

International perspective on women's work participation, around 1900 – organisation of resistance to the night work prohibition for women

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Ulla Wikander, Economic History Department, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm.

/excuse my English/

The labour market is still gendered. We are all aware of an gender division of labour, which seems to be reconstructed perpetually. The reasons for this are many.¹ My contribution here will be to show how some women inside both the socialist and more bourgeois women´s movement attempted to organise a resistance among women to the legalisation of a different treatment of women at work.

The so-called protective labour legislation for women, which forbid night work for women in industry, was made into an international convention in Berne in 1906. It was later on to be transferred into a convention at the International Labour Organization (ILO), established in connection with the peace negotiations after the First World War. Many states have during the 20th Century accepted and integrated this convention of night work prohibition, as a protection for women, into their national legislation and practice. Most European countries did so.² Some did so before the international convention, others as a consequence of it rather rapidly, others with some delay. Some countries did not ever accept the convention. Several have since then abandoned it. However, this convention concerning only women has been part of the construction

¹ Wikander 1998; See also my article "The concept of feminism at early international women´s congresses in Europe, 1890-1900" for the session K-14 First Wave Feminism Reconsidered, 15 April, 2000, at the Third European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam, 12-15 April 2000

² From the Court in Luxemburg: later Arrêt de la Cour du 25 Juillet 1991. Égalité de traitement entre hommes et femmes – Interdiction législative du travail de nuit des femmes; Wikander, Lewis and Kessler-Harris 1995;

of a gendered worker through all of the 20th Century in Europe and in the world. I will present to you some early objectors. This is a reorganised extract from a chapter in a book I am about to finish. I thus beg you pardon of some inconsistency and things that are more unclear than they (hopefully) will be in its context of a whole book.³

Male dominated organisations had been the most active in supporting special legislation for women in the labour market during the decades before 1900. Men also founded the International Association for Labour Legislation in 1900, which established an Office in Basel, Switzerland.⁴ The association was behind the formulation, the acceptance and the further spread of the so-called Berne convention of 1906.

Copenhagen in 1910, the congress of the Second socialist international and the socialist women's congress

At the congress of the Second socialist international in Stuttgart in 1907, a socialist women's congress was for the first time also held.⁵ No women from Sweden or Denmark took part. Their absence might explain why protective labour legislation for women met with no objections. The things turned out differently at the next congress in Copenhagen in 1910. A tradition of a separate congress for women had been established and was held one day before the general congress. Danish and Swedish women would at the Copenhagen congress question other women's positive view on protective labour legislation for women, make a great stir about this resistance but become silenced. The protest has almost been removed from history. The first one to diminish the action against special labour legislation for women, was Clara Zetkin in *die Gleichheit*. There it was

³ 2006 the book was published in Swedish. It is not available in English except in my own translation that will be put out in due time at <http://ullawikander.se> where the whole Swedish book might be read.

⁴ The organisation had three official names, also L'association internationale pour la protection légale des travailleurs / die Internationale Vereinigung für gesetzlichen Arbeiterschutz: letter-head in 1905, File: Denkschrift, Frauen, Nachtarbeit, Pre-IL0 10 400, ILO Archives; Congrès ... des Travailleurs, Paris 1900 II; Périgord 1926: 65; Shotwell Vol 1 1934: 476.

⁵ *Reports to the first International Conference of Socialist Women ... 1907.*

qualified as immature. Louise Dornemann, in her book on Zetkin, avoids the controversy. But the Danish historian Anna-Birte Ravn has written about the antagonism among socialist women in Copenhagen.⁶

The socialist women's congress in 1910

On the agenda of the special congress for women were: a network for socialist women, suffrage for women and social care for mothers and children. The debate on suffrage took a big part of the limited time because of differing opinions. The English Fabian socialists could accept a limited suffrage as long as women could vote on the same conditions as men. All others wanted suffrage without limitations of income etc.⁷

The last point of discussion on the agenda was the one on social care for mothers and children. Its concern was foremost conditions around birth, including demands for paid leave during eight weeks. Then a group of Danish women staged a coup and brought forward a new resolution. It was formulated *against* protective legislation for women only and came as a surprise for most of the participants. The coup seems to have been well prepared in advance. That it was not on the official agenda, indicates that the activists had found it impossible to act via the organisers. It indicates a steering of the content of the congress.⁸

A number of printed leaflets were hastily distributed to the public. These were in three languages: Danish, German and English. The leaflet was written in the spirit of a socialistic feminist tradition, that had developed since international congresses during the 1890s, mostly held in Paris. In that spirit, the content of the resolution was positive towards general protective labour legislation for all workers but objected to a legislation that forbid women to work at night. Such a prohibition was said

⁶ Much of the following is from Ravn 1995; to the congress came 97 delegates from 17 countries. The German delegation consisted of 14 women, the Swedish probably 12 and the Danish – not remarkable – 40 women. Two handwritten lists with names of delegates remain, one with a letter-head from *die Gleichheit*, one with the letter-head of "International socialistisk Kvindekongress, København 26.-27. August 1910" – the lists differ somewhat. 33.536/Kasse 770 ABA; *Die Gleichheit* 20 Jhg 1910: 387f; according to Ravn the Danish women delegates were 37, Ravn 1995: 220; Dornemann 1974: 232.

⁷ *Die Gleichheit* 20.Jhg 1910: 273, 387f.

⁸ The organisers were Clara Zetkin together with the Danish Social Democrats Nina Bang and Elisabeth Mac, Eklund Hansen 2002.

to make it more difficult for women to earn their bread. The resolution was signed by fourteen women. Among them were Henriette Crone, Hildora Mouritzen, Gudrun Bodö and Marie Christensen, all with central positions in Danish Trade Union organisations and the Social Democratic Party.⁹ This Danish group of women asked the delegates of the congress to support their resolution, which had the following wording, here in its English version (which has some linguistic faults, I think):

" This conference resolves that as under Capitalism and its exploitation the woman is not only a wife and mother, but is also forced in ever greater numbers into the labour market. The a wage-earner,/As a wage-earner, my correction/ we lay down the following inexorable lines of development.

It is first recognised that the only way to obtain equality between the sexes is to establish Socialism in our midst.

As a means to this end this Conference demands that the woman should first be protected as a mother, and all the attempts to carry out this protection should be fully recognised. The protection of women and children, as opposed to the exploitation of capitalism, as opposed to misery and want, these are the measures which Social Democracy always places and keeps to the front.

The Conference opposes legislative which places either men or women in an unfavourable position in their struggle as bread winners, and makes the economic struggle harder.

We are against the forbidding of night work for adult women only; when not accompanied by legislation forbidding night work for all.

The Conference demands therefore that international Social Democracy should agitate for the passing of laws forbidding night work for both men and women." 10

The main argument of the resolution was that a special protection would worsen women's possibilities to earn their livelihood. On the other side, a maternity insurance for pregnancy would be a benefit; such legislation was the only special law the Danish women supported. Such a law would help certain women at a crucial period of their lives. To argue their case, the Danish women had chosen a recognisable and often used

⁹ The following had signed : Henriette Crone (1874-1933), Hildora Mouritzen, Alfrida Petersen, Gudrun Bodö, Johanne Jensen, Fru Bötcher (13.Kreds), Louise Wuertz, Alvilda Jensen (Hörsholm), M Camilla Nielsen, Louise Anderberg-Jensen, Marie Christensen, N Hansen (Esbjerg), Gram Petersen, Ella Rasmussen. Leaflet " Dagsordenens Punkt 4", 33.536/Kasse 779, ABA.

¹⁰ Pamflett "Dagsordenens Punkt 4", 33.536/ Kasse 770, ABA.

socialist/Social Democratic rhetoric, but turned it around to their own advantage. That rhetoric pointed out in which way women were related to men: women were "wives" and "mothers". These words had often been used in the defence of the night work prohibition. Clara Zetkin had used them in her overview speech in Stuttgart; for her a woman was a "mother" and a "wife" at the same level as she was a "Arbeiterin /female worker". But Zetkin had not problematized these different roles of women, in the way the Danish opponents did.

The signers did not hesitate to use the word "protection" as they asked the Social Democracy for the "protection of women and children" against "exploitation of capitalism". These were the words chosen when they referred to protection related to pregnancy. But they did not include in this "protection" any general legislation concerning all women at all times, as potential mothers. The oppositional women differed clearly between legislation for real mothers, which gave temporary benefits during a limited time and other so called protective legislation aiming at all women and applied always. The differences are clearly spelled out in the resolution.

Between the lines in the leaflet, you can see the opinion that women were competing with men for work opportunities, just as the socialist analysis said when it accused women for being so called "Schmutzkonkurrenten"/ dirty competitors. But the Danish women's demand was to *compete* with men on equal terms, *except when it came to giving birth*. Thus they entered into the debate on women as competitors to men. They said they were not afraid of such a competition and willing to take part as long as it was on equal conditions. Behind this (among other points) was the radical demand of "equal wage for equal work". Implicitly women promised not to compete with lower wages if men allowed them to compete on equal conditions. At the same time, it is possible to suspect a challenge in this proposal of a competition; men had often argued against women's wage work, that women competed with

lower wages, that is on not equal terms. Here women said: we accept competition and we do not need any special protection.

The dispute about a night work prohibition was heated in Denmark at the time. The state had demanded and gotten a postponement of the ratification of the Berne Convention on the night work prohibition of women. Since 1909 a revision was under way of the Danish Factory Acts and the outcome was not yet decided upon. The congress of the Second international was held in the midst of an infected national debate. This must have been an important reason for the Danish women to demonstrate their resistance also in an international context. The night work prohibition was also on the agenda, because in Sweden the Berne convention had been accepted for the first time in 1909 (it would have to go through a second acceptance in Parliament before becoming a law). Organised Swedish women, both bourgeois and socialists, had put up a struggle to stop that legislation and seemed to have failed.

Already in 1900, when an earlier revision of the Factory Acts was considered in Denmark, huge protest meetings had been gathered to protest all special legislation for women. Organizers had been bourgeois women's organisations together with female trade unions as *Danska typografforbunds Kvindelige Afdeling* (eng. The section of women at the Danish Union of Typographers) and *Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund i Danmark* (eng. The Female Trade Union in Denmark), which together had been able to stop any special legislation. When the new revision came up in 1909, they again went out in common protest actions. The matter was considered more dangerous since the Berne Convention of 1906 and the development in neighbouring Sweden. A public protest meeting in 1909 had gathered 1200 persons, mostly women. The male dominated Social Democratic Party was *for* protecting women by forbidding night work. Also the woman in Denmark, who in the labour movement had a position equivalent to the one Zetkin had in Germany, was *for* a legislation. Her name was Nina Bang. Just as Clara Zetkin, she had led a campaign via articles for special laws for women, with wordings and arguments similar

to the one Zetkin had used in *die Gleichheit*. Against a night work prohibition *for women only* were several of the unionised women in Denmark. In the formal coalition to oppose such legislation were at the time of the congress in 1910 Henriette Crone (president in Danska typografforbunds Kvindelige Afdeling) one of the leaders. On the bourgeois side, a Factory Inspector, Julie Arenholt, was in a leading position.¹¹

In a European perspective, it was rather unique that a Factory Inspector acted against night work prohibition, but if we limit the scope to the Nordic countries, it was not the case. The Finnish Vera Hjelt and the Norwegian Betzy Kjelsberg, both Factory Inspectors, belonged to the eager opponents of such legislation. The Swedish Factory Inspector Kerstin Hesselgren was not totally happy about it either, but had to conform after the prohibition was definitely accepted in Sweden in 1911.¹² A cooperation over the class barrier was seldom heard of in Europe as a whole but common actions by oppositional women, bourgeois and socialist, were taken in Denmark and Sweden directed against the night work prohibition.¹³

Behind the resolution in 1911 at the Second International were all of the women in the Danish delegation, except three. And all of the Swedish delegates supported it. They were the two largest delegations at the Women's socialist congress. Still they lost because all the delegates from other countries moved against the radical resolution. Henriette Crone defended the leaflet and its content with gusto and temperament and she had a loud support during the meeting from Swedes and Danes. The Danish Nina Bang had then told the opponents off on behalf of the Danish

¹¹ Letter from Louise Neergaard to M Rutgers-Hoitsema 24/3. and 9/4 1911, File 13 Coll R-H, IIAV; Ravn 1995: 215ff.

¹² Karlsson 1995; Åkerblom 1998: Kapitel 4.

¹³ Karlsson 1995; Ravn 1995.

Social Democratic Party and Gertrud Hanna did the same as a spokeswoman for unionised German women.¹⁴

The resolution was depicted in the international organ for Social Democratic Women, *die Gleichheit*, only as disturbing, not as a principle question of equality. The Danish women had dared to formulate the already before articulated socialist feminist standpoint on protective labour legislation for all, not for women only. The way they had done it, shows that they were well aware of the compact resistance they were up against. But still they wanted to mark their opinion, both for the international public and – maybe mostly - for the national. Now they are also remembered historically.

In *Gleichheit*, Clara Zetkin herself wrote the report from the womens congress. Her interpretation thus decided the understanding of the event both for her on time and to a large extent for the ages to come. She wrote that it was a "hurting surprise" to find a resistance against night work prohibition at a conference for socialist women. According to her, Danish as well as Swedish delegates had defended their position "ardently". Zetkin denounced them as "frauenrechtlich", that is she used the adjective, which in Social Democratic circles was common to defame bourgeois women's thinking as narrow and self-serving. Clara Zetkin disliked the way the Danish women had argued for, as she put it, a mechanical "equality between the sexes" in the same way as bourgeois women did. She maintained that female typographers only claimed an individualistic interest when they demanded the right to work at night.¹⁵

The women's congress agreed to a resolution for peace, one for suffrage for women and a long resolution about social reforms concerning women and children.¹⁶

¹⁴"Gleichheit der Geschlechter" and "leidenschaftlich" and "eine schmerzliche Überraschung" (388) *Die Gleichheit* 20 Jhg 1910: 387ff; Leaflet "Dagsordenens Punkt 4", 33.536/Kasse 779, ABA; Zepler 1910: 1455f; Hagemann 1995:267.

¹⁵"Gleichheit der Geschlechter" och "leidenschaftlich" och "eine schmerzliche Überraschung" (388) *Die Gleichheit* 20 Jhg 1910: 387ff; Pamflett "Dagsordenens Punkt 4", 33.536/Kasse 779, ABA; Zepler 1910: 1455f; Hagemann 1995: 267.

¹⁶*Die Gleichheit* 21 Jhg 1910 9f; Eklund Hansen 2002.

The male dominated general congress

At the general congress of the Second Socialist International, protective labour legislation as well as the fight against unemployment were on the agenda. The resolution taken in Paris in 1889 was referred to; it was about protective legislation "for both sexes" and contained a demand of night work prohibition for all workers whenever it was possible to implement. Added to this were demands that had been raised in Amsterdam in 1904, on protection of pregnant women and women giving birth. The original resolution was unclear about the special night work prohibition for women. In 1889 it was a demand under the general one. It was still unclear although confirmed as a question in its own right at the Second international in Zürich in 1893.¹⁷

One odd person demanded a new formulation in 1910; it wanted to promote a clear wish for equality between women and men. Carl Lindhagen, mayor of the capital of Sweden, Stockholm tried to formulate at least a wish for equal legislation for both sexes. He had not long ago in the Swedish parliament objected to protective labour legislation for women only. He had earlier been a liberal but recently joined the Social Democratic Party. In Copenhagen Carl Lindhagen tried during the work of the commission that prepared the resolution on labour protection, to alter the wording and thus also the socialist position. From the resolution on unemployment, he managed to weed out a formulation that could have been interpreted as negative towards women's work generally in industry.¹⁸ But he met with hard resistance when he wanted to introduce a new version on the night work prohibition, clearly directed against the Bern Convention and formulated in the socialist feminist tradition. The formulation of Lindhagen aimed at expanding the Berne Convention to

¹⁷ *Protokoll des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kongresses...1893, 1894: 36ff.*

¹⁸ Carl Lindhagen was the mayor of Stockholm 1903-1930; ("...pour les travailleurs des deux sexes..." 2594) *Le mouvement socialiste*, Oct-Nov-Dec 1910 in *Histoire* Tome 21 1982: 2594f; ("...without distinction of sex...") May Wood-Simon "Report of Socialist Party Delegation and Proceedings of the International Socialist Congress at Copenhagen 1910" in *Histoire* Tome 19 1981:892; The French protocol (according to George Haupt in his introduction to *Histoire* Tome 19 1981:14 this protocol was the best) *Histoire* Tome 19 1981: 456, 466.

everybody and was in agreement with the wish of the Swedish Social Democratic women. Diplomatically he did not ask for the annulment of the Berne Convention but for its expansion:

The congress demands that a legislation about a night work prohibition for all kind of work -- if conditions are not against it -- immediately should be attended to. And, as a consequence of this, that in all countries where such prohibitive legislation have been implemented for women according to the Bern Convention, it should be expanded and become equal for both men and women, including the reservation above.¹⁹

Lindhagen expressed as his view, that the formulation of the resolution, that referred to decisions taken at congresses in 1889 and 1904, did not contain any new ideas. His brave attempt of a reformation was just ignored, without any discussion. A kind of response was given by the Swiss delegate N Reichesberg, who maintained that the congress should be even stronger in its defence and more clear about its support of the night work prohibition for women and children.²⁰ The final resolution remained vague.

At the male dominated congress, Carl Lindhagen had raised his voice for a change and for taking a further step towards the socialist opinions of the 1880s and early 90s that the night work prohibition eventually ought to embrace all workers, also men. That opinion had found less and less serious expressions during the late 1890s and during first decade of the new century. Probably Lindhagen acted on behalf of the Swedish Social Democratic women. Against the men in the party, these women had several times before stood up for their opposition. One such occasion had been at the first national conference for Social Democratic Women, held in

¹⁹ "Le congrès déclare qu'une législation sur le travail de nuit dans toutes les professions doit être élaborée immédiatement, à moins que les circonstances ne le rendent inévitable et que, par conséquent, dans les pays où pareille législation n'a pas été créée en même temps pour les hommes et les femmes, une pareille législation pour les hommes devra, sous les réserves indiquées ci-dessus, suivre l'exécution de cette interdiction du travail des femmes, conformément à la convention de Berne." (in the original protocol p 229f) *Histoire* Tome 19 1981: 471f.

²⁰ *Histoire* Tome 19 1981: 471ff.

1907. Lindhagen also had strong connections to the bourgeois women's movement in Sweden, also antagonistic to the unequal prohibition.²¹

During the congress in Copenhagen women delegates decided to start celebrating a Women's Day. The first should take place on the 19th of March 1911.²² That same year an international suffrage congress was to take place in Sweden. There – once again - special labour legislation for women should be discussed, although not being on the agenda.

The International Congress for Suffrage in Stockholm 1911

Both feminists and other female activists working for women's emancipation, hoped and believed in the early decade of the new century that suffrage would be the royal road to solve the problem of women's subordination. But already at some earlier international congresses, feminists had questioned that political citizenship should lead to economic independence and get rid of the resistance to equality in the labour market. The rather new organisation (founded in 1904) International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) choose to be a one-question movement and became strong as such. The Alliance wanted to get a broad movement without much discussions of the content of the political citizenship and none of women's other positions in society.

But some women ranked the question of an equal economic citizenship high, higher than suffrage. They considered the vote only as a small part of a much larger need for emancipation of women. Some of these radicals wanted to start a new international organisation, to focus on a promotion of equality in the labour market, thus on the economic citizenship. They tried to start it in Stockholm in 1911.

The International Woman Suffrage Alliance arranged a congress which gathered 1 200 delegates in Stockholm in June, 1911.²³ The organisation, formed in opposition to the vague policy on suffrage inside the International Council of Women, was started by radical women and

²¹ Karlsson 1995: 248.

²² Dornemann 1974: 232f.

²³ June 12-17 1911; Chapman Catt (foreword by Ezaline Boheman) 1911: 7.

their demands for equality with men. Suffrage was very much on the agenda at the time since more and more male organisations organised to reform suffrage legislation. Only in France and in Switzerland, *all men* had full political citizenship, since 1848.

The facts might also be formulated in another way: in Europe men – and *only men* but not *all men* – had full political citizenship. Because ideologies of equality gained more and more influence during the 19th century - in combination with an economic development, which gave more resources to distribute in society - new groups of people demanded to be part of political decision making. During the same century income and/or property constituted in most countries the bases for citizenship. During the 19th century the biological sex had been defined as a constant factor for exclusion from political citizenship. Added to this were laws and regulations discriminating women even further economically. Despite this, some unmarried women could, if wealthy, get a local political influence but no women were allowed into decision making of state affairs. Some unique women succeeded via luck or intelligence and smartness – despite discriminating attitudes, praxis and legislation – to obtain a fairly large economic independence. But they were few.

The women's movements focus on the question of suffrage must be comprehended in the perspective of the general struggle for it. It was by many seen as the biggest political subject, around which debate, organisation and activities turned. Excluded men demanded - less and less patiently - to be heard politically. Women did not like to be set aside. Some joined the fight for suffrage for all. Others demanded for their sex suffrage on the same conditions as men.

Thus for many women, suffrage became an important goal in its own right. It was by others one of many areas on which women demanded equality. The activists needed to summon many new members to show the strength of the movement for suffrage. An argument against women's suffrage was that women themselves had not shown clearly that they wanted it. At the end of the 19th Century – during the process of

democratisation spreading through all of the industrial world – more and more women raised their voices to be included. After 1900, the insistence increased and the impatience. National suffrage organisations for women were founded and eventually joined the IWSA. Thus, questions about the gender division of labour, women's waged work and other questions of a more economic kind were put aside. They could have split the suffrage movement, which gathered women from many kind of classes and opinions. Economy, work conditions, family structure and the likes became non-questions inside the rapidly growing suffrage movement. Suffrage first, then the other questions could be dealt with, was the policy.

The influential Swedish author Ellen Key was fairly typical of the majority of women in the suffrage movement. She had published the book *Barnets århundrade* (eng *The Century of the Child*) in 1901. The book was soon translated to all the major European languages. Motherhood and woman's difference were her main arguments for giving women the vote. Woman's special nature and experience should be good for society. She – as many others – compared the nation to a family, where the duties were to be shared between men and women in rather traditional ways.²⁴

"The Woman should get the rights of a citizen because society needs mothers as well as fathers."²⁵

Most women at the suffrage congress in Stockholm in 1911 should probably have agreed to Key's analysis. The radicals were of course also present there, but focused also on suffrage. During this congress and in this ideological context, a Dutch initiative was taken to form an international network, to revise the laws of the labour market especially trying to get rid of the night work prohibition of 1906.

The president of IWSA, American Carrie Chapman Catt was informed of the plan in advance by Dutch Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema. In a reply to her, Catt agreed that woman's need and right to work "at fair pay and

²⁴ This book of Key contains a large (in pages) defence of special legislation in the labour market for women and puts an emphasis on the night work prohibition. Key 1901, 1912; Manns 1994; Melander 1994.

²⁵ "Kvinnan bör få rösträtt och tillträde till alla de medborgerliga livets områden, emedan samhället behöver mödrar lika väl som fäder". Key 1896:55; Karlsson 1995.

under fair conditions" was more important than her need to vote. But Catt at the same time cautioned Rutgers-Hoitsema and said that the opinions on this were many and differing inside the suffrage movement.²⁶ Catt was probably well aware that many women would agree with the formulation of Key as to why women needed the vote. The president of the international suffrage movement acknowledged that the gender division of labour and waged work was a more complicated question than the suffrage and that those who worked for women's political citizenship would not easily join a policy to promote equality in the labour market, thus an economic citizenship.

In her opening speech to the congress, Carrie Chapman Catt made clear that she herself was positive to an economic equality without stressing the standpoint further. She hinted at the negative impact of the special labour legislations for women, when she described the changing conditions for women in the industrial society:

"Modern economic conditions are pushing hundred of thousands of women out of their homes into the labour market. Crowded into unskilled employments for want of proper training, they are buffeted about like a cork upon a sea. Everywhere paid less than men for equal work, everywhere discriminated against, they are utterly at the mercy of forces over which they have no control. Law-making bodies, understanding neither women nor the meaning of this woman's invasion of modern industry, are attempting to regulate the wages, the hours, the conditions under which they shall work. Already serious wrong has been done many women because of this ill-advised legislation."²⁷

Chapman Catt spoke for a liberal labour market concept, without any labour protection, and did not refer to the socialist feminist standpoint, which was equal protection of all workers. She added that the increase of prostitution and the traffic in women, the so-called "White Slave Traffic"

²⁶ "That woman's need and her right to labor at fair pay and under fair conditions is a greater question than the suffrage, we will all agree. That much might be done now before we have the suffrage, is also true - but I'm sure you will find a wide difference of opinions upon the methods to be pursued" IWSA, Report...1911; Letter from Rutgers-Hoitsema to "Dear Mrs Catt" 26/4 1911, and letter from Carrie Chapman Catt to "My dear Mrs Rutgers Hoitsema", Stockholm 12/5 1911. File 12 Coll R-H IIAV.

²⁷ She spoke under the headline "Is woman suffrage progressing?" (quotation 69f) IWSA Report ...1911: 58-71.

was depending on unequal conditions in the labour market. Without the right measures taken, venereal diseases were going to spread and lead to "deteriorating the race". Chapman Catt did not see the suffrage as the solution of women's emancipation but wished for an almost total change of society.²⁸

In her speech the president showed a belief that women were more keen than men on "the ultimate welfare of society" but she also raised the demand that women should have the very same conditions as men politically and economically. That is to say, she thought as the continental feminists also had, that women were different to men but still claimed the same rights for women as men. There had been a growing stress on the biological aspects of differences since some time. We can discern Social Darwinistic wordings in the speech of Chapman Catt. Among other things she said that "we are defending the highest good of the mothers of our race" about the suffragists. A strong accent on motherhood could maybe lessen the demands of equality in the labour market? Carrie Chapman Catt was a smart diplomatic speaker. She did not hesitate to talk about women's difference and motherhood, thus at the same time being attractive to women, who were positive to special labour legislation for women. But during all of her speech Chapman Catt did not say anything that could be interpreted as if she deduced an unequal treatment from her stress on difference, on the contrary.²⁹ As president of an organisation, which had a radical image, she had very good reasons to keep differences of opinions low; and she had despite this been very clear in her formulations on the conditions in the labour market.

The official printed congress report does not represent all the speeches held during the meetings. It reproduces rich reports, in which every country told what had happened since the former suffrage congress in London in 1909. Only one of these, the Norwegian, had any comment

²⁸ (quotations 70), IWSA Report...1911:69f.

²⁹ IWSA Report...1911: 69ff, (quotations 70f); At this time Chapman Catt was definitely an equality feminist even if Cott 19 finds her less clear in this respect.

on night work or protective labour legislation of any kind.³⁰ The Norwegian delegate, Mrs F.M. Qvam, president of the national suffrage organisation in Norway, Landstemmeretsforeningen, expressed her satisfaction that the women's movement in her country had been able to stop the introduction of a night work prohibition for women:

L.K.S.F. (den norska kvinnorösträttsföreningen) har alltid använt sitt inflytande till förmån för kvinnor när lagar som berört kvinnor har kommit upp till behandling i riksdagen. Så till exempel lyckades vi, när arbetarskyddslagarna var uppe till behandling, se till att få igenom beslut om en kvinnlig yrkesinspektör och att lagen inte förbjuder kvinnors nattarbete.³¹

Norway and Finland were the two Nordic countries that already had turned down the Berne Convention. Denmark was to follow.³² Finland was the first country in Europe to allow women to vote, in 1906. The government and the legislative body, lantdagen, had heard the women's opinion. Anna Lundström from the Swedish-speaking Finnish Kvinnosaksförbundet Unionen said that the women who since 1906 were in lantdagen all had been against special labour legislation. The government had carried out an inquiry among female industrial workers about a prohibition and then renounced from the introduction of a night work prohibition as the questionnaire had shown that the idea was not appreciated among those.³³

The Finnish Factory inspector and member of the lantdag Vera Hjelt spoke in Stockholm at a meeting (in Nordic languages) at the People's House (sv Folkets Hus).³⁴ The house was the arena of the worker's movement and open to the local population. The theme of her speech was social and political cooperation between men and women in Finland. She raised the case of the withdrawal from the Berne Convention as an example of the importance of women in lantdagen. She said that the

³⁰ "Reports of countries affiliated", IWSA Report...1911: 72-137.

³¹ IWSA Report...1911:120.

³² Hagemann 1995; Ravn 1995; Wikander 1994:51.

³³ The initiative for the questionnaire had been taken by the Union, which was satisfied with the result. IWSA Report ... 1911:92ff.

³⁴ The meeting was chaired by Miss Anna Lindhagen. IWSA Report ... 1911:9-10. She was the sister of Carl Lindhagen.

questionnaire had shown that working women did not want limitations of their right to work. She said that the women wanted to be free to choose where to work and had been reluctant about the benefits. They had thought that such a labour legislation should exclude them from better paid work and leave them with home industrial work and dependent on temporary work.³⁵

The Finnish women's movement was very well informed about the foreign debate. Vera Hjelt referred to the international congresses that already in the 1890s had seen such a prohibition as negative, because it diminished women's freedom of choice and forced them into less good jobs. The Finnish lantdag had instead taken the decision to limit night work as much as possible for both men and women, a decision that pleased Vera Hjelt. It had been demanded by socialist feminists in Europe for more than two decades. By presenting the Finnish questionnaire Vera Hjelt could help the already strong Swedish opposition among socialist women and show how suffrage could be used for the labour market questions.³⁶

Maybe could suffrage later on help to stop the Berne Convention as it had in Finland? But some of the women who were frightened by the Convention and its consequences did not want to wait but wanted to do something immediately.

A new international organisation for equality in the labour market

Many of the delegates at the congress in Stockholm had been active at earlier women's congresses and had firm views about questions on politics and economy in general. Maybe it is no wonder that the Berne Convention was taken up as an informal topic in Stockholm in 1911, as it had been in Copenhagen the year before? The organised opposition had been evident and publicly announced in the Nordic countries. More than in other countries, the legislation was a burning question at this very time as

³⁵ More than 64 % of the women in the investigation were widows, divorced or abandoned and needed to earn money. 13 % had been positive to a special legislation. Hjelt 1911:8f (quotation 8).

³⁶ Hjelt 1911:8f; Bruxelles 1912:58; Karlsson 1995.

the Berne Convention had been accepted by the two Swedish riksdagar (parliamentary meetings) of 1909 and 1911. As historian Lynn Karlsson has showed, the resistance from organised Swedish women had been widespread and loud.³⁷

Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema used her time in Stockholm to gather information about the resistance to the prohibition. She was making preparations for an international resistance movement against the night work prohibition and other special labour legislations for women that might be coming. Women were to be alerted to such possibilities. Rutgers-Hoitsema took part in the congress as one of eleven substitutes of the Dutch delegation.³⁸ She was active in work for suffrage in the Netherlands and since long working against the night work prohibition.

Before the Stockholm congress Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema had not only written to Carrie Chapman Catt about her plan but also to Marie Bonneval, France, Dagny Bang, Norway, Maikki Friberg, Finland, and Louise Neergaard Denmark, among others. Her round-letter to these potential participants, she finished with a sentence that sounds like a credo: "The right to work is as indispensable to a woman as the right to vote."³⁹

Rutgers-Hoitsema first move was to gather a group of interested women in a meeting room at Grand Hôtel, the centre of the congress. She offered an outlay of a new international organisation, with the main aim to get rid of night work prohibition for women. The goal was to introduce equal, gender neutral conditions at work. She suggested to the women present the foundation of an organisation called the International Woman's Labour Association and put forward a preliminary constitution. The basis of the new association should be that "men and women being born equally free and independent members of the human race, ought to be equally protected by the labour legislation". Her vision included the

³⁷ Karlsson 1995.

³⁸ IWSA, Report...1911:18.

³⁹ "Congrès 1911 – Stockholm" DOS 41, BMD; "Le droit de travail est non moins indispensable à la femme que le droit de vote". Letter (the same letter sent to many) 11/3 1911 from MHW Rutgers-Hoitsema. File 12, Coll R-H IIAV.

foundation of national committees. One important part of the activities would be that the members joined the national sections of the International Association for Labour Legislation. Thus the work to undermine and get rid of the Berne Convention should be done from the inside. In fact the resistance to the international night work protection of women would be the first focus of the organisation. A summon to this meeting had been done by leaflets at the congress and without any selection of the interested. Thus the women who congregated were of different opinions. The suggestion from Rutgers-Hoitsema met with strong criticism from foremost the German Else Lüders and the American Maud Nathan.⁴⁰ The meeting was dissolved without any result.

Two days later, only women who were inclined to work for an equal regulation of the labour market, met. Again. These few women established an organisation with the almost anonymous name of "Correspondence Internationale/ International Correspondence". Its secretary as well as the responsible in all other respect became Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema, who had taken the initiative. The aim was to develop an international net-work between "feminists", who were positive to labour legislation but against legislation of such kind for women only.⁴¹ The assembled founded an international organisation around the socialist feminist idea: an economic citizenship meant equality in the labour market and labour protection for all workers.

In a letter to Dagny Bang, who had been involved in the preparations, Rutgers-Hoitsema wrote that Swedish Anna Lindhagen and Frida Stéenhoff had been the only participants apart from the Dutch

⁴⁰ "Invitation" to the meeting June 15 1911 was printed on a paper with a letter-head "Nationaal Comité Inzake Wettelijke Regeling van Vrouwenarbeid" which was founded in 1903, and it was signed by M.W.H. Rutgers-Hoitsema, W Drucker, Marina Kramers, Dr Aletta H Jacobs and J.C van Lanschot Hubrecht. There were versions in English, French and German, and "Constitution of the International Women's Labour Association", with the summon to the meeting, containing "men and women being born qually free and independent members of the human race, ought to be equally protected by the labour legislation". File 12 and letter from MWH Rutgers-Hoitsema to Dr Bang, 9/7 1911, File 16, all in the Coll R-H IIAV; Printed copy of an article "Internationale Frauenbewegung und internationaler Arbeiterinnenschutz" *Berliner Politischer Tagesdienst* 21/6 1911 (which gives a reference to *Soziale Praxis*), Pre-ILO-10 412, ILO Archives; Bruxelles 1912:60-61.

⁴¹ See more later on .

women when the organisation was founded but also that many more had declared to her that they were interested.⁴²

Rutgers-Hoitsema was to work to enlarge the organisation further by presenting it to an international women's congress in Brussels the following year. The member countries were then still few and the organisation in a vulnerable stage. At the suffrage congress in Stockholm its foundation had been a very small incidence, not at all a success and probably hardly even known to the majority of the delegates. Dagny Bang commented later about the situation in Stockholm by expressing her disgust with "protection fanatics" and her despair over the difficulty to unite women.⁴³

To unite civil and economic rights, the international feminist congress in Bryssels, 1912

At the end of April in 1912 Le Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles was held. It was to be the last in a long succession of congresses, which had carried the label "feminist". It was not a congress inside the International Council of Women, but by a detour yet connected to it.⁴⁴ The congress followed the new attitudes of the time and had a broader agenda than before. Main organiser and the general secretary of the congress was as usually in Brussels, Doctor of Laws Marie Popelin, a long-standing feminist. Now she attempted to balance her congress between the older feminism and the new women's movement, which was solely focussing on suffrage. She regretted the absence of the English suffragettes, who were in prison and thus not able to participated but she

⁴² Three persons in every country should constitute the link to Rutgers-Hoitsema. The journalist Hilda Sachs was going to join the other Swedes. From Finland Vera Hjelt, Tekla Hultin and Maikki Friberg, from Danmark Frk Th Daugaard, Louise Neergaard and Julie Arenholt, from France Mme Léon Brunschvicg and Mme Compain, from Hungary Rosika Schwimmer, from England Cristal Macmillan and Eva Gore-Booth. Nobody in Germany was interested to join. Letter from MWH Rutgers-Hoitsema to Dr Bang, 9/7 1911. File 16 Coll R-H IIAV.

⁴³ "Schutzfanatiker", letter from Doktor Dagny Bang to Frau Rutgers-Hoitsema (with no date but marked with "Antwort op de brief van 9 Juli 1911") File 16 Coll R-H IIAV.

⁴⁴ Bruxelles 1912; Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD; Lefaucheux 1966:350.

greeted also more moderate suffrage proponents warmly welcome.⁴⁵ A number of men, especially academics, were on the list of honorary members, as well as the prominent socialist lawyer and member of parliament Emile Vandervelde.⁴⁶

In an opening speech the Belgian socialist member of parliament Hector Denis praised his own country because it stood up in defence of "the liberty of work" and was of the meaning that the congress wanted to "unite civil and economic rights" for women.⁴⁷ Marie Popelin especially thanked him and the leader of the Socialist Party Emile Vandervelde for their support for labour protection of children in the parliament. But she refrained from commenting the positive view both Vandervelde and Denis had on special labour legislation for women. Was their view in this respect of no interest to Marie Popelin, because Belgium did not have any intention of implementing such legislation? Were other kinds of support for women's emancipation to be expected from the socialists rather than from others in the parliament and thus male socialists had to be met with respect and not provoked?⁴⁸

Objections to protection of women

When women's economic conditions were up for discussion at this congress, the special labour laws were of importance. All arguments were connected to equal treatment, which was supposed to do away with women's subordination. Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema, Wilhelmina Drucker and Marie Bonneval were the head speakers during the session and all of them wanted equal treatment at work.⁴⁹ Only one of them neglected to demand a general protective labour legislation at the same time.

⁴⁵ Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD; *La Française* 19/5 1912; "Le congrès féministe internationale" *L'étoile Belge* 29/4 1912.

⁴⁶ E.g. Oddo Deflou, Avril de Sainte-Croix, Maria Vérone and Isabelle Bogelot. Bruxelles 1912:25f; Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD.

⁴⁷ Hector Denis was socialist since 1875; "...la liberté du travail..." "...lie le droit civil au droit économique..." Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD.

⁴⁸ *L'étoile Belge* 29/4 1912, Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD; Hilden 1993: 316ff.

⁴⁹ "Le congrès féministe" *L'Etoile Belge* 30/4 1912 File: Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles DOS 43, BMD. The title was "Conditions d'infériorité de la femme vis-à-vis du travail; lois dites de protection; admission des femmes à tous les emplois et professions; égalité des salaires et traitements à travail égal; travail domestique des gens

Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema presented her view, that there had been a reoccurring state interference at work during the period of industrialism. First there had been regulations of child work, then children had been forbidden to work at all, later on the work time for youth, irrespective of age, had been regulated. At the end the legislation called protective had been extended to adult women but not to men.⁵⁰ She informed the public of the protests in Norway, Finland and Denmark against the Berne Convention. She criticized the International Association for Labour Legislation and mentioned that it was preparing the introduction of yet another international convention to limit the working day to ten hours: it should only apply to women!⁵¹

As a possibility to protest, Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema presented her chief concern, the International Correspondence, which according to her was "the very first international feminist organisation".⁵² Thus she dismissed the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and the International Council of Women as feminist. These were organisations she knew well. But for her equality in the labour market was the basis of feminism. The purpose of the new organisation was

to create a cooperation between women, or rather between feminists in different countries, who -- even if they find protective labour legislation a necessity -- are against a special legislation only for women's work, because that will harm the female workers.⁵³

The formulation was in accordance with the one formulated earlier by the social feminists: labour legislation for all but no special legislation when it comes to adults. Six states had already joined the International Correspondence: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Hungary, The Netherlands

de maison; syndicats féminins", Bruxelles 1912: 55ff & 62ff; Drucker the editor in chief of *la Revue féministe néerlandaise*, according to *La Française* 19/5 1912; Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles, DOS 43, BMD.

⁵⁰ The title was "La Législation et le Travail de la femme". Bruxelles 1912: 56.

⁵¹ Bruxelles 1912: 56ff.

⁵² "...pour autant que je sache, la première organisation féministe internationale...". Bruxelles 1912: 61.

⁵³ "...de former un lien entre les femmes, ou plutôt entre les féministes des divers pays qui, quoique considérant la législation protectrice des travailleuses comme nécessaire, s'opposent à une législation spéciale sur le travail de la femme seulement, à cause du préjudice qui en résulte pour les ouvrières elles-mêmes" Bruxelles 1912: 60.

and Belgium.⁵⁴ She was having high hopes in her description of how "feminists" were to unite to give all women the right to work and thus emancipation:

We ardently hope that feminists in all countries, who so far have been struggling alone, and because of this probably have had no great progress, will unite in the future. Unity will give strength.

We hope that the International Correspondence will be the start for feminists all over the world in a march forward, in tight ranks, to reach the common goal: woman's total emancipation. We should never forget, that to obtain this beautiful ideal, the right to work is necessary. Help us to conquer that right.⁵⁵

According to Rutgers-Hoitsema wage work was yet a right women had to conquer. Without it women remained subordinated. The right also had to be practiced. Wage work for all was the way to emancipation.

The next speaker, Wilhelmina Drucker, supported her views and went on to criticise the consequences of the protective legislation. Women had been expelled from tailoring, dairies, laundries, potteries, and from post offices and telegraph stations; their former jobs had been taken over by men. The special labour legislation was an obstacle to women's advancement because the laws made them troublesome for employers. Added to this, women got psychologically damaged by a legislation which said that a woman could not ever become more mature than a 16 years old boy. She concluded strongly with allusions to two authors then of current interest, Olive Schreiner and Thorstein Veblen; she stressed how the gender division of labour had created the passive upper class woman and now the same "parasitism" was spread to the working class via legislation.⁵⁶ Feminism was the contrary to passivity for women.

⁵⁴ France, Great Britain and Finland were considering membership.. Bruxelles 1912: 60; Correspondence in File 14,15 and 16 Coll R-H, IIAV.

⁵⁵ "Nous souhaitons ardemment que les féministes de tous les pays, qui jusqu'ici ont lutté séparément et par cela même probablement sans beaucoup de succès, s'unissent à l'avenir. L'union fait la force. Que, pour les féministes du monde entier, la Correspondence Internationale soit le point de départ d'une marche en avant, en rangs serrés, à la poursuite du même idéal: la complète émancipation de la femme. N'oublions jamais que pour atteindre ce bel idéal, le droit au travail nous est indispensable. Aidez-nous à le conquérir." Bruxelles 1912: 61; this was reported for example in *L'étoile Belge* as well as in a report by Druckers. *L'étoile Belge* 30/4 1912, File: Congrès 1912 - Bruxelles DOS 43, BMD.

⁵⁶ Compare Veblen 1899 and Schreiner 1911.

Women from the upper classes become more and more as parasites. Protective legislation will force women from the lower classes to become that too. It is the conscious impression – or unconscious even – of this humiliation that has produced the feminist movement. Feminism is when all comes to all the fight against the forced parasitism. (Applauds)⁵⁷

She argued from a bourgeois feminist perspective without any mention of how hard work was for the labouring people, although she had been rather poor herself and worked as a seamstress part of her life. Marie Bonneval complemented Drucker's speech by talking in favour of a labour legislation protecting both men and women. Bonneval got applause when she lifted the double demand, as socialist feminists used to do.

The congress in Brussels brought forward a critique of special labour legislation for women without anyone invited to defend such legislation. This was a Belgian feminist congress, with a tradition from the congress in August 1897, the Congrès Féministe International de Bruxelles, also led by Marie Popelin. There were no formal resolutions suggested or taken. About protective labour legislation, Marie Popelin would only tolerate a feminist discourse.

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⁵⁷ "La femme des classes élevées descend de plus en plus au rang de parasite. Les lois de protection obligent la femme des classes inférieures à le devenir aussi. C'est l'impression consciente, ou inconsciente, de cet abaissement qui produit le mouvement féministe. Le féminisme est au fond la lutte contre le parasitisme forcé. (Applaudissements)"(70) Bruxelles 1912: 68ff ; Applauds were not marked in the later printed book of protocol but according to a daily paper, they were heard at this very place, *L'étoile Belge* 30/4 1912.

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Documents about the International Association for Labour Legislation: Pre-ILO 10 400,

IIAV= International Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging / International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement, Amsterdam; Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema (1847-1934) has left documents that are preserved in the Collection Rutgers-Hoitsema (=Coll R-H)

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