

6. EXCAVATING RADICAL WOMEN IN PROGRESSIVE-ERA CALIFORNIA

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In 1948, at age seventy-five, Frances Nacke Noel reflected on her long career as a social activist. Noel expressed frustration at losing the energy to pursue the social justice causes she had championed for most of her adult life. "There is so much to be done and it makes one restless to be no longer young and strong to go in line with leadership. However I have already, in a quiet way done a few things which may bear bigger fruit than one expects. . . . So I am keeping at it to the best of my strength and ability."¹ Although she worked in the latter part of her life (she died in 1963 at age ninety) in environmental conservation and public safety, Noel's primary, and most passionate, commitment was to the empowerment and emancipation of women, especially working-class women.

Noel had come to the United States from Germany in 1893 as a young "adventure loving woman" with training in an early period of the kindergarten movement. After developing dual commitments to feminism and socialism in the mid-1890s, Noel settled in California in the early twentieth century. There she joined an active network of radical women similarly dedicated to advancing "underminingly ameliorative" reforms designed to empower women and the working class and to create a genuinely redistributive state that would prefigure socialism. These women spanned several generations, and while most came from relatively privileged, native-born, and Protestant backgrounds, they shared deep and life-changing identifications with the laboring classes, especially with wage-earning women.²

At the heart of their vision of a "Cooperative Commonwealth" was women's freedom, and essential to that freedom was women's economic independence, to be achieved through a combination of wage earning, full political participa-

tion, state remuneration for child rearing, and access to birth control. Both their commitment to women's economic independence and its centrality in their multilateral program for women's emancipation were unusual among women reformers at the time. Yet from 1890 to 1920, Noel and her colleagues actively championed these goals—through campaigns for woman suffrage, female unionization, protective labor legislation, mothers' pensions, legal contraception, and the gender integration of political parties and the state. Adept at coalition building, and especially at facilitating class-bridging alliances among women, they established a distinct, independent, and effective socialist-feminist presence in the socialist and women's movements and in broader progressive coalitions.³

Reconstructing the political and personal lives of California's socialist-feminists is not an easy task. While Noel (and her son) left behind two small manuscript collections and a brief oral history interview, most of her socialist-feminist colleagues did not deposit their organizational records or personal papers in archives. But Noel's collections and historian Mari Jo Buhle's pioneering study, *Women and American Socialism*, did provide windows into the world of socialist-feminist activism.⁴ From these important threads, I was able to construct a research methodology appropriate for tracing the paths of radical women whose distinctive political ideas and reform proposals ultimately rested in the margins of both politics and scholarship.

I developed what I am calling a method of "researching around our subjects," in order to reconstruct and interpret their lives.⁵ This process involved mining the small number of manuscript collections and oral histories of my subjects, and then working outward in concentric circles of related sources—from socialist movement newspapers and manuscript collections; to the varied materials of the specific feminist, labor, and social reform campaigns and organizations in which socialist-feminist activists played key roles; to the collections of individuals and organizations they collaborated with in the mainstream women's movement and in progressive reform coalitions; to government documents in which they made appearances; and to reportage in the local, state, and national press. Integrating these layers of materials enabled me to construct the political trajectory and impact of socialist-feminists, but it is still a very partial portrait, full of silences and unanswered questions. In particular, my ability to probe their personal lives and the relational aspects of their political careers is limited by a source base heavy in newspaper reportage and scattered organizational remains, with little complementary biographical material. In this essay, I will discuss the ways I utilized different kinds of materials in piecing together the whole fabric of early-twentieth-century socialist-feminism in California. I will also consider some significant limitations of the sources in this field.

My "researching around" methodology is not unique. In fact, this method may be widely practiced by women's historians, especially those working to excavate "marginalized" or little-known women who left few of their own records (for example, many ethnic-racial and working-class activists). Yet there appear to be only a handful of explicit discussions of this type of research strategy in the women's history literature. Historian Nell Irvin Painter's description of her work on Sojourner Truth certainly suggests a "researching around" methodology. Painter lacked archival collections on her subject, and further, she faced an "extreme version of the usual lack of sources" because of Truth's illiteracy. "Understanding her activities and thoughts in the decades in which Truth flourished meant combing through antislavery newspapers and the personal papers of her colleagues and friends . . . and several obscure autobiographies." Painter argued, however, that her task was not "quantitatively different" from that of other women's historians, as many "achieving" women lacked their own archives because their papers were destroyed or lost or because no one considered them "important enough to warrant an archive."⁶ I am naming this essential research strategy, detailing important sources for recovering radical women, and advocating this practice for the reconstruction of marginalized political voices.

Excavating left-wing women is vital to our understanding of women's political diversity. Without such research, the radicalism that has often been foundational to feminism remains invisible. As historian Ellen DuBois argues, socialist-feminism, as a distinctive political tendency, can be traced back at least to the mid-nineteenth century and "has consistently been a radicalizing force in the larger history of feminism" within the United States and internationally.⁷ Yet radicalism, including socialist-feminism, has often been, as historian Linda Gordon writes, "lost, erased, or distorted" in U.S. history writing, as left-wing proposals are viewed merely as "defeated alternatives" with "little political possibility" of enactment (dismissed in part, I would add, because of assumptions about the potency of anticommunism in American politics).⁸ Although socialist women rarely achieved all that they envisioned, their contributions to the women's movement and social reform were certainly central to contemporary struggles and are relevant to feminists in our own time.

In *Dual Commitments: Socialist-Feminism in Progressive Era California*, a book-length manuscript-in-progress, I argue that socialist-feminists played unique and critical roles in some of the key transformations of turn-of-the-century America—the rewriting of the social contract to account for industrialization, the expansion of the social welfare functions of the state, and the transformation of gendered political behavior. The impact of California socialist women on social reform and the expansion of an activist state are

major themes of the book. As a rich historical literature now demonstrates, social policy making operated on two gendered tracks during the Progressive Era, with women reformers playing an instrumental role in conceptualizing and constructing the early welfare state. What has never been shown is the influence of socialist-feminist politics, in particular, on proposed reforms, reform coalitions, and state policies. I argue that the remarkable activism of socialist-feminists helps explain why California was one of the most prominent sites of nuanced debate and early enactment of gender-specific social welfare legislation in the Progressive Era, including protective labor legislation for women and mothers' pensions.⁹

Another central theme of my research, undocumented in the historiography up to now, involves the efforts of California socialist-feminists to shape the gendered integration of partisan politics, a relatively new development at the time. The impact of women on political parties and partisan alignments represents an important aspect of recent research in U.S. women's history. Operating as an independent political tendency within the Socialist Party, radical women attempted to "redefine the political" as they worked to merge the traditions of white middle-class women's political culture with those of male partisan politics. Socialist-feminists championed the full integration of women in electoral politics, the incorporation of gender-specific concerns in the agendas of parties and the state, coalition building in social policy making, and an independent style of partisanship, one that made loyalty to party contingent on support for women and their political priorities.¹⁰

My search for California's socialist-feminists began with my discovery of a taped interview with Frances Noel recorded in 1952 by labor historian Irving Bernstein in the Special Collections Department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), along with eleven small boxes of manuscript materials deposited around the time of Noel's death a decade later. I also stumbled upon another collection of Noel materials held privately by historian Knox Mellon. These materials were critical in shaping my interest in studying California's socialist-feminist network and in suggesting a research path.¹¹

I do not know how Bernstein came to interview Noel, but he was clearly interested in her role in the Los Angeles labor movement in the early twentieth century (and she was, indeed, one of the most prominent and outspoken women in organized labor at that time). It was amazing to hear her voice—strong, with a distinctive German accent—as she engaged in a tug-of-war on tape with her interviewer. Bernstein wanted her to stick to the history of labor and socialism in Los Angeles (and her participation in those movements), while Noel kept fighting time and again to come back to the topics of women and feminism. Her socialist-feminist ideals, and their importance in her political activism, came through clearly. Noel was most proud, she

remembered, of her efforts on behalf of working women and for the creation of cross-class alliances among women in the service of social reform. She spoke of campaigns for woman suffrage, birth control, and social welfare, and of efforts to integrate women into the labor movement and Socialist Party. I was taken with her passion, tenacity, and continuing commitment to gender and class issues.¹²

Noel's UCLA manuscript collection reinforced what I learned from her taped interview. The collection put her interest in wage-earning women at the center, and it was organized around Noel's involvements in the women's, labor, socialist, and progressive movements. The collection's letters, writings, and organizational materials also made it clear that Noel was part of a lively and active network of like-minded socialist-feminists and helped me to identify their main Progressive Era campaigns. These materials also suggested the promises and difficulties of their efforts to work within the male-dominated Socialist Party and labor movement, and their complex relationships to the mainstream women's movement. I am not sure I was quite conscious at the time of how important all of these building blocks would be to my broader research, but in retrospect, this collection clearly grounded much of my subsequent work. While the collection helped direct my research, it also proved frustrating. The eleven small boxes offered incomplete organizational records, although they did provide some newspaper clippings and drafts of flyers and speeches. And the correspondence was relatively sparse, providing very few clues about her personal or family life.¹³

Mellon's collection of Noel materials consisted of several large boxes. I came upon this collection, as researchers sometimes do, by accident. Mellon had worked in the 1970s with urban and architectural historian Dolores Hayden on historic preservation. Hayden, one of my mentors at UCLA, believing that Mellon might have conducted some research on Noel, decided to introduce us. Mellon had interviewed Noel's son, Francis, for a research project on socialist Job Harriman, and Francis Noel had given Mellon his mother's remaining papers. Some of these were duplicates of materials in the UCLA collection, but I also found new correspondence, newspaper clippings, and a photo album. The new materials tended to be more personal—a number of letters and the photo album allowed me a few glimpses into Noel's family life and some of the friendships and activities that sustained her. The photo album, for example, suggested the centrality of the wilderness to Noel's life and spirit, as it documented numerous hiking trips with her husband, son, extended family, and close friends.¹⁴

What these small and fragmented collections imparted to me as a researcher was the necessity of examining every possible type of extant material that might shed light on how Noel and her colleagues operated politically and

influenced social reform. At this early stage in my research, I had identified a substantial number of Progressive Era socialist newspapers and journals (many originating in California and focusing on the state's radicals), and I began my broader search there. My dissertation advisors believed that I should read these selectively, choosing time periods relevant to specific campaigns for the vote, female unionization, social welfare legislation, and birth control. The Noel collections, Buhle's book, and previous scholarship on California radicalism certainly provided key issues and dates.¹⁵ But I sensed that a more thorough search was needed. And so I embarked on an extended journey into these weekly newspapers and monthly magazines, including the *Los Angeles Socialist/Common Sense*, *People's Paper*, *Socialist Voice*, *World*, *California Social-Democrat*, *Wilshire's Magazine*, *Western Comrade*, and *Socialist Woman/Progressive Woman*. These sources proved to be a gold mine for my research. Most of the publications made considerable space available to socialist-feminists. The *Los Angeles Socialist* even published a women's column for about half of its eight-year run. During at least two of those years (1902-4), socialist-feminists clearly controlled the column, with Mary Garbutt serving as editor.¹⁶ Interestingly, earlier treatments of California radicalism that had also utilized these sources but were written prior to interest in women's history largely ignored women's participation and gave no hints of this substantial socialist-feminist presence.¹⁷

In these publications, the voices of many of the leaders of California's socialist-feminist network could be heard. What was particularly exciting was their engagement in an extended conversation about the core issues of socialist-feminist theory and practice. In fact, the newspaper reportage and correspondence had the feel of letter writing. Their dialogues proved especially important, since I lacked extensive collections of letters or complete organizational records. The newspapers and journals provided access to socialist-feminist discussions and musings that could not be found anywhere else. Clearly, socialist-feminists used these publications to share their experiences in different parts of the state and to knit together local groups of radical women into a statewide network of socialist women's clubs (which went through several formal organizational incarnations). Through the radical press, they conceptualized a socialist-feminist vision for women's emancipation and debated strategies for advancing this vision.¹⁸

Through these exchanges, I saw the construction of what I call a "dual political strategy" of separatism and integration that socialist-feminists used to create a distinctive presence, and exert substantial influence, within the Socialist Party, the women's movement, and the larger sphere of social reform. Josephine Cole, a prominent and sophisticated leader, complained that

"man Socialists seem to consider the political movement a man's movement, one in which women need not be considered except as passive beneficiaries, or at most, obedient helpers."¹⁹ As they sought a place in the socialist movement, Cole and her colleagues demanded both gender equality and respect for women's socially constructed differences. To foster their participation in the party as equals, they built autonomous women's organizations (under the umbrella of the Woman Socialist Union [WSU] of California) in which they could develop their individual and collective political skills and voices. Organizational independence, they believed, would also provide the strategic leverage necessary for socialist-feminists to incorporate women's distinctive political issues and styles into the party, with the ultimate aim of creating a truly gender-integrated socialist movement.²⁰ In fact, Cole proposed that the very articles I was reading in the socialist press had been published because socialist-feminists "succeeded in getting an allowance of space in our Socialist papers" for women's issues and activities due to the fact they had their own organization.²¹

The incorporation of these independent-minded women into the party was not smooth, and the socialist press also provided important windows into conflicts over women's presence in the party. These conflicts arose most clearly when socialist-feminists sought to integrate feminist political issues such as woman suffrage or gender-specific organizing strategies intended to reach women and children. In 1907 the Los Angeles WSU organized a meeting on woman suffrage for the party local. This meeting generated weeks of heated exchanges in the socialist press, as Mary Garbutt and her female colleagues felt that they had been "sat down upon vigorously" for raising this issue. "To ridicule the women who are working for their enfranchisement shows a want of sincerity at least, if not direct antagonism to woman's emancipation. How can we look for fidelity to the principles of woman's economic and political freedom under Socialism, when any effort to secure them in part now is hooted at."²² In response to the charge that "woman suffrage [was] merely incidental" to the socialist program, socialist-feminists argued that working for the vote was indeed a key issue of emancipation and should be a political priority for the party.²³ After California women won the right to vote in 1911, socialist-feminists would more fully develop a new concept of partisanship. Their independent style of politics would link loyalty to party with organizational commitments to feminist principles and goals.²⁴

Exchanges in the socialist press also helped socialist-feminists construct a "dual strategy" with respect to their involvement in the mainstream women's movement. Many state leaders articulated the need for a distinctive socialist-feminist presence in the women's movement, developed through

a combination of organizational autonomy, integration, and efforts to build cross-class alliances. Cole proposed a “program for those of us who are vitally interested in the woman question. Let us bring together the various organizations of women into one strong woman’s movement. Who so well trained to do this as the Socialist woman, standing upon a platform broad enough to embrace the thought of the suffragist, the trade-unionist, and the temperance worker.”²⁵ Ethel Whitehead argued that socialist women could develop a “voice” and “a good strong delegation” within women’s groups only with their own “Socialist Woman’s organization.”²⁶ Georgia Kotsch added that socialist-feminists could not “fall in unreservedly and contentedly with this general woman movement,” for they had a “special mission” to perform in raising consciousness about “material conditions,” working-class women, and the central relationship of economic independence to women’s rights.²⁷ Socialist-feminists’ major involvement in the women’s movement prior to 1912 focused on the struggle for woman suffrage; in the second decade of the twentieth century, they turned to social welfare policymaking in campaigns for mothers’ pensions and protective labor legislation, and to the legalization of birth control.

My research on socialist-feminist involvement in the suffrage movement began with the Noel collections and the socialist newspapers, but I eventually relied heavily on suffrage movement materials and mainstream press coverage. The suffrage materials did not, unfortunately, constitute a complete organizational record and were scattered across the state. These materials included various movement publications (especially suffrage newspapers covering western activism), scrapbooks compiled by mainstream suffrage activists, and manuscript collections in California repositories—most consisting of the personal papers of suffrage activists (several of them socialist-feminist, but most mainstream) and a few featuring suffrage movement materials exclusively. I remember being astounded, when I first read the *Yellow Ribbon*, the official organ of the California Equal Suffrage Association (CESA) from 1906 to 1908, to see many socialist-feminists featured prominently as California suffrage leaders.²⁸ I was able to piece together from all of the diverse sources that at least thirty-six socialist-feminists led local suffrage organizations between 1902 and 1911 and that they maintained a continuous presence on the CESA’s executive committee during this period. In fact, socialist-feminists created an influential constituency within the broader suffrage coalition. They helped expand the movement’s base among the working class, devised new arguments linking economic and political emancipation, and introduced modern methods of “militant” agitation, including open-air meetings and street speaking. Their grass-roots activism in working-class communities

proved critical to the success of California’s 1911 suffrage amendment, a victory that ignited expectations nationwide.²⁹

One particularly important figure in the California suffrage movement, and in the preservation of suffrage materials, was socialist-feminist Alice Locke Park, who served as the head of the CESA’s literature committee from 1906 to 1911. From this position, Park produced leaflets directed at working-class and wage-earning women and highlighted socialist-feminist contributions to the state’s suffrage movement via articles in the suffrage press.³⁰ Park’s “collecting zeal,” and her belief in the importance of history, also led her to carefully compile suffrage materials in order to preserve the historical record of the state’s suffrage coalition. In 1918, Park complained to a colleague that she was one of the few activists to save suffrage materials, and the only one to do so somewhat systematically. “I kept more than most suffragists not only because of my appreciation of literature, but because we had no headquarters at all until toward the end. . . . I knew my stuff would be wanted some day—I even thought I might some day write the California chapter in the final suffrage story.” Park continued to collect suffrage materials from all over the world for almost three decades after the national suffrage amendment was ratified in 1920.³¹

Although other California suffragists did save critically important materials that eventually made their way into the archives, Park was responsible for creating key collections and depositing them in a number of libraries across the state. In fact, Ellen DuBois suggests that Park helped pioneer the archiving of women’s history materials when she gave some of her personal papers to the Huntington Library in San Marino in the 1930s. In 1941, Park (with the assistance of Una Winter) donated a broad collection of suffrage materials named for Susan B. Anthony (featuring many items from the California campaign) to the Los Angeles Public Library; this collection later joined Park’s papers at the Huntington Library. Several other collections of Park’s materials, relevant to many aspects of socialist-feminism (and other social movements), are now housed at Stanford University, the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, and the California State Library in Sacramento.³²

After winning the right to vote in 1911, socialist-feminists focused on achieving other aspects of their multilateral program for women’s emancipation, through activism geared toward legislation and policymaking. In hopes of achieving greater economic independence for women and laying the groundwork for socialism, they played key roles in campaigns for protective labor legislation, state provision of mothers’ pensions, and the legalization of birth control. The California women’s movement as a whole also embraced legislative activism after 1911, and socialist-feminists often worked for social

welfare reform as members of women's clubs and organizations (grounded, as always, in their own networks).³³

As I researched the socialist-feminist contributions to social welfare policymaking, I explored many new layers of primary materials. In examining the campaign for mothers' pensions, progressive reform and mainstream women's movement publications and manuscript collections came to the fore, including *The California Outlook* and *The Woman's Bulletin*. For protective labor legislation, I consulted labor movement records and publications, as well, especially the California State Federation of Labor *Proceedings* and labor council publications from San Francisco (*Labor Clarion*) and Los Angeles (*The Citizen*). For both of these topics, state government documents and contemporary compilations of the work of the California legislature proved useful.³⁴

These diverse documents made clear how involved socialist-feminists were in mainstream women's organizations and their social welfare campaigns, especially after 1911 and in Southern California. It is impossible from extant records to trace the precise anatomy of the popular campaign for mothers' pensions in 1912 and 1913, but it is evident that radical women helped to draft a number of the twenty proposed bills on the subject. Caroline Foster, a socialist-feminist prominent in the Friday Morning Club of Los Angeles (one of the most influential women's clubs in the state), chaired its mothers' pension subcommittee, worked on several pension proposals, and may have been involved in negotiating the final bill. The unique contribution of socialist-feminists to the campaign, and to our broader understanding of the mothers' pension movement in the United States, was in engendering a vigorous debate about the meaning of mothers' pensions as a social welfare policy. I discovered and reconstructed this thoroughgoing debate not through organizational records, for only a few fragments exist; rather, I examined key progressive and women's movement journals, the socialist press, and coverage in a number of daily urban papers.³⁵

Mainstream clubwomen argued for minimalist programs designed to support the children of impoverished "worthy" widows and to protect society from their possible "delinquency" and "immorality." Socialist-feminists, by contrast, proposed broad and well-funded mothers' pensions for all impoverished self-supporting women with small children, challenging distinctions between the worthy and unworthy poor and framing such support as a right of the indigent and a responsibility of the state. A number of them went even further in arguing for mothers' pensions as a means to compensate women for their socially important childrearing services and a mechanism for furthering women's economic independence. Socialist-feminist arguments reverberated

in the controversy in the spring of 1913 over the competing bills drafted by women's groups, juvenile court judges, and state agencies. Mainstream reformers worried that the radicalism of some bills might lead to guaranteed government support for the poor or to the funding of "all mothers, regardless of circumstances." Although the bill enacted by the legislature (one of the first in the nation) was probably the most limited of all the proposals, the nuanced discussion of this new social policy in California, in which socialist-feminists articulated the most radical approaches, may have implications for our understanding of the mothers' aid movement nationwide.³⁶

As we have seen, the method of "researching around my subjects" enabled me to analyze socialist-feminists' activism, and explain their larger political significance, by weaving together layers of diverse primary sources. But because my sources tended to be incomplete, fragmented, and without corroborating personal detail, I have had to choose how to work with the list-like quality of the materials. I decided to privilege those episodes for which I could combine sources in such a way as to explore, in some depth, the beliefs, activities, and contributions of radical women. But I am troubled by my inability to develop other aspects of their work for which there is simply not enough data for an "imaginative reconstruction."³⁷

Understanding the complexities of my subjects' lives presented even greater challenges. Simply constructing a demographic portrait of the leadership cadre was problematic because of the absence of strong biographical materials. While the life stories of Frances Noel, Alice Park, and several other socialist-feminists could be gleaned from their manuscript collections, the life courses of other leaders proved elusive. For about forty leaders, I located some information about age, nativity, family background, employment history, adult family structure, and their paths to socialist-feminism. Many types of sources were used in this process, and once again newspapers played a central role, especially the socialist press. The *Socialist Woman/Progressive Woman* ran a series of biographical sketches on socialist-feminist leaders, and several of my subjects were the focus of those pieces, Mary Garbutt and Ethel Whitehead among them. Articles about socialist-feminists running for political office frequently highlighted their backgrounds. Obituaries written by longtime comrades proved helpful. And numerous articles and letters to the editor by socialist-feminists contained bits and pieces of demographic data (regarding themselves and their co-workers). I also used manuscript census materials (when I knew the head of household), death certificates, and city directories. Occasional letters found in the manuscript collections of others sometimes contained demographic details. Several radical women authored books, and these sometimes provided personal information. A few

of the more elite or socially prominent women (or their spouses) appeared in contemporary biographical dictionaries.³⁸

The most surprising sources of biographical information were short written portraits produced by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s as part of its Federal Writers Project. I found these in the Los Angeles Public Library, where they enjoyed broad public access after WPA writers completed them as part of a "City Officials" local history project. Some of the writers documented their subjects' lives and public careers through research in local newspapers and municipal records. Remarkably, Estelle Lawton Lindsey, elected as a radical, labor, and women's club candidate to the Los Angeles City Council in 1915 (and the first city councilwoman to serve in any major city in the United States), was interviewed for her 1936 sketch. These WPA-funded local research projects, conducted in many cities during the 1930s, may offer valuable biographical material for other historians of activist women.³⁹

One of the most frustrating aspects of working with my sources has been the absence of personal material for most of my subjects—letters, diaries, oral histories, and other sources that provide windows into the feelings and personal details of their lives. The paucity of collections of intimate and self-conscious materials means that my understanding of their personal struggles and choices, and even of their political relationships, remains limited. In particular, I have been hindered in adequately developing the dynamic connections between their personal lives and their political activism (between the private and public). How did the married women and mothers in this group (who constituted the majority of these activists) blend activism, paid work, and household responsibilities? How did their efforts to combine these aspects of their lives, these dilemmas of modern womanhood, shape their focus on women's economic independence and the political priorities that flowed from that issue? What sustained them in their political activism—family, friends, comrades, other sources of support? How did they cope with "a degree of ostracism" or "otherness" they must have felt in working within larger movements and coalitions in which their political views did not predominate? How did they feel about their political careers and choices over time?⁴⁰

I am indebted to historian (and mentor) Regina Morantz-Sanchez for helping me name this problem—what she termed a "disembodied" quality in the research materials.⁴¹ And I have begun to wonder recently if it would be possible to uncover more of the personal in the manuscript collections at my disposal. I was more focused on political questions when I did my original research; perhaps I neglected some of the more personal materials and the possible linkages between private and public. To begin this process, I went

back to Knox Mellon's collection of Noel materials. There I rediscovered a letter from Noel to her close friend Ethel Duppy Turner dated October 19, 1911. Noel described in some detail her activism in the last months of the woman suffrage campaign, when she was out speaking or at planning meetings most evenings and traveling to many parts of Southern California in the final push for the vote. She made it clear that her feverish activism was made possible because of support from her husband, son, and friends. Noel wrote that she "adore[d]" her husband, P. D. (also a socialist and labor activist), for his assistance and patience with her political work. She called her son, Francis (about seven at the time), a "dear sensible kid" who "went to all and everybody, and made himself at home." He "traveled alone in street cars from one end of the city to the other to meet me or P. D. or to meet with folks where he could spend the afternoon." He also went on a three-day camping trip with family friends. Here we catch a glimpse of the ways radical women constructed complex support systems in order to sustain their demanding public careers.⁴²

This letter also provided a rare extant discussion of Noel's feelings about her political activism—in this case working with women of different classes and political orientations. While socialist-feminists certainly believed they had a special role to play in bridging the class divide and helping women from different walks of life work together for common goals, it has been difficult to find references to what such activism meant to them personally. Noel wrote enthusiastically that she took "genuine pleasure" as she observed women from different classes come "so closely in contact." The campaign, she believed, had done more to "kill snobbishness than we can dream of."⁴³

Another letter in the Mellon Collection revealed the experience of illness and recovery, in which Noel's love of the outdoors, her humor and imagination, and her underlying passion for feminism helped sustain her spirits. Noel wrote to her sister-in-law in 1913 about recent surgery for breast cancer, an event she reported confiding to only two local friends. Noel confessed that she had been anxious, not "just for myself to be butchered and disfigured," but also about the possibilities of long-term disability. However, she had "a jolly group of nurses" at the hospital, and they all had "such fun together" that she missed their humor when she came home. Once home, she experienced many "crying spells" because she "felt so blue," but it helped to pull herself "out by the boot straps as the saying goes" and concoct "a lot of foolish plans for this and that just to forget" herself. Her recovery sped up once she could take her "blessed walking exercises," which "revived" her spirits completely. Noel could not resist playing on feminist themes as she joked about her illness. "Well it's done now, and all I can hope for is that the dear god, who so

generously damned all women when he chased Eve out of paradise, will call it square with me and not keep adding insults to injury."⁴⁴

These personal materials, coupled with the rarity of such sources in the archives, suggest how socialist-feminists understood the relationship between the personal and the political. Noel's admission that she told few friends about her breast cancer seems to represent a suppression of the private, and especially the painful, aspects of their lives. Perhaps part of their ethic at the time, then, was to save more political than personal materials. Or perhaps they (or their heirs) acted to keep the private out of the public record of their political careers. Conversely, Noel's discussion of how family and friends supported her activism does provide a window into the ways socialist-feminists combined the political and the personal in their daily lives.

The method of "researching around our subjects" has proved a painstaking but rewarding strategy for reconstructing the public careers of socialist-feminists and shedding light on their important contributions to Progressive Era social reform, including the construction of the early welfare state and the gendered integration of partisan politics. Yet the limitations of these rich but incomplete and fragmented sources shape the story I wish to tell, providing only a partial view of their political commitments and relationships, their social backgrounds, and their personal lives. Further excavation of personal correspondence, photographs, and other private materials may help me construct a more integrated understanding of the personal and the political in the lives of these radical women. This seems particularly appropriate, as their own multilateral program for women's emancipation, with women's economic independence at the center, demanded the rethinking and restructuring of women's relationship to both public life and private matters.

NOTES

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1. Frances N[ack]e Noel to Ed Heim, October 5, 1948, box 11, folder 18, Frances Noel Papers (Collection 814), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, hereafter Noel Papers.

2. For Noel's characterization of herself, see Frances Noel's handwritten obituary for P. D. Noel, [1943], Knox Mellon Collection, a collection of Frances Nacke Noel materials held privately by historian Knox Mellon, hereafter Mellon Coll. The phrase "underminingly ameliorative" comes from Sara [Bard Field] to [Charles Erskine Scott Wood], April 8, 1913, box 270, Charles Erskine Scott Wood Collection, Huntington Library, San

Marino, Calif., hereafter Wood Coll. For Noel's life course and the demographic portrait of California socialist-feminists, see Sherry Katz, "Frances Nacke Noel and 'Sister Movements': Socialism, Feminism, and Trade Unionism in Los Angeles, 1901-1916," *California History* 67, no. 3 (1988): 181-89; Sherry Katz, "Socialist Women and Progressive Reform," in William Deverell and Tom Sitton, eds., *California Progressivism Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 118-19.

3. Sherry Jeanne Katz, "Dual Commitments: Feminism, Socialism, and Women's Political Activism in California, 1890-1920" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991); Sherry J. Katz, "Redefining 'the Political': Socialist Women and Party Politics in California, 1900-1920," in Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth I. Perry, eds., *We Have Come to Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 23-32.

I am grateful to historians Joanne Goodwin and Glenna Matthews for suggesting (in various informal conversations) that the centrality of socialist women's commitment to women's economic independence set them apart from other women reformers of the Progressive Era. For more on radical women's fierce commitment to women's economic independence, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 13-50; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), especially chapters 1, 2 and 5; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South," in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 166-98, especially 179-85.

4. Frances Noel, "Recollections," interview conducted by Irving Bernstein, November 4, 1952, Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection (Coll. 100), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, hereafter Noel Interview; Noel Papers; Mellon Coll.; Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*. Although socialist women did not use the term "socialist-feminists" to describe themselves, I believe, along with Ellen DuBois, that this phrase captures their unique political commitments. And, like DuBois, I am hyphenating this term to suggest that their political outlook resided "precisely at the point of the hyphen that separates and connects 'socialism' and 'feminism.'" See Ellen Carol DuBois, "Woman Suffrage and the Left: An International Socialist-Feminist Perspective," *New Left Review* 186 (1991), adapted in Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 253.

5. I am indebted to my colleague Julyana Peard for this phrase.

6. Nell Irvin Painter, "Writing Biographies of Women," *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 160. Also see Elisabeth Israels Perry, "Critical Journey: From Belle Moskowitz to Women's History," in Sara Alpern et al., eds., *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 83-88, and articles assessing the research possibilities of newly opened archives on U.S. feminists at Smith College in *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 2 (2002).

7. DuBois, "Woman Suffrage and the Left," 253.

8. Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 3. Historians of socialist women have also noted a tendency to marginalize women in the historiography of the Left. See Buhle,

- Women and Socialism*, xiv, and June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s-1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 11, 16-17.
9. Katz, "Socialist Women." For the concept of gendered tracks, see William H. Chafe, "Women's History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal," in Hewitt and Lebsack, eds., *Visible Women*, 101-18.
10. Katz, "Redefining the Political." For the recent focus in U.S. women's history on women and gender in partisan politics, see Nancy Cott et al., "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," especially comments by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Ellen DuBois, *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003), 147-54.
11. Noel Interview; Noel Papers; Mellon Coll.
12. Noel Interview.
13. Noel Papers, including the collection's finding aid.
14. Information on the origins of Mellon's collection of Noel materials came from discussions we had in 1983; see photo album and other materials in Mellon Coll.
15. Noel Papers; Mellon Coll.; Buhle, *Women and Socialism*; Ralph Edward Shaffer, "A History of the Socialist Party of California" (MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1955); Ralph Edward Shaffer, "Radicalism in California, 1869-1929" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1962).
16. I read the most complete extant runs available for the *Los Angeles Socialist/Common Sense* (Los Angeles), November 2, 1901-August 7, 1909; *People's Paper* (Santa Barbara and Los Angeles), December 6, 1902-July 8, 1911; *Socialist Voice* (Oakland), August 6, 1904-June 1, 1907; *World* (Oakland), May 22, 1907-April 13, 1917; *California Social-Democrat* (Los Angeles), July 15, 1911-July 29, 1916; *Wilshire's Magazine* (Los Angeles), January 9, 1900-February 1915; *Western Comrade* (Los Angeles), April 1913-June 1918; and *Socialist Woman/Progressive Woman/Coming Nation* (Chicago and Girard, Kans.), June 1907-July 1914. I also mined many other socialist periodicals, including *Appeal to Reason*, *American Socialist*, *Chicago Daily Socialist*, *International Socialist Review*, *Party Builder*, and *Socialist Party Monthly Bulletin*. Hannam and Hunt discuss the importance of socialist periodicals (and especially their women's columns) to their research on British socialist women; see Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, 61.
17. See Shaffer, "Socialist Party," and Shaffer, "Radicalism."
18. Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapters 2-3, especially 167-68.
19. J. R. Cole, "New Wine in Old Bottles," *Wilshire's Magazine* 5 (June 1903): 75.
20. Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapter 3. For an excellent discussion of the ways many Progressive Era women's-rights activists combined equality and difference arguments, see Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 18-34.
21. Josephine R. Cole, "Women's Unions," *Appeal to Reason*, June 13, 1903; letter from J. R. Cole, *Common Sense*, June 10, 1905.
22. Mary E. Garbutt, "Thinks Criticisms Were Unjust" [letter to the editor], *Common Sense*, March 9, 1907.
23. Alfred E. Sanftleben, "To My Critics," *Common Sense*, March 30, 1907; Josephine R. Cole, "In Defense of Woman Suffrage" [letter to editor], *Common Sense*, March 9, 1907; and Garbutt, "Thinks Criticisms Were Unjust." For more on conflicts over women's presence in the party, see Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapter 3.
24. Katz, "Redefining the Political."

25. Cole, "Women's Unions."
26. Ethel Whitehead, "Appeal to Socialist Women in the State of California," *Common Sense*, October 31, 1908.
27. Georgia Kotsch, "The Mission of the Socialist Woman," *Progressive Woman* 5 (August 1911): 13-14.
28. *Yellow Ribbon/Western Woman* (San Francisco), October 1906-January/February 1908. See also the *Woman's Journal*, 1888-1916, and the *Western Woman Voter*, 1911-13. Key collections containing suffrage materials include the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Collection (Ephemera), Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. (HL); Alice (Locke) Park Collection, HL, hereafter Park Coll.; Caroline Maria (Seymour) Severance Collection, HL; Elizabeth Morrison (Boynton) Harbert Collection, HL; Friday Morning Club Scrapbooks Collection, HL, hereafter FMC Scrapbooks; Wood Coll.; Woman's Suffrage Scrapbook, compiled by Mrs. M. A. Holmes, Pasadena Historical Society, Pasadena, Calif., hereafter Suffrage Scrapbook; Amy C. Ransome Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif.; Alice Park Manuscripts, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University, Palo Alto, Calif.; Alice Park Papers, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University; Minutebook of California Equal Suffrage Association, Inc., 1904-10, California State Library, Sacramento, Calif.; Keith-McHenry-Pond Family Papers (Mary Keith), Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (BL); Hester Harland Papers, BL; McLean Family Papers, BL.
29. Sherry J. Katz, "A Politics of Coalition: Socialist Women and the California Suffrage Movement, 1900-1911," in Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (Troutdale, Ore.: NewSage Press, 1995), 245-62.
30. Katz, "A Politics of Coalition," 252, 258.
31. For Park's "collecting zeal," see Ellen DuBois and Karen Kearns, *Votes for Women: A 75th Anniversary Album* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1995), 38, 41, 43; for the Park quote, see Alice Park to [Sarah J.] Eddy, December 3, 1918, box 5, Park Coll.
32. Ellen Carol DuBois, "Making Women's History: Historian-Activists of Women's Rights, 1880-1940," *Radical History Review* 49 (1991), reprinted in DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*, 210-38, especially 228; DuBois and Kearns, *Votes for Women*, 38, 41, 43; Una R. Winter, ed., *Alice Park of California, Worker for Woman Suffrage and Children's Rights* (Upland, Calif.: [n.p.], 1948), 7-8, box 8, Park Coll. See note 28 for the Park collections.
33. Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapters 6-8; Katz, "Socialist Women," 117-43.
34. I consulted, for example, *The California Outlook* (Los Angeles), January 6, 1912-January 5, 1915; *The Woman's Bulletin* (Los Angeles), June 1912-April 1915; California State Federation of Labor, *Proceedings* ([San Francisco]: California State Federation of Labor) for 1909-16; *The Citizen* (Los Angeles), 1907-16; *Labor Clarion* (San Francisco), 1904-13; California Board of Control, Children's Department, *Report[s]* (Sacramento: California Printing Office) for 1914, 1916, and 1919; and Franklin Hichborn, *Story of the California Legislature* (San Francisco: James H. Barry), for 1911, 1913, and 1915.
35. Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapter 6, especially 510-26, 541-42n32, 553n61. Key primary sources included *The California Outlook*; *The Woman's Bulletin*; *California Social-Democrat*; *Los Angeles Record*; FMC Scrapbooks; Suffrage Scrapbook; John Randolph

Haynes Papers, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles, hereafter Haynes Papers.

36. Katz, "Dual Commitments," chapter 6; Katz "Socialist Women," 121–27. For the quotes, see Estelle Lawton Lindsey, "Associated Charities Is Heartily in Favor of Mothers' Pension Law," *Los Angeles Record* [1913]; and E. A. Dickson, "Mothers' Pensions—Being a Survey of Constitutional Limitations upon Proposed Legislation," [*Los Angeles Examiner?*] February 13, 1913, box 161, Haynes Papers. National studies of mothers' pensions include Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

37. Many readers of my dissertation helped me to understand the difficulties of the list-like materials; see especially an anonymous reader's report from 1993 (in my possession). The quote is from Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *American Historical Review* 37 (January 1932): 233–34, cited in Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117.

38. For a discussion of the biographic difficulties and the sources utilized, see Katz, "Dual Commitments," 106–12. For the specific sketches, see Agnes Halpen Downing, "Mary Alderman Garbutt," *Socialist Woman* 2 (June 1908): 2, and A[gnis] H[alpen] D[owning], "Ethel Whitehead," *Socialist Woman* 2 (August 1908): 2.

39. Estelle Lawton Lindsey sketch, compiled by Clare Wallace, December 18, 1936, for the Works Progress Administration Project: City Officials, California Biography File, Los Angeles Public Library.

40. For the "ostracism" language, see Georgia Kotsch, "The Mission of the Socialist Woman," 13.

41. Gina [Morantz-Sanchez], letter to author, July 15, [1991] (in the author's possession).

42. [Frances Nackle Noel] to E[thel Duppy Turner], October 19, [19]11, Mellon Coll.

43. Noel to Turner, October 19, 1911, Mellon Coll.

44. Frances [Nackle Noel] to G[race Noel], [1913], Mellon Coll.

7. RECOVERING WOMEN'S VOICES IN COMMUNIST POLAND

Malgorzata Fidelis

Anyone who looks closely at women under communism in Eastern Europe is sure to encounter two contradictory images. In the popular press and scholarly literature alike, women were presented as either the beacons of communist liberation or the desperate victims of communist social exploitation. East European newspapers and other popular publications were rife with the liberation image, especially during the Stalinist period of 1948–56. This image was immortalized in political art by the "woman on the tractor," which illustrated two major aspects of women's emancipation under communism: paid employment and equal rights, symbolized by access to traditionally male jobs. According to this propaganda, the communist state liberated women from capitalist exploitation and offered personal fulfillment through employment and political activism.¹

The second image presented a sharp contrast to such propaganda. In post-communist popular and scholarly writings, women were often depicted as the victims of communism and postcommunism. In this view, communist emancipation was a sham that exploited female productive and reproductive labor. Women in Eastern Europe were overworked, burdened by the double duties of work outside and inside the household. Consequently, they became alienated and cultivated their maternal and familial identities in opposition to the production-oriented regime.² This victimization continued after the collapse of communism in 1989, when women were hurt, as evidenced by high unemployment statistics, job discrimination, domestic violence, and sex trafficking.³

What can one make of these two incongruent representations of women's experiences in post-1945 Eastern Europe? How can one recover women's voices from under the piles of propaganda materials, statistical numbers,