an equal one as a support.

Harriot Stanton Blatch explained, in something between a pun and a serious analysis, that there was an "invalid theory of woman's emancipation": women were treated as invalids, not as capable workers. Because of this, they were not trusted with all kinds of work. She declared that for her, such a theory was "invalid". Women were already supposed to be able to a large amount of heavy work, such as "scrubbing, charring, night sick-nursing, which do indeed demand exceptional strength". Blatch mentioned that women lived longer than men, to prove their physical endurance. This was a rare argument. She asked for a serious debate on the often heard opinion that protective labor legislation for women should lead to the same for men in the longer run. That a good work

²⁹ DuBois 1997: 74f.

³⁰ "Factory Legislation". London 1899 Vol 2: 50ff ; In the printed protocol she is called "Black" in stead of Blatch but her name is the right one in the "the list of convenors". London 1899 Vol 2, no page number.

environment for all was better than protection for women only, had recently been expressed by Alexandra Gripenberg. Blatch underlined it:

But the principle reason for making legislation equal is that men need legal protection as much as women."³¹

This was how Harriot Stanton Blatch formulated the socialist feminist demand on workers protection for all, which had been heard before at international women's congresses.

Ellen Carol DuBois writes that Blatch in her position for equal protection differed from "the prior women's rights criticism of sex-based labor legislation"³². Among radical women on the Continent of Europe, this was not so. The double demand of protection for men and women, had been raised several times at congresses in Paris and Brussels during the 1890s. And at the congresses examined in this book, the demand was for the first time raised by the English Florence Balgarnie in Paris in 1889 and by an English association, the Women Workers' Association at the congress of the Second International in Zurich in 1893. This formulation must have been heard before also in debates in England. At last Blatch polemized against the health argument:

Can any woman doubt that the nation is leading a saner life, a better life, where the balance between the sexes has not been destroyed by protecting one half of the race, and leaving the other half exposed to every danger?³³

By mentioning "race" she hinted at the Social Darwinist debate and answered Beatrice Webb, that even men should be seen as sexual beings in need of protection to become fathers to sound children. This was also an answer to all who repeatedly pointed to the positive relation between a sound race, women as mothers and protective legislation for women. Men belonged also to the human race and were fathers of children.

When the floor was open to comments, still some voice were heard against special protection.³⁴ The English Dora Montefiore, a widow with two children, had since ten years been responsible for them and her own livelihood. She had started as an activist for suffrage, but with time she found that the vote was not enough for woman's emancipation. Her project was to unite socialism and feminism and she often appeared in public at international congregations.

³¹ London 1899 Vol 2:51ff, quotes pp 51, 52, 54 ; DuBois 1997:75, 80f.

³² DuBois 1997:79.

³³ London 1899 Vol 2:54.

³⁴ London 1899 Vol 2:54ff.

Montefiore choose to support and reformulate what Harriot Stanton Blatch said: "she was in favor of restrictions upon all, but asked for no restrictions which did not apply equally to the men and women in the same trade".³⁵ They were in agreement, even if Montefiore could accept a gradual introduction of equality, trade by trade.

Gertrud Guillaume-Schack chose to lift up the need for women to organize in trade unions. She had been an activist in Berlin until she was exiled, because she had organized women politically. After many years in East End, among the poor in London, she said that her experience told her, that women should not meet hindrances but get help to organize. She saw a connection between legal hindrances and prostitution. Before she had been forced to leave Berlin, Guillaume-Schack had organized working women against limitation of their working hours³⁶ which she did not mention in her contribution in London. She had been among the first organizers of working women in Germany, but chose in London only to mention her experiences in England.

These women met with opposition. Emma Brooke, belonging to Webb's wing as a Fabian, countered that "the interference with the liberty of the individual for the good of the whole was part of the duty of the legislature, and was the essential condition for social progress". Margaret MacDonald, also socialist, believed in protection of women at the same time as she said she wanted equal rights for men and women. As protective legislation was good laws, they should not be abolished. She was not saying the same as Beatrice Webb because she put forward her wish to include men but in due time, in a traditional socialist rhetoric.³⁷

That Guillaume-Schack had the bad taste to mention prostitution in association with working women upset one of the few representatives of the working class, Amie Hicks. As the president of the Ropemakers' Union, she objected to that women in trades where the night prohibition ruled, were accused of such deeds. A majority of the prostitutes were recruited among female servants, according to her, and they were not protected by any laws. She was

³⁵ London 1899 Vol 2:58.

³⁶ London 1899 Vol 2: 56f; *Reports to the first International Conference of Socialist Women...1907*: 10; Schmitt 1995a: 47ff.

³⁷ London 1899 Vol 2:54ff , Quote p 56 ; DuBois 1997: 74.

"in favor of what some called restrictive, but she called protective, legislation for women."³⁸

The last words were uttered by a man, Herbert Burrows, secretary in the Matchmakers' Union. He wished that women could see to the best of everybody, to the common best. By not accepting special legislation, women gave their support to low wages. This representative with his connection to the match industry, where many women worked, was focusing more on the interests of humanity than on women's rights. He could, without any reprimand, hint that working women were prostitutes sometimes to complement their low wages, because the employers' wage policies: "women are driven into all sorts of straits to make a living."³⁹

Women's right to waged work, he considered a special interest, not in harmony with the interest of humanity. He spoke in a way that the leader of typographers August Keufer should do the next year in a dispute with Käthe Schirmacher in Paris. But more than Keufer, he pointed to the loss for the whole of society if women did not get special protection. His hidden opinion was that married women should stay at home and foster children; the husband should earn a family salary. It was a common view in English socialism.⁴⁰ The same opinion was also common among trade unionists on the continent and was always heard in debates on night work prohibition.

This debate with many voices and opinions must be seen as the result of the congress because no resolutions were allowed. The International Council of Women abstained from any opinion. The ICW also backed away from taking a position in the other great, controversial equality question, the one about the political citizenship. When the committee, which was to organize a public meeting inside the congress on women and politics, got an order from the president of ICWs, lady Ishbel Aberdeen, to hear both proponents and opponents to suffrage for women, the leader of committee and some of its members departed. But a meeting was held anyhow.⁴¹ And it became far from the neutral meeting the board of the ICW had wished for. Famous speakers for

³⁸ London 1899 Vol 2:57f.

³⁹ London 1899 Vol 2:58.

⁴⁰ DuBois 1997:74.

⁴¹ London 1899 Vol 3 (*Women in Politics*):1ff, 115ff.

suffrage for women, such as Susan B Anthony from the USA, Anita Augspurg from Germany and Gina Krog from Norway set the tone.

A written contribution from "the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the State of New York" was read aloud by an English woman, because the signatories could not come, or did not dare to come. Its argument against a political citizenship for women was founded in biology and said to be scientific. Men and women had "physiological differences". Men were stronger and if the state interfered to change this "essential line of difference" it should go against the evolution of humanity. If women could vote, evolution should be disturbed, was the message. Nature, not men, were against suffrage for women. The audience got impatient and whistled to stop the reading.⁴²

Susan B Anthony since long, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a radical and the leader in the women's movement of the United States of America, emphasized that women had gotten better possibilities in the labor market in the last fifty years, and that "(t)he ban of social ostracism has been largely removed from the woman wage-earner". She connected women's waged work to their demands for suffrage, stressing that "there are no longer any fences around the industrial field, although men will continue to have the best pickings in the pasture as long as women are disenfranchised". Equality in the labour market was not to be expected without the right to vote. And equality at work was of utmost importance. Anthony now had the wish that agitation was concentrated on suffrage, because it should promote equality between men and women and thus make society a better place. Above all, suffrage would mean an "exact justice"⁴³ between individuals. She saw the injustices in the surrounding society but had an optimistic view on progress, even if slow, founded in the fact that women were already in the labor market. Almost as a necessity this should lead to a right to partake in politics. Anthony saw the time ripe for demands of a political citizenship for women.

Anita Augspurg, leading as a proponent for suffrage in Germany, was glad to see a gradual progress for women. She warned against thinking that getting the vote was a final victory:

⁴² "physiological differences" and "essential line of difference"(3). London 1899 Vol 3:13ff; *Dagny* 1899:312.

⁴³ London 1899 Vol 3: 5ff Quotes pp 5, 8.

Women's suffrage is the very *beginning of our work*, for all our labor for human society remains abortive so long as it is not founded on firm legal terms, unchangeable by protection or favors (original italics).⁴⁴

In this there is a critique against special legislation at the labor market - which she and others often named "favors" or privileges. But Augspurg did not develop her view on suffrage in relation to waged work.

A hope of another kind of society can be heard behind these demands of suffrage, a fair society. That women were to contribute something special to a new and better society is not mentioned but might have been taken for granted. Justice was stressed and equal treatment.

Florence Balgarnie regretted that "the personal or womanly element had been made too much off". She missed a voice that praised the benefit for "humanity at large" of woman suffrage. It seems she was sensitive to any hints that women as such should give new dimensions to society. It might imply a certain irritation, that the arguments had been vague in relation to a general equality. Alexandra Gripenberg later on intervened in this debate by saying that women had to contribute something new to society and that should be "the mother's heart".⁴⁵

Thus women were far from agreeing on the goal of woman suffrage. But no open debate was heard. Opinions were inserted here and there. Frequent were outspoken hopes for a better society benefitting of maternal characteristics. Balgarnie's irritation and her wish for a wider view, was rare. A predictable support for woman suffrage was the result of the meeting.

In direct opposition to the neutrality of the congress another successful manifestation for woman suffrage was arranged by the National Union of Woman Suffrage Society. Woman suffrage was presented as a progressive movement; to wish suffrage for women was said to be modern and timely. Women's waged work was considered positive but now contributions were needed "not only of the manhood, but the womanhood of the nation".⁴⁶ That women were different was an asset, and should not be used as an argument against woman suffrage, was the logic of many. Men were allowed to be different from each other, and that did not exclude them from political rights. The famous Lady Henry Somerset,

⁴⁴ London 1899 Vol 3:11.

⁴⁵ London 1899 Vol 3:27ff. Quotes pp 27, 30.

⁴⁶ London 1899 Vol 3:121ff. Quote p 124.

president of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Movement, was also a campaigner for women's rights. She expressed this:

Woman may be essentially different in intellect from man; but at any rate none on reflection can deny that the average woman ranks with the average man; that if a man's privileges are not accorded to him by any measure of intellect, while our civilization allows a woman to hold property, to be the guardian of her children, it seems almost within the range of possibility that she would be likely to vote as well as a man on whom is thrown the same responsibility.⁴⁷

Emphasizing femininity as in the above can be interpreted in two ways. It might be an answer to those who argued against woman suffrage with a stress on biological difference. It might also be a positive argument. If a participation of women in political life should add new qualities to society, it should not be that easy to disregard, with arguments taken from the modern scientific knowledge. If, which was the common opinion as well as the newest scientific views, women were different to men, then the argument of justice was not as strong as the argument of difference. Women were keen to be modern and scientific. There is no doubt that arguments about difference and peculiarity ("Eigenart") and motherhood was more appealing than the discourse on equality and justice. But at the same time it is inevitable not to hear the irony, the understatement, in Lady Henry Somerset's way of talking about differences among men who could vote and women, who were not allowed to.

To argue about maternal instincts, femininity and peculiarity could further increase a construction of and consciousness of gender differences. So it might backfire on demands for equality, in fields where difference was not easy to defend as adding something positive. That women already had some civil rights, such as to work and get paid became an argument for political rights. Stress was put differently, sometimes on more feminine values in society, sometimes on woman as a person, as a unique individual. One speaker said that if a woman could rule the country and had done so for sixty years, all women ought to be able to vote. When the meeting was finished the participants, as usual, sang "God Save the Queen".

The woman's rights defenders were not in agreement on what suffrage would achieve, still agreed on hopes for a better society. Suffrage seemed to be the most urgent issue. The gender division of labor was not in focus.

⁴⁷ London 1899 Vol 3:134.

Some voices had honored women's waged work. Women's special qualities, such as being motherly, moral and religious were lifted up as important for building a good society. The earlier broader equality demand was diminished into only one: *political equality*. Ever more saw woman suffrage as the question to prioritize by the woman's movement.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ London 1899 Vol 3: 1-31, 114-141.