

# WOMEN SHOULD LOSE THE VOTE (AND SO SHOULD MEN)



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The bicentenary of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*<sup>1</sup> seems a fitting occasion upon which to remind female and, indeed, male readers of a simple but, nonetheless, oft forgotten truth. That women have as much right to make laws as men is not contested. Here women and men are truly equal: Neither has the Right to make Laws.<sup>2</sup>

The suffragettes' heirs, the modern mainstream feminists, claim State laws are needed to end the oppression still suffered by women: the discrimination against them on the basis of sex. Whether this discrimination be differences in pay, job prospects, legal rights to own property or, most importantly, (male) society's acquiescence to violence committed against their person or property feminists look to State legislation for remedies and justice.<sup>3</sup>

Society can be founded upon one of two, mutually exclusive, axioms: coercion or consent. Coercion creates a hierarchical force relationship between individuals,

typically taking the form of theft, slavery and murder, and is institutionalised in the State. Consent is the basis of free trade or laissez-faire with but one rule, the law of nature, that observes everyone's right to control their own person and property providing they do not interfere with another's equal right to the free exercise and control of their own person and property.

Condemned by politically correct intellectuals for refusing to hire women a male chauvinist employer is, however, penalized for his prejudice by having to offer higher wages to attract additional male workers. Increased costs and reduced competitiveness allow firms with cheaper female workers to undercut him, a process which, over time, raises female wages and reduces male wages.<sup>4</sup>

'Equal pay' legislation produces a very different outcome. Prohibition of this profitable substitution (of cheaper female workers for expensive males) reduces job opportunities, with established workers extracting

## Libertarian Alliance Pamphlet No. 21

ISSN 0953-7783 ISBN 1 85637 142 5

A Joint Libertarian Alliance/British Association of Libertarian Feminists Publication

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The views expressed in this publication are those of its author, and not necessarily those of the Libertarian Alliance, its Committee, Advisory Council or subscribers.

## BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF LIBERTARIAN FEMINISTS

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a wage “rent” above the market rate financed by coercive redistribution from poor to rich. Little wonder trade unions favour minimum wage laws.

Such legislation, or entitlement claims to the property of others, resurrects that situation feminists consider women to suffer, i.e. legitimated coercion reminiscent of slavery, and in doing so appears to have repudiated its earlier tenets. American feminism emerged in the 19th century, radical individualist, anti-slavery movement of William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*.<sup>5</sup> The Grimk sisters, Sarah and Angelina, in lectures and pamphlets demonstrated how State law regarded the rights of women and slaves as equally non-existent.

Few feminists support the re-establishment of legalised slavery yet, couched more in the language of entitlement claims than of the right to self-ownership, this is the consequence of the Pro-Choice lobby’s campaign for a legislative “right to an abortion on demand”.<sup>6</sup> The nature of this claim is revealed by the following scenario: Imagine that all the doctors refused, for one reason or another, to conduct abortions. For there to be a “right to abortion on demand” it would be necessary to coerce some or all the recalcitrant doctors to perform operations, and so establish a force relationship between people reducing those coerced to slaves.

The notion that through democracy such entitlement claims can be derived is false for it matters not whether it is one person or a million who vote to usurp another’s right to self-ownership and to cast them into slavery. Feminists who call for justice and freedom should reflect upon the fact that justice cannot be made by State coercion of individuals but instead must be discovered through the removal of that body of pernicious legislation that abrogates the right to self-ownership for women and men.<sup>7</sup>

As Lysander Spooner remarked, “If the women, instead of petitioning to be admitted to a participation in the power of making more laws, will but give notice to the present lawmakers that they (the women) are going up to the State House, and are going to throw all of the existing statute books in the fire, they will do a very sensible thing — one of the most sensible things it is in their power to do. And they will have a crowd of men — at least all the sensible and honest men in the country to go with them.”<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

In this article I have sought to present some of the ideas, and the general ‘feel’ or tenor of arguments, characterising the individualist feminist tradition by using it as a perspective or foil with which to examine some of the more prevalent claims of modern, socialistic feminism. Though the text stands on its own and does not require much in the way of references, I have chosen to incorporate an annotated bibliographic guide to further readings, for those interested, which locates particular arguments made in the text to specific source materials in the form of several extensive footnotes.

1. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political And Moral Subjects* [1792], Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1992.
2. The sentiments expressed in the course of the article are in close accord to those of the leading Nineteenth Century libertarian theorist, Lysander Spooner, in his essay “A Right to Make Laws?” published in *Liberty* and J. M. L. Babcock’s *The New Age* and which is republished in Wendy McElroy’s excellent anthology *Freedom, Feminism, and the State: An Overview of Individualist Feminism*, Cato Institute, Washington, D.C., 1982 [1st edition]. McElroy’s book is perhaps the definitive collection of writings in this area.
3. McElroy offers a particularly scathing critique of the shortcomings of the socialistic feminists’ grounding of oppression in the market process in her article “You’ve slid a long way, baby!” published in the *No Statesman* Vol. 1, No. 1, (1990). Rather than being the consequence of market activity, oppression is shown by McElroy to originate with State violence and interference with the market. For the market process penalizes, over time, voluntary discrimination against individuals so bringing into existence, in Ludwig von Mises’s words, a harmony of individual’s rightly understood interests. Thus, advantages and privileges can only be maintained in the face of this process by the use of violence either on an individual basis or institutionalised in the form of the State. See also the classic distinction between the State and Market drawn out by Franz Oppenheimer in *The State*, Vanguard Press, New York, 1926.
4. This argument is drawn out in greater length by Walter Block, who demonstrates why “The Male Chauvinist Pig” should be regarded as a modern hero, and can be found in his remarkable and profoundly subtle exposition of toleration: *Defending the Undefendable: The Pimp, Prostitute, Scab, Slumlord, Libeler, Moneylender, and Other Scapegoats in the Rogue’s Gallery of American Society*, Fleet Press Corporation, New York, 1976.
5. For historical sketches of the emergence of individualist feminist thought see Wendy McElroy’s “The True Mothers of Feminism” published in *Reason*, July 1983, pp. 39-42, and her longer treatment of the subject, “The Roots of Individualist Feminism in 19th Century America” pp. 3-26, which forms the introductory chapter of *Freedom, Feminism and the State*. Dr. Stephen Davies has written a similar excellent history of *Libertarian Feminism in Britain, 1860-1910*, LA Pamphlet No. 7, Libertarian Alliance, London, 1987. This last paper serves to demolish the current socialistic feminists’ myths surrounding the origins of the feminist movement in Britain.
6. McElroy’s presentation, “What Does it Mean To Be An Individual? (Self-Ownership Is Key To Abortion Issue)”, in her debate with Doris Gordon of Libertarians for Life, an anti-abortion organisation, in *Rampart Individualist* Vol. 1, No. 4, fall, 1983, pp. 3-9, should be consulted for an argument for a right to an abortion explicitly framed from the standpoint of self-ownership.
7. This view of the State, law and justice is very much that of the Voluntaryists, of whom Wendy McElroy is closely identified with. A useful collection of Voluntaryist writings has been published as *Neither Bullets nor Ballots: Essays on Voluntaryism*, The Voluntaryists, Baltimore, Maryland, 1983, which brings together essays by McElroy, George H. Smith and Carl Watner. The Voluntaryists seek to “delegitimize the State through education” and “advocate withdrawal of the cooperation and tacit consent on which State power ultimately rests”. However, it should be noted that this not a recent strategic innovation amongst libertarians and, as the modern Voluntaryist writers point out, extends back at least as far as Etienne de la Boetie and his classic work *The Will to Bondage* [trans. A Discourse on Voluntary Servitude], 1577, [1735], *Libertarian Broadides* No. 6, Ralph Myles Publisher, Colorado Springs, 1974. Lysander Spooner also can be considered part of this tradition; his *No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority* and *Natural Law: The Science of Justice* have recently been made available in an excellent collection edited by George H. Smith, *The Lysander Spooner Reader*, Fox & Wilkes, San Francisco, 1992.
8. Lysander Spooner, “A Right to Make Laws?”, p. 330.