

Saint-Simon and Feminism
Lecture No. 0041 (May 6, 1974)

Transcript digitized in 2026 by the [Harvey Goldberg Center](#), a project of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Department of History.

Preliminary remarks

We finally got the new administration to get us some technology... [*laughter*].

Now, a couple of things before I really get down here. First of all, let's see... there's a person who was supposed to come today, and I don't see him. But I think he said that first meeting was today, did he not? At 4:00 this afternoon or quarter to 4...?

[*Student*: That's next week.]

Oh, in a week. Okay, then I... [*inaudible*].

I have a suggestion before I begin: today and on Wednesday, I'm going to try to finish up what I have to say about the women's movement in the 1830s and '40s. But it raises a great number of questions, and very fundamental questions — not all the answers to which I certainly have, that's for sure — and when one confronts the problematic, it really confronts a great number of the issues about how women organize (or should organize) what their relationship to even left-wing, rather male-dominated movements and organizations ought to be. And I thought it might be useful — and this is just a sheer suggestion — that when I finish, what I'm going to do on Wednesday (or get at least as close to it as I possibly can), that some of you may want to stay with me after that session — after the class, basically, is dismissed — and really discuss some of those issues. I would really like to hear, especially from the women, what you do have to say about those questions. Is anybody interested in that? Alright, we'll stay and we'll do that, and maybe I'll try to get Elaine Marks to get people who will come... [*inaudible*].

It has a very long history — you know, I've learned in the women's movement, I can tell you — it goes back a very long time through the secret conspiracies that I have always had with women over my detestation of male worlds... and I really don't like it.

Lecture

Like [Charles] Fourier, [Henri de] Saint-Simon was a prophet of very great style and of broad vision. Having lived through the French Revolution, he really heard the death rattle of the old regime. And consequently, he could assume that that parasitical aristocracy would no longer

wallow in political power and in very real social privilege; that that parasitical aristocracy would no longer be able to usurp the wealth of the nation for its own benefit, and consequently to disrupt or to inhibit production in that society. He could even hope that now what he called *les industriels* — the real productive elements in the society; namely, the entrepreneurs and the workers and the farmers and the scientists and the technicians — would come to replace what he called *les oisifs* — the parasitical ones — as the dominant class in society.

And having lived through the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, Saint-Simon had a vision: he envisioned, stretching long before mankind, an era of infinite material progress, so that at long last the expended productive forces of society would be able to accommodate the wellbeing of the mass of the citizenry; so that the full and the free development of every individual in the society would no longer be simply a theoretical dream, but would become a very real possibility. And in the last half-dozen years of Saint-Simon's life, until his death in 1825, he was at great pains to try to clarify and try to pinpoint exactly what his meaning was. Because although a number of bankers and industrialists had become very ardent partisans of his ideology of productionism, Saint-Simon was at very great pains to say that he was in no way an apologist for the free-market capitalist society; that the very purpose of the new industrial society which he was gearing for was not only to increase the forces of production, but also to distribute fairly and equitably the social wealth of that society; so that finally, after all, the whole missions and the whole purpose of that new industrial society would be distributive as well as productive.

And the fulcrum of this new and authentic industrial society was to be the state. But not the state in the old political sense of the term: not the state as the ruling elites had habitually constructed and employed it in order to enhance their power over the popular classes, but the state as a central planning agency. The administrative rather than the political state, through which an elite of technocrats were able not only to increase the forces of production and to increase social wealth, but also to plan the distribution of that wealth — so that finally, the ages-old impoverishment of the laboring classes, those who Saint-Simon called "the poorest and most numerous class of society," would yield to the abundant material life and to the cultural opportunities of every humble citizen in the society.

In all of his writings, Saint-Simon never once used the word "socialism." That word, after all, would be invented by his own disciples some six years after his death. But in no way can we underestimate the monumental impact of Saint-Simon's scenario upon the definition that socialism would take in modern history. That the Saint-Simonian scenario would provide the basic elements for what socialism was supposed to be: in the first place, a mass collective effort to guarantee the wellbeing of the masses; and in the second place, the planning society, so that finally the vicissitudes and the irrationality of the capitalist working economy would give way to a rational, planned economy.

Now, of course, we have enough history at our disposition — we have enough hindsight at our disposal — so that we know abundantly well how many perversities and how many misuses of that Saint-Simonian scenario there would be in the twentieth-century practice of communist societies; that, after all, the very definition of socialism would be compressed and narrowed into a quantitative one — equivalent, after all, with economic growth; equivalent after all, simply with expanded production. And we know perfectly well that the planning state would put in the hands of a managerial elite awesome power. And we know perfectly well that masses of citizens in communist societies, who are rank-and-file workers, have no say in either the ends or the means of the plans, and that they have lost control over their lives in the workplace itself.

But note it well: that the perversities of the bureaucratic state were in no way what Saint-Simon had in mind when he etched out his scenario. Nor was he interested, after all, in simply weaving theories without any concern about the practical implementation of those theories. Because, at the bottom line, Saint-Simon is a revolutionary, and is concerned about a revolutionary breakthrough to that stage of the authentic industrial society: that stage of authentic social development, when nature can be captured for the good of humankind. And consequently, he pondered toward the end of his life how to begin — how, after all, to get to that revolutionary stage. And so he returned over and over again to the need and to the imperative for what he called *le parti industriel*: the industrial party, the revolutionary party, that would lead that great group to the new stage of society. But how, after all, to make such a party? How even to begin, especially in the repressive atmosphere of the Bourbon restoration?

And so, in his very last book, called *The New Christianity*, Saint-Simon pressed hard for the elaboration of a new revolutionary ideology. Now, in demanding what he called a "new Christianity" — a new religion of humanity to replace the old ideology of Christianity — Saint-Simon was in no way abandoning his materialism, his philosophical materialism. For he didn't believe that ideas make revolutions, nor did he believe that ideas by themselves simply bring on new societies. But he did think — and for very good reason, and we have just pondered it — that a radical and revolutionary ideology is important: that, after all, it can inflame the imagination of the oppressed masses; that, after all, it can revolutionize the consciousness of the working class; that it can break, finally, the grip of bourgeois ideology over the minds and the spirit of the masses; that it can finally snap those masses out of their torpor and out of their somnolence; that it can indoctrinate them with the great promise of technology and the great promise of a new kind of a society.

And you must think about that, because if there is anything that we are denuded of, that we do not have at our disposition, that the last elections (to take simply one example) prove the deficiency of the left in, it is precisely that there is no other idea; that there is no other ideology; that there is nothing to grab up anybody who is suffering and may be looking for an alternative to his or her particular current existence. And so Saint-Simon said of these, "Let us press this idea

and press it hard." And for that reason, he called upon the most partisan followers that he had — those who really believed in this authentic industrial society and in its great promise — to become the clergy of this new religion to promulgate this message: to get this intelligentsia of engineers and of technocrats and of scientists and of economists to become, really, the great propagandists of this new revolutionary society.

And it was precisely that kind of intelligentsia which, after the death of Saint-Simon, launched the Saint-Simonian movement and planted its first cell. We are talking about young intellectuals like Saint-Amand Bazard, who had had such practice, after all, in insurrectionary secret societies — in republican societies in the 1820s — trying to overthrow the Bourbon regime. And even more conspicuously, of course, that most important voice of the Saint-Simonian movement, Prosper Enfantin. And it is this Enfantin, after all, who will be engineer: a former student at the École polytechnique, and who was completely and totally imbued with this kind of message of Saint-Simon of what could be done with the resources and the facilities of the society to create this new world.

And these young Saint-Simonians of the late 1820s took the doctrine which Saint-Simon had spelled out in dozens of books, in hundreds of magazine articles — diffused, ill-written, confused — they took that doctrine and they hammered it into something systematic. They popularized it, they made it accessible, and they sharpened its socialism. And consequently, they began to popularize the work. In 1828 and '29, these young Saint-Simonians gave a series of public lectures in Paris, and they then collected them in a single volume called *Exposition of the Doctrine*, which had a considerable impact upon the public.

But the real breakthrough in the Saint-Simonian movement comes with the revolution of 1830. Now, granted, that the fruits of that revolution in 1830 were stolen from the workers and the students who had made it by the bourgeois elite of the Orléanist regime. But nonetheless, until the massive repression of 1834, a republican and socialist left continue to organize and to agitate, and the years 1830 and 1831 will become the highpoint of recruitment and propaganda by the Saint-Simonian movement, so that it ceases to be only a tiny sect and becomes something of a more sizeable church. And what it did in those years was to tighten its organization, so that at the top of the Saint-Simonian church were two authentic spokesmen: *les deux pères suprêmes*, the two supreme fathers, who were Bazard and Enfantin. And then it sharpened the party line so that it became very ostensibly and clearly socialist, so that the Saint-Simonians said that a political revolution was insufficient in an industrial society — that only a social revolution would really emancipate the most numerous and the poorest class in that society.

And the year 1831 is the highpoint of the influence and recruitment of Saint-Simonianism. And you have only to read that magnificent monograph written twenty years ago by Jean Maitron [*Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France*] on the propaganda techniques of the Saint-

Simonians in spreading their message to understand how it was that their influence radiated, and also to understand why we should know something about how you start from scratch in a repressive society and begin against all discouragement to build something. And so the Saint-Simonians sent missions out into every industrial center in the country to try to contact and address workers. But their mission was greatest in Paris. Note that in every working-class arrondissement of Paris, they established a social service center, staffed by a doctor and a pharmacist in each one, which gave free medical service to doctors. Note it well: that they founded in working-class quarters two very notable collective or communal housing projects for workers, each one of which took in twenty-five workers families — a total of 600 working-class men, women, and children housed now in this cheap and very comfortable lodging.

And note it well: that in their propaganda, they did not depend only on their newspaper *Le Globe*, nor did they depend only on their theoretical magazine *Le Producteur*. They were trying to address half-literate workers, and so they ground out by the thousands those little cheap tracts that they distributed — two pages, four pages — in which, in simple terms, they spelled out their socialist message. And then at every ally and every meeting and every street demonstration, there were those famous Saint-Simonian songs that had been composed by the young Saint-Simonian composer Félicien David. And those songs, all of them, underscoring the exploitation of workers — underscoring, note it well, the ubiquitous oppression of women.

And their experience was not only one of recruitment and propaganda, but it was a lived experience. Because we are talking about a Saint-Simonian church, centered at its *hôtel* in Paris in the Rue Monsigny, and in the Rue Monsigny they had a veritable living collective. And there were some 330 members of that Saint-Simonian family, 110 of whom were women, who lived together in that *hôtel* in the Rue Monsigny: who took their meals together, who lived under that same roof without any of those bourgeois institutions of marriage and the family, but in that extended family — that kind of harmony about which Fourier, after all, had been talking. And those in that family who came of bourgeois origin and had money gave that money to the common fund — there was that kind of egalitarianism.

And so it spread. And the question we ask is: What did this burgeoning movement, addressing itself to the poorest and most numerous class, mean for women?

Now, you must understand in putting Saint-Simonianism in its context, how debased the condition of women was in the 1830s and how deprived of their rights women were: that in that Orléanist society, in which only 200,000 property holders were permitted to vote, of course women were disenfranchised; that in that sexist society, in which the Guizot law of 1833 laid the feeble foundations for a system of free public primary schools, women of course were excluded from all educational opportunity; that in that bourgeois society, in which the ideology of property reigned supreme, of course divorce was denied to women. So that on the 12th of March of 1832,

right after the Chamber of Peers had turned down a proposal to restore that right of divorce that the French Revolution had given, *Le Globe* — the newspaper of the Saint-Simonians — exploded with this indignation: "These lawmakers were moved by one consideration and one alone: that women, weak and inferior creatures, are the property of men, that strong race among human beings, whose very strength and superiority establishes their sovereign right to possess and to exploit their wives."

And why should we expect anything different in an Orléanist society in which that most prestigious and famous bourgeois philosopher, Victor Cousin, could issue this particular dictum about women: "Woman is and must remain a private, domestic person. Man is and will remain a public, political person"?

Now, Saint-Simon was never married, and in his writings we find that not single, pejorative word about women. But in his writings we find very little about women at all or about their condition, except in that last book, *The New Christianity*, where he says at a certain place the following: "All of my life has been dictated by a single thought: to assure for all human beings the full and free development of their faculties. *L'individu social, c'est l'homme et la femme*." That the social individual — in other words, the people in society — are men and women equally: that is clear in that text of Saint-Simon.

But in the early years of the Saint-Simonian movement until the revolution of 1830, there were very few women in it. The women who were there were bourgeois without exception, and they were there because they were in some *liaison* with a Saint-Simonian man, either as their wives or as their lovers. And they had no real role to play, and they were passive and they received the doctrine. That they were permitted to go to classes conducted by men, who spelled out the fine points of Saint-Simonian doctrine, but that they were not permitted to go to the so-called *mercredis masculins*: the "Male Wednesdays," which were the sessions where the top *pères suprêmes* and the top Saint-Simonian men hammered out the party line to be presented at the weekly public meeting. Those were reserved for men alone. The women were encouraged to have their *samedis féminins*: their "Feminine Saturdays," where they were to sing and to dance and to gossip.

And then something happens, and a change takes place in 1830 and especially in 1831 — note it in a letter that is written by Claire Bazard. Claire Bazard is the wife of that supreme father Saint-Amand Bazard, and she has been in the movement since the beginning as his wife, and quiet and submissive and never demanding anything. And then she writes, after all, in 1831 to her husband: "I still have done nothing in this movement. I have not experienced the great promise of the doctrine. The hierarchy of this church has excluded me and my sisters. We have been forced to be passive and mute."

And what had changed, of course, was the interior of the movement itself, which had enabled a Claire Bazard to make that protestation. We're talking about two things. We're talking about the entry into Saint-Simonianism of a large number of women in 1830 and 31, and especially working-class women, who make women much more visible and who change the atmosphere of the movement. But we're talking primarily about the remarkable initiative of Enfantin, who almost single-handedly among the male Saint-Simonians placed the liberation of women at the center of the doctrine. And liberation in the largest sense: emancipation from monogamous marriage, from the nuclear family, from the repressive moral codes of sexuality.

And that Enfantin is important, because he is assuredly the most charismatic and magnetic leader of Saint-Simonianism. He is a proverbial beauty: all of the texts say that he is virtually of Apollonian handsomeness, that this was someone magnetic in his very appearance, with the long blond locks down to the collar of his shirt. And this was a great orator — impassioned, brilliant in his talk. And his commitment to women's liberation, and his belief that there could never be a new society so long as there were so many oppressed women, worked its way into the ideology of the movement. So that in 1830, in *Le Producteur* — the theoretical magazine of Saint-Simonianism — Enfantin said categorically: "The total emancipation of women will trumpet the arrival of the Saint-Simonian era"; that the new society will not come without that total emancipation.

Nor did he mute — influenced as he was by Fourier — nor did he mute the theme of sexual repression. For he bluntly stated that full sexual expression for women was thwarted — thwarted! — and was paralyzed by reducing the function of women simply to reproduction in the monogamous family. And so Enfantin writes in 1830: "The Saint-Simonian militant — who is a husband or a lover, who isn't ashamed of sexual pleasure, who does not run off to confession full of guilty — Saint-Simonian men and women, who know the joys of truth and freedom in their relationship, they have a lesson in human liberation to teach more fundamental than the lessons of algebra."

And with the slightest stretch of the imagination, you can begin to realize what this message meant when it fell upon the ears of so many women trapped and brutalized in loveless marriages, trapped in brutalized and exploited work, who suddenly discovered that there was a movement, a church, a voice who understood them and spoke for them and beckoned to them. And in the Enfantin archives — which exist in Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the library of the Arsenal — we have found a mass of letters that came in from simple women all over France to Enfantin. There was from Bordeaux, for example, a letter signed simply from a Madame M. in which this woman writes: "How timid oppression makes us! I would never have found the courage without your liberating words to stand up against the repressive mores and beliefs of this bourgeois city of Bordeaux."

But what better example, or what more copious one, do we have than the example of that woman — who you must record in your notes and in your mind — that Suzanne Voilquin. We know more about Suzanne Voilquin than about most working-class women of that period, because she left us a magnificent set of memoirs: a set of memoirs called *Souvenirs d'une fille du peuple*, just recently reproduced by the women's movement in France, *The Memoirs of a Daughter of the People*. And Suzanne Voilquin will tell you that she knew from A to Z what the oppression of a sexist society was about. Here was a young woman in working-class family, who by the time she is fourteen years old has been raped and abandoned by a man who showed some interest in her. Her father, a worker in the hatmaking industry, mainly unemployed, and poor Suzanne at sixteen had to go out and work. And she went out and worked as a *brodeuse*, an embroiderer, in *couture*, in the dressmaking trade.

Now, note it well: that the great number, perhaps the majority, of working-class women in the Saint-Simonian movement came out of *couture* — they were seamstresses. And you must know something about the conditions of the worker...

[audio cuts out]

... and they might make as much as four francs a day. But for the mass of seamstresses — those who were called the *lingeres*, or simply the needlewomen; or those who were the *brodeuses*, or the embroiderers — life was simply an imprisonment in that trade. And so they began work at nine in the morning, and they worked until twelve at night.

And I tell you that, through the 1830s, the average annual wage of a seamstress in *couture* was 150 francs — less than half a franc a day. And you know what that means when you realize that for the smallest, dingiest room in Paris at that time, the rent was 200 francs a year, and that for bread and milk every day, it was at least five sous. And consequently, we're talking about women who could not possibly have survived just on that income. And add to that the unemployment in a trade which was notoriously seasonal; add to that the sexual harassment of constantly being mauled and pawed; and worse than that, being looked down upon by society, by the respectables, because it was considered that only loose women went into *couture* and became seamstresses. And then you understand why Suzanne Voilquin would have married anyone who got her out of that.

And so she met this [Eugène] Voilquin, and he was petty-bourgeois (the assistant to an architect), and she married him in a loveless marriage simply to get out of her economic destitution. And Voilquin never told her that he had an uncured case of syphilis, and on their wedding night she was infected with it, and became sterile for the rest of her life. And for five years she was in that hideous and loveless marriage, until in 1830 certain male comrades in a printing establishment in Paris told her about those Saint-Simonian meetings, that once a week

those meetings were held. And she went, and what a revelation! And she tells us in her memoirs: "With this new doctrine, I realized that my condition wasn't hopeless. I was too skeptical of men to trust the Saint-Simonian militants too much. When they gave me a chance to break out of my isolation and to save my life, I plunged into the common struggle for a total change in society with the security and joy of a convalescent who, on a bright spring day, sings at the top of her voice, 'Hosanna! I am going to be cured!'"

And we talk about the impact of Saint-Simonianism upon women, and we must — if even for a split second, in passing — mention those two most redoubtable revolutionaries whose first step in that revolutionary feminist movement came through Saint-Simonianism. We think, of course, of Jeanne Deroin and, of course, of Pauline Roland. And we're talking about two women who would become important militants in the revolution of 1848.

And note that we're talking about, now, just momentarily, that this young Deroin is *lingère*, she is a seamstress, she is poor — poor as a church mouse. She is born in 1805, she has no education; her father thinks that it is useless for women to know how to read and write. And I want you to know that Jeanne Deroin is absolutely brilliant, and that she learns by herself to read and to write, and that her writing in feminist newspapers throughout '48 and then in later decades of the nineteenth century is absolutely superb. And this Jeanne Deroin married and had three children, and could not stand that brutal husband, and split and took work as a seamstress. And it was Saint-Simonianism that pulled her to a coherent socialism and to the militant life she would always live. She is superb.

I have for you here a letter that is from 1875. I want you to know that Jeanne Deroin is seventy years old then, and she's almost blind, and she was still working because there is no other way to support herself, and that the revolution of 1848 had been crushed years before, and that the Paris Commune had been crushed. And here in 1875, the women's movement again begins like a little porpoise to raise its head out of the ground. And consequently, Hubertine Auclert, that militant woman of the 1870s, writes to Jeanne Deroin and says, "We are launching a new newspaper, *La Citoyenne*. Will you write for it? Can you contribute to it?" This old, broken, half-blind woman, still working. And she replied: "In spite of my seventy years, in spite of my failing vision, I must struggle to survive economically — I have lost not one whit of my fervor for the full emancipation of women and for a just socialist world. Of course I will write for *La Citoyenne*." And she did.

And according to Roland, who is the only one of these women I mention who is of petty-bourgeois and not of working-class origin, and absolutely remarkable. And she, born down in the province — in the department — of the Calvados in the center of France, and her father was the postmaster of a little town, but died in 1806, when she was only one year old. Then her mother took over as postmistress, and her mother had the idea that this bright girl ought to have an

education, even if it wasn't permitted by the state in the public schools. And so she shelled out and hired a private tutor, who was a high school teacher in the local high school, and his name was Desprez, and he became the tutor of Pauline Roland. And he himself was a Saint-Simonian, and he indoctrinated her and he brought her to socialism. And the mother was out of her skull — she was politically conservative, and she locked the door and threw the tutor out. But it was too late, and Pauline Roland went on in Paris to meet the Saint-Simonians and to join with Suzanne Voilquin and the others in that community in the Rue Monsigny, to live in that community.

And she lived to the hilt that liberated life: she had a long affair with a Saint-Simonian man named [Jean-François] Aicard, and she simply never married him, because her statement about that was perfectly categorical: "I will never consent to marry any man in a society where a woman no chance to claim equality with her husband. Nor do I think that sexual freedom is meaningful unless women feel free and strong enough to refuse a relationship as well as to accept one." And so she never married, and so she never legitimized the children she had in that affair, and so she lived that life.

Well, as you can well imagine, the stress of *Enfantin* upon women's liberation created a fundamental schism in the Saint-Simonian movement, because Bazard and his cohorts were very conformist in cultural matters; they were conservative in cultural matters, very patriarchal in their attitude toward women. And there recurs in the Saint-Simonian movement those famous debates, two historic debates, the 19th and 21st of November of 1841 in front of the full assembly of that *grande famille* of the Rue Monsigny, all that were there. And *Enfantin* went on the offensive, and he said in this debate: "How can you talk about liberation if you won't put this movement behind the full emancipation of women? How can you appeal to women if you won't spell out what the new society will mean to them?"

But Bazard and his group would not have it. And when the majority supported *Enfantin*, they broke with the movement. Their contention was that the first task of this socialist movement was to discipline the public, to produce the goods that could finally emancipate the citizenry; that the cultural evolution was a diversion, that it would create indiscipline. And one hears the beginnings of that argument that will be made over and over again.

I think of that famous interchange of 1920 between Lenin and Clara Zetkin. And Clara Zetkin went to Lenin and talked about emancipation of women, and she said, "You know, Rosa Luxemburg, before she was assassinated, had the idea of revolutionary battalions of prostitutes; that they, after all, had the greatest grievance against society." And Lenin threw up his hands and said, "Battalions of prostitutes! Battalions of workers, yes. But prostitutes, that I don't understand." You should understand that, already in the matrix of the Russian revolution, there were young *exaltées* in Moscow and in Petrograd who were already practicing what [Alexandra] Kollontai was preaching, of a real sexual liberation. And Lenin made that famous remark that

"sexual relationships are not like turning a faucet on a wall": you can't do it just like a drip of water; that it will shock the peasants, that it will create indiscipline. And all of that, you see, infers the whole notion of whether it will make a fundamental cultural change in a society.

So the Saint-Simonian movement is left in the hands of a single *père suprême*, and that is Enfantin. And now he commits this movement — under the inspiration of Fourier, whom he read assiduously — he commits this movement to the full emancipation of women, and certainly to the full and free expression of sexual impulses. "We will see a liberated life upon earth," he writes on the 12th of January of 1832, "We will see a liberated life upon earth which has never before existed. We will see men and women united in an unprecedented love, without restraint, without jealousy. Men and women will love many, yet form special attachments. The spirit of the bourgeois family is egoistic; it undermines the solidarity of humanity. But we have embarked on that magnificent long march toward the unity of the human family."

Now, stretch your imagination just a little bit, and you will realize what it meant to do that in 1831 and 1832. The calumny in the bourgeois press and in respectable society was absolutely terrific, and the whole operation was considered to be an exercise in harlotry. Enfantin was attacked as being some kind of a sexual maniac who had surrounded himself with prostitutes, and all of the Saint-Simonian movement was accused of tearing down the ramparts of society. Look: that young bourgeois went out on the boulevards of Paris, and they disguised themselves — they dressed themselves as Enfantin, and surrounded themselves with prostitutes in a kind of arrival circle to illustrate what that Saint-Simonian movement was about.

And I'll tell you that Enfantin was bizarre, that he certainly did have certain delusions; he talked about himself as a latter-day Saint Paul who had been chosen by God, after all, to preach the ways of liberation. But there is nothing in the evidence to suggest that Enfantin was using his commitment to women's liberation as a ploy for his own libertinism. On the contrary, there is a remarkable reflection in Enfantin about the ways of sexual and erotic impulses. And so in a number of letters, he addresses something fascinating that Xavière Gauthier addresses very centrally in her great book on the Surrealists and sexuality. And he addresses the complementarity between a free and full association between the sexes and greater intimacy within each sex, that men toward men and women toward women ought to have a greater intimacy and a greater friendship; otherwise, among men there will be always too much of a macho spirit, too much competition for women, too many notches to put on the belt, and consequently, the brutalization of women.

And so it is that Enfantin is not, in that sense, a phony. But then something happens, and here the problem begins to develop. Fourier was magnificent because he was androgynous, and he didn't treat women as inferior or superior, or put them on a pedestal or in a cellar. But Enfantin began to put women on a pedestal and to say, after all, that they were to be the lawgivers of the new

morality in society, and consequently began in Saint-Simonian history that great quest for *la mère suprême*: the supreme mother who would sit with Enfantin, the supreme father — but all of the upper Saint-Simonian men would be the apostles of this supreme mother, and that she would symbolize, embody, be the lawgiver, of the new morality for society. And so the quest began.

Now, you see, Fourier had written as early as 1808 something extremely important: something extremely important about the need that women have for leaders. And he had written in 1808, in his *Theory of the Four Movements*, the following: "Women should produce not so much writers and philosophers, but the leaders of slave revolts — a breed of liberators like Spartacus. It is upon women that the culture weighs so heavily, and it is up to women to lead the attack." What Fourier is saying is, in effect, what black militants had said: that we feel the oppression of racism every day and in every way; that it is ubiquitous; that no matter how good-spirited you white people are, you cannot really understand this; and consequently, it is to us to define the problem and lead the attack. And Fourier said the same thing about women — a very practical view.

But with Enfantin, it was that *la grande mère*, that the supreme mother, was simply a reflection of the superior nature of women. Now, there is something phony about that, and women begin to suspect it in the movement. And they begin to see a dichotomy between a love of words and a certain kind of practice, just as women in the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] in the 1960s suddenly began to see that dichotomy: that all the men, all the big wheels and so forth, ran the show and that they, after all, were the people that did the errands. And in the same way, the Saint-Simonian women began to say, "Look, the ideas of Enfantin are good, but he is a man like other men: that the search for *la mère suprême* is carried on by men, and then they can't find one [laughter]. Now, they found two fathers easily [laughter], and there's always this empty chair next to Enfantin when the mother isn't there. And we the women say yes, we want *la mère suprême*, but only as a symbol for the collective capacity of women to emancipate themselves."

And Suzanne Voilquin in *La Tribune des femmes* — *The Tribune of Women*, one of the newspapers they would later launch — was to put it on the line this way: "Men, even as Saint-Simonians, look upon women the way governments look at the working-class citizenry: they fear us, they really don't trust us, and they look at our initiatives as the source of disorder." And it reached the point of course, the dramatic point, of the suicide of Claire Démar. And the suicide of Claire Démar is worth noting in passing in part because that magnificent woman left a tract called *The Liberation of Women*, which is one of the most stirring tracts in the nineteenth century on this question.

And she wrote — a young militant Saint-Simonian woman — and she wrote in this tract that "I am born for barricades," and that she was a revolutionary and that she flaunted those repressive sexual and social institutions. And yet the longer she militated — and she was only thirty-two on the 6th of August of 1833, when she committed suicide — that the longer she militated, the more

she seemed to wait in vain; that not only was the society not changing., but that the Saint-Simonian men themselves were not really giving women an equality. But where, then, was there hope? Where to turn? This poor Claire Démar, who says at a certain point that to struggle against patriarchalism, to struggle against male chauvinism, is to risk everything; it is to get that cold horror in you of having all of society against you. And then she makes that famous statement: "You push the father out the front door and, in these societies, he creeps back through the window."

And so it was in that Saint-Simonian movement, and she committed suicide. And Suzanne Voilquin wrote in an article in *La Tribune des femmes* a kind of obituary. But listen to it well:

"Sisters, courageous women, we must learn from this tragedy. We must always sustain ourselves mutually. We must unite in the closest community, or else we will never have the courage to sustain us in this struggle. Believe me, it will never do to call men to freedom and then let them fight it out alone in this egoistic world. Our hope of emancipation has rested too much on a community of men preaching our rights and our equality — but we must do it ourselves. Of course, it is useful to have the devotion of men. But in a transitional period, until we have manifested our collective strength and will, the action of men must be secondary to that of women."

And then the state stepped in and made it possible, because the state had had it with the Saint-Simonians. And consequently, in the summer of 1832, they simply shut down the *hôtel* on the Rue Monsigny and disbanded the entire group. And they filed charges against Enfantin and a bunch of the leaders, and brought them to trial in November of 1832. And you've got to hand to Enfantin: he was courageous at that trial. Not only did he make stirring speeches for women's emancipation, but he even insisted that two women defend him, even though the law forbade women to become lawyers. When that was simply not permitted, Enfantin defended himself and made those stirring closing speeches about the emancipation of women on the near horizon.

But he was sent off to prison for a year; the movement was disbanded, and that gave the women their chance. Because when that movement was disbanded, they moved to their own collective offensive. And they launched, in August of 1832, *La Femme libre* (*The Free Woman*), the first of their Saint-Simonian newspapers. The same one would reappear under different titles to try to fool the censors and to get out from under the weight of the state; it would later be called *The Tribune of Women*, after that *The Future of Women*, to get the word "freedom" out of the title. And in that newspaper, they will hammer out that first tentative program of radical feminism.

And what that was, what happened to them, and how they lived to '48 is a fantastic story, and it raises a lot of the problems that are still with us. And we will have to decide. [applause]