

# THE ANARCHIST-FEMINIST RESPONSE TO THE “WOMAN QUESTION” IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

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IN THE POPULAR PRESS, THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN LATE NINETEENTH-century America was often regarded not as a set of coherent beliefs and demands but as the rather nebulous and disconcerting “Woman Question.” The very phrase evokes a sense of uncertainty, an inability to describe precisely the nature or motives animating the demands for sexual equality. The “woman question” was indeed both vexing and puzzling, not only for contemporaries but also for scholars attempting to cope with the complex phenomenon of nineteenth century feminism—a phenomenon which cannot be subsumed, as it was so conveniently after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, in the demand for woman suffrage.

In an effort to explore the whole range of concerns embodied in the “woman question,” historians in the last decade have been examining the political perspectives and the attitudes of those women whose concerns differed markedly from the legal and political interests which by the early 1880s had come to characterize the organized women’s rights movement. Among those “other” women were the anarchist-feminists, who launched a stinging attack on prevailing cultural mores and social norms—an attack which rested on an ideology significantly at variance from the precepts that had come to dominate mainstream feminism. Interestingly, very little scholarly attention has been focused on anarchist women, with the exception of Emma Goldman, who was not fully representative of them.

Despite their differences, some common theoretical territory united all feminists in nineteenth-century America. They believed that American society had institutionalized certain inequities for women, inequities which required remedy. As Kathryn Kish Sklar noted in her biography of Catharine Beecher, feminists agreed that women had a right to participate

in and to influence society. Beyond that agreement, however, lay a dilemma which was articulated as early as the 1830s and which continues to plague feminists: should women exercise their power by emphasizing their differences from men, or their common humanity? Increasingly in the nineteenth century, the organized feminist movement resolved the dilemma by arguing that, while women had a right to equal access to the political, legal, and educational institutions, they also, by reason of their maternal and reproductive roles, differed from men intellectually, psychologically, and physically.<sup>1</sup>

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, mainstream feminism, in which I include the suffrage organizations, the women's clubs, and reform groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, had chosen to exploit the idea of inherent differences between women and men as a justification for granting women civic and legal equality. Many feminists adopted the Social Purity crusade which swept the nation in the mid-70s, contending that if women were allowed to express their superior moral sense at the ballot-box, they would be able to alleviate social evils like drunkenness and prostitution. In other words, reform-minded feminists argued, women would extend their nurturing role from the domestic circle to the larger society. The capitulation to what William O'Neill has referred to as the Maternal Mystique reflected a growing desire on the part of feminists to win the support of the larger society by suggesting that feminism did not, after all, threaten cultural foundations. Accordingly, mainstream feminist leaders (with the exception of the aging Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the younger Charlotte Perkins Gilman) muted the earlier criticisms of sexual and familial relationships and concentrated on legal and political issues. Whether they shifted their emphasis because of ideological considerations or as a tactical move does not concern us here; in the eyes of its own rank-and-file and the larger society the movement as a whole became less radical, less threatening, and hence less likely to result in fundamental changes.<sup>2</sup>

The anarchist-feminists refused to accept this solution. Rejecting outright any notion of significant inherent intellectual or psychological differences between the sexes, they continued to insist on equality based on

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973), 137; Robin Miller Jacoby, "Feminism and Class Consciousness in the British and American Trade Union Leagues, 1890-1925," in Bernice Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), 137-38.

<sup>2</sup> William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), 5-7, 31-38; Aileen Krador, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), 56-74.

a shared humanity. This approach had the strength of continuing to confront the vexing questions of domestic and economic equality; however, those were questions which an increasingly family-centered society was unwilling or unable to answer.

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Anarchism in late nineteenth-century America was a complex philosophical and political movement which does not lend itself to succinct definition. It is necessary therefore to confine the discussion of anarchist theory to those aspects which relate directly to the development of anarchist-feminism. In terms of its social and political implications, which were the major concern of the anarchist-feminists, the most important precept of American anarchism was the belief that not only government but all forms of coercive external authority must be abolished to implement the ideal of personal liberty. To paraphrase the often-quoted anarchist poet John MacKay, anarchists wished neither to rule nor to be ruled. Two distinct anarchist philosophies competed for followers in the United States—the individualist and the communist. For both groups, individual freedom, limited only by the proscription against interference with the liberty of others, was of primary importance; the principal point of controversy involved the means of attaining that goal. At its simplest level, the individualist argument contended that while government as well as all other forms of nonvoluntary authority must be abolished, some form of private property system was essential to individual liberty. The communist-anarchists, on the other hand, in part reflecting the Marxist influence which had significantly affected European anarchism, insisted on the elimination of private property as well, with the substitution of small, noncoercive, cooperative communities as a foundation for a new society.<sup>3</sup>

Together, the two factions of American anarchism may have claimed some 50,000 adherents at the peak of their strength in 1884 through 1886, before the Haymarket riot, although since anarchists tended to eschew formal organization exact numbers are unobtainable. While anarchism never reached the status of a mass movement, it was highly visible, partly as a result of its urban orientation. Chicago was the headquarters of communist-anarchism until the early twentieth century; the individualists looked to Boston for leadership. Philadelphia and New

<sup>3</sup> James J. Martin, *Men Against the State* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles, 1970); Eunice Minette Schuster, *Native American Anarchists: Smith College Studies in History*, 17 (Oct. 1931–July 1932); Terry M. Perlin, "Anarchist-Communism in America, 1890–1914," (Diss. Brandeis Univ. 1970). MacKay's poem can be found in Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1969), 47.

York both contained active and vocal movements, and smaller cities such as Denver served as regional centers. Anarchists occasionally established rural communes, but these were exceptions to the general rule.<sup>4</sup>

Headquartered in urban centers and creating a powerful media impact, anarchism appeared to be a much more ominous force than it actually was. The anarchists, including the anarchist-feminists, also were convinced that theirs was an ultimately irresistible movement. Anarchist-feminists felt a responsibility to articulate and to practice a set of principles consonant both with anarchist theory and with their view of equality. Anarchist-feminism, therefore, developed directly from the cornerstone of anarchist philosophy—the primacy of complete individual liberty. This individualistic premise led directly to the contention that the most important source of woman's inequality was her dependence on men, particularly within the family structure. If they had stopped at that point, the anarchist-feminists would have sounded very similar to the women at Seneca Falls; but the anarchists contended that within the existing institutional framework equality was impossible. If women truly intended to achieve equality, the first step must be a declaration of independence from men and from male-dominated institutions, beginning with marriage. This emphasis on "free love" was not unique to the feminists within the anarchist movement. However, while nonfeminist anarchists hoped for the replacement of state-controlled marriage by consensual "free unions," they intended no substantial changes in the way households were organized. Anarchist-feminists, on the other hand, wanted very much to tamper with household organization; they universally believed that women should always be self-supporting. Many individualists argued that only when women began to maintain "independent" homes, apart from their male companions, would complete liberation become possible.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> George Woodcock, *Anarchism* (Cleveland: World, 1962), 462 estimates the numbers of anarchists living in Chicago at about 30,000. Several contemporary essays attempted to assess the class, ethnic, and geographical patterns of anarchism; see especially R. Warren Conant, "Anarchism at Close Quarters," *Arena*, 28 (Oct. 1902), 338–45; R. Heber Newton, "Political, Economic, and Religious Causes of Anarchism," *Arena*, 27 (Feb. 1902), 113–15; Washington Gladden, "The Philosophy of Anarchism," *Outlook*, 69 (Oct. 1901), 449–54.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Gordon, "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States," in Mary Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 67; Herbert Osgood, "Scientific Anarchism," *Political Science Quarterly*, 4 (Mar. 1889), 21; *Liberty*, 4 (Sept. 15, 1888), 6–7; Voltairine de Cleyre, "Those Who Marry Do Ill," *Mother Earth*, 2 (Jan. 1908), 500–11. The *absolute* rejection of marriage distinguished anarchist-feminists from the critics of the *existing* marriage system, as analyzed by Sondra P. Herman, "Loving Courtship or the Marriage Market: The Ideal and Its Critics, 1871–1911," *American Quarterly*, 25 (May 1973), 235–52.

Like mainstream feminists, anarchist-feminists decried the sexual double standard. While the former dealt with the prevailing sexual norms by attempting to “raise” the moral standards of men, the latter demanded equality of sexual freedom. Many argued in favor of “varietism”—that is, nonexclusive sexual relationships—on the grounds that exclusivity implied that lovers held property rights over one another. The twin issues of independent homes and sexual varietism surely posed important questions regarding childrearing. This is one area in which attitudes seemed sharply divided. One viewpoint held that, whether or not parents lived together, each parent was equally responsible for the welfare of the children, arguing that if women held the sole responsibility they were unfairly burdened, creating a condition of inequality. Others offered the view that children should reside with the mother, who would therefore be their primary caretaker. On the face of it this seems to demonstrate that the maternal mystique, which so severely hampered the mainstream feminist movement, also affected the ideas of the anarchist-feminists. However, although there were some elements of that attitude, for the most part anarchist-feminists were convinced that once anarchism had come to prevail children would not be cared for primarily by parents themselves, but by adults who chose child-care as their careers.<sup>6</sup>

The question of childrearing in anarchist-feminist ideology remains a difficult one for the historian, because evidence concerning actual parent-child relationships is so meager. The theories by themselves seem vague and contradictory. In the pages of *Liberty*, the principal organ of the individualists, one group argued that in anarchist theory neither parent was obligated to care for the children. While such a theoretical position does demonstrate that the freedom of the adult was clearly more important than the welfare of the child, those same writers also argued that parents would instinctively care for their children out of love. The whole question of parent-child relationships was apparently a trying one for the anarchist-feminists, who were unable to develop a satisfactory solution.

Whether the anarchist-feminists insisted on separate homes or argued for a communal existence in the belief that such a mode of living left women freer, the chief requisite for domestic independence was economic freedom. The following quote from *Liberty* columnist Florence Finch Kelly indicates the inseparability of the two goals:

I cannot see that much advance toward individualism in the relations between men and women is possible until the economic freedom of women shall have become an established fact . . . Not until woman becomes a self-supporting,

<sup>6</sup> *Liberty*, 5 (May 1888); *Liberty*, 6 (Jan. 18, 1889); *Liberty*, 6 (Sept. 15, 1888); *Liberty*, 5 (June 23, 1888).

independent creature who has ceased to beg alms of [man] and who can and does support herself as easily and with as much comfort as he does, will he respect her as an equal and lose the last remnants of that old spirit of tyranny which made him get everything under his thumb that he could.<sup>7</sup>

And Marie Louise, prominent individualist and former member of the faction-ridden First International, echoed that sentiment. What women needed, she argued, was “Liberty to act; Liberty to work; Liberty to live; Liberty to feel that our own acquired emancipation and happiness are not soiled by the aid of jealous proxies.”<sup>8</sup>

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The majority of the anarchist-feminists who created this ideology were largely anonymous women who wrote articles for, or correspondence to, the English-language anarchist periodicals of the late nineteenth century, particularly *Liberty* and *Lucifer*. To the extent that such ideas appear to have been widely shared by women anarchists of the rank-and-file, anarchist-feminism may be said to have been a grass roots phenomenon. Unfortunately, beyond a few articles or letters, we know very little about most of these women. It is possible, however, to use the admittedly less than ample data to present a tentative analysis of the socioeconomic backgrounds and ideological concerns of some of the women who became anarchist-feminists.<sup>9</sup>

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anarchist-feminism attracted supporters from among both native Americans and the foreign-born. Anarchist-communist women were either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants; a substantial proportion were Jews from Russia or eastern Europe. Their fathers worked as poorly paid manual laborers or kept small shops, while their mothers often took in piecework. Anarchist-communist women rarely attended school for more than a few years, economic necessity cutting off their opportunities. After leaving school, most of them remained in the large cities in which they had been reared, finding work in factories, sweatshops, or domestic service.

On the surface, the individualists seemed rather different from the communists; they were predominantly native-born Americans of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite such differences, the two groups bore striking similarities. The individualists, although attaining higher levels of education, were usually unable to maintain a comfortable income; they

<sup>7</sup> *Liberty*, 5 (Feb. 25, 1888).

<sup>8</sup> *Liberty*, 5 (May 12, 1888).

<sup>9</sup> The following observations are based on a preliminary analysis of data from the anarchist subsample (N = 10) of a systematically gathered sample of mainstream feminists, socialists, anarchists, and labor activists (N = 40).

often eked out wages as country school teachers, itinerant lecturers, or private tutors. Thus the insistence of both groups of anarchist women on the coupling of financial independence and control over other aspects of their lives appeared to stem from their own occupational experiences.

Although most of the anarchist-feminists whose backgrounds I have been able to trace participated in the anarchist movement for a period of two or more years, not all of them were long-term activists. Some of the women became disillusioned when the movement failed to resolve the personal difficulties which had led to their initial involvement. Others, for whom anarchism was a manifestation of youthful rebelliousness, outgrew their commitments and came to terms with conventional society. Finally, for some women anarchist ideology was an intellectual fad, later abandoned for more fashionable philosophies.

The most important differences between the short-term radicals and those who remained in the movement are not found in an analysis of class, ethnicity, or educational background. Rather, the distinctions rested on the nature of their involvement. Those who were lifetime activists, or who adopted the ideology as mature adults, appear to have developed an intellectual framework which emphasized the interrelationships of anarchist theory, the psychological needs of individuals, and a sense of social responsibility. The short-term activists, on the other hand, tended to view anarchism primarily as a personal answer to their dissatisfactions with conventional society.

In order to underscore and expand upon the discussion of anarchist-feminism, I have chosen to emphasize the career of Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912). While her name is hardly familiar today, during her lifetime her influence among the anarchists was exceeded only by that of Emma Goldman. Her prominence in the movement rested chiefly on her position as one of the two native American anarchists who successfully bridged the distance between the native-born, English-speaking individualists and the predominantly foreign-born communist-anarchists. (The other was her mentor, Dyer D. Lum.) She began her career as an individualist, gradually developing an ideology which offered a practical, if somewhat theoretically inconsistent, amalgam of the two approaches. Because she was not fully at home in either camp, yet was influential in both, she offers a particularly felicitous illustration of the anarchist-feminist perspective.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For published information on de Cleyre see Shuster, *Native American Anarchism*, 88, 160-61, 167; Terry Perlin, "Anarchism and Idealism," *Labor History*, 14 (Fall 1973), 506-20; Emma Goldman, *Voltairine de Cleyre* (New York: Oriole Press, 1932); and Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978).

Born in Leslie, Michigan, on November 17, 1866, de Cleyre was the youngest of three daughters of Hector Auguste and Harriet De Claire, an itinerant tailor and a seamstress. Her parents separated early in her childhood, and she lived with each of them at various periods. Her father, having recognized her intellectual abilities, somehow financed an expensive convent education for her, despite his relative poverty. After graduation from high school, she restlessly moved from Michigan to western Pennsylvania and then to Kansas before she finally settled in Philadelphia, where she lived throughout most of her life. In a pattern similar to other American anarchists, de Cleyre gravitated from the free thought movement through socialism before adopting anarchism in 1888.<sup>11</sup>

My primary concern in this essay is to analyze those aspects of de Cleyre's anarchism that are directly related to her feminist viewpoint. I do not, however, suggest that those aspects are divorced from her total philosophy. In fact, de Cleyre's anarchism appears to be inextricably tied to her ideas about the "Woman Question." Moreover, it is probable that her conversion to anarchism resulted from a belief that the anarchist philosophy offered the best hope for the achievement of sexual equality. It is at least clear that her feminism preceded her anarchism. Although it may be exaggerated to contend that her anarchism was merely a by-product of that feminism, nonetheless in choosing a political ideology one of her chief concerns was the position it offered to women. Suggestive of her early preoccupation with the role of women is the fact that when she first began to publish her poems and articles she adopted the pseudonym "Fannie Fern," after a recently deceased novelist of that name who had been noted (and sometimes castigated) for her independence both in her novels and her personal life. Later, in 1890, de Cleyre was one of the founding members of an apparently short-lived "freethought" feminist organization, The Woman's National Liberal Union, under the direction of Matilda Joslyn Gage.<sup>12</sup>

The principal indication of the close interrelatedness of de Cleyre's feminism and anarchism can be found in her own explanation of her advocacy of anarchism. In part, she became an anarchist because of her "anger at the institutions set up by men ostensibly to preserve . . . female purity, really working out to make [a woman] a baby, an irresponsible

<sup>11</sup> Agnes Inglis, "Notes for a Biography of Voltairine de Cleyre," c. 1934 (type-written). Letter from Adelaide Thayer (de Cleyre's sister) to Joseph Ishill, Feb. 3, 1935.

<sup>12</sup> On the original Fanny Fern, see Ann D. Wood, "The 'Scribbling Women' and Fanny Fern," *American Quarterly*, 23 (Spring 1971), 4-24. Matilda Joslyn Gage, ed., *Women's National Liberal Union: Report of the Convention for Organization* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Master's and Stone, 1890).



doll of a creature not to be trusted outside her 'doll's house.'” Further her “disgust with the cramped, subordinated circle provided for women” in art and literature led her to conclude that there was no chance for women to improve their status in existing society. Finally, claiming that existence was intolerable where women (and men) were imprisoned in rigidly defined social roles, she experienced “a wild craving after freedom from conventional dress, speech, and custom, an indignation at the repression of one’s real sentiments, and the repetition of formal hypocrisies.” Only anarchism, she concluded, provided her with a philosophy which satisfied both her political and psychological needs.<sup>13</sup>

In two essays, published in 1891 and 1896, de Cleyre systematized the anarchist-feminist perspective. In the first essay de Cleyre insisted that the prerequisite for the achievement of sexual equality was woman’s “*freedom to control her own person*” (italized in original). That control precluded marriage, which for de Cleyre as for most anarchists was equivalent to prostitution. “Remember,” she admonished women who were contemplating marriage, “what the contract means: the sale of the control of your person in return for ‘protection and support.’” She warned members of her sex not put any faith in suffrage: “The ballot hasn’t made men free and it won’t make us free.” To a significant extent, her prescriptions for the achievement of equality were based on standard anarchist economic remedies; for example, she advocated “the destruction of any and every barrier, the abolition of every law by which the sources of wealth are held out of use:—in other words . . . the complete liberation of land and capital.” But she went beyond anarchist doctrine as enunciated by its theorists (who were all men) and insisted on a direct relationship between feminism and anarchism. Women must insist “on a new code of ethics founded on . . . equal freedom; a code recognizing the complete individuality of women.” In the final analysis, women must free themselves, by “making rebels whenever we can. By ourselves living our beliefs.”<sup>14</sup>

De Cleyre’s conviction that women must themselves take the initiative through individual rebellion against prevailing attitudes and behavior patterns was characteristic of anarchist-feminism. However, such an attitude ought not to be viewed as an indication of insensitivity to the

<sup>13</sup> Voltairine de Cleyre, “Why I Am an Anarchist,” *Mother Earth*, 3 (March 1908), 16–21; “Sex Slavery,” *Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre* (New York: Mother Earth, 1914), 344–51.

<sup>14</sup> De Cleyre, “The Gates of Freedom,” *Lucifer* (1891). This essay is located in a clipping file in the Joseph Ishill Collection at Houghton Library, Harvard University. The exact dates are not on the clipping. De Cleyre, “The Case of Woman vs. Orthodoxy,” *Boston Investigator* (Sept. 18, 1896).

social context of woman's position. In the second of the two articles, for the freethought periodical, *The Boston Investigator*, she conceded that "material conditions determine the social relations of men and women"; therefore, in her view, the emancipation of women had become possible only with the dominance of industrialization in nineteenth-century America. Nevertheless, she continued to stress the significance of the individual act of rebellion: "The first and best of praise is due to the 'voice crying in the wilderness'. . . . Those who call for the breaking of the barriers will always precede the general action of the masses; but I add that were it not for the compulsion of material necessity the preaching would be barren."

De Cleyre deplored the legalistic and political emphases of the woman's rights movement of her own day, as the above quotes suggest. Intellectually, she was far more compatible with such isolated rebels as Mary Wollstonecraft, in honor of whom she wrote poetry and delivered lectures. Her stress on the necessity of personal liberation became even more pronounced as the mainstream feminists concentrated more intensively on group action. Until her death in 1912 she continued to insist on the importance of individual refusal to conform. Her opposition to marriage, in which she included "free unions," intensified as she remained convinced, both ideologically and personally, that women would never be free until they declared their economic and emotional independence from men.<sup>15</sup>

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Despite the conviction that anarchism was the only philosophy which promised the possibility of a society based on economic, social, and sexual freedom, none of the anarchist-feminists believed that their male co-revolutionaries viewed the "Woman Question" seriously enough. De Cleyre castigated anarchist men publicly for their ambivalence and outright indifference to women's equality. Florence Finch Kelly noted in *Liberty* that "man is still a little bit tyrannical. Even the best of men and the most imbued with a desire for justice and equity . . .—even these still have something of the tyrant in their feelings toward and their treatment of women."<sup>16</sup>

My research suggests that while most anarchist men assumed that once anarchism had been achieved equality would follow, very few agreed

<sup>15</sup> De Cleyre's Wollstonecraft poem is in her *Selected Works*, 49; for her attitude on marriage in her later years, see "Those Who Marry Do Ill," *Mother Earth*, 2 (Jan. 1908).

<sup>16</sup> De Cleyre, "Sex Slavery," 349; *Liberty*, 5 (Feb. 25, 1888), 2.

with the anarchist-feminists that immediate action was feasible, or even desirable. They joined in urging that the "Woman Question" be subordinated to the other economic and political goals of anarchism. More important, anarchist men apparently anticipated no fundamental alteration in the relationship between the sexes even after the triumph of anarchist principles. An illuminating series of essays on the issue of sexual equality appeared in *Liberty* in 1888, in which Victor Yarros contended that women, if they expected to attain personal independence in the future, must sacrifice the issue of equality in the present. Rather, each woman should "join her strength to that of man . . . in *his* effort to establish proper relations between labor and capital. And only after the material foundations of the new social order have been successfully built, will the Woman Question proper loom up and claim attention." A "new social order" notwithstanding, Yarros expected domestic arrangements to remain substantially as they were, with the exception that either party would be free to terminate any unsatisfactory partnership. "When I speak of a man's and a woman's making a home, I mean that he is to provide the means and she is to take care of the domestic affairs." Yarros' viewpoint was typical. Most anarchist men, despite their advocacy of free love, retained a rather traditional attitude on woman's place in the family structure. Linda Gordon's contention about free lovers in general, that "they did not challenge conventional conceptions of woman's passivity and limited sphere of concern," applies to most anarchist men.<sup>17</sup>

Even in their core demand of economic independence, anarchist-feminists met with resistance from their male comrades. Georgia Replogle, by trade a compositor, by political affiliation an anarchist, and co-editor of the periodical *Egoism*, argued in an editorial which appeared in her journal that women deserved equal pay for equal work. Nonsense, retorted Benjamin Tucker, editor of *Liberty* and the leader of the individualists. "Apart from the special inferiority of woman as printer . . . there exists the general inferiority of woman as worker. . . ." Even skilled women, he argued, demonstrated "a lack of ambition, of self-reliance, of a sense of . . . responsibility."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Liberty*, 5 (May 12, 1888). Some anarchist-communists believed that once anarchism became established women's role would change. See Henry Addis, "Essays on the Social Problem," *Free Society*, 6 (June 1898), 19–20; *Liberty*, 5 (Sept. 15, 1888), 7; Linda Gordon, "Voluntary Motherhood," 67.

<sup>18</sup> *Liberty*, 8 (Nov. 21, 1891), 1; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), esp. 34–35. See also Joseph Labadie's letter in *Liberty*, 5 (Feb. 23, 1889); and Hutchins Hapgood, *A Victorian in the Modern World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1939), 330–31, as well as his *An Anarchist Woman* (New York: Duffield, 1909), for explorations into the relationships between men and women among the communist-anarchists.

The above paragraphs suggest that the individualists, at least, despite their assertions that at some point in the future the issue of sexual equality would “loom up and claim attention,” were unwilling to question their own conventional conceptions of woman’s role either in the economic or domestic sphere. Since the anarchist-feminists averred that immediate changes were necessary in just those areas, a meeting of the minds was at best unlikely. Sexual egalitarianism appears to have been almost as rare among the communists. Certainly the position of Johann Most, the preeminent figure among communist-anarchists in the United States, tended toward outright misogyny. The rank-and-file of both sides of the movement agreed that woman’s equality was an issue not worthy of immediate consideration.

The principal exception to this view was Moses Harman, who transcended conventional attitudes towards women’s roles. Harman edited the journal *Lucifer*, dedicating it to “the emancipation of women from sex slavery.” During the 1890s *Lucifer* was the only male-edited anarchist journal which consistently denounced the oppression of women. Perhaps inevitably, neither *Lucifer* nor Harman was taken seriously by anarchist men.<sup>19</sup>

Like the male former abolitionists who in the late 1860s stood firmly behind the suffrage amendment which enfranchised black men only, and like the socialist men of the early twentieth century who urged patience upon women comrades who wished to make an issue of sexual inequality, anarchist men persisted in believing that masculine concerns were by their very nature universal concerns, while the demands of the women were at worst selfish and at best of secondary importance. The abolitionist men, pleading that it was “the Negro’s hour,” perhaps forgot that half the former slaves were women, doubly cursed by their race and sex. Socialist men proclaimed adherence to the ideal of sexual equality but allowed women little power within the party; in many cases they were more traditional in their domestic arrangements than the most ardent capitalist.

Because the abolitionists were reformers and not critics of the entire American social and political system, their inability to surrender their assumption of the preeminence of masculine goals is understandable. That the socialist and anarchist men were similarly incapacitated, despite their radical philosophies, indicates that the premise of female subordination extended even to those men who scorned conventional society. Just as anarchist women had been unable to free themselves completely from

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Dyer D. Lum to Voltairine de Cleyre, Jan. 9, 1891.

the concept of the Maternal Mystique, anarchist men were incapable of ridding themselves of the notion of distinct spheres of concern for men and women, with women confined to the domestic and personal, hence less important, sphere.

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Despite the fact that some feminists who were not anarchists would have agreed in part with the major contention of anarchist-feminists—that economic dependence subordinated women to men—the ideology of anarchist-feminism as a whole elicited little serious attention outside the anarchist movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It appealed neither to mainstream feminists nor to most women radicals, who turned instead to an equally unsatisfactory socialist movement. The reasons for this rejection lie partly in the changing nature of both anarchism and feminism during this period, and partly in the inappropriateness of an individualistic ethos in an organizational age.

Until the 1870s, the anarchist movement in the United States consisted of small groups of intellectuals who traced their abhorrence of government partially to the doctrines of the French philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon and partially to the American nonresistants of the antebellum era. For the most part, these anarchists were peaceful philosophers who, although considered eccentric on social and sexual questions, were not viewed as a threat to the fabric of society. Thus it was possible for them to ally with various other “reform” groups, including feminists, to promote specific issues. In fact, as late as the early 1870s there remained an organizational tie between the anarchists and feminists, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton served as vice-president of the anarchist-dominated American Labor Reform League.<sup>20</sup>

Even such tenuous connections had been severed by the end of the seventies, however. Feminism became more respectable, while anarchism, in the form of the development of communist-anarchism, was perceived as becoming more radical. Partly because of the rhetoric of the German-born Johann Most and his followers, partly because of antiforeign sentiment, the anarchist came to be viewed as a symbol of irrational violence. The public image of the anarchist was that of a wild-eyed, bomb-throwing fanatic. Alliances between anarchists and reform groups grew more difficult to achieve. As anarchism became more revolutionary, and as feminists became ever more determined that working within the existing legal and political framework offered their best hope for achieving equality, any community of interest between the two groups vanished.

<sup>20</sup> Martin, *Men Against the State*, 115–17, 203; O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave*, 34, 29.

Although the negative public image of anarchism, particularly after the Haymarket Riot of 1886, may have prevented some potential adherents from even an investigation of the ideology of the anarchist-feminists, that seems an insufficient explanation for its failure. The primary reasons behind the failure appear to lie in the nature of the ideology itself. The anarchists' goal of complete personal freedom, limited only by the proscription against interfering with the liberty of others, precluded organization, except in the most informal sense. Although there was widespread agreement on the answers to the "Woman Question" among anarchist-feminists, there was little coordination in promoting their ideas, and they worked mostly as isolated individuals. Their writings were scattered, almost haphazardly, throughout the anarchist press. The only anarchist journal concentrating on the subject of women was *Lucifer*, which increasingly after 1895 dealt almost exclusively with issues of sexuality. With the exceptions of the *Egoist* and *Clothed with the Sun*, two small eccentric papers with tiny circulations, no anarchist paper was edited or published by a woman until Emma Goldman began *Mother Earth* in 1906, too late to exert any influence for changes in the by now pragmatic, almost totally suffrage-oriented feminist movement. Even at the more personal level of intellectual interaction among peers, the anarchist-feminists do not appear to have developed any social forms comparable to the homosocial interpersonal relationships which were so successful in providing a support network for both suffragists and social feminists.

In an organizational age, the insistence on the part of the anarchist-feminists that equality was based on individual refusal to participate in an unjust society seemed anachronistic, even to many radical women. Their conviction that personal independence was necessarily connected to a rejection of marriage and the nuclear family structure further alienated them even from those who may have adhered to other aspects of the anarchist tradition. As Richard Sennett has pointed out in *Families Against the City*, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was an infelicitous period for attacks on family structure. Such attacks threatened the emergent belief that the family offered the most secure refuge from a chaotic, unstable, constantly changing industrial society. Further, the anarchist-feminist contention that one of woman's first steps toward equality should be complete self-support not only offered even greater insecurity, but also contravened a growing national trend toward sentimentality about the family. Women who were dissatisfied with contemporary economic or social conditions had other choices, particularly socialism, which did not threaten the existing family struc-

ture. In fact, much American socialist literature insisted that socialism would purify marriage.<sup>21</sup> As a result, anarchist-feminists could not hope to gain the support of even most radical women.

Despite its inability to influence the direction of mainstream feminism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, anarchist-feminism was not simply a *divertissement* in the struggle for sexual equality. Significant in their own right, the anarchist-feminists offer the historian the opportunity to study the interplay between cultural and physical determinants of social roles, such as class and sex, and the development of ideology. To a certain extent, the anarchist-feminists appear to have been almost reactionary. They were undaunted individualists in an organizational age; they were antifamily in an era of family romanticism. Nevertheless, the developments in twentieth-century attitudes about women's roles may suggest to us their particular strengths. Their insistence that the roots of inequality lay in the domestic relationship has resurfaced as modern feminists realize the inability of legal and political reform to assure complete equality. The equalization of relationships is one of the principal problems bequeathed to the feminists of the late twentieth century. Finally, they refused to be shaken in their belief that what was most important about men and women was not their difference from each other, but their common humanity. This premise, a truism for the early feminists, appeared to have been left behind by a generation of pragmatic suffragists and social feminists who used their womanhood as a tactic in their drive for political and legal rights. In the short run, the organized feminists seemed to have been following the most assured path to equality. In the long run, however, American society still struggles with the issues abandoned by the organized feminists but kept alive by the unsuccessful, unpragmatic anarchist-feminists.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Sennett, *Families Against the City* (New York: Random House, 1974), esp. 116–19. For the working class family, see David Walkowitz, "Working Class Women in the Gilded Age: Factory, Community, and Family Life among Cohoes, New York Cotton Workers," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (Summer 1972), 464–90. On women and socialism, see Olive M. Johnson, "Woman and the Socialist Movement," (New York: Socialist Labor Party, 1919), a pamphlet first published in 1907. Jeanneth D. Pearl, "Women in Society," *Unity*, 1 (Jan. 1911), 6–8; R. B. Tobias and Mary Marcy, *Women as Sex Vendors* (Chicago: Chas. H. Kerr, 1918).