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Jeanne Deroin and Mutual Education of Women and Workers

Françoise F. Laot¹

The image of Jeanne Deroin was illuminated during the 1980's thanks to the historical research of feminists². She is currently defined as one who dared to stand for election to the Legislative Assembly in 1849 although women were neither eligible nor voters, inviting the anger of Proudhon³ and the majority of her socialist friends, as well as the vulgar laughter and hatred kindled by the derision of the greatest caricaturists of that age. A militant fighter for the political and social emancipation of women within the Saint-Simonian and utopian socialist movements, alongside like-minded comrades she engaged against "social lack of solidarity", her fight was also educational.

Thanks to numerous works, whether in French or English⁴ which have been dedicated to her over the past 40 years, she is internationally regarded as one of the pioneers of the struggle for the citizenship of women (she herself claimed to be a follower of Olympe de Gouges), not to say as one of the first feminists⁵. Why wish also to equally make her a pioneer of adult education? This aspect of her activity is not effectively the best known, whilst others, such as Pauline Roland, Eugénie Niboyet and Élis Lemonier, also engaged in the struggle for the recognition of women politically and socially, were involved in more obvious educational activities.

The path of Deroin cannot be disassociated from that of her contemporaries. The years 1830 to Louis Napoléon Bonaparte's "coup-d'état" of 1851, which marked for her exile in the suburbs of London from which she never returned, were a period of bubbling discourse and initiatives for the liberation of workers and women. She and they took up the pen for the first organs of the press dedicated to them or which were established by their

¹With many thanks to Roger Windsor for translation.

² Notably SERRIÈRE M., « Jeanne Deroin » in M. AUDOUX, P. AISSE, *Femmes et travail : Jeanne Deroin, Marguerite Audoux, Marie Curie, Claire Etcherelli, suivi de L'atelier de Marie-Claire, Romorantin : Martinsart, 1981 ; RIOT-SARCEY M., La démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes. Trois figures critiques du pouvoir, 1830-1848, Désirée Veret, Eugénie Niboyet, Jeanne Deroin, Albin Michel, 1994. Numerous 19th century historians of utopian socialism or feminism were also interested in Deroin, although in a less central manner.*

³ To which she replied in a firm and vigorous manner

⁴ Notably of J. Scott, P. Pilbeam, V. Baker, M. Tamboukou... or in the journals published by Deroin: J. Dixon-Fyle, A. Primi, L. Strumingher Shor...

⁵ The word is nevertheless anachronistic

efforts. The Saint-Simonians (or former Saint-Simonians) and the utopian socialists were at the forefront of most of these movements. The history of adult education had retained the role which they had enjoyed in the creation of journals which sought to be educators of the people (*L'Atelier*, *La Ruche Populaire* or again in another field, *Le Magasin Pittoresque*) and in those of other older adult educational societies such as l'Association polytechnique (1830) or l'Association philotechnique (1848) but was much less attracted to the action of women as writers for the press or founders of journals or associations. Their role of educators remains undervalued, or rarely discussed.

No more than her comrades and friends on this path, Deroin “an extraordinary person” and at the same time “a woman of her time”⁶, could, however, be considered as a leader of any particular educational movement. The choice of designating her as a pioneer of adult education relies upon an amalgam of characteristics which relate to her personal history, her positions and the methods, resolutely collective, which she had chosen to promote. It is less her concrete actions, of which little trace remains, but her arguments which she employed to defend a resolute egalitarianism in respect of education and access to work which retained attention. She probably inspired a number of those who were in close contact with her as, for example, Jean Macé who is subsequently revealed as a major player in popular education⁷

This article is based on the French and English publications which are dedicated to her, but equally on the whole assembly of texts which she published⁸ Some journals relating her trial or her public interventions and manuscripts (letters) have also been considered⁹. In a somewhat scattergun manner, new archives have also been researched, regrettably without success, notably her correspondence with Jean Macé¹⁰, and through contact with the spouse of a British descendant of her youngest daughter.

⁶ RIOT-SARCEY M., « Une vie publique privée d'histoire. Jeanne Deroin ou l'oubli de soi », *Cahiers du Cedref*, n°1, 1989, p. 81-93, p. 82.

⁷ MARTIN J.-P. et al., *La ligue de l'enseignement. Une histoire politique (1866-2016)*, PUR, 2016.

⁸ Principally accessible at the Bibliothèque Nationale et à la Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand which has created a small file on her.

⁹ For these latter examples, the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris.

¹⁰ Fonds Goyau held at the Institut Catholique de Paris.

Underlying traces of a life of a socialist woman

Laundry woman, teacher, journalist, here is how she presented herself in the minutes of the trial which led her to imprisonment in 1850. The biographies of Jeanne Deroin remain punctuated by numerous areas of shade since, other than the writings which she, for the most part, she published herself in various publications, booklets, tracts and journals, the sources are relatively rare. Her memoirs which, as she said in her letter to Hubertine Auclert in 1886, she had started to organise, have never been found again.

Working class youth in Paris under surveillance

Jeanne Françoise Deroin was born in Paris on 31st December 1805 in a France engaged in the Napoleonic Wars. Ten years later, the Restoration, far from bring forth tranquillity, was accompanied by troubles and still a great number of great restrictions. The prescriptions of 1830 suppressing the freedom of the press provoked insurrection. There was thus an explosion of working-class journals. But the improvement was of short duration. Further riots in Paris then in Lyon in 1833 provided the Monarchy of July the pretext to enforce new restrictions. The 1830s, nevertheless, marked, with the action of Minister Guizot, the start of the institutionalisation of a system of national education with the creation of “normal schools” (for male teachers only) and a strong incitement of the State for the development of adult courses. The educationist era had begun.

Little is known neither of Deroin’s childhood or youth nor the moments of her life when she remained silent. Yet, these were numerous. Michèle Riot-Sarcey underlines her thirst for knowledge, her “force of thinking and [her] need to learn”¹¹. Despite a family environment of little wealth¹², born into a working-class background, she was obliged to work and thus, understood that she had to “renounce science and happiness”¹³. This feeling of injustice and, no doubt, her readings, led her to become very critical of the Church. Only marriage, she thought, could offer a better life. It was thus, according to her own recollection of events, that she opened a “book of law” and read these words:

¹¹ RIOT-SARCEY M., *La démocratie à l'épreuve des femmes, Trois figures critiques du pouvoir, 1830-1848*, Albin Michel, 1994, p. 94.

¹² She made only an allusion to her mother (never her father) who had hardly ever encouraged her to study.

¹³ DEROIN J, « Profession de foi de Mlle Jenny de Roin », probablement 1831, in RIOT-SARCEY M. [Textes recueillis et présentés par], *De la liberté des femmes : Lettre des dames au Globe (1831-1832)*, Côté Femmes, 1992, p. 116-139. p. 129.

“The husband must protect his wife, a wife owes obedience to her husband’, I sensed a deep indignation, never, I told myself, shall I buy happiness for the price of slavery¹⁴”.

From there dates her undertaking of the “mission” which occupied her throughout her life:

“I resolved to zealously educate myself with all that brought to me knowledge in order, one day, to take an active part in the combat that all courageous man must deliver against the monstrous abuse which dishonoured human kind; my greatest wish was to be able to join my voice to those defenders of the rights of people¹⁵.”

As with others amongst her contemporaries, Martin Nadeau or Agricola Perdiguier, that the history of adult education has distinguished, Deroine started out on a journey of self-education. This is in addition to reading of *The Globe* where she discovered Saint Simonism.

“Amidst the debris, embroiled in the darkness, there escaped a beam of light, Saint Simonism appeared! It came, it is said, to reconstruct anew the temple of the real God¹⁶!”

Deroine was a deist, as were most of the socialists then¹⁷. She adopted with passion the new religion which favoured the emancipation of women. She was explained the plan of “universal domination” by a member of the Saint Simonian society, one Antoine Desroches, whom she would enter into a civil marriage with in August 1832, remaining free in her own destiny and without taking his name, apparently a sort of social contract which they concluded together. Few elements assist in understanding how she became a teacher after having exercised the profession of laundry woman. The certificate of competence once obtained, she opened a school, a source of income from work much less punishing.

Political and social activism

She was 26 years old when she submitted her Statement of Faith to *The Globe*, the sole public writing known containing some large traits of her autobiography and of her personality. All the ideas which she later developed were there already stated. Here contacts with the Saint Simonians led her into companionship with numerous persons, followers, as her, in the revulsion of injustice against workers and women. She collaborated in many popular

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 136.

¹⁶ Ibid. p.116

¹⁷ PILBEAM P., « Dream Worlds? Religion and the Early Socialists in France », *The Historical Journal*, 43, 2000, p. 499-515. Deroine probably remained a deist until the end of her life.

publications such as *La Femme libre*. Rapidly, she distanced herself from the Saint Simonians which did not hold to their engagement of equality the sexes in order to become closer to the Fourierists. She also interested herself in the writings of Cabet.

But soon, the repression of journals and the vagaries of life led her to retreat from public life. Escaping perhaps less than anticipated from the constraints of married life and the woman's condition, she gave birth to three children, Cecile in 1835, Caroline in 1841 and Charles-Jules in 1845. The latter, handicapped, required care until his death at the age of 42. She emerged from a lengthy silence at the Revolution of 1848. This is the period of life the most described; her collaboration in *La Voix des femmes* of Eugénie Niboyet, then the creation of her own publications, *La Politique des femmes* (just two issues), then *L'Opinion des femmes* from August 1849 to June 1849, her candidature – ultimately rejected – to election of the National Assembly in May 1849.

Also widely commented upon are the virulent attacks that she was obliged to suffer, her arrest in 1850 for having organised a secret meeting of the l'Union des associations (Confederation of Unions) and her imprisonment for 6 months renewed and in all lasting 13 months, in the company of Pauline Roland and Louise Nicaud, her protest against the interdiction of the right of petition for women and her first edition of the *Almanach des femmes* (Women's Almanac) during her detention at La Roquette prison in Paris. I refer here numerous analyses of this period as intense as it was short.

This was, evidently, a collective adventure, as is well displayed by Michèle Riot-Sarcey¹⁸, but Deroin was a first rated player. Scott insists on her persistence to flush out the confusions, the ambiguities and the lies of the republican speeches seeking to exclude women from citizenship. Deroin's writings manifest an implacable logic which she developed out of a both precise and rigorous rhetoric. She did not cease to repeat the same ideas, modifying them marginally in order to better sharpen her arguments. She made herself plenty of enemies amongst whom she made them face their contradictions. She remained unheard amongst most of her contemporaries, both men and women, or otherwise provoking inflamed reactions.

According to Scott:

“her arguments and her actions [...] reversed the usual explanation for differences between the sexes, making them less an effect of biology than of social organization¹⁹.”

¹⁸ RIOT-SARCEY M., *La démocratie...* 1994, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ SCOTT J. W., *Only Paradoxes to Offer. French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 78.

Deroin never deviated from her “mission”. For her, the emancipation of workers and of women were indivisibly linked, out of which became her engagement for what she termed "the organisation of labour", but which aimed at a reorganisation of society as a whole where bosses and proletariat would no longer exist. This is what she was reproached for in the trial with 27 others for having organised a “secret society”. It did not escape the judges that she was one of the principal organisers. “Jeanne Deroin, wife of Desroches” was described thus:

“This woman is of short stature, thin and starkly pale. She is dressed on her head by a bonnet of black crepe decorated with bright pink ribbons. She replies with great calm; in the exposure of her ideas she gives evidence a great socialist erudition²⁰”.

The labour movement, in its associative component, never fully forgot Deroin, rekindling episodically her memory through the “Trial of the Associations”, less for her fight for the emancipation of women but for having been an instigator of the Confederation of Associations, sometimes considered as the forerunner of the 1864 International Workingmen’s Association. For all that she was not admitted to the pantheon of the workers’ struggle...

The years of exile: all the mysteries are not revealed

Leaving prison, her liberty was threatened after the Coup of 2 December 1851 and, on the urgent advice of several friends, she resolved to leave Paris and seek refuge in Great Britain as had a good number of her co-religionists. Welcomed by a group “forty-eighters”, she set up a frugal home in London where her children joined her whilst her husband, Desroches, suffering from madness, died without ever seeing her again.

Given a lack of sources, most of the biographies of Deroin stop at the end of the publication of the *Almanach des femmes*, of which the two last numbers of 1853 and 1854, were published in London and Jersey, at which time she was deeply touched by the death of both her banished fellows, Pauline Roland and Louise Julien. The over-riding theme of these years of exile is that, weary from her failures, refusing to return to France following the 1859 amnesty and with great financial problems, she would have dedicated all her energy to keeping her family alive and disinteresting herself from political and social questions and would have died forgotten and on foreign soil at the age of 89.

²⁰ La Gazette des tribunaux of 13 November 1850.

Nevertheless, a “crowd²¹” of people accompanied her cortege to the cemetery at Hammersmith in 1894, and moving tributes were given by French and British socialists. What a funeral for a forgotten old woman.

New historical analyses show that the exiled women, even more than the exiled men, were made invisible²². Certain recent works put into question the hypothesis according to which these exiles maintained themselves at a distance from British social and political life²³.

If Deroin intervened much less publicly, some indicators show that she would have remained active. In 1857 she participated in a banquet organised in London by the Revolutionary Commune and International Association²⁴ where twenty-three people joined to celebrate the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic in 1792. The International Bulletin republished by the Proletariat of Brussels mentions that following several speeches:

“Citizen Jeanne Deroin took the floor to speak against the democrats who do not recognise woman’s equality of rights²⁵.”

Her intervention gave rise to a lively discussion, her detractors being “rather numerous”²⁶.

Not being able to content herself to the theory of renunciation, an American historian and philosopher, Vaughan Baker, tried to recount the events of these years of exile. She noted that at the beginning of the 1860’s, Deroin set up home in Hammersmith in a quarter of laundries where she could possibly return to her former employment of laundry woman. She was known there under the name of Jeanne Desroches²⁷. The changes in her economic situation are retraced by reference to the amount of her different rents or her arrears of taxes²⁸. In 1861, she opened a school and assembled sufficient funds to pay for publicity in a local commercial directory. In 1876 she wrote

²¹ BAKER V. B., “Jeanne Deroin: The Years in Exile”, in B. ROTHBAUS (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History. Selected Papers of the Annual Meeting*, vol. 25, University Press of Colorado, 1997, p. 142-155.

²² APRILE S., « De l’exilé à l’exilée : une histoire sexuée de la proscription politique outre-Manche et outre-Atlantique sous le Second-Empire », *Le Mouvement social*, n° 225, 2008, p. 27-38.

²³ Notably: JONES T. C., *French Republican Exiles in Britain, 1848-1970*, PhD, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, 2010 and KUNKA F., *French Émigrés from the Revolution of 1848 and British Radicalism*, PhD, University of Aberdeen, 2014.

²⁴ Anecdote related by T. C. JONES (*OP. CIT.*).

²⁵ *Le Prolétaire*, n° 16, 3rd year, November 1857.

²⁶ BAKER V., 1997, *art. cit.*

²⁷ All hypotheses remain open as to this decision to take the name of her husband after his death: an attachment to the deceased, or more simply the wish to not invite curiosity towards her within a Victorian society, her children bearing their father’s name living with her.

²⁸ She often changed her address, but always in Hammersmith.

to Léon Richer²⁹ that the pupils' parents were too poor to pay to keep them at school, she had faced a period of great distress a situation aggravated by the illness of her son. The census returns of 1880 showed her occupation as "farming schoolmistress". Her eldest daughter, Cecile, then aged 46 years, who taught French and her 36-year-old son, were living with her in a two-storey brick-built house which indicated a certain material comfort. She received each month the journal *Le Droit des femmes* which Richer continued to send her and which gave her great joy. She repeated her ardent wish to contribute to it, but she manifestly could not find the opportunity.

In 1884, William Morris founded the Socialist League in Hammersmith. He was joined with Eleanor Marx and Hammersmith became the centre of socialist activity. Deroin and her daughter became members of the League, their presence at meetings being confirmed in its journal³⁰.

A group photograph of the members showed Cecile seated in front of Morris. At his side the archives identify "Madame de la Roche" moving. One sees nothing other than a ghostly presence/absence which, according to Baker, reflects well the mystery of her life of exile.

Over 80 years of age, Deroin continued to work. She is mentioned in the local register of electors³¹. The last years of her life appeared to unfold in relative ease. In 1887, her son was admitted to an asylum for the insane where he would soon die. Six years later, Deroin lost her youngest daughter. Finally, she herself succumbed to bronchitis on April 2nd, 1894.

At the cemetery, in an emotionally charged oration which has regrettably disappeared, Morris recalled her courage and, despite her great age, her fidelity to the socialist ideas. Representatives of French residents of London such as Adrien Ranvier took the floor as well. Ranvier's tribute to her has been conserved³². These expressions of friendship show the proximity of Deroin up to her last day to her socialist life. Baker thought that, even if historians had seen nothing, she had certainly influenced Morris.

²⁹ Founder with Maria Deraismes of the Association for the Right of Women (1869)

³⁰ This information given by Baker is confirmed in the thesis of Françoise Kunka (op. cit.), see also: KUNKA F., "The French Teacher at Kelmscott House: Cécile Desroches, Jeanne Deroin and the Utopian Socialist Connection", *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, Vol. XXII, N° 1, 2016, 54-70.

³¹ As opposed to France, women were in effect, voters. In local government elections, single women ratepayers received the right to vote in the Municipal Franchise Act 1869.

³² He was present at the Congress of the Workers Associations of 1900 and republished in the documents and more recently virtually in full in DESROCHES H., *Solidarités ouvrières I. Sociétaires et compagnons dans les associations coopératives (1831-1900)*, Les éditions ouvrières, 1981, p. 61-73. Despite the common names, Henri Desroches indicated that he was not related to Deroin.

The Right of Women to education and to work are indivisible

An analysis of Deroin's writings and ideas is here dealt with in a partial and oriented manner, leaving in the background her position taken on political equality. In effect, these have been widely commented upon, while her ideas on education although extensively exposed in numerous works attributed to her, have not still been the object of particular focus.

Teaching emancipation: the Cours de droit social pour les femmes³³

“The education of woman is directed in a manner to reduce all her moral and intellectual faculties; one wants to persuade her that she is inferior to men and all is done to realise as much as possible this odious supposition³⁴.”

At the start of the 1830s, Deroin denounced the exclusion of women from work and citizenship as being knowingly and meticulously organised through the bias of education.

If, from childhood, one strives to stamp out amongst “womanhood [...] the germs of sincerity, of courage, of boldness” because contrary to “duty of one's sex” if “one inspires her with frivolous tastes” then she “is unable to understand her true destiny, led astray by a vicious education”. This distorted vision of her value leads her to “an abasement of herself right to the point to put her glory as to seduce and captivate her cruel oppressors³⁵”.

And even if just one:

“may reach to the highest degree of knowledge and to a real superiority: all careers are closed to her, she cannot take on any public office, entry to higher education, colleges to her are forbidden, she is ruthlessly pushed back, her sex alone is a signal for reprobation!”³⁶

Education has corrupted in such a profound manner women's perception of themselves that the great majority of them do not have any conscience of the injustice which is made against them through the exclusion of social life, written in the law which makes them permanent minors (family law, male suffrage) and closes all doors to them. This is thus why it is priority to render them clear sighted. This is the objective of the Cours de droit social pour les

³³ Lesson of Social right law for women

³⁴ « Profession de foi de Mlle Jenny de Roin », in RIOT-SARCEY M., *De la liberté...*, 1992, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 136.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

femmes (Lesson of social law for women) which, at the same time carries out an inventory and encourages women to take the stage.

“Humanity is on the move: it grows in time and space, and nevertheless women, still in slavery, remain veiled and silent [...] Bent under the yoke of men, no more any hope of liberation is in her; it is man who must free her! [...] Oh woman, mother of human race, rise up and speak in the name of humanity! God himself commands it; it is more than a right; it is a duty³⁷.”

This “lesson” was published in 1848 in the form of a small booklet as an insert in a journal *La Politique des femmes*. It was to appear as the first of a series, but the project did not survive the journal which had to shut down due to a lack of funds. Nevertheless, the continuity of training was provided by the different media in which Deroin wrote in subsequently.

Gender teaching – although the expression is anachronistic – really constitutes the basis of all Deroin’s publications. This task proves to be, however extremely difficult given the idea of the difference between the sexes was then deeply rooted as “natural” in the representations. The opposition which she encountered during the whole of her combat emanated as much from women as from men. To affirm the total equality between the sexes represented an absurdity or an aberration. She was well aware of it:

“The majority [of women] although distanced from this thought considering it an attack on religion and morality, and as a danger to society; one has persuaded them that they are born to obey, to enjoy suffering, sacrifice themselves, and that they should remain enclosed with the tight circle of the domestic family³⁸.”

Even one of her closest friends and collaborators, Hortense Wild, who signed “Henriette (artist)”, could label as “grotesque” some of her activities³⁹. Deroin, herself, argued in a manner which might appear today as very “differentialist”, notably for the necessary participation in social and collective life by women as “mothers of humankind”. Some of her arguments appear nevertheless particularly sharp, for example, when she argues that male knowledge could not suffice in the comprehension of the world.

³⁷ DEROIN J, *Cours de droit social pour les femmes*, 1848.

³⁸ DEROIN J, « Mission de la femme dans le présent et dans l’avenir », *L’Opinion des femmes*, n° 1 du 28 janvier 1849.

³⁹ RIOT-SARCEY M., « Une vie publique privée d’histoire... », 1989, *art. cit.*, p. 85.

Mutual women's education for the future of humankind

“... slavery, servitude and the proletariat produce everywhere corruption, ignorance and misery. This is because men alone cannot understand that which is necessary for happiness and the longevity of societies and for the complete development of all of the physical, intellectual and moral faculties of the humanhood, man and woman⁴⁰.”

For Deroin, man alone can achieve nothing. Only the two sexes, considered as equal, can undertake the work of social transformation. In order to arrive there, the mutual education of women must be seen as a priority.

The prospectus of the journal *L'Opinion des femmes*, of which the first edition was published in January 1849, underlines the principal objective of the publication:

“The teaching upon which the future of humankind is based must, for us, have the object of serious examination [...] we shall make sure that this publication encompasses the theory and the practical means, and that it should be at the same time a quality teaching and a good work.”⁴¹

This publication, as its predecessors, was supported by the *Société mutuelle d'éducation des femmes (Society for the Mutual Education of Women)* presided over by Désirée Gay:

“The goal of the Society is to facilitate as much as possible women's meetings, either with the objective to form industrial unions, or to enlighten ourselves the means to cooperate for the achievement of our duties and our rights, or again, finally to establish teaching centres⁴².”

Women's education operated through the publication of journals or pamphlets but also by the organisation of lessons.

“The Mutual Society for the Education of Women soon led to a course of general history by Mme Jeanne Deroin and a course of botanical analogy by Mr. Deschenaux. Those persons wishing to participate in these courses are requested to enrol at 4 Rue Miromesnil⁴³.”

Unfortunately, no trace remains of the course in General History. On the other hand, the importance of history and its teaching as the basis of political and social education is often frequently renewed. In order to convince women of their social role, Jeanne-Marie⁴⁴ proposed a method:

“Delving into history researching writings and realisations which braved prejudices and interdictions, and which show this struggle is timeless [...] if we

⁴⁰ DEROIN J., *L'Opinion des femmes*, n° 3, 18 avril 1849.

⁴¹ Prospectus for *L'Opinion des femmes*, 1848.

⁴² DEROIN J., *L'Opinion des femmes*, n° 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Perhaps Jeanne-Marie-Fabienne Poinard.

go back in the history course, to all eras of social renovation, one sees women actively participating⁴⁵.”

Other associations in which Deroin was involved equally gave themselves a mission to educate, young people like adults; the Société des Instituteurs, Institutrices et Professeurs Socialistes (*Socialist Society of Male & Female Primary & Secondary School Teachers*)⁴⁶ or the Association Fraternelle des Démocrates Socialistes des Deux Sexes pour l’Affranchissement Politique et Social des Femmes (*Fraternal Association of Democratic Socialists of both Sexes for the Social and Political Emancipation of Women*) also created in 1849 by Deroin and five other founder members including Jean Macé.⁴⁷ This latter organisation had as objective the affirmation of the equality of rights between men and women. In its declaration of principle there was a well-placed sentence which was taken up by Deroin in a great number of articles:

“Liberty for women as for men is the right to be able to freely and harmoniously develop and exercise all her physical, intellectual and moral faculties without limit other than respecting the rights of all.”

After the blocking of her candidature in the 1849 elections, she threw herself into the project of the Confederation of Associations. Having been denied of her civil rights, she devoted herself to social emancipation. The sharing of work, lodgings, care and consumable goods... was entirely undertaken by this organisation, managed by a “sharing committee” which undertook numerous functions of regulation and administration of social life, such as the organisation of education aimed at both children and adults:

“In the quarters where shall be established several groups of workers, the committee will also delegate teachers of both sexes to give courses and conferences for adults. And in these same rooms the association of artists shall provide various concerts and theatrical performances for the entertainment of workers on holidays and Sundays⁴⁸”.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Formed in 1849 by « Lefrançais, Pauline Rolland et Pérot ». Several texts mention Deroin equally under the title of founder.

⁴⁷ The “Apostolic Commission” was comprised of Jeanne Deroin, Henriette, Annette Lamy, Jean Macé, Delbrouck, Eugène Stourm.

⁴⁸ *L’Opinion des femmes*, n° 6, p. 5. Republished in her « Lettre aux associations et aux travailleurs de toutes les professions », *L’Almanach des femmes*, 1852.

“The destiny of women and workers are providentially joined⁴⁹”

“It is attributed to a French woman, Jeanne Derouin [sic] the idea of bringing together all of the workers’ associations into one universal confederation of solidarity⁵⁰.”

It is probably on the precise point of the equal urgency for the emancipation of workers and women that Derooin had known the greatest deceptions. Indeed, even her closest allies - such as Macé, extremely close on the cause of women and who said that he was ready “to seek his part of ridicule⁵¹” in sustaining the emancipation of women -, were cooler, estimating that the emancipation of workers was more urgent, women being “more comfortably placed to wait⁵²”.

However, a future consolation is not worth its waiting time. To all of her socialist allies who advised her not to mistake the enemy by seeing man rather than capitalism, she responded:

“Excuse me, sir, woman seeks to be freed from man, make no mistake, it is very simple since man represents, in quite every relation with woman, the sacrifice of right to force, the law of constraint and necessity. As for capitalist despotism [...] we remain in full agreement with you, that she [woman] is at one with the worker [...] that it not a question of taking women out of the workplace but to transform the workplace itself.⁵³”

She expanded on her view on the transformation of the workplace, through what she called “the organisation of labour” in the *Almanac*. Based on the equal access to all occupations without exception, she developed it in her letter to the Associations and workers in all occupations and in an article entitled *Le travail des Femmes (Women’s Work)*:

“And the woman freed, like man, from the yoke of misery, of ignorance and prejudice, and like him, independent through work that will give satisfaction of all her needs, will be able at last to make her own decisions [...], she will be able employ her faculties according to her real aptitudes and her free choice⁵⁴”.

She takes up again these same arguments, relying again and always on questions of education, professional training, autonomy through work and social emancipation in another project, the *Ligue d’élévation de la Femme*

⁴⁹ DEROIN J., Introduction, *Almanach des femmes*, 1852.

⁵⁰ LAVELEYE E. de, *Le socialisme contemporain*, Bruxelles : Librairie européenne, C. Muquardt, 1881, p. 238.

⁵¹ MACÉ J., *L’Opinion des femmes*, n° 1, 1848.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ DEROIN J., Réponse au Peuple, *L’Opinion des femmes*, n° 4, mai 1849.

⁵⁴ DEROIN J., *Le travail des femmes*, *L’Almanach des femmes*, 1852.

(League for Women's Elevation) which had the objective "to awaken English women".

"The stupid indifference of some women within the highest ranks of society and the insensibility of women in general to remain in an inferior status as a member of the community, manifests greatly the need to elevate the sex to the feeling of her ignoble and unwarranted position in society and the advice of the League will soon try to wake the women of England out of their lethargy by publications, lectures and public meetings.

[...] Which professions might be banned to women? Those which they would not be able to fulfil. But precisely, what facilities are given to women to perfect their talents and what careers are open to them? The limited sphere which she is given is not though indicated by nature. [...] The Ligue pour l'Élévation de la Femme demands the complete removal of barriers which exclude women from every profession in which they may be capable physically and intellectually⁵⁵."

The tone of these words allows a glimpse of a certain irritation, or perhaps a deception of seeing things remaining also unmoveable from one to the other side of the Channel. According to Dixon-Fyle⁵⁶, this League, which was a project of Deroin herself, was supposed to open its offices in London. But the programme was finally abandoned, without known reason for this setback.

In the lack of additional sources, the analysis of Deroin's ideas about education and work was achieved with the final edition of the Almanac where she emphasised one more time upon the fact that

"it is in simultaneous work, in industry, science and the arts, according to natural aptitudes and real vocation that each human being may acquire complete development of their capabilities⁵⁷".

The assessment that she had made more 20 years earlier on the educational inequalities between men and women, remains but little changed.

Some years later in a letter to Léon Richer she reiterated her faith in education:

"If, at the beginning of next year it possible for me to enrol as a member of your society, perhaps I would choose the pedagogic section since I believe that in the future teachers will be at the same time the priesthood and doctors of humanity. Happiness, moral well-being, intellect and physique for all are based on education and knowledge. Without awareness, education is more often than not a more powerful weapon in the hand of the oppressors and a two-faced sword

⁵⁵ DEROIN J., La Ligue pour l'élévation de la femme, *L'Almanach des femmes*, n° 3, 1853, p. 101-107.

⁵⁶ DIXON-FYLE J., *Female Writers' Struggles for Rights and Education for Woman in France (1848-1871)*, Peter Lang, 2006.

⁵⁷ DEROIN J., *L'Almanach des femmes*, 1854.

in the hand of the oppressed. Without moral education the future of industry, arts and sciences will be unable to produce well-being for all⁵⁸.”

A relative redemption of a visionary woman

The analysis of Deroin’s writings leads to a certain frustration, as the same sources are at each occasion mobilised, always incomplete, always insufficient to truly provide a comprehension of how this woman was able to rebel over so many years of adversity of all and sundry. Even though surrounded by the French "democ-soc community"⁵⁹ whilst a refugee in London, as she probably was from the start of her exile, she appeared isolated and misunderstood.

This Utopian, like many of her contemporaries, had dreamed of a world of equality, of liberty and of fraternity. Though, even saved from oblivion, she remains marginalised, as it has been for a very long while, and still remains, for numerous women who do still not come to make their mark on the pages of history⁶⁰.

The lack of legitimacy which was awarded to her by her contemporaries seems to continue over time. Sources exist though: are they less numerous for Deroin than for Leroux (who said he was proud to have been her friend)? Cabet? Considerant? It is true that the absence of constancy in her name, as well as being a symptom, is an obstacle to her recognition in all senses of the word. Sometimes just Jeanne, a forename which was the only name that alone belonged to her fully, as she wrote. She signed also Jenny de Roin, Jeanne f Deroin, Vve (Widow) Desroches, and perhaps Jeanne-Victoire? Jeanne-Industrielle? Furthermore, her name had been – voluntarily or otherwise – regularly misspelt: Derouin in many texts, Desroins, De La Roche, Des Roches or even Madame XX in the journal *La Liberté* which wished to avoid to “give her publicity” which make Riot-Sarcey say that “not to name Jeanne Deroin, this is to nullify the scope of her arguments⁶¹”.

⁵⁸ It is her who emphasises. Undated letter but reasonably at the start of the appearance of the « Droit des femmes », thus around 1870. Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, Dossier : Manuscrits, histoire par époques, Histoire contemporaine, NA ms 111. This letter demonstrates that she had not thus renounced a thing.

⁵⁹ JONES T. C., 2010, *op. cit.* Voir aussi CORDILLOT M., « Les fouriéristes et l’émergence de la coalition démoc-soc à l’automne 1848 », *Cahiers Charles Fourier*, 2002, n° 13, on line: <http://www.charlesfourier.fr/spip.php?article55> (consulted on 12 avril 2017).

⁶⁰ A quick research on the Internet in December 2016 showed that streets named Jeanne Deroin exist in Nantes, Rennes, and Neuilly-les-Dijon but still not in Paris. One or two schools or nurseries also bear her name.

⁶¹ RIOT-SARCEY M., « Une vie publique privée d’histoire » 1989, art. cit. p. 85. It relates to n° 47 of *La Liberté* dated the 16 avril 1848.

Her ideas stem from her engagement with education. Outlining the main lines, her women's educational project remains, it is true, relatively vague. But, in the context of eviction of women from any places of education, it is the intention that counts as well as the form⁶². The journals in which taking up the pen appeared thus to be one of the sole possible vehicles to provide a different voice to be heard, were often moreover rapidly stifled.

Shall the memoirs which Deroin would have started to prepare be rediscovered one day? Access to her close world would give us new keys of understanding of her unshakeable faith in education. She who had spent a great part of her life to teaching children has left no written legacy of her life as a teacher other than as a postscript to the already cited letter to Richer:

“You will excuse this hardly legible draft of a letter when you know that I am writing in a class of somewhat noisy children⁶³”.

But for the theme which is of interest to us, adult education, it is really on these courses, those of general history and social rights for women, that one would like to know more, as much as their concrete organisation than on the composition of their audience as well as on their reception.

⁶² KRAMPL U., PICCO D., THIVEND M. (dir.), « Manières d'apprendre (XVII^e-XX^e siècles) : quand le genre s'en mêle », *Genre et Histoire*, n° 20, 2017.

⁶³ Cf. note 58.