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Resolutions and Motions *and* Excerpt

First International Conference of Socialist Women and Second International Conference of Socialist Women

Stuttgart, Germany, and Copenhagen, Denmark

August 18–24, 1907, and 1910

This first conference was held in conjunction with the International Socialist Congress. Clara Zetkin (perhaps most famous for proposing March 8 as International Women's Day), a leader of the German women's rights movement, convened the conference in her own home. Fifty-eight delegates from fifteen countries participated, including representatives from Germany, Austria, the United States, and Russia; representatives from each of the Scandinavian countries; female members of Parliament from Finland; British delegates from the Women's Labour League, the Independent Labour Party, and the Social Democratic Party; and a single delegate from the Portuguese Tailoresses Union. Rosa Luxembourg (pictured in figure 25.2) was another attendee, who earlier in 1907 had attended the Congress of the Russian Social Democrats in London, England. International connections were growing in every direction.

The Stuttgart conference is most notable for its position on women's suffrage. Up until this conference, many socialist women suspected that female suffrage would extend the right to vote to women on the same conditions as men, meaning only "bourgeois" or propertied women would be granted the right. This conference was among the first to express a "clear commitment to suffrage for all men and women, as opposed to a strategy of male universal suffrage first."¹ This conference is thus a key moment in the movement towards universal suffrage, which it defines as "open to all adults and bound by no conditions of property, payment of taxes, or degrees of education or any other qualifications." The International Socialist Conference later adopted this demand.

The Resolutions are interesting for other reasons, as well. While supporting universal suffrage, socialist feminists see the legal equality of women in class society as of limited consequence, since those with more property, including women, necessarily have more social power. Where other groups and gatherings largely tried to build bridges among women across race, class, religion, and national boundaries, socialists spoke directly about "class antagonisms between women" that result in the fact that "the bourgeois woman's movement does not march united, with closed ranks and the highest development of force." Their argument was that proletarian women would have to look elsewhere for justice and full political and economic rights.



Clara Zetkin, *left*, and Rosa Luxembourg, 1910.

This document² foreshadows many others in emphasizing antimilitarization. It is the first to advocate for paid maternity leave and for giving “mothers with children dependent upon them ... continued adequate support to enable them to attend to their children without having to work for wages.” At the Second International Conference of Socialist Women, held in 1910 in Copenhagen, these sorts of provisions were greatly expanded upon. Because such detailed attention remains unusual, we include that part of the 1910 Resolutions³ along with the 1907 Resolutions.

Resolutions and Motions from the First International Conference of Socialist Women

I. Resolutions on Woman Suffrage

The demand for Woman Suffrage arises from the economic and social transformation caused by the capitalist system of production, especially, however, from the revolutionising of woman's labour, of her position and her mind. It is by its nature a consequence of the bourgeois democratic principle, which calls for the setting aside of all social distinctions that do not rest on property, and proclaims in the sphere of public as well as of private life the complete legal equality of all adults as a right of personality. For this reason Woman Suffrage has always been demanded by individual thinkers in connection with every struggle which the bourgeoisie ever took up for the democratization of political rights as a necessary condition of their political emancipation and class rule. Efficient force as a demand from the masses has, however, first accrued to it from the increasing number of women who have to earn their living, and especially owing to the numbers of the female proletariat who have been drawn into the modern industry. Woman Suffrage is necessarily bound up with the economic emancipation of woman from the household and her economic independence of the family on the strength of her activity as an earner.

From the standpoint of principle the active and passive suffrage means for the female sex, as a whole, the recognition of their social maturity; from the practical point of view it is the means to obtain political power, so as to remove the legal and social hindrances which stand in the way of the development of woman's life and activity. But owing to the class antagonisms, which are just as influential in the world of women as in that of men, the value and main object of the suffrage is different for women of the different classes. The value of the suffrage as a weapon in the social struggle is in inverse proportion to the size of the property possessed by the individual and the social power conferred by that property. Its principal object differs, according to the class position: it is either the complete legal equality of the female sex, or it is the social emancipation of the proletariat through the conquest of political power for the purpose of abolishing class-rule and bringing about the Socialist society which alone affords a guarantee for the complete emancipation of woman as a human being.

In consequence of the class antagonisms between women, the bourgeois woman's movement does not march united, with closed ranks and the highest development of force, in support of Universal Woman Suffrage. The proletarian women, consequently, must rely on their own strength and on that of their class for the conquest of their full political rights. The practical needs of their struggle for emancipation, together with their historic insight and sense of justice, make the proletariat the most consistent champion of the complete political emancipation of the female sex.... Social-Democracy, as the political fighting organisation of the class-conscious proletariat, supports, therefore, Woman Suffrage both in principle and in practice. The question of Woman Suffrage gains increased importance as the class-war increases in severity. In the ruling reactionary parties the tendency grows to strengthen the political power of property by the introduction of a limited Woman Suffrage. The limited Woman's Suffrage is not so much to be looked on as the first step to political emancipation of the female sex, as far more the last step in the social emancipation of property. It emancipates Woman not as a personality but as the bearer of a certain income and property, and thus becomes in effect a plural suffrage for the propertied classes, leaves large numbers of the proletariat Women without political rights and in consequence does not mean the political equality of the entire female sex. For the proletariat the necessity grows of revolutionising the minds and of placing their adult members, without distinction of sex, well armed in the front of the battle. The fight for Universal Woman Suffrage is the best means of making the situation serve the interest of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation.

In accordance with these considerations the first International Conference of Socialist Women declares:

The Socialist Woman's movement of all countries repudiates the limited Woman's Suffrage as a falsification of and insult to the principle of the political equality of the female sex. It fights for the only living concrete expression of this principle: the universal woman's suffrage which is open to all adults and bound by no conditions of property, payment of taxes, or degrees of education or any other qualifications, which exclude members of the working class from the enjoyment of the right. They carried on their struggle not in alliance with the bourgeois Women's Righters, but in alliance with the Socialist Parties, and these fight for Woman's Suffrage as one of the demands which from the point of view of principle and practice is most important for a complete democratization of the suffrage.

The Socialist Parties in all countries are bound to fight with energy for the introduction of Woman Suffrage. Consequently their fight for the democratization of the Suffrage in the legislative and administrative bodies in the State and Commune must especially be fought also as a struggle in favour of Woman Suffrage and this demand they must raise in their propaganda as well as in Parliament and insist on it with all their power. In countries where manhood Suffrage is already far advanced or completely achieved the Socialist Parties must take up the fight for the universal Woman's Suffrage, and with that naturally put forward all the demands which remain in order to obtain complete citizenship for the male proletariat.

- I. It is the duty of the Socialist Woman's movement in all countries to take part in all struggles which the Socialist Parties fight for the democratization of the Suffrage, and that with all possible energy, but also to see that in this fight the question of the universal Woman Suffrage is insisted on with due regard to its importance of principle and practice.

The Socialist Women of Germany.

- II. That as all Socialists recognise that the freedom of women must include both economic as well as political freedom before it can be complete, every effort should be made by Socialists to assist the Women's Suffrage, the Women's Trade Union, and the Women's Co-operative movements in their respective countries and to arouse the workers in all these movements to the necessity for uniting together for the realisation of Socialism.

Women's Labour League, England.

- III. That the women of the Socialist and Labour movement, standing especially for the protection of home and family and believing that the interests of the different countries are identical, and not antagonistic, urge that strong efforts should be made to spread anti-military feeling and to promote international fraternity.

- IV. That this Conference urges the adoption of a system whereby necessitous [indigent] mothers shall receive monetary assistance at the time of the birth of children, and whereby mothers with children dependent upon them shall receive continued adequate support to enable them to attend to their children without having to work for wages.

The Women's Labour League.

Excerpt, 1910 Second International Conference of Socialist Women

To Point 4 of the Agenda—Social Protection and Provision for Motherhood and Infants.

1. That this Congress, demanding as it does the National and International ownership of the means of production and distribution, affirms, that it is the duty of the community to maintain the child-bearing women, infants, and children attending school.—*British International Socialist Women's Bureau, London.*

2. The Second International Conference of Socialist Women at Copenhagen demands the following measures of social protection for mother and child:

I. Of the Labor Legislation

- a. The legal eight hours' day for all women workers above 18 years of age, the six hours' day for girls above 16 and under 18 years of age; the four hours' day for children above 14 and under 16 years; the prohibition of all wage-earning labor for children under the age of 14.

- b. The prohibition to employ women in such operations which by their whole nature must be particularly injurious for mother and child.
- c. The prohibition of such methods of work which endanger particularly the female organism and thereby injure not only that one, but also the child.
- d. For pregnant women the right to stop work without previous notice eight weeks before the confinement.
- e. For women in childbed the prohibition of working for eight weeks, if the child lives, for six weeks after abortions or if the child dies within this time.
- f. For nursing women the establishment of nursing-rooms in the factories.

II. Of the State, Sickness or Motherhood Insurance.

- a. In case of unemployment caused by pregnancy an obligatory subsidy for eight weeks.
- b. For women in childbed an obligatory subsidy for eight weeks, if the child lives, for thirteen weeks, if the mother is able and willing to nurse the child herself; for six weeks, if the child dies within this time or in case of abortions.
- c. Levelling the subsidies paid to pregnant women, women in childbed and nursing ones with the average daily wages.
- d. Granting of obstetric services, medical treatment of pregnancy and childbed ailments and care for women in childbed at their home by skilled nurses.
- e. Extension of these measures on all laboring women—including agricultural laborers, home workers and maid servants—as well as on all women whose families do not earn more than 250 #.

III. Of the Communality.

Establishment of lying-in hospitals, asylums for pregnant women, women in childbed and infants; organization of attendance to women in childbed at their home by special nurses; granting of benefits for nursing women as long as the mothers do not get subsidies during the nursing period by the state insurance; providing good, sterile babies' milk.

IV. Of the State.

- a. Contributions paid to the Sickness and Motherhood Insurance and communalities in order to enable them to satisfy our demands.
- b. Enlightenment of women how to perform suitably their maternal duties by introducing into the obligatory continuation classes training for girls in the care and management of infants. Distribution of leaflets containing instructions about nursing women in childbed, managing and feeding infants.

The Conference requests the following social provisions for the child, besides granting a uniform, gratuitous and lay instruction based on the integral education in schools whose leading principle is to develop the child's capacities by labor and for labor:

- a. Establishment of lay nursery schools and "kindergarten" (play schools).
- b. Obligatory, gratuitous feeding of all school children, in school times, of unprovided ones even in holidays and vacancies.
- c. Establishment of school homes where unprovided children are looked after in physical and moral respect in leisure times, including holidays.
- d. Establishment of sport, trips and camps for holidays.
- e. Establishment of baths, halls for swimming and gymnastic exercises and school gardens.
- f. Appointment of school physicians and school dentists.
- g. Foundation of sanatoriums and wood schools for sickly and weakly children.—*The Social Democratic Women of Germany*.

3. That the tendency to make use of boy and girl labor in monotonous and uneducational work is destructive in its results upon the health, character and subsequent industrial efficiency of the boys and girls themselves and upon the rates of wages and chance of continued employment of men and women, this conference therefore urges the desirability of so raising the standard of education as to secure to every boy and girl up to the age of 18 efficient physical and technical training, and of making where necessary some provision for their maintenance during that period.—*Women's Labor League, Great Britain*.

4. That in view of the prevalence of preventable diseases and the inability of large masses of the population in every civilized country to pay for skilled attendance and care, this congress demands that national provision should be made for the medical and nursing services, including the setting up of school clinics, hospitals, sanatoria, and convalescent homes, at the public expense.—*Women's Labor League, Great Britain*.

5. That in view of the number of distressing cases where after the death of the father of the family the widow is unable to provide the necessities of life for herself and her children and of the resultant injury to the community, this congress urges the universal establishment of State Insurance for widows in the interests especially of those with young children and those incapacitated by age or illness.—*Women's Labor League, Great Britain*.

6. The conference declares it an absolute duty of the state to protect defenseless and poor citizens. To provide for mother and child, the conference has to recommend in first line such reforms as public obligatory motherhood insurance, viz., the right of unmarried mothers and their children to a real subsidy paid by the father during the pregnancy and for education of the child. The conference urges our comrades in the parliaments to strive for a rational reform according to really modern and just points of view.—*General Women's Club, Stockholm*.

7. Considering the success obtained in Sweden by arranging "lectures of fairy tales and legends" and the importance of a clear understanding of women of the great danger of the English Book Control Movement as being full of clerical and militarist spirit, the conference is earnestly invited to commission the delegation.—*Women's Club, Stockholm-South*.

Notes

- 1 Ruth Rubio-Marin and Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz, *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 14.
- 2 Sources on the Development of the Socialist International (1907–1919), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Library. Accessed September 28, 2017, library.fes.de.
- 3 Second International Conference of Socialist Women. Pamphlet. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Library. Accessed September 28, 2017, library.fes.de.