

Translation, preliminary, from *Feminism, familj och medborgarskap. Debatter på internationella kongresser om nattarbetsförbud för kvinnor 1889-1919*. Stockholm: Makadam 2006, both book and translation by Ulla Wikander [ulla.wikander@gmail.com](mailto:ulla.wikander@gmail.com) to you Marilyn Boxer with thanks for cooperation and for the book on Clara Zetkin.

## 6. EQUALITY CLAIMED: WOMEN'S CONGRESSES IN PARIS 1892 & 1896

Radical women started to call themselves “feminists” in Paris around the year 1890. Marya Chéliga-Loévy used it positively in writing, describing the group of women she was active in. Chéliga-Loévy should be given credit for spreading the word as a denomination for women working for equality with men in all respects. At the end of 1891 the *Fédération française des sociétés féministes* was founded, with the aim of uniting all radical French women's organisations. It was the first one to call itself feminist.<sup>1</sup>

These feminists of the 1890's wanted legal equality and organised to obtain an integration of women in society as equal citizens. They were not an organisation for women only, in principle. Men were welcome to join. Some men were present at the international feminist congresses in Paris, as supportive activists, invited guests or of pure interest.

The congresses which later in time chose to be called feminist are – in addition to the two congresses of this chapter - also *Le Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles* in 1897 and in 1912. All four congresses asked for equality (“égalité”) including suffrage. The first feminist congress to be an official congress at a World Exposition was the International feminist congress in Brussels 1897.<sup>2</sup> The congresses in Brussels were not socialist but definitely feminist whereas the two congresses in Paris wanted to be both, trying to integrate two new political ideologies still not rigid, still contested.

Feminist socialist congresses were held in Paris in 1892 and 1896. To understand the social and cultural surroundings they were part of and in dialogue with, a short description of the surrounding socialism is needed and also how socialism had looked at and looked at the woman question. In France the burgeoning of an organised socialism had split in two larger fractions in 1880, one reformist and one revolutionary. Inside and beside these two there

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<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes* Nr 4, 1890:6; the word “feminist” again page 11; Klejman & Rochefort 1989: 95. Cott 1987: 14 has another opinion.

<sup>2</sup> General secretary and organiser was the Dr of Law, Marie Popelin, president of La Ligue belge du Droit des Femmes. *Actes du Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles, (4-7 août) 1897*, publié par les soins de Mlle Marie Popelin, docteur en droit, secrétaire générale du congrès. Bruxelles: Impr. Scientifique, 1898, later = Bruxelles Aug 1897; In the USA the word feminism was accepted in the 1910's. Cott 1987:13; The word “feminism” was used for the first time in England in 1898 av Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, see Caine 1997:143.

were others. Anarchists were also active. Some men – far from all – belonging to the reformist part of the socialist movement supported feminists and gave them hopes of a possible feminist socialism. On the contrary, the revolutionary fraction was of the opinion that the emancipation of the working class must proceed before women's emancipation. The latter socialism was close to the German Social Democratic party: the woman question should be solved after the revolution. The split of the French socialism – which was not mainly about the woman question – resulted in continuous ideological polemics among socialists all the time until a unification in 1905.<sup>3</sup>

This is only a rough outline of French socialism in formation. During these years women were dedicated to contribute to the new ideology with their views of justice and equality. But also the French feminists - not only French socialists – were divided in many smaller groups.<sup>4</sup> The male dominated groups were on the way – despite disputes – to find a place in the established political system of the Third Republic. They had newspapers and journals and their leaders had often respected professions. They had representatives in the National Assembly, an assembly with more power than the German Reichstag. The distribution of power between socialist men and women to the left was to women's detriment. Some women sided with revolutionaries but the feminists set their hopes on the reformists and were not easily subordinated.

The idea of an equality in the labour market should in an European context have a long life in small groups of women in France, but also in other countries. The idea was kept alive by international contacts. But equality between the sexes was not an easy idea to promote. In France the libertarian, by marxists called utopian, socialism of equality between men and women was clashing with the complementary and misogynic view on women, held by the anarchist Pierre Joseph Proudhon and his followers. His influence was great among French trade unions. He was better known than Marx. Proudhon had praised the housewife as the help and support of the man. The married woman should work at home, otherwise she was behaving as a slut. His judgement was harsh. Also unmarried women should find work inside families as domestics, if they had to work for wages at all, according to Proudhon.<sup>5</sup> The trade unions were generally, by male egocentricity, against working women, seeing them as competitors. An even more important role as the guardian of an ideal family had the Catholic church on the European continent. Socialism had to pay some attention to the church; many

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<sup>3</sup> Millerand 1903; Droz II (1974) 1997: 133-236.

<sup>4</sup> Klejman & Rochefort 1987, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Proudhon u å (ca 1865); Stanton 1884: 245f; Fau-Vincenti 1990; Zancarini-Fournel 1995:81f; McMillan 2000:115, 122ff.

Catholic trade unions with influence existed. Adding to the opposition of equality between men and women must be some modern trends, for example the sociology of Auguste Comte. He had founded a science of society and in it placed the man as the head and protector of woman. Similar views are found in Darwinism and in the Social Darwinism by Herbert Spencer.<sup>6</sup> This just to give a glimpse of what resistance there was against the idea of a possibly equality between men and women.

At the period "socialism" was debated everywhere. The feminist woman congresses of 1892 and 1896 were part of such debates. They were to fail to get a cooperation with young male students, who were even more recently organised than the feminists. The historian Charles Sowerwine writes in his book *Les femmes et le socialisme*, that this failure shows that the congress was not socialist. He evaluates the congress as unsuccessful as socialist. Still he categorizes it as saint-simonistic.<sup>7</sup> That is anachronistic because saint-simonism was a kind of socialism with roots in France since long.

His understanding of a connection between the doctrine of Henri de Saint-Simons and the congress in 1892 is accurate. Saint-Simon's ideas had been spread during the radical decades 1830 to 1850. The historian Claire Goldberg Moses, writing about the development of the French women's movement during the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century, underlines the continuity between the early socialism and the feminism at the end of the century. Charles Sowerwine has chosen a rigid interpretation of the word "socialism", without respect for its tradition and its contested and varied use during the 1890's.

The years 1889 to 1895 have been described as an "explosion" for socialism in France. The so called social question, the conditions of the poor in society, was important for this flaming up of interest. Reforms or revolution was one of the dividing themes discussed. Many saw that the fairly new Third Republic had a constitution making the country suitable for a less dramatic change of power relations than via a revolution. Sowerwine, in his judgement of the congress 1892, applies a definition of socialism, in which revolution and class struggle are central. Such groups were present in France, the most prominent around Jules Guedes. Their kind of socialism was rather new, even if France had seen revolutions earlier. In the older French tradition of socialism ideas of women as equal to men prevailed. Such socialism had been developed during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by philosophers as

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<sup>6</sup> Sayers (1982) 1985:28-50; Zancarini-Fournel 1995:85.

<sup>7</sup> Sowerwine 1978:67f; Klejman & Rochefort 1989:231ff do not agree with Sowerwine; See Taylor 1983 on the English movement .

Charles Fourier, the already mentioned Saint-Simon and their followers.<sup>8</sup> Their theories and ideas were still appreciated at the end of the century also by persons in the male dominated French reformist socialism, not only by the socialist feminists, but indeed by them. In it they found a socialism explicitly speaking of equality between man and woman.

### The socialist feminist congress 1892

In 1892 women convened again for an international congress in a Paris - without an Universal Exposition. It was considered a success as a manifestation for women's emancipation. It got cover in the radical newspapers, and information of it reached beyond the frontiers of France. At the congress several resolutions were voted in, which were to be taken up again at later international congresses as feminist demands.

For the very first time the word feminist was applied to the name of an international congress. The general congress of feminist societies / Le Congrès général des Sociétés féministes was the successor of earlier women's rights congresses in Paris, in 1878 and 1889. The congress was feminist and socialist. Feminist in the sense of demanding radical changes in the power relations between men and women. The congress wanted to assert both justice and equality between classes and justice and equality between men and women. Such an equality should be achieved by changes in state policies and legislation. Demands of gender neutral laws were at this congress supported by a broader resolution of general justice for all.<sup>9</sup>

At the congress no focus was on a night work prohibition. But one formulation repudiated special legislation for women only. That very same formulation was to be taken up at later woman congresses and be defended by socialist feminists at international congresses, and also at male dominated congresses.

The congress was organised by La fédération des Sociétés féministes and l'Union universelle des Femmes. It had a triple cause: first to unite all French feminist groups and to be a platform for La fédération des Sociétés féministes. The federation was founded one year earlier as an umbrella organisation for French feminist groups by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin. The congress was its first big manifestation, thus a national one. Last, the

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<sup>8</sup> Droz II:(1974) 1997:160 on "l'explosion"; Goldberg Moses 1984; and e.g. Riot-Sarcey 1994; Anderson 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The congress was summoned hastily - it was advertised for the first time in *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 4 Mars 1892; It was taking place in the great aula of the City Hall of Saint-Sulpice, It was the same place as the official women's congress had used in 1889; *Le Temps* 14/5 1892; *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892; The resolution was proposed by Mme Bogelot and supported by Mme Vincent, *Jn des Femmes* nr 8 Juillet 1892; Krakovitch 1980:28; Klejman & Rochefort 1989: 95ff, 108, 210f.

congress wanted to unite women internationally in the Women's universal union/ l'Union universelle des Femmes, founded during the rights congress in 1889.<sup>10</sup>

The Union published a journal *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes*. It kept up an intense surveillance of the French debates in the National Assembly on a night work prohibition of women. The journal was against the introduction of such a legislation. It was not taking any notice of what socialists thought in the question, but stayed with the opinion they had formed themselves.<sup>11</sup>

Marya Chéliga-Loévy and several of the leading feminists called themselves socialists, but in the question on a night work prohibition for women, they were critical towards the socialist attitudes in the National Assembly. In the Bulletin they praised the liberal Yves Guyot and his defence of woman's liberty in the labour market when he was opposing the socialists. The journal quoted approvingly an other deputy who asked the assembly if it through a prohibitive legislation wanted "to force working women to die of starvation, to preserve their health". The Bulletin also published articles on working women's low wages and difficult living conditions. The Swedish umbrella organisation for women's associations, Fredrika Bremer-förbundet, was presented twice. Its regulations were quoted, maybe to inspire the French umbrella organisation? The editor of the Union was the Polish author, journalist and playwright Marya Chéliga-Loévy. She was a leading socialist and feminist, living in Paris since 1883.<sup>12</sup>

The leaders of the congress were Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin. Since 1889 they had together organised the Women's socialist league / La Ligue socialiste des femmes. In 1891 they renamed it Women's Solidarity / La Solidarité des Femmes. Did they skip the word "socialist" in the name of the association to show their disappointment with the disinterest from male comrades? Or because they did not want to push away bourgeois women? As a group, but not as individuals, they had troubles to be acknowledged by socialists. Eugénie Potonié-Pierre was allowed to argue for equality between the sexes among

<sup>10</sup> *Bulletin de l'Union universelle des Femmes* nr 17 (Mai) 1891; *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892; the congress also had a longer title "Le premier congrès annuel de la Fédération des Sociétés féministes jointes à l'Union universelle des femmes." This shows the double national and international intention, already found in the title of the congress in 1889. *Le Temps* 14/5 1892. Léopold Lacour was for equality between man and woman and the author of *L'humanisme integral* 1896, Avril de Sainte-Croix 1907: 139; Sowerwine 1978: 67; Klejman & Rochefort 1989: 95-96.

<sup>11</sup> "France" *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes* nr 4, 1890: 6. In addition to M. C-L, Clémence Royer, Eugénie Potonié-Pierre and Maria Martin were activists, according to Jules Bois "Les Apôtres femmes du Féminisme à Paris", *Figaro* 9/11 1894, ref. in Wilkins 1975: 12; on Clémence Royer, Fraisse 1985: 97.

<sup>12</sup> Marya Chéliga-Loévy had started and was the main secretary of l'Union universelle des Femmes. *Bulletin de l'Union universelle des Femmes* nr 9 1890:7 & nr 17 1891 See also Leopold Lacour, "L'assemblée des femmes", *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892; "... vous obligez les ouvrières à mourir de faim, pour leur conserver la santé", said deputy Albert Ferry, *Bulletin ...* nr 3: 8.

other reformist socialists in the journal *La Question Sociale*. In 1893 Potonié-Pierre, as secretary of the group La Solidarité des Femmes, wrote an appeal to her male socialist comrades, that they at political nominations should apply a “total equality between the sexes”. This group of women wanted that the socialist reformists should engage in a campaign to protest that the differences between men and women so often was accentuated.<sup>13</sup>

At the congress of 1892 Maria Deraismes still played an important role. She had for a long time been the main figure in the French women’s movement. Now she was surrounded by younger feminists, such as Aline Valette, Marie Bonneval, Léonie Rouzade, Mme Vincent as well as by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre, Maria Martin and of course Marya Chéliga. They all called themselves socialists, except Deraismes.<sup>14</sup>

At the wish of Eugénie Potonié-Pierre the congress as a whole mostly dealt with the so called social question. Both male and female socialists participated,<sup>15</sup> for better or for worse. Maikki Friberg from the Finish women’s association the Union remarked that the congress became animated “because of the presence of undisciplined socialist students”. Léopold Lacour, a feminist friendly journalist, wrote in the more conservative *Le Figaro* that no one should believe that the organizers of the congress were “enemies of men”, in an attempt to disarm prejudices. But evidently, he did not either want them to imagine them as working women of the lower classes. This polite partisan for the feminists at the congress, stressed that most of them were “well married and charming”.<sup>16</sup>

The number of foreigners participating, as organisers or delegates, was fairly big. In all came 35 persons from other nations. Most of them came from north or continental Europe. Few came from the USA or England, and almost none of the there well known activists. The socialist feminist Dora Montefiore from England was there. May Wright Sewall’s name appeared on the list of the supportive committee, but she was not personally present. Internationalism was expressed by women giving reports from their home countries. During

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<sup>13</sup> The congress met 13 - 15 May 1892, *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892, Krakovitch 1980: 28 & Klejman & Rochefort 1989: 95; "... l'égalité complète des deux sexes ..." *La Question Sociale* 15/3 1893: 77f; Eugénie Potonié-Pierre was a regular contributor, see e g *La Question Sociale* 15/5 & 15/6 & 15/11 1892 and later; Sowerwine 1978:66; Jami 1981:126.

<sup>14</sup> Rouzade 1887; *Le Matin* 14/5 & 16/5 1892; *La Question Sociale* Jan.-Fevr 1896: 321f; Compère-Morel 1924; Sowerwine 1975: 90 & 1978: 46 ff, 67; Krakovitch 1980: 28.

<sup>15</sup> Krakovitch 1980: 28; the socialists Vaillant and Argyriadès were present, the latter the author of a short version of Bebel's ideas about women and socialism. Present was also Constans Deville, the translator of Karl Marx and the journalist Ballay, Lacour i *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892, Sowerwine 1978: 67.

<sup>16</sup> *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892; Friberg is quoted without reference but probably it is from Fribergs correspondence or diaries Alfthan 1965: 46.

the first two days, only pre-registered delegates were allowed in. The last day was open to the interested public.<sup>17</sup>

Léonie Rouzade gave an appreciated speech on women and work, often interrupted by applauds. As an ardent socialist she had her own opinions: woman's political emancipation was a necessity to stop exploitation and poverty. She demanded equal pay for equal work and encouraged all mothers with families to demand the really radical right to have a paid work outside of the home. *Journal des Femmes* edited by Maria Martin, covered the congress closely. It reported that Aline Valette had spoken about women in industry and their harsh lives. In connection with this, Valette stressed the importance of a night work prohibition for all workers – without any exceptions.<sup>18</sup>

This was a critic by Aline Valette of the prohibition that France was about to introduce for women only. She formulated a socialist feminist defence for a night work prohibition for all; the beginning of it had already been formulated by Florence Balgarnie in Paris in 1889. In 1892 the connection was clear to the night work prohibition whereas Balgarnie as an example had taken the eight hours working day, when she asked for equality in the labour market.

Clemence Royer, a famous philosopher and translator to French of Charles Darwin, was presiding the last day, when the hall was open to the public. Yves Guyot was honorary president. Woman and the laws was the most important theme of the day. It provoked the young students. The president had difficulty to keep the speakers' heard and order in the hall, especially during a debate on fatherhood. French laws made it illegal to mention the name of a father to a child born out of wedlock. French fatherhood only existed in connection with marriage. The prohibition to mention the father's name had a motive: to protect the father of family /the pater familias/, his wife and children. The stability of a marriage should not be threatened by children, born out of wedlock, demanding maybe part of an heritage. For

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<sup>17</sup> Present were among others e.g. Lina Morgenstern, Louise Otto and Mlle Auerbach: Alexandra Gripenberg and Mme Ehrnrooth: Mme Hierta Retzius and Mlle Ellen Fries according to *Le Temps* 14/5 1892: Lina Morgenstern had sent a long letter to the congress. *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 9 Août 1892; UW comment: franska newspapers could mix names of persons present with those who were just on a list for supporters; "comité d'organisation" seems to be a list of names of supporters, where the foreigners were not supposed to do anything at all. Among them were May Wright Sewall and three Danes Frédrik Bajer, Mathilde Bajer and Johanne Meyer. Participants came from Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Roumania, Russia, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, Germany and Austria. *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 5 Avril och nr 10 Sept 1892; "...égalité en toutes choses de l'homme et de la femme, tel est, en résumé, son desideratum." *Le Matin* 14/5 1892; Observe that Sowerwine 1978: 6-71 does not even mention that this was an international congress. Klejman & Rochefort 1989:95ff are also almost neglecting this aspect of the congress; On the broad engagement by Dora Montefiores for both socialism and feminism, Hunt 1998.

<sup>18</sup> "Elle est partisan de la suppression du travail de nuit, sans exception." *Jn des Femmes* nr 8 Juillet 1892; UW comment: compare Diebolt - Zylberberg-Hocquard 1984: 39f, where they write that Valette was having the opposite view, that is positive to special legislation. That is not how I read her statement.

feminists the legislation was abominable, because it protected men's exmarital affairs and forced an abandoned woman to cope alone with a child. She should carry the shame and not even had the right to an economic compensation or the father's family name for her child. A majority at the congress wanted to put an end to this unequal legislation, there only to protect men. But it met with opposition. The young Georges Diamandy, the president of a socialist student association for international revolution, questioned this way of forcing a woman's question upon socialism. He got loud support by other angry young men. Diamandy dismissed the question on fatherhood and wanted to accentuate a much more important topic: how could women's emancipation be tied to the victory of the working class? The president refused to accept a vote on a resolution that Diamandy proposed. The hall was totally disorganised and emotions were running high.<sup>19</sup>

The incidence can be seen as one in a number of demonstrations against woman's emancipation in the period. During 1892 several disturbances discriminating women took place at the Sorbonne, the university of Paris. Male student protested with uproars, physical violence and screamings to protest that young women, with legal rights, wanted to listen to lectures or pass exams.<sup>20</sup> Young, often radical, men could not accept that women trepassed the traditional limits of common behaviour and asserted their right to a university education.

Despite the emotional tensions and the high protests on the question of fatherhood, the congress managed to take a resolution that every child ought to get the right to know the name of its biological father.<sup>21</sup>

But a schism had been manifested between the young socialists and the socialist feminists at the congress. It got attention in the press. The organisers had made an effort to compose a programme for cooperation. It was rejected by the socialist students. In today's terminology, the congress's intention was to put the social question in a gender perspective. The attempt was seen as absurd by the newly organized men. They were loudly irritated over women's pretension to know what socialism was about. According to them, focus should be on class struggle.

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<sup>19</sup> Lacour, *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892 on the emotional scene; "La femme devant la loi", *Le Figaro* 13/5 1892; *La Lanterne* 17/5 1892 (Yves Guyot was considered a traitor because his book *Histoire de Prolétaire* published in 1873. At first he was among the early socialists, then turned Republican liberal and minister of Travaux Public 1889-1893. E Museux "Le faux-frère Yves ... Guyot", *La Question Sociale* 15/6 1893); Yves Guyot was 1892-1903 chief editor of *Le Siècle*. Om Royer, Fraisse 1985.

<sup>20</sup> Lacour, *Le Figaro* 13/3 1892; *Le Matin* 16/5 1892; The Groupe des étudiants. Socialistes révolutionnaires internationalistes de Paris, had been founded in December 1891, see short notice in *La Question Sociale*, 15/11 1892, which praises the group, its propaganda and its "enthousiasme"; Wilkins 1975:9 gives examples from Sorbonne of actions against women, giving references to articles in *Figaro* (3/7 & 7/7 1892 samt 18/2, 27/2, 28/2 & 4/3 1893) ; Sowerwine 1978: 67.

<sup>21</sup> *Le Temps* 17/5 1892; *Le Matin* 16/5 1892; *La Lanterne* 17/5 1892.

And women were not in agreement on how to deal with the students' interference at the congress. Eugénie Potonie-Pierre apologized publicly in *La Question Sociale* that the president had interrupted Diamandy and not put his proposal up for a vote. In an emotional article she agreed with the young student and turned against the more liberal Clémence Royer who had been in the chair. There should have been a vote on his resolution: should women declare themselves in solidarity with the "demands" of the international proletariat.<sup>22</sup> Was there a real split among the organisers or was this written excuse a strategic move to conciliate socialist men to the feminist cause? In the long run such a pacifying attempt to reach an integration was not of any use. Her apology shows the unsecure position of feminists trying to have their own views on socialism accepted and the reprimands they were offered in return.

The great debacle on fatherhood demonstrates how difficult the question of equality was inside socialism. The feminists at the congress got support for this question from some liberals, as the minister Yves Guyot and the philosopher Clémence Royer. But such allies were also creating tensions.

Thus gender and class relations were problematic and posed a dilemma at the congress of 1892. The feminist organisers thought they had found a good ideological ground for equality in the socialist thinking on the equality of all. But their demands were not easily connected to the class struggle or the interests of the proletariat, as these were formulated by men. How could the question of expecting a child be defined as being about equality? Biology was not showing that equality. Equality for parenthood was the feminist answer; a child has a father as well as a mother. But according to French legislation, fatherhood was not biological but purely legal. Feminists were of the opinion that biological parenthood should be the same as the legal.

The daily *Le Matin* summarised the demands of the congress as a whole as "equality in everything concerning women and men". Equality and feminism had been treated in the tradition of a humanistic socialism with roots in a so-called utopian socialism. Reforms and organised cooperation, preferably regulated at cooperative work places, run by the workers, was appreciated.<sup>23</sup> The congress did not hesitate to demand suffrage for women; women ought to be both entitled to vote and eligible, was the opinion of Edmond Potonié-Pierre, the

<sup>22</sup> "revendications", Potonié-Pierre 1892: 233f.

<sup>23</sup> "...égalité en toutes choses de l'homme et de la femme, tel est, en résumé, son desideratum." *Le Matin* 14/5 1892; "Cahier de doléances féminines, Rédigé conformément à la décision prise au Congrès international féministe tenu, les 12, 13 et 14 mai 1892, ... etc" printed in Diebolt & Zylberberg-Hocquard 1984: 145ff, is a confirmation of the equality tendency of this congress.

husband of Eugénie. The same was expressed by Maria Martin, Mme Vincent and the philanthropist Isabelle Bogelot in different resolutions, all accepted by the congress.<sup>24</sup> In this question they all spoke more freely now, living in a more stable Third Republic than some years earlier.

Some other resolutions on legal equality were accepted. Among them was the question of a night work prohibition. Aline Valette had raised the demand that “night work should be prohibited, without exceptions”.<sup>25</sup> Of importance is the choice of pronouncing the words “without exceptions”. These words contained a critic of a legislation for women only. This formulation was taken *as a resolution* for the first time at this congress. It was to reappear in a bit different words to express the socialist feminist opposition against a night work prohibition for women later.

This clearly formulated dissociation from a night work prohibition for women must be understood in the context that the French National Assembly that very year proved to be very clear of the opposite view. The question had been discussed for many years. Socialist men had defended such a special legislation for women, in company with worker friendly conservative politicians, the Social Catholics, with count Albert de Mun in front. Such was the political alliance that together pushed for this protective legislation.<sup>26</sup>

### The socialist feminist congress 1896

The international feminist congress / *Le Congrès féministe international* was held in Paris in 1896. The word feminist was by now rooted in France. Eugénie Potonié-Pierre was again responsible for this congress together with Maria Martin.<sup>27</sup> The Finnish woman journal, with Maikki Friberg as editor, reported on the great success of the congress:

Newspapers, not only in France, but both in the new and the old world, printed long records of every scéance. The propaganda for ideas, formerly only whispered, were now

<sup>24</sup> *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 7 Juin, nr 8 Juillet 1892; *Le Temps* 15/5 1892; *La Lanterne* 15/5 1892; *Le Figaro* 17/5 1892.

<sup>25</sup> : "le travail de nuit soit supprimé sans exception". *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 7 Juin, nr 8 Juillet 1892, has a list of all resolution voted; *Le Matin* 14/5 1892; *La Lanterne* 17/5 1892.

<sup>26</sup> Read about the debate in *Bulletin de l'Union Universelle des Femmes* 1890-1891; Thibault & Riot-Sarcey 1995:41ff; Zancarini-Fournel 1995:75-92.

<sup>27</sup> The protocols of the congress were published, written by Eugénie Potonié-Pierre, in *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril until nr 55 Juillet 1896. The protocols are summaries; Program, Congrès féministe international de 1896, and Vœux adoptés par le Congrès féministe international: Congrès 1896 - Paris, Dos 37 BMD. Also the name was Congrès internationale des Sociétés féministes applied; *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 49 Jan 1896; Dissard 1896:537ff; *Shafts* Vol IV Nr 5 May 1896:50; Vincent 1898:2.

heard aloud. Its programme had been developed by elegant, eloquent and beautiful ladies and now got spread even in the most reactionary of circles.<sup>28</sup>

The press coverage was massive. The surveillance should be of importance for the French women's movement for quite a time to follow. The journalist and former actrice Marguerite Durand turned into a feminist by following the congress as a journalist for *Le Figaro*. She became important in many ways and active at later international woman congresses in Paris. In December 1897, she founded a daily newspaper, *La Fronde*. In it she gathered good female writers to influence opinions on the woman question of course, but also in other political question of the period, for example on the Dreyfus Affaire. Her definite views on the night work prohibition and other special legislations were often argued in her paper, but she did not write any longer herself. The feminism of Durand was an equality feminism but she did not, with her background in the theater and as the former mistress of a political Saloon, thought of ever renouncing of elegant and feminine dresses, all that was making her attractive as a woman according to the norms of the society.<sup>29</sup> She practiced equality at her newspaper; she hired women for all tasks, all the jobs, days and nights, at *La Fronde*. Only women wrote in the paper. Only women printed it and were responsible for the whole of its production. An other activity of Durand was to found trade unions for women.

Marie Bonneviel, teacher, trade unionist, feminist and socialist active in the Second Socialist International, evaluate the congress of 1896 as of decisive significance. It marked the turn of the tide for the political awakening of women in France. And in Bonneviel's opinion a feminist had to be a socialist.<sup>30</sup>

Many foreign delegates came; demands were formulated and spread internationally and nationally. But many questions were then mostly treated in their French context. As in 1892 the demands by women were irasibly attacked by young socialist men, who ever so often

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<sup>28</sup> ” Hela prässen, ej blott i Frankrike, men i både nya och gamla världen gaf vidlyftiga referat öfver hvarje scéance, och propaganden för hittills blott halfhviskade, nu högt ljudande nya idéer, det program som utvecklades af lika eleganta som värtaliga och vackra damer, fick en oväntad spridning i de mest reaktionära kretsar.” *Nutid* 1900:312.

<sup>29</sup> *La Fronde* 6/9 1900; Grinberg 1926:84f; Jami 1981:10; Rabaut 1996; Durand gave the foundation for an archive and a library on the women's movement in Paris. BMD

<sup>30</sup> *Congrès international de la condition & des droits des femmes, tenu les 5, 6, 7 et 8 Septembre 1900 a l'exposition universelle au Palais de l'Economie sociale et des Congrès*. Questions économique, morales et sociales. Éducation. Législation: droit privé, droit public. Paris: Impr. des Arts et Manufactures, 1901:503f, later = Paris Sept 1900; *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril - nr 55 Juillet 1896. E g *La Petite République* (= PR) 2/10 1900 om Bonneviel på Andra internationalen.

interrupted and shouted at speakers and refused to obey the orders of the president. This year, 1896, male Catholic students had joined in the disturbances.<sup>31</sup>

Feminism, marriage and family, women' work, prostitution, education and political rights were topics treated during the five days in April 1896. Delegates came from fourteen nations. Among them was Swedish Hilda Sachs, who was foreign correspondent of the in Sweden leading newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* 1895-1898. Formally the congress was divided between one open and one closed part. During the morning hours only delegates were allowed in. The general public could enter in the afternoons.<sup>32</sup> Maria Pognon, owner of a hotel, and living in Paris since 1888, was elected to chair the congress as president. The congress was announced as politically independent and was given a subvention of the Ville de Paris, the city of Paris, of 1000 francs.<sup>33</sup>

Many of the familiar French women, who had been present at the congress 1892, were delegates. Among them Isabel Bogelot, Maria Martin, Léonie Rouzade, Marie Bonneviel, Mme Vincent and Marya Chéliga-Loévy. Maria Deraismes was not alive any longer. Mme Coutant from a recently founded trade union was the only working class woman. A letter from The National Council of Women in USA deplored that noone from its board could be present.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Paris Sept 1900: 503; Sachs *DN* 17, 20 & 21/4. 1896; About students organising for socialism, Livet 1897; Wilkins 1975, built on articles in *le Temps* and *le Figaro*.

<sup>32</sup> The third day, a Friday, there was no meeting, instead visits etc. Program "Congrès féministe international de 1896", Congrès Boite 2, Fonds Bouglé, BHVP; The congress was held 8 – 12 april in La Grande Salle i l'Hôtel des Sociétés Savantes, 28 rue Serpente. Program " Congrès féministe international de 1896", Mapp: Congrès 1896 - Paris, Dos 37 BMD (l'Hôtel des Sociétés Savantes låg på 8 rue Danton enligt programblad till ett nationellt kvinnomöte 1908, Congrès 1909 - Paris Dos 40,BMD) about the address see Zylberberg-Hocquard 1981: 266; *La Lanterne* 9/4 1896; Participants came from Armenia, Belgium, Denmark, England, Finland, The Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Rumania, Ryssia, Schweiz, Sweden, Germany and USA, Dissard 1896; *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril 1896; Jami 1981: 10; *PR* 10/4 1896 the following foreign guests are mentioned: Claeys, Nelly von Kol and Popelin, Belgium, Drucker, Holland, Frost Ormsby, USA, Ida Molander, Finland, Esmeralda Horesco and Rosa Marie Amadori, Rumania, Dr Käthe Schirmacher, Germany "et d'autres, d'autres, encore"; Eugénie Potonie-Pierre mentioned Ernesta Urban and Emilia Mariani, Italy, Maikki Friberg, Finland, Blanche Edwards Pilliet, no land, Ellen Robinson, England, Nersessian, armenian in exile, Barbara Ootchinicoff, Ryssia, Elise Haighton, Holland. *La Question Sociale* Avril-Mai 1896:378ff; *La Lanterne* 10/4 1896 mentions also Matilde Bajer, Denmark and Hilda Sachs, Sverige; Sachs gave a speech against a too solemn tone she heard at the congress on motherhood. She got many remarks in the press, where she was appreciated for being young and beautiful. *Le Figaro* 13/4 1896; *PR* 10/4 1896; Sachs wrote (the reports were written Paris 10,13 and 14 april) about the congress in *DN* 17, 20 & 21/4 1896.

<sup>33</sup> Program, "Congrès féministe international de 1896", Mapp: Congrès 1896 - Paris, Dos 37 BMD; (compare *Der Internationale Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen in Berlin 19. bis 26. September 1896*. Eine Sammlung der auf dem Kongress gehaltenen Vorträge und Ansprachen. Herausgegeben von der Redaktionskommission: Rosalie Schoenflies, Lina Morgenstern, Minna Cauer, Jeannette Schwerin, Marie Raschke. Berlin: H Walther, 1897:39, later = Berlin 1896); *Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril 1896; Dos: Maria Pognon, BMD; Jami 1981:10; Corradin-Martin 1999:172.

<sup>34</sup> *PR* 10/4 1896; *La Question Sociale* Avril-Mai 1896; "Syndicat des blanchisseuses et laveuses et infirmières etc" was recently founded for women workers. The letter from the American National Council was signed by

The confrontation with the dogmatic socialism was repeated. Jean Melia spoke this time for a socialist collective of revolutionary students. He refused any cooperation and said that the congress was unimportant. It should have put the class struggle before any demands for women, which he denounced as bourgeois. The only congresses to attend were the international workers' congresses, if your goal was a society without differences between nationalities, races and sexes, was Melia's conclusion.<sup>35</sup>

The socialist students had been invited, because the socialist feminists wanted their backing in the fight for equality. These female socialists had also invited so called bourgeois women in their attempts to shape a feminist socialism. The organisers had not yet accepted the separatism, which demanded a strict dividing line against all that was to be called bourgeois. Above all, they did not themselves categorized feminism as bourgeois. On the contrary: the word feminism had been brought into fashion and launched by women in Paris who supported socialist ideas, not of a revolutionary but of a reformist kind. Were they to be excluded from how to use the concept? They acted not at all as socialist women were to act in Berlin later that year. In Berlin socialist women should be firm about a "clean cut" between socialists and others, without any cooperation.

Mme Vincent urged the participants to vote for a platform for all the discussions at the congress: "Equality for both sexes, in the laws and in society". Protective labour legislation for women became a question of principle and was blown up to be about woman's purposes and missions in society.

The newspapers carried very different reports from the congress. Of interest here is especially the papers representing a reformist socialism, because it might be the one nearest to the views of the socialist feminists. Only in them could they expect support for the effort to merge feminism and socialism. The paper *La Petite République*, with the editor-in-chief the prominent reformist socialist Alexandre Millerand, wrote several articles on the congress and followed several of its topics. But not anywhere was a discussion on special protection for women mentioned. Millerand was a proponent of such a special night work legislation and a person who later on will be of importance to internationalize a prohibition for women only.

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its president Mary Lowe Dickinson. The Council was represented by Mme Wilbour, a member who for the time being was in Paris, *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 49 Jan 1896 & nr 53 Mai 1896.

<sup>35</sup> *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 53 Mai 1896; Sachs *DN* 17/4.1896.

Maybe the newspaper remained silent on the topic not to show its readers that such a legislation was not loved by all socialist women.<sup>36</sup>

Already in her introductory speech Maria Pognon protested against "the obligatory protection that is forced unto women instead of letting them be independent and give them possibility to an intellectual development grounded in justice and individual freedom". She tied protective legislation to suffrage. It was not justifiable to legislate for women who were excluded from voting; and it was not good for society as a whole because men had no experience and not enough fantasy to imagine the troubles such laws were causing.<sup>37</sup> She did not refer to her biological femininity but to women's experiences as different. To account for these special experiences, she asked for an equal legislation.

An acid, sharp debate developed at the congress about the French legislation, which since four years forbid women to work at night. The thesis that woman's place is in the home was the starting point. It was expounded by the typographer Auguste Keufer, and by Dr Julien Pioger and moreover - with a special angel - by Mme Vincent, all three of them socialists. The thesis was put in question by the president Maria Pognon, by Maria Martin and by Italian Émilie Mariani.<sup>38</sup>

Auguste Keufer was a famous trade union activist and an adherent of the humanistic positivism of Auguste Comte. He was General secretary of La Fédération du Livre, organising typographers, lithographers and others working in printing trades. As a socialist he was reformist and he was also delegate in a state commission on workers' questions. His political credentials in the question were big. His view that women belonged in the home and should not work for payment was of old standing. Even if he had tried to modify his aversion to women's work somewhat during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a trade unionist he was keen on keeping women totally away from his own district, away from printing of any kind.<sup>39</sup>

The other man to defend a night work prohibition for women was Julien Pioger. He belonged to the group around the socialist journal *La Question Sociale*, was an academic and

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<sup>36</sup> "Egalité des deux sexes devant la loi et la société" *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril 1896; This central resolution was again underlined --- by E P-P - in a short article on the congress in *La Question Sociale* Avril-Mai 1896:378ff; see PR during the days of the congress in 1896.

<sup>37</sup> "...la protection obligatoire qu'on veut imposer aux femmes au lieu d'appuyer l'indépendance et le développement intellectuel de celles-ci sur la justice et sur la liberté de l'individu." *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 52 Avril 1896: 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Jn des Femmes* nr 53 Mai 1896;"La question du travail dans toute son extension et ses applications" Program ... Congrès, Boite 2, Fonds Bouglé, BHVP; Frederic Harrison "The emancipation of Women", 1891; Zancarini-Fourel 1995: 76.

<sup>39</sup> Compère-Morel 1924; Sowerwine 1978: 18f, 157f; Zancarini-Fourel 1995:83ff.

a journalist.<sup>40</sup> He provoked the audience of women when he said that women were not strong enough for all kind of works. He was not able to finish his speech because of the loud protests from the floor.

Mme Vincent spoke for a night work prohibition with a somewhat different stress. She had for many years been an activist for the cause of woman and worked together with Maria Deraismes.<sup>41</sup> In a speech that might be seen as contrary to her earlier demand of a legal equality between men and women, Mme Vincent wanted some industrial work forbidden for women, for example to work with phosphore in match factories or work as typographers. Such occupations were harmful to women's bodies. Mme Vincent wanted women's work to be diminished to six hours per day and that all night work should be forbidden. And she also wanted the state to pay women a subvention during two months before and two months after childbirth.

Maria Martin began to speak against the proposal of Mme Vincents. Laws of protection gave women worse jobs than men. A married and thus, for the time being, supported woman, could suddenly have to work if her husband fell ill or lost his job. And men needed protection as well. Thus, special legislation was unfavourable for both men and women, said Martin and joined in this the independent feminist position of equal protection for all.<sup>42</sup>

Many of the speakers wanted to differ between married and unmarried women . Monsieur Lavy, socialist and member of a parliamentary group for women's rights, turned to the disorderly and loudly interrupting socialist students and told them that women's work was a topic of common interest and connected to men's work. Women should be earning enough to live. He added, clearly addressing himself to trade union representatives such as Keufer, that aversion to women's paid work depended on egoism and fear for competition. But he added – neither originally nor radically – that he was of the opinion that married women should stay at home to care for the household and the children.<sup>43</sup>

Paule Minck, famous socialist, spoke for woman's right to work, earn money and be independent. She argued against the opinion that competition from women was causing unemployment and lower wages:

If women compete with men, we are not guilty of creating such conditions. A man can not, in the social situation in society of today, earn enough to be able to support his

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<sup>40</sup> *La Question Sociale* 15/6 1892: 234; Pioger was one of the founders of le Syndicat des journalistes socialistes, *La Question Sociale* 15/9 1893: 164f.

<sup>41</sup> Sowerwine 1978:46.

<sup>42</sup> Dissard 1896; *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 53 Mai 1896.

<sup>43</sup> *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 53 Mai 1896.

wife; and a woman should get emancipated through work and become independent of a man. Thus woman's work should neither be forbidden nor regulated.<sup>44</sup>

Paule Minck was conscious of an opinion among some socialists for a total ban on women's work – at least dreams of such a ban for married women. A trace of such a demand had been heard in the speech of Lavy. Thus she stressed that she was against both such a total prohibition for women to work, as well as different rules for men and women in the labour market.

As Lavy, Paule Minck mentioned a competition between man and women for work. This was a theme that often was referred to by those who suggested that women should stay at home or that women's work should be regulated in a special way. The underlying view was that women's lower wages also was a press downwards on men's wages. If the employers had fewer workers at his disposition, thus if women stayed at home, wages should be higher; the employers should have to compete for the workers, thus paying better wages. The employers should be forced to compete between themselves.

But Minck abstained to go deeper into the question of the competition over wages; she only put as a fact that a woman had to work or she was not going to survive. Even if married, the husband did not earn enough for two or more; a realistic observation. But woman should work for money not only out of necessity but also to become independent and thus emancipated. Her arguments were the same as Clara Zetkin's had been in 1889, when she gave her speech of equality at the congress of the Second International. Since then Zetkin had changed her mind but her radical opinion lived on, her pronouncement by Minck, who knew about Zetkin's speech.

Minck's view was an odd one in a period of strong opinions about married women's duties in the home. Even those who in principle defended women's right to work for wages, often liked and expected that married women stayed at home. The deputy Lavy was of such an opinion and also Maria Martin appreciated a house-wife but without demanding regulations to keep women at home. As a matter of fact, in no socialist circles was it opportune to ask for legislation to stop married women to work. But maybe some women suspected a coming regulation when a negative attitude to married women's work so often was expressed? They might compare to the introduction of the night work prohibition for

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<sup>44</sup> "Si les femmes font concurrence aux hommes, ce n'est pas nous, ..., qui avons créé la situation. L'homme, dans l'état social actuel, n'est pas assez payé pour pouvoir nourrir sa femme; c'est à la femme de s'emanciper par le travail et de se rendre indépendante de l'homme. On ne doit ni interdire, ni réglementer le travail de la femme." *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 53 Mai 1896.

women; such a regulation had been introduced in France. It was accepted even if it had been seen as limiting adults freedom; only women suddenly had been categorized as part of the family, not free individuals. Thus the socialist feminists could not really rely on socialist men and not on all socialist women either, when it was about equality in the labour market. There must have existed a fear that a night work prohibition might be extended to a general prohibition of married women to be employed. As historians we know that such legislation became a reality in many European countries later on, after the WWI.

The congress agreed on a resolution on the same protective labour legislation for men and women; no special laws. A resolution on suffrage was passed, as well as resolutions for the protection of children and their rights. The socialist demand for an eight hours working day for all, asked by the Second International since 1889, was also voted in.<sup>45</sup> This last mentioned resolution shows that to define the congress as socialist is correct.

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One direct result of the congress was an open letter of protest formulated by Maria Martin and Camille Bélilon, both journalists as well as feminists. They wrote to several deputies of the National Assembly. As the basis of the letter, they referred to the resolutions of the international congress. They demanded for women the same liberty to work as men had. Energetically they protested “against a legislation, the results of which has proven to be inhuman and inviting to immorality”, thus a protest against the night work prohibition for women.<sup>46</sup>

The letter was directed to those who had contributed to the discussion on women’s and children’s work in the National Assembly and voted for the introduction of the prohibition. Among them were so different strands of politicians as two leading socialists, the reformist Alexandre Millerand and the revolutionary Jules Guesde and also the conservative count Albert de Mun. The letter was published on the first page of *Le Journal des Femmes*. It was introduced by a laconic statement that the legislation had forced women into prostitution:

The law of 1892, forbidding women only not to work at night, had as consequence to put thousands of honourable women on the streets.

The journalists wrote that they had the addresses of factories, which had been obliged to discharge women who earlier had earned good wages. As an evidence that women’s interests

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<sup>45</sup> "Vœux adoptés par le Congrès féministe international 1896": Congrès 1896 - Paris Dos 37 BMD.

<sup>46</sup> "La loi de 1892 interdisant aux femmes seulement de travailler la nuit a eu pour conséquence de jeter sur le pavé des milliers de femmes honorables" "contre une loi qui a prouvé, par ses résultats, qu'elle est anti-humanitaire et favorise l'immoralité" *Le Jn des Femmes* nr 55 Juillet 1896.

had not been protected, they especially mentioned the production of newspapers: female typographers had been discharged and were now unemployed despite their knowledge of a qualified profession. But, at the same work places, women were still hired at night to do the unqualified work of folding the printed newspapers, heavy work that no man wanted to undertake because of its low pay. They worked seven hours. Description as this one, about the conditions at printing houses, should turn up again and again, when discussing the discriminating consequences of a night work prohibition for women only. Already in 1889 a presumption of such a development had been heard at a woman congress. The line of trade was near at hand for journalists; they were so to say in the printing trade but at the other end.

The printing business had expanded during the long economic depression which was now coming to an end. As many more learnt to read, the political situation was unstable, and demands for democracy were increasing, both newspapers and journals saw an increase in demand. It had opened up opportunities for women to enter as printers and learn the trade. Employers were keen to hire them but the trade union of typographers had not liked the development and acted with hostility when women came into their trade. This situation would continue long into the next century.<sup>47</sup>

The published letter of protest was of course not changing anything. The legislation to forbid women to work at night in industries was there to stay. But a protest had been formulated and made public.

The two congresses, 1892 and 1896, had been organised with the understanding and hope of a solidarity between the sexes because socialism preached equality of all. During the 1890's the split in opinions would increase and result in an inevitable cultural and political separation of men and women in France.<sup>48</sup>

Strong tensions between young revolutionary socialists and the socialist feminists had been come out into the open at the two congresses in Paris, 1892 and 1896. An other kind of tensions were to erupt in connection with an international woman congress in Berlin later in 1896. This time the tensions were between women.

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<sup>47</sup> *2e congrès international des œuvres et institutions féminines, tenu Au Palais des Congrès de l'Exposition Universelle de 1900* sous la présidence d'honneurs de M. Léon Bourgeois et sous la présidence de Mademoiselle Sarah Monod. Compte rendu des travaux par Madame Pégard, Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur, secrétaire générale du congrès, Paris: Impr.de Charles Blot, 1902, later = Paris June 1900. Maria Martin points to the importance of the printing trade in Paris June 1900 Vol I:81; Compare Sowerwine 1983; Marchand 1993:126ff, and other debates at international congresses.

<sup>48</sup> Klejman & Rochefort 1989:98.