

LENINISM, STALINISM, AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN, 1920-1939

Sue Bruley

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
WOMEN'S HISTORY



LENINISM, STALINISM,
AND THE
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
IN BRITAIN,
1920-1939

Sue Bruley



Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London
1986

First published in 1986

This edition first published in 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

First issued in paperback 2014

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 1986 Sue Bruley

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-62461-9 (Volume 8)

ISBN: 978-1-138-00802-1 (pbk)

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:
WOMEN'S HISTORY

LENINISM, STALINISM, AND THE
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN,
1920–1939

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page number</u>
List of abbreviations used...	4
Preface...	7
Acknowledgements...	9
<u>Chapter One</u>	
The Inheritance: a survey of socialism and feminism in Britain until 1920...	12
Appendix...	54
<u>Chapter Two</u>	
Early Promises, August, 1920 - October, 1922 ...	57
<u>Chapter Three</u>	
Women's Sections: progress or defeat? November, 1922 - December, 1925 ...	92
<u>Chapter Four</u>	
"Women are our best men", January, 1926 - July, 1928 ...	126
<u>Chapter Five</u>	
"No class can free you but your own" August, 1928 - December, 1932 ...	168
<u>Chapter Six</u>	
Feminist cadres make an entrance, January, 1933 - December, 1935...	226
<u>Chapter Seven</u>	
Women against war and fascism, January, 1936 - September, 1939 ...	258
Appendix to Chapters Six and Seven...	293
<u>Chapter Eight</u>	
Conclusion...	295
<u>Appendix</u> ...	303
<u>Bibliography</u> ...	305

"LENINISM, STALINISM AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
IN BRITAIN, 1920 - 1939"

Susan Bruley

Submitted for the degree of PhD at the London School of Economics,
University of London, in 1980, under the title of "Socialism and
Feminism in the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1939."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page number</u>
List of abbreviations used...	4
Preface...	7
Acknowledgements...	9
<u>Chapter One</u>	
The Inheritance: a survey of socialism and feminism in Britain until 1920...	12
Appendix...	54
<u>Chapter Two</u>	
Early Promises, August, 1920 - October, 1922 ...	57
<u>Chapter Three</u>	
Women's Sections: progress or defeat? November, 1922 - December, 1925 ...	92
<u>Chapter Four</u>	
"Women are our best men", January, 1926 - July, 1928 ...	126
<u>Chapter Five</u>	
"No class can free you but your own" August, 1928 - December, 1932 ...	168
<u>Chapter Six</u>	
Feminist cadres make an entrance, January, 1933 - December, 1935...	226
<u>Chapter Seven</u>	
Women against war and fascism, January, 1936 - September, 1939 ...	258
Appendix to Chapters Six and Seven...	293
<u>Chapter Eight</u>	
Conclusion...	295
<u>Appendix</u> ...	303
<u>Bibliography</u> ...	305

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED.

A.E.U.	Amalgamated Engineering Union.
Anon.	Anonymous.
A.R.P.	Air Raid Precautions.
A.S.L.E.F.	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.
Aut.	Autumn.
B.B.C.	British Broadcasting Corporation.
B.M.	British Museum.
B.M.A.	British Medical Association.
B.S.P.	British Socialist Party.
B.S.S.S.P.	British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology.
B.U.F.	British Union of Fascists.
C.A.M.	Committee Against Malnutrition.
C.C.	Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain.
<u>The C.I.</u>	<u>The Communist International.</u>
c.	circa.
Comintern	Communist International.
Co-op.	Co-operative.
C.P.G.B. or C.P.	Communist Party of Great Britain.
C.P.G.B. (B.S.T.I.)	Communist Party of Great Britain (British Section of the Third International).
C.P.S.U.	Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
<u>The C.R.</u>	<u>The Communist Review.</u>
C.W.I.	Communist Workers International.
C.W.S.M.	Cotton Workers Solidarity Movement.
<u>The D.W.</u>	<u>The Daily Worker.</u>
E.C.C.I.	Executive Committee of the Communist International.
Ed.	Editor.
Edn.	Edition.
E.L.F.S.	East London Federation of Suffragettes.
Eng.	England.
Exec. Cttee.	Executive Committee.
F.W.G.	Fabian Women's Group.
G.B.	Great Britain.
Herts.	Hertfordshire.
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party.

<u>Inprecorr</u>	<u>International Press Correspondence.</u>
I.W.D.	International Women's Day.
I.W.M.	Imperial War Museum.
I.W.S.	International Women's Secretariat.
K.P.D.	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands.
Lancs.	Lancashire.
L.C.C.	London County Council.
L.C.W.I.O.W.R.C.	Lancashire and Cheshire Women's Textiles and Other Workers' Representation Committee.
<u>L.M.</u>	<u>Labour Monthly.</u>
L.P.	Labour Party.
L.R.D.	Labour Research Department.
<u>L.W.</u>	<u>Labour Woman</u>
Mddx.	Middlesex.
Misc.	Miscellaneous.
n.	footnote.
N.A.C.	National Administrative Council.
N.C.L.C.	National Council of Labour Colleges.
n.d.	no date.
N.J.C. for S.R.	National Joint Council for Spanish Relief.
N.M.M.	National Minority Movement (or M.M. Minority Movement).
N.U.G.M.W.	National Union of General and Municipal Workers.
N.U.R.	National Union of Railwaymen.
N.U.S.E.C.	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship.
N.U.T.	National Union of Teachers.
N.U.T.G.W.	National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers.
N.U.W.C.M.	National Unemployed Workers Committee Movement.
N.U.W.M.	National Unemployed Workers Movement.
N.U.W.S.S.	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.
N.U.W.T.	National Union of Women Teachers.
P.A. Inst. Soc. Hist. A'dam.	Pankhurst Archive, Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.
P.L.P.	Parliamentary Labour Party.
P.O.U.M.	Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista.
P.R.O.	Public Record Office.
pub.	published.
R.C.A.	Railway Clerks Association.
R.C.P.	Russian Communist Party.

Res.	Resolution.
R.I.L.U.	Red International of Labour Unions.
R.P.C.	Revolutionary Policy Committee.
R.T.U.O.	Red Trade Union Opposition.
S.D.F.	Social Democratic Federation.
S.D.P.	Social Democratic Party.
S.P.D.	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands.
S.S.R.C.	Social Science Research Council.
T. and G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers Union.
T.U.	Trade Union.
T.U.C.	Trade Union Congress.
U.A.B.	Unemployment Assistance Board.
U.C.W.U.	United Clothing Workers Union.
U.M.S.	United Mineworkers of Scotland.
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
Vol.	Volume.
W.B.C.G.	Workers Birth Control Group.
W.C.A.W.F.	Women's Committee Against War and Fascism.
W.C.O.G.	Women's Co-operative Guild.
W.D.	Women's Department.
W.G.E.	Women's Guild of Empire.
<u>W.L.</u>	<u>Workers Life.</u>
<u>Women's D.N.</u>	<u>Women's Dreadnought.</u>
<u>Workers D.N.</u>	<u>Workers Dreadnought.</u>
W.S.F.	Workers Socialist Federation.
W.S.P.U.	Women's Social and Political Union.
W. Su. F.	Workers Suffrage Federation.
<u>W.T.</u>	<u>Woman Today.</u>
<u>The W.W.</u>	<u>The Workers Weekly.</u>
Yorks.	Yorkshire.

Footnotes: - publication is in London unless otherwise stated.

PREFACE

The 1970's have witnessed a validation of the maxim that "each generation writes its own history". Since the rise of the modern feminist movement in the U.S.A. and western Europe, there has been a flow of research and publications on various aspects of women in history. This is not simply a question of adding to what we now determine as "history", "women's history" (also known under the names of "feminist history" and "herstory"). History and women's history cannot be separate entities, as the latter has been formed through an examination of historical data as a whole from a different standpoint from conventional historical perspectives. An essential part of this process must be a re-evaluation of the socialist tradition, since this tradition has always claimed a particular commitment to the advancement of women.

The aim of this thesis is to make a detailed examination of the interaction between socialism and feminism in one particular socialist organisation, the Communist Party of Great Britain, from its foundation in 1920 until the outbreak of the Second World War. The study of socialism and feminism in the C.P.G.B. can be divided into four major areas.

First, it is necessary to examine the party's concept of socialism and of the role of women and the family in a future socialist society. How would a socialist revolution liberate women? What did they understand by the term "sexual equality"? The second question concerns the party's relationship to the feminist movement. What was the party's attitude to independent feminist organisations? Thirdly, what sort of work did the party conduct in relation to specific women's issues such as equal pay, birth control and maternity services? Which issues were the party most likely to take up and why? Lastly, how did the sexual division of labour operate within the party? Did the party have a concept of "women's work" and "men's work"? Were the roles open to women more restricted than those open to men, and if so, why?

In order to be able to evaluate the Communist Party in the 1920's and 1930's, along these lines, we must be able to see it in relation to its antecedents. Chapter One, therefore, takes the form of an historical survey of the century before 1920. It defines and explains the socialist and feminist traditions in Britain and describes the ways in which they interacted, both at the level of theory and at that of practice. The main part of the thesis is then divided into six chronological chapters,

each dealing with between two and four years. This chronological, rather than thematic, approach, is made necessary by the drastic changes that occurred in the C.P.G.B. during these years. For example, the Bolshevik policies of the early 1920's could hardly make a more dramatic contrast than with the Popular Front policies of the late 1930's. Such generalisations that can be made for the period as a whole are drawn together in the concluding chapter.

Finally, a word regarding sources. Conventional documentary sources, from the party press, congress reports, etc., are clearly inadequate by themselves as they reveal only the official policies of the leadership. This material has to be supplemented by, and contrasted with, both other written evidence and oral sources which reflects the attitudes and experiences of rank and file party women. Use has been made of evidence provided by contemporary party members of both sexes, (although obviously a greater proportion of the interviews were with party women).⁽¹⁾ Chiefly for the purpose of contrast, a smaller number of interviews with Labour Party women were conducted. Wherever possible party sources have been supplemented by the use of non-party evidence. This includes files available at the Public Record Office, reports from the national and local press, Labour Party archives and memoirs and papers of non-party and ex-party contemporaries.

1. The interview questionnaire for women who were in the C.P.G.B. for at least a part of the period between 1920 and 1939 is reproduced in the Appendix. Details of the interviews conducted are given in the Oral Sources section of the Bibliography.

.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank all those women and men who agreed to be interviewed for this project. I owe a particular debt to Dora and Idris Cox, who helped to answer my many queries after sifting through the interview material. I am grateful to Margaret Kentfield and Nicholas Wetton at the Marx Memorial Library for all their help in providing me with the many research materials which I required. Many thanks to Allison Farnum, the long-suffering typist of this thesis. Gratitude is also extended to the University of London Central Research Fund for grants to conduct interviews in south Wales and Lancashire and to visit the Pankhurst Archive in Amsterdam.

The period of writing this thesis would have been a great deal more arduous if it had not been for the sustained interest and stimulation of my friends, many of whom read and commented on some or all of the various draft chapters. Particular thanks to Jeffrey Weeks, whose help and advice was extremely useful. I also wish to thank Sally Alexander, Bea Campbell, Bob Cant, Lee Davidoff, Barry Davis, Martin Durham, Barry Edwards, Jane Lewis, Jill Liddington, Siri Lowe, Stuart MacIntyre, Karen Margolis, Sally Miller, Shiela Rowbotham and members of the Feminist History Group and of the Communist Party History Group for their interesting comments and helpful criticism.

Sincere thanks are also extended to my supervisor, Dr. R. Barker, whose unstinting advice, encouragement and criticism were invaluable.

Last, but by no means least, I am grateful to my parents, V.A. and J.W. Bruley, whose support and interest in my work was of enormous assistance.

Needless to say, the people who are mentioned above are not responsible for, and do not necessarily agree with, the opinions expressed in this thesis, for which the writer accepts sole responsibility.

CHAPTER ONE.

THE INHERITANCE: A SURVEY OF SOCIALISM AND FEMINISM IN
BRITAIN UNTIL 1920.

As a preliminary to examining the complex interaction between socialism and feminism, it is necessary to begin with some background information on the separate histories of these two movements. I shall deal first with the socialist tradition in Britain. Only a brief resume is provided as this subject is well documented.

The socialist movement arose in the early nineteenth century out of the earlier traditions of radicalism and utilitarianism. Socialist ideas first took root among skilled workers whose livelihoods were thrown into crisis by the proletarianisation of labour. The movement took two explicit forms; Owenism and Chartism. Robert Owen is chiefly remembered for his promotion of model communities in the 1820's and 30's. The failure of these ventures led later socialists to label Owenism "utopian socialism". Certainly the Owenites had no clear strategy beyond change by example and education. Nevertheless their socialist vision was an inspiring force and involved a questioning of all forms of oppression, in personal, as well as public life.

Chartism, on the other hand, was a much more pragmatic and limited movement which focussed on the democratic control reform of Parliament. Figures such as William Lovett believed that working-class control of the government machine could eliminate the social evils caused by nineteenth century industrial society. With the collapse of Chartism in the late 1840's the movement was eclipsed and did not re-emerge with the same vigour until the 1880's.

Marx and Engels were both exiled in England after the failure of the 1848 revolution on the continent, but it was over a generation later that Marxist ideas began to find their expression in the British movement. The Democratic Federation was formed in 1881, in 1883 it became more explicitly socialist and changed its name to the Social Democratic Federation. The group was handicapped by its leader H.M. Hyndman, who failed to grasp Marx's economic ideas and whose autocratic manner led to many internal tensions and disputes. In 1884 many of its most well known figures, including William Morris and Eleanor Marx, split off and formed the Socialist League. Within five years the League fell into insignificance after being taken over by anarchists, leaving the S.D.F.