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Emma Goldman: A Voice for Women?

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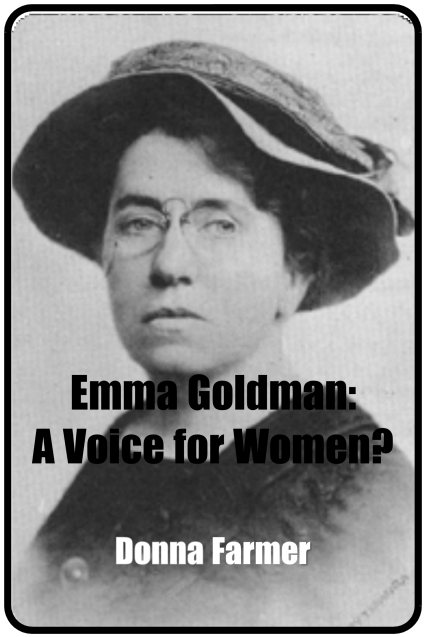

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"Mother liberty caresses with generous affections... [those] who, armed with the weapons of high-minded honesty... have grasped that the freedom of each is rooted in the freedom of all..."

- Emma Goldman to
Cronaca Sovversiva,
1 June 1903

Introduction

Emma Goldman defined anarchism as 'the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made laws; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence and are therefore wrong and harmful as well as unnecessary'.[1] Goldman's vision encompassed an idea of sexual and personal freedom as well as social revolution, but because she was primarily an anarchist - devoting her whole life to that cause - her feminism[2] has been overlooked, both in her own and recent times. Her dismissal of the women's suffrage campaign, and her bitter opposition to the social purity doctrines that inspired many feminist reformers, led her to reject the label *feminist*, and led many feminists to denounce her as an 'enemy of women's freedom' and a 'man's woman'. This work will attempt to show that she had something of value to say to women and that, in her way, she was not only a feminist but one of the most radical of her time.

The fact that Goldman was an activist rather than a systematic theorist presents a problem for any discussion of her

[1] Emma Goldman 'Anarchism: What it really stands for' in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, p.50.

[2] According to the 1933 supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary the first recorded use of the term 'feminist' in English (derived from the French word feminisme) was in 1894. See Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, p.1.

ideas; I have tried to show, however, that she *did* have particular ideas. To explain the evolution of her ideas, I felt it was essential to spend some time discussing the context in which her ideas were formed, for the reason stated above but also because, unlike other feminists, Goldman's fight for equality for women was second to her fight for equality for all.

The first part of this work discusses the early influences that worked on her consciousness and made her a rebel; it includes a discussion of the intellectual climate in the societies in which she lived (Russia and the USA) and discusses the conditions of the workers in those societies - to which she reacted so strongly. The second part discusses the conditions for women in the USA: their problems, the feminists' reactions, how Emma Goldman addressed the situation, and the answers she gave.

Russian Background

Emma Goldman was born into a Jewish family in the Russian province of Kovno on 29th June 1869. In her memoirs[3] she describes how she saw in the society around her the demoralising effects of unpredictable authority: wives and children beaten, peasants whipped, Jews outcast, rules made and broken on the whim of those in charge. There was no refuge for her within her family life; her despotic father, 'the nightmare of my childhood'[4] singled her out as the object of his frequent rages, thus ensuring that from the beginning her development was 'largely in revolt'[5]. In 1882 the family moved to St. Petersburg. Within a year, she says, 'it changed my very being and the whole course of my life'.[6] This was the year fol-

[3] *Living My Life.*

[4] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.59.

[5] 'Was My Life Worth Living?' in *Red Emma Speaks: Selected Writings and Speeches by Emma Goldman*, edited by Alix Kates Shulman, p.394.

[6] Frank Harris, *Emma Goldman, the Famous Anarchist*, p.228, cited by Alice Wexler in *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.19.

in by tradition and conventions. The essence of Emma Goldman's feminism is that we must rid ourselves of the shackles of those traditions and conventions and consider ourselves as human beings whose value is equal to that of men:

Since woman's greatest misfortune has been that she was looked upon as either angel or devil, her true salvation lies in being placed on earth; namely being considered human.[89]

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[89] In the anarchist ranks Kropotkin, for example, neglected to mention the specific problems of women and Proudhon (although not a contemporary) had a distinct strain of misogyny.

Conclusion

Emma Goldman's life was a battle for freedom for both sexes as well as an end to 'industrial slavery'. She was almost alone among immigrant radicals in resisting a narrowly economic interpretation of social injustice and in stressing cultural, psychological, and sexual issues. During a time when most of the rest, anarchist and socialist, argued that emancipation of women would occur automatically with the defeat of capitalism, Goldman insisted (as feminists always had) that women's issues must be addressed immediately and not left to a hypothetical future. At a time when many radicals looked forward to the strengthening of traditional roles after the revolution, she insisted that the institutionalisation of love and motherhood was part of the structure that imprisoned women and must be radically revised.[88] Goldman may have failed in achieving her anarchist vision, but she succeeded in giving a feminist dimension to anarchism and a libertarian dimension to the concept of women's emancipation.

Emma Goldman had a message for women that is still relevant today. She told us to look beyond the artificial limitations and boundaries society has placed around us. By extending the anarchist emphasis on individual will to women, she was telling us we have both the right and the power to take our own fixture into our own hands, individually as well as collectively. She did not preach a feminism of extremes - of man-hating separatism or denial of the value of motherhood; an understanding of Goldman does not tell us to divorce our husbands or practise free love, but it can lead us to an awareness of ourselves as individuals with the right to make our own choices. It may be that women would of their own volition make different choices from men, but we can never know that whilst we are hemmed

[88] Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.224.

lowing the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, which was the climax of several decades of mounting radical activity directed against Tsarist autocracy. The Tsar was assassinated by members of the terrorist organisation 'Narodnaya Volya' (The People's Will) who were part of the socialist movement known as *populism*. Populism had first emerged as a response to the European revolutions of 1848 and was strengthened by the growing contradictions between Russia's developing industrialisation and expanding intelligentsia on the one hand, and the extreme poverty of the masses on the other. All of Russia's wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of a tiny, landed gentry, which lived off a vast exploited population of illiterate and impoverished peasants. Over this empire of misery presided the Tsar, whose absolute rule was supported by a powerful secret police, a huge bureaucracy, and the Russian Orthodox Church.

In revulsion against the growing poverty and injustice around them, intellectuals such as Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevski - nourished by radical thought from Western Europe - began to evolve a specifically Russian version of socialism. They believed that the Russian peasants were inherently socialist in spirit and argued that Russia could bypass capitalism in the march towards socialism if only the enslaving institutions could be destroyed. What they called for was a decentralised, agrarian socialism. This was to be organised around the traditional autonomous, self-governing peasant commune with collective ownership of land, factories, and workshops. They also called for universal education and suffrage; complete freedom of speech and the press; sexual equality; and a democratically elected constitutional government with a high regional autonomy.[7] Beginning by emphasising self education in loosely organised discussion circles and study groups, the Populists moved towards more

[7] This information is from Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.24.

organised forms of agitation and propaganda work among peasants and workers, and finally towards highly disciplined conspiratorial terrorism - including the destruction of property and assassination of state officials.

The period following the Tsar's assassination was one of savage reprisals and political repression, but St Petersburg was a city of resistance and remained alive with libertarian and egalitarian ideals. Emma Goldman began to read the forbidden tracts and novels that circulated amongst her sister's student friends and to mourn the revolutionaries - most of whom had been imprisoned, exiled to Siberia, or executed.[8] She began to question more and more the society in which she lived. The ideas of the Populists clearly influencing her later anarchist ideas.

It is relevant to note the special reverence Emma Goldman felt towards the young women revolutionaries. They 'had been my inspiration ever since I had first read of their lives'; she later wrote in her memoirs.[9] The prominence of women in the Russian revolutionary movement was a unique phenomenon within the context of the nineteenth century European left. The movement was perhaps the only setting in which women were treated as equals; the vocation of revolutionary the only one that allowed women the full use of their talents. Women functioned at all levels of the movement, including leadership. The revolutionary ethic of sacrifice for the cause appealed both to the traditional value of female self-sacrifice and the women's hunger for action, equality, and social commitment.[10]

[8] In *Living My Life*, p.27-28, Goldman says, 'Something mysterious had awakened compassion for them in me. I wept bitterly over their fate,' Wexler points out, ibid. p.23, that Goldman called populists 'nihilists' although technically nihilism referred to one element within the broader populist movement - the rebels of the 1850s and 1860s - for whom the element of personal revolt was paramount, as distinct from those who were primarily political and social radicals.

[9] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.12.

[10] See Wexler, ibid., p.27.

> miserable detective on the beat, ... the authorities in every prison.[84]

Although Goldman was no more in favour of prostitution than marriage, she identified with prostitutes because of their class, and because they defied the sexual hypocrisy of puritanism as she did. She did not blame them, but understood their plight. That she could not easily identify with middle-class wives was less of a failure of her feminism, or even a function of anarchism, than a failure of imagination.[85]

Goldman's main quarrel with her women contemporaries was that she refused to see women as inherently different intellectually from men and therefore neither better nor worse than them. She argued that if male egotism, vanity, and strength operated to enslave women, it was partly because women themselves idealised these qualities and created a self-perpetuating system; when women changed their consciousness, broke that circle, and freed themselves from such ill-suited ideals, they might 'incidentally also help men become free'.[86]

True emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts, it begins in women's soul. History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn from that lesson, that she realises her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches.[87]

[84] Ibid. pp.216-7.

[85] Emma Goldman, 'The Traffic in Women' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.188.

[86] Point made by Alix Kates Shulman in 'Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal', *Red Emma Speaks*, p.16.

[87] See *Living My Life*, pp.556-7.

> prefer marriage, with all its deficiencies, to the narrowness of an unmarried life: narrow and unendurable because of the chains of moral and social prejudice that cramp and bind her nature.[82]

At other times she did seem to say that if you suffer in marriage, leave your husband and be free; if you suffer jealousy, stop seeing the other person as your property; and if as an emancipated woman you are lonely, go out and practice free-love. Together with her position on suffrage this attitude shocked and angered many feminists (neither sympathy nor hostility to the plight of married women was implicit in anarchist doctrine).

If Goldman was impatient with middle-class and married women, she did identify with the needs and desires of the working-class women she helped to organise. As a trade union organiser, she insisted that women ought to earn enough money to be able to be more than mere drudges and to enjoy some pleasure in life. 'A so-called independence which leads only to earning the merest subsistence is not so enticing, not so ideal that one could expect women to sacrifice everything for it'.[83] Women needed flowers, books, visits to the theatre and romantic love.

She identified in the prostitute a paradigm of woman's subordinate position in society:

> Society has not a word of condemnation for the man, while no law is too monstrous to set in motion against the helpless victim. She is not only preyed upon by those who use her, but she is also absolutely at the mercy of every policeman and

[82] Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and Love' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.234.

[83] Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.221.

At the age of fifteen Emma's father tried to marry her off but she rebelled against his authority protesting that she wanted to study and travel. Her father's reaction, that 'girls do not have to learn much' only how to 'prepare minced fish, cut noodles fine, and give the man plenty of children',[11] further inspired her rebellion, so when her sister planned to emigrate to America in 1886, Emma fled with her. She went full of images of the golden life of freedom she would find there - instead, in the ghetto life of Rochester, New York, she found repression and squalor that differed little from what she had left behind.

American Background

The United States[12] was undergoing rapid industrial expansion. The prevailing ideology was that whatever helped business helped the country. They were operating under a laissez-faire economic system, which appealed to the ingrained American belief in freedom; political economists believed this system would promote competition, encourage business enterprise, and increase national wealth. This notion was strengthened by Darwin's evolutionary theories (as popularised through the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer), which implied that if it was inevitable and right that the fittest should survive in nature's struggle for existence, then the same thing should hold true in the economic sphere; free competition without government intervention would enable the most efficient businesses to survive, thereby promoting the national economy in the most effective way. But, in this era of big business, the consequences of laissez-faire were clearly not in the public interest, especially as the government denied

[11] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.12.

[12] Background information on the U.S.A. from Peter N. Carrol and David W. Noble, *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* and Foster Rhea Dulles, *The United States since 1865*.

its basic tenets through subsidies and loans and protective tariffs; it tended to kill off competition and, when monopoly dominated the scene, the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few increased the concentration of political power, threatening the liberty of many. As a justification for this situation, the idea was cultivated that economic and political power should be concentrated in the hands of a privileged minority who not only were rich but were also good and wise. This 'Gospel of Wealth'[13] gave little thought to farmers, workers or small businessmen who fell victim to monopolistic practices.

The position of the workers had been transformed by the growth of industry and the increased use of machines; workers in factories, mills, and foundries lost the independence and freedom that labourers had once enjoyed; they became helpless pawns in the hands of corporations which considered labour, like any other commodity, as something to be bought as cheaply as possible.

Anarchism

The problem was extenuated by the continued swelling of the urban population by the throngs of immigrants who were pouring into the country at an ever-increasing rate. By the 1870s these immigrants were largely Eastern European peasants, whose arrival increased the working class and gutted the labour market; the consequence was that jobs became scarce and wages shrank - other urban workers felt their economic po-

[13] There was an effort to develop a 'Gospel of Wealth' among those who found themselves in the select group of the rich, the good and the wise. This meant that the rich should be the trustees of the poor and distribute some of their money through public philanthropy. But a theory that sought to justify a system that actually increased the chasm between the rich and poor, substituting charity for a more equitable division of income, aroused criticism, and resentment.

be seen to blame not only women[80] but also men and even workers for their oppression.

It is true to say that Goldman does not always identify with women in their struggle, especially middle-class women and, given her great hostility to marriage, wives. Her writings show a mix of understanding and blame:

> It is not important whether the husband is a brute or a darling … marriage guarantees woman a home only by the grace of her husband. There she moves about in his home year after year, until her aspect of life and human affairs becomes as flat, narrow, and drab as her surroundings. Small wonder if she becomes a nag, petty, quarrelsome, gossipy, unbearable, thus driving the man from the house … married life, complete surrender of all faculties, absolutely incapacitates the average woman for the outside world. She becomes reckless in her appearance, clumsy in her movements, dependent in her decisions, cowardly in her judgement, a weight, and a bore, which most men grow to hate and despise.[81]

But at times she seems to sympathise with the plight of both wives and emancipated women:

> It has been conclusively proved that the old matrimonial relation restricted women to the function of a man's servant and the bearer of his children. And yet we find many emancipated women who

[80] Emma Goldman, 'Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure' in *Red Emma Speaks*, p.220.

[81] So did Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She felt that it suited middle-class married women to remain blind to the realities of their situation.

that many independent women found the problems they faced insurmountable. Goldman's 'problem' was that she was somewhat of a 'superwoman' and, as Alix Kates Shulman points out[78] the impact of the superwoman on women of lesser accomplishment is always double-edged. While she stands as an important example to others of what it is possible to achieve, for ordinary women, bogged down by daily life, the model may serve as a rebuke, causing her to question her ability.

Goldman - anarchist and individualist - was concerned not only to change social structures but to live out her principles as well (indeed she was prepared to go to jail for them), and she was sometimes impatient with women who were unable to follow her example. She exhorted people not only to organise to resist authority but to also change their ways as individuals. The individualism associated with anarchism emphasises will, creating a problem in that a failure to change can be seen as a failure of the individual will:

It is only too true that we all smart under the burdens of iniquitous social arrangements, under coercion and moral blindness. But are we not conscious individuals, whose aim it is to bring truth and justice into human affairs? The theory that man is a product of conditions has led only to indifference and to a sluggish acquiescence in these conditions, yet everyone knows that adaption to an unhealthy and unjust mode of life only strengthens both, while man, the so-called crown of all creation, equipped with a capacity to think and see and above all to employ his powers of initiative, grows ever weaker, more passive, more fatalistic.[79] Thus, Goldman can sometimes

[78] Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*, p.505.

[79] In 'Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal', introduction to *Red Emma Speaks*.

sition was threatened. It was a period of upheaval, in the face of deterioration in economic and social status; the country's workers sought some means for better protection of their interests while strikes, labour violence, and rural unrest underlined the severe tensions that accompanied industrialisation and urbanisation.

Reform proposals took on an incredible variety of forms - ranging from populism[14] and socialism, through farmer-labourer coalition to Henry George's single tax'[15] and beyond - emphasising the confusion that many people felt concerning both the causes and cures for America's social and economic problems. In the United States, as in most industrial countries of Europe, radicals increasingly chose socialism for several reasons; its ideology reinforced rather than resisted the trend towards political and economic centralisation, its reliance on political techniques allowed for organisation and integration into an already existing governmental process, and because of its attitude towards technology (that it was a blessing that would ultimately provide all members of society with material comfort). While most Americans, including the majority of radicals and reformers, struggled to come to terms with the technological and economic forces that had transformed

[14] The aim of populism in the U.S.A. was to assert the rights of the producing classes throughout the nation, win redress for their grievances, and break the hold of monopoly capitalism over the nation's economic life. There was a political arm called the 'People's Party'.

[15] George, who completely rejected Social Darwinism, believed the problems created by the fact that the concentration of wealth was in the hands of the few stemmed from a system of land ownership that enabled property owners to profit from the increasing social value of the land without necessarily doing anything themselves to improve it. They were not entitled to this unearned increment, he argued, and it should be returned to the people whose presence in the community had accounted for the land's increase in value. This was to be done through a 'single tax' on the land. He was convinced that it would minimise the difference between the poor and the rich, make all other taxes unnecessary, and mark the beginning of a new golden age.

society, the anarchists contemptuously refused to do so. They carried to extremes the doubts expressed by others in more moderate terms.

So, anarchism appeared in the United States in the late nineteenth century as one response among many to the social and economic dislocations attending the emergence of an increasingly centralised and urbanised industrial society. Anarchism, like socialism and other radical reform movements, confronted the issues of conflict between capital and labour, corporate, centralisation, the concentration of wealth, the creation of mass poverty, and rapid technological change, but it was set apart from the other movements by its voluntarist and decentralist ideology.

At the core of anarchist ideology was the rejection of all forms of externally imposed authority, especially but not exclusively as it was embodied in government. Anarchists insisted on each individual's right to absolute freedom, limited only by a prohibition against infringing the liberties of others. This belief united anarchists who agreed on nothing else, for the anarchist movement,[16] no less than the socialist movement, was faction ridden and divided. In the United States the two most important factions were the Individualists and the Communist anarchists (or Anarcho-communists). Individualist anarchism reflected the cultural traditions and economic circumstances of America. It is an outgrowth of classical liberalism and most educated, native-born Americans who became anarchists chose Individualism. Communist anarchism offered greater attraction to the working-class immigrants and their children who felt cheated by the false promises of the 'American Dream'.

The Individualists rejected governmental authority and wanted the creation of a society in which each person would

[16] Information on anarchism from David Miller, *Anarchism*, George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870-1920*, and primary sources.

it has 'brought woman economic equality with men' (an assertion Spender points out would have been contested no less rigorously at the turn of the century than now) this 'highly praised independence is, after all, but a slow process of dulling and shifting a woman's nature, her mother instinct'.[74]

Spender concludes that Goldman sees emancipation as more of a tragedy than traditional marriage, but I think she fails to understand Goldman's anarchism. Although it is strange to hear an anarchist invoking the 'cult of true womanhood and presenting it as a desired and inevitable outcome of the anarchist revolution,[75] Goldman wanted the new anarchist society to be one where women (and men) would be free to give rein to all their natural instincts.[76] She was trying to say that emancipation in existing society did not allow for the individuality and freedom of each person to do and be what they choose without denying the 'inner' person. To say that to be loved, or to be a mother, is synonymous with being a slave or subordinate is, she said, ridiculous.[77]

Spender's severest criticism of Emma Goldman is that she lays some blame on women themselves for their position. Spender says that no one has ever suggested that it is easy or without penalties to live as an independent woman in a male-dominated society, but that the difficulties are inflicted by men, who usually do not like such independence in women and want to coerce them back into 'the fold of love for men, and expression of the maternal instinct' and

[74] Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.224.

[75] Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*, p.504.

[76] Remembering that Goldman, like Kropotkin, assumed that mankind was inherently good and thought that the removal of artificial restraints would allow this 'goodness' to surface. Instincts of a kind that would not be beneficial to the society of other individuals therefore would not be considered a problem that was likely to arise.

[77] Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.224.

tion of women), she went much further than most radicals in her understanding of the politics of sex.

Goldman idealises love, and also - giving fuel to her feminist critics - motherhood. '…Motherhood is the highest fulfilment of woman's nature', and 'the most glorious privilege'.[70] Love and motherhood are held up as the positive features of women's existence, and it seems paradoxical to hear a 'feminist' invoking them. Women's emancipation was, she felt, eroding women's ability to love and to mother; it was leading women down the wrong path to freedom:

> Emancipation as understood by the majority of its adherents is too narrow a scope to permit the boundless love and ecstasy contained in the deep emotion of a true woman, sweetheart, mother in freedom.[71]

She was criticising modern feminists for concerning themselves merely with 'external tyrannies' like the denial of the vote or lack of a job, while the 'internal tyrants' of ethical and social conventions - which are more harmful to life and growth - were ignored. She pitied emancipated, professional, middle-class women; they were independent but paid for it 'by the suppression of the mainspring of their own nature' for 'fear of public opinion robbed them of love and intimate comradeship. It was pathetic to see how lonely they were and how they craved children'.[72] Dale Spender is strongly critical of Goldman on this point.[73] She cannot accept Goldman's argument that the 'emancipated' woman is to be pitied and needs to be 'emancipated from emancipation', because, while

[70] Emma Goldman , 'Marriage and Love' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.235.

[71] Emma Goldman: 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.217.

[72] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.371.

[73] Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*, p.504.

choose freely how to live. All they prescribed for this society was non-interference with the liberty of others and the acceptance of the costs and consequences of individual actions. The main disagreement between the two groups was over the question of property. The Individualists accepted the notion of private property, believing that the state was the chief obstacle to freedom; the Communist anarchists on the other hand placed private property itself at the centre of their analysis of social and economic oppression. Although both groups derived their ideas from Proudhon,[17] the Communist anarchists had also been influenced by Marxist theories of class conflict.

Emma Goldman's Anarchism

From the late nineteenth century on, Peter Kropotkin was the chief theoretician of anarcho-communism. At the heart of his social theory lay his belief that the essential characteristic of human beings was their desire to co-operate with others in order to secure the basic needs of life.[18] This quality meant that the individual was essentially a social being who could only achieve full development within society, while society could only benefit if its members were free. Kropotkin and his followers saw no conflict between the interests of the individual and those of the community; therefore, they felt no need for the preservation of private property and would abolish it along with the state. They wanted instead to create a system of federated but autonomous communes, producing and sharing

[17] Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, often called the 'father of anarchism', proposed an economic system, 'mutualism', that reconciled individualism and communism.

[18] Kropotkin's theory of 'mutual aid' was his attempt to counter the theories of Social Darwinists with an evolutionary theory which denied that the 'survival of the fittest' was the fight of individuals, and stressed the necessity of socialisation for survival.

freely. Within these communes wages and payments for services would be eliminated along with private property, because the community would provide equally for all its members.

The message of the Anarcho-communists did not appeal to the Americans, and by the late nineteenth century the mention of the word 'anarchism' evoked terror in most minds. One source of this response was the Haymarket bombing on 4th May 1886. An unknown terrorist threw a bomb during a labour demonstration at Chicago's Haymarket Square. One policeman was killed outright and six others died as a result of the attack. The authorities never discovered the identity of the person who threw the bomb; but that did not deter the police from indicting eight men for murder on the charge that they were anarchists and therefore morally responsible for inciting terrorism - even if they did not perform the deed themselves. Seven of the eight were sentenced to death; four of them were eventually hanged. It was reading about the Haymarket trials and the consequent execution of the anarchists that resolved Emma Goldman to becoming an active revolutionary.

'Anarchism,' Goldman says, 'stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion, the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraints of government.'[19] Anarchists question the validity of the very structure of society as it exists, but Emma Goldman wanted to do more than just question and theorise, she believed that 'propaganda by deed' was necessary to arouse people to action.

At the age of twenty she moved to New York and was soon living with several Russian born anarchists, including Alexander Berkman. After only six months in New York, she set off on a successful speaking tour with the aim of 'making a revolution'. This launched her career as one of the most charismatic and volatile speakers in the history of American oratory. She

[19] Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.62.

nobody's business but her own; if it was acceptable for men to be varietists, surely a woman had the same entitlement. In lectures on 'Sex, the Great Element of Creative Art', she stressed the power of sexual impulse over all aspects of life and argued that sexual repression harmed health and also inhibited intellectual and artistic creativity.[66] The basic anarchist idea of 'non-invasion' was also extended by Goldman to the defence of homosexuality;[67] she argued that any act entered into voluntarily by two people was not vice. 'What is usually hastily condemned by thoughtless individuals such as homosexuality, masturbation, etc.' she advised, 'should be considered from a scientific viewpoint and not in a moralising way.'[68]

Since women suffered most from repressive sexual values, 'the sex question' was emphatically a woman's question. For Goldman, the liberation of women could not wait until after the revolution or be subsumed under larger political struggles; free women were essential for the success of the radical movement and, moreover, the sexual liberation of women was integral to their emancipation as fully developed human beings. 'I demand the independence of woman, her right to support herself; to live as she pleases. I demand freedom for both sexes, freedom of action, freedom in love and freedom in motherhood'.[69] Although we may regard her discussion of sexual liberation as romantic (she ignores, for example, the ways in which 'free love' was often used by men to rationalise the sexual exploita-

[66] Emma Goldman 'The Element of Sex in Life' in the *Michigan Daily*, 17th March 1912, Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.94.

[67] I would like to point out here that Dale Spender says (*Women of Ideas*, p.504) that Goldman does not even question heterosexuality. While she does not question it for herself, she makes it clear that she sees sexuality as an individual choice, and she has no moral bias in favour of heterosexuality - as seen both in these quotations and in *Living My Life* pp.665-6.

[68] *Lucifer*, 23rd March 1901, Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.94.

[69] *The Firebrand*, 19th July 1897, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.94.

'Marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, an insurance pact,' in which every woman pays with. her self-respect, 'her very life till death doth part'. The man however pays only in an economic way.[60] She was repelled by the fact that women will marry for the practical reason of financial security and not love. 'Free Love? As if love is anything but free!' Love in freedom, she said, can give itself 'unreservedly, abundantly, completely'. All the law courts 'cannot tear it from the soil once it has taken root, if however, the soil is sterile how can marriage make it bear fruit?'[61] Love, like everything else, is contaminated by institutionalisation. She did not deny that there can be loving marriages but said that in the case of real love, marriage is superfluous. She believed only in 'the marriage of affection'. 'If two people care for each other', then 'they have a right to live together as long as that love exists. When it is dead, what base immorality for them still to keep together'.[62]

She went on to define 'the sex question'[63] as 'the very basis of the weal or the woe of the race' and urged for public discussions to overcome the 'conspiracy of silence'[64] She held talks on 'Marriage', 'The New Woman', 'Free Love' and 'Sex Problems'; explaining that 'the sex act is simply the execution of certain natural functions of the human body, as natural, as healthy, and as necessary when exercised temperately, as the functions of the stomach, the brain, the muscles etc.'[65] Each individual should be the sole determinant of his or her sexual behaviour. If a woman was a monogamist or a 'varietist' it was

[60] Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and Love' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.228.

[61] Ibid. p.236.

[62] New York World, 17 September 1893, cited by Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.93.

[63] The following discussion relies on Wexler as I had no access to the relevant articles.

[64] *Free Society*, 13 August 1899, Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.94.

[65] Ibid.

believed that if the masses could be aroused to action by some polarising event, the revolution against the capitalist masters might begin. The steelworkers' strike of 1892 in Homestead, Pennsylvania, seemed to present the right opportunity. The nation's attention was focused on the violence of the situation at Homestead and Emma and her comrades thought it provided the perfect moment for the 'supreme deed' - for violent propaganda that, by their anarchist theories, would arouse the people against their capitalist oppressors. The plan was to assassinate the chairman of the Homestead company, Henry Clay Frick, as the Russians had assassinated the Tsar. Goldman's tasks were to raise the money for the gun and to explain the deed to the world. The act was committed by Berkman on 23rd July 1892 - but Frick survived and recovered quickly.

The world did not want to hear Berkman's explanation. The anarchists' motives were misunderstood, disapproved of, and were repudiated by the Homestead strikers themselves. The action confused the issues of the strike and reawakened a nationwide fear of anarchism. It was from this time that Goldman's demonic legend was launched. On her release from a one-year prison sentence for delivering a speech that allegedly incited the New York unemployed to riot (no riot in fact took place) she found herself a notorious celebrity: 'Red Emma', the enemy of God, law, marriage, and the state.

The following years saw Emma Goldman participating in each radical crisis that emerged, travelling the country, and speaking with dedication to her anarchist vision. Her anarchism was not formulated in a systematic way[20] but developed in her lectures, in pamphlets, in articles published both in the anarchist and commercial press, and in interviews. Her thought, as it emerged in the late 1890s, blended Kropotkin's theory of Anarcho-communism with the individualism of

[20] See Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.50.

Stirner, Ibsen, and Nietzsche[21] and had a strong emphasis on women's emancipation and sexual freedom drawn from Chernyshevski, Freud, the British sex radicals, and the American free love tradition. Less interested in theory than practice, she used these ideas to criticise contemporary society and to promote methods of change.

The essential basis of her politics was opposition to the state. Her strategy was opposition to centralised authority, to large organisations, to legal compulsion such as the draft, and to any form of censorship or coercion. Anarchists opposed not only dictatorships and repressive government authority but also more liberal forms of the state. Goldman therefore opposed parliamentary democracy (as well as undemocratic forms of government) on the grounds that it subordinated the individual or minority to the will of the majority. Individuals were required to delegate decision making to the will of the majority; this meant that decision-making power was taken from the individual and given to a representative. On her opposition to parliamentary democracy, she was adamant, actively urging people not to vote, participate in electoral campaigns, or hold any government positions; she criticised comrades who occasionally compromised their principles to campaign or vote for socialist or labour candidates. Elections and voting, she asserted, gave people the illusion of political participation without the reality. Electing radicals to political office merely created a new class of bureaucrats within the radical movement, the ballot being 'simply a means for the transference of the rights of people to the control of rulers'.[22] In Goldman's view, the struggle must not be fought by electoral politics for, she said, 'correct ideas must precede correct

[21] She admired the strong, heroic, non-conformist individual. She was herself capable of Nietzschean tirades against the 'rabble' and the 'common herd', which at times appeared to undercut her defence of labour.

[22] Emma Goldman, *Free Society*, 5th June 1898, cited by Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.91.

and therefore women had a right to a role in public life.) She felt that almost every man she had ever known had tried to inhibit her activities as unsuitable to her sex and treated her as a 'mere female'[56]:

> Nowhere is woman treated according to the merits of her work, but rather as a sex. It is therefore almost inevitable that she should pay for her right to exist, to keep a position in whatever line, with sex favours. Thus, it is merely a question of degree whether she sell herself to one man, in or out of marriage, or to many men.[57]

She saw the institution of marriage as leading to the despicable treatment of women, even as legal prostitution:[58]

> The institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, and absolute dependent. It incapacitates her for life's struggle, annihilates her social consciousness, paralyses her imagination, and then imposes its gracious protection, which is in reality a snare … marriage prepares woman for the life of … a dependent, helpless servant, while it furnishes the man the right of chattel mortgage over another human life.[59]

Marriage, for Goldman, is a force to be submitted to for the sake of public opinion; it is hypocritical, and nothing to do with love. Love should be the binding force of relationships.

[56] Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, p.215.

[57] Emma Goldman, 'The Traffic in Women' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.171.

[58] As had many feminists before her, notably, Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791).

[59] Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and Love' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.235.

plicitly discussed women they have frequently not extended to them their various conceptions of human nature; they have not only assigned women a distinct role, but have defined them separately and often in contrast to men.[53] Goldman recognised this and insisted that female subordination was rooted in an obsolete system of sexual and familial relations that needed to be overthrown. 'Puritan morality', marriage, enforced childbearing and the nature of the patriarchal family were the cause of women's restricted life.

Goldman embraced the sexual radicalism of birth control, free love[54] and free motherhood. To her personal autonomy was an essential component of sexual equality that political and legal rights could not of themselves engender. The 'internal tyrants' thwarted and crippled women more than legal and economic factors:

> It is morality which condemns woman to the position of a celibate, a prostitute, or a reckless, incessant breeder of hopeless children... Religion and morality are a much better whip to keep people in submission than even the club or the gun.[55]

The first step to equality for women, in Goldman's view, was economic, psychological, and sexual independence from men and male dominated institutions. This rested on her belief in the essential sameness of men and women. (She believed that, although there are individual differences between people, intellectual and psychological differences are not gender based,

[53] These points are made by Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought.*

[54] By 'Free Love' is meant love in freedom and not a license for sex. Exponents of free love expressed a belief that it would not lead to promiscuity but to a deepening of the union between those people who come together without the contamination of institutionalisation and tradition.

[55] Emma Goldman, 'Victims of Morality' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.171.

action', and further, 'Education and agitation are the means. Whenever the people shall have arrived at knowledge of the true principles governing harmonious social relations, they will put them into action without the ballot box.'[23]

The anarchists advocated 'direct action' instead of 'political action' - demonstrations in the streets, strikes in the workplace and the assertion of individuals' will in everyday life. Instead of mass organisations or political parties, Goldman advocated action by small autonomous groups and by individuals seizing the initiative to oppose oppressive laws and to create alternative institutions such as radical schools, theatres, libraries, and co-operatives. She actively defended trade unions, urged them to become more revolutionary in their demands, and often spoke in support of striking workers. 'Direct action against the authority in the shop, direct action against the invasive, meddlesome authority of our own moral code, is the logical consistent method of anarchism'.[24]

Goldman, as a communist anarchist, opposed capitalism as well as the state. As discussed above, the parliamentary socialists argued for nationalisation of the means of the production, while the anarchists argued for 'socialisation'; in other words, the transfer of private property, not to the state, but to the individuals who actually worked or used it. Goldman therefore was opposed to the socialist and populist demands for state social welfare programmes and for the nationalisation of major industries - such as railroads, utilities, and banks - on the grounds that this would only increase the power of the government.

Like most of her anarchist contemporaries Goldman was antipathetic to religion. She frequently lectured on atheism and the failure of Christianity, which she thought was 'admirably adapted to the training of slaves' and insisted on the evils not

[23] Emma Goldman, *Free Society*, 15th May 1898, Ibid.

[24] Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.72.

only of the church, but of religious belief itself.[25] She was herself, however, inspired by a deeply ethical and moral passion. She once remarked, 'I don't care if a man's theory for tomorrow is correct, I care if his spirit of today is correct'; this spirit she defined not as trying to 'enrich ourselves at the expense of others'.[26]

Emma Goldman emphasised that anarchism was not just 'kicking against everything - especially private property', but that it was committed to the 'tearing down of existing institutions which hold the human race in bondage'.[27] It was also committed to building a free society in which the potential of every individual could reach its fullest expression. She accepted Kropotkin's view that human beings were 'naturally' social and that there was no inherent conflict between individual and social instincts. Without the domination of powerful institutions of authority and of 'manmade laws', people would be free to follow the dictates of natural law, which she defined as, 'that factor in man which asserts itself freely and spontaneously without any external force, in harmony with the requirements of nature'. Removal of artificial forms of authority would result not in chaos, but in the emergence of 'natural' forms of social co-operation and mutual aid.[28]

Goldman, like most anarchists, refused to prescribe the future anarchist society, only affirming that 'Its economic arrangements must consist of voluntary productive and distributive associations, gradually developing into free communism...'.[29] By contrast with present society which robbed

[25] Emma Goldman, 'The failure of the Church', in *Red Emma Speaks*, p.187.

[26] Emma Goldman, *Mother Earth*, December 1907, p.44, cited by Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, p.92.

[27] Emma Goldman Lecture, February 1908, file 52416-43 U.S. Dept of Labour, Immigration and Naturalisation Service, cited by Wexler, ibid.

[28] Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.58.

[29] Ibid. p.56.

desire to see women free.[51] Emma Goldman thought women should be working (with men) to create an anarchist society; the restructure of society as a whole should include the transcendence of individual social and moral precepts to enable women to create for themselves independent, productive, and meaningful lives.

Anarchist-feminists went further than questioning the structure of the state and questioned the structure of the patriarchal family. Goldman and other anarchist-feminists, following in the path of their radical predecessors, were probing sexual and familial relationships to see to what extent the family relationship may be inegalitarian. They probed the question of gender and found that in the case of woman what is called natural is dictated by whatever social and economic structure a theorist favours and is defined as what suites women's prescribed functions in that society.[52]

For Emma Goldman sexual and reproductive matters were at the heart of women's inferior position in society; she recognised that socio-sexual factors like repression, as well as economic factors, worked to oppress women. To regard the family as a natural and necessary institution can lead to the definition of women by their sexual, procreative and child rearing functions within it. This can lead to the prescription of a code of morality and conception of rights for women distinctly different from those prescribed for men (as we have seen within the suffrage movement). The assumption of the necessity of the family leads the theorists then to regard the biological differences as entailing all other conventional and institutional differences in sex roles, which the family has required. As a result of this, women's restricted role has been regarded as dictated by her very nature, and where philosophers have ex-

[51] Her prediction of how little the vote would benefit women has turned out to be correct.

[52] For a discussion of anarchist-feminists in the U.S.A. see Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870-1920*.

of purification is to credit her with supernatural powers'.[48] The vote would be, at best, irrelevant to women:

> [Woman's] development, her freedom, her independence must come through herself First by asserting herself as a personality, and not as a sex commodity. Second, by refusing the right to anyone over her body; by refusing to bear children, unless she wants them; by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family etc. By making her life simpler, but deeper and richer. That is by trying to learn the meaning and substance of life in all its complexities, by freeing herself from the fear of public opinion and public condemnation. Only that, and not the ballot, will set women free.[49]

While acknowledging that some women wanted the vote in order to free their sex from bondage to church, state, and home, the majority of suffragists, she argued, wanted the vote in order to 'make her a better Christian and homemaker and citizen of the state ... the very Gods that women have served from time immemorial'.[50]

For Goldman, the struggle for the vote was a diversion from the real struggle; women's hopes were being corrupted by the enemy of government. As those who criticised her point out, her estimate of the practical consequences of the vote, and her hostility to government, blinded her to the natural rights argument in favour of suffrage; but her active opposition to suffrage was not anti-feminist or anti-woman, it was based on a

[48] Emma Goldman, 'Woman Suffrage', in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.198.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

man 'not merely of the products of his labour, but of the power of free initiative, of originality, and the interest in, or desire for, the things he is making', the anarchist society would leave the individual free to do meaningful work. The worker would resemble the artist, 'One to whom the making of a table, the building of a house, or the tilling of the soil, is what the painting is to the artist and the discovery to the scientist - the result of inspiration, of intense longing, and deep interest in work as a creative force'.[30]

To her anarchist vision - a world in which everyone would be free from the tyrannies of capitalism, state, and church - Emma Goldman added the tyranny of patriarchy. It was her insistence on making sexuality a central concern of her politics that distinguished Goldman's anarchism from most of her contemporaries, for while she saw all these tyrannies as morally self-supporting, she made it clear that women's oppression was distinct from men's oppression, and she showed an understanding of the pressure and conditions under which women uniquely suffered.

Conditions of Women in the U.S.A.

Having discussed Emma Goldman's reaction to American society in general, we will now turn to look at her reaction to the specific problems associated with women, beginning with a discussion of women in eighteenth and early nineteenth century American society.[31]

Business and trade had taken men away from their homes leaving women alone in them, isolated from the world of commerce. Women's role in the family had always been her

[30] Ibid. pp.55-56.

[31] Information for this analysis from Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman, A *History of Women in America* and Peter N. Carol and David W. Noble, *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* and *The United States since 1865*.

most important role but previously she shared the role with men. On colonial farms, for example, the labour of both sexes was equally necessary - men and women worked as partners. Among the new middle class, home and family came to be seen as separate from the world of work and money. Women were affected by this change in significant ways. Within their homes, middleclass women continued to perform traditional work - to cook, to clean, make clothing and household goods, but this was no longer considered 'real work' as, unlike men, they earned no payment from it. For the first time in America a class of women emerged who were seen as being 'supported' by their husbands. They were no longer partners but dependents; the development of an industrial society changed the definition of women's work.

Taking away the economic importance from the middle-class home did not, however, diminish the significance of home and family life. Ideas about the home and the women and children who were kept safe there from the 'cruelties of the marketplace' came to assume new levels of emotional importance. Home and family became the emotional receptacle for all the sentimental values and feelings that middle-class men increasingly felt inhibited from exhibiting. A wife came to symbolise her husband's 'better half, embodying the purity, spirituality, and the goodness which his business life lacked. Men tried to regain the tender side of their own natures through women.

Although at the time few would have recognised the connection between the new sexual definitions and economic practices, the changing relationship between the sexes was perceived by many; both male and female authors wrote at length on what they called 'man's sphere' and 'woman's sphere'; an entire theory of human personality evolved, two separate branches of humankind with opposing characteristics. The idea that men and women were very different (that women were, for example, dependent and soft, while men

chist fight against capitalism worked for her feminism rather than against it.

The main condemnation of Emma Goldman from feminists, both past and present, is her opposition to the women's suffrage campaign. Suffragists looked to the vote to empower women but, as we have noted above, they wanted to do this by increasing their power from within the traditional institution of marriage. They tended to be a predominantly middle-class and conservative movement and for Goldman, whose whole life had been involved in the worker's struggle, such a movement was suspect. As an anarchist who opposed government in all forms, whether elected or not, who considered that all government corrupts, and that the state is a major agent of oppression, Goldman saw the struggle for the vote as a diversion from women's real struggle:

> I am not opposed to women suffrage on the conventional ground that woman is not equal to it. I see neither physical, psychological, nor mental reason why women should not have equal right to vote with man. But that cannot possibly blind me to the absurd notion that woman will accomplish that wherein man has failed.[47]

She argued against suffrage for class reasons, on anarchist grounds, but also on the grounds of women's interest. She saw the whole social purity movement, from the Temperance Unions and the Prohibition Party to the anti-sexual Purity Leagues (most of which were allied to the suffrage movement), as inimical to women's freedom. Against the notion advanced in support of suffrage - that women would purify politics if granted the vote - Goldman wrote: 'To assume that [woman] would succeed in purifying something which is not susceptible

[47] Emma Goldman, 'Woman Suffrage', in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.198.

and continued to insist on absolute equality based on shared humanity.

Despite the many contradictions, we can see on reflection that there are certain ways in which anarchism and feminism have an affinity. Anarchism, by definition, and radical feminism, as it has evolved, are both fundamentally and deeply anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian. Both operate through loose voluntary social organisation from the bottom up, relying on collective activities by small groups rather than large political parties and both favour direct action to promote change.[45]

Emma Goldman's Feminism

Was Emma Goldman a sexual radical when it came to women, or was she, as some commentators (both contemporary and recent) would say, a conservative on the woman question?

Dale Spender feels that Emma Goldman was a conservative with no special understanding of women's problems, who could only be classed as a radical within a male context. 'To her, capitalism was the soul source of women's oppression, and she looked no further for evidence and has no need of other explanatory ideas.[46] She goes on to say that Goldman does not admit the collective experience of women to her frame of reference, and because of this she can accept without question the descriptions and explanations provided by men to account for their circumstances under capitalism, and she assumes (with few exceptions) that it is the same for women and ignored the issues of women's oppression prior to capitalism or in cultures that are not capitalist. I intend to show that, while not explicit, her thought encompassed these omissions and that her anar-

[45] Point made by Alix Kates Shulman in 'Emma Goldman's Feminism: A Reappraisal', introduction to *Red Emma Speaks*, p.17.

[46] Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*, p.17.

were independent and tough) had existed in the 1700s[32] but was then, in general, balanced by ideas of qualities that men and women shared.[33] By the 1800s, shared attitudes were largely forgotten; qualities of mind and character were seen as applying to one sex or the other and not to both, and if they were it was seen as deviance from the norm. Although these ideas were predominantly middle-class, they were diffused among an increasingly literate working class, and the working-class girl had the added problem that she was unable to aspire to the new ideals of womanhood. Many of them entered programmes of self- education with hopes of marrying above their station and thus exchanging the prison of work for the more comfortable prison of marriage to a well-off man. Along with the devaluation of women's work in the home went the closing of other economic opportunities. Women who sought work had fewer options, as many trades now required formal training from which they were excluded. Only a few kinds of low paid work were available to the majority of women - domestic service, teaching, sewing, and factory operative - and none of these jobs provided women with status or a decent wage.

Before discussing the plight of the working women of the lower classes, reference should be made to a paradoxical situation. By the turn of the century the inventions that introduced the typewriter, the cash register, and the telephone into the business world had opened up an entirely new area of job opportunities to educated women, altering the status of those who became salesgirls, secretaries, typists, and telephone operators. These independent women could no longer be governed by rules based on the premise that a woman's place was in the home, and although they were a small minority, they were con-

[32] Expressed very eloquently by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Book Five of *Emile* (1762).

[33] For a discussion of changing attitudes to women at this time see Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism.*

sidered a threat to manners, morals, and general ways of life. They added support to ideas developing in the movement in support of broader civil rights and women's suffrage. Emma Goldman was to have much to say against this new breed of woman, a point which I will return to below.

The emergence of the industrial economy also created new conditions for working women of the lower classes. From the start of the Industrial Revolution women were needed to mass-produce the foods they had once produced for their families. By 1900 there were five million female wage earners in the United States, making up one fifth of the nation's total work force.[34] After 1880, with the influx of immigrants, factory work became the second most common kind of employment for women. They took factory jobs that were listed as 'female only'; these were unskilled jobs paid on the piece rate system, which did not provide them with a living wage. Women were the cheapest pool of workers in the labour force.[35]

In 1885, Emma Goldman worked in an overcoat factory in Rochester, New York. Here, she said, there was more 'elbow room' than in the St Petersburg glove factory she had worked in, but the work 'was harder and the day (twelve hours) with only a half hour for lunch seemed endless. The iron discipline forbade any free movement, and the constant surveillance of the foreman weighted like a stone on my heart'.[36] Like many of the Jewish immigrants, Emma Goldman had come into contact with the labour and socialist movements in Russia and recognised the common problems confronting workers in Russian and American factories. She also understood the social as well

[34] Figures quoted from Hymowitz and Weissman, *A History of Women in America*, p.234.

[35] Ibid. p.239. Studies of working women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show that women received one-half to one-third the wages of working men.

[36] *Living My Life*, p.16.

their superior moral sense at the ballot box, they would be able to alleviate social ills like drunkenness and prostitution. Suffragists argued that 'the state is but the larger family, the nation the old homestead' hence by extending their nurturing functions from the family circle to the larger society, women would not abdicate their traditional domestic role.[43]

So, over the course of the nineteenth century the feminist movement had developed from a movement dominated by women who held extremist positions on the question of slavery, and therefore found radicalism congenial, to one that encompassed a broad range of women without the unifying coherence of a radical tradition; it became therefore of necessity, more conservative. The result was that by the late 1800s, mainstream feminism - including the suffrage organisations, the women's clubs, and reform groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union - had chosen to exploit the idea of inherent differences between women and men (that by reason of their maternal and reproductive roles they differed from men intellectually and psychologically) as a justification for granting women civic and legal equality.

There is an argument that during the last years of the nineteenth century, the organised women's rights movement capitulated to a 'Maternal Mystique' (such as has been previously discussed) but that this may have been, in part, a tactical move to attract a mass following.[44] Whether the shift of emphasis was ideological or tactical, the movement as a whole became less radical, less threatening, and hence less likely to effect fundamental change. Emma Goldman and other anarchist-feminists refused to accept this solution to the dilemma. They rejected outright any notion of significant intellectual or psychological differences between the sexes,

[43] Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870-1920*, p.48.

[44] Ibid.

By the late nineteenth century, the theory of female moral superiority was an accepted truism of American public and private life. From the recognition of female superiority to the belief that women were needed to purify a corrupt society was only a short step. Women used the issue of corruption as their wedge into the world of men and power. They declared that, as they had kept American homes pure, so they were needed to clean the world at large. The 'sphere theory' was to be extended - the needs of society were too great to allow the better sex to remain silent. Reform became women's byword. Suffragists demanded the vote so as to be able to reform America; they would do this by prohibiting alcohol, ending prostitution, sterilising criminals, improving prisons, giving physical education to girls and boys, using sex education as a means of ending vice, having pure food laws, and in hundreds of other ways.[42] Most of the issues reformers concerned themselves with were political and economic, but their perception of these issues was almost always moral. This reform zeal was fed by Social Darwinist beliefs about the perfectibility of society. Social Darwinists described society as an organism in the process of evolving to a higher state, and women were thought to be more highly evolved than men; this added to the prestige of women in reform movements. This assertion was 'proven' by woman's apparent lack of 'low' and 'animalistic' sexual drives and urges, and it was believed that when society was perfected men as well as women would be without lust. For the time being, however, it was up to women reformers to try to teach chastity to men. Reformers who believed that they could speed the process of evolution through their own activities to improve society saw their work as steps towards the perfection of human society. Many feminists supported the social purity crusades that swept the nation in the mid-seventies and periodically thereafter, contending that if only women were allowed to express

[42] Hymowitz and Weissman, *A History of Women in America*, p.219.

as the economic factors that kept many women from rebelling against their secondary place in the labour force:

> But a very small number of the vast army of women workers look upon work as a permanent issue in the same light as does a man. No matter how decrepit the latter, he has been taught to be independent and self-supporting… The woman considers her position as 'worker' transitory, to be thrown aside for the first bidder. That is why it is infinitely harder to organise women than men. 'Why should I join the union? I am going to get married, to have a home.' Has she not been taught from infancy to look upon that as her ultimate calling?[37]

Although some working women sought alliance with male unions, their general apathy was increased by the fact that the men who led the labour movement did not consider women worth organising. This was in part due to the fact that women retired when they married (although for many retirement was only temporary), and in part to the fact that their unskilled work was considered to reduce their worth. A further reason why men failed to support their female counterparts was that many men believed that economic justice would be achieved when they could afford to keep their daughters and wives out of the factories. The object was to rid factories of women rather than to improve conditions for them. Other trade unionists were convinced that because working women were paid one third to one half of men's wages, they were underbidding male salaries and threatening jobs for men. Socialist men in the labour movement and political left argued in theory for women's equality, but in practice they failed to support the ideas of a special women's movement to fight

[37] 'Marriage and Love' in *Anarchism and other Essays*, p.233.

for that equality, showing a continued conservatism towards women. By the late 1800s, however, some male unions and middle-class women's organisations did begin to acknowledge the problems faced by working women, and in turn working women, supported by women reformers and feminists, gained the strength to sustain militant organising drives.

Feminism in the U.S.A.

Alix Kates Shulman says that to understand Emma Goldman's feminism we must understand that feminism is not a monolith.[38] There are, and always have been, she says, different strands of feminist politics - economic issues, issues of sex and the family, legal and constitutional issues, and woman centeredness - these strands 'aggregate in different patterns of overlap and exclusion, depending on the time and place and the individuals who embrace them'. In Emma Goldman's time, forms of feminism were as diverse as they are today. There were tendencies including bourgeois feminism, the women's trade union movement, reform or social feminism, the women's club movement; there was feminism that centred around social purity, and there was radical feminism surviving from an earlier time. So, feminism, despite the tendency of later scholars to subsume the whole movement into the drive for suffrage, was a vast, complicated, and often contradictory movement.[39]

Despite the contradictions, however, some theory was common to all feminists; they believed that American society had institutionalised certain inequalities for women, which needed a remedy; they agreed that women had a right to participate

[38] In 'Emma Goldman: Anarchist Queen', *Feminist Theories*, edited by Dale Spender.

[39] Information on feminism in the U.S.A. from Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870-1920*, Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism*, and Hymowitz and Weissman, *A History of Women in America*.

in, and to influence, the societal processes. Beyond this agreement lay the dilemma - should women exercise their power by emphasising their differences from men, or by their common humanity?

Feminism of the antebellum period had been radical. It was compounded of the political outrage and moral fervour that fuelled the extreme wing of the anti-slavery movement.[40] The early feminists repudiated the notion of wifely obedience, refused to remain silent in public debates, insisted on access to educational institutions, and in 1848 demanded the right to vote. The radicalism of the early feminists stemmed from the integration of a recognition of the inherent inequality of economic dependence with a re-examination of the marriage relation and insistence that women had a role in public life.

A recent historian[41] has said that the demand for suffrage was radical in itself because, 'to women fighting to extend their sphere beyond its traditional limitations, political rights involved a radical change in women's status, their emergence into public life'. This argument is compelling for the antebellum years, because feminists clearly viewed suffrage as an escape from their restrictive and domestic spheres but, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the majority of feminists no longer saw suffrage as the first step in the liberation of women from the home, and many of them were at pains to express the view that voting women would not cause any disruption in society.

[40] Abolitionists used the 'natural rights' argument and claimed that if liberty was man's right and God-given then those who denied it denied God's law. The meshing of politics and religion brought the debate to the attention of women who were denied access to the political arena. The participation of women in the anti-slavery movement prepared them to fight for their own rights. As Mary Wollstonecraft had understood in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791), the natural rights argument was ready-made feminist ideology.

[41] Richard Sennett, *Families Against the City* (New York, 1974), p.116, cited by Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women 1870-1920*, p.47.