
WOMEN AND COLLECTIVE ACTION
IN INDUSTRIALIZING FRANCE, 1870-- 1914

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It was the 27th of May, 1871, in the Parisian suburb of Issy. Victorine B., an ambulance attendant, accompanied a unit of *Fédérés*, soldiers of the Commune of Paris, as they attacked an outpost of the Versailles-based French government. She had enrolled, with her husband, two months earlier, in a military unit formed for the defense of the republic and the Commune. Her first duty had been as a cook in a caserne in Paris. But now, as Bloody Week drew to a close, her unit was in battle to recapture the fort of Issy. Retreat was called. The red cross flag of the ambulance squad was raised, and Victorine, who had been ordered to stay back earlier, went forward. She wrote in her memoirs: "We gathered up our wounded and our dead under enemy gun fire. Although the red cross flag had been raised, the Versailles continued to fire randomly; more than once we had to drop to the ground, holding our precious burden to prevent their being killed a second time.... The battle had been terrible, our flag had fallen three times; it was raised again and this time it was victorious. The Versailles abandoned the field and fled in all directions.

At the chateau, the scene before our eyes was horrible; dead and wounded were scattered pell mell in the rooms of the first floor ...in the midst of this slaughter were three women, the *cantinières* (of two other units) one dead, one gravely wounded I was the third, and chance had spared me."¹

In January, 1887, a government report tells us, "the women workers in one section of the government monopoly tobacco factory in Marseille, greatly victimized by many irritations and unjust punishments ordered by the head of their unit, went on strike and declared that they would not return until the foreman was removed."² The thousand women, whose strike caught the attention of the townspeople and newspapers, struck from the 6th to the 21st; they returned to work when Roustan, the foreman, "a veritable slave driver" was transferred. Two days later, they founded a union.³

In March, 1906, a coal mine disaster shook the pits of Courrières and the nearby village of Billy-Montigny in the Pas-de-Calais mine field in northern France. Thousands of miners were trapped and more than a thousand

died. A miners' strike followed. The miners demanded that the companies be forced by law to pay more attention to their workers' safety. The strike was bitter and violent, as was often the case in mine strikes. One of the bosses' house was attacked with dynamite. A Paris newspaper reports two women's demonstrations in Billy-Montigny on April 10.

In the first, a group of 500 women, carrying red and tricolored flags draped in black crepe went to the train stations to meet a woman believed to be on the train from Bethune. Madame Ringard was returning from the chef lieu, where she had given testimony to a judge against three accused dynamiters. She was not on the train, but the crowd searched the quais, reassembled to sing the "International" and marched off down the street.

Another group of some 200 women had set out from their coron, the mine company row housing, for Billy the same day. Carrying black flags, they headed for the house of the mine company director, only to find their way barred by police. Some of them eventually spoke to the director's secretary. They accused the company of letting their husbands starve to death underground, for some of the dead brought to the surface had only recently died. They were calmed by assurances from the secretary, and returned to the street. There they met the women coming from the train station and the two groups marched together. As police and soldiers tried to hasten and contain the procession, "a great number of rocks were thrown at the soldiers... The two groups broke up and individuals ran through the streets of Billy-Montigny. They threw bricks at the house of M. Bard, the chief engineer of the mine, and broke several windows.

"Repulsed by the gendarmerie, the demonstrators finally dispersed."⁶

In August, 1911, housewives in the town of Ferrière-la-Grande, near Maubeuge, also in the Nord, demonstrated for lower prices on bread, meat, butter, and eggs. Women from a nearby town dumped a merchant's goods when he refused to lower his prices. A women's committee was formed, complete with presiding officer. In Maubeuge itself, on August 25, a crowd broke the windows of a merchant who sold butter. On Saturday, August 26, there

were no butter or eggs on the market but a small group of women marched into the market place in two columns. They all wore red insignia and as they marched they sang the "International of butter at 15 sous:"

Rise, each mother of a family
Arise, and let us unite
Let's march to fight the misery
That the farmers have brought down on the country
And if one day we are victorious
We'll show our dear husbands
That all women have fought
For the lives of their poor little ones.

Forward comrades,
Friends, all arise,
Without fear, without tumult
We want butter at fifteen sous!⁵

A wave of protest about food prices swept over the industrial northern departments, reaching Billy-Montigny on August 30. Then a crowd of women and men attacked the wagon of M. Wils, a baker who was also a municipal council member. He shot one of the demonstrators and crowd turned on him in fury. He hid in a house; the crowd smashed the windows, plundered the chicken coop and set a wagon on fire before they were dispersed by gendarmes.⁶

On June 2, 1907, in Nîmes, an ancient Roman city in southern France, there was a demonstration of 280,000 winegrowers. From all over the south they gathered, to march behind a tattered flag which, it was said, had flown in Nîmes in the revolution of 1848 and in the days of the Commune of 1871. The winegrowers demanded that government ease the way for the sale and consumption of their wine by reducing their taxes, reducing transportation charges, negotiating international commercial treaties and providing daily wine rations to French soldiers. The feminine presence was strong among the demonstrators: "peasant women from Arles in their traditional costume, young women from Portel in their tricolored scarves, those of Carcassone in white blouses with a crepe band, the saleswomen of Beziers in black, women of Marseillan in their work smocks, those of Saint-Thibery in black with tricolored cocades in their hair, those of Antignac with red berets..." The speakers at this and other of the massive demonstrations held weekly in the south recognized this in addressing their audience: "Men and women citizens..."⁷

It was October 29, 1904, the solemn convocation in the grand amphitheater of the Sorbonne to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Napoleon's promulgation of the Civil Code, M. Valle, garde des sceaux of France, had just completed his speech with the words, "we must expand the code." A woman sitting in the audience rose and shouted, "Down with the Napoleonic code! It dishonors the Republic! It oppresses women!" She was removed and taken to a nearby police station where she was identified as a demoiselle Kaufmann, member of the Feminist League. "Meanwhile," continues the report in Le Figaro, "on the street in front of the Sorbonne, several coaches pulled up, filled with women. 'Sandwich men' accompanied them, and distributed 'anti-hominist' handbills. They read, 'The Code oppresses women; we protest its glorification!' The police quickly dispersed the coaches and the sandwich men who were betraying the cause of men."

The news article goes on to say that "Along with these insignificant events lacking seriousness, there was a real meeting of serious character at the headquarters of the Learned Societies." It was organized by Marguerite Durand, a feminist journalist, publisher of La Fronde, France's most durable feminist newspaper.⁸

Collective action and Feminism.

The incidents described here involved thousands of French women in collective action ranging from rebellion to a public forum. What the incidents have in common are women acting collectively in their self-defined interests. Although they all involve women, these incidents of collective action range from those in which women's interests are incidental, when they are acting as members of households composed of persons of the two sexes, to those in which women's interests, as women, are intrinsic. We can place the incidents on a continuum in terms of the women's interests running from incidental to intrinsic. The defense of the commune, the mine wives' demonstration, the food protest and the winegrowers' demonstration cluster at the end of the continuum where women are acting as members of households or communities, in which their interests as women are incidental or subdued. The women tobacco workers' strike comes somewhere in the center of the continuum, for in this case the women act in their interest as workers, but

their association together in work leads them to be conscious of their interests as women, as well as as workers. Only in the case of the feminist demonstration were women acting as women on issues usually defined as women's issues.

The history of feminist organization and action in France is not one of excitement or easy success. French feminist groups, although they proliferated in the period of the Third Republic were never as prominent in the political struggles of the time as were the British and American; they never gathered a large following; they never grabbed headlines with dramatic confrontation tactics; they were only moderately successful in changing women's civil and political status in the period. Female suffrage was only granted in 1945, and other legal reforms came even later. My questions, however, only indirectly address the question of why feminism was so weak in France. I ask instead, around what interests did women in France organize, mobilize and act collectively? Where, when and how did the interests of mobilizing feminists intersect with those of other mobilized women?

The concept of collective action, as a struggle over control of resources among groups, is the theoretical framework within which these questions are examined. Collective action is defined as the extent of a group's application of pooled resources to common ends. Groups apply resources in their interests to other groups or to governments. Political power is the rate of return from the application of resources to governments. Violence occurs when governments or other groups resist the collective action of a mobilizing group, as well as when such a group deliberately chooses violent means.⁹ "The history of collective action clearly has four components: interest, opportunity, organization and action itself. All four vary from group to group, place to place, time to time, problem to problem."¹⁰

The events described above, in all their variety, illustrates that the history of French women and collective action is much more than the

efforts of feminists to bring women into formal politics. Feminist politics in France did not lead women to conflict and violence or to possibilities of influencing public policy in the period 1870 to 1914. Nevertheless, in order to place feminist collective action into the context of other women's activity, let us review who the feminists were, what were their interests, and what led them to act together at this time.

French feminists were nearly all women of means in the middle and upper classes. Unlike many main stream American feminists, the leaders of these women did not come to feminism through religious reform movements but by way of Free Thought and Masonry, such as Maria Deraismes, minority religious backgrounds, such as Protestants Sarah Monod and Mme. Jules Siegfried, and Jewish born Mme. Brunshvicg, or even foreign national origin, such as Jeane Schmal and Maria Martin, both English.¹¹ They were all women who could afford good educations, who sought control over their wealth and the use of their personal talents.

The programs they articulated were reform in the civil status of women (particularly through amendment of the Civil Code), political participation for women through the vote, and access to education and employment. Nevertheless, relatively few of these women had to work or worked. The exceptions were journalists, actresses and school teachers. Their movement emerged more or less contemporaneously with the organization of the working class and the growth of political parties, along with the typical forms of collective action of these groups, the strike and the demonstration.

The feminists shared with the labor movement a proactive thrust to their collective action by which they claimed new rights and sought a redistribution of power. This was in marked contrast to reactive protest, which was the violent resistance of local groups to encroachment on their rights and interests by larger systems, in particular the consolidating nation state and the widening national market.¹² The French feminist

movement more often adopted the forms of collective action typical of contemporary formal politics -- the demonstration, the parade, the political meeting, and occasionally, the symbolic act of disruption of a meeting. French feminists had an earlier tradition of feminist thought and action to refer to. Eighteenth-century feminists had acted in the context of formal politics, as for example, the women's rights petition to the national assembly during the French Revolution. The various feminist groups of the Third Republic, composed primarily of bourgeois women, acted in the political style of the bourgeois republic, in forms of collective action common to the French political system. Women, and men too of course, tried to influence national politics through petition and other political pressure on legislators and through litigation, to promote corrective legislation. Without much success. There is an explanation for this failure which analyzes politics at the center, and in particular the alliances and coalitions of interests in the French Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The interpretation offered here starts from the bottom up, examining the various forms of women's collective action and asking who were the participants, what were their interests, and how changes in economic and political structure from 1870 to 1914 were moving these women to act.

Economic and Political Context

When politics is understood in a broad sense, women can be seen as political actors trying to influence government authorities and those in positions of economic power in order to protect or promote their interests. The forms of collective action of French women were closely connected to the political system and with the economic and social structure of the time during which they acted. Large scale structural change was under way in the processes of industrialization, urbanization and political concentration. In order to establish this context, a brief sketch of economic and political developments follows, in which women's activities in economy and family are noted.

In industrialization, labor and resources shifted away from primary production (agriculture, fishing, forestry) toward manufacturing and commercial and service activities. The scale of production increased, and the factory eventually replaced the household as the locus of productive activity. In France, the process of industrialization was very gradual, and it affected different groups and geographic areas at different rates and times. Over the long run, the decline of small units of production meant a declining number of propertied peasants and artisanal craftsmen, and an increase in proletarian propertyless people working for wages, in city or country.

France had its modern industrial region in the north. The smokey red brick textile factories of Roubaix and Tourcoing physically resembled those of Lancashire; the coal mines of the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais resembled those of Yorkshire and South Wales. Yet figures of per capita consumption of industrial products show that although French industry was growing very rapidly between 1880 and 1900, it lagged far behind Britain in all indicators of industrial growth.

Selected Indicators of Industrial Activity

	1880		1900	
	France	United Kingdom	France	United Kingdom
kilos raw cotton consumption per inhabitant	2.6	17.1	4.5	18.1
kilos cast iron produced per inhabitant	46	220	65	220
kilos coal consumption per inhabitant	740	3740	1200	4070
motor force in 14 horsepower per 1000 inhabitants (excluding transport)	58		46	220 (1907)

Source: Paul Bairoch, "Niveaux de développement économique de 1810 à 1910," *Annales, E.S.C.*, 20e Année (November - December, 1965), 1102, 1104, 1107, 1108.

Even at the end of the nineteenth century, much French manufacturing took place in the households of peasants and craftsmen or in small scale work shops. France's laboring population lived scattered throughout the country in rural as well as urban areas, "so that the distinction between industrial and agricultural work is often artificial."¹³

In France, in sharp contrast to Britain, the small family-run peasant farm predominated. There were regional variations to be sure. In the north, and around the really large cities, larger farmers hired subsistence peasants and propertyless workers. But the tendency toward "an increase in the number of small owners whose assets consisted of no more than a house, a garden, and one or two fields..." continued in the period. At the height of this development, in the 1880's, there were 3.5 million farms in France.¹⁴ At mid-nineteenth century, Marx had described "the great mass of the French nation" as an agglomeration of autonomous units... A small holding, a peasant and his family; alongside them another small-holding, another peasant and family..."¹⁵ In 1959, a British historian could still write, "In the last resort, and at bottom, France is a Peasants' Republic."¹⁶ Unlike the British farmer, the French peasant continued to depend on the labor of his family, so wives and daughters living and working on small peasant farms were an important part of France's agricultural work force.

The persistence of agriculture in France accompanied a lower level of urbanization than in England. By 1891, 72.5% of the English population lived in places of over 2,000 inhabitants, 32% lived in cities of over 100,000. In France, on the other hand, the comparable figures were 37.4% and 12%. Over the course of the century, French urban population (in cities over 10,000) increased 2.7 times, which is almost the same rate as the English (2.9 times). Despite the rapid growth of cities, however, France had a much less urban population than England.¹⁷

Industrial growth had created new kinds of cities in France by the 1870's. The textile city of the Nord and mining city of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais are examples. These cities, although both products of in-

dustrialization, had very different labor force characteristics. In the textile city, there was heavy labor force participation by girls and women, including some married women. In the mining towns, most jobs were men's jobs. Girls did some auxiliary work around the mines, or were servants; women were seamstresses or store or cafe keepers, if they worked. The division of labor by sex in the coal miners' or metal workers' families are especially sharp. Men and boys worked in heavy, exhausting labor removed from the household. Women stayed in the home, responsible for housework and child bearing and rearing. Only limited female wage earning went on. Most French cities did not have the peculiar labor force characteristics of the textile city or the mining town. In other towns and city, public administration, commerce and small business producing directly for consumers were common. In these cities, women worked primarily in the garment industry, food production, domestic service and in the tobacco monopoly plants. There were also many urban women in informal, casual labor as carters, petty traders, street hawkers, laundresses. Women in the cities were more likely than those in peasant households to earn individual wages for their work. The decline of the household mode of production in the urban sector meant that even if they worked at home, women were no longer part of a family productive unit. Instead, they worked for an employer who paid them a wage. Married women in the working class worked intermittently, doing laundry, cleaning, and the like, for they had heavy home responsibilities also. Women's work had changed rather little: the majority of working women had jobs with low levels of skill and low productivity similar to those that had been women's work for centuries.

By the 1890's, however, the development of the tertiary sector was providing new types of jobs for women. As differentiation increased and the scale of organization of the economy grew, bureaucratic and administrative organization expanded. Clerks, typists and secretaries were needed in increasing number to staff company offices and to fill government positions.

Larger scale production was accompanied by larger scale distribution. The department store, with its army of sales clerks, was born in Paris. Compulsory primary education meant that teachers were needed, while government expansion of communication and social services demanded workers in these areas as well. Relatively high wages in heavy industry continued to draw male workers. The continuation of peasant agriculture reduced the supply of available workers in the urban sector. Confronted with a shortage of male workers, and a large demand for white collar workers, employers began to recruit women. As a result, the twentieth century saw a "migration" of women from industrial and domestic production into modern tertiary employment.¹⁸ In France, this process had only begun by 1914. It was to be slowed further by the war years, in which women took men's places in manufacturing. Therefore, the French economy, in the entire period with which this paper is concerned, was characterized by the continuing importance of peasant agriculture, small scale manufacture and commerce in cities, large scale, industrialized enclaves, and a growing tertiary sector.

The family, then, did not disappear as a productive unit in France in this period. The peasant family holding was the typical organization of agriculture. In the middle class, the family managed property and capital. The continuation of the custom of dowry gave women a stake in the economic resources of the family she and her husband formed on their marriage. In the middle classes as well as the peasantry, marriage was an economic alliance and family was an institution which protected and developed jointly held resources for the present and the future. Even among industrial workers where the family economy had disappeared and individual wage earning had taken over, however, there was a residual involvement of the family with production. This occurred through family decision making and family strategies about which persons would earn wages in order to accumulate needed cash for consumption needs. Surplus cash, once such needs were satisfied, had to be allocated to other uses. Again the family unit was the locus of strategy decisions. Production dictates the need for reproduction of the

labor force, and the mode of production shapes reproduction decisions. Nevertheless, in the processes of industrialization and proletarianization, the family played an active role in determining strategies about wage earning, spending, child bearing, child nurture. The family, then, continued to mediate between individuals and the large economic processes in which they found themselves. The continuing centrality of family as an associational reference for the French was not simply a matter of ideology. It was the family's continuing role as an economic productive unit for peasants and craftsmen, and its continuing role as economic resource for propertied and wage earning persons that makes the family so central to understanding French social relations and French women's collective action.¹⁹

Although the French economy was relatively decentralized and small scale, French politics were centralized. France had long been a centralized nation state, but 1870 marks a break in regime. The Second Empire of Louis Napoleon had begun to loosen up controls on organization and association in the late 1860's. The regime became somewhat more representative and consultative. In the Franco-Prussian war, a republic was proclaimed, but it was unable to save the day. France was crushingly defeated. Once the new regime surrendered, after a long siege of Paris, even the republic was in doubt, for the first elections brought in a very conservative majority in the legislature, including many who supported a restored monarchy. This was the situation which spurred Paris to declare itself an autonomous commune and later led to the attack on the city by the government, quartered in Versailles.

In the years following the Commune, a republic form of government was hammered out in practice. The Third Republic had no constitution; a set of legislative acts defined its structure. The system was based on universal manhood suffrage, which had first been proclaimed in 1848.

The years 1870 to 1914 saw a continuing centralization and concentration of political power. The central government expanded its social programs,

for example, providing compulsory and free primary education, and the inspection of work places to enforce safety standards and child labor prohibitions. Political parties had been slow to develop in France, but by the 1880's and 1890's, there were political groups which acted collectively on the national political level in elections, in legislative voting, and in cabinet ministries. One of the main areas of political agreement among republicans was anticlericalism and secularism. Labor, as a conscious and organized group, worked within various republican and socialist parties in formal politics and through strikes. The nineteenth century alteration of power which Charles Tilly spoke of this morning -- "a nationalization of politics, an increased role of special purpose associations, a decline in the importance of communities as the loci of shared interests, a growing importance of organized capital and organized labor as participants in power struggles" -- was rapidly being completed in the period 1870 to 1914.

In summary, in this period, the French economy was still decentralized and small scale; peasant agriculture dominated. The family and household continued in many cases to be a unit of production, and even when it was not the productive unit, it was the guardian and agent of any individual's economic resources. French politics was centralized and administration and decision making highly concentrated. These factors defined the structures in which people were located. Any individual's position in these structures shaped his or her interests.

How do women and their interests fit into the structures of power and how and when do their interests lead women to act collectively? Let us return now to the events of collective action described in the introduction, to examine participants, their interests, and the set of opportunities, and circumstances which led them to act.

Women's Interests and Collective Action

The Commune of Paris needs to be examined from the point of view of the ordinary participants as well as of the leaders. Alongside the record of the women who were active members of the First International, of the several women's organizations within Paris, of the women who spoke in the clubs of the quartiers which sprang up following earlier revolutionary custom, must be put the testimony of an authentic participant in the military defense of the Commune, Victorine B. Victorine was a boot sewer, her husband, Rouchy, a cobbler. (Her father, also an artisan and worker militant, was the son of a bourgeois family.) Relatively well educated, and well paid, the Rouchys were active in Paris units of the International in the late 1860's, and they had been among the organizers of a cooperative bakery.²⁰ Victorine's daily life, like that of many urban women of the popular classes, involved her in work outside the home. Victorine B. resented the "pitiful wages" and long hours of women workers, who were "forced to leave their elderly parents and children" in order to work. She pitied the plight of women who, out of necessity for wage work, were unable personally to care for their own children.²¹ She herself lost her two sons, although she was able to find and pay for medical attention for the children and although her mother aided her with child care. Victorine B. expresses here the craftsman's ideal so often repeated by Proudhon and others, of the wife in the home, even though her own life experience was quite different.

In contrast to the occasional feminism, or at least the vigorous individualism of the better known women militant leaders, such as Louise Michel, Victorine B.'s memoirs bring us up short. She had evidently been asked many times about Louise Michel and the women's groups, for she writes that she met Michel only once, during the Commune defense. Michel asked her to join a defense group. "I didn't know anything about the feminine movement," writes Victorine, "I never put my foot into a public meeting. It would be impossible for me (to join Michel) for I'd promised my friends never to abandon them..."²²

Jean Maitron has done an analysis of the social characteristics of 115 women whose dossiers are in the archives because they were tried and convicted by jugements contradictoires. Only two of the women, Louise Michel and Natalie Le Mell, were well-known militants. Demographically and occupationally, these women strongly resemble Victorine B. Most of the women (62%) were aged 30 to 50; 75% were married or widows. 83% of those for whom occupations were given were working class, and almost 50% of the workers were in the clothing trades.²³ The typical male communard was also a worker, but an "elite worker" according to Jacques Rougerie's analysis. Relatively few of them were true proletarians.²⁴ Yet, the small scale, craft-organized industries of Paris were increasingly being undermined. Craftsmen were on the defensive to preserve control over their own work.

The interests of women and men Communards were those of craftspeople in a changing productive system. Victorine B. explains the cause of the Commune as desire for political association and republican government as a means to guarantee that workers' voices would be heard: "By means of the republic, to arrive at an improvement in society by means of government action, not by means of the social republic (for only a minority of the Communards favored this.)"

"The Communards wanted a more equitable, more humane Republic. The Commune would concern itself with local affairs."²⁵

Victorine B. spoke for a reactive interest within the defenders of the Commune. She voices not at all the radical program which was debated in the clubs: the social republic, the criticism of the church, the defense of common law relationships and protection of illegitimate children's rights. As in most revolutions, there was a conversion in Communard collective action of a range of interests, which intersected temporarily. Victorine B. is less well-known than Louise Michel, but her interests and ideas may have been more typical.

In any case, the opportunity, and indeed the necessity to act joined them when the government attacked the Commune. Everyone was needed in the

defense of the city, although some fought in the interest of the republic, some for local urban autonomy, some for declining craft positions, and some in hopes of far reaching social change. The women of the popular classes had long been integrated into a world of work outside the home, no matter how oppressive such work often was. They were little affected by the civil code's definition of their status. Many had worked in the interests of their families, and many fought so, alongside family and companions of quartier and work. Class, local and family interest intersected in the collective action of these women in defense of the Commune of Paris.²⁶

The tobacco workers of Marseille were very different from the Parisian garment workers and craftsmen, although they too were workers. The factories of the tobacco monopoly employed thousands of people in one institution. Women who worked in these factories were spatially far removed from their households for hours each day. Although women tobacco workers were primarily unmarried, as were most women workers, there were proportionately more married women than in many occupations, for the job was relatively secure and skilled. Women apprenticed and trained for several years. The daughters of workers sought to enter the profession, for although working conditions were not good (one striker in 1887 wrote that they made her "envious of a galley prisoner"), they were superior of those of many jobs.²⁷ Apprenticeship, parent and child links to the same occupation, lifetime commitments to the occupation of all suggest the opportunity for the development of solidarity and association among women tobacco workers similar to that of male craftsmen. In fact, the tobacco workers had mutual aid or friendly associations before they formed unions, just as did many artisanal groups. The Marseilles union, founded after the 1887 strike was the first local; by 1891, 40% of tobacco workers were in unions. One consequence was a relatively high (for women workers) propensity to strike. Perrot writes, "Although they accounted for .5% of the female labor force [in the period 1871 to 1890] they [tobacco workers] supplied 16% of female strikers."²⁸

The tobacco workers organized in their interests as workers, to improve conditions of work and claim benefits (such as maternity leave) for themselves. Interestingly enough, not even these women protested the unequal pay for women workers.²⁹ The large scale of their industry, which grouped many women together, the skill and security of their jobs, and probably the segregation of women in certain jobs and units promoted association. The tobacco workers developed organization in female or predominantly female groups. There was one of the few unions in which women were a substantial proportion of the leadership. (There were 13 women out of 21 delegates to the trade union congress in 1891; this proportion declined thereafter, but it was high again after 1910, with 24 female delegates out of 49 in 1913. The tobacco and garment workers unions had higher proportionate women's unionization and female leadership than did textiles). This level of female association with other women in work and organization contributed also to the strong individualism seen in some tobacco workers' public statements. Marie Jay, of the Marseilles union, spoke thus at the union congress of 1892: "No matter what her physical characteristics, a woman must not be considered a slave or a servant; she must achieve her independence by her own work."³⁰ Jay, and other working women, did not take the legal provisions of the civil code, which assigned a woman's wages to her husband, into account here. In every day life in the popular classes, a woman's wage was most likely not spent for her personal needs. Rather, her earnings went into a family wage pot to be allocated for family needs. The proletarian wife, who spent most of the family's earnings on necessities, was little concerned about her husband's claim on her wages.

Collective action by women tobacco workers was both more common and more effective than that of other women workers. The interest they were defending, and the rights they were claiming were those of skilled wage earners who were, incidentally, women. The form of their association, the union, and the form of their collective action, the strike, were those developed in contemporary industrial struggles.

The coal miner's wives protest was also class-based, but their class collective action was mediated by the paternalistic environment in which mine families lived and worked. The mine wife was exceptional among workers' wives in her active participation in work-connected struggles. More often than not, she had herself worked at the mine when a girl, as a carrier or sorter of coal: she knew the work of the mine. As a wife, she had to deal with the company as a landlord and as the owner of the store, distributor of health services and even sometimes schooling. Michelle Perrot notes that the mine strike was an "affair of the tribe: committed, the women demonstrated unequalled tenacity, seeking contributions for aid, collectively organizing the slim resources of strikers, boosting the flagging morale of the men, involving themselves with the policing of the strike. At the time the shift of workers changed, they stood across the roads, blocked access to the pits..."³¹

The women demonstrating at the train station of Billy-Montigny were collectively seeking to discipline the woman who, they believed had betrayed the striking workers. Yet the second women's demonstration illustrates another aspect of mine wives' lives: the extreme division of labor in the household, and the dependence of the wife on her husband as a wage earner. Her own responsibility for the house and children, was time-consuming, but the death of her wage earner was a severe blow to the mine wife, living in a community where it was likely to be difficult for a woman to support herself. These two interests, then, the solidarity among workers, and the dependence of the mine wife and family on male wage earning, are present in the demonstrations in the streets of Billy-Montigny in March, 1906. Although there are elements of defensive or reactive collective action in the demonstration of the wives who protested the slowness of mine rescue operations, the other demonstration was proactive in its effort to police class solidarity. The form chosen for both actions was a familiar one in turn of the century France, the demonstration procession. This time the women marched behind flags draped in black, recalling the disaster which provided the occasion for the strike.³²

Food protest by the women of Maubeuge and its region is another variation of working class women's collective action. It shares with the mine wives' demonstration its origin among women who lived in households with a strict division of labor. The food price demonstrations began in a metal working area in which the labor market situation and familial role of wives was similar to that of the mines. The labor force was primarily male in these towns; their work was heavy and exhausting. Such workers left house work and child rearing to their wives, who were expected, in turn, to use male wages to purchase a comfortable standard of consumption. The contemporary motto, "the miner in his home" ("le mineur chez soi") summed up the notion of the home as a haven from work, a haven into which the mine wife's energy and time was to be invested. In such a household division of labor, the wife's role as wise consumer was salient.

It was just such women, acting as consumers, who launched the food protest in 1911. This consumer interest recalls the role of women in grain and food riots in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Women had a special concern with the consumption needs of their family. It was they who had to make scarce cash stretch to buy food when prices rose. Yet there were important differences between the protest of 1911, and that of, say, 1789. Old regime food protest consciously referred to the system of paternalist economic market regulation by local or royal government. The crowd in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century claimed to be defending the traditional right or custom of local consumers to the product of their community. Informed by these beliefs, men and women food rioters invoked an earlier justice of consumer protection and tried to block grain shipments or set prices on bread.³³

The 1911 food protest broke out first in industrial areas, not in areas whose products were being shipped out, driving up prices. (From the metal and mining areas of the Nord, the protest spread to the textile industrial area; from there it moved to non-industrial, specialized farm areas, such as Burgundy, and finally to areas in the west where there were arsenals and navy yards, in which urban and familial division of labor were again similar to mines and metal working.) Demonstrations were only tardily launched in cities such as Paris where women worked in consumer industry and services. They occurred

primarily in industrial areas around which little food produced and in which consumption was highly differentiated from production.³⁴

The object of price fixing was less often bread and grain, basic diet items, and more often butter, meat, eggs. The form of protest was also quite different from the old food riot. The protesters often resembled strikers more than food rioters, strikers who tried to bargain with the producers and merchants in the marketplace. Once a price was agreed upon, they sought to police the agreement, just as coal miner's wives policed the strike. Those who resisted their demands, those who tried to elude the set price were attacked. The correspondent of Le Figaro who filed a report from Maubeuge employed the strike analogy when he wrote that the protest was "more than a strike but not quite a crusade".³⁵ Michelle Perrot writes, "For doubtless the first time, the strike became, in a massive way, a form of protest against high prices."³⁶

Labor unions quickly moved to catch up with the protest and perhaps lead it. Some of the later incidents, such as those at Creil, near Paris, Charleville, and Nezières in the Meuse valley, followed the efforts by C.G.T. speakers to spread the word about resistance to high prices. In Paris, formal demonstrations were organized by the Union des Syndicats de la Seine.³⁷

Even before the unions moved to take the lead, however, still other aspects of the collective action clearly distinguished it from old regime food riots. The demonstration of women in the Maubeuge market wearing red insignia and singing their International of Butter borrowed a new form of protest, the demonstration. The committee set up after the first day's incident was likewise more formal and more bureaucratic than anything in the old regime food riots. There rioters shared a sense of justice and of communal rights but no formal organization. Part of the difference was due to the influx of men into the demonstrations, men who "marched with red flags, sang the International, and held meetings" but the Maubeuge incident shows that some women at least also called upon the demonstration as their model of collective action.³⁸

It was the consumer interest of working class wives which led them to protest in 1911; the high prices and shortages of that year gave them the occasion for expressing their interest in forms of collective action, the strike and the demonstration, which were available in the repertoire of contemporary political struggle.

The wine growers who rose to protest conditions of the Languedocian wine industry in 1907 were men and women who owned small holdings and did skilled labor in the vineyards of larger landowners. Harvey Smith has shown that in many ways the winegrowers were cultivators with artisanal characteristics -- skill, spirit of independence and corporate identity. Competition from larger, more efficient vineyards increasingly put the smallholder/skilled worker under economic pressure. The small holders allied themselves with propertyless laborers in 1907, thus producing a huge audience for protest meetings and thousands of marching demonstrators. According to Smith, 1907 was the culmination of about ten years protest, "the result of efforts taken by the body of skilled agricultural workmen in the village to defend their position from further deterioration, while attempting simultaneously to prepare a reorganization for the village community along the lines that would ensure the security of their children in the future."³⁹ The wives and daughters of the smallholder winegrower took an active role in cultivation. Their work and their future was closely tied to the success or failure of the family holding. Like the women of the crafts families of Paris who fought in the Commune, the household organization of work and the communal links among working households brought them to collective action. Many of the wage laborers who were involved in 1907 demonstrations acted because of their own poor harvests. A speaker at the agricultural workers' congress that year noted, "we are all both workers and small holders."⁴⁰ Proletarianization of small holders like proletarianization of artisans mobilized all members of the household for protest.

Despite the reactive aspect of the wine growers' collective action, the form of the action is parallel to proactive protest such as that of organized

labor or political parties. The gigantic demonstration, with its sea of people, its banners, its placards had little in common with rural protest of the past. At times, speakers addressed the assembled throng, and units organized by communes marched past. They had come in by special train; at the end of the day they dispersed to their villages to plan their appearance at the next, and largest demonstration, Montpellier, on June 9, 1907. Their demonstrations and petitions were directed at the Parliament and the premier, Clemenceau. They acted in the context of politics at the center.

French Women's Interests and Feminism

This tour de France of women's collective action has shown how women participated when their interests were involved and when opportunity or need to defend old rights or make new claims for these interests occurred. Frenchwomen's collective action was linked to their class position, to their role in the productive process, to their consumer role in the household division of labor, and finally to their involvement in community or formal associations.

We return to the Parisian feminists to ask again when and how other women's interest intersected with the feminist program. Women in peasant and artisan households earned influence in the household through their contribution to the common economic enterprise. They played their part in the household division of labor. Formal political involvement of the household unit was by way of its head. To the feminists, this was an abomination; to the peasant wife, this reflected her husband's public, political responsibility for the household unit as an agricultural production unit, as a taxpaying unit, as a contributor of young men to military conscription. Each person in the household contributed to family goals by doing his or her work. This is illustrated by the enormous effort on the part of all household members that went into saving the cash that would rent or buy an extra field, or buy a substitute for military service for the son of the family, needed on the farm.⁴¹ Peasant and artisan women, working members of a household productive unit, acted in the interest of the unit rather than of themselves as individuals with autonomous needs.

Wives in the industrial households, where wage earning was the male's

activity, also had little chance to develop concepts of themselves with individual needs. These women shared in a household where activities were highly differentiated, but both husband's and wife's activities were crucial, and mutually respected. Control over property was simply not an issue in these households, nor was control over the intermittent wages a wife might earn. If such a woman did wage work, it was likely to be because of an exceptional need; her wage then went for necessities. At other times, she was needed in the management of the household, child bearing and child rearing, and saving through sacrifice of her own time.

Women who were themselves skilled workers, and who maintained wage work commitments over their life times, like the tobacco workers, or primary school teachers, in practice usually chose to work within the labor unions rather than reach across class lines to feminist women of another class. However, these women workers were the only group of women among those examined here whose position and interest offered something of a choice of strategies for collective action. Continuing verbal opposition of some male skilled workers, such as printers, to women as competitors, continuing ideological commitment of male industrial workers to the concept of strict household division of labor, gave some organized women workers pause. These were the women with a lifelong career, not the young, unmarried women who were working at one stage of their lives, who would later marry and do wage work only intermittently.

A teacher militant wrote in 1913, "The class struggle will be effectively carried on only if there is absolute agreement between men and women marching to the attack against the privilege of their bosses; this will come about when both receive the same education, when they have the same rights, when they treat each other as comrades, friends, and equals."⁴² Hélène Brion, also a teacher, went much further; she wrote that "Women are still more exploited by males than they are as producers exploited by capital."⁴³ Brion argued that class based organizations, such as unions, protected women not at all in their everyday family relationships. Any feminist-worker alliance was sure to be uncertain because of the areas in which interests did not

coincide. Marguerite Durand of La Fronde provided women workers for a printing firm whose male workers were on strike, thus opening herself to accusations of dividing the working class. In 1907, she presided, as government appointed, head of the Office of Women Workers, over a congress on women's work. Women unionists who attended were offended by the condescension of the invitation they had received and of the feminist speakers. One Mme. Roques, a unionist, noted, ironically, "Comrades, mesdames, we have the good luck of having the bourgeois women come ask us what we think." She ended up accusing the feminists of being "handmaidens of Capital."⁴⁴ Similarly, some women teachers opposed tentative alliance of one of their groups with a feminist organization, the National Council of French Women, in support of suffrage. Marie Vidal of Marseilles condemned the council as bourgeois, backed by Rothschilds, welcoming teachers only because they could "be valuable when it comes to leading the people into paths favorable to the interests of capitalism."⁴⁵ The syndicalist school teachers moved away from the feminists in mutual recriminations over feminist intervention in a union disagreement, again over female printers. The story of feminist-union interaction is much more complicated and nuanced than this brief sketch suggests. In some areas, women workers definitely benefited from feminist support and intervention. Overall, however, most working women, although they could benefit from some parts of the feminist program, were reluctant to join forces with this cross class interest group. To the extent that they were integrated into the productive process, and skilled workers with career commitments were strongly so, most women chose to work within class-based organizations to define and expand their interests and rights as workers.

The Bourgeoisie and Feminism

Under most circumstances then, there was relatively little intersection between the interests of most groups of French women ready to defend their interests and the middle class feminists. But what of the bourgeoisie; why were French feminists apparently less successful in garnering support even from women of means than were the American and the British? (No one has attempted a quantitative estimate of the proportionate numerical importance of feminist

supporters in three countries. The French were less successful politically than the other women, but that was at least partially a matter of non-feminist French politics, and not a function of the amount of support for feminism among women. It is generally assumed, on impressionistic grounds, that French feminists were fewer in number, proportionately, than were American and British.)

Here we must examine the differences between the middle class in France and in England and in the United States. In all these countries in the nineteenth century, there was increased differentiation between the public world of work and the private world of the household, most marked in the upper classes. There was less involvement of middle class women in the world of production. At the same time more of these women were educated and had the leisure to read and talk about politics. They had occasion to develop networks of friendship and companionship in causes such as charity or moral reform movements. Women in earlier periods, due to their greater involvement in small scale units of production, were more isolated from other women, and did not act collectively in these ways. The networks middle class women developed were voluntary; they were not built on mutual needs for assistance, as were networks among peasant or urban working class women, whose networks were more often built on family connections.⁴⁶

Many middle class women, furthermore, had rather weak class links, little consciousness of class interest, compared to women of the working class and peasantry, for they were not personally involved in production or relations of domination and submission outside their families. It was middle class women such as these who transformed a feminist ideology, based on universalistic concepts of equality of the sexes, into a concrete program in the national political arena.

Although many French bourgeois women shared these characteristics with American and British middle class women, others offered a distinct contrast on two counts. First, Frenchwomen's education and participation in charity and moral reform movements were likely to be under the auspices of the Catholic Church. Although both education and church-linked reformist activism can be traced in the background of British and American feminists, Catholic education and activism did not contribute to later participation in feminist action. There was a French Catholic or Christian feminist newspaper, Féminisme chrétien, which editorialized in favor of women's education and of women's helping other wom

The newspaper's position, however, envisioned both education and charity rising out of women's family roles; it proposed no individual choice or autonomy, no universal claim of sex equality. Neither peasants nor workers practiced Catholicism as fervently as did the bourgeoisie, and Catholicism offered an alternative universal ideology to feminism for the bourgeois woman.

Second, many women of the French bourgeoisie maintained connections to production through their independent ownership of property and their share in family business. Here the dowry was the crucial institution, although the importance of family-owned business also played a role. Every bourgeois daughter and wife had a stake in family property. A bourgeois woman brought wealth to the family she joined by marriage. This wealth continued to be a concern of her family of origin. While the civil code may not have offered her protection within her marriage, her family of origin did. Individual choice and autonomy were not part of this marriage system, but a large share of influence and say over property and children -- over the future and the economic well-being of those aspects of the family -- came to a bourgeois woman with marriage. A marriage that worked was an economic agreement according to the social rules of the class. To many bourgeois wives, that was the interest that they wished to guard and protect. Protecting it involved careful management of investment and resources, including having few children and raising them in a family-oriented way. Individualism would tear the fundamental unit of the family apart; with her economic stake in it, the bourgeois wife had no interest in doing any such thing. Even the interest of many bourgeois women was not incongruent with the feminist program.

No wonder Louise Weiss, the French feminist leader of the interwar years exclaimed in despair, "Peasant women kept their mouths tightly closed when I spoke to them about the vote. Working women laughed, shopkeepers shrugged their shoulders, and the bourgeois pushed away horrified."⁴⁷

This historical overview of French women and collective action from 1870 to 1914 has shown that women were participants in group politics, whether or not they had formal political rights. Occasions for collective action were shaped by interest and organizational bases rooted in the economic and social structure in which they lived. Political relationships and contemporary repertoires determined the forms of collective action. The long and short run political situation provided, or denied, opportunities for action. Louise Weiss was correct that suffrage interested few French women, but the vote is only one of the ways in which people act collectively on their interests, as French women most assuredly did.

FOOTNOTES

1. Victorine B., Souvenirs d'une morte vivante, (Paris, 1976), 177 - 178.
2. France, Direction du Travail, Associations professionnelles ouvrières, I, (1889), 604.
3. Michelle Perrot, Les ouvriers en grève. France, 1871 - 1890, (Paris, the Hague, 1974), 329 - 330.
4. Le temps, April 11, 1906.
5. Le Figaro, August 27, 1911, quoted in Paul R. Hanson, "The 'vie chère' Protests in France, 1911," unpublished paper, University of California history seminar, 1976, and Jean-Marie Flonneau, "Crise de vie chère et mouvement syndical, 1910 - 1914," Le mouvement social, 72 (July - September, 1970), 60 - 61.
6. Le temps, August 31, 1911, quoted in Hanson, op. cit.
7. Felix Napo, 1907. La revolte des vigneronns, (Toulouse, 1971), 65, 70, 48.
8. Le Figaro, October 30, 1914. See also Maïte Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours (Paris, 1977), 380 for another version of the demonstration of October 29, 1904.
9. Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution, (forthcoming, Addison Wesley), 1978.
10. Charles Tilly, "Getting it Together in Burgundy, 1675 - 1975," Theory and Society, 4 (1977), 484.
11. Karen M. Offen, "The Woman Question as a Social Issue in Republican France before 1914," unpublished paper, 1974, 57.
12. See Charles Tilly, Louise A. Tilly, and Richard Tilly, The Rebellious Century, (Cambridge, Mass., 1975) for discussion of this classification.
13. Claude Fohlen, "The Industrial Revolution in France, 1700 - 1914," in The Emergence of Industrial Societies, edited by Carlo Cipolla (London, 1973), 26.
14. Roger Thabault, Education and Change in a Village Community, Mazière-en-Gâtine, 1848 - 1914 (New York, 1971), 21; Gordon Wright, Rural Revolution in France (Stanford, 1964), 6.
15. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte," in On Revolution, edited by Saul K. Padover, (New York, 1971), 320 -321.
16. Alfred Cobban cited in Wright, op. cit., 1.
17. Adna Ferrin Weber, The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century, (Ithaca, New York, 1967), 144.
18. See Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, Women, Work and Family (forthcoming, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), Part III, and Michelle Perrot, "L'éloge de la ménagère dans le discours des ouvriers français au XIXe siècle," Mythes et représentations de la femme au dix-neuvième siècle, numero special de Romantisme, Paris, 1976, 118 - 119.
19. This argument is documented and illustrated in Louise A. Tilly, "The Family Wage Economy of a French Textile City, Roubaix, 1872 - 1906," paper presented at the Social Science History Association meeting, October, 1977.
20. See Edith Thomas, Les Petroleuses, (Paris, 1963), for description of the militants, the clubs and the debates. Victorine B., passim.
21. Ibid., 61, 66.
22. Ibid., 190.
23. Jean Maitron, "Etude critique du Rapport Appert. Essai de 'contre rapport,'" Le Mouvement social, 79 (April - June, 1972), 104 - 105.
24. Jacques Rougerie, "Composition d'une population insurgée. L'exemple de la Commune," Le mouvement social, 48 (July - September, 1964), 47.
25. Victorine B., 160 - 161.
26. See Rosario Perez, "Women in the Commune: The Persistence of Tradition and its Adaptation to Modern Conditions," unpublished paper, Yale University, 1974.
27. Bulletin de l'Office du Travail, January 1907, 401, quoted in Perrot, 329, and Cri du Peuple, January, 15, 1887, quoted in ibid., 330. See also Madeleine Guilbert, Les femmes et l'organisation syndicale avant 1914, (Paris, 1966) 93 - 99.

28. Perrot, 329.
29. Madeleine Colin, Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui. Femmes, syndicats, luttes de classe, (Paris, 1975), 46.
30. Ibid., p. 42.
31. Perrot, 505, gives other examples of women policing strikes in ways that resemble an older form of collective action, the charivari. They banged on pots outside the door of scabs living in the coron, pulled down the pants and spanked a miner who was working during a strike. For another discussion of food riot, strike and crowd mentality, see William M. Reddy, "The Textile Trade and the Language of the Crowd at Rouen 1752 - 1871, Past and Present, 74 (1977), 62 - 89.
32. For the mine household division of labor, see E. Vuillemin, Enquête sur les habitations, les écoles et le degré d'instruction de la population ouvrière des mines de houille des bassins du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, (n.p., 1872, 31); Raymond Delcourt, De la condition des ouvriers dans les mines du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, (Paris, 1906), 204 - 220; Georges Michel, avec la collaboration de Alfred Renouard, Histoire d'un Centre ouvrier (les concessions d'Anzin), (Paris, 1891), 258 ff; John Condevaux, Le Mineur du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais, Sa Psychologie, ses rapports avec le patronat (Lille, 1928), 8 - 16, 50 - 51. For metal workers, Serge Bonnet, avec la collaboration d'Etienne Kagan et Michel Maigret, L'homme du Fer, I (Nancy, 1976), 150 - 152; II (Nancy, 1977), 77 - 78, 164 - 165.
33. See E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Nineteenth Century," Past and Present, 50 (February, 1971), 76 - 136; Louise A. Tilly, "The History of the Grain Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 2 (Summer, 1971), 23 - 57; Charles Tilly, "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe," in Charles Tilly, ed., The Formation of National States in Western Europe, Princeton, 1975; and Louise A. Tilly, "Women and Collective Action in Europe," in Dorothy McGuigan, ed., The Role of Women in Conflict and Peace, (Ann Arbor, 1977), 31 - 44.

34. For the geography of the movement see Hanson, 10 - 20, Flonneau, 60 - 62, Perrot, 130 - 132.
35. Le Figaro, August 27, 1911, quoted in Hanson.
36. Perrot, 131.
37. Hanson, 18 - 29; Flonneau, 61.
38. Flonneau, 61, believes the influx of men was influential in changing the form of protest.
39. J. Harvey Smith, Village Revolution: Agricultural Workers of Cruzy (Hérault), University of Wisconsin Ph.D. dissertation, 1972, 227.
40. Ibid., 269.
41. See Emile Guillaumin, The Life of a Simple Man (translation of La vie d'un SIMPLE) translated by Margaret Holden (London, 1919) for a description of a peasant family's efforts to buy exemption from military service for its son.
42. Quoted in Arbistur and Armogathe, 362. See also Guillot, Brion and other women teachers in the syndicalist movement in Persis Charles Hunt, Revolutionary Syndicalism and Feminism among Teachers in France, 1900 - 1921, Ph.D. dissertation, Tufts University, 1975.
43. Quoted in Arbistur and Armogathe, 363.
44. Colin, 57.
45. Hunt, p. 83.
46. This interpretation is derived from Alice Rossi "Social Roots of the Women's Movement in America," in ibid., ed., The Feminist Papers From Adams to de Beauvoir, (New York, 1973), 241 - 281. On middle class female networks, see Nancy Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood, Women's Sphere in New England, 1780 - 1835, (New Haven, 1977) and Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," Signs, I (1975), 1 - 29. On working class female networks see Michael Anderson, Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire, (Cambridge, 1971) and Michael Young and Peter Wilmott, Family and Kinship in East London (London, 1957). On French bourgeois women sharing educational experience and charity work, see Bonnie G. S. Smith, The Women of the Lille Bourgeoisie, 1850 - 1914, Ph.D. dissertation, 1975.

47. Albistur and Armogathe, 383.

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