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**'Make yourself free
from the enslavement of man'**

Alexandra Kollontai

see Revolutionary Women, page 32

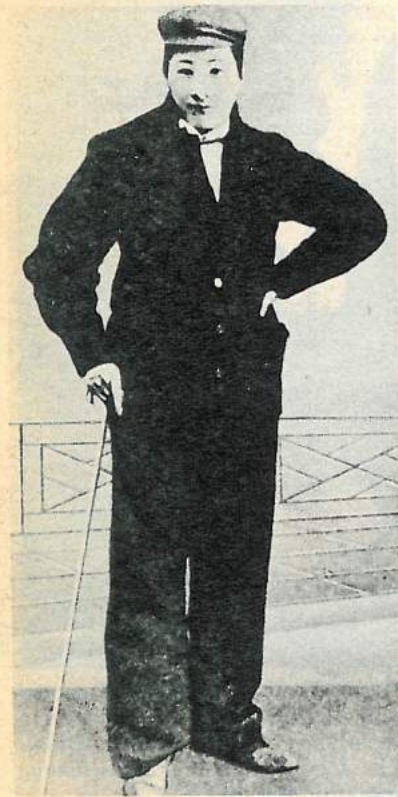


**'Concubinage is truly
a hell on earth
which competes with
the hell of the dead'**

Ch'iu Chin

Feminists in the firing line

Ch'iu Chin



At daybreak on 15 July 1907 at Shaohsing in the province of Chekiang, Ch'iu Chin, at the age of 32, was executed for organising an uprising aimed at overthrowing the Manchu dynasty in China. These were early days for Chinese revolutionaries, and the other sporadic uprisings in that year were as ill-timed as that of Ch'iu Chin. But they were enough to shake the Government and shorten its future to barely another four years.

Ch'iu Chin's brief and dramatic career was the more astonishing because she was born into Confucian society, where a woman's role of painful – and total – subservience had hardly been challenged. Among the radicals of the budding feminist movement she was unique, if only in one respect – that she singlehandedly masterminded the armed insurrection of an entire province.

In his youth Mao revered the Chinese tradition of the bandit hero. Ch'iu Chin could be said to personify it, along with the image of the swash-buckling knight errant, inspired by noble ideals and bent on self-

sacrifice as the highest example of patriotism.

In the Chinese tradition the knight errant was often female, in both history and fiction. Ch'iu Chin rode horses astride, excelled in sword fighting, made bombs, drilled women fighters, organised secret armies. She was also a considerable poet, a legend for her skill in verbal contests, and had a daughter who became China's first woman aviator.

As a model of the feminist revolutionary and as a folk heroine, the Ch'iu Chin myth has the distinction of having survived, unchallenged, in China, since her death. Yet in the West it is relatively unknown.

She was the eldest daughter of a declining middle-class family in Shao-hsing. They were scholarly and liberal. For instance, Ch'iu was not subjected to such extremes as foot-binding – the tradition of painfully deforming the feet of young girls for the sake of beauty.

Ch'iu's arranged marriage to Wang T'ing Chun, from a conservative family, came comparatively late in her life by Chinese standards. When she moved with her husband to Peking in 1900, the year of the Boxer rebellion, she reacted sharply to the visible feebleness and corruption of the alien Manchu rulers who had governed China since 1664. The sight of the highly painted doll-like Manchu women disgusted her.

She developed into a fierce nationalist: the twin evils that fired her revolutionary aim 'singlehandedly to restore the ancestral country', were corruption at home and imperialism from abroad. During this time she became increasingly troubled with anxiety about her own existence, which seemed meaningless.

The Chinese political scene was changing rapidly. The failure of the reformist movement of 1898, after the war with Japan, and the persecution of the reformists themselves, hardened opposition among the educated bourgeoisie and convinced moderates that radical change was the only answer to China's disintegration. In this Peking climate Ch'iu read progressive literature, made contact with women radicals, absorbed Western ideas. She became obsessed with the plight of Chinese

women, which she later wrote about in intense and illuminating detail.

Ch'iu's attitude to married life in this period was dutiful and traditional. She applied her talents, above all, to poetry. The sinologist Mary Rankin wrote, 'Autumn, sorrow, loneliness, wind and rain were recurrent themes, which had a special personal note, because the Chinese character for Ch'iu's surname also means autumn and is an element in the character meaning sorrow.' The verses also reflected the poetic Chinese obsession with images of water. She was known as 'Female Champion of the Mirror Lake' – the Western Lake near Hangchow where she planned to be buried next to the Sung dynasty hero, Yo Fei. For herself, she took another name which meant 'Male challenger'.

By 1903 Ch'iu's experiences had crystallised into a single burning ambition – to save China, through revolution. Compared with that heroic mission, poetry and domestic life seemed to be trivialities. The Confucian tradition put the family before the State, but this was the tradition that had to be swept away. Ch'iu took the almost unprecedented action of leaving her husband and her children. For a woman of that time, it was a step into the abyss. It was a radical decision for her own emancipation, too – both exhilarating and filled with anxiety – and she threw herself into the cause of feminism and revolution with impatient brilliance.

'My body does not attain

In prominence to those of men
My heart verily transcends in
ardour

Those of men'.

Because she was a woman, she was up against greater odds than men. She had further to go to be a revolutionary, more ties to break, and, in a period of transition, little with which to replace them except her own sense of mission. Her loneliness and melancholy was necessarily acute at times, as her poetry shows; so was her deeper despair at failure. What she achieved was at great emotional and personal cost – ultimately the cost of her own life.

In Tokyo – where she sought refuge – Ch'iu seemed a fascinating, compelling figure. Having arrived

from Peking 'quite alone and oppressed by a thousand anxieties', she was instantly the focus of attention. Her behaviour, for a well-bred Chinese girl, was idiosyncratic in the extreme. She was never without her short sword; she swilled wine like a buccaneer. Her brilliance in debate turned any public meeting she attended into an event.

Ch'iu admired Western figures of heroic action: Napoleon, George Washington, Sophia Perovskaya (who helped to assassinate Alexander II) and Madame Roland, the Girondist leader who was guillotined during the revolutionary Terror. Her models in Chinese history were usually those who had committed suicide in the act of assassinating tyrants. Often they were women; notably Mu Lan, who disguised herself as a foot soldier and fought in the ranks in place of her father. Ch'iu often wore men's clothes, but whereas Mu Lan acted out of filial piety – the Confucian virtue – Ch'iu sought to prove her moral ascendancy over males.

In her writings Ch'iu railed against the system that kept women in bondage: enforced marriage, seclusion, concubinage and especially the 'untold misery' of foot binding – 'Our faces grew pinched and thin, and our muscles and bones were cramped and distorted.' She satirised mothers who talked of the 'three inch golden lilies', or 'the captivating little steps' of their daughters' newly bound feet. Concubinage was not only miserable and humiliating; it caused jealousy and unhappiness in the family. 'You try to flee its insufferable tyranny by poison, hanging or drowning. . . . It is truly a hell on earth which competes with the hell of the dead.'

Ch'iu warned against reformism, however. Women were to blame for their own passivity. They alone, by themselves, could escape from their suffering. How could they trust men – the oppressors in an oppressive system? The liberation of women therefore needed a revolution that would overturn the old structure of Chinese society.

But her position was elitist, too. Only educated women could lead the way, and give the example. Her notion of the revolution, according

Today's revolutionary feminists are not without precedent. They are part of a long and extraordinary tradition of pioneering idealists who turned away from orthodox ideas of 'womanliness' to achieve their aims, not just for social justice but also for sexual equality. JAMES FOX, who has been exploring this tradition, says of the four women we feature: 'Each of these women was more extreme, more perfectionist, in her dreams of the absolute than her male colleagues. Because they were fighting on two fronts – for political and for socio-sexual revolution – their task was doubly difficult.' We lead with the story of Ch'iu Chin, following it with that of Louise Michel and Alexandra Kollontai. These three are written by Fox. We end with the strange tale of Flora Tristan, adapted from an essay by G.D.H. COLE

to most women scholars of the West, was vague, based as it was on a naive and romantic belief that overthrowing the dynasty would bring swift and radical change. Her advice to women to educate themselves and to learn trades took no thought of their position in a male-dominated economy. Instead of proposing a carefully thought-out mass movement, she emphasised acts of heroism and individual will.

Pressed by the Manchu Government, Japan agreed to restrict Chinese students' activities in Tokyo, and Ch'iu decided to return to Shanghai early in 1906. From that moment she became an active revolutionary. She opened a branch of the Restoration Society, the main revolutionary movement of the times, and hired a house in Hongkew to set about making bombs. Her inexperience nearly proved fatal. One day an explosion rattled the windows in the district, injuring Ch'iu and one accomplice. To their great surprise, it failed to attract the attention of the police.

She made exhausting, difficult journeys through the mountainous province of Chekiang, preparing an uprising to coincide with those in Hunan and Kiangsi at the end of the year. Both of these ended in disaster, with the execution of many of her friends. In anger and despair she returned to Shanghai and founded a feminist newspaper, *The Chinese Women's Journal*. Its readership, for all her efforts at popularisation, was confined to the educated elite, and it lasted for only two issues.

Ch'iu left Shanghai for the last time in 1907 for her birthplace Shao-hsing, to become principal of the Ta-t'ung school. By now, aged 32, she had total control of the movement in Chekiang. That spring she reorganised the society, and tried to pull all the secret societies under its banner. She made contacts with revolutionaries in the army in Hangchow. She drilled her students for combat in the 'physical culture' classes. This, and the impropriety of wearing male dress and riding flamboyantly through the town, angered the local gentry, who tried to lynch her. Ch'iu was saved by her students.

Meanwhile, the planning went to considerable lengths. Army commanders were appointed, duties assigned, uniforms and banners manufactured – all in great secrecy. Ch'iu had joined forces with another revolutionary, Husu Hsi-lin, a man of 'fierce energy and fanatical temper', who was in charge of Anwei province. Both agreed on 8 July for the co-ordinated uprising. Their plans, however, went wildly wrong from the outset. The uprising started elsewhere on 1 July. Hsu lost his judgment and shot wildly, without his glasses, at the Governor of Anwei, who was attending a local function. He then ran into the street, waving his sword, to signal the uprising. Nothing happened. He was then

killed and his heart cut out to appease the governor's family.

Ch'iu wept with rage and disappointment. Any further moves were clearly hopeless, yet she went ahead. She knew that the Army was marching from Hangchow on the school. She ignored the pleadings of her students to escape, and with those that remained she put up a brief resistance, with only a few rounds of ammunition.

Ch'iu was tortured and interrogated, but refused to admit to having planned a revolution. Her only statement in court after the death sentence was passed was a single line of poetry, traced out in the courtroom and using the characters in her own name. 'Autumn rain and autumn wind will make me die of sorrow.' On 15 July, dressed in the red robes prescribed for a criminal, she was decapitated with a sword.

Five days before her execution Ch'iu wrote her final poem, in the classical style. This has been translated into English for the first time for *The Observer Magazine*, by Gregor Benton of the Department of Chinese Studies at Leeds University:

'It pains me that my compatriots are still deep in their drunken sleep, and that I know of no one who will save our motherland from engulfing darkness. With night falling and nowhere to go, all that people can do is shed useless and despairing tears, like the Hsin-t'ing intellectuals of the Eastern Chin dynasty. Who will invoke the souls of the zealots in the remaining parts of the nation? Don't build a three-foot grave for me – there is no unsullied soil left throughout the length and breadth of China. Hold up a glass of the diluted wine of the state of Lu and at some future time sing together Byron's song. I am about to die, but I will live on. This sacrifice is my duty. We are about to part forever. May the coming storm sweep away the skull of our enemy.

'My great aim has not yet been realised, but my ambition has still not been submerged. My heart breaks when I think of China!'

None of her relatives dared touch Ch'iu's corpse, which lay exposed for a time, until a charitable society buried it on a nearby hill. Then a close female companion honoured an old promise to bury her by the Western Lake and moved the coffin secretly, by night. The Manchu Government destroyed the tomb and ordered the family to rebury the body at Shao-hsing. In 1909, her son, aged only 14, made the long journey alone from Hunan province, to collect the coffin. And finally, after the revolution of 1911, revered as a national heroine and martyr, she was brought back to the Western Lake. The Wind and Rain Pavilion now stands there as her memorial.

'Her hot heart was given,' says one epitaph, 'a whetstone, that the country sharpen its dull sword.' ★

Alexandra Kollontai



Virago

'There are only two Communists in Russia,' said Julius Martov, one of Lenin's closest friends. 'Lenin and Madame Kollontai.' Alexandra Kollontai (above) became Commissar for Social Welfare in the first Soviet Government and thereby the first woman in history – so she claimed – to be recognised as a member of a government.

With Trotsky and Lunacharsky, this daughter of a Czarist general was acclaimed as one of the Russian Revolution's most popular speakers. An unswerving radical, her lifelong aim was nothing less than the complete liberation of working women and the foundation of a new sexual morality. The status of women and the family itself were transformed in a process, according to Trotsky, 'assuming alternatively morbid or revolting, ridiculous or tragic forms'. In these chaotic conditions there was little Kollontai could achieve as a Minister, except draft new laws. She did manage to nationalise maternity and infant care and later she helped to draft laws legalising abortion.

But the changes, as the writer and historian Sheila Rowbotham has observed, were superficial. 'The revolutionaries faltered at the very moment when those external changes started to penetrate the inner consciousness.'

Kollontai's fierce battle in the Bolshevik Party for acceptance that women's inner struggle for freedom was part of the class struggle was regarded with suspicion and hostility. Her aims turned out to be too radical for the Bolsheviks. Although

Engels, Trotsky and Lenin all agreed with the need to free women from the tyranny of the patriarchal family, this was a marginal issue among orthodox Marxists.

The fact that she was a great beauty, an elegant dresser and a general's daughter were added irritants for her. She joined the opposition to Stalinist trends, became politically isolated, and for the last 30 years of her life was disgraced and forgotten.

In the 1880s Kollontai was educated at home by a governess who had revolutionary connections. She was an only child, coddled and spoiled. 'Already as a small child I criticised the injustice of adults,' she wrote, '... and early in life I had eyes for the social injustices prevailing in Russia.' She revolted against the idea of a marriage of convenience, and married, 'out of a great passion', her cousin, Vladimir Kollontai.

Her happiness lasted three years. In 1896 she visited a factory where Vladimir was installing a ventilation system, and her horror at the workers' conditions there crystallised into an 'allegiance to the Marxists', and political action. 'This led to differences with my husband, who felt that my inclinations constituted an act of personal defiance against him,' she said. She left husband and son for Zurich to study political economy, returning a year later to St Petersburg to join the illegal Social Democrat Party. Her marriage was over.

Later Kollontai wrote, 'Love, with its many disappointments, with its

continued

tragedies and eternal demands for perfect happiness, still played a very great role in my life . . . Nevertheless we of the older generation would have been able to create and achieve much more had our energies not been fragmented in the eternal struggle with our egos and with our feelings for another. It was, in fact, an eternal defensive war against the intervention of the male into our ego, a struggle revolving around the problem-complex: work or marriage and love . . .

'We felt enslaved and tried to loosen the love bond. And after the eternally recurring struggle with the beloved man, we finally tore ourselves away and rushed toward freedom. Thereupon we were again alone, unhappy, lonesome, but free – to pursue our beloved, chosen ideal . . . work.'

Kollontai was forced into the illegal underground, lecturing and writing. In 1908, on the point of arrest for writing a pamphlet urging an armed uprising in Finland against the Russian government, she left for the West. Her travels took her across Europe and the USA, and to visit prison cells in Germany and Sweden. In 1915 she began corresponding with Lenin, and joined the Bolshevik Party.

When the February revolution came, she raced back to Russia – one of the first political exiles to do so – in time to meet the sealed train that had carried Lenin and 30 comrades across enemy territory to the Finland station. She was elected a member of the executive committee of the Soviet. In August that year she was jailed by the liberal Kerensky Government. In September, she organised the first ever Conference of Working Women in Petrograd. By October she was Commissar for Social Welfare. And she had become a great orator.

Lenin recognised her talents by giving her the job, immediately after his return, of addressing the sailors on the battleships at Petrograd. She singlehandedly won them over from the Kerensky Government with her impassioned rhetoric, and meanwhile fell in love with Pavel Dybenko, the Bolshevik Party's *chargé* for the Baltic fleet. They married in January 1918, 'the most famous pair of lovers of the October Revolution'.

Kollontai's attachments were always brief. 'The longing to be understood by a man down to the deepest, most secret recesses of one's soul, to be recognised by him as a striving human being, repeatedly decided matters,' she wrote. 'And repeatedly disappointment ensued all too swiftly, since the friend saw in me only the feminine element which he tried to mould into a willing sounding-board for his own ego. I had to go away. I had to break with the man of my choice otherwise (this was a subconscious feeling in me) I

would have exposed myself to the danger of losing my selfhood.'

By 1921 she had thrown her weight behind the Workers Opposition and fell in love with its chief protagonist, Alexander Shlyapnikov. They argued that under Lenin's so-called New Economic Policy, bureaucratisation and party control were threatening the trade unions, which were the real voice of the proletariat. Her views isolated her from all the leading Bolsheviks, but Kollontai returned to the attack again and again for over a year.

'There can be no self-activity without freedom of thought and opinion,' she wrote. 'We give no freedom to class activity, we are afraid of criticism, we have ceased to rely on the masses, hence we have bureaucracy with us. That is why the Workers Opposition considers that bureaucracy is our enemy, our scourge and the greatest danger to the future of the communist party itself.'

Later she said that the concessions of the New Economic policy 'rob the working class of its faith in Communism'. Trotsky was to take a similar stand for 'the revival of proletarian democracy', only a year later, but at this point both he and Lenin saw it as a dangerous threat to the state, and Kollontai was sent into diplomatic exile in Norway. It was the beginning of 30 lonely years of official semi-disgrace. From abroad she watched the women's movement collapse, and the traditional patterns of their lives return. When the purges began, her two former husbands and her closest friends were exterminated. Her own remarkable survival is said by one historian to have been due to 'a certain shyness on Stalin's part to condemn prominent women'. Kollontai did agree to curtail her writing in exile, however, and this compromise with Stalin helps to explain her eclipse until recently as a popular figure of the left.

As Kollontai fell foul of the Party, her views on the 'new woman' and the 'new morality', which she began to explore in exile, were also bitterly attacked in her own party, and, of course, outside it. She used fiction as a means of exploring sexual relationships in the post-war period.

In 'Red Love', published in Britain as 'Love of Worker Bees', she describes three generations of women, all of whom find a sexual life that suits their needs. The youngest, Zhenia, tries to divorce her emotions from sex. 'But I liked them and I felt they liked me . . . It's all so simple, and then it does not tie you down to anything.'

However truthful Zhenia's character was, she was seen as 'depraved' by the Party critics, and Kollontai's books were attacked as 'reeking of pornography and the gutter'. She became associated with the famous theory that sex should be as simple and as uncomplicated as

drinking a glass of water. Lenin, who was shocked by Kollontai's views, delivered an equally famous attack on the theory. 'This . . . has made our young people mad, quite mad. . . I think it is completely un-Marxist and, moreover, anti-social. Of course . . . thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal man, in normal circumstances, lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips?'

'Many of the opponents of my writings,' said Kollontai, 'tried to impose on me an absolutely false postulate that I was preaching "free love". I would put it the other way. I was always preaching to the women: make yourself free from the enslavement of man.'

As the feminist writer and historian Sheila Rowbotham has observed, Kollontai never solved the dilemma in her own life of what she called the 'sexual crisis'. She said her 'love affairs always ended in the breaking down of romance. The hour of separation was inevitable.'

It was in this area of inner feelings, uncharted by socialists, that Kollontai probed to find clues to the emergence of the emancipated woman. But the 'new woman' in her fiction, fighting the age-old demons of jealousy and possession, often just opted out by denying her passions through an effort of will, as a step to liberation. Beyond that Kollontai had a utopian belief in a new 'solidarity-love' that would emerge in the growth of a Communist society. It would be unrecognisable from the old pattern.

Kollontai's long diplomatic exile was unremarkable, apart from her work in making peace between Finland and Russia in 1940, which was regarded as a personal *coup*. The life exhausted her morally and physically, and she became partly paralysed with a stroke. Her writing drained to a trickle after 1930. She returned to Moscow in 1945, aged 72, and died one year before Stalin in 1952. The fact went unreported in the Soviet Press.

Yet Kollontai was important not only as a Bolshevik leader but as a theorist about the role of women in society in general. She showed originality in her preoccupation with the inner conflict between romantic passion and individual passion, which plagued her personal life, and the problem this posed for women's political emancipation. Only recently has this been widely understood in Western feminist circles: hence the renaissance of interest in Kollontai's life, and the appearance in Britain during the last year of two books about her life and work ('Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Writings,' edited by Alix Holt – Allison & Busby 1977; and 'Love of Worker Bees' by Alexandra Kollontai – Virago 1977) and the imminent publication of a major biography by Cathy Porter, half a century after her Russian heyday. ★

Louise Michel

Louise Michel was one of the most tempestuous, revolutionary spirits that the world has ever seen. Her memory is surrounded with superlatives of both love and hate – in a country and especially a city, Paris, that lives close to its history. She was described as the 'Grand Druidess of Anarchy'; 'The Inspirer'; the 'Revolutionary Breath of the Commune'. She also earned the name 'The Red Virgin', from the day that she first shot – to kill – at her own countrymen in the Place de l'Hotel de Ville on 22 January 1871.

That first blood-letting heralded the short-lived revolutionary regime of the Paris Commune, for which she fought with demoniacal bravery at the head of a men's battalion. She was a poet, a novelist, a teacher and a spellbinding orator. Her fanatical revolutionary faith, which lasted until she died in 1905 – remarkably, of nothing more violent than pneumonia – was mixed, as her life shows, with an unflinching generosity, compassion and a sense of justice. Anarchism, for her, followed 'the eternal call of progress'. She personified all its virtues, weaknesses, and excesses on a scale which caused grave concern to the rulers of France's Third Republic.

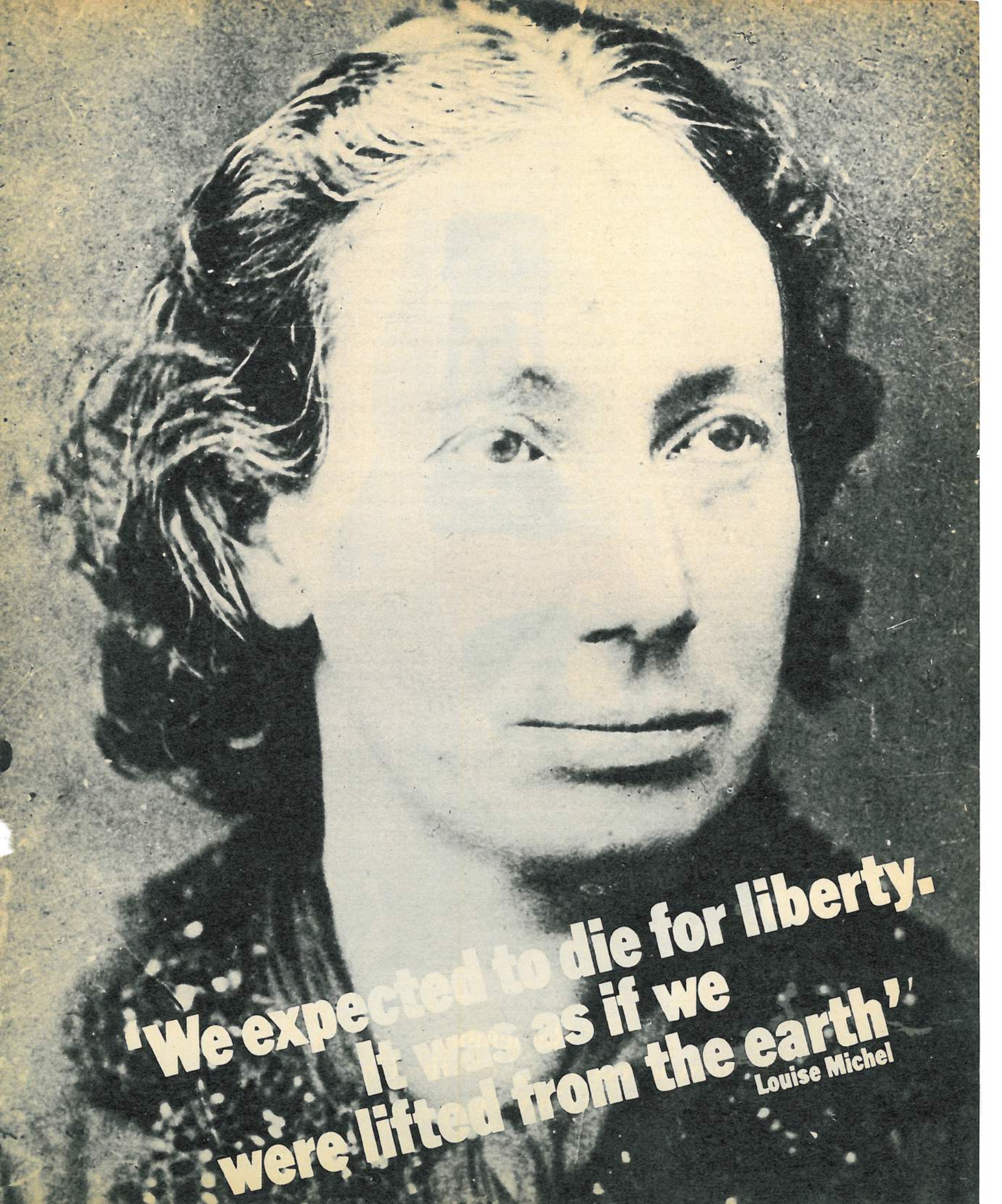
This extraordinary loner was the bastard daughter of a servant, born in the Haute Marne in 1830. Her father's parents, who owned the local chateau, adopted her lovingly and reared her on Rousseau and Voltaire. Her mother, whom she loved deeply, brought her up a devout Catholic. Louise's sense of pity for the suffering around her moved her to acts of charity, then to thoughts of justice. She turned down offers of marriage from suitors among the local bourgeoisie, and became a teacher. When Napoleon III came to power, and dissolved the Republic, she roused her students to demonstrate against him.

She moved to Paris at the age of 24, went to night school, read sciences and natural history and joined the first International.

Louise Michel was 40 when the four-month siege by the Prussian army in 1870 began a swift radicalisation of the Paris population. Part of this was effected by the popular clubs, which had started as patriotic groups to help the war effort. Louise joined one – the Club de la Patrie en Danger. Like other women in the siege, she worked as a nurse or a *cantinière*, but she was also feverishly active in the Woman's Vigilance Committee of the 18th *arrondissement*, which she started with two other women as a makeshift social services centre. 'Often she presided over meetings, keeping discipline by brandishing an old hammerless gun . . .'

When the Empire fell in September 1870, the new Republican

continued



**'We expected to die for liberty.
It was as if we
were lifted from the earth'**
Louise Michel

Government – installed in Versailles – seemed to be deliberately capitulating to the Prussians, using up the Parisians' own National Guard in suicidal sorties against the invading army. Behind this the Parisians sensed treachery.

It was in that mood that a crowd, including Louise Michel, dressed in National Guard uniform, swarmed into the Place de L'Hotel de Ville, shouting 'Death to the Traitors'. When the army shot into the crowd, she recorded: 'I could not take my eyes off the pale savage figures who were firing upon us, emotionlessly, mechanically, as they would have fired upon a pack of wolves. I thought: We will have you one day, you scoundrels, for you're killing, but you believe in it. They haven't bought you, they've tricked you. We need people who aren't for sale.' She herself was taking careful aim at those same pale figures.

'The first time you defend your cause with weapons,' she wrote later, 'you live the battle so intensely that you are no longer yourself, but more of a projectile.'

The token that signalled the beginning of the Commune was taken by women. The Government ordered the army into Paris to seize the cannons of the National Guard. The bells of the city began to ring. 'I went down,' wrote Louise. 'my rifle under my coat, crying "Treason" . . . We ran up at the double (to the heights of Montmartre) knowing that at the top there was an army in battle formation. We expected to die for liberty. It was as if we were lifted from the earth . . . The women stood between the Army and the Guard, challenging the Army to fire on them. The soldiers mutinied.

With hindsight Louise realised that the *communards* should then have marched on the Republican Government at Versailles. Instead they delayed, and Versailles marched on Paris at the beginning of April. On 1 May the Army began to bombard the rebellious city. Many women fought with great courage; but none, surely, fought like Louise Michel. When she wasn't doing battle at the barricades with her new Remington rifle, she was touring the city, tending the sick, making political speeches.

At one point she resolved to go to Versailles to assassinate Thiers, head of the Government. She was dissuaded from that plan, but she got into the army camp heavily disguised, propagandised for the revolution, and returned with trophies.

She sat with a candle next to a *communard* ammunition dump threatening to explode it when a fellow soldier wanted to surrender the dump to the army. And in the horrific days of Bloody Week, which began 21 May when the Army entered Paris, she defended the fortifications at Issy with the 61st Battalion. Clemenceau saw her there: 'To stop being killed, she killed. I



Arrested. Louise Michel, heroine of the Commune, was later deported

never saw her so calm. How she wasn't killed 100 times under my eyes, I don't understand. And I only saw her for an hour.'

The final moment came when, realising that the defenders of the Montmartre cemetery were giving way to the Army, Louise went to collect 50 men to reinforce them. Several died on the way. When they were reduced to 15, the party retreated along the barricades. When only three were left, she was thrown into the ditch of the barricade by Versailles officers dressed as National Guardsmen. When she saw them ransacking neighbouring houses, she cried, 'Put fire in front of them. Fire. Fire. I don't see a barricade left.'

Somehow Louise escaped, changed her clothes, and made her way home. To her horror, she found that her mother had been arrested as a hostage. She ran to the police station and gave herself up instead. She was marched through the night with the other prisoners to Satory Depot, which she later described in lurid detail. 'On the floor were snaky, silvery little threads forming currents between veritable lakes, large as anthills, and filled, like rivulets with a nacreous swarm. They were lice . . .' She was repeatedly told she would be shot. 'As you wish,' she said.

Through her arrest Louise Michel had escaped the bloodthirsty revenge

meted out by the Government to the *communards*, although several were shot in Satory without trial. When she appeared for trial in December 1871, she admitted every charge, even false ones. Her replies to the interrogation were sharp and accusing. Finally she said, 'Since it seems that every heart that beats for freedom has no right to anything but a slug of lead, I demand my share. If you let me live, I shall never cease to cry for vengeance. If you are not cowards, kill me.' She was sentenced to deportation.

In the nine years she spent on New Caledonia, in the south Pacific, she endured, at her own insistence, the treatment given to the male prisoners. But Louise Michel was allowed to study the flora and fauna, and the life of a native Polynesian tribe, whom she secretly aided when they staged a revolt.

When she came back at last to Paris in 1880 traffic within a mile of the Gare St Lazare came to a standstill. As she stepped off the train she looked like an old peasant woman, worn out by working the soil. 'She was dressed, as usual, in black, from head to toe, with grey hair showing from under her hat.' The crowd outside the station chanted, 'Vive Louise Michel, Vive la Commune, Vive la Revolution Sociale, Vive l'Humanité', and sang the Marseillaise.

From now on Louise Michel began

a new political career. She was not less revolutionary in aim than before, but now she saw her work clearly as serving, ultimately, the emancipation of women. Her politics had become firmly rooted in anarchism, and she demonstrated that she had not lost her oratorical gifts in exile. She held frequent public meetings, which were always packed. Political rights for women alone, Louise argued, were a waste of time; and she opposed, equally, universal suffrage. 'Let the people understand that it's for them we are working, and the more one lowers the position of women the further one descends into the abyss,' she said. She steered carefully clear of factions which tried to claim her support. About anarchism she said, 'We are the demolishers. Others will govern.'

Louise was followed everywhere by police, who seldom left her alone. Three years after her return from exile she was jailed again – this time on conspiracy charges, and served three years, often suffering at the hands of guards who had been wounded in the Commune. Verlaine wrote a ballad about her when she was sentenced.

Soon after Louise was released she was shot by a Breton at a public meeting. A bullet lodged in her left temple, but she pretended it was a blank, and went on holding meetings till a doctor persuaded her to have the bullet removed several days later. This she survived, like everything else. But her increasing personal danger in Paris, and police harassment in France – both provoked by her new programme for a general strike to 'take possession of the world' – made Louise travel to England.

Here she was impressed by the liberal atmosphere, habeas corpus, the British bobby, and most of all, Queen Victoria, and led an extremely quiet life. In her waning years she spent longer periods here, resting between bouts of illness, writing books – especially about the Commune.

When she died in a Marseilles hotel at the age of 74, anarchists and socialists squabbled for the honour of burying Louise Michel. Her funeral was said to have brought out the biggest crowds Paris had seen since Victor Hugo's interment nine years before.

What was her secret? Partly, of course, her record in the Commune, and the peculiar place of that episode in French history. But there was another reason, as her biographer, Edith Thomas, says in 'Louise Michel' (Paris 1971): 'that sort of power, quasi-magical, charismatic, that you find, for better or worse, in men whose presence and whose words can, by themselves, stir up the crowds. This power is rare among women and, in our time, I can only think of La Pasionaria, or Edith Piaf, who can be compared to her.'

Flora Tristan

UNTIL near the end of 19th century, no woman occupied a leading place in the development of Socialist thought.

There were, of course, a number of 'advanced women' and pioneers of women's right. But only one woman clearly claims even a minor place in the history of the development of Socialist thought.

Flora Célestine Thérèse Tristan (1803-44) was the daughter of a Peruvian-Spanish father and of a French mother. At law, she was illegitimate; for though her parents had been married in Spain by a French *émigré* priest, the necessary civil formalities had not been complied with. Her father came of a rich Peruvian family; his brother became President of Peru and he himself was a colonel in the Spanish army until he retired to live in Paris. There he died suddenly, leaving his widow and child almost unprovided for. The relatives in Peru apparently knew nothing of his marriage. Flora received hardly any formal education, though she developed a small talent as an artist. She was, by the way, the grandmother of Gauguin.

To support herself, she went to work as colourist for a painter and engraver, who fell in love with her, as most young men who came her way were apt to do. At her mother's instance she married him, and had three children, two of whom survived childhood. She and her husband, André Chazal, led a cat-and-dog life and after a few years she fled from him, taking the children. He pursued her, demanding first her return and later their custody. She wanted a divorce: but under the Restoration in France no divorce was allowed, and even legal separation was very difficult. Mme Chazal sent her children to live with her mother, and for some years, from 1825 to 1830, wandered about the world, apparently in some sort of service with a rich English family – a service which hurt her pride, but enabled her to gather a great many interesting impressions about the conditions of life in a variety of countries.

Returning to Paris in 1830, Mme Chazal soon became involved in a series of acrimonious and complicated disputes with her husband about their future relations. He again demanded her return, and then the custody of the children. She agreed to hand over her son to his care, but not her daughter. She then made up her mind to go to Peru and to seek recognition from her family.

Leaving her daughter in the hands of the keeper of a *pension* where she was staying, Flora took ship at Bordeaux – the only woman among an exclusively male complement of crew and passengers. The captain fell in love with her and, not knowing her to be married (though he knew of



her child), tried again and again to persuade her to marry him, even following her after her arrival in Peru till she finally dismissed him. Her uncle, who had for some years been making her and her mother a small allowance, received her in his great house, but refused to provide for her further. She returned to France, where, after further adventures, she published her autobiography 'Pérégrinations d'une paria' (1838), giving an exceedingly frank account of her adventures, except those of her period of service with the English family, of which she told nothing.

The book infuriated Flora's husband, who was so angered by its account of him that he made an attempt on her life, for which he was sentenced to forced labour. She almost at once published her only novel, 'Méphis' (1838), in which there was much more autobiographical material. She then went to London where she wrote her most interesting 'Promenades dans Londres' (1840), published in both Paris and London. It contains a most moving and lively picture of the sufferings of the British workers and of the Chartist movement in its early days.

Flora Tristan had by this time become convinced that she had a mission to work for the emancipation at one and the same time of her sex and of the working class. She had, however, hardly any contacts with the French workers. Through the poems of the carpenter, Agricole Perdriguier, who also inspired George Sand's novel 'Le Compag-

non du Tour de France', she got to know something of the old *compagnonnages*, or clubs, of the French craftsmen. Attempts had been made previously to join the *compagnonnages* together into a general combination; but these had broken down in face of their exclusiveness and of the sharp rivalries between them.

Flora Tristan, after reading the poems and pamphlets of the *compagnons*, conceived the project of a far more ambitious union – nothing less than a single body uniting the entire working class, not merely in one country, but in all. In 1843 she published her ideas in a small book, 'Union ouvrière' – the first published project of a world-wide Workers' International.

Flora Tristan's idea was simple in itself, though not to carry out. She proposed that every worker in France, and in every other country that could be induced to take up the idea, should subscribe a small annual sum to a fund, which was to be used to build up a capital sufficient to emancipate the working class from its subject position. This fund was to be used not for projects of co-operative production so much as for the establishment of 'Workers' Palaces' in every town. These palaces were to be at once schools, hospitals for the sick, places of refuge for the aged and disabled, and centres of working-class culture. They were to rally the workers, and to give them the security and independence that would enable them to improve their economic conditions.

The summary at the end of the book included these proposals.

To secure recognition of the legitimacy of *property in men's hands* (*de la propriété des bras*).

To secure recognition of the legitimacy of the *right to work* for all, men and women alike.

To examine the possibilities of the *organisation of labour* within the existing social state.

To recognise the urgent necessity of giving to the women of the people an *education*, moral, intellectual and technical, in order that they may become the moralising influence on the men of the people.

To recognise, in principle, the *equality of right* between men and women as being the sole means of establishing *Human Unity*.

In order to spread the knowledge of her ideas, Flora Tristan next set out on a journey through France from town to town, getting everywhere into touch with the workmen's clubs and associations, in the hope of enlisting their help. Still busy on this mission, she contracted typhoid fever, and died at Bordeaux at the age of 41. Her projects died with her.

She was a very strange apostle of working-class unity. Of great beauty and appeal to men, she was imperious and, with all her sympathies for the workers, very conscious of her family connections. She felt bitter humiliation in being forced to work with her hands and deep indignation at the laws which denied her legitimacy. In her personal relations she revolted against any acceptance of inferiority or subordination – including subordination to her husband.

She became an ardent advocate of women's rights, but was not interested in the right to vote, which she regarded as unimportant in comparison with the equal right with men to labour and to education. Uneducated and untrained herself, because of her mother's plunge into poverty, she came to lay the greatest stress on the education of the workers, both intellectual and technical.

With all this, she was a most remarkably good observer of men and things, a great keeper of diaries, and a very graphic narrator of her own experiences. *L'Union Ouvrière* came to nothing: her plan was chimerical, and her acquaintance with business nil. But so far as I have been able to discover, Flora Tristan was the first person to put forward a definite plan for an all-inclusive proletarian International. She said again and again that whereas the great French Revolution had emancipated the 'Third Estate' – and made a tyrant of it – the mission of the new revolution was to set free the 'Fourth Estate', *les ouvriers*; and she saw, however dimly, that this meant comprehensive organisation internationally as well as within each nation.

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