Paths of Proletarianization: Organization of Production, Sexual Division of Labor, and Women's Collective Action

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On October 25, 1880, the women cigar makers in the government monopoly tobacco factory in Lyon, France, sat down at their work with their arms folded. The factory manager, along with the prefect of the department, met with a delegation of strikers and proposed a compromise. The workers refused and continued their strike. Their agitation increased until, finally, the police forcefully evacuated the courtyard of the factory where the workers had gathered to demonstrate.

The manager and the prefect then requested that the government send an inspector-engineer from Paris with full authorization to bargain, and this was done. In another negotiating session, the Paris delegate agreed that no new measures would be taken that directly or indirectly reduced workers' salaries. Nor would the striking women's delegates be punished for their role. The cigar makers then agreed to return to work.[1]

Charles Mannheim, a French scholar who wrote his 1902 thesis on the condition of workers in the state tobacco factories, remarked further that the Lyon plant was in a state of "incessant agitation" throughout the period from 1880 to 1883.[2] In fact, a large section of his study is devoted to descriptions of strikes in the tobacco industry—twenty-seven of them—between 1870 and 1900. In all of the strikes, women workers played a dominant part. Michelle Perrot notes in her magisterial study of French strikes that "although they accounted for only .5 percent of the female labor force [in the period from 1870 to 1890] they [tobacco workers] supplied 16 percent of the female strikers."[3]

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[1] Charles Mannheim, *De la condition des ouvriers dans les manufactures de l'etat (tabacs-allumettes)* (Paris: Giard & Brière, 1902), pp. 420–22.

[2] Ibid., p. 420.

[3] Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève: France, 1871–1890* (Paris: Mouton, 1974), p. 329.

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What a contrast to the often-assumed passivity of women workers! Although her chief concerns are elsewhere, Perrot is very evenhanded in her evaluation of women as strikers. Nevertheless, she concludes that women were characterized by "timidity and lack of resolution" when it came to striking.[4]

Why were the women tobacco workers such an exception to the common rule that women, relative to men, were unlikely to strike? What does the case of the tobacco workers suggest about the conditions which *promote* female strikes?

This paper focuses on women's collective action in response to the multifaceted process of proletarianization in France and the new organizations of production and household division of labor that accompanied it. It focuses exclusively on urban working-class women and primarily, but not exclusively, on workplace-based collective action. The argument is developed by a systematic comparison of contrasting situations, in which variations in the organization of production and in the household division of labor provide part of the answer to the central question, Under what conditions will women's participation in collective action be more or less likely? The paper begins with a brief discussion of the concept of "collective action" and its usefulness for understanding women's class-based action. The French economic-historical context for proletarianization and women's economic activity is the topic of the next section. Brief case studies of typical proletarian situations follow, each involving a different "mix" of organization of production and household division of labor. The cases proceed along a continuum from household organization of production, that setting least likely to promote women's collective action, to individual wage earning in industrial production, in which certain circumstances facilitated it. Typical forms of female collective action and different participation patterns are identified in each setting. The conclusion lays out some generalizations about the connections among organization of production, the household division of labor, women's propensity to act, and the form of that action.

Collective Action

Many political historians ignore women—and men—who had no formal role in political structures. They focus on the power center of a polity, the capital, and confine their analyses to formal politics: legislation, day-to-day administration of government activity, officials, and policy and its enforcement. Those without a role are marginal from this perspective; if they appear at all, it is only incidentally, when they come into intermittent contact with formal politics. Historically, the political activity of women has been most often outside this central arena, for they have had no formal rights or duties as citizens. To observe women's politics, then, it is necessary to look beyond the formal arena and seek out a more comprehensive method of analysis. The concept of "collective action" as a struggle over control of resources among groups is the theoretical framework used here. (One of these groups may be government and members of the polity; others may be classes; still others part of a class, an interest group, a community, a region, or a religious sect.)

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[4] Ibid., p. 322. See Kate Purcell, "Militancy and Acquiescence among Women Workers," in *Fit Work for Women,* ed. Sandra Burman (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 112–33, for comparable conclusions in present-day England but a model that explains low female strike participation rates in terms of situational factors rather than personal characteristics.

Collective action is defined as a group's application of pooled resources to common ends. Acting in their own interests, groups apply their resources to other groups or to authorities at any level of government. Political power, then, is the return from the application of resources to governments. Violence occurs when governments or other groups resist the collective action of a mobilizing group, or when a mobilizing group deliberately chooses violent means.[5]

Economic Change, Proletarianization, and Women's Productive Role in France

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution initiated an enormous shift of labor and resources away from primary production—agriculture, fishing, forestry—toward manufacturing and commercial and service activities. The scale of production increased, and the factory eventually replaced the household as the most common unit of productive activity. In France, the pace of industrialization was very gradual; it affected groups and geographic areas at different rates and times. The decline of small units of production was generally accompanied by a declining number of propertied peasants and artisans. The growth of industrial capitalism meant an increase of propertyless proletarians working for wages in city or country. Dependence on a labor market and on markets for subsistence needs—markets managed by others—increased the proletarians' lack of control over their own work.

For ordinary people witnessing the growth of industrial capitalism, proletarianization was the central social experience. *Proletarianization* is defined here as the process of increase in the number of "people whose survival depended on the sale of labor power."[6] Although proletarianization was a common experience, how it occurred in given populations varied markedly, as did the timing of the process. The paths or patterns of proletarianization were linked systematically to patterns of collective action.

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[5] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 52–59.

[6] Charles Tilly, "Did the Cake of Custom Break?" in *Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. John M. Merriman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), p. 29.

The entire nineteenth century saw French agriculture, in sharp contrast to that of Britain, dominated by the small, family-run peasant farm. There were regional variations, to be sure. The tendency toward "an increase in the number of small owners whose assets consisted of no more than a house, a garden and one or two fields" continued throughout the period.[7] The peasantry was an important section of the French population that escaped proletarianization. Unlike the British farmer, the French peasant continued to depend on the labor of his family; thus wives and daughters living on small peasant holdings were an important part of France's agricultural work force. Individually, however, members of peasant households became proletarians if they left holdings to seek work or if the holdings were inadequate and wage labor had to be sought to supplement income.

This is not to suggest that rural proletarianization, which preceded urban industrial proletarianization in almost all European nation-states, did not occur in France. Absolutely and proportionately, the French agricultural proletariat was less important than that of Britain. But part of the agricultural work force in France consisted of day laborers and of live-in servants and hands. Sometimes these workers were the sons and daughters of propertied peasant families who had no chance to inherit land; sometimes they were offspring of landless workers. Both were, in a classic Marxian sense, proletarians. Although rural, agricultural proletarianization was an integral part of the process, it is not discussed in the primarily urban case studies that follow.

Urbanization occurred in nineteenth-century France as the proportion of population in cities increased, but even at the end of the century, much manufacturing took place in the households of part-time peasants, craftsmen, and rural workers in domestic industry or in small-scale workshops. Because of the particular character of French industrialization, operating alongside continuing peasant agriculture, France's manufacturing population was scattered throughout the country in rural as well as urban areas; thus "the distinction between industrial and agricultural work is often artificial."[8] Protoindustrialization—cottage industry, or the putting-out system, as it was called by the classic economic historians—had begun as a stratagem of merchant capitalists to tap underemployed labor power in needy rural households to produce cheap goods for distant markets. It lingered in France, in small towns and villages, even in the late nineteenth century, because it allowed high-quality craftsmanship and quick changeover of styles to match fashions, not to mention low wages. By the late nineteenth century, families working as cottage production units owned their tools, usually looms, and sometimes they hired an assistant or two. Despite these anomalies they were all proletarians, parents and children alike, selling their labor power with little control over their joint wage except putting additional family members to work or laboring longer hours.

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[7] Roger Thabault, *Education and Change in a Village Community: Mazières-en-Gâtine, 1848–1914* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 21.

[8] Claude Fohlen, "The Industrial Revolution in France, 1700–1914," in *The Emergence of Industrial Societies*, ed. Carlo Cippola (London: Fontana Books, 1973), p. 26.

Urban industrial growth had created new kinds of cities in France by the 1870s. The textile cities of the Nord, and mining and metalworking cities of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais (or of the Stephannois region of the Center-South), are examples. These cities, all products of industrial capitalist concentration, had very different labor force characteristics. In the textile city, there was heavy labor force participation by girls and women, including some married women. In the mining town, most jobs were men's jobs. Girls did some auxiliary work around the mines and shops or were servants; married women were seamstresses or store or cafe keepers, if they were wage earners. The division of labor by sex in the coal miners' or metalworkers' families was especially sharp. Men and boys worked in heavy labor removed from the household. Married women generally stayed in the home and were responsible for housework, childbearing, and child care.

Most French cities did not have the peculiar labor force characteristics of the textile city or the mining town. In other towns and cities, public administration, commerce, and small businesses that produced directly for consumers were common. In these cities women worked primarily in domestic service, the garment industry (young women in shops, married women in their homes), food processing, and paper and tobacco plants. Throughout the century there were also many urban women in informal, casual labor as carters, petty traders, street hawkers, and laundresses. Although consumer production and merchandising became large scale in the nineteenth century, the specialization of sectors of these urban economies changed little. Unmarried women in cities usually earned wages for their work. The decline of the household organization of production in the urban sector meant that even if they worked at home—and the late nineteenth century was a heyday of sweated home industry—women were unlikely to be part of a family productive unit. Instead they labored as isolated individuals for employers who paid them a wage. Married women in the working class often worked intermittently doing laundry, cleaning, and the like, for they had heavy home responsibilities too. Women's work, then, had changed rather little: The majority of working women had low-skilled jobs in areas considered women's work for centuries.

The economic life of the manufacturing classes can be characterized by organization of production. First, household organization did not disappear in nineteenth-century France; craftshops continued household-organized production. Second, other household production units, particularly in handloom weaving and small metal production, were composed of proletarian wage earners. Third, individual wage earning was the predominant mode in urban industry. Hence, a distinctive characteristic of French economic production in the second half of the nineteenth century was that the household organization of production was preserved in some proletarianized production. That is the economic context for the first case in the typology of organization of production and women's class-based collective action.[9]

The cases to be examined next are those of household manufacture in the Cambrésis, the silk industry of Lyon and the Lyonnais, the large-scale textile industry of the Nord, the mining and metalworking industry, and the tobacco industry.

Household Manufacture in the Cambrésis

The linen handloom weavers of the Cambrésis in northern France seemed an anachronism even to their contemporaries. Here is an ethnographic account of these weavers' work and family life written at the turn of the century:

> The father of the family groups the community of workers, of whom he is the natural head, in the workshop, at the looms. He himself works too, giving each of his family the joint responsibility of working in the enterprise. All the family members collaborate to varying degrees, without exception, in the production of cloth.
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> From an early age, the children of both sexes help their father do his job by producing the *trames.* This task consists of winding the linen thread on a bobbin, which is then placed in the hollow of the weaver's shuttle. Once they are thirteen, the children are rapidly taught how to weave by their own family and assigned to their own loom. . . .
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> The mother is concerned above all with house work, aided in her many tasks by her daughters. The rest of the time, often rising before dawn, she also prepares the bobbins for the weavers' shuttles; if there is an idle loom, she hurries to replace a sick or absent worker.
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> [In the family workshop] each person finds the task appropriate for his or her strength and intelligence. The children, far from being a burden for their parents, become very real resources for the family. Raised to be weavers, they become weavers.[10]

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[9] The economic change described above is more fully discussed in Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978).

[10] Charles Blaise, *Le Tissage à la main du Cambrésis: Etude d'industrie à domicile* (Lille: Bigot, 1899), pp. 36–37.

Without the unpaid labor of his wife and the wages of his children, it would have been impossible for the male weaver to support a family. Wages were very low in the industry, reflecting its marginal relationship to the industrialized textile industry, located in the same area of France. Furthermore, there were sharp cycles in the trade, and in any ordinary year there were likely to be several periods of unemployment.[11] In response, all family members were pressed to accept familial goals, even if this meant sacrifice of individual hopes. Children were not schooled; they went to work very young. Their marriages could be delayed, or they could be sent out to find work elsewhere as their younger siblings took their places at the looms.[12] The weavers' chief solutions to poverty, short of migration, were working longer hours and having children who could work, too.

As their conditions degenerated, the weavers did act collectively in large strikes in 1889, 1895, and 1906. The strikes of the handloom weavers were largely male events; those who dealt with the bosses and paraded their demands through the small towns of the Cambrésis were the male heads of weaving households. They were accompanied by their sons but not by their wives and daughters. There was a strict division of labor in these households; the shop, even though located in the weaver's cottage cellar, was the male weaver's preserve. He was the boss, the person who carried on family contacts with the public world of the labor market. Although the children of these families earned individual wages, the wives did not. Children's wages were given to the mother to spend on household needs, as were the father's wages. The organization of production promoted familial orientations among the handloom weavers. Workers in the small, separate, household production units were slow to mobilize and strike. When they did, the women's role was minimal.[13]

The Silk Industry of Lyon and the Lyonnais

There were some similar characteristics in the organization of production in the silk industry of Lyon. There the once proud and independent artisan silk handweavers were undergoing slow, painful proletarianization. For a time, the defense of their jobs met with some success, for the merchant capitalists benefited from the concentration of weavers in the city. Just as the linen entrepreneurs of the Cambrésis, these merchants were hampered by the cyclical demand for their products, based on trends in fashion, which made them hesitate to invest in factories or big inventories.[14]

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[11] Ibid., pp. 53–55.

[12] Serge Grafteaux, *Mémé Santerre: Une vie* (Verviers: Marabout, 1975), passim.

[13] See Louise A. Tilly, "Linen Was Their Life: Family Survival Strategies and Parent-Child Relations in a French Handloom Weaving Village" (paper prepared for Round Table II: History and Anthropology, sponsored by the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte, Göttingen, and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 1980).

An economic journalist, writing in 1860, noted the continuing importance of the household as productive unit: "One fact is striking, right off; that is family life. The stable workers, owners of one or more looms, are almost all married. Since the assistance of a wife is indispensable for the multitude of tasks auxiliary to weaving, they marry young. By the nature of his work, the weaver stays in his home."[15] Recent research shows that by this period, however, the household economy had been considerably modified. Between 1847 and 1866, there had been "a reduction in the proportion of residents in the household not related to the head of the household or to his spouse, and in the proportion of nonresident workers needed to weave the active looms ('familialization'), and a reduction in the proportion of males, both kinfolk of the head or spouse and nonkin, residing in the same household ('feminization')."[16] Women workers—kin of the master weavers or live-in wage earners who were part textile workers and part servants—performed the various tasks of preparing and winding the warp, and they did the weaving. George Sheridan concludes "that women played an especially important role in preserving the traditional household economy."[17]

A second kind of productive unit, in addition to the household-organized silk workshop, was the convent weaving shop, located in the suburbs of Lyon. There nuns supervised women weavers and managed the business, which was financed by Lyon entrepreneurs.[18] A third productive unit was the silk *internat,* sometimes metaphorically called a convent factory. At these institutions, girls and young women boarded in dormitories attached to silk spinning and reeling mills, their work and personal lives strictly supervised, often by nuns.[19] In both cases, women were greatly limited in their freedom of action because of supervision and threats of dismissal on the job and of lost wages and fines if they quit. At the same time, there were a growing number of large-scale mills, mostly in small towns but also in Lyon, where silk reeling, throwing, and the various spinning and twisting operations were done by local women and girls hired on a daily basis.

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[14] George J. Sheridan, Jr., "Household and Craft in an Industrializing Economy: The Case of the Silk Weavers of Lyon," in Merriam, ed., pp. 120–23.

[15] Armand Audiganne, *Les Populations ouvrières et les industries de la France: Etudes comparatives* (Paris: Capelle, 1860), p. 44.

[16] Sheridan, p. 111; see also Laura S. Strumingher, *Women and the Making of the Working Class: Lyon, 1830–1870* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1979), pp. 1–16.

[17] Sheridan, p. 113.

[18] Strumingher, pp. 8–9.

[19] See Dominique Vanoli, "Les Ouvrières enfermées: Les couvents soyeux," *Les Révoltes logiques* 2 (1976): 19–39; Paul LeRoy-Beaulieu, *Le Travail des femmes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1873), pp. 410–25; Perrot, p. 328.

By the 1860s the repressive regime of the Second Empire and hard times in the silk industry had greatly reduced the level of Lyonnais *canut* ("silk weaver") mobilization and action. It was only when new labor laws, which relaxed prohibitions on association, were passed in the last years of the Second Empire that a large strike of the *Fabrique* (the Lyonnais handweaving system) brought out urban *canuts,* rural domestic weavers, *and* women factory workers. The largest group of women who struck in the city were some 600 *ovalistes,* who performed a special twisting operation on the silk thread, usually in medium-sized shops. It was in the "revolutionary fervor" of 1869, in response to an organizing effort by the Lyonnais affiliates of the First International, that "for the first time, we witness large strikes of women workers, who held meetings, discussed issues, set up committees and organized unions."[20] The petition of the *ovalistes,* which one historian calls an illustration of their "naiveté and inexperience," asked the prefect to arbitrate between them and their employers. The bosses pointed out that they were competing with lower-paid Italian workers and refused any concession. Some *ovalistes* who received room and board from their employer were evicted. The women gathered in menacing groups around his house, breaking windows and threatening to burn the building down. Several of the women were arrested, and the strike was broken by police action.[21] Given their circumscribed lives, such women ordinarily would not be expected to strike. The contemporaneous large waves of strikes made theirs more thinkable and offered them models of collective action.

Generally, neither the girls and women working in the proletarianized household production of silk nor those in the *internats* were often involved in collective action, even when male weavers were. The *internats* were set up such that they preserved women's social ties—frequent home visits were allowed—while isolating them from other workers.[22] Parents could be fined if their daughters left their jobs. The women were so closely supervised and overworked that it was hard for them to develop any solidarity. Lucie Baud, a silk union activist around 1900, was one who decried the effects of the *internats* on women workers' solidarity.[23]

Later, in the 1870s and 1880s, however, there were women's committees among factory silk workers in Lyon and the surrounding region that affiliated with local union confederations *(chambres syndicales).* Most of the southeastern strikes in that period were led by such groups. In the period from 1871 to 1890, one-third of the all-female strikes in France were in the textile and garment sector, and one-third were in the silk industry.[24] When women workers organized with men, they struck with them as well. By the end of the nineteenth century, then, women engaged in industrial production. They earned independent wages, and though both their husbands and their parents often had a claim on these wages, the women mobilized and acted collectively in strikes.

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[20] Sreten Maritch, *Histoire du mouvement social sous le Second Empire à Lyon* (Paris: Rousseau, 1930), p. 253; see also Maurice Moissonier, *La Première Internationale et la commune à Lyon (1865–1871)* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1972).

[21] Maritch, pp. 221–22; Moissonier, pp. 81–83.

[22] Michael Hanagan, "Artisans and Industrial Workers: Work Structure, Technological Change and Worker Militancy in Three French Towns: 1870–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976), p. 276.

[23] Michelle Perrot, ed., "Document: Le témoinage de Lucie Baud, ouvrière en soie," *Le Mouvement social* 105 (1978): 139–46.

The Textile Industry of the Nord

Women constituted a large minority, sometimes even a majority, of millworkers in the classic cotton and wool textile cities of the Nord. By the 1870s the industry was mechanized and located in large-scale shops. Michelle Perrot describes a favorite photographic study at the turn of the century—men and women flooding through the textile factory gates together at the end of the day *(sortée d'usine)*: "[There were] crowds of workers of both sexes, young, gaunt, wrung out, underfed, but clowning crudely nevertheless, as if emboldened by their number, by the 'collective being' of which they were a part. . . ."[25] Although men and women were both employed in these mills, the type of work done by each sex was usually quite different. Women and children did preparatory work; they were piecers and helpers. Proportionately fewer women did the central tasks of textile production—spinning and weaving. Those who did weave were more likely to work in a mixed setting. Women who worked in the mills were primarily young and unmarried, though toward the end of the period there was a clear tendency for more married women to work.[26]

Women in the northern textile mills did strike with other workers. The published statistics did not always report numbers of women in strikes that involved both women and men prior to 1890; nevertheless, newspaper and police accounts placed women in demonstrations and processions on the occasion of strikes. In the weavers' strike of 1867 in Roubaix, a strike directed against an employer speedup that required each worker to watch two looms instead of one, two of the ninety-eight persons arrested were women.[27] Later the same year a woman, along with two men, was arrested for beating up a male weaver who had accepted the two-loom regime.[28] In an 1880 city-wide strike in Roubaix, the commanding officer of the gendarmerie reported to Paris that all of the male and female workers, some 12,000–15,000 strong, were on strike in the spinning and weaving mills. He noted large groups of strikers clustering in the streets and parading about.[29] Nevertheless, women did not strike in proportion to their numbers in the industry.[30]

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[24] Perrot, pp. 326–27.

[25] Ibid., p. 352.

[26] Louise A. Tilly, "The Family Wage Economy of a French Textile City, Roubaix, 1872–1906," *Journal of Family History* 4 (1979): 381–94.

[27] Prefect of the Nord to Paris, March 30, 1867, F^{12} 4562, Archives nationales de France, Paris (hereafter cited as AN).

[28] Prefect of the Nord to Paris, July 10, 1867, F^{12} 4652, AN.

Women workers were in a difficult position in the northern mills. Male workers accused women of competing, at low wages, for men's jobs. Contemporaries, both workers and authorities, believed women were less likely to strike. In 1886, for example, striking Roubaix weavers demanded that their employer fire one of the women workers who would not strike with them over a wage issue.[31] The boss refused to fire the woman. The police reports for a series of textile strikes during the fall and winter of 1899 in Roubaix and Tourcoing further illustrate male/female discord. The women did not strike often, but they were put out of work by the strikes. In only one of the strikes reported did women weavers join male workers—thirty-five women accompanied seventy men in the initial walkout on November 20, 1899. In Wattrelos on December 4, 1899, there were taunting serenades outside the homes of families whose daughters did not join the strike at the Motte woolcombing establishment in Roubaix. The parents were blamed for their daughters' lack of solidarity, an accusation that may have been justified in some cases; one of the fathers involved was himself a dissident from the strike.[32]

Male workers were ambivalent about women workers. A song written by a militant socialist accused the bosses of hiring women to undercut male wages and the women of collaborating with this policy.[33] Women generally were not welcomed in the northern textile unions. They were seldom chosen to be leaders. Of the ten national congresses of the textile unions whose proceedings Madeleine Guilbert was able to locate, only three had a single female delegate. At eight of the ten congresses, the question of women workers was not discussed.[34]

Women textile workers were also especially vulnerable because there were many young women seeking work. In a strike of women bobbin winders in December 1880, fourteen women protested the dismissal of one of their co-workers. Their employer promptly gave them their papers and replaced them with no difficulty.[35] Moreover, most women workers, single or married, lived with families. Their families claimed their wages and loyalty and could influence, particularly among young women, their decisions about striking. That women were proletarian wage earners was not sufficient to promote their participation in collective action parallel to that of men. This was due less to personal characteristics, such as the female passivity so often invoked by contemporaries, than to situational factors. Young single women, in particular, were less likely to strike because of their economically vulnerable position, their relatively brief commitment to industrial employment, their lack of opportunity to develop solidarity on or off the job, and, finally, their reliance on the family for personal well-being. The situation was different for married women. Although relatively few of them worked at any time, even in the textile industry, it is likely that over the years an individual woman worked often enough to develop connections and a kind of solidarity with other workers, as well as lore about strikes, which could serve her when the occasion to strike arose. At this time, I have no evidence of differential participation rates in strikes by married women, but statistics indicate that there were more women strikers, proportionately, as the female textile work force came to include proportionately more married women after 1900.

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[29] Report, May 5, 1880, F^{12} 4660, piece 711, AN.

[30] Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève,* pp. 318–19.

[31] Report of the Conseiller de Préfecture délégué to Paris, January 28, 1886, F^{12} 4661, AN.

[32] Police report to Prefect, Roubaix, November 23, 1899; police report, Wattrelos, December 4, 1899, M 625/106, Archives départementales du Nord (hereafter cited as ADN).

[33] Song, M 625/106, ADN.

[34] Madeleine Guilbert, *Les Femmes et l'Organisation syndicale avant 1914* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1966), pp. 117–23.

[35] December 22, 1880, F^{12} 4660, piece 719, AN.

The Mining and Metalworking Industry

The metalworking and mining town, another prototypical industrial city, was characterized by quite a different industrial organization and household division of labor. Men and boys were the primary wage earners, and wives were concerned with the home, children, and food purchase and preparation. Young women could be coal sorters at the mine, or perhaps servants, but few other jobs existed for women.

The coal miner's wife was noted among workers' wives in her active role in work-related struggles. She had often been employed at the mine as a girl; she knew the work of the mine. As a married woman, she had to deal with the company as landlord, as owner of the store, as distributor of health services, and sometimes, even, as school board. Michelle Perrot writes that the mine strike was an "affair of the tribe: committed, the women demonstrated unequaled tenacity, seeking contributions for aid to strikers, organizing their slim resources, boosting the flagging morale of the men, involving themselves with the policing of the strike. At the time the workers' shifts changed, they stood across the roads, [and] blocked access of scabs to the pits. . . ."[36]

An incident illustrative of women's collective action occurred in April 1906, in Billy-Montigny, a mining town in the Pas-de-Calais. A month earlier, a disaster had shaken the pits of nearby Courrières. More than 1,000 miners were trapped and died. A strike followed; the miners demanded that the companies attend to their workers' safety. The action was bitter and violent and included a dynamite attack on an employer's home.

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36. Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève,* p. 405.

On April 10, a group of 500 women carrying red and tricolored flags trimmed with black crepe went to the train station in Billy-Montigny to meet a woman believed to be on the train from Bethune. Madame Ringard was returning from the *chef-lieu* ("county seat"), where she had given testimony to a judge against three accused bombers. She was not on the train, but the crowd searched the platforms, assembled to sing the "Internationale," and marched off down the street. The same day another group of women carrying black flags marched to petition the mine administration to hasten rescue efforts in the flooded pits, as some survivors had been found. The two groups joined. When police and soldiers tried to hasten the procession, "a great number of rocks were thrown at the soldiers."[37]

The women who met the train at Billy-Montigny were seeking to discipline the woman who, they believed, had betrayed the striking workers. The second women's demonstration indicates the utter dependence of the wife on her husband's wages. The death of a husband was devastating to the miner's wife, who lived in a community where it was very difficult for a woman to support herself. The women were not wage earners; they could not strike, but they expressed their solidarity with striking workers through a demonstration.

Another homemakers' protest, a version of the food riot, was launched in 1911 in Ferrière-la-Grande, a metalworking city in the northern industrial belt near Maubeuge. Women from a nearby town dumped a merchant's goods when he refused to lower his prices. In Maubeuge itself, on August 25, a crowd broke the windows of a butter merchant. On Saturday, August 26, no butter or eggs were available in the market. A small group of women wearing red insignia marched into the marketplace. As they marched, they sang, to the tune of the "Internationale,"

> Rise, each mother of a family
> Arise and let us unite
> Let's march to fight the misery
> That the farmers have brought down on the country.
> And if one day we are victorious
> We'll show our dear husbands
> That all women have fought
> For the lives of their poor little ones.
>
> Forward comrades,
> Friends, rise with us,
> No fear, no riot
> We want butter at fifteen sous![38]

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[37] *Le Temps* (Paris) (April 11, 1906).

[38] *Le Figaro* (Paris) (August 27, 1911), quoted in Paul R. Hanson, "The 'Vie chère' Protests in France, 1911," photocopy (Berkeley: University of California, 1976); and in Jean-Marie Flonneau, "Crise de vie chère et mouvement syndical, 1910–1914," *Le Mouvement social* 72 (1970): 49–81.

A wave of protest about food prices swept over the industrial departments, including a violent incident at Billy-Montigny on August 30. There a crowd of women and men attacked a baker's wagon. The baker shot one of the demonstrators, and the crowd turned on him in fury. When he hid in a house, the crowd smashed the windows, looted the chicken coop, and set a wagon on fire before they were dispersed by gendarmes.[39]

Both the protest over food prices and the strike-related collective action originated among women in households with a strict division of labor. The miners and metallurgists left housework and child rearing to their wives. The women, in turn, were expected to use male wages to purchase a comfortable living. The worker's home, like the bourgeois home, was a haven from work—a haven for which the wife was primarily responsible. With this household division of labor, the wife's role as wise consumer was salient.

This consumer interest recalls the role of women in the eighteenth-century grain and bread riot. Yet there are differences. The 1911 food protest began in industrial areas, not in agricultural marketing or administrative cities.[40] The object was less often the basic diet items of bread and grain and more often butter, milk, and eggs. The protesters were often connected with unions or parties—witness the red insignia and the "Internationale of Butter." Indeed, the unions soon took over the movement and began formal, nationwide demonstrations. The early demonstrators tried to police prices, just as coal miners' wives policed the strike. Those who resisted their demands, who tried to elude the set price, were attacked. The reporter for *Le Figaro* who filed the report from Maubeuge on August 27, 1911, employed the strike metaphor when he wrote that the protest was "more than a strike but not quite a crusade."[41]

Still other aspects of the 1911 collective action clearly distinguished it from the earlier grain and bread riot. The women's food demonstration, which had an elected committee and a designated chair, was organized in a more formal and almost bureaucratic fashion than was the food riot, a protest held together by the rioters' shared sense of justice and communal rights. It was the consumer interest of working-class wives which led them to protest in 1911, but the form of their action had more in common with other collective actions of the period than with the food riot of the Old Regime.

The Tobacco Industry

We have seen women as purposeful actors in strikes and demonstrations in late nineteenth-century France. Whether, when, and how they acted was determined by their familial position as well as by the organization of production. Their interests were often familial, whether they were supporting striking husbands, protesting high consumer prices, or striking (or choosing not to strike) on their own behalf. We return now to the tobacco workers, whose work situation pulled them away from family interest and placed them in a different relationship to their work.

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[39] *Le Temps* (August 31, 1911), quoted in Hanson.

[40] Hanson; Flonneau, pp. 60–62; Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève,* pp. 130–34.

[41] *Le Figaro* (August 27, 1911), quoted in Hanson.

The factories of the tobacco monopoly—which produced cigarettes, cigars, loose tobacco, and matches—employed thousands of people in one institution, the majority of them women. Women in the tobacco industry worked in shops far removed from their households each day. Although they were generally unmarried, as were most women workers, a disproportionate number were married women, as the jobs in the tobacco industry were relatively secure and skilled. Cigar makers in France apprenticed and trained for several years, and, unlike the comparable labor force in the United States, the majority of French cigar makers were women.[42] The privileges these skilled workers won were often passed on to their co-workers. A tobacco worker's daughter often sought a position in the same shop as her mother; working conditions and wages were superior to those of most female jobs.[43] Apprenticeship, parent-to-child continuity in the same occupation, and lifetime commitment to one job provided opportunities for the development of solidarity and association among women tobacco workers not unlike the opportunities of male craftsmen and skilled workers.

In fact, the tobacco workers founded mutual aid or friendly societies and then formed unions, just as did male skilled workers and artisans. In the Lyon strike described in the introduction of this paper, a mutual club preceded the strike, and its leaders represented the women.[44] The first union was set up two days after a successful strike in January 1887, in Marseille. The tobacco workers organized in their interests as workers, to improve conditions of work and to claim benefits such as paid maternity leave. The particularities of their work situation accounted for the assertiveness of these women in defining and acting in their interests. In addition, their average pay was closer to men's salaries than was the pay of other women workers. The tobacco workers' earning power continued to increase over most of their working lives because of their long-term work commitment. (To be sure, these factors could have been a result as well as a cause of their activism.)

The organization and scale of the tobacco industry also promoted association by grouping many women together and possibly even by segregating women in certain positions; teams of workers were paid as teams. It is not surprising, then, that tobacco workers organized in female or predominantly female groups. Theirs was one of the few unions in which women played a significant leadership role. Their activism was an ongoing affair, not tied to temporary mobilization and strikes. It led a male supervisor to complain, "Neither the privileges which the state worker enjoys nor the generosity and concessions which they have received have led them to moderate their demands."[45] These women knew what they wanted and were ready to fight for it.

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[42] Mannheim (n. 1 above), p. 22.

[43] Ibid., p. 63; see also Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève,* pp. 329–30; and Guilbert, pp. 93–99.

[44] Mannheim, p. 421.

Conclusion

The cases examined here, focusing on working-class women's collective action in different proletarianized situations—household manufacture in the Cambrésis, the silk industry of Lyon and the Lyonnais, the large-scale textile industry of the Nord, the mining and metalworking industry, and the tobacco industry—illustrate the conditions under which such collective action was more or less common. They do not address the questions of women organizing and acting on women's issues but, rather, the ways in which industrial capitalism changed and shaped wage labor and households, men's and women's relations to each, and patterns of collective action.

Characteristics of the organization of production and the household division of labor were critical variables in women's participation in collective action. Women working in household production were isolated from other workers except family members. The chief of the household productive organization was also head of the family. Hence, in the strikes in domestic industry, the heads of household acted for the family as they did in other relationships with the state or with employers.

Some women in the large-scale silk industry of Lyon were isolated from their families when they were at work because they lived in dormitories at their place of employment. But these women were frequently working for their families or to save for marriage, which made them extremely vulnerable to possible employer retaliation if they complained or acted collectively. In the face of a massive class mobilization, however, such women did join a strike movement. As time went on, more women who worked in silk factories were older, "permanent" workers; that is, they worked for more of their lives, though not necessarily continuously. This gave them the opportunity to build networks of solidarity and association and, I speculate, a higher propensity to class-based workplace actions. Furthermore, the silk industry unions facilitated women's organization through women's committees.

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[45] Quoted in Marie-Hélène Zylberberg-Hocquard, "Les Ouvrières d'etat (tabacs-allumettes) dans les dernières années du XIXe siècle," *Le Mouvement social* 105 (1978): 87–107.

In the Nord, women workers in the early years of the cotton and wool textile industry were more likely to be young and single. In the workplace their work differed from that of men, and they were less skilled. If employers tried to substitute women for male workers, the men blamed the women and perceived the only way out of the problem as eliminating or limiting women's work. Compared with men, women were shut out of workers' organizations, Their family connections also tended to isolate single women from other workers with similar class interests. Sometimes they were pressed to strike (or pressed not to strike) by family as well as class interest, or by personal inclination, but they lacked independent associations or opportunity to build solidarity. Thus it is no surprise to find uncertainty and lower levels of strike participation among young women. The sexual division of labor in the household could act as a deterrent for married women workers, for they were obliged to do housework as well as wage work. There were also cases of husbands who intervened to prevent their wives' striking. Nevertheless, as the cotton and wool industry, like the silk industry, hired more married women, their lifetime commitment to wage work and the opportunity to build association gave women more chances to participate in collective action.

Paradoxically, perhaps, a very strict division of labor in the household, such as that in the homes of metal and mining workers, seems to have encouraged wives to participate actively in workplace struggles because of their dependence on the wages of the male head of the household. The community of work in these industries included women, even if women were not themselves wage laborers. Women in this setting, and other wives whose major concern was managing household consumption, also acted out of consumer interests.

Only in the case of the tobacco industry was there strong participation of women in class-based workplace collective action, which grew out of the special characteristics of their work, the organization of production, and their lifetime commitments.

This historical evidence, then, suggests that proletarian women will tend to act collectively more often when *as workers*

(1) they associate with others with similar interests;
(2) they can translate these interests into structured association;
(3) they have resources they can mobilize and deploy;
(4) their employers are dependent on their regular supply of labor;
(5) there is a favorable economic climate, which means that withdrawal of labor represents a real burden for the employer and, potentially, a real gain for the workers;
(6) their position is not extremely vulnerable;
(7) there is a general climate of economic claims; and

(8) their position in the household division of labor gives them the opportunity to act autonomously.

Furthermore, women will tend to act collectively more often *as members of households* when

(9) the household itself is mobilized in defense of interests that can be generalized as those of the household as well as of individual members.

These conclusions do not differ very markedly from those that predict higher participation rates by men. The chief difference is in the case of defense of household consumer interest. Women were much more likely than men to participate in such collective action. Responsibility for household consumption was rarely a primary concern of men in an industrial economy. A general theory about comparative propensity to participate in working-class collective action, whether strikes or food protest, informs about women, too. No special psychological or gender-attribute explanation is needed to understand women's proportionately lower participation rates. Certain women, in positions and situations that promoted their readiness to act, did act. The paths of proletarianization shaped women's wage labor and their family responsibility and, consequently, determined both their propensity to act collectively and the form of action they chose.

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