

COLETTE AUDRY

b. 1906 Place?
Studied at?

original

I undertook university studies, passed the agrégation, and became a professor of literature in the lycées. That was the basis of my career. When I was about 25, I found myself torn between literature and politics. ^{Politics} interested me from childhood, for I came from a political family; one on the Left. Generally one wants to break away from one's family; to establish one's identity. But in my case there was no such conflict; at least as far as politics were concerned. In fact I was more radical than my parents were. I began to become active in politics at the beginning of the anti-fascist movements. This was three or four years before the Popular Front, which I was also involved in. During this time I was a member of the Socialist party. I stayed with it until 1938. So I was involved in all the anti-fascist battles before the Second World War. In particular I was a member of the Vigilance Committee of Intellectuals, a group composed of intellectuals from the entire spectrum of the Left; Socialists, those called Radicals in France; Communists, etc. ?

During the war I was in the Resistance.

(Joined when and with what group? Other details?)

No. I didn't place bombs, because when I volunteered to do that I was told NO. I would have liked to place bombs on railroad tracks. Instead I was asked to write articles and distribute clandestine newspapers. So you see I did nothing extraordinary, even though my modest activities would have sent me to the concentration camp had I been caught. Still I don't believe I did anything out of the ordinary.

It was also during the war that I started to write books; tales and memoirs. After the war I continued to ^{write} work, but I have not written a great deal altogether for I was always active in politics. I was involved with my profession, my writing, and politics. That took a great deal of time. My writing is varied: some is literary, some political. I wrote two books focussing on politics. One on Léon Blum called Léon Blum et la Politique du Juste. In this work I try to analyze the person; both his ethics and his politics and show how the two themes harmonized [were integrated/ complement each other]. I consider ethics in politics to be a very important subject that is often neglected. My second book deals with the problem of the marrow morality (?) one finds among many militants. In Les Militants et leur morale (in France?) I compare the morality/ethics of the Socialists and the Communists. The (French) Communist Party has a rigid morality. Members are ready to undertake extraordinary sacrifices for their party. My study examines the weaknesses of the two parties and endeavors to suggest a future ethics to be incorporated into politics. And of course I have written a fair number of articles; some of them political. With a colleague I publish a political review (titre?) that comes out every fortnight.

Then there are my articles on literary criticism. For example, I published a number of them in Les Temps Modernes; particularly during its early years. When I was teaching at Rouen I met Simone de Beauvoir. We saw a good deal of each other during this time. Later on we both became very busy and didn't see so much of each other. She introduced me to Sartre.

I must say I was never in agreement with him on political views; positions taken. However as far as his view of the world is concerned, I believe that in 2 or 3 hundred years, Sartre will prove to be an exceptional witness because of his theater, his books and so forth.

Before the war I was not active in feminists activities at all. Precisely because I was on the Left. I thought--as did S de B during a certain period of her life--that the emancipation of women would be the outcome of socialism. At the same time I knew there were problems, even at that time, for women within the socialist movement. And I remember having spoken with S de B about it at great length. I wanted to write a book on that problem. She kept urging me to write that book. But I never did. So it was S de B who wrote The Second Sex. After the war she asked me about it, for she was considering writing on the topic herself. So I told her to go ahead.

For some time after the war I did not become involved in politics (Reason?). Then I resumed my activities; in groups such as the New Left, which was neither Socialist nor Communist. I was active with that group for some time. At the beginning of the 60s, the Left in France was very divided. That was when we founded a feminist group, the Mouvement Démocratique Féminin. Even Betty Friedan came to see us. To our surprize she was interested in what we were doing. Although this feminist group was never very large, we did manage to initiate a number of new ideas. Yvette Roudy heard of the group from me and joined. Our president was Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, a woman who did a great

deal for both feminism and socialism. Our principal goal was to convince women that they had to do more than just form a women's movement. Women had to find the means to realize their demands. To succeed, women had to get into the political arena. The only party that could help women was the Left. The proof is seen in the passage of the law permitting abortion. It was voted under the government of the Right of Giscard d'Estaing. He asked his Minister of Health and the Family, Simone Veil, to put the measure through. This she did, but without the help of her party. The law passed only because the Socialists and the Communists voted for it.

To return to the women's group. By the middle of the 60s the Left had begun to reassemble, particularly under Mitterrand who became a presidential candidate for the first time, challenging then president DeGaulle. The new Socialist party began to organize. Our women's group, the MDF, integrated itself into this new party. We decided to continue our feminist struggle there. And that is what we did.

There are a certain number of feminist (women's issues?) problems that fascinate me. You can see this perhaps in the introduction I did for Michelle Coquillat's book, La Politique du Mâle. However I was only really active in a feminist movement during that earlier period of the MDF. Now that the Socialists are in power I work in and for the party. I am too old to undertake a position of authority in the government. Moreover, it doesn't interest me. What I do is help train militants and work at the Socialist Research Institute, which organizes colloquia

and seminars.

The MDF was involved in a double struggle/battle: We went after positions within the party and we succeeded. First we secured a quota of feminine candidates. That was Marie-Thérèse's idea. She maintained that unless we had a certain number of women in leadership positions within the party as well as women candidates on the electoral lists, we would never succeed. Initially we asked for a small %, 10%. But at that time only 13% of the Socialist party members were women. A little later, at the Nantes congress in 1977, we had the quota raised to 20%. And for the European Elections, the Socialist slate included 30% women candidates. Our second battle was to get a Secretariat for Feminist struggle (issues?). Every party, whether Left or Right, had a section on women's problems. But these commissions were always considered marginal. A Secretariat, on the other hand, meets weekly and is part of the bureaucracy of the party itself. The Secretariat has a voice; a vote. Above all, it is a political post (group?), that counts among the political decisions the party takes. It represents the conquest of (political) power.

What else did we accomplish? We asked for and obtained a convention (something smaller than a congress) that focussed uniquely on women's problems. We drew up a manifesto that showed how women's problems could be articulated within the struggles of the Left. Thus you see we have had a hard battle within the party. And it is not finished yet. It will last as long as misogyny and the old patriarchal attitudes persist. As for the longstanding problem of reconciling work and

family responsibilities, one possibility would be to shorten the work week (which the Socialists have already done). This would provide more time to organize family life. Men could assume more of the care of their children. One parent might work in the morning, the other in the afternoon. However the problem is the world economic crisis.

The name of the Secretariat changed from that of the Feminine Condition, to that of the Rights of Women. The emphasis is on rights. Now approximately 25% of the PS membership is composed of women; double that figure of a decade ago (1971). In the last election the gender gap narrowed. Until the age of 40 there is little difference between the voting patterns of men and women. It is only when they become older that the balance tips to the Right. That is because there are more than 3 million older women in France, and older voters tend to be more conservative.

A major area of concern is professional training. As long as women are at the bottom of the professional ladder, they will not be considered as important as men. Women writers are beginning to be better known. Women are making a name for themselves in a number of areas. But as long as the vast majority of women workers are not at the same level as their male counterparts, women will be considered as inferior; as the second sex; like the blacks in the United States. There will be real changes in women's condition only when there is a major change in the jobs women hold.