

Thanks to Carole Turbin for corrections of my language, some of them integrated, others unwisely not.

#### 4. PARIS 1889: DISAGREEING WOMEN CONGRESSES

"Of all the prejudices that cling to the hem of woman's garment and persistently impede her progress, none holds faster than this. The idea that she owes service to man instead of to herself, and that it is her highest duty to aid his development rather than her own, will be the last to die."

Susan B Anthony, 1900

Two international women's congresses were held in Paris during the summer of the Exposition Universelle in 1889. They disagreed about a special night work legislations for women only. At this time, there was a public discussion about a prohibition of women's night work caused including heated discussions in the National Assembly. The first of the congresses was against a prohibition; it was considered unfair. The second one, which the Exposition authorized, accepted special legislation of women only.<sup>1</sup>

The two congresses had originally been planned as one but a split occurred – despite negotiations – because of this controversy.<sup>2</sup> As it was the basis of organizing two separate congresses, the question of "special labor laws" or "protective legislation" was not taken up as a topic at any of the congresses in 1889.

If the word "feminist" had been used by radical women then, the "free" congress would had included it in its title. Their congress, called The French and International Congress for Women's Rights / le Congrès Français & International du Droit des Femmes, emphasized equal rights. This was the successor of the congress held in Paris eleven years earlier, which was the first *international* women's congress to raise the question of woman's total emancipation. The "free", unattached, congress was held outside of the World Exposition because its leader, the well-known defender of woman's emancipation, Maria Deraismes

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<sup>1</sup> Mallet 1992; Zancarini-Fournel 1995: 75ff.

<sup>2</sup> The split was not caused by religion, as presumed by Wilkins 1975:12; Bidelman 1982: 173ff.

would not accept would not accept a man as president, who supported special labor laws for women.

The other congress, authorized by a commission at the Exposition, had no emancipatory aims and a less radical title: The International Congress for female endeavours and institutions / le Congrès International des Œuvres et Institutions Féminines.<sup>3</sup> The arrangers had decided that a certain man should head it.

Both congresses believed that women and men had different natures, but they disagreed on whether biological distinctions should be the basis for legislation. Underlying this conflict was their view of the nature and stability of differences, whether they would remain if women attained other and better conditions, and how differences were related to the society and the family.

The historian Ellen Fries, the first Swedish woman to earn a doctoral degree, was in Paris in 1889, as a representative for the Swedish women's organization the Fredrika Bremer-Federation. She took part in both congresses. She respected the authorized congress, with its concentration on philanthropy and showed a certain skepticism towards the other congress, according to her organized by "the coterie".

Ellen Fries complained that both congresses; they spent "altogether too little time to *the economic side of the woman question*". Especially at the official congress only one person had spoken about it. Fries was of the meaning that "a woman's work must be higher appreciated, a woman must be able to work under more normal conditions", referring to wage work and professional work. This was very near to her heart. She had the year before given a lecture about the gender division of labor in Sweden. It was printed afterwards. In this she argued that woman's position in the labor market was central; it was not only a question of earning a living but also one of emancipation. It is not surprising that Ellen Fries, coming from the debates on women and work in Sweden, was disappointed of the tiny interest at both congresses for women's waged work and economy. But she found that the rights congress showed more interest for work

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<sup>3</sup> *Congrès français et international du droit des femmes, 1889. tenu à Paris, salle de Géographie du 25 au 29 juin 1889.* Paris, 1889, later = Paris June 1889; *Actes du congrès international des œuvres et institutions féminines* (Exposition universelle internationale de 1889). Publiés par les soins de la Commission nommée par la Comité d'organisation. Paris: Société d'éditions scientifiques, 1890, later = Paris July 1889

than the one with philanthropy as its profile, where the audience consisted of women without personal problems of making money to support themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The conservative *Le Figaro* pointed out that the women at the rights congress took themselves too seriously. The journalist thought that these women "might regret not being men". On the other hand, the philanthropic congress was praised in that daily for not asking for equality with men and thus preserving their feminine roles, without any envy of men's privileges. They got the journalist's admiration for concentrating on philanthropy and on work that women were already doing and had a right to do.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the politically shaky situations in France during the first part of the 1880s and the difficulties this had given the French women's movement, eleven years had passed between their first and second international women's congress. An international – but mainly national – women's congress had been held in Washington in 1888; no night work or labor legislation had been discussed. The North American congress had few guests that were not from the Anglo-Saxon world; among these few real foreigners were the French Isabelle Bogelot and the Finnish Alexandra Gripenberg.<sup>6</sup>

Both the congresses of 1889 could attract visitors who were visiting the World Exposition, celebrating the 100 years jubilee of the French Revolution. It was of importance for the Third Republic, installed in 1870. European nations ruled by royal families – and they were many – refused to take part officially. Despite this, many curious visitors came and companies from all over Europe and the rest of the world saw it as a good place to exhibit and make business. The controversial Eiffel Tower, a stable and airy construction of iron, dominated the Exposition.<sup>7</sup> A so called Cairo-street, where "exotic races" could be visited, was a great attraction.<sup>8</sup> At this street people from the colonies as well as their dwellings and houses were exhibited. They lived publicly during the whole summer. They were there in an educational purpose This concrete construction of The Other,

<sup>4</sup> Fries' three articles in the journal of the Fredrika Bremer-federation, *Dagny* 1889: 180f & 253; *Dagny* had published Fries' critique of the gender division of labor in 1888. Manns 1997:74.

<sup>5</sup> "Elles doivent regretter de ne pas être des hommes." in art. "Les femmes en congrès" by Charles Chincholle, *Figaro* July 3, 1889.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the International Council of Women Assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association*. Washington DC: R H Darby, 1888, later = ICW Washington 1888; Gripenberg wrote a book about her long stay in the US. Gripenberg 1889; Bidelman 1982:173ff; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:425ff.

<sup>7</sup> Sweden did not take part as a nation. But still Sweden had more than 160 exhibitors and a house of its own. Schroeder-Gudehus & Rasmussen 1992:114.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Sandström as the sign. "Uffe" *Dagny* 1889, quote 183; Schroeder-Gudehus & Rasmussen 1992:112ff; Pinot de Villechenon 1992: 28f; Ullman 2004:43ff.

and the comparison to be made, where strangeness and distance was accentuated and racial features were pronounced. A Swedish delegate to the congress, Anna Sandström, became romantic at the meeting with Arabs and Africans:

Yes, if a human really is 'the king of nature', then he an Arab and not a European. What a rhythm, which poetry in his steps, what a posture. What humanity has been degraded by trousers and boots! - Almost the same wild grace is seen in many negroes here ...<sup>9</sup>

The good and pure savage was at this time also part of the construction of The Other, not only the uncivilized. Was it the ideal man Anna Sandström was imagining, a virility not destroyed by civilization? Inside the women's movement we could find thoughts of an equally natural femininity, not yet destroyed by subordination, a femininity that emancipation might restore.

The Universal Exposition dominated the central parts of the French capital. Electricity was new and contributed to the possibility to keep the exposition open until midnight. Slightly more than 30 million visitors were counted from May until October. 69 official congresses were held. In addition 18 congresses were held outside of the exhibition.<sup>10</sup> Among these were two socialist men's congresses, which were also discussing the need for labor legislation. That the first woman congress, the rights congress, was held outside of the exposition was thus not at all odd.

### **A congress on women's rights**

The French and International Congress for Women's Rights in 1889 was arranged by those behind the women's rights congress of 1878, Maria Deraismes and Léon Richer. An alliance was for the time being constituted between two somewhat different groups.<sup>11</sup>

The group led by Maria Deraismes had the most consistent demands on legal equality. For these radical women it was impossible to accept the *introduction* of a differentiating legislation in the labor market. They wanted all the formal rights men had. They demanded them referring to the equality,

<sup>9</sup> Dagny 1889:183; in a letter Sandström wrote drastically about the congress, Ullman 2004: 162.

<sup>10</sup> Open from May 5 to October 31. Schroeder-Gudehus & Rasmussen 1992:112ff.

<sup>11</sup> Paris June 1889; formally it was a temporary cooperation between, La Société pour amélioration du sort de la Femme et la revendication de ses droits, led by Deraismes, on the one hand and on the other la Ligue Françaises du Droit de Femmes, led by Léon Richer, Paris Juni 1889: iii-iv& 279; see also Bidelman 1982:176f and Chapter 5.

formulated during the French Revolution. New special laws for women were considered as going backwards; they wanted progress. Demands on equality were not considered contrary to opinions that women were more suited for some works than men. These women wanted to be able to make their own choices facilitated by better education and legal rights to all occupations.

Members of the National Assembly and other influential Parisians supported the congress, as they had its forerunner in 1878. The city of Paris made a small financial contribution, giving it some official legitimacy. Attendees had to pay a fee in advance, which entitled them to vote on proposed resolutions.

Approximately two hundred people paid fees, fewer than in 1878, and only a small number were from outside of France. Sweden was represented, as well as Poland, England, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland.<sup>12</sup>

Maria Deraismes was the president, which was an advance for women, and still revolutionary. Eleven years earlier a female president had been considered inappropriate. Léon Richer and Clémence Royer were honorary presidents, and Eugénie Potonié-Pierre was secretary. The Swedish observer, Ellen Fries, described Deraismes as "a grey-haired elderly lady of large proportions, who was beautiful and intelligent with strong colors". Her exquisite dress was she considered somewhat overdone. Deraismes, age sixty, was wealthy, and had probably financed the congress.<sup>13</sup> A leader of the French women's movement since the 1860s, she had never married, and been a journalist, playwright and activist for woman's emancipation.

When Ellen Fries the first day entered the hall of the congress, she saw a mixed audience of "a number of fine, decent ladies of different ages, most of them foreigners, thick, painted French women in the most extravagant toilets, some ordinary and decent bourgeois woman, even some wearing caps, some elderly, distinguished gentleman and several young men with more or less self-indulgency." At the podium Maria Deraismes was seated, where she was "busy ringing the bell to calm the vivid audience or fanning herself to cool down

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<sup>12</sup> The congress had sessions June 25 - 29. There had been plans of an open congress. Paris June 1889: iii-iv & 2; the meetings were at La Salle de Géographie, *Figaro* July 3, 1889; [which must have been la Grande Salle de la Société de Géographie, boulevard Saint Germain 184 Compare the address of on other meeting, *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes* Nr 17 (15 Mai) 1891:3 UW]; Two Swedes read reports, Ellen Fries and Rosalie Olivecrona. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan Anthony had written letters to the congress. Table des matières, Paris June 1889; the following Swedes were present "fröknarna Butenschön, Fries, Geijer, Roos, Sandström, Schoug and mrs Straube" *Idun* 1889:312; Bidelman 1982:176, 179; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:428.

<sup>13</sup> *Dagny* 1889:215

because of the very hot weather but also maybe to cool her own existed feelings".<sup>14</sup>

In her introductory speech, Deraismes stressed the congress's position on equality and explained how the split had resulted in two women's congresses. At first a common program had been accepted. But the Board of the Exposition Universelle wanted to elect the president of the congress. It had chosen a man, who Deraismes mentioned as politician as well as a member of the Academy. She did not say his name but everybody knew he was Jules Simon, a very well known elderly French politician.<sup>15</sup> He had published the book *The working woman/ l'Ouvrière* already in the 1860s. It described the difficult toil of women factory workers. In his opinion, women's place, especially if married, was in the home and not in paid work outside it. This view was deeply ingrained in the Code Napoleon, which held that in France, as well in many other countries, a married man had the right to decide whether or not his wife could work for wages, or use her education, if she had any, for a profession.<sup>16</sup>

The question of special legislation to protect industrially employed women had been debated in France in earlier decades and referred to laws passed in England since 1844. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu's book, published in the 1870s, summarized that earlier French debate, which argued that the state should regulate the labor market, that the nation's basic social unit was the family which had to be protected, and that women's lower wages depressed men's earnings. As a liberal, he disagreed to all of these because he opposed all labor market regulations, arguing that the state, which was constantly in flux, should not regulate more than necessary. Also, women were individuals as well as men. Finally, women's waged work was necessary for themselves as well as for the industry.<sup>17</sup> Thus it was not a new discussion, but one of long standing. But at the moment the illiberal arguments were about to win in the National Assembly.

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<sup>14</sup> *Dagny* 1889:215f ; Paris June 1889:259; Eugenie Pierre, secretary at the congress of 1878, had as married put her husband's name after her own. He was the pacifist Edmond Pontonie (later to get Nobel's Peace Prize). He also chose to wear a double family name.

<sup>15</sup> Introductory speech, Paris June 1889:2ff; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:425f.

<sup>16</sup> Simon 1861: see especially Préface; Jules Simon was a Republican politician of importance; in France a woman had to have her husband's agreement to get a paid work. In other countries the legislation could be such that if the man wanted, he could forbid his wife to have a paid work. Arnaud-Duc 1991: 109.

<sup>17</sup> Leroy-Beaulieu 1873: e.g. 192ff.

The positions of the two women's congresses are all the more interesting because they took a stand on an issue that were part of a national as well as an international debate. They wanted to be heard trans nationally.

In her opening speech Deraismes emphasized that she and others rejected the proposal of Jules Simon as president. They organized a separate congress, because Simon advocated special, "protectionist" laws for women. Deraismes saw two perspectives on woman's emancipation: "liberals", who sought rights for all persons; and "protectionists", who wanted to control women. The latter group limited the possibilities for those they said they wanted to protect.<sup>18</sup> As the debate was formulated, it was about a free labor market against a regulated one.

Deraismes criticized prohibiting night work for women as protectionist, and praised the two members of the National Assembly, Yves Guyot and Frédéric Passy, who had argued against it. Those who were pro-regulation might have had good intentions, but the consequences would be negative. As a liberal who advocated individualism, Deraismes opposed special protective labor legislation because it was the opposite of freedom for all, including women:

All what we demand, is based on principles only, such as justice, equality and freedom, the source of all social rights. And we want to stress, that rights are inseparable; this however will not stop us from dividing up our demands on reforms as to suit the spirit of the time.<sup>19</sup>

Her three principles "justice, equality and freedom" were close to the slogan of the French Revolution, recently revived by the Third Republic: "freedom, equality and brotherhood". But she changed the word brotherhood to justice and placed it first. These three words summarize her conception of history: the French Revolution had forgotten its sisters. By putting justice first and near to equality she wanted to take back the real intentions of the revolution.

When Deraismes remarked that women's demands had to suit "the spirit of the time" she meant that it was not yet appropriate to put woman suffrage on the agenda. In the long run there were many other demands before women's

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<sup>18</sup> "Le fond"...: les libéraux et les protectionnistes." Paris June 1889:3; Maria Deraismes saw that the women's movement of her time was split because of the question of "protectionists" and "libéraux", Krakovitch 1980:27.

<sup>19</sup> "Toutes nos réclamations ne puisent leur force que dans les principes de justice, d'égalité et de liberté d'ou ressort la droit. Et, comme nous venons de le dire, le droit est indivisible; ce qui ne nous empêche pas de proportionner nos demandes de réformes à l'état d'esprit du temps." Paris June 1889: 3f.

equality was reached was the underlying meaning. Her audience was well aware that this was her answer to Hubertine Auclert's demand for the precedence of political citizenship, which Deraismes had refused to place on the program. There was a schism about strategy not on equality.<sup>20</sup> Deraismes was more keen on supporting labor market equality for women. The most urgent topic of the day was to prevent *new legal restrictions*. The night work prohibition was an imminent threat and had to be opposed first.

Suffrage was considered more controversial because it was about extending to women a right that men already had. Many liberals also feared that suffrage for women would threaten the young Third Republic, which had gone through some serious crises recently. Women in general were considered more conservative than men. As will be shown, the congress was not against equality for women, on the contrary. And the issue of suffrage was to be mentioned positively several times. Demands for equality ran like a red thread throughout Deraismes' speech, but she did not want to give priority to political citizenship.

Maria Deraismes asked in her speech if the Revolution of 1789 had lived up to its principles? Her answer was no; women had been excluded. They had been disregarded despite the fact that Olympe de Gouge, Rose Lacombe and many other women had been fighting for the revolution and its equality for all. Deraismes understood that women had lost confidence in the state after such an act of treachery. If men's biological strength had subordinated women during the Stone Age, nowadays it was the legal system which maintained "women's subordination"<sup>21</sup>.

In the middle of her speech, Deraismes departed from arguing that women's demands were rooted in justice, and asserted that women should have more rights because they were different from men. Women were more peaceful and created to be mothers, thus superior to men. Also a childless woman was an excellent educator. The emancipation of women should be a peaceful revolution of society. When women's special nature was given its due place, then the family, the society, and all of humanity would be better:

By giving woman, what she should have, by giving her the human dignity that arbitrary laws had deprived her of, we are giving the civilized world

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<sup>20</sup> About the schism with Auclert see e.g. Goldberg Moses 1984:218ff. Auclert is the heroine and the radical in the interpretation by Goldberg Moses as well as by Hause-Kennedy 1984. My interpretation is different. GM points to that Deraismes the year after the congress publicly supported suffrage for women.

<sup>21</sup> "... la subordination féminine ..."Paris June 1889:4f quote 5



something valuable. Not by introducing a new power but by a better use of what powers there are already<sup>22</sup>

Through the emancipation woman should be better as an individual, and the same should happen to the family, society and the whole of humanity. Maria Deraismes had a vision of total equality as the final goal. She was strategic, building her case for woman's emancipation on the one hand on equality and justice and on the other on difference, stressing motherhood. But the demand -- raised from both these perspectives -- was equal rights. As a liberal, she could not support special laws for mothers. The biological difference between men and women should not result in different treatment of adult persons by the state. Deraismes meant that subordination via legislation was the hinder for the full development of woman's nature.

Protective labor laws were not openly discussed. But the participants were supposed to have the same opinions as the president. As Ellen Fries complained, all in all there was not much talk about women and work, or women and economy.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, one session on economy was held, presided by Maria Deraismes. One contribution there mentioned night work. It might be seen as a summary of the opinions of most delegates. A report on women's work written by Mme Fabre, secretary of La Société l'Avenir des Femmes de Nîmes, was focusing women's right to and their need of a well paid work. Her report was read aloud by Maria Martin, since 1888 editor of the journal *La Citoyenne*, earlier edited by Hubertine Auclert. A night work prohibition, said the report, should not change the hard toil of seamstresses, because the prohibition could be neglected for 60 days per year without any sanctions. On the other side legislation should keep women away from other respectable jobs.<sup>24</sup> The report also opposed the view on marriage that was behind such legislation:

To look at marriage as a profession for a woman (and that is really the view of those who demand a prohibition on women's work) we consider as immoral and degrading.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "En restituant à la femme ce qui lui est dû, en lui rendant la dignité humaine dont l'ont privée injustement des lois arbitraires, nous fournirons au monde civilisé un apport nouveau; non par l'introduction d'une force nouvelle, mais par un meilleur emploi de celles qui existent." Paris June 1889: 4ff quote 11

<sup>23</sup> *Dagny* 1889:253.

<sup>24</sup> Paris June 1889 116ff; Bidelman 1982:180.

<sup>25</sup> "D'ailleurs, le mariage, considéré comme une profession pour la femme (et c'est bien comme une profession que le mariage est considéré par ceux qui demandent l'interdiction du travail à la femme), nous semble immoral et dégradant." Paris June 1889:120.

Looking at marriage as a profession was to consider a married woman as a prostitute, selling her body for life instead of for a short while. This was morally degrading, according to the report. This comparison was developed by many women around 1900, who criticized the legal frames of marriage. In 1885 the couple Marx and Aveling wrote about it; Garrett Fawcett did so in 1891 and Hamilton in 1909, as well as others.<sup>26</sup>

The report judged the prohibition harshly. It was compared to slavery. "Yes, slavery is not a too strong a word and is what we think of it". The word "protection" had been used through history as a cover up for the misuse of power. How could the guardians of the Republic at the centenary of the Revolution introduce a so called protection of women, at a time when she through education, willpower and work was in the beginning of having professional careers? If woman was weak, she needed her freedom to learn how to be strong. A prohibition should close progress. The printing of daily papers was mentioned by the report as work places from which women were to be excluded.<sup>27</sup> The printing houses was to become the foremost example among feminists talking about how women were discriminated against by a night work prohibition.

This radical report also demanded that married women should have the right to handle their own income, it demanded suffrage for women and a marriage between equals. At the end it carried a plaidoyer about a nationwide umbrella organization for women, so that changes could be achieved in the longer run.<sup>28</sup>

Quite a different angle was taken by Léon Giraud. He had supported women's political rights in a book and in articles in the weekly *La Citoyenne*, an organ mainly for suffrage. At the congress he spoke in two ways about women and work: he spoke *against* women's work in industry but *for* more openings for

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<sup>26</sup> E.g. the couple Eleonore Marx and E Aveling in 1885, see DuBois 1997:66; Garrett Fawcett (1891) reprint 1996: 285; "Den internationella kvinnokongressen i Paris", article in Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (later = *DN*) April 17, 1896; Hamilton 1909; Swedish Frida Stéenhoff did the same in the beginning of the 20th Century, Carlsson Wetterberg 1994:93; Irma von Troll-Borostyáni 1896.

<sup>27</sup> "Oui, l'esclavage, le mot n'est pas trop fort et ne dépasse pas notre pensée." Paris June 1889:122; the comparison with slavery was often done by radical women and was upsetting many men. See Rowold 1996:78.

<sup>28</sup> A resolution that was put forward but it was not voted on, it was not considered well-timed. Paris June 1889: 123f quote 123.

women in intellectual careers. Women ought to do as little manual work as possible and instead social work.<sup>29</sup>

What Giraud wanted to promote was a clear cut gender division of labor, not a very conventional one but still near to the general opinion that woman's duty and disposition was to care for others. He considered, as a matter of course, that all married women should stay at home whereas unmarried women were to be free to pursue a career. In a certain way he made a contribution to the debate on night work, because none of the jobs he mentioned were done during the night.

Giraud based his argument against women in heavy jobs on the descriptions in the book by Jules Simon *The Working Woman/ l'Ouvrière*. He also again took up the oft repeated argument that industrial work for women made the husband go out into a "cabaret" in the evening, because his home was not tidy and the dinner not on the table when he came home. Because working women were paid such low wages, they could as well reject that pittance and instead educate their children, was his view. If industrial work was forbidden for women, all of them should be married (implied: men should then get better wages); widows should get a life assurance as a protection if the husband died; unmarried women should be forbidden to spend money and time on simple divertissements.<sup>30</sup> So far, the opinions of Giraud were only conservative and not suited for this congress. By adding a comment in a quite other key, they became less one-sided and thus acceptable. Giraud wanted to see women educated to become medical doctors, lawyers and administrators. For him these professions were suitable for women.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1880s Giraud had worked with Hubertine Auclert in *La Citoyenne* to promote suffrage for women. His contribution at the congress shows that a radical stand on woman's political citizenship was not always going hand in hand with a wish to give her economic equality. On the contrary, the speaker was in favor of drastic cut in women's right to work. He did not want to see any married women in paid work. His knowledge of the conditions in a a working class family was zero. To believe that a woman's income in a working class family was

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<sup>29</sup> Paris June 1889:111ff; Dagny 1889:253; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:429; Léon Giraud was with Hubertine Auclert and Antonin Levrier the founder in 1881 of the weekly *La Citoyenne*. Giraud had written a book on woman and suffrage. Goldberg Moses 1984:215.

<sup>30</sup> Paris June 1889:112ff; "cabaret" as a refuge for men was a common argument. For example Ardaillou 1998:90, 95.

<sup>31</sup> Paris June 1889:115.

disposable because it was small, was absurd. The idea of telling young women what to do and what not to do shows an authoritarian view on women in general. Economic citizenship for women was unthinkable for Giraud, despite the fact that he had been fighting for their right to vote.

All in all nine resolutions were accepted by the congress. Not one was directly about labor legislation. Several of them were about equality between man and woman: one demanded equal pay for equal work for teachers; one that women should be permitted into all professional occupations; one that women should be allowed into legal professions; one demanded a revision of the Code Napoleon, which was the French constitution since the beginning of the 19th century, in such a way that the principles of justice and total equality were honored. These broad resolutions might be interpreted as a demand of equality all over, of suffrage, of an equal marriage and equality in the labor market. Indeed, demands for equality was the red thread of all the resolutions. Suffrage was not expressed in a special resolution.<sup>32</sup> Maria Deraismes' broad demand of equality might be interpreted as including suffrage without putting it out on display. The report by women in Nîmes had a demand for suffrage, beside its strong stress on an economic and equal citizenship. But, evidently, suffrage was avoided as a resolution. But when mentioned it was not contradicted. Léon Giraud had been given the platform even if he was well known for wanting suffrage for women or maybe because of that. A close look shows that suffrage was accepted but not considered as the important question. It was integrated in a larger agenda for equality.

The congress was perceived as promoting both an economic and a political citizenship for women. In the *Bulletin de l'Union Universelles des Femmes*, the editor Marya Chéliga-Loévy wrote that all the resolutions of the congress could be summarized as supporting "the idea of justice, of equality, of happiness and peace".<sup>33</sup> This interpretation came from inside the circle of activists. Also participants, not initiated in all the fractions and groups in the French women's movement, had understood the congress as openly positive to woman's suffrage. Ellen Fries' judgment was that equality at this congress had been demanded in all areas and that suffrage had been of importance:

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<sup>32</sup> Bidelman 1982: 180f, 258.

<sup>33</sup> "...: l'idée de la justice, de l'égalité, du bonheur et de la paix".

Thus the woman question in France immediately had a *radical* touch. It was at once demands for all rights, thus also the political suffrage, yes, this question is for some of the friends of the woman's question the most important of them all ...<sup>34</sup>

Also those who looked critically on the congress from outside, had the impression that equality in all respects had been demanded. One of them was Jules Simon. When opening the other woman congress, held a couple of weeks later, Simon was outspoken when declaring that suffrage was not to be mentioned at his congress, even if so had been the case at an earlier woman congress.<sup>35</sup>

### **A congress on women's philanthropy and other endeavors**

The International Congress for female endeavors and institutions was an official one. It gathered more than 550 persons. Almost 400 of them were from France. It was held in the City Hall of S:t Sulpice, an arrondissement in the center of Paris. This congress seems to have had a larger audience than the other but probably the presence was rather irregular. The bishop of Paris had publicly denounced the congress and thus Catholic women were few if any. The public was mainly protestants. Ellen Fries remark was that this congress "...had difficulties of getting a large audience. Many an intelligent, interested wife had been formally forbidden by her husband to inscribe at the congress".<sup>36</sup>

The congress put the stress on women's philanthropic endeavors. The lack of public might also be dependent on the program, which gave detailed presentations of one philanthropic organization after the other, without any discussions. There were "a lot of speeches, presenting different associations, which cared for poor and sick people or other neglected persons. It could even be said that such reports were many more than you could really stomach", Ellen Fries evaluated.<sup>37</sup>

The congress had a less provocative aim than the earlier independent congress. Still some men and women were present at both. Men were always presidents at the meetings. The two congresses were not antagonistic and could

<sup>34</sup> Dagny 1889:180; also the person reporting in Swedish weekly *Idun* 1889:302 was of the opinion that suffrage had been treated.

<sup>35</sup> Dagny 1889:180(citat); Paris July 1889:X; "...: l'idée de la justice, de l'égalité, du bonheur et de la paix." *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes*, Nr 3 1890:14; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:431.

<sup>36</sup> The congress was held 12-18 July, 1889, Paris July 1889: VII; Dagny 1889:217; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:434.

<sup>37</sup> Opening speech by de Morsier, Paris July 1889: XXff; Dagny 1889:249 quote; Bidelman 1982:175.

even be seen as complementary, at least by those who choose to take an active part in both. An example was the journalist and editor Maria Martin -- active against special protective labor legislation for women -- who was secretary together with Monsieur Beurdeley, mayor at VIII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement in Paris. He, on the contrary, was an ardent defender of protective laws for women.<sup>38</sup>

Mme Emilie de Morsier initiated the congress. She was active against the regulations of prostitution. The minister of Public Works, Yves Guyot, was there as a sign of approval by the government.<sup>39</sup> He was known for being openly *against* any special labor legislation for women and maybe most known for his resistance *against* the regulations of prostitution. Many foreign guests were present at both congresses, as Ellen Fries. More foreign guests came to this congress than to the former, especially from England. 21 countries were represented.<sup>40</sup>

The "protectionist" Jules Simon was president. He was already an old man with his life-time achievements behind. He had been a professor of philosophy and chief editor for several daily papers. As a politician, he had been head of government, minister and since many years had a seat in the National Assembly. He had been an ardent defender of the Republic and at times politically persecuted for this. In the woman question he had already in 1862 written his famous book *L'ouvrière*. In the introduction to it, he emphasizes that it is a book of morals. He is not criticizing the factory system as such but he describes in detail special works and environment. He considered the payments reasonable but is of the opinion that factory work despite this did destroy femininity. Men, not women, should work there. A woman should not leave her home. Jules Simon was positive to special legislation for women workers.<sup>41</sup> The book *L'ouvrière* describes dreary interiors from factories, visited by the author. Such were also the images of industrial work in general, used by many who referred to

<sup>38</sup> Klejman & Rochefort 1987:432ff; Paris July 1889: II, VI.

<sup>39</sup> "Travaux Public", Paris July 1889: XX & XXV.

<sup>40</sup> Approx. 45 persons, among them Mrs Stopes and Mrs Joséphine Butler (obs list contains "délégués et adhérents étrangers" and adds also organizations and persons who gave their support in absence) Certainly there were guests from Belgium (6 among them Mlle Popelin); Brasil; Denmark (6 among them Frederik Bajer, Mlle Kristine Frederiksen); Finland (only Alli Trygg); Greece (3 among them Callerøe Parren), the Netherlands, India, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Norway (only Anna Bugge Wicksell), Poland, Roumania., Russia, Schweiz, Scotland, Spain, Sweden (among others Anna Hierta Retzius, Ellen Fries), Germany (3 among them Lina Morgenstern), USA (12 among them Frances Willard, May Wright Sewall, Lillie Devereux Blake and Lucy Stone) and Austria. Paris July 1889: 529ff and *Dagny* 1889: 220.

<sup>41</sup> Simon 1861: Préface; Paris July 1889: Vf & XVIIff; Thibault & Riot-Sarcey 1995: 49; Zancarini-Fournel 1995: 88. See also his acting at the Berlin conference in 1890 in this book.

the book. Not all were in agreement with Jules Simon about woman's place in the home. The book could be interpreted and used as a general critique of industrial work conditions. It was a classic at the end of the century, read and known by many.

Three women were honorary presidents of the congress: among them Mme Isabelle Bogelot, who had been elected the treasurer of the International Council of Women in 1888 in Washington the year before. The minister, liberal Yves Guyot was deeply involved in this congress as was the Peace activist Frédéric Passy. The two of them, and especially the first one, were well known as opposing all state interference in the labor market.<sup>42</sup> These two men, as well as Jules Simon, will be reappearing several times in connection with discussions about a night work prohibition for women at international congresses, even congresses arranged and dominated by men.

In his opening speech at the congress Jules Simon made it quite clear to the audience that no one was supposed to raise any question or suggest solutions to problems in society or to put into question, what was already decided upon. This certainly included the topical night work legislation for women. He expected, he said with authority, that the congress should work in mutual understanding. The aim of the congress was to bring out what women had contributed, what they had organized and maybe, to a certain degree, what they still had to do.

He turned to the women as mothers and educators of the new generation; he saw the old traditions threatened. Woman was the guardian of morality. He turned to the French women, heartbroken by the widely spread image of Paris as the sinful Babylon. He bemoaned that French men were depicted as libertines and French women without moral, that Paris was seen as the capital of impudent entertainments! Simon urged the women at the congress to show how wrong this was: most French women were brave, patriotic and had high moral standards. There were courtesans in every big city. Authors and journalists wrote about sensations, neglecting the thousands of French women, who worshiped God and struggle in their daily lives in an honorable way. They were the real France.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Paris July 1889: Vff& XXXff, among other things gave Guyot a reception for participants in "son hôtel, 246, boulevard Saint-Germain". (Guyot was minister 1889-93.) Frédéric Passy was member of the organizing committee;(Passy was députée of the National Assembly 1881-1889. His greatest interest was the peace question, for which he was very active. See *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*. Paris 1889-1940.)

<sup>43</sup> Jules Simon's opening speech, Paris July 1889: IXff; Zancarini-Fournel 1995: 80ff.

In his concluding oration a couple of days later, Jules Simon was openly showing his distance to the congress of women's rights. He stressed that all women's meetings were not of such a dubious kind:

There are often in Paris meetings by women, which are not always of such a nature that they promote your cause. I will quickly add, that your congress has nothing in common with the meetings I am talking. <sup>44</sup>

In his finishing speech Jules Simon polemized against women's demands of more participation in society; he was against that they worked for wages, against their demands for equality and suffrage. He was aware that such demands had been raised at the other congress. Personally he had not been there, and -- by the way -- he had not either been present during the sessions of the congress he was about to close. He must have been informed via secondary sources, maybe through the papers, about the other congress.

Simon was an eloquent speaker. He was against giving women economic or political citizenship. He promised women a high appreciation of their femininity, if they did subordinate voluntarily. And he compared the "passions" of the earlier congress with the wisdom which had been characterizing the congress he was addressing. He thought the steam machine a destructive invention, which had brought women into industrial work and forced them to leave their families. For a long time, his speech went in circles around the theme of femininity and peace. Woman's duty was to devote herself to peace. "There you have a political right, which no one can take away from you. Believe me, that is the best of them all." Referring to his own experience, he assured that political engagement was not anything to desire. Women should lose more than they gained if they became involved in politics; they should lose the respect men had for their weakness, and they should lose their female kindness.<sup>45</sup> Both threatening and praising Simon wanted to make women satisfied with their role.

This was a congress positive to special labor protection for women only but -- as on the other congress -- it was not debated. There seems to have been a consensus not to mention the imminent legislation. The president had his well known position. Opponents to the legislation -- as Maria Martin -- were participating.

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<sup>44</sup> "Il y a souvent à Paris des assemblées de femmes qui ne sont pas toujours de nature à faire avancer vos affaires. Je me hâte d'ajouter que votre congrès n'a rien de commun avec les assemblées dont je parle." (LVI), Paris July 1889: LVIf.

<sup>45</sup> "Voilà un droit politique qu'on ne peut vous enlever. Croyez-moi, c'est le plus beau de tous" Paris July 1889: LXV.



A night work prohibition was mentioned only by one person. Florence Balgarnie from England had impressed Ellen Fries, who commented on her appearance, her way to perform and her demands on political equality to her Swedish readers:

If you wanted to have a lecturer, who would be irresistible for the male sex, to preach about the suffrage question, do ask *Miss Balgarnie*, secretary in the English National Society for Women's Suffrage. Her curly hair, rosy cheeks and bright eyes would probably be brilliant arguments charming the so called strong sex, which in such cases is a very weak one. Look at her, and then say that only old, ugly spinsters might get such unfeminine thoughts in their heads as suffrage.<sup>46</sup>

Balgarnie refused all special legislation for women but not labor legislation generally. She reported that women had been replaced by men in some factories, since prohibitive laws had been introduced in her country. Such laws gave women, but not men, a ten hours working day, half the day off on Saturdays and a free Sunday. But Balgarnie was not happy either with the older system without any state regulations. Her proposition was an eight hours working day for all workers. Thus jobless should be given work and working men and women should be happier, even if the profit of the capitalists might be decreasing.<sup>47</sup> To all this she had, wrote Fries, added a demand for suffrage.

It seems strange that a speech of such a content was at all given at this congress. An eight hours working day was a socialist demand. Internationally it was heard for the first time on the socialist congress held in Paris approximately at the same time. But Balgarnie's speech had no consequences. It did not result in a discussion or any resolutions.

Florence Balgarnie's combination of *demands on state interference to regulate the labor market but without any special laws for women only, became a model to be taken up many times later at international women congresses*. Here it was spoken out for the first time at an international woman congress. In this book it will be called *the socialist feminist model*. Later on it will be specifically connected to the night work prohibition. Here Balgarnie objected to all special legislation for women without explicitly mentioning the night work

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<sup>46</sup> *Dagny* 1889:219f; Florence Balgarnie (1856-1928) was a liberal suffragist, working for the National Society for Women's Suffrage later called the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage in England. She was "a believer in the necessity of economic independence for women" and better conditions for working women." She "was regarded as one of the finest women speakers of her period" quotes from Lilian Lewis Shiman <http://www.orforddnb.com/view/article/55095>, accessed to 7 Nov 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Paris July 1889:481ff.

prohibition, which probably was on the mind of those listening anyhow. A negative opinion to special labor laws was not at all unknown in England, but this time she was not repeating the general liberal view against all state regulations. Balgarnie wanted to include men in protective labor laws. Probably the speech of Florence Balgarnie was ignored as an odd interference by a foreign guest. It had been more appropriate at the congress of women's rights.

Among the administrators of the congress there were mixed views on women's need for protection. Emilie de Morsier spoke positively on special legislation for women. She concluded when summing up the important results of the congress:

The congress of 1889 should have as a result to show that women have been good at what they are doing and that they have a right to be trusted and protected, in a way that so far have been denied them.<sup>48</sup>

To de Morsier protective labor legislation was the answer to an excessive exploitation. The state ought to step in as a protector of women. Was there perhaps also a hidden agenda of suffrage when de Morsier said that women had a right "to be trusted"? Maybe she belonged to those who would accept a political but not an economic citizenship for women?

Monsieur Beurdeley, lawyer and the local mayor, spoke in the session on Woman and Civil Legislation, and gave his view of labor legislation for women as seen in the perspective of the family. In the book reporting on the congress, his contribution got a nice place among the important contributions. This lawyer could see nothing wrong in a special legislation; it should not be regarded as devaluating women:

We demand a more efficient protection of the woman, at the same time as we demand her rights. In no way this is contradictory. A woman might be weak without being incapable; thus she might be protected without reducing her rights.<sup>49</sup>

Mayor Beurdeley treated the relationship between men and women in marriage laws. According to legislation the man decided in the family and

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<sup>48</sup> "Le congrès de 1889 doit avoir pour effet de montrer que les femmes ont fait leurs preuves et qu'elles ont droit à la confiance et à la protection qu'on leur a refusées jusqu'à ce jours." Paris July 1889: III, from the introduction of the printed protocol.

<sup>49</sup> Beurdeley was one of the secretaries of the congress: "Nous réclamons une protection plus efficace pour la femme et en même temps, nous revendiquons ses droits. Cela n'implique pas contradiction. La femme peut être faible sans être incapable; il peut y avoir protection sans déchéance."(XLV) Paris July 1889:XXXIV-XLV; Klejman & Rochefort 1987:435.

protected the woman. In exchange for protection she should obey him. Only one had to decide in the family, otherwise the harmony in marriage was threatened. He thought that the attraction between men and women was depending on their differences. It was against nature to have equality in a marriage. The frailty of woman needed the protection of a marriage. The man should have more freedom than a woman, because he was stronger. Beurdeley, lawyer and politician, was of the meaning that it was the duty of the state to protect the unmarried woman, as she did not have the protection of a husband. More legalized protection of women was his wish, to protect their honor and moral.<sup>50</sup>

His way of reasoning give a clue to understanding why so many saw it as self evident that the state "protected" women through a night work prohibition, even if such a protection was not necessary for men. The woman was subordinated her husband in the family legislation of so called civilized nations. She was seen as in need of a man's protection because she was bodily and mentally vulnerable. Jules Simon had also mentioned this. The woman was protected in her original family as a daughter. Later on she was protected by her husband. Thus in a family, she was protected. But outside of the family the power of the father or the husband was not valid. The protective power of the man did not reach into a factory and have difficulties to be valid whenever a woman worked outside of the home. Seeing it in this perspective, it was not strange to demand that the state should take on the protection in the labor market. To support a special labor legislation for women was a natural consequence for all who supported the common view on women and its consequences in marriage legislation. To think otherwise was odd, almost inhuman against unprotected women, working outside of the protected area: the family.

The decade around 1900 saw deepening controversies between men and women, which also resulted in that conflicts were discussed, formulated and solutions were proposed. Women's increased presence outside of their homes, outside of a family, as workers, was considered a problem. New solutions were suggested to solve it. One of them was protection at the work place through protective labor legislation. Tensions because women's new demands but also

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<sup>50</sup> Paris July 1889: XXXIX & XLV.

work conditions could be observed at the two women's congresses in Paris in 1889, where also men – beside women – had aired their opinions. They were all in the midst of negotiations for rules in a changing society, in which democratic ideas of equality and older mores of relations between sexes were mixed. The outcome was still uncertain. Only men had legislative power, even if not all men. Men had opinions on women's needs and position in society. Their views were also to be heard at international congresses, arranged by men, at men's congresses. The congresses were centers of male power, if not directly, then via men's authority and their proximity to the legislative power.