Syndicalism is, in essence, an ideology of action that evolved and revolved around the worker's movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Socialist and anarchist philosophies, along with the early actions of those movements, originally inspired revolutionary syndicalism in France. The syndicalist movement derived its name from the French term, *syndicat*, which simply refers to a trade union.

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a prolific logician and philosopher from this period, explained that the ideology developed in response to the political machinations of certain socialists in in the 1890s.[1] Workers, frustrated with the empty promises of politicians, sought to achieve their socialist goals through "industrial" and not "political action."[2] Russell also notes, "Trade Unionists of France became divided into two sections, the Reformist and the Revolutionary, of whom the latter only professed the ideas which we now associate with the term 'Syndicalism.'"[3]

The basic tenant of syndicalism is the conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie, fought through direct, collective action of the workers. The trade union acts as "both an organ of struggle and an instrument of revolution."[4] In *The Basis of Trade Unionism*,[5] Emile Pouget (1860-1931), a syndicalist writer and secretary for the French federation of *syndicats*, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), declared the *syndicat* "a perfect combination answering to all needs, to all aspirations, and therefore sufficient for all purposes. It

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[1] Arne Holmberg, ed. *Les Prix Nobel en 1950* (Stokholm: Nobel Foundation, 1951).
[2] Bertrand Russell, *Proposed Roads to Freedom: Socialism, Anarchism and Syndicalism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 62.
[3] Russell, 62.
[4] Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis* (Abingdon, Oxon, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 28.
[5] Emile Pouget, *The Basis of Trade Unionism* (London: Voice of Labor Pamphlet, 1908), 1. Translated into English by an unnamed individual. The pamphlet notes that the original word Pouget employed was *syndicat* in place of trade union.

is an association conceived by 'reformers' affording opportunity for daily conflict with employers, for improvements, and for settling minor claims."[6]

Yet, the literature discussing the theories and the histories discussing the strikes rarely mention women in relation to syndicalism. During this period, as economic pressures grew, women increasingly left the domestic sphere of the home to seek work in factories. These women faced the same, if not worse, conditions of the proletarian men of the time, who felt the need to fight for worker's rights and revolution. Narratives and texts abound of socialist and anarchist women engaging in political groups or creating their own and fighting in the struggle against the capitalist state.

However, syndicalism is a less understood movement in that same struggle, and the working-class culture of the period was a strong deterrent to women's participation. Women, who men often saw as destroyers of the home simply by working for a wage, had little recommending existing male unions as a path to emancipation.[7] However, there are instances of women forming their own unions and subsequently employing the methods of syndicalism to achieve their goals. In addition, socialist and suffrage groups often participated in militancy suggestive of syndicalist theory.

Using examples of movements, incidents, and theory from both France and Britain, this paper will discuss the different ways in which women engaged with the syndicalist movement. Working women reacted to a number of pressures when deciding to participate in union activity. With poor conditions and unequal pay on one hand and societal scrutiny and disapproval on the other, these women often did not engage at all. Thus, the paper will discuss the sources of these pressures. Consulting significant primary and secondary materials, a trend emerges suggesting

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[6] Pouget, *Basis of Trade Unionism*, 1-2.
[7] Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz and Susan Stuard, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 10.

that female leaders employing syndicalism were often drawn from socialist or anarchist groups in which they were already active. Working-class women participating in collective action were workers primarily, acting to improve their own condition, and secondarily to improve society as a whole. By applying a broad definition of syndicalism in order to understand female labor engagement, this paper endeavors to suggest a female syndicalist spirit existed alongside and despite of its male counterpart.

Contemporary articles and monographs written on women in syndicalism concentrate exclusively on French women, and all authors published in the 1980s and 1990s. Jeremy Jennings' describes and contextualizes a single incident of a woman attempting to join a syndicalist union. Louise A. Tilly takes a wider view of and makes broader conclusions regarding working women's collective action, while still focusing on French workers. In her doctoral dissertation, Persis Charles Hunt examines French teachers and their relationship with syndicalist organizations. However, none takes a comparative view and none considers the interrelated nature of the separate revolutionary groups of the period.

Like the working-class women mentioned above, working-class men often participated in syndicalism as a way to improve their conditions and not primarily with the intellectual goal of industrial revolution. This led them to value strategy before intellectual speculation, experience before theorizing. Frederick F. Ridley pushed this conception of the ideology to claim "there was no consciously held syndicalist theory at all; their action was their philosophy."[8] Immediately he retreated, but this assertion is intriguing when considering the militant climate of early twentieth-century Europe, and the open, yet limited, nature of the trade unions. Male unions often barred women from entry. However, if in organizing their own groups or in

[8] Ridley, 6.

adopting militancy for the purposes of a similar socialist cause, one could view women as *practicing* syndicalism, one could also consider them syndicalists.

The main tool of union members was direct action, which consisted of any and every deed workers did in or around their place of employment to improve their conditions. Darlington explains, "It encompassed conventional strikes, intermittent strikes, passive resistance, working to rule, sabotage, and the general strike."[9] Syndicalists employed direct action because they could control it themselves. Pouget emphasized that the workers relied on no outside help or intermediary to achieve their ends.[10]

For this reason and because of the conflicts arising among syndicalists and socialists who were seen as trying to co-opt the unions, the CGT banned the involvement of members with any political party.[11] Darlington expounds, "Syndicalists denied that the class war could properly be prosecuted by political parties" and rejected the efficacy or fidelity of parliaments in general.[12] Tom Mann (1856-1941), a British industrial union organizer and convert to syndicalism, wrote in 1913 that workers "must realize that [parliament] belongs to their enemies and see it as an institution that can never be used effectively by the workers."[13]

The goal, as Russell succinctly states, was "not to secure such improvements of detail as employers may grant, but to destroy the whole system of employer and employed and win the complete emancipation of the worker. For this purpose what is wanted is the General Strike, the complete cessation of work by a sufficient proportion of the wage-earners to secure the paralysis of capitalism."[14] European syndicalists widely believed that a normal strike anywhere in the

[9] Darlington, 33.
[10] Darlington, 33.
[11] Darlington, 25.
[12] Darlington, 25.
[13] Darlington, 23.
[14] Russell, 67.

industrial world could spark the general strike, leading to the revolution and the replacement of the capitalist state by a federation of trade unions.

However, when Mann and his associate, Guy Bowman, returned from making a study of French syndicalism in 1910, they began to educate British workers unfamiliar with it in a slightly different form. He wrote in *The Industrial Syndicalist* that the movement

> Will be avowedly Revolutionary in aim, because it will be out for the abolition of the wages system and for securing to the workers the full fruits of labour, thereby seeking to change the system of society from Capitalist to Socialist.
>
> Revolutionary in method, because it will refuse to enter into any long agreements with the masters, whether with legal or state backing, or merely voluntarily; and because it will seize every chance of fighting for the general betterment.[15]

Russell noted in 1919 that "Pure Syndicalism" was unlikely to become popular in Britain as the populace's "temperament" was not "revolutionary or anarchistic" enough.[16] Mann and Bowman seemed to have anticipated this opinion. The vague phrasing of "general betterment" lacks the radical vision of the French theorists. In his analysis of the two men's efforts, Matthew Thomas allows that though "there was no doubt that their call to direct action, their denunciation of cautious and sectional leaders and their policy of working with the existing organisations attracted many recruits," they "rather fudged the issue of control in the unions."[17]

In his memoirs, however, Mann specifically communicates the idea of the unions making "these organizations what [the workers] desired them to be, for the unions are working class organisations which can be modified and improved as the workers themselves desire."[18] Mann and Bowman's notion seems, then, to be in the spirit of action by workers for workers. They did

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[15] Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1923), 255.
[16] Russell, 80.
[17] Matthew Thomas, *Anarchist Ideas and Counter-Cultures in Britain, 1880-1914: Revolutions in Everyday Life* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 188-189.
[18] Mann, 254.

not dictate any specific syndicalist ideological requirements, but simply wished to educate the existing unions on methods and ideas that could help them.

Like other British adaptations of European syndicalism, such as the movement under the leadership of John Turner earlier in the decade, and because of their willingness to allow union members to choose their political policy, Mann and Bowman's organization lacked the rejection of political action that the CGT emphasized.[19] Thomas noted that this alienated many anarcho-syndicalists influenced by immigrant Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in Wales or American IWW De Leonist theories and already active in industrialized Britain.[20] Syndicalists like John Paton, found Mann's unwillingness to overrule union leaders to be an exacerbation of the problem of centralization in the workers' movement and advocated decentralization to enable each worker to decide what action he should take.[21]

This conflict highlights Ridley's observation that "Syndicalism differed from Marxism or anarchism in that it never existed in isolation."[22] The unions, in both France and Britain, existed before the idea of a militant union, before the idea of a society based around the union. These "ideas reflected the character of the institutions" that spawned them.[23] Darlington makes the claim that the reason syndicalism may have become popular in countries as different as France, Spain, Italy, and England was because it was so vague and able to evolve to suit each population's needs. This flexibility "enabled [syndicalists] to gain adherents from diverse elements inside the working class, appealing equally to anarchists and socialists disillusioned

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[19] Thomas, 182-183.
[20] On the Spanish influence in Wales, see Thomas, 190. On De Leonism in Scotland, see Lewis H. Mates, "The Syndicalist Challenge in the Durham Coalfield Before 1914," (paper presented at the "Is Black and Red Dead?" conference organized by the PSA, Anarchist Studies Network, and Marxism Specialist Group, University of Nottingham, UK, September 7, 2009). Daniel De Leon developed a Marxist theory calling for the use of both industrial and political action in the class struggle.
[21] Thomas, 191.
[22] F.F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The Direct Action of its Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 6.
[23] Ridley, 6.

with parliamentary politics, to trade unionists eager for more militant policies, and to the discontented without ideological attachments."[24]

Contemporary historians are quick to point out that syndicalism was first and foremost a movement of action and not one of theory or philosophy. Syndicalists described their theory as open and evolving in reaction to the action of the workers. It was distrustful of middle-class intellectuals and outside forces of corruption, yet open to any worker who wished to participate, regardless of their personal political views. This simultaneously closed and open, strict and flexible ideology, defined primarily by its methods, led to confused terminology.

Depending on the individual, male syndicalists often held socialist or anarchist political views in addition to his industrial goals. For example, at least one syndicalist leader was also a positivist.[25] If women socialists and anarchists, even suffragists, employed the practices of syndicalism in the struggle for the worker's revolution, the flexibility of the ideology could stretch to include individuals not belonging to a *syndicat* or a union.

Ridley asserted that any modern analysis "is the attempt of an outsider to give a rational account of something that was never intended to be translated into such words. The syndicalists were neither philosophers nor politicians but workers; they were less concerned with ideas than with the actual, everyday struggle to improve their lives."[26] For this reason, syndicalists never strove to compile a complete body of thought or definitively separate themselves from other similar ideologues. Such a thing was not necessary. A variety of individuals who moved in and out of Marxist, socialist, anarchist, and trade unionist circles, within Britain and France, organized and operated the syndicalist movement. Ideas and opinions flowed freely among these groups and at times changed for individuals over the course of their lives.

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[24] Darlington, 20-21.
[25] See below, page 7 for a definition of positivism.
[26] Ridley, 6.

The political and cultural climate that led to the creation of revolutionary syndicalism in France had its deepest roots in the French Revolution. Sima Lieberman writes that "egalitarianism was . . . deeply embedded in the minds of the masses" thanks to "the large number of artisans, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and peasants who constituted the bulk of French society in the days of the Revolution and the Empire."[27] Egalitarianism and mutualism were key concepts in the philosophy of Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), whose ideas on "social and economic reforms were to be accepted as gospel by French labor leaders during most of the nineteenth century."[28] In his selection of Proudhonian writings, Stewart Edwards argues that though Proudhon advocated working class political action take place through "mutualist associations," the philosopher would never have condoned syndicalism.[29] "Proudhon's socialism was . . . an alliance of the lesser bourgeoisie, the industrial workers and the peasants, on the grounds of a common equality of property, against the growing wealth of the capitalist class."[30] Syndicalism's class war would have seemed unnecessarily hostile to Proudhon. In addition, the trade unionists largely ignored the plight of the peasant next to their own struggle.

It is primarily in his argument for the uselessness of political action that Proudhon and Marx differed, and this gave rise to one of the main conflicts between later Marxist socialists and revolutionary syndicalists in France. Both groups sought to bring about a proletarian revolution. However, the militant unionists saw the reformist methods of some socialists as counter-productive.[31] Syndicalists followed Proudhon in their insistence that the workers reject the

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[27] Sima Lieberman, *Labor Movements and Labor Thought: Spain France, Germany, and the United States* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 168.
[28] Lieberman, 168.
[29] Stewart Edwards, introduction to *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*, trans. By Elizabeth Fraser (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 32.
[30] Edwards, 32.
[31] This stratification between the groups seems not to have been so pronounced in Britain.

guidance of "an intellectual elite [meant] to lead the workers for their own good," and take control of the revolution themselves.[32]

Syndicalists took from Proudhon mutualism, egalitarianism, and revolution. In addition, they took other less obviously political ideas as—those regarding marriage, family, and women's place in society. Even in his writings on mutualism in *De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières,* Proudhon categorized women with "children . . . old men, valetudinarians and sickly people" as distinct from the "able-bodied."[33] He specified that their day's work should be "only a fraction of the official, normal, legal day" for the standard person. Women, not being male, are outside the normal as a valetudinarian is for having a weak constitution.

Yet, it is in his writings on marriage that Proudhon makes his views on women clear. Proudhon claims that in marriage women and men are equal. Thus, because of this equality through their union, "she is considered part of her husband."[34] The reason Proudhon gives for woman's divorce from society and public life

> is that her faculties do not bear any comparison with those of a man in the realms of economics and industry, philosophy and literature, or in that of law. . . . Thus society does no injustice to woman by refusing her equality before the law. It treats her according to her aptitudes and privileges . . . If you alter this system you alter the natural order of things. You impoverish man without giving woman more dignity or more happiness.

By allowing a woman a place in the public sphere, society debases her and makes her "odious and ugly" to the men around her.[35] In this passage, Proudhon does not explain why man would find her ugly. However, a simple step in logic suggests it would be because man would see her now as competition and not companion.

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[32] Ridley, 31.
[33] Pierre Joseph Proudhon, "On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes" in Edwards, 67.
[34] Pierre Joseph Proudhon, "Justice in the Revolution and the Church" vol 4 in Edwards, 255.
[35] Proudon, "Justice" in Edwards, 255.

Fernand Pelloutier (1867-1901), known as the "father of revolutionary syndicalism" and one of the founders of one of the first national *syndicats* in France, the *Federation des bourses du travail*, did not leave this idea to silent implication.[36] In his writings, he openly stated that a direct result of "female labour . . . was the 'lowering of the male salary' and thus a worsening of 'the state of misery' suffered by the working class as a whole. Women . . . had 'committed the fault' of entering into competition with men and had provided an appearance of rationality for the worst abuses of capitalism."[37] Pelloutier noted that some women could not avoid having to work to support themselves and their families. However, he felt that if she could, a woman should avoid the labor market. Jennings describes how Pelloutier was reluctant to approve of granting women suffrage on the basis that, though some showed "praiseworthy" spirit in pursuing socialist goals, most were not prepared for the vote. He wrote: "let our companions first secure their economic emancipation, that is, the possession of a salary equal to men . . . and this will be proof that they are ready for political emancipation."[38] Other political arenas reflected this idea of proof later in the period.

Although his future design for women is nearly the opposite of Proudhon's promotion of the institution of marriage and Pelloutier's guarded ultimatum, Emile Pouget's discussion of women in *Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth: How We Shall Bring about the Revolution*, belies the paternalistic, and sometimes antagonistic, tendencies, even of progressive male intellectuals of the period. In imagining the future world after the successful syndicalist revolution, Pouget, and his co-author, Emile Pataud, describe what life will be like for women. The authors break from Proudhon's anti-feminist ideas to predict the freeing of women from

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[36] Jeremy Jennings, "The CGT and the Couriau Affair: Syndicalist Responses to Female Labour in France Before 1914," *European History Quarterly* 21 (1999): 322.
[37] Jennings, 323. Quoting Fernand Pelloutier, "La femme dans la société moderne," *La Revue socialiste 14* (1894): 545-59.
[38] Jennings, 324.

domestic labor and economic pressures to work when and how they liked. They could choose to conceive, to be a mother to their children, or to give it over to other women to bring up. "The hateful marriage market" would be unnecessary as she would not require a man to provide for her.[39] Whether or not marriage will still be in practice, they leave unsaid.

At a time when women were actually legally relegated to the status of children, and most men openly shared Proudhon's opinions, this was a radical prediction. Yet still, the negative opinions of women's behavior in Pouget's current society come forward as the authors state a woman would "no longer [be] a slave to fashion: the disappearance of commercialism had brought about its ruin—to the benefit of good taste."[40] Women in the early twentieth century, the authors imply, are vain and materialistic. Capitalism has shaped them this way, and they are not educated or righteous enough to resist as the male syndicalist worker has done.

Specifically mentioning Proudhon's exile of women to the home, the authors say that women in the syndicalist future will have more options. However, "neither [will they have] to follow the childish hobby of the Suffragettes who saw no freedom for [them] except in the conquest of the vote."[41] Syndicalist contempt for the democratic processes of the state notwithstanding, dismissing women's effort to gain suffrage seems spiteful when men already have it. In addition, characterizing suffrage as "childish" suggests the same kind of categorizing of woman with children that Proudhon practiced in his misogynistic philosophy.

The most telling attitude indicated in the chapter on women implies the opinion that Pelloutier postulates: "Woman could remain woman in the most feminine and human sense of

[39] Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth: How We Shall Bring about the Revolution* (Oxford: The New International Publishing Company, 1913), 246.
[40] Pataud and Pouget, 246.
[41] Pataud and Pouget, 245.

the word without having to imitate man, without seeking to supplant him."[42] Pouget and Patuad sought a world where a woman is free to work and stay out of men's way; where she will not compete because she does not need to; and there would be no reason for her to want to. The new order would allow her to stay "feminine," where the current corrupt capitalist society forces her to masculinize herself, emasculating the male workers around her.

Lest this progression suggest that each new theorist stepped closer to condoning female emancipation and suffrage, contemporary to both Pelloutier and Pouget, a French union leader named Auguste Keufer held a more conservative view and had the power to act upon it. Keufer was the leader of the *Fédération du livre* in Lyons, a local bookmaking and printing union.[43] Keufer was a positivist, a philosophy of science that Auguste Comte (1798-1857) developed that believed the only way to knowledge of any kind was through the observation of phenomena and different methods of thought regarding those phenomena.[44] Jennings labeled positivism a "religion" with "cults and rituals" as part of the practice.[45]

Positivist doctrine held that a woman's purpose was to be mother, educator, and homemaker. Her temperament and role was to be the compliment to man's. To this end, Comte said, "every woman should be carefully protected from external labour in order to accomplish her holy mission with dignity."[46] Keufer and men of like mindset propagated these views in the *syndicats*. They blamed women workers in factories for social denigration, the destruction of the family, and alcoholism. Like Pelloutier, realizing that some women had to work, Keufer argued it was "the responsibility of the *syndicat* . . . to ensure that the added competition for jobs did not

[42] Pataud and Pouget, 245.
[43] Jennings, 328.
[44] John Stuart Mill, *August Comte and Positivism* (1865).
[45] Jennings, 328.
[46] Jennings, 329.

lead to a lowering of wages and that the principle of equal pay for equal work was observed."[47] Ironically, Pelloutier who advocated free love with more than one partner for both men and women, never went so far as to place that particular responsibility with the unions.

When in 1912, Emma Couriau and her husband, Louis, applied to become members of Keufer's *syndicat*, the union denied both—Emma because she was a woman, and Louis because he allowed his wife to work with him as a typographer.[48] The CGT officially disapproved, but there was little the federation could do to sanction an individual *syndicat*. The incident inflamed an already sensitive issue in the region and in France in general. Several years before, a feminist newspaper publisher had attempted to organize a women's union for the typesetters she employed and later, this female group performed labor at another company whose typesetters were on strike.[49] In his article on the matter, Jennings claims that this "affair" led to a debate in syndicalism regarding the role of women but concludes that at the end little changed.[50]

This denial of women was the case for the bookmakers of Lyon. However, other unions in France held slightly different policies toward women. In the late 1890s, textile unions in the Nord of France—in Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing—came together to form the *Fédération nationale textile*. Although several of these unions were officially associated with the *Parti ouvrier français* and many of its members worked to elect socialist political candidates, the federation was also a part of the syndicalist CGT.[51] Hilden notes that early numbers for women's involvement in these unions is scarce, but by 1900, of the six thousand members the

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[47] Jennings, 330.
[48] Jennings, 321.
[49] Persis Charles Hunt, "Revolutionary Syndicalism and Feminism among Teachers in France, 1900-1921" (Doctoral thesis, Tuft's University, 1975), 93.
[50] Jennings, 321-337.
[51] Patricia Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France 1880-1914: A Regional Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 126-127.

Roubaix and Tourcoing *syndicat* claimed, two hundred were women.[52] Though women joined in vastly smaller numbers than men did, the rate at which they joined grew over the first decade of the twentieth century. In addition, though the work done in the textile mills was divided by gender, Tilly notes that even in the nineteenth century, French newspaper accounts indicate that women workers did strike with their male counterparts.[53]

The general strike of textile workers in the region in 1903 provides an excellent example. The strike itself had few planned goals and no clear demands. It was spontaneous and not union led. Hilden noted that this was not unusual for strikes at the time. Workers formed processions and held parties, "crowds . . . massed outside factory gates, preventing any possibility of scabbing workers breaking the strike."[54] However, media attention focused on the participation of the women. These socialist and syndicalist journalists were "shocked that these itinerant groups included 'numerous women,'" and circulated stories about the events surrounding the women to extract sympathy for the textile workers' cause in their readership and among the broader public.[55]

At the time however, there seems to have been a disconnect between the intellectual leaders in the press and the "grassroots" workers at the strike. Lille protesters even chose a woman, Mme. Sorgue as a spokesperson. Another woman during the strike, Gabrielle Petit, "an ardent neo-Malthusian as well as a feminist . . . shocked male *syndicalistes* by climbing onto a table and demanding a separate meeting of women strikers where they could discuss 'birth control, women's health, and an end to corsets.'"[56] Not all of the ladies present were in

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[52] Hilden, 127.
[53] Louise A. Tilly, "Paths of Proletarianization: Organization of Production, Sexual Division of Labor, and Women's Collective Action," *Signs* 7 (Winter 1981): 409.
[54] Hilden, 158.
[55] Hilden, 159.
[56] Hilden, 165.

agreement with her, but they were there, and she was confident enough in her place and militant enough to stand and speak her mind.

Though the numbers and the female involvement in specific strikes suggest harmony among unions in the north of France, stereotypes and prejudices remained. Most women who were able to participate did not do so. In the 1880s and 1890s, male textile workers felt put upon by female workers. Tilly gives an example in 1886 of "striking Roubaix weavers demand[ing] that their employer fire one of the women workers who would not strike with them over a wage issue."[57] Women at the time were vulnerable to replacement because young women seeking work were always available. Tilly cites an 1880 strike of female bobbin winders whose employer immediately dismissed them and filled their positions without difficulty.[58]

Women at the time, whether single or married, lived with their families who claimed their wages and thus "could influence . . . their decisions about striking."[59] Young women, especially, "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."[60]

Competing mixed *syndicats* and church-run Catholic women's unions often drew women away from socialist and syndicalist unions.[61] Hilden details the harmonious attitude of "*syndicats rouges*," or socialist unions, in 1909 with women speakers and attention paid to women's issues, to explain that only two years later, "women as a potential constituency began to disappear from national view."[62] In 1911, during the campaign to gain the *semaine anglaise* (the English work

[57] Tilly, 410.
[58] Tilly ,410
[59] Tilly, 411.
[60] Tilly, 411.
[61] Hilden, 128.
[62] Hilden 133.

week), textile union leaders harped on the idea that the time off they would gain would allow women to return to their domestic role at home; "to see to the housework a little more, to the profit of their health and that of their family."[63] This did not help working women to see male unions in a positive light.

Again, both Tilly and Hilden stress that women participated in strikes. Even if they did so in small numbers, even if it was independent from the unions, they took part in collective action. Hilden quotes a contemporary observer, Marie-Louise Compain, when she attempted to shed light on the working-class climate in the region:

> One has no clear sense of politically militant, nor even furious women emerging from this army of women, constrained to hard labour in the unhealthy combing rooms and overheated spinning mills . . . . But it may be that, in this homeland of labour and struggle, where working men and women live and suffer side by side, the organization of women's labour will yet achieve its greatest success.[64]

Compain visited the region in 1910. The Lille strike in which so many women were active took place in 1903 to 1904. The woman who refused to strike with her male co-workers did so in 1886. The climate of female militancy in the Nord region vacillated between conservative male domination and a more radical openness in *syndicats*. However, as stated above, by 1912 the period of women participation seemed over as leading men, like Victor Renard, gained more influence over the textile federation. Women felt a distinct sense of exclusion in these male-dominated atmospheres.[65]

Leading female figures on the complex landscape of radical politics were more difficult to find and more difficult to categorize. Both men and women active in the political and labor sphere during this period exhibited rapid and numerous changes in party and opinion. Georges

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[63] Hilden, 135.
[64] Hilden, 136.
[65] Felicia Gordon and Máire Cross, *Early French Feminisms, 1830-1940: A Passion for Liberty* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1996), 9.

Sorel (1847-1922), a famous apologist of syndicalism, "was monarchist in the 1870s and 1880s, then a Marxist, a Bernsteinian reformist, and admirer of anarcho-syndicalism, a proto-Fascist, ending his life by praising both Mussolini and Lenin."[66] Madeleine Pelletier (1874-1939) began her career as a feminist with *la Solidarité des femmes*, moved left to socialism in the form of Guesde's Marxism, from there joined with Gustave Herve's revolutionary socialism, and still later drifted to communism.

Pelletier and Hélène Brion (1882-1962) were both feminist leaders in France during this period. Hélène Brion was the General Secretary of an affiliate of the CGT and a leader in her local socialist group as well before joining the Communist party and later leaving communism during the 1920s.[67] At the time of the Couriau affair, Brion was a primary school teacher in Paris. Couriau's dismissal from the *Fédération du livre* sparked a furor among feminists already involved in the worker's struggle. Brion, one among many women such as Elisabeth Renaud, Marie Vidal, and Marie Guillot, began a debate in articles and letters if syndicalism and socialism had a place for women or could even accomplish anything to improve their condition in society. Brion wrote: "the elite of the syndicalists is anti-parliamentarian, and since it sees nothing in our feminist movement but a wild-eyed chase after the vote, especially with this tendency of syndicalism to see itself as a panacea, that it shouts 'you're crazy,' to anyone of good will who shows any sign of joining us."[68]

Other female voices insisted on syndicalism's ability to help women as workers first. Others cautioned women, like Brion, about speaking against men too loudly because they might become offended and not help. Still others, like Marie Guillot, worried that pursuing feminism and suffrage would open working-class women's organizations to infiltration by bourgeois

[66] Sharif Gemie, "Anarchism and Feminism: A Historical Survey," *Women's History Review* 5 (1996): 436.
[67] Gordon and Cross, 9.
[68] Charles Hunt, 96.

groups after the same goal.[69] Guillot was another teacher and syndicalist who wrote for a syndicalist press, *Ecole émancipée.* She was a leader in the formation of the short-lived women's committee, the *comité féminin d'action syndicaliste,* within the CGT in 1913.

These female syndicalist leaders operated in precarious positions and in frustrating circumstances. With the male membership unwilling to cooperate or sometimes even tacitly supporting feminist goals, strong leaders, like Brion, eventually left the movement for more promising results in socialist and communist organizations. Meanwhile, British women of vastly different origin but no less enthusiasm were discussing these same feminist issues.

European social activists often moved in the same circles, even across the Channel. When he moved his family to London in 1885, Dr. Richard Marsden Pankhurst (1834-1898) ran for Parliament as a radical and was defeated. However, he "became increasingly involved with the then fermenting world of London radicalism that included William Morris, Tom Mann, and Annie Besant, all of whom attended quasi-political gatherings at the Pankhurst's home."[70]

In the midst of her husband's radical circle, Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) began to become involved in politics, particularly the women's suffrage movement that was, at the time, primarily focused on winning the vote for unmarried women. In 1903, in response to female textile workers barred from the male union, Pankhurst and a group of "working-class supporters" formed the Women's Social and Political Union with the intention of working on behalf of women of the same class.[71] Even members of the labor press who Pankhurst personally knew paid little attention to the organization. Emmeline and her daughters spoke and advocated in parliament for a suffrage bill for all women. The logic behind this parliamentary tactic,

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[69] Charles Hunt, 97-98.
[70] Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union 1903*-1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 16.
[71] Rosen, 50.

notwithstanding the fact that male labor leaders regularly ran for office, was the massive influx of working-class women's votes that would almost surely go to the Independent Labor Party, with which the WSPU was associated through Mrs. Pankhurst, upon their enfranchisement.[72]

Again, despite the fact that the WSPU was attempting to engage in parliamentary politics to achieve their goals, they gradually became more militant, eventually employing methods reminiscent of syndicalism in their struggle. Because the WSPU sought to equalize the condition of working women and men through the vote, parliament itself, along with other government offices, became the site of production at which they disrupted the work. On June 29, 1909, police arrested Mrs. Pankhurst along with 108 other women and 14 men after a "prolonged melee" at the door of the House of Commons.[73] The goal of the action at parliament was to secure arrests of as many women as possible, which the WSPU used as a kind of terrorist act through scandal. Yet, that evening "a group of thirteen women, using small stones wrapped in brown paper, began to break windows at the Privy Council, Treasury, and Home Offices."[74] This was a form of sabotage.

Though the WSPU leadership never discussed the window-breaking before it happened, the group embraced the tactic. In 1912, at Royal Albert Hall in London, Emmeline Pankhurst gave a speech advocating women's militancy and echoing a basic tenant of the syndicalist movement: striking at capitalist enemies by affecting their profits.[75] By targeting government property, the WSPU aimed to force the government to listen simply by costing them the money needed to fix the destruction. Pankhurst threatened in her speech

> There is something that governments care far more for than human life, and that is the security of property, and so it is through property that we shall strike the

[72] Rosen, 34.
[73] Rosen, 118-119.
[74] Rosen, 119.
[75] Darlington, 34.

> enemy. . .women who agree with me will say, "We disregard your laws gentlemen, we set the liberty and the dignity and the welfare of women above all such considerations."[76]

Placing women's social status above the capitalist concerns of the state, she exhorted women to "be militant each in your own way," and ended with, "I incite this meeting to rebellion."[77]

The WSPU had seen the efficacy of male violence, especially in the case of the Miners' Federation. Pankhurst said that the "government's capitulation to Ulster's force—or rather, threats of force—is the greatest encouragement and greatest incitement ever offered to women of the militant movement."[78] Emmeline's daughter Christabel, another leader in the union, "extracted the political lesson that not only could Parliament be terrorized but also 'that Parliament never grants reform unless it is terrorized . . . Terrorism is, in fact the only argument that Parliament understands!'"[79] Incidents of destruction and eventually arson first stemmed from the feeling of frustration with the machinations of politicians. Later, sabotage against the public was committed in the form of the destruction of mail in order to coerce the public, in place of gaining sympathy, to side with the suffragists. A *New York Times* article in February of 1913 attributed Mrs. Pankhurst as saying, "short of taking human life, the militant suffragettes intended to do everything possible to settle once and for all the political status of the women of Great Britain."[80]

A particular line in Pankhurst's 1912 Albert Hall speech suggests that the attitude of many members of parliament were similar to that of anti-feminist revolutionaries like Pelloutier. Pankhurst blamed the destruction of property not on the women destroying it but on "the

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[76] S. Michele Nix, *Women at the Podium: Memorable Speeches in History* (New York: Harper Resource, 2000), 178-179.
[77] Nix, 179.
[78] Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *The Transfiguring Sword: The Just War of the Women's Social and Political Union* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 47-48.
[79] Jorgensen-Earp, 48.
[80] "Mrs. Pankhurst Still Defiant," *New York Times*, February 22, 1913.

government who admits the justice of our demands but refuses to concede to them without evidence, so they have told us, afforded to governments of the past, that those who asked for liberty were in earnest in their demands!"[81] The idea that women needed to prove their seriousness or their worthiness to be included in the political and social sphere of men was widespread among men in Europe. Pankhurst and the WSPU sought to prove themselves with the terrorism of the worker's unions who had gained concessions and cooperation from the very government that these groups sought to overturn.

The WSPU's chief example of successful worker's militancy was the Miner's Federation of Great Britain.[82] The MFGB's "use of political persuasion" was the product of an extremely popular Welsh syndicalist pamphlet, *The Miner's Next Step*.[83] Scholars of British syndicalism point to the period between 1910 and 1914 as the hey-day of the ideology in the country.[84] However, as noted above, this idea of employing political pressure as a tool to achieve worker's goals is incompatible with pure syndicalism. Yet, as Mann advocated with his Industrial Syndicalist Education League, the unions could make their organizations in their own image. As the Suffragettes learned, Welsh miners felt that they should "engage in political action . . . on the basis of complete independence of, and hostility to all capitalist parties, with an avowed policy of wresting whatever advantage it can for the working class."[85] It is the inherent flexibility of the lack of formal syndicalist theory that allows this practice and, in both cases, its success.

Contemporary news stories in the United States indicate that though the workers on strike in the Welsh coalfields were men, women participated in the strikes as well. A short dispatch

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[81] Nix, 179.
[82] Jorgensen-Earp, 47.
[83] Stephen Knight, "Anarcho-syndicalism in Welsh Fiction in English," in '*To Hell with Culture:' Anarchism and Twentieth-century British Literature* (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2005), 54.
[84] Mates, "Syndicalist Challenge."
[85] Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miner's Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation* (Tonypandy, 1912).

from London in the *New York Times* on November 9, 1910, notes that, in "the rioting in the South Wales coalfields, where 30,000 miners are on strike because of employment of non-union men. Women were prominent in the attack upon non-unionists."[86] The *New York Times* piece offers no explanation or description of what the women were doing there or who they were. However, Tilly, in examining a similar mining area in France called Pas-de-Calais, has found that though women had no formal occupation in coalmines beyond young girls sorting the coal, "the coal miner's wife was noted among workers' wives in her active role in work-related struggles."[87] Because she could not work, a wife's sole livelihood relied on the work, and thus the good conditions of her husband's position. Thus, "the women were not wage earners; they could not strike, but they expressed their solidarity with striking workers through a demonstration."[88] It is very likely that these Welsh women were acting with the same sense of solidarity with the men in their community.

Female solidarity in a working-class community can manifest itself in a number of ways. A less conventional method, perhaps, is in literature. In 1911, Irene Saunderson published a romantic novel entitled *A Welsh Heroine: A Romance of Colliery Life*. Stephen Knight notes the book was "clearly influenced by the events of 1910-11 and firmly presents the angry dissent of the colliers . . . However, after figuring the miners' resistance of the anarcho-syndicalism-inspired period, the novel's tensions are resolved through colonial romance, as the brave collier girl, both sympathetic to and protective of radical workers, marries the now also sympathetic English army officer."[89] Notwithstanding the conventions of romantic novels, the setting of the book indicates a region permeated by knowledge of syndicalist philosophy and working class

[86] *New York Times*, November 9, 1910.
[87] Tilly, 411.
[88] Tilly, 411.
[89] Knight, 55.

aggression. Even if they had no family who were coal miners, even if they disagreed with the political action and industrial demonstrations of union members, women engaged with syndicalism on a social level.

As noted above in the discussion of Emmeline Pankhurst and the WSPU, radical leaders influenced each other on a social level as well. Both Tom Mann and an earlier union leader, Annie Besant (1847-1933), socialized with the Pankhursts at their house in London.[90] Yet, Mann's memoir indicates that they spoke for the first time at a meeting of the Fabian Society, a socialist group of which Besant was a member. Mann describes the encounter in which he gave "an address on 'The Eight-Hour Working Day" and Mrs. Besant took part in the discussion afterward.[91] Mann also socialized with Besant when he was "sent as a delegate by the Bolton engineers" to an International Conference called by the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress in 1888.[92]

That same year, another activist, Clemintina Black, "gave a speech on Female Labour at a Fabian Society meeting in London."[93] Annie Besant attended the meeting and became outraged during the group discussion at H.H. Campion's description of the women worker's pay and conditions at Bryant and May match factory. She and fellow activist Herbert Burrows investigated the matter and interviewed the workers. On June 23 of that year, Besant published "White Slavery in London" in the *Link*, the journal that she edited for the Law and Liberty League.[94]

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[90] See page 18.
[91] Mann, 54.
[92] Mann, 70.
[93] Alan Kucia, "Administrative/Biographical History," *Bryant & May Matchworkers Strike Register* (London Metropolitan Univeristy, 2002).
[94] Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: an Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), 331-338.

The article describes in detail the pay rate of the girls, while contrasting it to the profits made by the company; the hours the girls are required to work including meals; the fines and punishments given if a girl was late, untidy, talking, or became injured; and the ill-treatment they received from their male supervisors. Besant also depicted an instance of militancy on the part of the female workers when the owner of the factory took money from the women's wages to build a statue of Gladstone on the property and then gave the workers an unpaid holiday to attend the opening. Besant writes

> So furious were the girls at this cruel plundering that many went to the unveiling of the statue with stones and bricks in their pockets, and I was conscious of a wish that some of those bricks had made an impression on Mr. Bryant's – conscience. Later they surrounded the statue – "we paid for it" they cried savagely – shouting and yelling, and a gruesome story is told that some cut their arms and let their blood trickle on the marble paid for, in very truth, by their blood.[95]

Besant wrote a follow up article in *The Link*, publicizing the fact that the workers who had talked to her were being "bullied" and "terrorize[d]" to tell the management of the factory who had spoken to Besant.[96] Once they discovered the informers, the management first punished the women by cutting their wages and then dismissing them. Besant also shared the good news that a Factory Inspector had visited the place and put a stop to the illegal fines system. Several newspaper articles appeared concurrently, describing Besant's article and the situation of the match workers.

Reacting to the bad publicity, Bryant & May "attempt[ed] to force their workers to sign a statement that they were happy with their working conditions."[97] When a group of workers refused to sign, the factory dismissed them. In response, 1400 female match workers went on strike. It is important to note that Besant did not incite them to strike. They already had nearly

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[95] Annie Besant, "White Slavery in London," *The Link: A Journal for the Servants of Man*, June 23, 1888.
[96] Annie Besant, "How Messrs. Bryant and May Fight," *The Link: A Journal for the Servants of Man*, July 7, 1888.
[97] Kucia, *Strike Register*.

done so during the incident at the statue. After the women had left their work, they came to her "to ask what to do next," and she helped them.[98] Mann highlights this role of Besant as an organizer, as does Sweet in his piece on her in the *Continuum Encyclopedia of British Philosophy*. With the managerial help of the more experienced Besant, the match workers won their negotiation with Bryant & May, gaining an end to the fines system and reinstated positions for the unfairly dismissed workers.[99]

The match worker's victory occurred more than ten years before Tom Mann's trip to France to study syndicalism. Besant's involvement in the case happened at least four years before the emergence of a De Leonist faction within the British Marxist Party in 1902.[100] Yet, Mann cites her in his memoirs as a figure for which he had had great respect and had admired before he even met her. They discussed working men and women's issues together, presumably on more than one occasion after their first meeting. It seems likely, then, that her labor politics or her organizational actions influenced Mann when he began to take a more active interest in the philosophy and practice of syndicalism. He was on the path to leadership but still followed her example.

In the conclusion to their monograph on French feminists, Gordon and Cross identify an idea they describe as a "passionate identification with a broad movement of social transformation."[101] The belief that things could change for the better drove these women, and men like them, to change organizations and try new ideologies that may have been drastically different from where they started or only slightly altered. The landscape of radical activism in

[98] Besant, *Autobiography*, 331-338.
[99] Kucia, Strike *Register*.
[100] Mates, "Syndicalist Challenge."
[101] Gordon and Cross, 264.

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exhibits an astonishing interconnectedness—a kind of web of social reform and revolution.

This paper has endeavored to act as a window into one corner of that web, but has taken in ideas and people outside of the narrowly defined view in order to see a clearer picture of the subject. Despite the prevailing male attitude that working women were unwelcome or detrimental to society, syndicalist women were active in syndicalist unions, and an array of women attempted to improve their lives and the lives of future generations by employing syndicalist ideas. In Britain, women like Annie Besant inspired men to strike for their rights, and in turn, those men inspired women like Emmeline Pankhurst. In France, women worked inside and outside of the affiliated CGT *syndicats* toward the very same goals that the men who barred them from participation craved.

Beyond leadership and strikes, women engaged with syndicalism through socialization and participation in their community; even through art. Syndicalism exhibited and seems to foster a spirit of radical movement—movement toward a worker's utopia or a worker's eight-hour day—movement toward equal treatment for women, even if those women want to participate in pointless parliamentary politics. Tactics and enthusiasm similar to those of syndicalism became a way for men and women to achieve goals within a capitalist society that felt too static to move and too powerful to change. Syndicalist theorists could write and define both the ideology and the woman, but in practice, neither would be contained. Syndicalism was not only a hope of reform but also a method to achieving it.

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