

Socialist Women Mujeres Socialistas



Publication of the Socialist Party Women's Commission

Summer 2007



LA MUJER EN LA GUERRA Y EN LA REVOLUCIÓN

En esta hora magnífica, todos son colaboradores al triunfo de la causa popular.

Mientras que los hombres luchan en los frentes para aniquilar el fascismo, la mujer ocupa alegre y valientemente su puesto en la fábrica y en el campo. La revolución ha tenido también la virtud de adelantar siglos la emancipación de la mujer y elevar moral y económicamente su condición.

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**Publication of the Socialist
Party Women's Commission**

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the Spanish Civil War (*La Mujer en
la Guerra y en la revolution, Mujeres
Libres*), and photos accompanying
Martha Ackelsberg's article, courtesy
of the author. Photo caption in English:
"At this great hour, everyone is a
partner in the triumph of the people's
case. While the men are fighting at the
fronts to eliminate fascism, the woman
happily and valiantly takes her place in
the factory or the field. The revolution
has had the fortune to push ahead by
centuries the emancipation of woman,
and to improve her condition, both
morally and economically."

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FROM THE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE...

This issue of Socialist Women is
dedicated to our anarchist sisters.
For generations, socialist and anarchist
women have struggled side by side for
freedom, justice, and equality at home,
in the community, and at the workplace.
For generations we have lived among
each other, in countries and cultures
largely hostile to, or disregarding of, the
needs and rights of their female citi-
zens.

Today, in a world under siege from
the effects of capitalism, imperialism,
and patriarchy, countless women are
increasingly impoverished, exploited,
abused, ill-housed, poorly educated,
and denied the necessary range of
health care and other basic services.
Frequently our very thoughts, feel-
ings, and ideas are ignored by those
who profit from gender inequality
and injustice. In light of these dire

circumstances, renewed coalition-
building among women on the rad-
ical Left should be one of our top
priorities.

Thus, while aspects of socialist
and anarchist analysis and tactics
differ, we need to remind ourselves
that those principles that connect us
remain critically important: a vision
of, and commitment to, fundamen-
tal change within ourselves, in our
relationships, and in the organiza-
tion of society itself; an end to hier-
archy and oppression; direct action
in defense of workers' rights and
civil liberties; and a recognition of
our strengths and capabilities, indi-
vidually and collectively.

Together, our voices as radical
women — in joy, anger, and sorrow
— will be raised. And they must be
heard.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have serious problems with the arti-
cle by Sharin Chiarazzo entitled "An
Anti-Imperialist People's Movement
Takes Shape in Lebanon" (in the
International Women's Day 2007 issue
of *The Socialist*) which draws heavily on
material from the International Action
Center (which has, from its inception,
had very close ties to the Workers World
Party), and which at no point suggests
that while Hezbollah has a genuine
grassroots base in Lebanon, among the
Muslim population, it also shares far
too much with the fundamentalism of
Islamic radicalism. One can support
the right of Hezbollah to exist, one can
salute the courage it showed in stand-
ing off the Israeli attacks, but social-
ists need to be more explicit in noting
that this is not a secular movement, it
is not a democratic movement, it has
not defended the rights of women or

of gays and lesbians. There is so much
material that quotes from or relies on
the International Action Center that
the article probably should have run
in their publication, not that of the
Socialist Party USA.

Lebanon is very complex, and Hezbol-
lah was, ironically, a creation of Israel as
Islamic Lebanese reacted to the Israeli
occupation. I do appreciate that *The
Socialist* should be open to a range of
views and in that sense, Sharin's article
is at odds with the editorial in the front
of the magazine.

Fraternally,
David McReynolds
New York, New York

The author responds:

While David McReynolds demands that I criticize Hezbollah and Lebanese progressive forces for their shortcomings, he neglects to mention that criticism should be focused on Israel as the force which not only perpetuated the recent Lebanon war but whose legacy has been relentless war and destruction in the entire region. Others deserving of criticism include the US backed Siniora government and right wing conservatives trying to hold onto privilege and state power in Lebanon.

The point of the article was to highlight the broad support for Hezbollah from the Lebanese masses, which goes far beyond its oppressed Shiite Muslim base, coming from Christians, Druze, Sunnis, Armenians, Palestinian refugees, communists and socialists, just to name a few. I tried to counter the prevailing mistaken view presented by the western corporate media that Hezbollah is pushing for an 'Islamic state' by explaining the important social and

political role Hezbollah is actually playing in Lebanon while also praising its reconstruction efforts, regardless of religious affiliation.

While criticizing the non-secular nature of Hezbollah, McReynolds fails to point out the repressive nature of Israel as a theocracy, based on rights and participation for only one religion. More than \$15 million USD every day goes to this apartheid state in the form of direct military aid, where Palestinians have been dispossessed, marginalized and exiled.

McReynolds stoops to sectarian red-baiting in his criticism of the people I interviewed from the International Action Center, failing to recognize their important participation in the strikes and demonstrations waged by the Peoples' Movement in Lebanon.

Lastly, rather than criticize Hezbollah's view of women, let's remember that the regimes most

repressive of women's rights in the region are those propped up by U.S. imperialism such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Emirates. Given the repressed position of women in these countries, women play a prominent role within Hezbollah as spokespeople, media representatives and organizers.

Maybe McReynolds needs to confront his own Zionist and anti-Arab tendencies in order to be able to clearly see the viability of the Peoples' movement in Lebanon and other truly progressive forces in the area.

Sharin Chiorazzo

Editor's note: The article being referred to can be found on the Socialist Party USA website. Go to the link for The Socialist and click "winter (IWD), 2007".

Speaking Out On Socialist Feminism...

by Breck Guise

How many ways can you change the world? How many ways can you change the world without violence? How many ways are *guaranteed*? When I think of all the ways one could change the world, the best way I can think of is through our children. I believe that the most powerful people in the world are mothers. They are the primary teachers of the world, because they are the primary teachers of the family. Sure you could argue for fathers' rights and equality in the family, but it is undeniable that most American families tend to revolve around the mother and we should rejoice in that fact and take every advantage from it.

Mothers teach by love, choice and discipline, but also by example. The way we live our lives as women has an effect on how our children will someday live their lives. Girls will learn to become strong women, women who demand respect in all aspects of their lives just as we demand respect in our lives. Boys will learn how to treat women with love and respect as we are treated with love and respect. They will learn to love strong women and everything they have to offer as we are loved. Everything we do as women is scrutinized by our children and we should take the time to explain our reasoning and passions. They will remember what was/is important to

us. Our passions will leave an indelible mark on their futures and slowly, generation by generation, the way we live our lives will eventually change the world.

I'm a Socialist because of my beliefs. I'm a feminist because I want to see those beliefs expanded. Expanded to other women and expanded to other generations. I'm a Socialist Feminist because I want to change the world. •

Breck Guise is a mother of one and currently lives and writes in Mineral Wells, TX.

Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women: Lessons from *Mujeres Libres*

by Martha Ackelsberg

In 1936, groups of women in Madrid and Barcelona founded *Mujeres Libres*, an organization dedicated to the liberation of women from their triple enslavement to ignorance, as women, and as workers. While it lasted for less than three years (its activities in Spain were brought to an abrupt halt by the victory of Franco's forces in February, 1939), *Mujeres Libres* mobilized over 20,000 women, and developed an extensive network of activities designed to empower individual women while building a sense of community. Like the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement in which these women were rooted, *Mujeres Libres* insisted that the full development of women's individuality was dependent upon the development of a strong sense of connection with others.

Anarchism aims to abolish hierarchy and structured relations of domination and subordination in society, and to create a society based on equality, mutuality, and reciprocity in which each person is valued and respected as an individual. This social vision is combined with a theory of social change, two dimensions of which were particularly critical to understanding *Mujeres Libres*'s visions and actions: a) means must be consistent with ends; and b) people cannot be directed into a future society, but must create it themselves, recognizing, thereby, their own abilities and capacities.

However, neither the theory of anarchism nor the practice of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain was egalitarian in the full sense of the word. Although many writers acknowledged the importance of women's emancipation to the anarchist project, and the importance of women to the movement, few gave those concerns top priority. As was the case with socialist movements throughout Europe, many anarchists treated the issue of women's subordination as, at best, secondary to the emancipation of workers, a problem which would be resolved "on the morrow of the revolution."

Thus, although the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement offered the promise of fully integrating a concern with the subordination of women into a theory of radical social transformation, that promise was not fulfilled in practice. Despite the apparent awareness at the core of anarchist theory that relations of domination were manifold and complex, attention to the subordination of women was repeatedly given lower priority than the oppression of male workers. *Mujeres Libres* was founded to address itself to this and other shortcomings of the movement with respect to women.

Mujeres Libres was created by women who were, themselves, deeply-rooted within the larger anarcho-syndicalist movement. They took to heart the anarchist insistence that an egalitarian society cannot be created through authoritarian means. Any truly revolutionary process must, itself, create an egalitarian society in its practices. At same time (and perhaps a bit paradoxically): "You can't improvise a revolution." People must prepare for it. In the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist context, that meant direct action: revolutionary activity must begin where people are, not through intermediaries (e.g. political parties)-- and they must be activities which change the realities in which people live. In Spain, anarchists advocated--and supported--union organizing and work-place strikes, but also "quality of life" protests and other forms of community-based activism.

A second crucial feature of this approach was education, in a variety of forms. They believed strongly that literacy would contribute to an improved sense of self, and greater ability to gain information about the world. Thus, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists created "rationalist schools" and *ateneos* (storefront cultural centers) in the early years of the 20th century, designed for both adults and children. They organized and supported an extensive array of cultural centers, youth groups, drama groups, outdoor and informal activities of various sorts. These types of programs were

a "signature" element of anarchist organizing, in both rural and urban areas

By the late 1920's, groups of women, with different foci, started meeting in cities and towns throughout the country. In Terrassa, women textile workers, all members of the clandestine CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, National Labor Confederation, the anarcho-syndicalist union federation formed in 1910), started meeting in 1928. Their purpose: to become comfortable speaking in a group, and to discuss issues they might wish to raise in union assemblies. It was as a result of these meetings that the union included in its demands, as early as 1931, the right of women to equal salary with men for equal work, and eight weeks of paid maternity leave.

In Barcelona, a group began to form late in 1934. It brought together women who were involved in CNT unions with the goal of fostering solidarity and encouraging them to take more active roles in their unions and in the movement. As Soledad Estorach (one of those who called that first meeting) reported, "In Catalonia, at least, the dominant position was that men and women should both be involved. But the problem was that the men didn't know how to get women involved as activists. Both men and most women thought of women in a secondary status. For most men, I think, the ideal situation would be to have a *companera* who did not oppose their ideas, but who in private life would be more or less like other women. They wanted to be activists 24 hours a day--and in that context, of course, it's impossible to have equality....Men got so involved that the women were left behind, almost of necessity." As a result, "What would happen is that women would come once--maybe even join. But they would never be seen again. So many *companeras* came to the conclusion that it might be a good idea to start a separate group for these women..."

Similar efforts were undertaken in Madrid, and elsewhere. Early in 1936, the groups learned of one another's

activities, and representatives started meeting together. They wanted to explore what they recognized as the specific subordination of women in capitalist society, in an atmosphere that would take women-- their lives, experiences, and hopes-- seriously. In May of 1936, they began publishing a journal, *Mujeres Libres*, that would appear throughout the ensuing war, until its editors and publishers were forced into exile.

In July, 1936, the Spanish Civil War began, with an attempted coup d'état that was repulsed by a combination of armed civilians and some loyal soldiers. The failed coup--and resulting civil war-- provided the context for wide-

They organized education and literacy programs, at all levels, for both adults and young people; employment and apprenticeship programs — in both rural and urban areas — because they believed women's employment was critical to their emancipation, and not simply a temporary response to wartime labor shortages; programs of consciousness-raising, that also took place in the context of unions and workplaces; programs of education and support around motherhood and child-rearing; education around sexuality and birth control for women, educational programs for soldiers around prostitution, and articles and advocacy opposing the sexual

saw themselves in a struggle with the Communist Party (and the *Asociación de Mujeres Antifascistas* — the Communist-dominated women's organization) for the allegiance and affiliation of women. They expected to have the support of the CNT and the anarchist youth organization, Juventudes, in doing this; but these organizations never seemed to understand what *Mujeres Libres* was trying to do. Instead, they viewed the women as "separatists" who were undermining the unity of the anarchist/anarcho-syndicalist cause.

As the civil war dragged on, and the need for support from male-dominated organizations increased, *Mujeres Libres* tried to explain to their male comrades why they needed a separate organization. As they wrote in a communique in 1938:

"We are aware of the precedents set by both feminist organizations and by political parties... We could not follow either of these paths. We could not separate the women's problem from the social problem [e.g. class-based injustices], nor could we deny the significance of the first [women's subordination] by converting women into a simple instrument for any organization, even our own, libertarian organization.

"The intention that underlay our activities was much much broader: to serve a doctrine, not a party; to empower women to make of them individuals capable of contributing to the structuring of the future society, individuals who have learned to be self-determining, not to follow blindly the dictates of any organization."

Their struggles, however, were never fully understood or appreciated. They never received the kind of support--financial or otherwise — that they expected from the broader movement: a situation experienced by women involved in radical movements throughout many eras and many parts of the world.

Mujeres Libres demanded that the new society — and efforts to create it — include women as well as men, and that the movement treat women equally with men, while respecting women's differences from men. This perspective was *Mujeres Libres*'s unique contribution to development of the libertarian

Mujeres, continued on p. 8



Casa de Maternidad, pictured in *Mujeres Libres*.

spread social revolution that built on over 70 years of anarchist (and socialist) organizing in Spain: militias replaced the army, workers collectivized factories abandoned by owners, agricultural workers took over abandoned farms/estates, and many municipalities were also collectivized.

In this context, *Mujeres Libres* developed two sets of goals: *capacitación* and *captación*. *Capacitación* can roughly be translated as "empowerment" — coming to an awareness of/acting on one's capacities or abilities. This was the essence of virtually all its programs, and derived from *Mujeres Libres*' commitment to direct action and, specifically, the notion of "preparation."

double-standard; support for the war (e.g. propaganda campaigns, visits to militias at the front); and extensive public relations and media efforts, including 14 issues of their journal, a broad-based program of publications (books, pamphlets, etc), a radio program, and public speaking (both teaching young women to speak in public, and organizing tours with CNT and FAI — Federación Anarquista de Iberia, Iberian Anarchist Federation — to villages and small cities).

Captación (or "recruitment") took on ever-greater importance as counter-revolution grew in strength: it meant mobilizing women into the libertarian, as opposed to communist organizations. The women of *Mujeres Libres*

Living the Values of Emma Goldman

by Karen Kubby

Emma Goldman (1869-1940) was a nurse, midwife, political lecturer and writer. She was an educator and public advocate for birth control at a time when such action was prohibited by Comstock laws. The FBI considered Emma Goldman to be the “most dangerous woman in America”. Her commitment to reproductive rights, activism, and social justice inspired the founders of the Emma Goldman Clinic to name the clinic in her honor.

The Emma Goldman Clinic opened on September 1, 1973 in Iowa City, Iowa. On a daily basis, we live out the same values invoked by Emma Goldman. We share her belief that access to reproductive health care information and services is a prerequisite for gender equity. The fact that we remain an important element in the national pro-choice movement is a testament to the wide range of expression of feminism in action.

Feminists have been pushing the boundaries and challenging the status quo in women’s health care for decades. We are no strangers to opposition and are not daunted by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In the 1970s and 1980s, many feminist clinics were founded on a dream to empower women—through support, education, self-help, and services—to make the best health care decisions for themselves: to put women’s health in women’s hands. Not only gems in their local areas, feminist women’s health centers have national impact. With a clear vision and a large amount of wit and will, the feminist

clinics changed the face of health care in the United States. Many aspects of care that we consider “standard” today are gains that were hard won by the feminist women’s health movement.

You have the feminist women’s health movement to thank if you:

- Signed an informed consent form before any procedure or surgery
- Read the package insert on any over the counter medication
- Were given options on health treatment
- Have looked at your cervix and vagina during a gynecological exam or with your own speculum
- Were offered a cervical cap as a birth control option
- Used menstrual extraction
- Heard the risks associated with breast implants
- Had a natural childbirth or had your partner attend a birthing, abortion or a consultation, or
- Purchased an over-the-counter vaginal remedy or pregnancy test.

Feminist reproductive health care providers, such as the Emma Goldman Clinic, share the vision of a world in which all women freely make their own decisions regarding their bodies, reproduction and sexuality — a world where women can fulfill their own unique potential and live healthy, whole lives. This vision is built upon a core belief that women are capable of understanding their bodies and directing their own health care by making intelligent, moral

health choices when they are provided with accurate and unbiased information, understanding and support.

Accordingly, the mission of the Emma Goldman Clinic is to provide high quality, confidential, compassionate and client-centered health services to women and men. Our services are inspired and informed by the broader feminist ideals of political, economic and social equality.

Feminist reproductive providers are social change agents. In addition to providing vital direct care services, we engage in community organizing, activism and education for the purpose of guaranteeing access to reproductive health care, both in our communities and across the country.

The goals and methods modeled by Emma Goldman live on through the Emma Goldman Clinic. One of the best ways to ensure the continuance of feminist health care facilities is to support your local independent provider (not affiliated with a national corporation). •

Karen Kubby is the Executive Director of the Emma Goldman Clinic and is a former member of the Socialist Party USA’s National Committee. Some of this article was taken from the case statement of The Consortium: a national network of non-profit feminist abortion providers, of which the Emma Goldman Clinic is a founding member. To contact Karen or the Emma Goldman Clinic go to www.emmagoldman.com.

Emma Goldman on Free Speech and Press

Published in *New York World*, July 19, 1908

Many good people imagine that the principles of free speech or press can be exercised properly and with safety within the limits of constitutional guarantees. That is the only excuse, it seems to me, for the terrible apathy and indifference to the onslaught upon free speech and press that we have witnessed in this country within the last few months.

I believe that free speech and press mean that I may say and write what I please. This right, when regulated by constitutional provisions, legislative enactments, almighty decisions of the Postmaster General or the policeman’s club, becomes a farce. I am well aware that I will be warned of consequences if we remove the chains from speech and press. I believe, however, that the

cure of consequences resulting from the unlimited exercise of expression is to allow more expression.

Mental shackles have never yet stemmed the tide of progress, whereas premature social explosions have only too often been brought about through a wave a repression.

Will our governors never learn that countries like England, Holland, Nor-



way, Sweden and Denmark, with the largest freedom of expression, have been freest from “consequences”? Whereas Russia, Spain, Italy, France and, alas! even America, have raised these “consequences” to the most pressing political factor. Ours is supposed to be a country ruled by the majority, yet every policeman who is not vested with power by the majority can break up a meeting, drag the lecturer off the platform and club the audience out of the hall in Russian fashion. The Postmaster General, who is not an elective officer, has the

power to suppress publications and confiscate mail. From his decision there is no more appeal than from that of the Russian Czar. Truly, I believe we need a new Declaration of Independence. Is there no modern Jefferson or Adams? •

Sharon Rudahl was born in 1947 near Washington D.C. and, as a girl, marched with Martin Luther King. She graduated from Cooper Union in 1969. She was the author of the hippie cult novel "Acid Temple Ball," published by Olympia Press in 1969. Sharon learned to draw comics during the

Vietnam War and has been frequently published in underground newspapers and magazines, as well as in Marvel Comics and Paul Buhle's "Wobblies!" Her art has been widely exhibited, including at the Secession Art Gallery in Vienna. Sharon now lives in Hollywood with her husband, a professional chess player, and two sons. Her graphic biography of Emma Goldman, "A Dangerous Woman," will be published by New Press in September, 2007. For further information, you can contact Sarah Fan at sfan@thenewpress.com.



Mujeres, continued from p. 5

movement in Spain (and, in fact, in the broader world) — and, at same time, that which posed the greatest challenges for it. Despite the difficulties they had (I explore both the successes and difficulties in my book, *Free Women of Spain*, it is important to recognize what they accomplished, even in midst of civil war:

First, they acted on the basis of understandings about the situation of women in society that were advanced — even revolutionary — not just for their own time, but even for ours. Most significantly, they conceived of the emancipation of women as an integral part of “human” emancipation. Further, they struggled hard to work toward that end in the context of a broad social movement, which, in turn, required them to confront their own comrades and organizations, at the same time that they were trying to work with them. These are not now — nor were they then — easy goals to achieve.

Second, they offered a truly important vision of emancipation of women: one that was not about women’s conquest of power (economic, political, or social), but that was a profound critique of hierarchy in all its forms. They insisted that striving for privileges for some will always leave on the margins others who are “disprivileged” (e.g., today, the unemployed, the immigrants, the underemployed, “welfare mothers,” gays). They envisioned a society “*mas justa, mas humana para todos*” (“more just, more humane, for everyone”) — and they insisted that, if such a goal is to be achieved, women must work for it together with men.

Third, they recognized the importance of diversity, variety, differences among

people. And they put forward a vision of social transformation in which different groups would be included, in and with their differences. They argued that true freedom — emancipation in the full sense of the word — is to be achieved

“Well, against all that you have had to suffer, against all this, comes *Mujeres Libres*. We want you to have the same freedom as your brothers, we want your voice to be heard with the same respect as that of your father. We want you to achieve that independent life that you sometimes imagine for yourself.

“Now, remember, all this will require work from you; these goals will not be achieved simply by wanting them; you will need the help, the collective efforts of other compañeras. You will need others to be interested in the same things as you; they will need to help you, and you will need to help them. In one word, you will need to work together in community.”

Not a bad vision, even for our own day! •



A *Mujeres Libres* street poster.

only in community, and through social/collective struggle. As one of their original “calls” put it:

“Do you live in a village where women are relegated to a life of obscurity and insignificance, considered little more than things, dedicated exclusively to the care of home and family? Undoubtedly, many times you have found yourself disgusted with this, and, when you have witnessed the freedom that your brothers, and the men of your household exercise, you have felt sorrow at the plight of woman...

Martha Ackelsberg is Professor of Government and of the Study of Women and Gender at Smith College, where she teaches courses on urban politics, democratic theory, political theory, and (occasionally) anarchism and social movements. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on women’s activism in Spain, the United States and Latin America, on gender and public policy, feminist and democratic theory, changing understandings of families, gender and citizenship, and Jewish feminism. Her book, Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women, was published in 1991 by Indiana University Press, and reissued by AK Press (Oakland, CA) in 2005. She is currently at work on a collection of her essays, tentatively titled “Resisting Citizenship.” A somewhat longer version of this article appeared in the magazine Fifth Estate (2006).