Women and Communism in Advanced Capitalist Societies: Readings and Resources

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The works listed in this bibliography range from political tracts and historical analyses to autobiographies, novels, films, and periodical literature. They were selected with several criteria in mind: first, because of their relative accessibility to readers in the United States; second, to indicate the kinds of sources available to study the policies and practice of communist movements toward what the Third International characterized as the "Women Question"; finally, to identify for study groups and beginning students the kinds of materials that might be used to study the participation of women in communist politics. These works are categorized sometimes loosely, by topic and theme, as well as by country, in order to suggest the possibilities for monographic research on the single national parties and movements and for cross-national inquiries into specific aspects of ideology and practice shared by the communist tradition as a whole.

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I. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Most of the analyses of the condition of women under capitalism quoted or written in the context of Third International communist movements might best be described as "adjunct" or "occasional" theory. With a very few exceptions—the writings of Frederick Engels, August Bebel and Clara Zetkin come immediately to mind—the positions of political leaders on the Women Question were developed under the pressure of events, the result at best of lucid strategic thinking rather than any innovative or systematic study. Nevertheless, this body of literature as a whole constitutes a tradition of analysis that bears careful study. For it represents the most sustained effort by a political movement in western societies to incorporate women's issues into a theory and practice of radical social change. Moreover, it was appropriated and to some extent reinterpreted by successive generations of movement leaders, cadres, and party members to frame questions of strategy and legitimate organizational tactics regarding
women and women’s issues. To understand the significance of these works for building a mass socialist movement, as well as to assess their import for women’s liberation, they should be read at several levels: to assess their internal coherence; to consider their validity as an account of the oppression of women under advanced capitalism; finally, to weigh their strategic consequences for the struggle of women for socialism and liberation. Both the contribution of these analyses and their limits are much better understood in light of more recent marxist-feminist studies. Accordingly, the works listed below include studies from a marxist-feminist and radical-feminist perspective, in addition to those conceived in the context of the Second and Third Internationals.

**Socialist and Communist Analyses**

Bebel, August, *Women under Socialism* (New York, 1971). First published in 1883, the Second International socialists’ major contribution to analyzing the Women Question may fruitfully be compared to the work of Lenin and Togliatti in its language, political analysis and vision of the place of women after the revolution.


Inman, Mary, *In Woman’s Defense* (Los Angeles, 1940). Militant assertion of the specificity of women’s oppression by a “premature” American marxist-feminist who, briefly in the 1930s, was in the CPUSA.


Landy, Alf, *Marxism and the Woman Question* (New York, 1943). The CPUSA’s rebuttal of Mary Inman’s work.

speeches, writing, and correspondence from 1896 to 1922, with an appendix by Clara Zetkin on "Lenin and the Women Question."


Togliatti, Palmiro, *L'emanicipazione femminile* (Rome, 1965). Speeches and writings of the PCI leader, dating from 1945; interesting for their emphasis on the need for women to build an autonomous organization to develop a political understanding of the specific nature of their oppression.


*Women and Communism: Selections from the Writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin* (Westport, Conn., 1973). The Socialist-Communist classics, organized by topic, beginning with the enslavement of women (by Engels) and including chapters on the "double" oppression of women under capitalism and the contribution of socialism to women's emancipation.


**Feminist and Marxist-Feminist Analyses**


de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex* (New York, 1953). Written amidst the growing disillusionment of European left intellectuals with the Soviet Communist experience this first 'total' perspective on women's existence, was first published in 1949.


Kuhn Annette and Ann Marie Wolpe, eds., *Feminism and Materialism* (London, 1978). Essays analyzing the historical and theoretical relations between patriarchy and mode of production; especially good on the role of the place of women under the welfare state and in recent political movements.


Weinbaum, Batya, *The Curious Courtship of Women's Liberation and Socialism* (Boston, 1978). Idiosyncratic attempt to distinguish how marxist and feminist traditions differ in their concepts of radical change.

II. COMPARATIVE APPROACHES

"Everyone to Berlin for the Reichs Congress of working women!" Cover of KPD journal for women party cadre, Die Kaempferin (1929).
Socialism, anarchism, and reform movements


Kaplan, Temma, "Other Scenarios: Women and Spanish Anarchism," in Becoming Visible: Women in European History, R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz, eds. (Boston, 1977). Shows how even under anarchist leadership, women were most radical and unified when they formed their own sexually separate organizations.

Pieroni Bortolotti, Franca, Socialismo e questione femminile in Italia, 1892-1922 (Milan, 1974). Political history of Italian socialism and its response to the woman question.

Quataert, Jean, Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917 (Princeton, 1979). Underscores the conflicts between feminist and socialist positions in the largest of the European socialist parties.


______________, Women's Consciousness, Man's World (Harmondsworth, 1973). Analyzes the formation of feminist consciousness as a response to recent social changes and the part women play generally in maintaining commodity production.


Tax, Meredith, The Rising of Women: Feminist Alliances and Class Conflict, 1880-1917 (New York, 1980). The intersections of socialist, feminist and trade union organizing at a time when women were entering industry for the first time.

Thoennesen, Werner, The Emancipation of Women: The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy, 1863-1933 (Glasgow, 1976). The first full ranging analysis of social-democratic women, stressing that feminist socialists tended to be radical on other party issues.


Communist movements in power


Davin, Delia, Woman-Work: Women and the Party in Revolutionary China (Oxford,
1976). Analysis of party's policies toward women, consequences, implications, and problems, with a fine selection of documents.

Randall, Margaret, *Cuban Women Now* (Toronto, 1974). Interviews with Cuban women, illustrating transformations in their condition following the revolution.


**Women in contemporary politics**


Jacquette, Jane, ed., *Women in Politics* (New York, 1974). Essays mainly by political scientists on women's political participation under a variety of national situations.

Nuova DWF. *Donna, uomo, femme*. Special issue. "Come si costruisce il socialismo" (Rome, 1980). Contributions from left, new left, and feminist perspectives focusing on Rowbotham's *Beyond the Fragments*.

Rowbotham, Sheila, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London, 1979). Explores central issues of neo-feminism, with implications far beyond the specific context of British socialist and Labourist politics.

Saraceno, Chiara, *Dalla parte delle donne: la questione femminile nelle società in-
sind Tod, Siechtum oder Zuchthaus das Schicksal von tausenden deutscher Arbeiterfrauen

"Under the claws of Paragraph 218, death, disease and the penitentiary are the fate of thousands of German working-class women." From the KPD satirical magazine, Eulenspiegel (1930).

Published by Duke University Press
**III. HISTORICAL STUDIES**

The quantity and quality of the historical studies on the role of women in western communist movements vary significantly from country to country. This unevenness is only partly a function of the strength of the parties themselves or of their success in the past in engaging the support of women. In Germany, for example, where there was a strong communist movement until the Nazi seizure of power and the number of women who voted communist or otherwise supported KPD initiatives numbered in the scores of thousands, research on the role of women in the party is relatively recent. Only in the last decade have scholars in the German Democratic Republic, mainly associated with the Leipzig Paedagogische Hochschule “Clara Zetkin,” begun to utilize the party archives; more recently still, feminist researchers in the Federal Republic have made innovative contributions to this inquiry. In Italy, by contrast, there has been an extraordinary proliferation of studies, the combined result of the strength of the left and the impressive intellectual vigor of the old-guard communist women, the vitality of feminist scholarship, and the editorial support of communist and other left publishing houses. In Great Britain, in the United States, and in Spain, where the PCE was only recently legalized, oral history projects and recent dissertations have been promoted by feminist scholars rather than by a specifically communist historiography. In France, notwithstanding the large numbers of communist women in the past and at present, research has just commenced, reflecting the sharp division between the Communist party and feminist groups there, as well as the still prevalent “workerist” orientation within the party itself.

**Third International**

Camparini, Aurelia, *Questione femminile e terza internazionale* (Bari, 1978). Studies the development of Comintern policy on women in the context of the changing strategies from the 1919 foundation of the Third International and the evolution of United Front tactics in the early 1920s through the growth of Popular Front alliances in the mid-1930s.


period piece, useful for its comparison of communist and fascist movements and regimes.

France


Germany


———————, with Ingrid Arendt, *Bibliographie zur Geschichte de Karempftes der deutschen Arbeiterklasse* (Leipzig, 1974).


working-class vote, with excellent references.


Great Britain

Bruley, Susan, "Socialism and Feminism in the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1939," Dissertation, London School of Economics, 1980. Distinguishes the variety of social and political functions played by women in the party as flankers, supporters, and in the 1930s, as full-fledged feminist cadres.

Rowbotham, Sheila, A New World for Women: Stella Brown—Socialist Feminist (London, 1977). Studies one of the few British socialist women to deal openly with sexual and reproductive reform, the founder of the Abortion Law Reform Association and a member of the Communist party in its first two years.

Italy

Ascoli, Giuliana, "L'UDI tra emancipazione e liberazione," Problemi del socialismo, 17 (October-December 1976), 109-159. Study of the major Italian left women's organization.

Caldwell, Lesley, "Church, State and Family: the women's movement in Italy," in A. Kuhn and A. M. Wolpe, eds., Feminism and Materialism (London, 1978), 68-95. Analyzes how in the 1970s in Italy, mobilization around women's issues such as divorce and abortion led to a fundamental questioning of hegemonic social institutions.

Cammett, John M. "Communist Women and the Prison Experience in Fascist Italy," Unpublished paper, IV Berkshire Conference on Women's History, August 1978. Part of a larger project of study on women in the PCI.

Pieroni Bortolotti, Franca, Feminismo e partiti politici in Italia, 1919-1926 (Rome, 1978). Examines the deep split between bourgeois nationalist feminism and left-oriented mobilization of working-class women during the crisis of the liberal state and the rise to power of fascism.

Ravera, Camilla, Breve storia del movimento femminile in Italia (Rome, 1978). Overview of the progress toward women's emancipation in Italy by one of the PCI's founders.

Spain

Di Febo, Giuliana, Resistencia y Movimiento de Mujeres en Espana, 1936-1976 (Madrid, 1979). Italian scholar using interviews and archival documents, explores the role of communist and non-communist women in the armed and underground resistance to Franco.

Scanlon, Geraldine M., La Polemica feminista en la Espana contemporanea, 1868-1974 (Madrid, 1976). Overview of women's participation in Spanish reformist, revolutionary, and feminist politics since the 19th century with sections on the Com-
munist party in the 1930s.

**United States**

Dennis, Peggy, "A Response to Ellen Kay Trimberger's Essay, 'Women in the Old and New Left,'" *Feminist Studies*, 5 (Fall 1979), 451-462. Raises interesting questions about how feminists today misunderstand the experience of Communist women.


Shaffer, Robert, "Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1940," *Socialist Review*, 45 (May 1975), 73-118. Analysis of its policies on women, taking account of the perceptions of those policies by the women involved in the party.


**IV. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, MEMOIRS, DIARIES, INTERVIEWS**

The words of communist women are indispensable for reconstructing the meaning of a political participation of which so little trace exists in party records. In recent years, many of these women have recounted their experiences in autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to draw conclusions from these works, not only because the motives of their writing were so mixed, but also because they reflect the experiences of three very different generations, active at very different phases in the history of the communist movement. In Italy, to take the clearest example, there is the old guard—the contemporaries of Spain's La Pasionaria—born in the late nineteenth or very early twentieth century, founding members of their party and formed during the "heroic" phase of the movement's history; a middle generation, born under fascism and entering politics during the armed struggle against the fascist regime, which achieved political maturity as activists in the mass party bureaucracy of the 1950s-1960s; finally, there is a post-war generation, whose political and personal experiences as communists and feminists have occurred at a time of stalemate in the communist movement. Each generation has had a particular purpose in writing, ranging from the didactic to the confessional; each a peculiar style of presentation—from the
"Women in need!" Eulenspiegel (1931)
romantic realism of the novel of adventure to the sociological and psychologizing; each its special mode of expression, from the impersonal tale of exemplary sacrifice to the ahistorical and deeply subjective. The reasons for and meaning of this variety of experience must certainly be taken into account when using these texts as a basis for analyzing the meaning of the communist tradition for these women and for exploring their very significant contributions to its development.

France


Chatel, Nicole ed., *Des Femmes dans la Resistance* (Paris, 1972). Accounts of French women of varying backgrounds who were active in the Resistance, including several PCF members.


"Maria Rabate, une femme communiste." Interview by Claude Willard, *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, 29-30 (1939), 171-193. French communist delegate to the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism, resistance leader, married to the communist leader Octave Rabate, and deputy in post-war parliaments. More interesting on internal party struggles than on women's issues.

Great Britain

Haldane, Charlotte, *Truth will Out* (London 1949). Upper class intellectual who while a party member in the mid-1930s was influential in work on 'women's issues.'

McCarty, Margaret, *Generation in Revolt* (London 1953). Although deeply tinged by the cold war atmosphere in which it was written, this autobiography of a Lancashire cotton worker who became involved in the Young Communist League in the 1920s and was very active through the 1930s, gives fine insights into party life.

Utley, Freda, *Lost Illusions* (London 1949). The story of a textile economist, who went to work in the USSR, married a Soviet citizen who was purged, and escaped back to England with her son. Introduced by Bertrand Russell.

Germany


1976). Memoirs of the leftist youth movement in Berlin in the 1920s, with emphasis on the relations between the sexes and sexual reform.

Heymann, Lida Gustava, with Anita Augspurg, Erlebtes-Erschautes, Deutsche Frauen Kaempfen fuer Freiheit, Recht und Frieden 1850-1940 (Messenheim am Glan, 1977). Memoirs of the leaders of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom which worked together with KPD women on many campaigns.

Kienle, Dr. Else, Frauen, Aus dem Tagebuch einer Aerztin (Berlin, 1932) Prison diary of woman doctor arrested for performing illegal abortions and defendant together with Dr. Friedrich Wolf in the abortion trial publicized by the KPD in 1931.


Zetkin, Clara, My Recollections of Lenin (Moscow, 1956) Self-effacing memoirs of the ex-social-democrat, founder of the women's organization within the III International.

Italy

Ascoli, Giulietta, ed., La parola elettorale: viaggio nell'universo politico maschile (Rome, 1976). Interviewees express ambivalence about working within what is perceived as male-dominated party structure and electoral system.

Balabonoff, Angelica, My Life as a Rebel (Bloomington, 1973). A Russian socialist exiled in Italy with enormous influence in the lives of leading Italian socialist, including the ex-socialist Mussolini.

Bruzzone, Anna Maria and Rachele Farina, La Resistenza taciuta: Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi (Milan, 1976). The personal and political experiences of twelve Piedmontese women who took part in the armed war against the Nazi-fascists, reconstructed through interviews.


Ferrero, Felicita, Un nocciolo de verita (Milan, 1978). Member of the PCI old-guard, one of the very few that discusses her experiences as a woman in the party organization.

Gerosa, Guido, Le Compagne (Milan, 1979). Interviews of three generations of Italian women communists, underscoring their very different conceptions of the Communist Party.


Lilli, Laura and Chiara Valentini, Care Compagne: il femminismo nel PCI e nelle organizzazioni di massa (Rome, 1979). Journalistic interviews with communist women, mainly focusing on how they have lived their "double militancy" as feminists and communists.

Mafai, Miriam, L'apprendistato della politica: le donne italiane nel dopoguerra (Rome; 1979). Memoir-history on the difficulties of organizing women in the party by a leading communist of the "middle" generation.

Leonetti, Pia Carena, Una donna del nostro tempo, C. Pillon ed. (Florence, 1969).
“Living together—struggling together!” From a KPD calendar commemorating important events in working-class history, Arbeiter Kalendar (1932).
Political memoir of a founding member of the PCI, sister and wife of prominent party leaders.

Noce, Teresa, _Rivoluzionaria professionale: la storia del PCI nella vita appasionata di di una donna_ (Milan, 1977). The autobiography of the Turinese working class woman, a leading party activist from the founding of the PCI and the former wife of the PCI President Luigi Longo.

Ravera, Camilla, _Diario di trent'anni, 1913-1943_ (Rome, 1973). Political memoirs of a founding member of the PCI and a national director of the Italian Union of Women.

Ravera, Camilla, _Vita in carcere e al confino_ Ada Gobetti ed., (Parma 1968). Letters to friends and comrades, written while Ravera was in prison and exile for her anti-fascist activities.

Rossanda, Rossana, _La altre_ (Milan, 1979). Radio interviews exploring the relationship of women to politics and political institutions.

Sesso amaro: _Trentamila donne rispondono su maternita, sessualita, aborto_ (Rome, 1977). Interviews conducted under PCI auspices with a cross-section of working- and middle-class women, indicating the rapidly changing attitudes of Italian women on motherhood and sexuality.

Scroppo, Erica, _Donna, privato e politico: storie personali di 21 donne del PCI_ (Milan, 1979). More interviews with PCI women, underscoring the love-hate relationship with their party.


Portugal


Soviet Union


Spain

Ibarruri, Dolores, _They Shall Not Pass_ (New York, 1966). La Pasionaria’s life, passionately identified with the history of the Spanish Communists and the struggle against Franco and fascism.

__________, _Speeches and Articles, 1936-1938_ (Moscow, 1938). The inimitable style and rhetorical power of the Comintern’s most brilliant speaker.

__________, _Intimas conversaciones con la Pasionaria,_, Jaime Camino, ed. (Barcelona, 1977). Interviews conducted by a documentary filmmaker, mainly valuable for its eloquent pictures.

Ibarruri, Dolores, A. Arbaiz, T. Medrano, and E. Kahn, _Lina Odena: heroína del pueblo_ (Madrid, 1936). Testimonials in memory of the secretary of the Communist Youth Organization of Catalonia, killed in battle by Franchist forces in 1936.
United States

Bloor, Ella Reeve, *We Are Many* (New York, 1940). The history of the American labor movement as told by "Mother" Bloor, a leader of the Communist Party in America.


The *Autobiography of Mother Jones* (Chicago, 1972). Mary Feld Parton ed. Conveys the zealous and dedicated single-mindedness with which the early labor organizer pursued her fight for workers.


V. DOCUMENT COLLECTIONS, OFFICIAL STATEMENTS, AND STUDIES

France


Tartakowsky, Daniel, "Le PCF et les femmes," *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, 9 (October-December 1975), 194-225. Documents drawn up in 1926 on the
occasion of the party congress at Lille, proposing organizational innovations to boost the number of women members.

Vincent, Madeleine, *Femme, quelle liberation?* (Paris, 1976). Member of the steering committee of the French Communist party who was involved in the Resistance movement and is now the party's expert on defending the interests of women workers.

**Germany**

*Arbeiterbewegung und Frauenemanzipation, 1889 bis 1933* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973). Documents of the KPD women's movement, including party policy, trade union actions, campaign against Paragraph 218, and the anti-fascist resistance.

**Italy**

Archivio storico dell'UDI Torinese. *Inventario* (Turin, 1979). List of holdings of the Turin section of the major left women's organization.

Ravaioli, Carla, *La questione femminile: intervista col PCI* (Milan, 1976). Interviews by a left journalist with leading party men, including Napolitano, Berlinguer, and Chiaromonte.


*Atti delle conferenze delle donne comuniste*, Published proceedings of regular conferences sponsored by the Women's Section of the PCI.

**VI. PERIODICALS**

The periodicals listed below are those mainly directed to women. The many newspapers, journals, and occasional pamphlets of communist parties, nationally and internationally, as well as at the local level, contain much material—under all sorts of categories and title—that is perhaps at least as significant for the study of party policies and practice.

*Third International*

*Die Kommunistische fraueninternazionale*, 1921-1923, monthly.
Great Britain

The Woman Worker, later Working Woman, 1926-1929, monthly.
Woman Today, 1941- Woman’s paper of the CPGB.

France

Femmes dans l’actoin mondiale, 1934-1936. Monthly of the French Section of the Women’s World Committee against War and Fascism.
Cahiers de l’Union des Femmes Francaises, 1945-1952. Monthly review of the leading left French women’s organization, a flanking organization of the PCF and PSF.
Femmes francaises, 1946-1957. Monthly published by the UFF.

Germany

Die Kaempferin, 1919-1921, 1927-1932. KPD bulletin for cadres.
Die Kommunistin, 1919-1926.
Proletarische Sozialpolitik, 1928-1932. KPD journal dealing with social reform issues.
Der Weg der Frau, 1931-1933. KPD journal for women.

Italy

Compagna, 1922-1925. Irregular byweekly.
Donna e politica, 1969- . Monthly published by the Woman’s Section of the PCI.
Noi Donne, 1945- . Weekly of the Unione donne italiane.

Spain


United States


VII. FILMS, FICTION, AND PICTORIAL RESOURCES

France

Germany

Braune, Rudolf, *Das Maedchen an der Orga Privat* (Berlin, 1975). First published by the KPD author during the Weimar Republic, this novel tells the story of a young white-collar girl in Berlin gaining class consciousness through her work experiences as a typist and as a result of the efforts of her worker hero lover.


Italy

Curra, Agata el al., *Canti della protesta femminile* (Rome, 1970?). Anthology of women's protest songs from the turn of the century to the present.


United States

*Union Maids* (1976) by Julia Reichert, James Klein, and Miles Mogulescu. Life stories of three Chicago area women, now in their sixties, who rose from the rank and file to become union organizers in the 1930s. Interspersed with newsreel footage and union songs of the 1930s. The oral history on which the movie was based (*Rank and File* by Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd) makes clear how many of the women were Communist Party members.

*With Babies and Banners* (1978) by Lorraine Grey. Description of the role of women in the General Motors sit-down strike in 1936-37, especially the formation, success, and subsequent disbanding of the Women's Emergency Brigade. Includes interviews and newsreel sequences.

The editors apologize for the fact that diacritical marks have been omitted from this article. This is a technical problem that we hope to correct in future issues.