

## THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND FEMINISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR (1945-1960)

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In this paper I offer an inquiry into American Marxist feminist activism at the beginning of the Cold War and its connection to the American Communist Party. Contemporary scholars of critical theory have expressed concern that worldwide progress made in gender equality in the 20th century has not translated into similar advances in economic equality. Those looking for the historical roots of this phenomenon sometimes fault the American women's liberation movement of the 1960's and 1970's for not challenging fundamental capitalist structures. This inquiry extends the scholarly discussion on work done in the area of women's rights to the early years of the Cold War, arguing that the American Communist Party assumed the Soviet Union's position that the Woman's Question would be solved as a result of a workers' revolution. Based on the accounts of American Marxist feminists, and with a look at the American Government's Cold War stance, it could be argued that the American Communist Party's mismanagement of the Woman Question at the beginning of the Cold War, combined with US McCarthy era anti-Soviet policy, helped to ensure that "second-wave" feminism, (while adopting revolutionary rhetoric) would achieve mostly "bourgeois" goals.

В этой статье предлагается к рассмотрению американский марксистско-феминистский активизм периода начала Холодной Войны в контексте его связи с Американской Коммунистической Партией. Современные представители критической теории обеспокоены тем, что мировой прогресс, достигнутый в области гендерного равенства в XX веке, не привел к аналогичным достижениям в области экономического равенства. Те, кто ищет исторические корни этого феномена, иногда обвиняют американский феминизм 1960-х и 1970-х годов в том, что он не оспаривал ключевые капиталистические институты. Этот обзор предлагает расширить научную дискуссию о проделанной работе в области женских прав в США в первые годы Холодной Войны, обращая внимание на то, что Американская Коммунистическая Партия разделяла позицию Советского Союза касательно "женского вопроса". Основываясь на свидетельствах американских марксистских феминисток и учитывая позицию американского правительства в годы Холодной Войны, можно предполагать, что ошибки Американской Коммунистической Партии в области борьбы за женские права, допущенные в начале Холодной Войны, в сочетании с политикой Маккартизма, послужили залогом того, что феминизм «второй волны» хотя и перенял революционную риторику, достиг, в основном, «буржуазных» целей.

Ця публікація пропонує до розгляду американський марксистсько-феміністський активізм періоду початку Холодної Війни в контексті його зв'язку з Американською Комуністичною Партією. Сучасні представники критичної теорії стурбовані тим, що світовий прогрес, досягнутий в області гендерної рівності в XX сторіччі, не призвів до аналогічних досягнень в області економічної рівності. Ті, хто шукає історичні корені цього феномену, іноді звинувачують американський фемінізм 1960-х і 1970-х років в тому, що він не заперечував ключові капіталістичні інститути. Цей огляд пропонує розширити наукову дискусію про роботу в області жіночих прав в США в перші роки Холодної Війни, звертаючи увагу на те, що Американська Комуністична Партія поділяла позицію Радянського Союзу щодо «жіночого питання». Ґрунтуючись на свідченнях американських марксистських феміністок і з огляду на позицію американського уряду часів Холодної Війни, стає очевидно, що помилки Американської Комуністичної Партії в галузі боротьби за жіночі права, яких припустилися на початку Холодної Війни, у поєднанні з політикою Маккартизму, призвели до того, що фемінізм «другої хвилі», використовуючи революційну риторику, досяг, загалом, «буржуазних» цілей.

**Key words:** Marxist feminists, Cold War, Communist Party, Woman's Question, "Second Wave" feminism.

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Some say that systemic patriarchy keeps all women back, that it long preceded both capitalist and communist social formations, and that it threatens to outlive them. Others argue that capitalist structures are the main denominator in the inequality equation, that exploiting people for profit is not really bound to the male sex. Yet

others try to pinpoint the configurations in which existing capitalist and patriarchal structures interact to reproduce gender and economic inequality. Researching the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century American feminist movements is akin to entering a maze, where the initial confusion is rewarded by a non-linear narrative at the end.

The ongoing academic debate regarding the influence and relevance of Marxist feminists who were active in the U.S. during the post-war period, set the context of this inquiry into the relationships between communism and feminism, and in particular between the American Communist Party (CPUSA) and feminist activism in the post-war decades. This paper will attempt to demonstrate how the marginalization of women's issues by American Marxists may have contributed to the fact that the "second-wave" feminism of the 1960s and 1970s achieved mostly capitalist goals. Although the women's liberation movement adopted Marxist-inspired revolutionary language, the movement's demands were focused on giving middle and upper class women greater opportunities within the existing capitalist system.

In her book Weigand [44] argued that there is a continuous thread that connects the work of communist party affiliated women activists of the 1940's and 1950's to the "second-wave" feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's. While Weigand stressed this connection to recognize women who she views as pioneers of the ongoing feminist movement, others have pointed to the communist pasts of feminist leaders and organizations to discredit the entire feminist movement as a Soviet-sponsored conspiracy [32; 13]. A preliminary review of primary and secondary sources on post-war feminism reveals a more complicated story. Although, the following quote refers to the state of U.S. feminism in the late 1960's, it could easily have been written to describe feminism in the immediate post-war era: "A great deal of confusion exists today about the role of women's liberation in a revolutionary movement. Hundreds of women's groups have sprung up within the last year or two, but among them, a number of very different and often conflicting ideologies have developed. The growth of these movements has demonstrated the desperate need that many women feel to escape their own oppression, but it has also shown that organization around women's issues need not lead to revolutionary consciousness, or even to an identification with the left. (Some groups mobilize middle class women to fight for equal privileges as businesswomen and academics; others maintain that the overthrow of capitalism is irrelevant for women.)" [30, pg. 1].

The sociologist Vogel has written extensively about theoretical deficiencies of traditional Marxist theory on women's rights [40], and she led a 2002 symposium to discuss Weigand's book. Articles produced from this symposium are instructive, as they contain some of the recollections of women who were Marxist feminists in the 1940's and 1950's. For example, the activist Aptheker [4] points out that she and other post-war feminists felt little support from the CPUSA and that some of the female leaders of CPUSA chapters (for example, Betty Gannett, who Weigand [44] mentioned as an example of the party's enlightened approach to female empowerment) were actually openly hostile to feminist goals.

There is much recent critique of the "second-wave" feminism because its achievements appear to have been limited to the advancement of women within the capitalist power structure. The integration of women into the American workforce has certainly been aligned with the evolving needs of the capitalism and consumerism (e.g. the need for low-wage workers in the service industries). The fears of progressives like Eleanor Roosevelt have been realized with the decline of the labor movement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if Marxism had an influence on the "second-wave" feminism, this influence may have been limited to the women's liberation movement's adoption of revolutionary rhetoric. The mismanagement of the Woman Question within the CPUSA, as detailed in Inman's critique [20] may have helped to ensure that "bourgeois feminism" ultimately prevailed.

#### **Literature review**

As Rupp and Taylor [37] mention, there is a widespread perception that there was virtually no feminist movement in the U.S. during the period between the end of World War II and the sudden appearance of "second-wave" feminism at the beginning of the 1960's. Many researchers describe two waves of feminism separated by a forty-year gap between 1920 and 1959. Popular culture paints the American 1940s and 1950s as a highly prosperous time when women were freed from their war-time production duties, happy to return to their roles as housewives and mothers while enjoying the labor-saving benefits of newly accessible domestic technologies like refrigerators and washing machines. The strength of this perception is reinforced by advertising and movies of that period and by U.S. Cold War propaganda that used the image of happy housewives to promote the superiority of consumerism and capitalism over communism [33; 9]. Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" [18] had as its main aim to challenge the dogma that the middle-class suburban housewives of the U.S. were satisfied with their lives. In 1957, Friedan interviewed her college classmates from Smith College. These women were from the graduating class of 1942, so the experiences that Friedan captured coincided with the war and the post-war period. It is not surprising that these affluent and well educated women were frustrated with social norms that only valued them for procreation, house-keeping and good looks. It is also not surprising that Friedan concluded that: "Women, as well as men, can only find their identity in work that uses their full capacities. A woman cannot find her identity through others – her husband, her children. She cannot find it in the dull routine of housework" [18]. If women could

only find their identities through work, it followed that the goal of upper and middle class feminists would be to have equal access to executive jobs and salaries. Therefore, if one accepts the simplest narrative, there was no feminism in the post war period until Friedan led an awakening of middle and upper class women and these women began to seek equal power within the capitalist economy.

However, Rupp and Taylor [37] challenged the idea that “second-wave” feminism materialized after a period when feminist activity was absent. The authors contend that U.S. feminism survived throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s as a movement among the economic and intellectual elites, a movement with direct connections to the suffragist movement of the 1920’s. For instance, authors focused on the efforts of the National Woman’s Party (NWP) to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. constitution in 1946. They mention that the ERA was opposed by most communists and progressives, including Eleanor Roosevelt [37]. The American communist and progressive agendas were dominated by their interest in the worker’s movement, and they worried that the ERA would lead to lower wages since women would compete for jobs. They worried that state laws protecting working women, limiting working hours for mothers, would be lost. Roosevelt explained her opposition in the following letter to the feminist activist Nora Stanton Barney, emphasizing that she made a clear distinction between the interests of “women in industry” and “women in professions:” “25 November 1946, New York City. Dear Miss Barney: I am sorry you have been misinformed on my attitude for equality for women. I do not oppose it and I have never opposed it in the United States. The confusion arises because I do not support the Equal Rights Amendment. I believe we still need the existing protective laws for women in industry. I know full well of the various state laws which are discriminatory to women. I believe we should work to have such laws repealed in the states. It takes two thirds of the states to ratify an Amendment and that means a lot of work. Someday the women in industry will not need protective legislation and then they can work with the women in professions for an Equal Rights Amendment. This has nothing to do with the political rights which were under discussion. We have those.” [36, pg. 23]. Since passing the ERA became an important goal of “second-wave” feminists, and since Friedan’s book (1963) was clearly addressed towards women who wanted to be “women in professions” it is reasonable to accept Rupp and Taylor’s [37] thesis that the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s was in part an outgrowth of the NWP’s elitist agenda. Dicker [14] largely agrees and states that “The National Woman’s Party was the only group to refer to itself as “feminist” during the period from 1920 to 1960” (Dicker 2008:61). He concludes that “the civil rights movement that began in the 1950’s and blossomed in the 1960’s set the stage for women’s rights reform” [14, pg. 66].

Furthermore, Weigand [43] and Keohane [22] presented an interpretation that is contrary to that of Rupp and Taylor [37]. They argued that communist party affiliated women activists of the 1940’s and 1950’s had a powerful influence on “second-wave” feminism. Their research uncovered many details about the post-war activities and writings of Betty Millard, Mary Inman, Nora Stanton Barney, Susan B. Anthony II and Claudia Jones. In particular, Weigand [44] described these women’s connections to the CPUSA and their membership in the communist-affiliated Congress of American Women (CAW). The CAW was the U.S. branch of the Soviet-sponsored Women’s International Democratic Federation. Weigand was not the first author to uncover a connection between post-war feminists and the CPUSA. For example, Friedan’s past as a “labor union radical” was examined by Horowitz [18]. In addition, a 1949 report on the CAW by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the U. S. House of Representatives singled out Nora Stanton Barney and Susan B. Anthony II as women whose prominent names were being exploited through the CAW by Soviet propagandists.

Weigand’s [44] basic assertion that the policies of the CPUSA influenced “second-wave” feminism were challenged in several articles produced in the 2002 symposium organized by Vogel [41]. Healey, who was chair of the CPUSA’s Southern California district beginning in the 1940’s, was interviewed as part of the symposium, and she disputed Weigand’s contention that the CPUSA enforced rules that promoted gender equality within the party. Healey mentioned examples of undistinguished women being elected to party positions as “tokens” of an ideology of equality while more qualified women were excluded. In another article from the symposium by Aptheker, a member of the CPUSA in the 1960’s and the daughter of the prominent CPUSA leader Herbert Aptheker, the author states: “Weigand wishes for more than was true about the Party. None of the women about whom she writes would have described themselves as feminists, at least not while they were party members. More importantly, Weigand does not distinguish between the often heroic efforts of individual women to reform the Party and the sectarian, dogmatic, and patriarchal investments and privileges of the men who controlled it” [4, pg. 521].

In her pamphlet criticizing the CPUSA’s approach to the Woman’s Question Inman [20] provided a description of what she considered to be the goals of Marxist “feminists” (although she did not use the term). For Inman, the desirable integration of women into the workforce needed to be accomplished in parallel with the establishment of services like child care that would help to protect the quality of life of working class families. Similarly, the goal of equal pay for equal work needed to be tied to fair wage policies so that industry could not use the entrance of women into the workforce as a means to reduce wages for all workers. These goals did not become top priorities for “second-wave” feminism. The movement of the

late 1960's and early 1970's focused on "breaking the glass ceiling" to allow women to reach upper-level corporate jobs, on the effort to pass title IX (protecting women from discrimination in higher education) and on abortion rights. There was little effort made to protect wages for working class women or to provide access to women's healthcare for those who could not afford to pay [11, pg. 7]. It would appear that the ideas of Marxist women activists of the early Cold War era had little impact of the agenda that was pursued by "second-wave" feminists.

### **The CPUSA's position on feminism**

Apparently, Soviet dogma on the Woman's Question under Stalin influenced the CPUSA's positions on feminism. The contest between Marxist Feminism and Bourgeois Feminism has existed since the time of the 19th century industrialization and the near-simultaneous birth of Communism and the suffragist movement. Millard [31] pointed out that the first Woman's Rights Convention was held in 1848, in the same year that Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto. The question at the time was whether women should strive to gain equal rights with men (as the mostly mid-to upper-class suffragettes argued) or whether women should focus first on fighting capitalist exploitation. According to Boxer [7] Marx and Engels saw organized feminism (the suffragist movement) as a false path to emancipation. In the context of Historical Materialism, they maintained that women's equality would be a natural result of the inevitable triumph of Communism. Boxer asserts that Clara Zetkin was the most influential socialist activist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries regarding women's issues, and that her position became the dominant Marxist position: "There cannot be a unified struggle for the entire [female] sex... No, it must be a class struggle of all the exploited without differences of sex against all exploiters no matter what sex they belong to" [7, pg. 131].

After the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet position was that women had automatically achieved nearly complete equality with their male comrades. On the occasion of International Working Women's Day in 1921, Lenin gave a speech that included the following statements: "Under capitalism the female half of the human race is doubly oppressed. The working woman and the peasant woman are oppressed by capital, but over and above that, even in the most democratic of the bourgeois republics, they remain, firstly, deprived of some rights because the law does not give them equality with men; and secondly—and this is the main thing—they remain in household bondage. No party or revolution in the world has ever dreamed of striking so deep at the roots of the oppression and inequality of women as the Soviet, Bolshevik revolution is doing. Over here, in Soviet Russia, no trace is left of any inequality between men and women under the law. The Soviet power has eliminated all there was of the especially disgusting, base and hypocritical inequality in the laws on marriage and the family and inequality in respect of children" [28]. Lenin went on to propose that the bulk of housekeeping chores would be handled by "large-scale socialized domestic services" [28]. While this vision of gender equality remained the official doctrine of the Soviet state, it was never realized. Women continued to face male dominance in the home, reduced pay and career prospects (with lower-status "feminized" fields of work), and a double burden of wage-earning work and household labor [35].

The CPUSA activist Irene Leslie (the wife of the CPUSA chairman Earl Browder) wrote an article in the March 1936 issue of the party's magazine "The Communist" interpreting Lenin's teachings on the Woman Question in the American context. Leslie repeats the party-line position that the Soviet Union had achieved "the complete emancipation of women" and that this should serve as "an object lesson for women in capitalist society" [27, pg. 250]. The author goes on to emphasize the "radiant example" of African American women who led a successful and militant strike among nut-pickers in St. Louis. In contrast to her praise of women labor activists, Leslie echoes Zetkin in a condemnation of "bourgeois" feminists: "It would be nonsense to speak of the women of the ruling class as being 'oppressed', even when they are not allowed to be so active in the exploitation of the workers as are the men, even when they are only parasites upon parasites... It is not these women of the ruling class whom we have in mind when we speak of the woman problem; we mean the toiling women and the wives of the toilers" [27, pg. 245].

The Bolshevik leader Alexandra Kollontai was another powerful and consistent voice for the mainstream Soviet Marxist-Leninist approach to feminism. As an early member of the Central Committee, she was one of the founders of the Zhenotdel (the Party's department for women's affairs) in late 1919 [10]. Written before the revolution, Kollontai's essay "The Social Basis of the Woman Question" [23] included the following statement: "The followers of historical materialism reject the existence of a special woman question separate from the general social question of our day... In other words, women can become truly free and equal only in a world organized along new social and productive lines" [23, pg. 1]. Kollontai did allow that partial improvements in the condition of women were desirable since "each right that woman wins brings her nearer the defined goal of full emancipation" [23, pg. 1]. She also mentioned that bourgeois women might be completely sincere in their intention to advance the interests of all women as long as they remained "equal in their inequality" [23, pg. 8]. However, she concludes that once bourgeois women gained a political voice, they would become "enthusiastic defenders of the privileges of their class, content to leave their younger sisters with no rights at all" [23, pg. 8].

The leaders of the Zhenotdel, including Kollontai, believed that it was inevitable that socialism would lead to women's full participation in the economic and political spheres. In addition, they began to explore the implications of Marxist predictions regarding the dissolution of traditional family structure. Marx and Engels saw the family as a vestige of feudalism and an institution that encouraged the pursuit of private property [46, pg. 662]. Kollontai is sometimes portrayed as a radical feminist [38] because of her views on "free love" and her belief that women should be free from moral rules that celebrated "purity." In 1932, she wrote: "it is one of the characteristic traits of (the new woman) that she does not hide her natural physical drives" [38, pg. 131]. While Kollontai's writings may seem to address the patriarchal nature of the family, the ideas are extended from orthodox Marxist economic theory. In any case, the Zhenotdel leaders' efforts on sexual liberation were secondary to their mission of reaching out to rural women to integrate them into the workforce. The Soviet state's family policies became more conservative under Stalin in the late 1920's and the Zhenotdel was abolished in 1930 as it was claimed that the Woman Question had been solved [10].

Even after the end of the Zhenotdel, according to Goldman (1993) there was some continued effort to provide daycare and socialized canteens, but always in the context of encouraging women to enter the workforce. By 1936 (Goldman 1993:337), laws and state media emphasized the importance of a "strong socialist family." The same year, abortion became illegal again in order to encourage the fertility of Soviet families [16]. During the period beginning in the early 1930's, Stalin's regime promoted a specific vision of the ideal Soviet woman. This vision included participation in industry, but also fertility and femininity. Reid [34] provides this translated quote from a 1937 article in the magazine "Работница" ("Female Worker"): "Soviet woman, while engaged in multifaceted social activity, must learn to preserve her feminine countenance and look after herself...she should pay attention to her appearance" [34, pg. 151-152].

The famous Stakhanovite (a category of highly productive workers named after a hero of Soviet labor) Angelina Praskovya (known as Pasha Angelina) exemplified the type of women who were celebrated under Stalin. Writing in 1951, in response to a questionnaire sent from a U.S. based encyclopedia of prominent people, Praskovya detailed her long career as a woman tractor driver (the Soviet Union's first). After working in manual labor jobs on farms and coal mines during the 1920's, she became a tractor driver in 1930. She had three children and, although she became a Deputy to the Supreme Soviet, she continued to drive tractors. It is likely that she was seen to be more valuable as an icon of productivity rather than as a former "toiler" who had become a bureaucrat. Her explanation for why she had not wanted a promotion to a higher post reflected her position as a symbol of Soviet womanhood: "I have been a tractor driver for many years. To me this is something more than 'merely a job.' It is the place I occupy in the struggle to carry out our Five-Year Plans, it was my place in the fighting line in our Great Patriotic War, it is the source of my happiness, prosperity and fame... I have remained a tractor driver, and I am proud of it, because in our country every post is a high post, only one must put all one's heart and soul into one's work" [1].

Writing in 1946, Kollontai provided a clear summary of the Soviet vision for women as it stood at the end of World War II: "The Soviet woman is a full and equal citizen of her country. In opening up to women access to every sphere of creative activity, our state has simultaneously ensured all the conditions necessary for her to fulfil her natural obligation – that of being a mother bringing up her children and mistress of her home. From the very beginning, Soviet law recognized that motherhood is not a private matter, but the social duty of the active and equal woman citizen. This proposition is enshrined in the Constitution. The Soviet Union has solved one of the most important and complex of problems how to make active use of female labor in any area without this being to the detriment of motherhood" [24, pg. 1]. These statements present a different viewpoint compared to Kollontai's early writing on the Woman Question. They may also explain why women's rights may not have been prioritized in the Soviet Party's directives to the CPUSA. After all, the Soviet's position was that women's inequality had been resolved through the triumph of Communism. So a revolution of the proletariat should be the priority for American communists. In her article "We seek full equality for women" the black communist activist Claudia Jones praised the leadership of CPUSA chairman William Z. Foster on the Woman Question. According to Jones: "The essence of Foster's contribution is that it is necessary to win the masses of American women for the over-all struggle against imperialist war and fascism by paying special attention to their problems and by developing special struggles for their economic, political and social needs" [21, pg. 5].

Although Jones acknowledged that women had specific problems (making working class women doubly oppressed and black working class women triply-oppressed), her prescription for the party was to develop and communicate Marxist-Leninist theory on the Woman Question and to organize women into labor unions [21].

At the beginning of the Cold War, the CPUSA maintained a highly orthodox (Stalin-era) Marxist-Leninist position on the Woman Question. This position did not acknowledge that middle-class housewives were oppressed, or that working class men were partially responsible for the oppression of working class women. The party was concerned about the risk that feminism could undermine solidarity within working class families. As will be discussed, the CPUSA did not accept that women could be true "toilers" unless they worked

outside the home. This rigid ideological position, combined with the fact that women's issues were assigned low priority by leadership, undermined the CPUSA's influence on the agenda of American feminism.

### **The disillusionment of women rights activists in the CPUSA**

Controversy over the Woman Question became quite dramatic within the CPUSA even before the end of World War II. The activist Mary Inman, at the time a member of the CPUSA in California, wrote a series of articles which were published as the book "In Woman's Defense" in 1940 [43]. Inman's ideas contradicted many of the orthodox positions of the party, including an assertion that the oppression of women existed across class lines. However, Inman's most controversial conclusion was that housework was a form of production and that women should organize to demand compensation and better conditions for this productive role. Party leaders objected to Inman's ideas so completely that they interrupted a class Inman taught at a CPUSA sponsored "workers' school" and subsequently barred her from teaching for her "incorrect" understanding of Communist theory [44]. The CPUSA leader Avram Landy even published an article in "The Communist" to offer the "correct" Marxist view that housework was "useful, but not productive" [44, pg. 40]. Inman resigned from the Communist party in 1941, although she spent much of the next ten years criticizing the CPUSA's positions on women.

The CPUSA was disbanded in 1944, as a sign of solidarity while the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were allied against Nazi Germany [20]. Earl Browder, the party chairman at that time, believed that socialism and capitalism could co-exist. However, when the war ended and Cold War tensions began to form, Browder was replaced by the former chairman William Z. Foster and the CPUSA was reconstituted in 1945. That same year, a conference for women's rights was held in Paris, and the Women's International Democratic Foundation (WIDF) was founded [12, pg. 548]. The WIDF received support from the Soviet Union, however several of its national branches were independent organizations that did not depend on the local communist parties [12, pg. 555].

The American branch of the WIDF, the Congress of American Women (CAW) was founded in May of 1946 [2]. The founders and members of the CAW were a mixed group [2; 19] that included CPUSA members (e.g. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Muriel Draper, Betty Millard, Claudia Jones, Margaret Undjus Krumbein, Ella Reeve Bloor), no Communist feminists (e.g. Susan B. Anthony II, Nora Stanton Barney, Elinor S. Gimbel), academics (e.g. Dorothy Wolff Douglass, Gene Weltfish) and artists (Florence Eldridge March, Helen Phillips). According to Weigand [44] Susan B. Anthony II had been a close friend of Mary Inman, and she worked within the CAW to promote a modified version of the Equal Rights Amendment, which read: "There shall be no discrimination against women because of sex or marital status, economically, legally, politically, or socially in the United States of America and in the territories subject to its jurisdiction. Nothing in this article shall be so construed to invalidate or prevent the passage of legislation improving the condition of women in their work or in their family status" [44, pg. 58]. This wording was selected to gain the support of original ERA supporters like Nora Stanton Barney and women who wanted to preserve gender-based protections for women in the workplace. As an affiliate of the Soviet-sponsored WIDF, and given the substantial numbers of CPUSA members in its leadership, the CAW represented an opportunity for the CPUSA to take an active role in the advancement of women's causes in the 1940's and 1950's. However, even Weigand [44] concedes that the CAW did not make much progress on women's issues, either in American society or within the CPUSA. The CPUSA's engagement with the CAW appears to have been limited to the publication of some of Anthony's writings from 1947 in the party's publication the "Worker" [44].

In January of 1948, Millard, who was head of the CAW's Commission on the Status of Women at that time, wrote the article "Women Against Myth." She argued that women should not be considered inferior to men despite the fact that they continued to be subordinated to men within the family, within the CPUSA, and in broader society [31]. Interestingly, Millard made an effort to defend the early suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton from the "bourgeois feminist" label. Millard's praise of the early leaders of the woman's movement may reflect the fact that many of her fellow CAW members were very wealthy. Elinor S. Gimbel was the daughter of a wealthy hop merchant and the wife of an heir to the Gimbel's department store fortune and Nora Stanton Barney was a successful engineer and the ex-wife of FM radio pioneer Lee de Forest. Therefore, it is unlikely that she saw them as "parasites upon parasites," [27, pg. 250] as Irene Leslie might have done. It should be noted that Millard's article contained a section titled "Tanya vs. 'the little woman'" [31, pg. 18-21] in which she contrasted the equality that women enjoyed in the Soviet Union to the "happy housewife" ideal that was imposed as their ideal condition under capitalism. Weigand argues that the publication of "Women against Myth" sparked a deep change in the policies of the CPUSA, and that the party began to tolerate male chauvinism less afterwards [43]. This conclusion is undermined by a letter, written by J. Gerard published in the June 17 issue of the "Worker" that she quotes: "If this is interpreted as a position supporting the married woman's place in the home, then you're right. A progressive worker has to have a feeling of security about his marriage. I charge that the wife who fails to do her job as a good home manager for the progressive worker is being bourgeois in her understanding and is showing contempt for the progressive movement" [44, pg. 83]. Gerard's position may seem extreme, but it closely mirrors the 1946 quote from Kollontai regarding a woman's "natural" obligation to keep house and raise children [24].

The CPUSA's failures on women's issues were not limited to the theoretical debates that went on within its publications or its lack of support for organizations like the CAW. It extended to the fact that relatively few women rose within the ranks of party leadership. According to Baxandall [5] women were largely excluded from top leadership positions, at least before the early 1950's when many of the male leaders were imprisoned under the Smith Act. Although she was referred to within the party as a "mother figure" and a highly effective union organizer, Ella Reeve Bloor never became an official leader within the party hierarchy. At the age of 78 Bloor wrote in her autobiography, "We Are Many," that male chauvinism within the party kept it from giving women "full equal responsibility with men" [8, pg. 563]. In her interview at the 2002 symposium on Red Feminism, Dorothy Healey discussed her recollection that leading communist women like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Claudia Jones resented being appointed to the CPUSA's Women's Commission because this type of commission was seen as symbolic: "They're something like what Presidents do when they want to avoid making decisions, they appoint a commission to study it <...>. They were not the center of Party Life, or Party policy, or significance" [17, pg. 512].

Healey also discussed how Betty Gannett (the CPUSA's Education Director) was excluded from the party's National Board at its 1945 convention (Gosse 2002). Although she was active in the CPUSA from the late 1920's through the early 1970's, she did not mention the CAW during her interview, and she emphasized that union organizing was always more central to her own work within the party [17, pg. 513].

The ideological debates that Millard faced in the party, in addition to the relative exclusion of women from leadership positions help to validate some of the criticisms in Inman's 1949 pamphlet "13 years of CPUSA Misleadership on the Woman Question" [20]. In this pamphlet, Inman detailed the way that work on women's issues was stopped in the early 1940's under Browder's leadership. Inman also explained the implications of the Party's decision under Foster and Education Director Avram Landy to narrow its definition of oppressed workers to those who were employed in heavy industries. This policy excluded lighter industries such as garment manufacturing which were predominantly staffed by women. This policy is likely to have infuriated Inman, since it went far beyond the idea that housework was not "productive" labor. Inman also faulted the CPUSA for allowing the CAW to be dominated by "bourgeois" women and a failure to agitate for the establishment of nurseries [20]. Inman points out that no editorial advocating access to child care was published in the Daily Worker for most of 1942 despite the fact that women were needed for wartime production [20]. Inman's criticism of CAW leadership (including her old friend Susan B. Anthony II and the Columbia University anthropologist Gene Weltfish) leads her into a seeming contradiction. Inman identifies Irene Leslie's 1936 essay condemning upper class feminists as a piece that provided an excuse for the CPUSA to abandon the woman question for nearly a decade. However, she insists that the CAW was illegitimate due to its many middle class and wealthy members, despite the fact that in 1949 this was the only remaining feminist organization which included a significant number of CPUSA members.

Bettina Aptheker, currently a professor in the Department of Women's studies at U.C. Santa Cruz, joined the CPUSA in the early 1960's. But she was also the daughter of the longtime CPUSA leader and historian Herbert Aptheker. Aptheker's [4] critique of Weigand's [45] thesis centers on her own interactions with key people profiled in Weigand's book, as well as her experiences with continued sexism within the CPUSA. In particular, Aptheker reports that Betty Gannett was "decidedly anti-feminist" and that she gave lectures that were "a cross between strict Victorian code and Stalinist ethics" [4, pg. 520-521]. Aptheker mentions that she was unaware of the CAW (which was disbanded in 1950) and that a large number of feminist-oriented women left the CPUSA by the early 1960's. She includes some praise for Weigand's celebration of individual activist women like Inman, Jones and Millard, but she insists that despite: "(...) the stellar contributions of all these women...it is extraordinary to consider the extent to which the Communist Party of which I was a member was so deeply sexist and homophobic. Male superiority was assumed in matters of theory and political analysis; women were objects of sexual prey in ways we would now call sexual harassment" [4, pg. 520-521].

The accounts of Healey, Aptheker and Inman, describe the CPUSA as uninterested in the Woman Question and the CAW as sincere but ineffective and largely ignored. If one accepts their perspectives, one can consider an additional way in which the CPUSA may still have influenced "second-wave" feminism. Horowitz [18] produced a detailed account of Betty Friedan's involvement with radical causes in the two decades between her college years and the publication of "The Feminine Mystique." He mentions that Friedan took an economics class with Dorothy W. Douglas (a Marxist economist and future member of the CAW) at Smith college in 1941, and that Douglas encouraged her to attend a summer writers' workshop at a school that had close ties to the labor movement [18]. After her graduation from Smith in 1942, Friedan spent a year in a graduate psychology program at Berkeley and then began a ten years' career as a journalist, first at the Federated Press (a leftist news service) and then for the UE News, the newsletter of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America [6]. Horowitz' main argument is that Friedan's period of labor union journalism shaped the ideas that she brought into "The Feminine Mystique". In particular, he emphasizes a pamphlet "UE Fights for Women Workers" that Friedan wrote in 1952 [18], in which she advocated equal pay for working women. Boucher [6] points out that Friedan's "UE Fights for Women

Workers” also covered the double discrimination faced by African American women, and that she covered this topic again in a pamphlet she wrote about one year later: “Women Fight for a Better Life!”. Horowitz cites Friedan’s involvement with the UE, and her writings about working women, to dispute Friedan’s frequent claim that she was not very concerned with feminist issues prior to the late 1950’s. Boucher [6] provides the following quote from an essay that Friedan wrote in 1974: “After the war, I had been very politically involved, consciously radical. Not about women, for heaven’s sake! If you were radical in 1949, you were concerned about the Negroes, and the working class, and World War III, and the Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthy and loyalty oaths and Communist splits and schisms, Russia, China and the UN, but you didn’t think about being a woman politically” [6, pg. 27].

Horowitz [18] portrays this type of statement from Friedan as disingenuous, and as an attempt to preserve the legitimacy of her “second-wave” leadership by isolating it from her Marxist past. He suggests that this strategy led her to make the false claim that the ideas in “The Feminine Mystique” came mostly from her own (and her Smith classmates’) personal experiences as housewives [18]. Boucher [6] and Horowitz [18] go further by suggesting that Friedan deliberately hid the Marxist origins of her thinking on feminism because she continued to be influenced by “the tragedy of McCarthyism.” Horowitz attempts to provide a sympathetic interpretation for what he judges to be Friedan’s dishonesty: “If McCarthyism prompted her to hide elements of her past from view, it also made it difficult for her to directly confront her debt to the old left, perhaps out of a sense that she may have betrayed a problematic or martyred cause” [18, pg. 29].

As will be discussed in the next section, the persecution of communists by the U.S. government did help to end some of the activism of Marxist feminist women. However, there is good evidence that work on the Woman Question was marginalized within the CPUSA during the 1940’s and 1950’s, and that this marginalization was mostly unrelated to government pressures. In light of the internal resistance faced by CPUSA members like Inman and Millard, who were focused on the Woman Question, and considering Dorothy Healey’s confirmation that women’s issues were not Party priorities, Friedan’s claim that her early radicalism was mostly confined to non-feminist causes is credible. While she experienced the CPUSA’s strong commitment to the fight for unions and Civil Rights, it is likely that she did not encounter similar support for women’s causes. In other words, the ideas in “the Feminine Mystique” may owe very little debt to the old left. Friedan was closely associated with the old left for more than ten years, yet her seminal book focused on the grievances of highly educated upper and middle-class white women. This suggests that the CPUSA’s indifferent approach to the Woman’s Question was at least as important as McCarthyism in determining the “bourgeois” nature of “second-wave” feminism.

#### **Antagonists to the cpusa, the end of CAW**

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the CIA helped to silence Marxist feminists while promoting individuals and organizations with a more individualistic and capitalist vision of feminism. When it was only two years old the CAW was investigated by the HUAC, and was cited as a “subversive organization” [19, pg. 110]. The HUAC’s final report on the CAW featured a list of the CAW’s most prominent members, along with notes on their communist ties [19]. The HUAC singled out several CAW leaders, providing profiles with details about their participation in protests, their speeches and their writing. Dr. Weltfish was profiled as a “ringleader” of the WIDF and CAW [19, pg.10], and Susan B. Anthony II and Nora Stanton Barney were portrayed as puppets, whose famous names were being used for Soviet propaganda [19, pg. 100–103].

The HUAC’s investigation of the CAW came at the same time that many male leaders of the CPUSA were being prosecuted under the Smith Act, and the report detailed the CAW’s delegations in support of these leaders, criticizing them for supporting men who were on trial “because of their membership in an organization that teaches and advocates overthrow of the United States Government by force and violence” [19, pg. 60-63]. Millard and other CAW leaders were summoned by the HUAC investigators as hostile witnesses. Foreign born members of the CAW were targeted for deportation. Claudia Jones was deported to the U.K. because she was born in Trinidad, and others were prosecuted and convicted under the Smith Act (for example, Dorothy Healey and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn). After the HUAC investigation, other CAW members were blacklisted, Dr. Weltfish was dismissed from her job at Columbia University. In the face of this attack from the HUAC, and a lack of support from the CPUSA, the CAW was disbanded in 1950.

The end of the CAW led to the dispersal of its members, with many leaving the CPUSA (for example, Muriel Draper and Betty Millard). Others abandoned further coordinated efforts on women’s causes. At the same time that the CAW was ending, a number of women’s civic organizations in the U.S. began to transform from internationalist organizations engaged with U.N. efforts to spread a peace agenda, to positions that were closely aligned with the U.S. government’s Cold War stance [26]. One of these organizations was the National Congress of Women (NCW). Rose Parsons, a NCW leader, became active in promoting U.S. interests among women’s organizations across the world. This effort was accomplished through a CIA funded offshoot of the NCW named the Committee of Correspondence (CofC) [26]. The CofC was used to communicate U.S. government positions to international women’s organizations and to counteract information produced by the Soviet-funded WIDF. The WIDF often casted the U.S. as an imperialist power and a threat to peace and child welfare. The propaganda

battle between the Soviet Union and the CIA extended to international youth movements as well, and the CIA built programs to spread positive information about democracy, prosperity and individual freedom in the United States. One CIA-funded news organization was (ironically) called the "Independent Research Service" and the future feminist leader Gloria Steinem was one of the service's key employees. Steinem's affiliation with the CIA was publicized in a 1975 article by the radical feminist organization Redstockings [3]. Kounalakis wrote an article in the Chicago Tribune in which he maintains that "Steinem's personal views and CIA political goals aligned" [25]. He quotes Steinem's view of the CIA at the time: "The agency was completely different from its image; it was liberal, nonviolent and admirable." Steinem's defense of the CIA is troubling, given that it was involved in many assassinations and coups during the time she worked with the agency. However, it may not be surprising that with leaders like Steinem, the "second-wave" feminist movement developed individualistic slogans that emphasized "owning one's own body" over collective aims such as child care or universal access to medical care.

### **Alternative voices**

While the achievements of the "second-wave" feminism may have benefited middle class white women more than working class and minority women, it is true that many feminist activists in the 1960's and 1970's were also active in the Labor, Civil Rights, and Anti-War movements. This could not have happened if feminists had been completely won over by the U.S. government's Cold War agenda, or if all progressive thinking had been erased from Women's Liberation. It appears that progressive ideas survived within the Women's Liberation movement, even if they were not realized. Weigand [45] might argue that this progressive undercurrent is a legacy of the old left and the early feminist women of the CPUSA. It is reasonable to think that the influential writing of women like Millard, Jones and Inman had some lasting influence. On the other hand, the CPUSA was only one of the organizations where progressive women were active after World War II.

Marxist Humanism, founded by the former Trotskyist Raya Dunayevskaya, was one small movement that (among other beliefs) stressed Women's Liberation as a reason for revolution rather than a consequence [15]. As an offshoot of Trotskyism, Dunayevskaya's movement was never connected to the Stalinist CPUSA. Dunayevskaya herself was expelled from the CPUSA youth organization in the late 1920s after she raised questions about Trotsky's dismissal from the party. Of course, advanced thinking on the status of women was also happening within academia outside of political circles. One example is the work of the sociologist Komarovskiy. Having witnessed the harassment of her affluent Jewish parents under the Tsar as a child and having immigrated to the U.S. to escape Communism when she was sixteen, Komarovskiy went on to become president of the American Sociological Association and chair of women's studies at Barnard College. Komarovskiy taught young women at Barnard for more than thirty years, and her research covered such topics as the sources of stability in working class marriages [39]. In 1953, Komarovskiy published "Women in the Modern World" in which she discussed her groundbreaking insights on the evolution of sex roles in society [39].

Another woman who was a non-communist pioneer of women's liberation, was also one of the most successful political women of her time. Bella Abzug was a passionate advocate for a Jewish homeland in her youth, and an effective lawyer for labor and civil rights causes during her early career. A contemporary of Friedan, Abzug was exposed to Marxist ideas while in college, but she did not join the Communists. One of her biographers points out that many left-leaning students were turned away from Communism when Stalin signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 [29]. Abzug was the organizer of one of the largest women's protest events of the early 1960s (the Women's Strike for Peace) and she joined Steinem, Friedan and other prominent feminists to found the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971 [29].

The stories of these three women are examples of the range of progressive feminist ideas that were being generated in the U.S. during the beginning of the Cold War. While it is hard to measure the impact of Dunayevskaya's philosophies, Komarovskiy had the opportunity to teach students over her long academic career and her insights on gender are still considered to be relevant. Abzug's influence on the Women's Liberation Movement is well documented, although it might be said that she (similar to Friedan) might have been expected to guide the "second-wave" in a more progressive direction.

In her conclusion, Weigand [44] describes the warm reception that Susan B Anthony II received among feminists who came to a Houston conference celebrating the United Nations International Women's Year, and she refers to Abzug and Friedan as "old left" activists [44, pg. 155]. However, there is evidence that Susan B Anthony II fit the definition of a "bourgeois feminist" by the standards of the CPUSA; and that, as mentioned above, Abzug and Friedan's contributions to the "second-wave" focused on elite women despite their pro-labor sympathies.

In the end, as Watkins [42] argues, the main achievement of the past few decades (when the American model dominated the women's rights discourse), were the accumulation of vast knowledge and academic research on women and gender topics. However, Watkins [42] concludes that the social and economic benefits of the American "non-discriminatory" or "equal rights" agenda went mostly to women at the top of the social pyramid around the world. She quotes Brenner to underscore a striking contrast between the outcomes of "first" and "second-wave" U.S. feminism: "After winning the vote in 1920, women's rights campaigners were politically marginalized. By comparison, after the legislative and social gains of the 1970s, feminist demands

were 'increasingly institutionalized and culturally incorporated', the radical ferment of the autonomous movement capped by a powerful Washington-based 'women's lobby' [42]. Evidently, the means for such institutionalization, were the individuation and fragmentation of women's causes, which increasingly become formulated in terms of "identity politics." In other words, women perceived themselves as "me," and not as members of an oppressed class. In contrast, earlier feminist activist conceptualized female entrance to traditionally "male" spaces as a means for further collective organizing and not as a measure of individual autonomy [42].

The idea of helping individual women around the world (or the so-called, "empowerment" discourse) instead of protecting women as a class, has had concrete economic consequences. For instance, in the U.S. the goal of equal pay for equal work was not tied to fair wage policies. So industry, in many ways, used the entrance of women into the workforce as means to reduce wages for all workers. Therefore, it appears that the ideas of Marxist women activists of the early Cold War era did not shape the agenda of the "second-wave" feminism.

At the beginning of the Cold War, the CPUSA adopted the Soviet position on the Woman Question. This position did not acknowledge that housewives belong to the class of the oppressed, or that working class men subordinated working class women. The party feared that feminism could undermine the unity of families. For the CPUSA, as for Soviet communists, whether a woman worked inside or outside of the house was the key factor that defined her as either a "toiler" or a "parasite." This ideological orthodoxy and narrowing of the liberation agenda, along with the fact that party leadership prioritized non-feminist causes, undermined the CPUSA's influence on the future of American feminism.

The accounts of prominent American Marxist feminists (Healey, Aptheker, Inman) detailed the ways in which the CPUSA marginalized the Woman Question. Four years of work under the umbrella of the CAW by its diverse feminist members could be seen as a sincere but ineffective way to organize and represent women in their collective struggle. The well documented persecution of communists by the U.S. government further contained the activism of Marxist feminist women. However, the CPUSA's lack of support for the CAW preceded the McCarthy era and was mostly shaped within its own patriarchal ideological and organizational axes.

Around 1960, a number of women's civic organizations in the U.S. (encouraged by the CIA) moved from work on global efforts to spread a peace agenda, to supporting causes that were closely aligned with the American Cold War position. Finally, the American government took control of the Woman Question by supporting individualization of the common cause, and by promoting "equal rights" and "non-discrimination" agendas [42].

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