

Women in Rebellion, 1900

Two Views on Class, Socialism and Liberation

Mrs. Wibaut and Lily Gair Wilkinson

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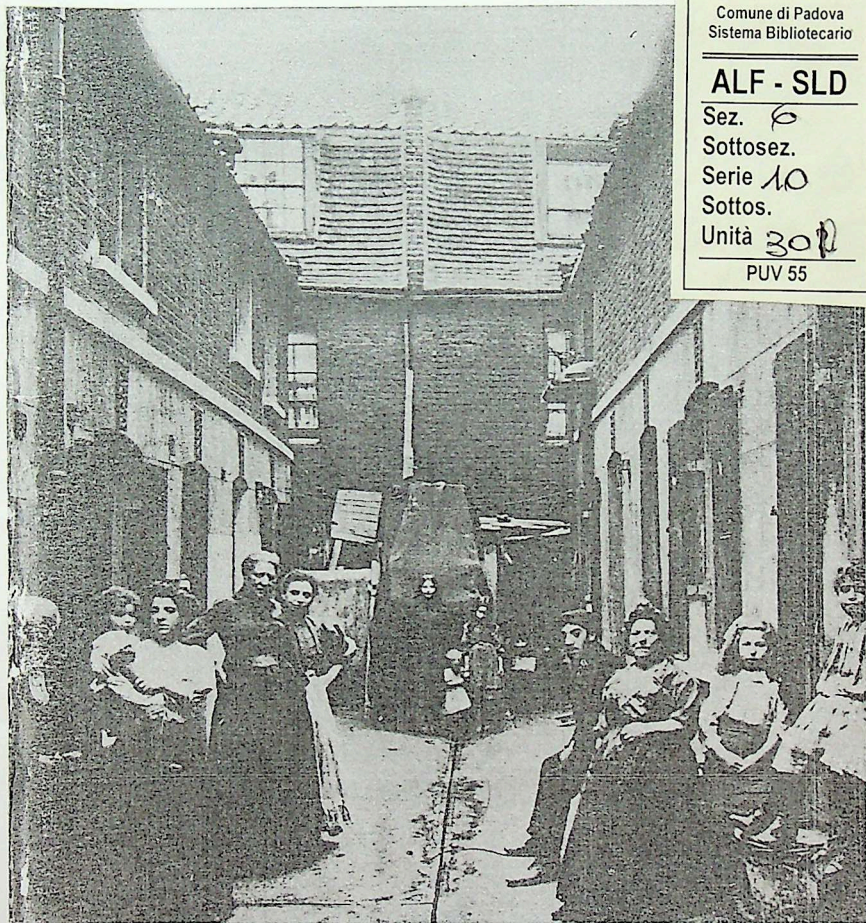
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Women in Rebellion—1900

Two Views on Class, Socialism and Liberation

Working Women and the Suffrage

by Mrs. Wibaut

Woman's Freedom

by Lily Gair Wilkinson

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INTRODUCTION

The I.L.P. Archives contain a number of pamphlets about women's liberation. When I first came across them two years ago it really blew my mind to realise that the women's movement of the late nineteenth century had been exploring all the areas of women's lives, just as the Women's Liberation Movement does to-day. Women then were not simply concerned with the vote, as history books have led us to believe.

Perhaps now that realisation is more commonplace. But I picked these two pamphlets for re-publication, because they give a vivid idea of the extent to which ideas that are around in the Women's Liberation Movement are in fact ideas re-surfacing; they are not new. This is not to say that history stands still, but simply to remind us that although we are thinking in new terms about *how* to struggle for our liberation, we should be wary of denigrating other women who went before us, and not believe those histories which present the early women's movement in one dimensional terms.

The most startling aspect of Mrs Wibaut's pamphlet, which was translated into English and published in England in the 1890s, is the discussion of the wageless condition of the housewife, and the consequences of that condition. The description of how the wife produces labour power, and the way in which because of her wageless condition "she never counts the hours of labour—her work is never done", is so topical, has such a bearing on the discussion on wages for housework now going on in Women's Liberation, that it's quite breathtaking to realise it was written eighty years ago. Here we see quite clearly set out—"If all housewives were to die at once, and the men were forced to buy everything ready for use, wages would have to rise immediately. It is by her unpaid labour that the housewife makes it possible for her husband's wages to be kept so low!"

Wibaut's concentration on the situation of the housewife is something which is only now reappearing in the women's movement. Then, as now, the problem of how to organise as housewives was a key question. For Wibaut the answer is to get the vote for all women, and use the vote to get all the other things we need.

Lily Gair Wilkinson argued at the time that the vote wouldn't amount to power. "The call for 'votes' can never be a call to freedom. For what is it to vote? To vote is to register assent to being ruled by one legislator or another." In her pamphlet she discusses the relationship between class and sisterhood, seeing both that class is the main divider, and that in spite of this *all* women have their prostitution in common.

"Go out again and watch the women as they pass. Look, once more, for instance, at the rich woman in the motor-car, the 'lady' . . . Lady! A slave and a bondswoman! She has sold her woman's body . . . She has sold herself into married prostitution." "These then are three types of women in bondage—the lady sold in marriage, the working woman, and the prostitute . . . All these women enter bondage by selling their bodies; selling them for man's pleasure or selling them for the profit of an employer, but always selling that sacred thing, a woman's body."

But she sees no point in women trying to win 'equality' with men. ". . . men, the great majority of men, are slaves; therefore, 'on the same terms as men' means terms of slavery."

Lily Gair Wilkinson rejects the vote, and offers her own vision of 'communist society'. But she is not looking for a lever of power for women to organise round. Wibaut is thinking about how to organise, and sees the vote as a means to power. Now that the vote has been proved a "poor, cracked, treble call", we have to find other ways to get that power.

Suzie Fleming

July 1973

Working Women and the Suffrage

by Mrs. Wibaut

“Awake all ye that are born as slaves.”

Did you ever take a walk in a rich quarter of the town when children come out of school? If so, you saw a very joyful sight. Rosy, fresh-looking children are running everywhere, the little ones guarded by mother or nurse; big boys and girls pass, racing on their bikes. All of them have good clothes, most of them look healthy and buoyant.

How charming are the surroundings here! There are fine houses, well-kept gardens and smart buildings. The schools are neat, the classes are small, and teaching is profitable.

In those large houses the mothers of those children dwell. They are able to give the children everything they want; aye, and more. Nobody needs to ask what kind of people live there; they are not of the working class.

Let us now have a look at another part of the town, at the hour when the free schools' lessons are over. The children pour out like a stream. But how small they are! The big ones no longer go to school; many of the children look weak; their clothes are made of poor material. They play in a crowded street, smart buildings are not to be seen, and gardens are scarce.

In high and ugly houses, crowded together, hundreds of windows look close on to the street. There do the mothers of these children live, not able to give them what they need. There they live a life of privation, which is the life of a woman of the working class.

In all these families there is a continual struggle against poverty. A famous author once wrote, “Life's highest purpose is ‘not to starve.’” It is true of today.

WHAT IS THE REASON OF ALL THIS?

Do women ever ponder on this question? Why is it that hardly any of them can get on in life, notwithstanding their utmost zeal, their utmost economy, although the world around them grows wealthier day by day?

No! most women do not think of such questions. They do not see any way out of their misery. Things are what they are. The one is born on the

sunny side of life, and the other in the shadow, and nothing else seems possible to them.

The origin of the misery in working-class families, the reason why the lives of working women are so full of privation, is that the possessing classes have the power to hold all this world's goods and make the worker labour for them, and as it is with working men, so it is with the women, even with the housewives.

The possessing classes own the ground on which the food grows, on which the houses are built; they own the mines containing coal and iron, and the factories and machines. But what could they do with it all without the workers? If no work was done in the fields, in the mines or factories, the possessing classes would have no profit whatever from their possessions. They cannot eat their ground or machines. They need the working classes to work for them. They buy their labour-power, and pay a wage for it. Just enough for the worker to live on. But the workers must not only be able to live, they must be able to have children who will become workers later on. So a family must be able to exist on the wages paid. Wages, however, are kept so low that this is only possible when there is somebody who does a great deal of household work which is not paid for at all.

WHO WORKS WITHOUT WAGES?

The housewife of the working classes, she toils without thinking of any wage. Much of that which is done in the household of the middle class, by laundresses, needlewomen and servants, who are all paid for it, is done by the working woman herself. If there is not so much actual cooking in the worker's household, it is more toilsome to cook, without the necessary pots and pans that are available for the middle-class housewife.

The worker's wife darns and mends things that are not worth the trouble she takes; she calculates and drudges without end; she looks for the cheapest food, which also takes time; she never counts the hours of labour—her work is never done.

When a man who has children loses his wife, it is very plain to see that the work done by the housewife represents money value. Very often the man is soon forced to remarry, because he cannot pay a housekeeper. He has to marry because his wage can only be a living wage when housework does not need to be paid for.

If all housewives were to die at once, and the men were forced to buy everything ready for use, wages would have to rise immediately. It is by her unpaid labour that the housewife makes it possible for her husband's wages to be kept so low.¹

WHO PROFITS FROM LOW WAGES?

The employer, of course, so all the toiling of the woman is in truth not profitable to her family, but to the employer. Housewives keep their families in the cheapest way; they nurse the children under the worst circumstances, and all the toiling of thousands of housewives enables the possessing classes to increase their riches, and to get the labour-power of men and children in the most profitable way.

The only wage the housewife gets for all her work is a bare existence. Thus the woman shares the grinding which the man undergoes directly. But the painful sacrifice which the mother makes for love of home is hardly noticed by anyone. A girl once said, whose father worked in a factory with his elder children, "Mother does not work." When asked, however, what her mother did do, she perceived that her mother had the longest day's work of them all, and the most full of trouble.

As long as a woman believes that she is toiling only for her family she will patiently acquiesce in the wrong situation. She is willing to do everything for her husband and children, but when she sees that her sacrifice and endurance only give profit to the possessing classes, there will be an end of her patience.

AND WHAT THEN?

How can a housewife take her part in the struggle? How can she remonstrate? What is the use of complaining?

She cannot fight in a trade union, she cannot claim any payment, she cannot strike, she cannot alter her work in any way.

If she works less, her household gets neglected, and she punishes her family without helping herself. She can, and probably will, encourage her husband and working children to fight for higher wages and better conditions of living by means of their trade unions. But how can she herself, as a reasonable being, claim her rights, for she should be able to fight with the others for a better life?

She will be able to do this if she has the right to vote. By voting, all the housewives will be able to remonstrate against the grinding of the possessing classes. It must not be said that women are not ripe for politics. The right to vote will prove the best training to make them so. In a very brief time women will know for whom they wish to vote. She will soon learn to defend herself and home from fraud and attack. Does the housewife know that every time she buys tea, sugar or cocoa an invisible hand takes some money from her, for which she does not receive goods, but which the Government keeps as a tax?

Probably some reforms may first be necessary, so that women can improve their lives and become strong enough to fight in the struggle to come.

IMMEDIATE REFORMS—ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD

One of the first reforms necessary for women to gain is Endowment of Motherhood. The woman of the working class, she who brings forth the future worker, is unnecessarily exposed to risk, both for herself and her child, through anxiety, and want of nourishment and good nursing—risks much greater than those of a well-to-do mother and child of the possessing class.

This must happen no longer.

Nor should the future mother have to endure the humiliation of having to beg help from philanthropical ladies, after having shown her marriage lines. If good nursing for the mother cannot be paid for from the wages the husband earns, then she should have the right to claim such provision from the State. She whom the State debars from earning in order that the welfare of its future citizens may be assured, should also be assured of a proper maintenance.²

The Socialist Party should demand a whole set of measures, which will include not only State Endowment of Motherhood, but the means for further nursing of the young mother and her child, the procuring of pure milk by the community and an allowance for other necessities (clothing, etc.); also the founding and arranging of good creches for the care of those infants whose mothers are not able, or strong enough, to care for them properly.

These are measures that will have to be considered as soon as every working woman has the right to vote. As a mother, should she not fight for everything that will make the lives of children less hard? Should she not fight for free maintenance? for children's protection? improvement of the schools? and better treatment for the children of the working class? Would it be so difficult for her to understand that reduction of her husband's working time is necessary for the education of the children, and a happy married life?³ Aye, everything that the Socialist or Labour Party could claim, she would have an interest in too.

Let us enumerate some of them: A good insurance against sickness, not forgetting the women; procuring of better houses, abolition of taxes which weigh heavily upon the working class, the increase of taxes upon the possessing class, a supply of pure food, and many other things which are necessary. There is no improvement demanded by the working class which is not at the same time an improvement for the woman.

END OF WOMEN'S SUBJECTION

It is quite clear that as soon as women have the right to vote they will claim the abolition of the laws which deny a woman the right upon her own personality, and which gives to the mother less right to her child than it gives to the father.

When a woman wants to get irritated she should have a glance over the civic laws. Many laws remain unrepealed although they have become obsolete and ridiculous. The question of how to earn a living rules the lives of men and women, so that there is little thought left for the obedience of women to men.⁴

In our days it is the employer who has to be obeyed.⁵ The man need not order his wife to follow him where he chooses to live. Very seldom is he able to choose his place of residence; that has to be the place where he may be able to earn a living, and for the woman it is the same.

How often nowadays man and wife are separated by poverty! Prejudices, however, concerning the dependence of women still linger in many minds, and these prejudices will not disappear until women become independent in political affairs. The franchise, coupled with economic freedom, will raise their position to that of men.

So she will as an independent person come out of the dark to take her place with men in the light of public life. He works and she works. Let them both fight together for a better life as becomes their dignity. For both of them elective franchise is a necessary weapon in this struggle; but for the working woman it is also the first measure towards the beginning of quite another, a new and higher life.

SUFFRAGE FOR THE WOMAN WHO WORKS FOR A WAGE— DEATH OF OLD FORMS OF THOUGHT

If our great grandmothers could rise out of their tombs how surprised they would be, and, maybe, how indignant, at the present life of many women and girls.

What is the reason, they might ask, that so many women are no longer occupied in the household? Why do they stand near whirring machines? Why do they write in offices? Plead in the courts of justice? Even do operations in the hospitals? Even married women work out of doors! Who could have thought of all this in our days? The domestic spirit of our forefathers could never have borne the sight! The changes wrought by the

last hundred years in the lives and work of women are very great indeed. From ancient times women have found their labour and their living in their families. Everything which a family needed was made in the home itself, and the greater part by women. Bread was baked, beer brewed, thread spun, children were taught, and sick people nursed. In the garden, fruit was cultivated; in the shippens, cows were milked.

That was the time in which a woman's life was as the poet describes:—

Inside in silence
Stays the housewife
She, mother of children
And reigns with wisdom;
She teaches the girls
And keeps off the boys.
She winds the thread round the whirring spinning-wheel,
Piles up the linen in nice-smelling drawers,
And enlarges the wealth with orderly mind.

WHAT HAS BEEN LEFT OF THAT FAMILY?

Children are now taught in schools; large mechanical cotton factories have expelled the spinning-wheel and loom to the world of fancy; the tailoring industry makes more and more of the clothing. Invention after invention diminishes the value of indoor handwork. Machines cut material, stitch, embroider, knit, darn, wash and iron. The fact that the working woman of nowadays has still so much manual labour only finds its origin in low wages. As soon as more wealth comes into the family the washing tub, for instance, disappears from the house.

The machine has caused a change in society such as could not have been wrought even by the bloodiest revolution. It has caused the well-to-do class of artisan to disappear. It has turned the master shoemaker, the master carpenter, the master smith, as well as their workmen, into wage-workers in the common industry.

Thousands of women and girls could no longer find their living at home, and they became wage-workers also. They had no need to struggle in order to get employment like the women of the middle-class, who were forced by the same causes—viz., change in domestic industry—to practise a profession; the factory gates were opened wide to receive the working woman.

The enormous machines, disposing of gigantic powers, the automatic instruments, moving with the fineness of fairy fingers, made a great deal of the muscular labour of men superfluous. Henceforth they could be served by women and girls.

The women's wage-work was much desired by the manufacturers because it was cheap and easily got. The exploitation of women's labour became a golden source of profit for the capitalist. Girls and women who live in their father's or husband's household can work for smaller wages than men, and with the exception of one or two of the large industries they are paid at a lower rate.

But woe to the girl, the forsaken wife or the widow, who has to earn a living alone. Here we see exploitation in its worst form. Working as hard as possible, she can seldom really provide for herself.

Some employers even do not employ girls who are orphans, unless they have other resources besides their wage. In this way even the working woman is often driven by capitalism to lead an immoral life.

Employers profit a good deal from women's labour, for the low wage of women in many trades keeps the wages of the men low. In this way the whole standard of wages comes down, and the employer pays no more money for the labour of both man and woman than he paid for the man alone.

THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE

But the same cause which brought misery at the same time brought the means of deliverance. Where a woman is driven to work for wages in the same trade as a man she comes immediately into the same rank with him in the class struggle. She is even more abused than he, and has still more reason to begin that struggle.

First of all, she ought to join the trade union, and, for precisely the same reasons as the working man, she ought to claim the elective franchise. Still more clearly than the housewife, the woman who works for wages should see how she is toiling for the possessing classes. She works directly for them; she sees that the profits from her labour are not advantageous to herself, but only to her employers. Though she has been toiling all her lifetime, she will be as poor at the end of her life as she was at the beginning.

Therefore she must claim back from the possessing classes as many as possible of the numerous things which are stolen from her. She must begin the political struggle also for the man's sake, who has become her labour-comrade and with whom she has the same interests. The woman who works for wages sorely wants the suffrage, and so does the housewife. Many women are at the same time both workers and housewives. This means that they are doubly exposed to exploitation, and have therefore double reason to fight against this exploitation.

THE MOTHER WORKER

She is indeed doubly exposed to exploitation, whether she is a charwoman, a costermonger, a sempstress, or a washerwoman; whether she works at home, or at a factory, or on the fields, she has always double work to do—labour for a very small wage, and housewife's work for no wage at all. In its hunger for gain, capitalism pays no heed to the wage-earner woman being a human creature, and takes no account of her motherhood. What does capitalism care whether the last glimmer of family life for the working woman dies out? Whether the mother cannot any longer be a mother? It takes up every spark of her energy every minute she is able to work, so that the housewife-worker is hardly ever able to take her part in social life. This, however, is necessary for her own sake, and must be done. First of all, she must have the elective franchise. By her right to vote she will be able to gain and enforce a shorter working day, and this is very necessary indeed.

How long already have the manufacturers, those uncrowned kings of our day, been dragging the very life out of working women and intensifying their work? To remonstrate against the long working day effectively we must have votes for ALL women and nothing less.

VOTES FOR ALL WOMEN AND NOTHING LESS

It is quite clear that the vote for the working woman and the vote for the middle-class or rich woman mean two different things, and will be used by each for a different purpose.

The middle-class women feel the need of the suffrage in their struggle for equality and independence in which they have the opposition of men of their own class, and a limited suffrage, dependent on the possession of money, will satisfy the needs of the middle-class or rich woman if it abolishes the disqualification of sex. But it must not be supposed that such a limited women's suffrage can be a bridge leading towards general women's suffrage.⁶ No, it is rather the "Crown upon the might of the possessing classes." In the castle of government the feminine possessors would then take their seat next to the masculine possessors, and there would be no opposition, but equality and co-operation of the possessing classes.

Limited women's suffrage would thus accomplish a different purpose, and perhaps even prevent general women's suffrage.

The working woman does not need the suffrage to gain her independence from men. The employer has already made room for her in the factory and workshop and field.⁷ The working woman needs the suffrage in order to oppose the possessing classes. She needs it in order to obtain better houses, better conditions of living, shorter hours of working, better care for her children.

The women's limited suffrage, therefore, is not for you, mothers of workers' children; not for you women selling your wares in the street; not for those who work at home, or in the fields; not for you who toil and suffer most.

The women of the working class must not be content with anything less than adult suffrage for all men and women. Together in their labour, together in the struggle, they have the same aim; let them march shoulder to shoulder to the same end.

SUFFRAGE AS A MEANS OF EDUCATION

"A woman—in so far as she beholdeth
Her loved one's face;
A mother—with a great heart that unfoldeth
The children of the race;
A self-poised, royal soul, brave, wise and tender,
No longer blind and dumb—
A Human Being, of an unknown splendour,
Is she who is to come."

—Charlotte Perkins S. Gilman.

What is the reason that women, who are the worst victims, do not resent the conditions of today? Why is it so difficult to get them to move? What is the reason that women are still so often a hindrance to the workers' emancipation when their only hope of betterment for themselves lies in their taking part in the struggle of the men?

The patience of women with unjust conditions does not arise from the same cause as that of the extreme poverty-stricken workers, who are so deeply sunk that they only live from hand to mouth.

No, there is another reason. Since her youth it is always impressed upon her that it is one of woman's virtues to be silent, modest and submissive. From olden times up to now it became a woman to serve. The old law enjoining obedience was not made for fun; in those days it really expressed the existing relation between men and women.

The notion that labour can make her independent is quite a new thing to her; she has always worked hard at home and remained there, still dependent on her father or husband, and the old-time conditions of working submissively still linger in her mind. She has been taught to have few necessities and to endure privations patiently. From these "virtues" the possessing classes profit. The middle-class woman works to obtain independence. This is not the motive of the working woman in going out to work.

Labour conditions for her are still so bad that the young girl always looks for deliverance in marriage, and always hopes to get a better existence when married however small her chances are. She is dependent before and after marriage. The suffrage will awaken her to feel her own value; political rights will educate her for personal independence and give strength to her character. Political enfranchisement is the best way to make a woman a good combatant in the class struggle.

When she feels her own dignity she will see that labour must provide for an existence worthy of her as a human being. Then she will rise to the standard of a self-conscious combatant. This feeling can be awakened by political suffrage.

What an effect it will have when the women of the working classes have the right as citizens to take part in the government of the country!

No other means will ever make her feel so strongly that she does not only exist for men's sake, but that she is a human being herself, having the same rights as he. Then the new woman will come forth, who shall no longer bear any yoke of slavery. Then the workers' struggle will be fought with more than double the strength it is fought now, for all the woman's virtues, self-denial, endurance, and devotion will come to the aid of her struggling comrades. The struggle for the suffrage will develop her character and be of advantage in the struggle of the whole class. Only the self-conscious woman will courageously help the man, or perhaps go before him in the difficult struggle against the strong castle of capitalism.

Therefore, ye men, work with all your might to deliver the woman from the chains of prejudice and tradition which still burden her. She cannot follow you so long as those chains hinder her.

Women! what are you prepared to do for your husbands and children and for yourselves? Are you any longer willing to live the life of slaves for the benefit of another class, or will you begin the struggle which aims at the deliverance of your class and the freeing of your sex as a necessary consequence?

Possibly you will for yourselves gather very little fruit from this struggle, but trying to gain a better future will give a brightness to your lives which will make you happy. Women! are you not mothers? or if you have no children have you not a motherly feeling towards the worker's children? Come, then, workers and mothers, promise yourselves that from this moment you will take your part in the struggle to deliver your class from oppression and humiliation—in the struggle for the deliverance of Labour.

NOTES

1. We are only now re-realising that, as Wibaut points out, the wife is really working for her husband's employer, not for her own family. See for example M. Benston "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" (publ. in *Monthly Review*, September 1969) and M. Dalla Costa "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (publ. in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, 1972).
2. This is one of the factors behind the current demand for wages for housework, which is being debated in the Women's Liberation Movement.
3. Another demand which is now being taken up by the W.L. Movement.
4. Wibaut herself knows this isn't true. See her comments in the section, 'Suffrage as a Means of Education'. See also the first note on Wilkinson.
5. See S. James, *A Woman's Place* for a development of this idea—an article written in 1953, and republished with the article by Dalla Costa cited above.
6. There was a continuing debate in the women's movement, amongst those who were agreed on the importance of the vote for *all* women, as to what was the best way to get it. Some argued that the abolition of sex discrimination was a crucial first step, and that all rights which applied to men only, especially the vote, should be extended to women immediately. But at a time when property qualifications were still necessary to vote, others argued that to remove discrimination on the grounds of sex was not much use, because most women would be too poor to vote, and only rich women would benefit. They wanted the women's movement to join with men in the demand for universal suffrage. The problem was, as many women pointed out, that there was no guarantee that the men would not at the last minute accept a compromise which granted full adult *male* suffrage, and left women out. Many women had bitter memories of other struggles in which men had been prepared to drop the women's demands in the hope that their own demands would then be more easily granted. For example, during the Chartists' struggle, the women had fought alongside the men and then seen their demand for political rights dropped from the Charter, in case the 'extremism' of demanding rights for women 'damaged' the men's case.
7. See again *Suffrage as a Means of Education*, where Wibaut is clearly aware that the situation is more complicated.

Woman's Freedom

by Lily Gair Wilkinson

I. WOMEN IN BONDAGE

There is much talk and clamour among us because of the "Woman Question". The discussion is obscured for the most part by sex prejudice. Some would have us believe that women form a sort of angelic sisterhood oppressed by the tyrant man; others inform us that women must forever be dependent upon men because of their natural inferiority.

Those feminists who believe in the angelic sisterhood seem always to be singing that old nursery rhyme:—

"What are little girls made of, what are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice, and all that's nice, that's what little girls are made of.
What are little boys made of, what are little boys made of?
Slugs and snails and puppy-dogs' tails, that's what little boys are made of."

And those who proclaim man's natural superiority repeat very much the same sort of nonsense the other way round. It seems as if they sing perpetually:—

"What are little girls made of, what are little girls made of?
Frills and laces and silly faces, that's what little girls are made of.
What are little boys made of, what are little boys made of?
Muscles and mind of superior kind, that's what little boys are made of."

Indeed, this lumping together of the sexes, as if they formed two opposing camps, has no reference to the facts of everyday experience. It is altogether too theoretic. Men and women do not oppose each other like two armies; they live together, and share together the pains and struggles and joys of life. Men as men are not in a superior social position. Women are not in bondage to men; they are not oppressed by men, nor dominated by men!

Go out into the street, and watch the people who pass. Notice the working men with their worn faces, shabby clothes, and all the characteristics by which you know at a glance that they are workmen. Then notice the first "lady" (rich woman, that is) who comes along in motor-car or taxi-cab; observe her soft clothes, her smooth face, her confident manner, and all the other characteristics by which you immediately know her for a rich woman. *That* woman in bondage to *these* men! The idea is only to be laughed at.

There is no sisterhood of women any more than there is a brotherhood of men. A working woman asking for employment from a rich woman does not greet the lady as a sister, and expects no sisterly greeting; she expects and she receives, much the same sort of treatment from a mistress as from a master. The case is just as bad for her one way as the other.

In fact, while it is true that we find in daily experience of life that human society is really split up very much into two camps (or what Disraeli called "the two nations" of rich and poor), these camps are by no means two armies of opposing sexes, but two armies of opposing classes. Yet it is also true that nearly all women are no better than slaves; that is to say, social restrictions prevent the full, free, and natural development of nearly every woman that is born. Certainly the same is true of nearly every man; but the restraint is greater for women, and the degradation is greater.

How is it, then? If not the tyranny of man, how is it? To understand it we must study various types of women in bondage.

Go out again and watch the women as they pass. Look once more, for instance, at the rich woman in the motor-car, the "lady", as she is called. In the streets, in the parks, in other public places, this "lady" type is to be observed in fine clothes, furs, and jewels of great price. She is arrogant, and does not notice us because we are less expensive mortals than herself; but we may well say to ourselves "Slave!" as she passes. The rich clothes, and the jewels, and the servants, and the carriages, and the motor-cars are all the very signs and tokens of her slavery. This woman has sold herself into bondage, and she is actually owned by the man who owns also the furs and jewels and servants and carriages—the man who signs the cheques. For a rich man's wife is merely his most costly possession.

Lady! What does it mean, this "lady"? It is a name of good repute, and often it is said of a woman as highest praise that she is "a perfect lady". Yet the very type of what is called a lady is generally a pampered, painted, fleshly instrument to some man's pleasure.

Lady! A slave and a bondswoman! She has sold her woman's body for costly accessories and a soft living. She has sold herself into married prostitution. The Christian religion has given to the sale the odour of sanctity, and at the priest's bidding she has promised to love, honour and obey the man who purchased her body in the marriage market. No matter how depraved, how diseased, how hideous the man may be who comes to bid in that market, he is sure, if only he bids high enough, of getting a prize for his possession—a beautiful, live, degraded woman's body. Love

such a man! What has love to do with such a bargain? Honour! How can honour be given to the sensualist who buys a woman with his riches? Obey! How should a woman swear away her freedom because she is going to live with a man? Love and obedience, moreover, cannot be given together, for love is by its nature free, and obedience is willing slavery.

To be a willing slave. Is that not the most shameful thing possible to a human being? But all the same she is "a perfect lady"! *Lady!* If anyone should compose for me some day an epitaph, I wish it may be written: "At least she was no lady".

And yet, what is a woman to do? What is a girl brought up in a rich family to do? Such a girl is usually entirely dependent upon her parents, whose ideals in life are probably dividends and social power. None dares to speak openly to her of sexual truths, and her own natural sexual dignity is cheated by the false appearance of successful attainment in the marriage bargain. Not only is she dependent upon her parents, but they have accustomed her to luxury, and she has become dependent upon luxuries by force of habit. When the choice comes to her, what is she to do but sell the one thing she has to sell, that one wonderful thing so desired of man—her woman's body?

It does not always happen so; but which of us can be sure that in the same case it would not happen so to us?

Now turn to another type. Most of the women who pass us wherever we go are of this type—it is the type of woman who is poorly born, the working woman. All her life this woman has found herself in a peculiar position. Her father and her brothers and her husband are all slaves—they are not free to work for themselves; they must spend their lives working for others. She also is a slave; either she must do the work of the household to make it possible for the men to work for wages, or she must work for wages herself. But her slavery has a peculiar characteristic. She found it out as a girl when first she sold herself for wages. She might do the same work as her brothers did, but she never received the same pay. She might sell herself as goods in the labour market, but she was always cheaper goods than her brothers.

What was the reason of this? Was she an inferior worker? No, that certainly was not the explanation.

If she, being a high-spirited girl, borrowed her brother's trousers, shirt, coat, and waistcoat, and went to do her brother's work, she would receive her brother's pay; as long as she succeeded in masquerading as her brother there would be no question of inferiority. But if she took the job dressed in her own petticoats, she would receive only about half what she earned for working the same hours and doing the same work in her brother's trousers.

When I go to buy eggs, and see one basket marked "12 a shilling, cooking", and another basket marked "8 a shilling, new-laid", I know that the "cooking" eggs are stale and will not give me the nourishment which I should get from the "new-laid". And so on with other goods. I buy the better goods at a bigger price, and get the better value. But not so with men and women. For doing the same work men's wages are often two or three times as high as women's wages—in tailoring, for instance, men get 30s. or 40s. a week when doing work for which women only receive from 7s. to 16s.

What is the reason of it all?

It is an old story going back to the time when, in primitive societies, physical strength, sheer muscular strength, was the principal factor in human social life. Then women must have been dependent upon men to a very great degree, and the effects of this dependence remain in human relationships long after its cause (mere muscular strength) has ceased to be an important social factor. Brute force is no longer the human criterion in life. A woman can work modern machinery (including machine guns, I do not doubt) just as well as a man can. But the tradition remains that she is socially weaker, or inferior, and therefore as a worker she is reckoned cheaper goods.

Then, again, women are affected by sexual functions which make their labour less regular and dependable than men's labour. That also tends to cheapen women's labour. Again, women very often work merely to earn a wage to help in the family, and are therefore willing to accept less than a living wage.

So from one cause and another women are always being bought as cheap goods in the labour market, and the result is that the struggle to live is even more painful and terrible for women wage-slaves than for men wage-slaves. We are told in cold official figures that forty-five per cent. of the wage-earners of the country are women, and that the average wage of women workers is only about 7s. a week. What unimaginable lives of struggle and suffering are summed up in these figures!

From this we turn naturally to that third type of women in bondage—the prostitute.

It is the fashion of today to be politely sentimental about the "White Slave Traffic", but the tales of guileless girls, of villainous men and women with drugs and snares, are in no way needful to account for prostitution. These statistics giving the conditions of women's employment are explanation enough to anyone who can read the living facts behind the bare

statement of the figures. Forty-five per cent. of the wage-earners are women, and they earn on the average 7s. a week!

The bondage of the prostitute is bitter and cruel, and every woman must feel the cruelty of it if she realises that a woman may actually be driven by want, by dread of death from starvation (and perhaps not only dread for herself, but also for her helpless children), to buy food by selling her body to a man. Not one woman only—though human social life will remain a loathsome thing while this is true of only one single woman—not one woman only, but countless numbers of women every day that passes!

These, then, are three types of women in bondage—the lady sold in marriage, the working woman, and the prostitute. The bondage of these three types is different in kind, but the manner of entering bondage is the same in all three cases. All these women enter bondage by selling their bodies; selling them for man's pleasure or selling them for the profit of an employer, but always by selling that sacred thing, a woman's body.

This is the evil and degrading thing which every woman does who enters slavery. It is clear that women are driven to this degradation, not because of the domination of some big abstraction called Man, but because of the domination of those human laws by which both men and women are forbidden the free use and enjoyment of the earth they live upon.

II. WOMEN IN REBELLION

There is only one thing more fierce than the tiger, and that is the tigress. Women in rebellion have something of this fierceness. For the most part, women are more passive than men; but in times of crisis, when danger threatens the family, women are animated, like the tigress protecting her young, by a strangely fierce activity. In the ordinary conception of women, this is overlooked. They are usually regarded as domesticated animals who require protection, and who never willingly come out of the shelter of the home into more active ways of life. Well, let us see.

Let us recall, as an instance, the hunger-fevered women of Paris on that wet October morning in the year of revolution, 1789. Heedless of the rain, they gathered together in the street, gesticulating, calling out to each other, the talk being always of bread and famine, the king and queen. They gathered their forces, these women, and a disordered march began. They swept down the narrow streets, out into the country. "To Versailles!" they cried; and when they reached Versailles, they invaded the Assembly,

demanding bread instead of words—bread for the starving people of Paris. By their fierce enthusiasm they carried everything before them. In the evening they invaded the Palace itself, and next day they returned in triumph to Paris, bringing with them as prisoners the king and queen of France.

Then, again, in revolutionary Paris, the Paris of March 18, 1871. It was the fearless inspiration of women that won Paris for the people that day. The women led the guards to the streets where the soldiers had captured the cannon of the people; fiercely animated in that hour of danger, they made a rush up the street and surrounded the soldiers, calling to them as brothers not to shoot, seizing them by the hands, even throwing themselves in front of the muzzles of the guns. And that brave appeal of the women had more power with the soldiers than the commands of their general. From mere shooting machines, acted upon by the word of command, they were transformed again into human beings; and instead of shooting down their fellows, they turned and seized the officers who were ordering them to do murder.

That miracle happened because of the action of women in rebellion. Perhaps if men had been acting alone, they would have been more *reasonable* about the crisis; they might have called a meeting and formed a committee, and made resolutions and amendments. And in the meantime, before they had passed their first resolution, the guns would have been lost.

That was an attempted revolution only—it failed, and in the failure more than 30,000 Communards were slaughtered in the streets. But, whether in success or failure, the women of the Commune took an active part in its defence. Women helped in the work of raising the barricades, and defended them alongside the men. Barricades were even built and defended entirely by women. During the slaughter, forty-two men, women, and children were shot down in one place, as an act of vengeance; when the soldiers tried to force them to kneel before their murderers, it was a woman with her baby in her arms who sprang out from among them, and, standing straight up, called to the others, "Show these wretches that you know how to die upright!"

And yet there are people who tell us that women must not have public rights because they cannot fight!

These two instances from French history show something of the spirit of rebel women. These things happened in France, perhaps the most enlightened country in the world. But it is the same everywhere. In Russia, one of the darkest of countries, the women have been wonderful in the effort against the oppressive Government which keeps millions of the Russian people in a state of miserable subjection and an ignorance worse than childish.

In the middle of last century there was a rebel awakening all over Russia. The inspired cry of "To the People!" was responded to by thousands of generous young men and women. "It is bitter to eat the bread made by slaves", they said; and they refused any longer to live on the riches of their parents. "*V Narod!* To the People!"—and they went out all over Russia to spread knowledge among the people, to help the people, to live the lives of the people. In this great movement young girls had to struggle desperately against domestic despotism. They sacrificed home-life, security, riches; and later on they knew also how to sacrifice life itself just as bravely as the men did.

Looking at rebel women, not merely in general in great historic movements, but as individuals, the same self-abandonment in action appears even more clearly.

In America there is a woman rebel, Emma Goldman, whom the police have named "the woman who cannot be stopped"; and there always have been women whom no forces of authority could stop. Louise Michel, tender and gentle in private life, fierce and reckless in the midst of the most dreadful danger; Maria Rygiel, the boldest speaker and writer in Italy, imprisoned over and over again for her revolutionary utterances; Marie Spiridonova, daring to kill and to suffer torture because she could not endure to think of the cruelties inflicted on the peasants of her country—these are only a few instances taken at random of innumerable women who could not be stopped.

Yes, women at all times and all over the world have been active, not passive, in rebellion; and active with a special kind of tigress fierceness of their own. There is, therefore, no reason to fear that women, any more than men, will continue to sell themselves into slavery without making splendid efforts to be free. The only thing to fear is that these efforts may be wasted in wrong directions, that all this wonderful wild rebel spirit should be uselessly dissipated in following some popular cry which is a mere mockery of freedom.

"Votes for Women!" What a poor cry that is compared with those other cries which have inspired rebel women in the past. The "To the People!" of the Russians; the "Vive la Commune!" of the Communards; the "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality!" of the Revolutionaries of 1789.

"Votes for Women!" There is a cracked and treble sound about that.

The call for "votes" can never be a call to freedom. For what is it to vote? To vote is to register assent to being ruled by one legislator or another. Such and such a man (or woman perhaps) is to make laws and to

administer the law *with the assent of the person who votes*. That is all. How, then, can a demand for votes be a call to freedom?

Legislation and freedom—these two words express exactly opposite things. Legislation is the making of laws to curtail and limit freedom. To vote is to take part indirectly by assent in this limitation of the freedom of human beings. And yet they cry, “Votes for Women!”

If I, for one, had the vote—if I had all the votes in the country—I would scorn to use that “right”, as they call it, to do so great a wrong to freedom. If all the voting papers in the world were at my disposal, the only use I should put them to would be to build one great bonfire of them, and call upon the people to come round and rejoice while I set them ablaze!

At a Suffragist meeting the other day a placard was displayed which read, “Legislation without representation is tyranny”. Mrs. Despard, the principal speaker at the meeting, made the claim that the “Women’s Freedom League” stands for freedom, as its name implies. After her speech came question time. She was asked about the placard. She was asked why, if freedom is the object, the placard did not omit the two words “without representation”. It would then read, “Legislation is tyranny”.

All that the speaker could reply was that she did not agree with the questioner, as people are not yet fit to do without laws; and she indicated that women would give them more laws when they have the vote, and especially laws for men.²

Very well; then Mrs. Despard and other Suffragists should cease sentimentalising about freedom, since it is really legislation, or the limitation of freedom by law, that they are out for.

But it is said that women demand the vote because it has already been given to men, and women should have the same social status as men. Because men have blindly mistaken for a social privilege the means of forging the chains that hold them in slavery, women are also to be cheated in the same way!

This “Woman’s Movement” at the best aims only at relative emancipation. Women are to have freedom *relatively* to men. The aim is expressed in the phrase of the Suffragists: “On the same terms as men”. But men, the great majority of men, are slaves; therefore, “on the same terms as men” means terms of slavery.

No; the call for “Votes for Women” is a poor, cracked, treble call; and the Suffragists uttering that cry, although many of them suffer bravely for their illusions, are but a travesty of true rebel women. Rebel women struggle to be free from bondage, and they struggle, not against the men who share their interests in life, but side by side with these men.

If the terms of slavery are even more ghastly for women than for men, so much the greater must be their effort towards freedom.

III. WOMEN IN FREEDOM

A free man or woman is one who can dispose of his or her person without let or hindrance, without reference to any master. If you, being a woman, resolved to be free in this social sense, to go out into the world as a woman in freedom, how would it fare with you?

For a time you might wander unhindered, elated by thoughts of liberty, but very soon you would find that you cannot dwell for ever on the heights. Let us suppose that you feel tired, and that you enter a tea-shop in default of a better place of rest. The shop looks sordid and dingy, and you shudder slightly as a vision of true repose comes to mind—something with green fields and running water and the scent of grass and flowers in it. But, alas! you are not free to that extent; here are no Elysian fields—here is London with its dreary grey buildings and endless discomfort. So you enter the shop. A pale, grim young woman comes up as you choose a seat, and asks what she will bring. You desire only rest, but once more you are reminded that you are not free to choose; rest of a kind you may have, but at the same time tea and buns will be forced upon you. You settle yourself in your uncomfortable corner, sip some of the nasty tea, taste a bun, and ruminate dubiously about your determination to be free. The grim young woman presently brings the bill for tea and cakes, and you realise in a flash that here again in the person of the shop-girl is a limitation of freedom—you are not free from *her*. To the extent that your needs have been satisfied by her service, to this extent your life is dependent upon that service. At this point where you and she have met in life, the one as receiver and the other as the giver of service, each is to a certain degree dependent upon the other.

And in a flash you recognize the social nature of freedom: how none stands alone in life, but the life of each is dependent upon the lives of others and affected by the lives of others; how the poor are dependent upon the rich, and the rich upon the poor; how the sick are affected by the healthy, and the healthy are affected—or infected—by the sick; how consumers are dependent on producers, and producers on consumers; how the learned are affected by the ignorant, and the ignorant by the learned; and so on throughout the whole range of human relations. And if your vision is clear enough, you realise that so long as one, even the least, of these human brothers and sisters is in bondage, there can be no true freedom for you.

As you pay the bill for tea and cakes, and bid the grim young woman good-day, you have a remembrance perhaps of the feasts in Morris's "News from Nowhere", when the bearers of food brought along with it, not bills, but roses and kind smiles and friendly words. Alas, again, for freedom!

If your resolve to be free is not quite ended by this illuminating experience in a tea-shop, surely your further experiences must end it soon. Even if circumstances favour you today, tomorrow must put an end to the dream. The sun shines perhaps, the breeze blows, clouds chase each other across the sky. You awake to it all, feeling glad and young and gay and *free*. You resolve to go out into country places where you may be in the companionship of free things—flowers and birds and dancing insects. For only one vivid, brilliant day you will be one of the free, you will live as all Nature is calling upon you to live, in idle enjoyment of the sunshine—freedom at least for a day!

But stop! What is that you hear? What is that monotonous beat? It is the clock ticking out the seconds which remain between breakfast and office hours. In half an hour you are due at the office. Now, then, be free for a day if you dare!

Then comes the overwhelming recollection of life as it is; the noise and the crush and the horror of the great city; the strife and labour and feverish competition; disease and death, suffering and starvation. And you see yourself among those who strive and push in the midst of this seething mass of millions of human beings, who hurry hither and thither in frantic efforts to maintain life in enmity with their fellows. You see yourself with nerves strained and brain exhausted, working hour after hour at the hateful machine, to be the human part of which you have sold your living body. For it is not worked by electric power alone, but by human power also.

Dare to be free for a day—and what then?

If you dare to be free for even one day, you will be thrust out by your fellows, another will take your place; the machine will still be served with its due of human energy; this great industrial activity which pollutes the air and obscures the sunlight will not be interrupted for one instant by the want of you—you will not be missed.

But you? The means of life will be gone for you; the price of your freedom will be poverty and death.

In that monster army of modern industrial life the penalty of desertion is death. There is no way of living for you in the wild outside of it. The woods and the fields and the rivers and all the rich, beautiful country all belong to individuals of whom you know nothing and who know nothing of you, who care nothing for you. They will not permit you to take

to your use so much earth as may fill a flower-pot—hands off! it is private property! Let the human body perish; the law allows it, and will even provide for you a pauper's grave. But let the sacred rights of private property be in the least degree violated, and the law in all its might is there to do vengeance and give protection to the proprietor.

No, the slave of the industrial system cannot be free for even one day. Turn back quickly to the city again and sell yourself once more into slavery before it is too late.

Here, too, everything belongs to individuals of whom you know nothing and who know nothing of you. All the tremendous machinery by which the few things needful and the many needless are being produced, and the buildings which contain the machinery, and the ground upon which the buildings stand—all belong to these unseen, unknown human beings in possession. And to sell yourself bodily for all the long beautiful hours of your precious days of youth to these possessors is your only means of life.

So once again, as you stand listening to the menace of the clock and wondering whether you will break free or trudge back to the office, you have a sudden revelation. You realise that while there are men and women who hold from others the means of life—the rich surface of the earth and the means of cultivating that richness—so long there will be no freedom for the others who possess none of it all. For possession by a few gives power to the few to control the lives of the millions who are dispossessed, and to bind them in lifelong bondage.

You have thus arrived at a great illumination through your vain striving after personal liberty.

There can be no freedom for single individuals—one here and one there cannot be free in a social sense; but men and women, being socially interdependent, can only be free together—as a *community*, that is. And further, there can be no freedom while there is private property which prevents all men and women having free access to the means of life; not one here and one there must be possessors, but all must possess together—in *common*, that is.

And this is Communism.

If ever men and women attain these essentials of freedom, the life of human beings will be a Communistic life and the most terrible impediments to a full and true human development may thus be overcome.

How, then, will it fare especially with women?

Women will have the same freedom as men, because they will be able to dispose of their lives as they choose.

In Communism there will no longer be any need for women to sell themselves as wives, as wage-earners, or as prostitutes. When there is no more monopoly of land and other means of producing wealth, each woman as well as each man will be able to produce enough, without undue stress of labour, for her own simple needs, so that she may have not only sufficient food, clothing, and shelter, but also enjoyment of the best that the world can give—sunlight, fresh air, and access to the beautiful places of the country.

Now, when such freedom as this is possible for all, what sane woman will sell herself to work for wages? And when such freedom is possible, what woman will sell herself for any man's pleasure when she may give herself for love?

Love is always free. Bodies may be bought and sold; that is the most terrible shame of our present society, where the world is turned into a great market and all things have their price. But love cannot be bought and sold along with a woman's body, because it is always beyond price and free. Our moralists talk of "free love" as if it were some wild proposition, something excessively outrageous and indecent. Marriage is respectable because it is a bond and a law; but love, free love, is wholly disreputable! The truth is that marriage as a bond and a law is quite superfluous, except as a property regulation having nothing to do with love.

But love itself is always free. Though men and women have endured, and do endure, and may forever endure, the most shameful slavery and barter of all sacred things on earth, still there is always this one sacred thing which cannot be enslaved, which is not to be bartered away. Show me the love that is not free!

When women can give their love in freedom without fear of want and painful lifelong drudgery, then that home-life which is so cruelly outraged today will become a living and wonderful reality, at least for those who by nature may desire such a life. When men and women give themselves freely to each other, and not for a price, then begins the life of true companionship in which is possible that perfect development which is the result of freedom.

For love, great as it is, is not the whole of life. It is rather the basis upon which is built up a life of full and glorious experience of all the joys of earth. The joys of the care and companionship of children, the joys of home and the daily round of homely doings, garden joys, field joys, joys of exploration and adventure, joys of congenial work; these many joys of life, and that indescribable animal joy which we call the very "joy of life" itself—all these are only truly known when life is permeated by love.

Such a life is rare indeed at present, but for free men and women there will be no difficulty in its attainment.

And then there will be no need to talk of "preserving the sanctity of the home" by means of law and domestic tyranny. The home will preserve itself in all sanctity, because with its happy child-life, and its life of happy grown men and women, and its life of aged men and women at peace, it will be the most beautiful and desirable of habitations.

Today the sanctity of the home is violated, not by those unrestrained passions upon which the novelists grow fat, but because men, and also many women, find themselves forced to spend their days outside of their homes. The home has become merely a place to eat and sleep in.

How is home life to be even tolerable, much less desirable, under these conditions?

As things are, the workers do not work for themselves; they work for other men and women who are their masters. And labour is enforced, or slave labour, because for the millions the alternative to working for a master is starvation. Under these circumstances those who work do not choose what their work shall be; they produce what they are ordered to produce. The result is an enormous mass of merchandise, in great part superfluous, and even objectionable or harmful. This mass of merchandise is produced by a mechanical method so complex, unhealthy, and abhorrent, that it cannot be supposed in sanity that free men and women would agree to take part in it. Such a monstrosity as the modern industrial system could only be maintained, in fact, by slave-labour.

If the slaves prove capable of freeing themselves from the property laws, which make the master and servant relationship possible, no doubt they will also be capable of freeing themselves from the altogether monstrous system of production in which the lives of the workers are now wasted.

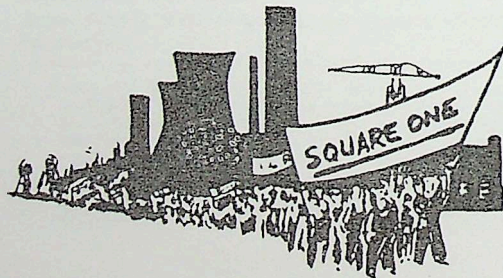
And the only alternative, it seems to me, will be to return to a simpler and more wholesome kind of life, in which physical needs will be provided for rather by handicrafts and agriculture than by the complex machinery system of labour in crowded cities. Workers might then return home again.

If this is ever to be attained, it is obvious that women must play a most important part in its attainment. The home must always be in great part for the child, and the being most nearly connected for the child is surely its mother. Therefore, there is truth in that worn-out phrase, "Woman's sphere is the home". But that is only desirable and quite wholesome when *man's sphere is the home also*. For men and women as male and female are not made to live apart, but together in love and companion-

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