

A Reply

Harold Benenson

Sarah Lawrence College

Respondents Montgomery, Anderson, Ladd, and Goldman contend that my critique of Karl Marx's theory of the working class (*ILWCH* 25) obscures the positive contribution Marxism made towards, in Montgomery's words, furnishing "analytical tools" for conceptualizing "the historical relations of gender and class." *The views of these commentators on my essay and Marxist theory are seriously flawed.* It is useful to consider first some general difficulties which are common to their arguments, before turning to their separate presentations.

While the intention of these respondents is to question my analysis of Marx's theory of the working class, much of their discussion focuses on secondary or tangential problems. Examples of secondary issues include the exegesis of socialist thinkers who wrote after Marx (by Montgomery and Goldman) and the presentation of Marx's and Engels' theories of pre-capitalist societies (by Anderson and Ladd). These kinds of discussions miss my point.

My article explored weaknesses in Marx's analyses of women's paid labor, the working class family, and the reproduction of human beings under capitalism. It sought to demonstrate: (1) the reductionist element in Marx's treatment of reproduction (for example, that of workers' labor power); (2) his inadequate, physiological explanation of women's subordination in employment; (3) the bias toward representing primarily working men's life situations in his concept of "class interest"; and (4) Marx's legitimation, in analyses of workers' family economies in the present and future, of working men's self-image as rightful family "breadwinners" under capitalism and even communism. I traced the influences of Victorian sexual ideology and the rise of organization among male, predominantly skilled workers in the early nineteenth century on these aspects of Marx's thinking. Placing him against the backdrop of earlier utopian doctrines, I also showed that Marx's theory marked a fundamental shift in the terms of socialist discussion of women's emancipation.

In light of this summary, I note two further limitations in the responses. First, none offers a credible, substantive interpretation of Marx's actual analyses of women and the family in capitalist society. Second, the respondents fail to treat Marx and later socialist theorists as historical figures, whose ideas were shaped by changing circumstances. I turn now to illustrating these problems in the separate comments.

David Montgomery raises two basic criticisms. He challenges my notion of a "shift" between the theories of the utopians and Marx, and he contests some parts of

my interpretation of Marx's ideas, especially concerning women's role outside the productive realm and workers' family economies. However, these points and Montgomery's own conclusion about Marx's theory of production don't hold up under scrutiny.

Montgomery discusses socialists who wrote before and after Marx in order to question my notion of (in his words) "a fundamental contrast . . . between the views of Utopians and those of Marxists on women's needs." Marx himself is largely absent from this section of Montgomery's piece.

Montgomery believes that the existence of pre-Marxian socialists, such as Étienne Cabet, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Wilhelm Weitling, who were not "champions of the rights of women" contradicts my analysis of utopianism and women's emancipation. This is incorrect, as is Montgomery's characterization of the two French leaders in this context. Cabet, in fact, emphasized the need to end women's social debasement in his early political journalism. This writing accounts for the favorable view of "Icarian" communism that was held by important women activists. The misogynist Proudhon, on the other hand, was in no sense a "utopian" socialist.¹

More important, my analysis of the "shift" in socialist frameworks centered, first of all, on the founders of the utopian systems, Fourier and Owen, I documented their critiques of female subordination, and said that these ideas were taken up by a *minority* of socialist propagandists of the 1830s–1840s (2). I did not claim anything further about the cohesion or general diffusion of the original utopian systems in this era. In fact, in this time of transition varied alloys of communitarian schemes and artisanal ideologies appeared that bore few traces of the earlier doctrines on women (i.e., Weitling's ideas, as Montgomery points out). This phenomenon is fully consistent with my discussion of the receding influence of utopian-inspired beliefs on working men's consciousness in the period (2, 5).

Montgomery's examination of later socialist theorists attempts to show crucial continuities from utopianism through Marxism. He holds up August Bebel and Karl Kautsky as examples of "Marxists" who "addressed . . . the question (of women's emancipation) . . . using his (Marx's) analytic tools" and whose "formulations . . . were strikingly similar to those of (the utopians) Tristan and Morrison." But Montgomery's characterization of the Bebel who wrote *Woman under Socialism* (1879 and 1883) as "Marxist" is misleading. In reality this manifesto "bore few marks of Marxist influence." Even in its later editions, "the major influence in the book remained that of Fourier."² Clara Zetkin, apparently Frederick Engels, and Bebel himself recognized that the original work lacked a Marxist framework.³ Since Fourier directly inspired much of Bebel's analysis, the "similarity" between *Woman under Socialism* and writings by utopians of the early nineteenth century, noted by Montgomery, is not surprising. It can be added that, Montgomery's reference notwithstanding, Bebel's ally, Karl Kautsky, contributed nothing new to socialist ideas on women's emancipation.⁴ In summary, neither Montgomery's discussion of the pre-Marxian socialists (Cabet, Proudhon and Weitling) nor of later theorists (Bebel and Kautsky) confronts my argument concerning a "contrast" between the original

utopian doctrines and the theory of *Marx*.

The latter part of Montgomery's essay concerns the interpretation of Marx. Montgomery takes issue with my explication of Marx's ideas on women's relation to activities outside production, and working class family economies. He concludes with an affirmation of the Marxist theory of materialism and social production.

Montgomery's first criticism is straightforward. He writes, "We are not helped at all . . . by the argument that Marx had identified . . . the *superstructure* with the female domestic sphere." (emphasis added) There's one problem: I didn't make this argument, but rather discussed deficiencies in Marx's conception of the *family* (outside the productive realm) and women's role in history-making. I specifically never referred to the concept of "superstructure" in my article.

About family economies, I argued that Marx's treatment of the impact of the employment of a wife and children on the position of the male "head of the family" legitimized working men's self-image as the proper family breadwinners. Montgomery rejects this analysis on two grounds: (1) the male "family wage" norm was "a pivotal concept of Catholic social doctrine," and as such, it was alien to Marxism, and (2) Marx advocated "the abolition of wages" and not the attainment of a particular family economy under capitalism. Neither argument is convincing, and neither addresses what Marx wrote about family employment patterns. By interjecting the Catholic position, Montgomery suggests that only conservative institutions aligned themselves with the notion that men were family "heads" and "breadwinners." This was not so. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Victorian ideal of male economic responsibility and female domesticity held sway, in varied guises, across the right-to-left spectrum of masculine politics. The views of Catholic leaders, quoted by Montgomery, tell us nothing about the way Marx, in his own framework, approached this issue. Montgomery's second point on Marx's political objective slights both Marx's concern with the struggle for immediate reforms (such as the shortening of the working day), and the ideological significance of the terms in which he condemned industrial capitalism. Marx's critique drew on an image of a handicraft era in which male workers fully supported their wives and children.⁵ This reference point conveyed to Marx's audience of working men an ideal of masculine providership that could be applied as easily to the socialist future as to the capitalist present.

My final point concerns Montgomery's conclusion. In his critique Montgomery does not solely assert the validity of Marx's perspective on the issues which I raised. On the contrary, he recognizes and further documents "Benenson(s) . . . two sound criticisms of *Capital*. The book offers neither a theory of the determinants of women's wages nor a basis for understanding the history of gender segregation in employment." But this important judgment undermines Montgomery's conclusion about the Marxist theory of production.

In the end Montgomery finds "compelling force" in Marx's conception of "social production." However, this is the same theory of economic life (developed in *Capital*) which, in Montgomery's view, exhibits serious flaws with regard to women. How can this conception explain the position of *women* in production, if the

analysis of gender segregation and female wages remains *terra incognita* for Marx? In his first paragraph, Montgomery describes his basic interest in “conceptualiz(ing) the historical relations of gender and class.” Given this objective, it is unclear what depth of inadequacy must be revealed before Montgomery would admit the necessity of critically rethinking Marx’s theory of production, rather than merely reaffirming it.

The response by Kevin Anderson asserts that my article “has succeeded in obscuring nearly totally the crucial relationship of women’s liberation to Marx’s overall dialectic of liberation.” However, Anderson himself never explains *how* “women’s liberation” and “overall . . . liberation” were actually linked in Marx’s theory of society. Rather, Anderson only provides some unconnected quotations from Marx. Most of these passages, on the “man-woman relationship” in Marx’s early writings, black labor, and women in ancient Greece, have minimal relevance to my argument.

I offer comments on three of Anderson’s more pertinent quotations, concerning the “abolition of the family,” the organization of women workers and “relations between the sexes” in a future society. Anderson is wrong to claim that Marx and Engels “*advocate . . . abolition of the family*” (emphasis added) among the proletariat as a way of remedying working-class women’s oppression. This fails to understand Marx’s and Engels’ view (stated in the same passage from which Anderson quotes) that *capitalism* had already brought about “the practical absence of the family among proletarians.”⁶

Anderson mentions Marx’s unique discussion in 1871 of the need for “women’s sections” in the First International. This reference illustrates mainly how deeply Anderson had to dig to find even a limited quotation indicating Marx’s concern for the organization of women workers. The background to this incident is revealing. In the aftermath of the Paris Commune, women from 15 *arrondissements* applied for membership to the International. Marx was responding to this initiative. Aside from considerations of solidarity, he had a partisan reason for encouraging the recruitment of women in France. Female adherents were a special source of discomfort to his Proudhonist adversaries in the International. There is no evidence that Marx every voiced a similar interest in taking practical steps to bring women into the International, trade unions or political life in the English and German contexts.⁷ It is therefore a great exaggeration to cite the 1871 discussion, as Anderson does, as evidence for Marx’s continuous concern with “women as a revolutionary subject.”

From *Capital* Anderson cites Marx’s single observation on the “new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes” which the employment of women and young people establishes. This passage is indeed significant as a reminder of Marx’s belief that sexual and generational relations, in conjunction with work organization, will undergo positive change (of an unspecified sort) under socialism. But a major feature of this discussion is the radical disjunction between the possibility of creating a “higher form” of sexual relations in the future, and the lack of a program that would allow women to struggle against their subordination under present circumstances. The latter defi-

ciency is linked to Marx's Victorian mode of analysis of female wage-labor outside the home. In a characteristic manner, Marx concludes this same passage by declaring that the employment of women in a "collective working group of . . . both sexes," however "humane" it may become in the future, is a pestiferous source of corruption . . . " under capitalism. Throughout *Capital* Marx describes the fact of female employment as a special basis of "degradation."⁸ In this he portrays women wage-earners only as victims, and offers them no perspective for initiating action to combat their special conditions of exploitation (for example, by demanding wages equal to those of men). It is noteworthy that even in discussing the positive (ultimate) consequences of women's employment, Marx returns to his victimization theme. Like Anderson's previous citation, this passage lends scant support to the contention that Marx "see(s) women as a revolutionary subject."

The comment by Doris M. Ladd constructs an account of Engels' and Marx's analyses that reflects her own vision of history more closely than theirs. Ladd, for example, concludes her summary of "Marxist theory," which draws centrally on Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, with the statement: ". . . all through the ages, women are seen to be deeply involved in not staying home and in making hay or history." In fact, however, Engels asserted the opposite. He saw the confinement of women in the domestic realm, prior to the stage of modern industry, as a crucial determinant of female subordination in precapitalist societies.⁹

Similarly, Ladd misconstrues Marx when she asserts that I failed "to distinguish *is* from *ought*" in discussing Marx's treatment of male workers' aspirations to be family breadwinners. In her view, Marx's analysis of this phenomenon conveyed merely his observation of "workers' own solutions" to their problems, without any normative, Victorian-minded bias on his part. As I have indicated above, however, Marx's writings on the subject inextricably link historical analysis with his own strong judgments. Marx laced his discussions of the supersession of the male breadwinner family pattern through the employment of women and children with terms like, "corruption," "degradation," "disgusting" appearance and "demoralization."¹⁰

The response by Wendy Z. Goldman invents an account of Marx's analysis to validate her notion of a single, authentic "tradition of Marx, Engels, August Bebel and Clara Zetkin." She writes that the "demand equal pay for equal work . . . was the legacy of Marx." The problem with Goldman's assertion is that Marx never put forward this demand. (Nor did Engels mention it in any of his discussions of women's role in modern, capitalist industry in *The Origin of the Family*.) It should be noted that Marx would have had a hard time reconciling the "equal pay" concept with his physiological explanation of the difference in men's and women's position in the employment structure.¹¹

Most of the program which Goldman identifies with "the Marxist tradition" entered the late nineteenth century socialist movement through the arguments of French women's rights advocates and pre-Marxian "collectivists" around 1876–1880 and Bebel's *Woman under Socialism* in 1879 (discussed above).¹² Goldman's con-

ception of a self-sufficient "Marxist tradition" concerning women does not admit the existence of cross-fertilization of political analyses across doctrinal boundaries. Yet this was a key factor in creating the body of ideas that Goldman values. Her perspective also fails to recognize profound shifts between Marx's 1846 writing (which she quotes), *Capital*, Bebel's 1879 manifesto, and the ideas of Soviet jurists in 1926. Her procedure thus detaches "Marxist" thought from the currents of social change.

The shortcomings in the comments by Montgomery, Anderson, Ladd and Goldman stem, most basically, from an unwillingness to place Marx in his own time, and to recognize the ways in which a conservative sexual ideology influenced even this radical critic of society. But this type of historical approach is essential if the search "to conceptualize the historical relations of gender and class" is to make headway against the tenacious assumptions of an earlier, Victorian age.

NOTES

1. Christopher H. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 90, 92, 175; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in *Collected Works* 6 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 513.

2. Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 156-157; see also, Maria Mies and Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism in Europe* (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1981), pp. 129-130; August Bebel, *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*, trans. H.B. Adams Walther. (London: William Reeves, 1885), pp. 43-68, 178-232.

3. Karen Honeycutt, "Clara Zetkin," Columbia University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1975, pp. 54-56; Lisa Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), pp. 75, 98; Mies and Jayawardena, *Feminism*, p. 129.

4. Karl Kautsky, *Le Programme Socialiste* (Paris: Marcel Riviere, 1910), pp. 38-39, 139-140; Gary P. Steenson, *Karl Kautsky* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978).

5. See my "Victorian Sexual Ideology and Marx's Theory of the Working Class," *ILWCH* 25 (Spring 1984), pp. 15-16.

6. Marx and Engels, "Manifesto," p. 501.

7. Jacques Freymond, ed., *La Premiere Internationale* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962), pp. 167-168; Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 119-120, 124; Werner Thonnessen, *The Emancipation of Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 33; G.M. Stekloff, *History of the First International* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), pp. 222-227; Karl Marx, *The First International and After*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 16-17.

8. Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1967), pp. 399, 464, 489–490, 696.

9. Engels wrote, “To procure the necessities of life had always been the business of man.” *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 220.

10. See footnote 8, above.

11. See my “Victorian Sexual Ideology,” pp. 14–15; Engels, *The Origin*, pp. 135, 231.

12. Charles Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 21–32; Evans, *The Feminists*, pp. 153–159.

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