Kate Richards O’Hare: Progression toward Feminism

by Sally M. Miller

One of the names most familiar to early-twentieth-century Americans was Kate Richards O’Hare. Kate O’Hare (1876–1948) emerged from the heartland of rural Kansas to become a well-known lecturer and agitator in pre-World War I America, especially celebrated in the Plains states and the Southwest. A Socialist party leader, she was known to members and to non-red-card carriers as well through her writings in the Appeal to Reason of Girard, Kansas, and in the National Rip-Saw of St. Louis. She was the only American woman to represent the Socialist party overseas in the halls of the international socialist headquarters and one of the very few women to serve a term as a federal prisoner for a conviction under the Espionage Act in 1919. O’Hare was a socialist propagandist and a social critic and wrote on a wide range of topics through which she engaged the public on virtually every aspect of American society and politics. As a daughter of a Kansas farming family reduced to impoverishment and migration, she recognized and identified with the plight of rural and urban workers in the struggle she perceived them to be waging against corporate capitalism. As a woman she knew the dimensions of exploitation that women faced. The so-called Woman Question of her era captured a great deal of her attention as a speaker and writer and saw her offer unique insights into the issue. Yet, ironically, she spent many years of her life insisting on her distance from those who labeled themselves feminists.

Kate O’Hare knew best the milieu of struggling farmers and other rural folk precisely because she was the child of the late-nineteenth-century frontier. Accordingly, her greatest fame lay in those areas of the Southwest then in their first generation of settlement. Each summer, Kate O’Hare traveled to the socialist en-

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Kate Richards O’Hare as a journalist, about 1913.
campsments where up to five thousand local residents would gather and camp out and listen to Eugene V. Debs, the beloved Socialist party presidential candidate; "Mother" Mary Harris Jones, the legendary union organizer; O'Hare; and other well-known figures who spread the message of socialism. These encampments were major annual events in the lives of poor farm people and village dwellers, believers or not. The encampments were described by organizer Oscar Ameringer as "linear descendants of the religious and Populist camp meetings of former days." Whole families would participate in socialist songfests where gospels and other traditional melodies were assigned new lyrics to advance the party's message; they would also engage in crafts and games and attend economic and historical lectures.

Families came by foot, on horseback, and even via covered wagons, bringing with them food and cooking essentials, while the socialist organizers supplied water, wood, and other necessities. Occasionally a rodeo, carnival, or parade would be an added attraction, but for the most part, the people of rural Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas from 1904 into the era of the world war attended this collective forum attracted by the activities that awaited them under the large circus tents pitched for the encampments. They came, reminisced Ameringer years later, because "pressure was upon them. Many of their homesteads were already under mortgage. Some had actually been lost by foreclosure. They were looking for delivery from the eastern monster whose lash they saw in Wall Street. They took their socialism like a new religion."

In fact, historians have debated the motivation of and the impact on those who attended these socialist chautauquas and lamented that it is "as difficult to measure the effects of teachers as it is those of the preachers." It has been argued that aspects of evangelical Protestantism or sectarian revivalism that pervaded the encampments cannot be minimized, while another view has emphasized the extent to which the encampment participants felt divorced from established Protestant churches, a fact that the socialist organizers of the encampments recognized. Thus, their usage of evangelical elements meant no more than the borrowing of revivalist techniques merely as an approach with which the audience would be familiar. However valid either argument may be, for Kate Richards O'Hare herself, instrumental in developing the encampments and one of their leading orators, the environment was a thoroughly familiar one, more than to any other major speaker, and she built on the evangelical techniques with which she had grown up.

Kathleen Richards was born on March 26, 1876, near Ada, Ottawa County, Kansas, into a homesteading family. Her parents were Andrew and Lucy Richards, who had moved west from Kentucky two decades earlier. Both branches of the family had settled originally in Virginia, and Kate could trace her background well into colonial times. Thus, the old American stock from which she emerged, flavored with southern and western influences, imbued her with an awareness of genuine American pioneering. This background also gave her a sense of irony when she later found herself portrayed in the role of a traitor to her country.

Andrew Richards became his daughter's role model and idol. He was of Welsh stock, a working farmer who had been wounded serving the Union during the Civil War. He was a man who took both his religion and his politics seriously, interests which his

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4. Shannon, "Kate Richards O'Hare Cunningham," Notable American Women, 1:417; Frank P. O'Hare, "Kate Richards O'Hare," Social Revolution (March 1918): 6–7; Kate Richards O'Hare to "Dear Sweethearts," May 25, 1919, Kate Richards O'Hare Prison Letters Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis (hereafter cited as Prison Letters). There is no biography of O'Hare, and her only collected letters pertain to her 1919–20 imprisonment; all her other papers were destroyed by Frank O'Hare during their marital breakup in the 1920s. For material on O'Hare's life, see "Kate Richards O'Hare — Candidate for Congress," Socialist Women 4 (August 1910): 2; Shannon, "Kate Richards O'Hare Cunningham," Notable American Women, 1:417–19; Melvyn Dubofsky, "Kate (Richards) O'Hare Cunningham," Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Four, 1946–1950 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 635; and Neil K. Basen, "Kate Richards O'Hare: The 'First Lady' of American Socialism, 1901–1917," Labor History 21 (Spring 1980): 155–99. O'Hare's birth certificate is not extant. The 1880 federal census and the 1885 Kansas census list her birthdate as 1876, although historians hitherto have indicated that she was born in 1877. The census data also indicate that her name was Carrie Katherine, but Kathleen was the name she used on certain official documents. The author thanks Neil Basen for kindly providing this information.
daughter Kate was to emulate. He was one of the first in the area to follow Henry George's single-tax movement, with the small group of single-taxers holding their meetings at the Richards home. Young Kate, perhaps twelve or thirteen at the time, kept the records for the members and was given copies of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and other reform-minded fiction of the day. Clearly the elder Richards passed on to his daughter a commitment to social reform. Her later letters from prison were filled with references to her father, second only to her references to her fellow inmate Gene Debs whom she revered perhaps as a second father. At that time, she wrote proudly of her father's patriotism which she so respected:

... not the love of flaunting flags and of moribund political parties, of empty phrases and demagogic politicians. He loved the fruitful soil, the wide plains, the majestic mountains, and the deep woods, the humble wild flowers, and singing brooks; but most of all he loved the people of his country, and he taught us that the only religion acceptable to God was to serve the people.

Kate's mother Lucy had been born in Tennessee and had made the not-unusual trip west, in her case to Kentucky, where she married Andrew Richards. Lucy Sullivan is a shadowy figure in her daughter's writings compared to the clearer lines with which Andrew Richards is sketched. In fact, in the only correspondence of Kate O'Hare to survive, there are relatively few mentions of her mother. In those brief citations, Lucy Richards is described as having walked beside Andrew in the various progressive movements which he supported from abolitionism onward and is praised for her ability to bear up under the ordeal of having her daughter imprisoned. She was also forbidden by her daughter to visit her, as Kate O'Hare wished to spare her mother the sight of a daughter in prison garb. Otherwise, all O'Hare's writings offer is a dim view of an elderly Lucy, "soft and pink with the sunset glow of life. In her the marks of motherhood have rounded into softened lines of happy grandmotherhood."

Kate Richards was the fourth of five children and the second of three daughters. Her earliest memories were of happy outdoor adventures on the family homestead romping with the other children. The security of those years in a functioning farming family, however, was abruptly terminated by the drought of 1887 and the subsequent financial panic. Her father became a machinist in Kansas City, Kansas, to which the family moved. Kate, who had attended elementary school in Ottawa County, continued her education. She briefly attended a normal school in Nebraska, and after a season of schoolteaching, she worked as a bookkeeper in the machinist shop where her father was by then a partner. But as she "hated ledgers and daybooks and loved mechanics," she became an apprentice in her father's shop and eventually joined the International Association of Machinists despite its males-only policy. At the time she was very religious and, as many serious adolescent young women of that era, not simply devout but filled with a need to act on the basis of her beliefs. She involved herself in temperance work in Kansas City's red light districts. O'Hare believed that alcoholism, prostitution, and other visible social ills were responsible for the poverty that she observed. O'Hare worked at the Florence Crittenton Mission and Home, one of a chain of missions then located in large cities that sought to provide "shelter and moral uplift" to prostitutes and delinquents. Her commitment to the cause of the fallen was profound, and she even planned to enter the ministry of the Disciples of Christ. Gradually she began to read popular social critiques such as *Caesar's Column* by Ignatius Donnelly and *Wealth vs. Commonweal*th by Henry Demarest Lloyd. She attended union meetings and, though taunted by her male colleagues, began to explore economic and political questions. She chanced to hear "Mother" Jones give a talk, and that became the turning point of her life.

Kate Richards joined a socialist study club and in 1901 became a student at a school in Girard for socialist organizers headed by Walter Thomas Mills, a Marxist theoretician, and underwritten by socialist publisher J. A. Wayland. She married a fellow student, Francis Patrick O'Hare, on January 1, 1902, and they immediately embarked on a lecturing and propaganda tour. They organized among anthracite miners in Pennsylvania and, stranded in the East without funds, spent a year working and investigating industrial conditions in New York City. Such a pattern of collaborative efforts would mark the more than two decades of their lives together.

9. O'Hare, "How I Became a Socialist Agitator," 8; Frank P. O'Hare, "Kate Richards O'Hare," 6–7; O'Hare, *Sorrow of Caged*, 58. On Frank P. O'Hare's early life, see "Frank P. O'Hare to Mrs. Margaret Scott Lawler, and Miss Mary Porter Scott," April 26, 1909, Missouri Historical Society Bulletin 20 (October 1963): 56–58.
O'Hare's socialist propagandizing won her the title, or epithet, of "Red Kate." Her close association with Eugene Debs, whose ideological stance placed him clearly in the party's revolutionary left wing, reinforced her flaming image. As a result, historians came to associate her with the left wing of the Socialist party. However, O'Hare accepted and agreed with the dominant revisionist or reformist direction of the party leaders, Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit. She believed in the inevitability of socialism, determined by economic factors whereby workers were continually exploited by capitalism. Their increasing exploitation would lead them to see the necessity of undermining the capitalist system and bringing on socialism. Because of the inevitability of the social transformation, she did not believe that a bloody revolution was necessary. Rather, socialism would emerge gradually through a variety of reforms of the existing system. Any possible contradictions in this recipe were not evident to her or to others in the reformist faction of the party.

She supported the craft unions of the American Federation of Labor; despite its exclusion of most American workers, it nevertheless represented the largest bloc of organized workers. Often in cooperation with nonsocialist reformers, she promoted shorter work day, the end of the child labor system, improved social conditions, protective legislation, and other socioeconomic reforms. She believed that the availability of the ballot to American male workers, and perhaps soon to women workers as well, provided the masses with a weapon they could use to vote for socialist candidates and eventually, through that device, to bring on peacefully the cooperative ownership of the means of production and distribution, or the cooperative commonwealth. 10

O'Hare's socialist career coincided with what has been called the golden age of the Socialist party of America. It was founded in 1901 as a party preponderantly of the native-born, in contrast to the late-nineteenth-century Marxist organizations that arose and collapsed every few years. It was able to organize locals throughout the country, with its greatest strength, proportionate to population, in Oklahoma and its most widely read newspaper published in Kansas. By the end of its first decade, the party had elec-

10. Standard historiographies assign O'Hare to the left. As an example, see David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America: A History (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1955), 68. But a review of her own writings and speeches and an emerging body of revisionist writings do not support that position. See Foner and Miller, eds., Kate Richards O'Hare, and Basen, "Kate Richards O'Hare," 165–99.

Kate Richards O'Hare in 1908 with her newborn twins Eugene and Victor and her older children Dick and Kathleen.

ted municipal, county, and state officials throughout the country and reached a membership of 118,000.11

Kate Richards O'Hare traveled across the nation constantly to transmit the party message. She was on the road for months at a time, with intermittent visits to her home. She toured alone and sometimes with Frank, with whom she always participated in the summer encampments. This schedule obviously meant separations from her young children, born between 1903 and 1908: a boy, Richard; a girl, Kathleen; and twins, Eugene and Victor, both named after Gene Debs. O'Hare was one of the two or three most active party speakers, and she did not seem to concern herself with the possible ill effects of such a life, either on family cohesiveness or on her own physical health.

Her speaking tours were the heart of her commitment, rather than the intraparty politics that engaged many party functionaries. She did not involve herself much in internal debates or in office-seeking. She did, however, hold party offices. She was elected to the party’s executive, the second woman to serve, and also sat on its Women’s National Committee for a term. She won election as the party’s international secretary in 1913 and again in 1919 and, in that first term, attended a meeting of the International Socialist Bureau in London. During that trip abroad, she visited Ireland and France, meeting with other socialists and unions, and was invited by the leading French socialist, Jean Jaures, to inspire his comrades to win over the French peasants based on her encampment experiences with tenant farmers in the Southwest.

O’Hare attended conventions, even upon occasion with an infant, and served on various convention committees. In 1917 at the party’s emergency convention, called to oppose American intervention in World War I, she chaired the committee that drafted the party’s antiwar statement. Twice she was a serious candidate for the party’s vice-presidential nomination. She ran for public office as a socialist, in 1910 campaigning for the House of Representatives in the Second Congressional District of Kansas, two years before Kansas women could vote. In 1916, when she and her family lived in St. Louis, she ran for the United States Senate, the first woman ever to do so.

The O’Hares lived in Oklahoma Territory and in Kansas, farming, organizing, and writing for the socialist press. In Girard, Kate and Frank worked on the Appeal to Reason, the most-read socialist paper in the United States, and later they moved to St. Louis to work on the National Rip-Saw, a monthly.12 One of Kate O’Hare’s consistent topics as a journalist and as a public speaker during these years was women in modern society, and it was the subject of her only book of collected columns. For Kate Richards O’Hare, the confirmed socialist, the system of capitalism was responsible for the exploitation and degradation of women. The lengthy hours of work; the unsanitary conditions in sweatshops, mills, and factories; the inadequate wages; and the resultant lack of opportunity for marriages based on love were all capitalist-caused. The American woman of the working class had no oppor-

12. O’Hare’s socialist activities can be traced most directly through Socialist party convention proceedings, various party newspapers such as the Party Builder (1912–14) and the American Socialist (1914–17), and the independent newspaper Socialist Woman (1907–13). In her August 28, 1919, prison letter to her family she described attending conventions with an infant in her arms.


portunity for education, for a carefree childhood, or even for a marriage of her choice, according to O’Hare. Modern life, she believed, forced adolescent girls into jobs at subsistence wages, granting them little free time or the chance to enjoy any of life’s amenities. Women were always paid less because the system seemed to accept the idea that a woman could “sell her labor power by day and her virtue by night.” Consequently, young women sought marriage as an escape, hoping to flee from the grinding schedule and impoverishment. However, marriage became only more of the same. Such young women inevitably married available young men who also faced deplorable conditions. A young male worker was unable to support a family because of the prevalent low wage scales, but he was anxious to leave behind “boarding houses and undarned socks.” Together, then, such typical working people formed loveless marriages supported neither by adequate income or even health because of the conditions they endured. It was no wonder O’Hare, like others of her era, noted and decried a falling marriage rate. But she also deplored the necessity of working mothers, the numerous and unhealthy children, and the rising rate of separation and divorce.13

Women had always worked, O’Hare wrote, and work itself was or could be a source of satisfaction and one of life’s joys. “We have never looked upon it as a problem or a curse until in the immediate past,” she stated, and she emphasized that women were in fact to a great extent engaged in the same kind of labor they had performed historically and “with vastly improved tools.”

Women have always been the weavers of the world’s clothing, and the maid or matron at her loom or distaff has long been the theme for painter’s brush and poet’s lay. Today she [sic] is still the weaver of the world’s raiment but she no longer inspires song or picture unless it be the song of misery and the picture of human suffering.

Those women weaving the world’s clothing, however, no longer owned their own looms and spinning wheels. The tools were owned by large capitalist concerns and, hence, the woman weaver saw little of the fruits of her labor. Work, thus, had become a curse creating wealth only for a master class; “that master sets the price of her labor, fixes the hours, says how much shall be done and what conditions must be.”14

O’Hare participated in hearings held by the Mis-
souri Senatorial Minimum Wage Commission in St. Louis in 1913. Women from the factories and department stores of St. Louis appeared before the commission to testify on wages and the cost of living, so that Missouri, following the lead of Illinois, California, and a few other states, could establish a minimum wage law for women workers. The average wage of local factory women was determined to be about $5.50. Those wages, O’Hare noted in her column in the National Rip-Saw, were not earned for pin money but to help support parents, children, or husbands.

They all worked because they were compelled to work. No feminine unrest there; no struggle for a “wider life,” no suffragette tendencies, no revolt against home, husbands and babies. The whole question resolved itself into the problem of bread.

The hearings suggested that $11.00 per week was required for a minimum standard of living or, as O’Hare wrote acidly, to keep a girl “in good mule condition,” just as a farmer knew how much corn it took to keep a mule functioning.15

O’Hare railed against a system that would undermine health and refuse to alleviate the problems it created. Arguing for free medical and dental care, at least for the children of the country, she noted that women did “our share in the bearing, but what of . . . the bearing?” She talked of two million American children working in mills, mines, factories, and farms, with the results sometimes of death, occupational accident, and industrial disease. In addition, schoolchildren of the working class never saw doctors and therefore grew up to be adults not fit to bear children of their own. In an article written more than a year and a half prior to the outbreak of World War I, she attacked society’s policies of underwriting armaments rather than the health of the coming generation.

... your government spends hundred of millions of dollars we create each year, but not one cent to save these ... wasted lives ... . Last year we spent $38,994,075 for new battleships and ammunition wasted in target practice. For this sum fifteen thousand physicians might be hired by the government ... .16

The women who bore those children to be sacrificed to the greed inherent in the system were performing one of their three fundamental roles, according to O’Hare’s most famous piece, entitled \textit{Wimmin Ain’t Got No Kick}. She termed women “three-fold machines” who were, first of all, the baby-making machines who could be criticized by such as Teddy Roosevelt who “calls us all manner of vile names because we do not produce babies fast enough to suit his masters.” Their second role was, of course, that of staffing industry themselves. “There are,” she said, “six million women who have been forced out of the home, denied the God-given right to wife and motherhood and forced to be wealth-making machines . . . .” Their third role, and that to which she devoted a great deal of her attention, was to “provide the machine of prostitution.”

Kate O’Hare was a student of the subject of prostitution stemming back to her days as a Crittenton Mission worker. She was familiar with current state and federal studies of prostitution and the infamous white slave trade. She unleashed her deepest-feeling anger when she wrote about the “720,000 known prostitutes” in the United States and the one out of six who died each year and ended in an unknown grave in a potter’s field, all because women were forced to work for wages that would not support them. Such women were not only destroyed by society but in their “fall” they brought down with them twenty times their numbers in the sons, nephews, and neighbors’ sons who tasted their wares and contracted “the vilest disease known to medical science.”

Back to the palace, the cottage and the hovel comes this nameless horror, the fruit of prostitution; back to our innocent daughters, back to our unborn, back to curse and maim and slay, and we women it is who suffer most, must fill the brothel and feel the curse at home.17

Discussing the subjects of prostitution, white slavery, and syphilis, which many of her fellow social critics chose not to discuss in public, O’Hare wrote that white slavery loomed as the worst of all crimes within capitalist society. In dark prose she wrote of girls “drugged into insensibility, forcibly violated . . . and sold from one owner to another,” while simultaneously distraught parents contacted missions and social workers trying desperately to trace daughters who had innocently gone off into the world. The heinous crime, she maintained, was not simply the work of vice rings but of police departments and “all executive departments of government” which formed an informal conspiracy of implicit support for the white slave trade. “In every case where white slavers were captured and

17. O’Hare, Wimmin Ain’t Got No Kick (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1912).
brought into court, the officials did not use their power to convict the white slaver, but his victim. Further proof of the elaborate nature of the vice conspiracy rested in Pres. Theodore Roosevelt’s recommendation to the U.S. Congress that a commission’s report on white slave traffic be stricken from the records of the nation as vile.  

O’Hare’s basic explanation of the exploited condition of the modern woman was shaped by the writings on the Woman Question in the major European socialist classics. Her views lay within their existing framework, and as she herself was not a creative thinker, she merely added her observations and experiences, which in a few cases lent certain insights. The traditional socialist position on female exploitation was summed up in Engels’ view of women as the proletariat of the family. O’Hare was familiar with his Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State and August Bebel’s Woman Under Socialism, which argued that the oppression of women had evolved with the institution of private property. Lewis Henry Morgan, a founder of anthropology, had influenced Engels’ thinking on social organizations and the emergence of the patriarchal family, displacing matriarchal society, and O’Hare herself had delved into Morgan’s works and those of his associates. In a series of articles on patriarchy, which she published under the title “The Tale of a Rib,” she concurred with their teachings and added the notion that the true history of women’s experience was not known and could not be written and published until generations in the future when women owned and managed publishing houses and were economically free enough to analyze and to relate their own experiences. However, from her own socialist perspective, the Woman Question was encased within the Social Question, and female liberation would occur only with the coming of the cooperative commonwealth.

Under socialism, a woman’s position would be enhanced, as would a man’s. Machinery would become the servant of the whole people rather than of the few, and the fruits of production would belong to all. Accordingly, workers would labor only a few hours per day and women would enjoy a new status. They would not simply be returned to the home as drudges, she cautioned, but they could choose to continue in social production, enjoying the safe conditions and shorter hours in a productivity “fit for women’s hands and brains to do,” or they could choose to give their full attention to homemaking; in that case, the worker-owned government would compensate them for their work in their “maternal years” on behalf of the next generation of workers and citizens as a kind of mothers’ subsidy. Women would be equal owners, equal voices, and full partners. Marriages would no longer be the result of economic need but of free choice, and marital unrest and divorce would, if not disappear, become less common. Economic independence for women would in and of itself alter the inequality in the institution of marriage and result in true companionship.

For the present, before the inevitable triumph of socialism, O’Hare envisioned a number of ways to reform society and to enhance the lives of working people. One of her main goals was to improve the quality and scope of education available to the masses. She proposed a system of free education that would be meaningful to the actual lives of people, one that would involve both liberal arts and vocational components. It was important to her, as a woman who began as a machinist and became a professional journalist, to educate both the intellect and the “craft potential” of the individual. Everyone should be taught to respect the value of basic manual work and also to appreciate the arts and sciences. She even spoke of a beneficial form of child labor that would lead to mental, moral, and physical development. She thought it was important to show children how to run a loom, lathe, or spindly, for “the workshop [could] be a school, and the school a workshop.”

She introduced her children to experimental education in accord with her ideas so that they experienced a John Dewey-inspired system of learning by doing. The four children lived for a year at Ruskin College in Florida, which was both a college of workers’ education and an agricultural settlement with which the elder O’Hares were associated, and spent a few years at Commonwealth College, which was also a school of workers’ education based at an agricultural colony in Louisiana and then in Arkansas, and where Kate O’Hare later served on the faculty and as a trustee. For her own children and for the masses of American children she hoped to build what she called “a culture in overalls,” one “whose ideal is a working class fit to inherit and hold the earth and the fullness thereof.” She hoped to take from existing academic institutions

18. O’Hare, Sorrows of Cupid, 69–82; O’Hare, Law and the White Slaver (St. Louis: National Rip-Saw Publishing Co., 1911).
20. O’Hare, Sorrows of Cupid, 190, 203, 216–19, 229, 238–39, 244–45.
“all that is fine and useful and beautiful and make it our own,” by which she meant the extant knowledge of the physical sciences and the best of literature, music, and art. The social sciences, which she believed had been deliberately held back by the vested interests in capitalist-dominated educational institutions who feared their inherent critical approach, would be fully developed by working-class educational institutions. The social sciences would “turn poverty, unrighteousness and war into social justice for the workers.”

The role of the young women of the working class in O’Hare’s ideal system of education is somewhat ambiguous. While she spoke of both young women and young men experiencing that system, her writings that specifically referred to the education of women suggested essentially education for homemaking rather than for social reconstruction. Girls who were currently exposed to the educational system, in contrast to those who at an early age were cast into the work force, were injured and cheated by their experiences, O’Hare believed. For the most part, girls were taught social graces, music, dancing, embroidery, “and all the arts of attraction,” and, she thought, they overstudied these unessentials when “they might learn to braid a braidstick or darn a sock” instead of “attempting to master a piece of music.” They were taught that “it is more essential to maintain the husband’s position in society by giving pink teas than it is to provide for his comfort by sewing the buttons on his underwear.” Thus, education for young women entirely ignored “the greatest art known to man, that of making a house Home, and giving life to wellborn children.” Girls must be trained for married life, she argued, but she also said they should not be taught “that a wife is the whole home”; moreover, future “fathers MUST be educated to be helpers and sustainers in the home.” O’Hare seemed to imply some sort of cooperation in the home, although she never detailed a husband’s involvement. For the young woman and future mother, however, she envisioned the best possible education for domestic training which, in the coming socialist society, would mean access for the housewife to the latest “scientific lore.” In that millennium, the husband would be freer to share home life, and those new conditions would make it possible “for her to be a real companion and helpmate instead of merely a household drudge and child-bearing machine.”

Another avenue that O’Hare explored to enhance the situation of women was political change. She was very active in the campaign for woman suffrage. As a socialist, she never viewed the ballot as an end in itself but as the means to provide women with a tactical weapon through which they might be able to reform contemporary society. She thought that women were desperately in need of the ballot as a means of self-

22. Frank P. O’Hare, “Kate Richards O’Hare,” 6–7. The O’Hares also sent their children to Roman Catholic boarding schools and hoped to send them to a Quaker boarding school in order to expose them to a variety of teachings. See O’Hare letter, April 17, 1920, Prison Letters. See also Workers’ Education in the United States, Fifth Yearbook of the John Dewey Society (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), 53–54; Philip R. V. Currie, Educational Attitudes of Organized Labor in the United States (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1926), 184; and William H. Cobb, “Commonwealth College Comes to Arkansas, 1923–25,” Arkansas Historical Quarterly 23 (Summer 1964): 99–122.

protection. Working women, upon whom she focused, lacked economic power and were no better positioned to help themselves than were slaves. She spoke of "the white woman slave in the cotton mill" to whom she wanted to extend the ballot so that she would have a weapon to use intelligently to "wipe the curse of wage slavery out of our social system." Thus, she saw a nexus between class and sex.

However, she not only believed that the vote for women was a weapon for use in the class struggle, but she most especially thought of the ballot as the means through which a woman could protect her so-called natural environment, that is, the home. "Home is the logical location of womanly activity; biology and the natural division of labor have placed her there..." A housemaker in twentieth-century America, she argued, needed the ballot in order to provide for the health and well-being of her family and home in ways that she no longer could herself. Formerly, the woman produced everything used in the home and was solely responsible for healthful conditions.

Today everything used in the home is produced outside the home in a factory, and the mother has absolutely no control of the conditions existing there... If a textile mill is unsanitary, operated by sickly women and children, and a veritable breeding place of disease, the mother who buys the fabric made there is helpless. If a food factory is reeking with filth and germs and sends poisoned food to the family table the mother is powerless to protect her own. The sources of food supply are often at the ends of the earth: an Asiatic with bubonic plague may send us death-dealing tea; a filthy packinghouse in Argentina may send diseased meats to our table. A girl with tuberculosis or worse in a London sweatshop may send her curse to our baby in a silk garment.

O'Hare deftly combined her knowledge of the social ills that Progressive Era reformers also attacked with her anticapitalist views to develop an argument on behalf of woman suffrage that could appeal to a wide audience. But the message that rang clearest, that women needed the vote to purify the home rather than that they now needed collectivist action to cope with individual problems, left little distinction between her message and that of mainstream reformers who also placed isolated women essentially in a domestic framework.8

O'Hare tried to keep some distance between herself and middle-class suffragists, at least in theory.

The Second International at its Congress in 1907 in Stuttgart, Germany, had warned against class collaboration on the suffrage issue. While it endorsed universal womanhood suffrage and clearly instructed the socialist parties of the world to promote woman suffrage, it simultaneously opposed alliances with bourgeois reformers on behalf of suffrage. However, Kate O'Hare and numbers of other socialist women nevertheless chose to cooperate with the middle-class suffrage movement. O'Hare worked with representatives of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in municipal suffrage campaigns, just as other socialist women joined forces with the NAWSA in testifying before congressional committees in favor of suffrage. But O'Hare and her comrades maintained that they always insisted that the vote was fundamentally a means to social transformation and that their collaborationist efforts were serving to radicalize the middle-class suffrage movement.

In St. Louis, O'Hare played a prominent role in a number of suffrage efforts, immersing herself in the various campaigns as they developed. She conducted a highly publicized series of debates with a well-known local woman attorney who was an antisuffragist, and the O'Hares' paper, the National Rip-Saw, serialized the debate for its national readership. In the spring of 1913, O'Hare served as grand marshal of the socialist section of the massive suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., and she pointed out proudly that the party's block of five hundred marchers was the largest segment of the parade.8

In one particular area, Kate Richards O'Hare offered an especially consistent commentary. She demonstrated a deep and ongoing interest in the moral issues of the day. In lectures and articles, she supported programs of sex education, she endorsed the idea of birth control, she promoted a policy of free medical care in these specific areas, and she believed in the greater availability of divorce as a necessary option. She favored these policies as appropriate and even required reforms prior to the coming of the social revolution because society did not allow conditions that encouraged healthy relationships between men and women or constructive family life. Indeed, as other socialists, she argued that corporate capitalism was in

Children were brought into the world, one after the other, by young parents who could neither support them nor sometimes even see to their very survival. Society’s message seemed to be “breed, mother; breed,” no matter what. Mothers themselves starved for sufficient food and lacked prenatal care and were unable to afford doctors, and without the services of the midwife of other societies, they brought forth stillborn babies or died in childbirth. Numbers of infants who lived were “sub-normal.”

... they would be better off dead, but many of them creep feebly into life, drag through a hungry, sickly childhood, stumble through a brain and body starved youth to become the mothers of children more unfit than themselves... 28

Under such appalling circumstances, and somewhat reluctantly, O’Hare came to accept the need for legal abortions. Once abortions were legally accessible, the criminal element would be removed and the dangers inherent to women very much reduced. She felt great sympathy for women who sought out illegal abortionists but nevertheless realized that the country was “degenerating into a nation of infanticides...”

But yet, what choice did poor women have when they could not support another baby? “Can we be surprised that women resort to desperate measures to prevent motherhood...?” Kate O’Hare saluted Margaret Sanger and her campaign for what was called family limitation. Calling Sanger “this brave little woman,” O’Hare attacked those who sought to close lecture halls against her and agreed with her that “the most sacred thing in life is the creation of life and... the creator should have the right and power to say when a life shall be called into being.” O’Hare was quite hopeful that the availability of birth control information would immediately erase some of the most desperate social ills. She believed that “with the gradual dawning of intelligence concerning our sex nature, women are learning that they are not mature and fit to be wives and mothers until after twenty-five” and that the “child-mother” and the woman bearing ten or fifteen children would soon be relics of the past. Her promotion of these causes, however, was somewhat muted compared to some of her other efforts. She refrained from handling Margaret Sanger’s literature and referred requests for information to Sanger directly. However heartily she endorsed such changes in social mores, apparently she feared that this explosive issue

26. O’Hare, Saviors of Cupid, 42–43.
27. Ibid., 38–39, 48; O’Hare, “The Wages of Women,” 2, 6–9.
might damage the socialist cause, and thus a degree of verbal support was sufficient.\textsuperscript{29} Divorce was not an option she endorsed lightly, and yet she strongly believed it must be available. Divorce was an effect of the wage system, as were all other social problems; so as long as capitalism existed, divorce as an escape must be possible for people who otherwise damaged each other and their children as well. This subject, too, like family limitation and birth control, might taint the socialist message, but perhaps with common lore already insisting that socialism meant free love and trial marriages, there was less to lose in mentioning the subject. Not quite an enthusiast of divorce, and indeed she would then no doubt have been aghast to know that she herself would request a divorce in 1928, Kate O’Hare nevertheless supported it as the lesser of evils.\textsuperscript{30}

Divorce and all other social problems, from what she called enforced celibacy to race suicide, would disappear with the new order. Socialism with its economic and political autonomy for every citizen would mean the end of all exploitation, including sexual. The double standard would be erased as women were no longer dependent beings, and “a few generations of free women will produce a race free from sensuality.” Independent choices would be made with all aspects of wholesome family life emphasized. Maternal health care would bring state protection of infants but certainly not ownership, she added. Socialism would not mean state interference with the family by public-owned nurseries, she assured any alarmists in her audience.\textsuperscript{31}

Kate Richards O’Hare, the social reformer and would-be revolutionary, sought to defend and restore what she saw as nineteenth-century virtues of the home. Old-fashioned in many of her views and hesitant to recognize the full dimensions of the emerging sexual emancipation of the twentieth century, she nevertheless was willing to focus on the most serious contemporary social problems that might in fact injure what she held to be her larger cause. She was caught between old and new perspectives and, as one author suggests, was willing to mobilize others to what she perceived to be necessary reforms, but she held back from assuming a leading role herself.\textsuperscript{32} Yet her overall vision of contemporary womanhood and its crises, whether her emphasis was on economic dependency, inadequate educational opportunities, political weaknesses, or moral problems, was a constant one and formed a large component of her campaign against the existing social order.

O’Hare was neither willing nor able to venture much beyond socialist guidelines on the Woman Question. Comfortable in her indictment of capitalism, she could see no more than economic determinants as relevant. Certainly not alone in her approach, she and most other socialists failed to weigh psychological dimensions, formative experiences, and other phenomena pertinent to the plight of women. She never embraced the feminism of her day, believing it to be a parochial middle-class movement that minimized economics.\textsuperscript{33}

O’Hare really never resolved this issue, and clearly during the height of her party activity she was convinced that socialism itself was the only answer. Thus, the Woman Question remained subsumed in the Class Question. Her behavior more than demonstrated her actual distance from the issue. Her participation in the work of the party’s Women’s National Committee during her one term in office can be called no more than peripheral, as she missed numbers of meetings, failed to submit several ballots, and, accordingly, was defeated when she ran for a second term. Her failure to contact the leaders of the International Conference of Socialist Women when she was abroad was noteworthy. In contrast to most prominent socialist women, O’Hare hurled no charges of party discrimination against women. Also indicative of her at most ambivalent feminism, O’Hare had few women friends and, indeed, showed a clear preference for the company of male comrades. Her reverence for her father and for Gene Debs may be symptomatic, as well as her distance from her two sisters.\textsuperscript{34}

O’Hare epitomized the dilemma that the Woman Question represented for her generation of socialist women and, indeed, for those of subsequent generations. Despite her awareness of the extra layers of exploitation that women experienced, she did not fully confront the issue of women’s liberation, and it remained obscured by both Marxist ideology and soci-


\textsuperscript{30} O’Hare, Sorrows of Cupid, 180. At the O’Hares’ wedding ceremony in 1902, a Girard, Kansas, resident asked whether theirs was to be a trial marriage. See Frank P. O’Hare, “Kate Richards O’Hare,” 5–7.

\textsuperscript{31} O’Hare, Sorrows of Cupid, 215–16, 244–45, 249, 251.

\textsuperscript{32} Babie, Women and American Socialism, 248; Basen, “Kate Richards O’Hare,” 195.

\textsuperscript{33} O’Hare letter, May 31, 1919, Prison Letters.

\textsuperscript{34} In her prison letters very little closeness to her sisters, Gora and Jessie, is evident. See the letters of January 28, 1919, May 25, 1919, and August 17, 1919. In her letter of September 11, 1919, O’Hare referred to having been a lonely child with two pretty sisters.
tal mores. She wandered between socialist feminism and pure-and-simple socialism. An overt struggle for women's liberation would dilute and weaken the class struggle, she continued to believe. While she acknowledged that women bore the double burden of class and sex, she failed to envision for women a liberation of shared and equal parental, household, occupational, and community responsibilities and freedoms. Social institutions under a socialism that freed women as it did men were not suggested in her writings, and indeed, she refrained from committing herself to a future socialism even of day care centers as espoused by some socialists, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The women's liberation with which O'Hare felt at ease was that of economic security for a woman in the cooperative commonwealth enabling her to remain in her natural sphere, the home, safe from the clutches of industrial capitalism. Hers was essentially a traditional view of the structure of the family and of historical role assignments.35

After a dozen years of lecturing and writing on behalf of socialism, O'Hare abruptly modified her focus. The war in Europe erupted in the summer of 1914 and served eventually to alter the pattern of her life. As early as that fall she addressed the bloodletting in Europe in her articles. She mourned the waste of human lives and wrote of American businessmen discovering the value of preparedness. Those already killed in the war, she insisted, were murdered by capitalism. Blaming American unemployment and the continuation of the warfare in Europe on American export policies, she pleaded with Congress to forbid the exportation of food and ammunition to the belligerents. Governmental inaction demonstrated the cheapness with which capitalist governments everywhere held human life; men were being killed in battle while women, bearing life produced by force in the war theaters, were bringing forth replacement workers-soldiers. Calling women “the wounded who do not fight,” she wrote that

it is the women of Europe who pay the price while war rages, and it will be the women who will pay again when war has run its bloody course and Europe sinks down into the slough of poverty. . . . It will be the sonless mothers who will bend their shoulders to the plow and wield in age palsied hands the reap hook.


She hoped that American women could make a difference. Because of the special price women paid in war, she urged her American sisters to write to President Wilson to demand that the United States remain out of the war. But her tone gradually became pessimistic. As other governments promoted war babies while they sent their men to their deaths, so, too, might the United States.36

O'Hare played a strong role in the Socialist party's effort to join with other antipreparedness forces to insure American nonbelligerency. When that effort ap-

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Kate Richards O'Hare on the lecture circuit about 1913.

36. O'Hare, “The Wounded Who Do Not Fight,” National Rite-See (October 1914): 6–7. The way in which women pay the price of war was a theme unique to her among wartime critics, and she always noted in passing that women could not even vote their opinions on war. See also O'Hare, “I Denounce,” National Rite-See (March 1915): 20, and “To the Mothers and Maids of America,” National Rite-See (August 1915): 5–6. Kate and Frank P. O'Hare collaborated on an antwar play entitled World Peace, which was popular on the socialist circuit in 1915–16.
peared doomed, the party held an emergency national convention in St. Louis to establish its policy for the duration. Kate O’Hare chaired the convention’s Committee on War and Militarism that drafted an antiwar statement opposing conscription and food exports and promoting the socialization of major industries and natural resources during the crisis. Thereafter, O’Hare barnstormed the country repeating her message of socialist internationalism, maintaining a consistency with her prewar positions in contrast to many socialists in Europe and the United States who chose to support their nations’ wartime policies. The war was an economic struggle among capitalist nations, she insisted, and she added a new theme, opposition to the encroachments on civil liberties.37

After delivering her standard antiwar speech in the small town of Bowman, North Dakota, on July 17, 1917, Kate O’Hare was indicted under the Espionage Act for intending to interfere with the national war effort. O’Hare had delivered that same speech dozens of times, often with federal agents in the audience, so her indictment, evidence implies, actually stemmed from a local political squabble.

O’Hare was tried before an unsympathetic jury and judge, found guilty, and sentenced in December to five years in prison. Despite vast publicity in the media as a result of her fame and also the fact that, unlike others indicted under the Espionage Act, she was the mother of four young children, various legal maneuvers and appeals were unsuccessful, and on April 15, 1919, she entered the Missouri State Penitentiary, the largest state prison in the country.38

From a life of constant activity, O’Hare suddenly found herself in a vacuum. While the American socialist movement was being destroyed by schism following the Bolshevik Revolution, Kate Richards O’Hare was absent during the turmoil in the party to which she had given her adult life. She entered prison at the age of forty-three, worried about the prison labor that faced her, the stifling heat and humidity in the eighty-year-old institution on the banks of the Missouri River, and the onset of menopause under those circumstances. She settled into a regimented routine in an antiquated penal system, incarcerated in a state prison that lagged behind the reform movement called the “new penology”; had her sentence commenced a half-dozen years later she would have been placed in the modern first federal prison for women at Alderson, West Virginia, but O’Hare in 1919 took up residence as one of four “federals” at Jefferson City in the women’s wing containing one hundred inmates out of an overall prison population of twenty-six hundred.

Basically, life in prison entailed nine hours a day in the industrial shop, working on denim for a private manufacturer despite a state law precluding contract labor for prisoners. As in other prisons, notably those in southern and rural-dominated states, conditions in the industrial shop at Jefferson City were appalling. Lighting, ventilation, and even temperature were life-threatening, or at least debilitating. To O’Hare, a woman who in fact had enjoyed manual work since her youthful days as a machinist and who chose to resume the soothing pastime of knitting during the long prison evenings (the habit of her “pioneer ancestresses,” she wrote), prison contract labor was the most intolerable aspect of her confinement.39

O’Hare was permitted to have personal effects in her cell. She and the women in the other cells communicated regularly despite the imposed silence. They had permission to talk only one hour per day in their outdoor recreation period and during Saturday outings in summer to local parks. The silent meals in the dining room were unbearable. O’Hare noted that the food itself might have been edible, but it was served cold to the women, having been cooked hours before in the kitchen on the men’s side of the prison. Because of the cold food and the unnatural silence imposed on the diners, the actual dinnertime became shared snacks in the cells during the evening. Prisoners were permitted to receive food packages and even to order food from neighborhood stores, and these foodstuffs became the basis of meaningful interaction, as items would simply be handed down the line from cell to cell. O’Hare’s third complaint, more important than that of contract labor and food service, was the dangerous lack of hygienic conditions. The inmates were not segregated in accordance with health standards, so the contagious syphilis and tuberculosis lived side by side with the healthy inmates, even sharing the same bathing facilities and dishes without the use of disinfectants. She described this as “one feature that is really revolting,” and she formally complained to the warden, for whom she came to develop an apprecia-

38. O’Hare, Socialism and the World War (St. Louis: Frank P. O’Hare, 1919); Bernard J. Brommel, “Kate Richards O’Hare: A Midwestern Pacifist’s Fight for Free Speech,” North Dakota Quarterly 54 (Winter 1976): 5–10. See the February and March 1918 issues of Social Revolution for a series of letters from people across the country protesting the verdict and sentence that O’Hare received.
tion of his efforts on behalf of the prisoners. She also wrote to a prominent St. Louis judge whom she knew asking for legal advice and sought to have Julia Lathrop of the U.S. Children's Bureau intercede in the matter with the Justice Department. 40

The so-called “federals” were the leaders among the female inmates, many of whom were prostitutes, dope addicts, thieves, and the mentally ill. Two of the other federals were young immigrants who had been immersed in leftist activities, and O’Hare became quite fond of them. The other famous prisoner was Emma Goldman, the incarnation of the anarchist movement of the era. Despite the fact that Goldman and O’Hare represented competing ideologies of the left, they developed a genuinely warm and respectful relationship that outlasted their confinement. O’Hare came to feel that Goldman was the “cosmic mother” to the other women, a “mother force” in the inmates’ wretched world, while Emma Goldman wrote that the imprisonment of a woman such as Kate O’Hare was in itself an indictment of the American system of justice and democracy. 41

Writing after her prison term, O’Hare described those inmates who were not federal prisoners in this way:

Between eighty and ninety percent...had committed minor offenses against property, and the others were about evenly divided between crimes against the person and homicide. They were almost without exception poorly educated, but very few having reached the sixth grade in school and many were entirely illiterate. A large percentage were feeble-minded, a smaller percentage were borderline cases between normality and subnormality, and practically all who were not dments were psychopaths...they were all very poor, all from the most poverty-pinched sections of the working class... With these inmates, O’Hare experienced intimate sisterhood for the first time in her life, but unlike the more earthy Goldman, O’Hare’s interrelationships in prison were nevertheless at arm’s length. She wrote to her husband and children that

to the very day I “dressed in” here I was a “lady” and that is a frightful thing to be. Just think of all the ways of prudery, snobbery, false pride and unnatural repression it takes to make a “lady”, and I was one and

felt that one might as well be dead as not “nice.” But in that horrible bath that I was forced to take under the matron’s eyes, all the “lady” was washed off me and I emerged a woman. When I put on the ugly coarse prison garb I had lost every outward mark of superiority and I knew that if I was above the situation it would be because of the inherent things of soul and spirit,...

She hoped the inmates’ initial sense that she was of a different class that prevented her from reaching them could be penetrated, but, in fact, while the inmates did seem to develop a closeness toward her, O’Hare herself could only view them as case studies rather than as individual human beings. She continually evaluated them for a textbook on criminology that the prison authorities ultimately prevented her from writing. 42

O’Hare unsuccessfully requested the privilege of teaching classes for the other inmates and sought other ways to aid the prisoners. She persuaded the authorities to allow the women access to books from the library in the men’s section. She read aloud to them, lent books and magazines to those she thought were educable, and shared the gifts that she received in bulk from socialists and other sympathizers across the country. She asked her children and some of her correspondents to write to the most lonely and forsaken of the prisoners and invited them to send trinkets as well. She interceded with the warden on behalf of women who had special problems. Frank O’Hare placed inmates when jobs could ensure their parole, and together the O’Hares successfully achieved an improvement in conditions: the dining room and the women’s cellblock were painted, meals were served warm, and showers were installed. But despite all of Kate O’Hare’s genuine efforts, she could see only the few federal prisoners as individuals. The majority of her fellows were inmates on whom she, the social critic, took notes. 43

O’Hare’s prison letters were sprinkled with generalized comments about the inmates and the nature of women. She noted how evident it was that women loved adornment, that a piece of jewelry “perked” them up, but that they were trained to hide their brains, and that they intuited whatever they could while men made a study of an issue. While bewailing

41. O’Hare letters, May 5, 1919, October 2, 1919, Prison Letters.
her own lack of "intellectual companionship" and "mental comradeship" after the other federal prisoners had left Jefferson City, she yet tried to remind herself of the inmates' basic humanity:

the women here are real human beings, stupid and intelligent, educated and ignorant, normal and abnormal, just like any group of women of the same number anywhere. Unnatural, abnormal and brutalizing as life is here, like weeds by the roadside they manage to survive and maintain their individuality. They retain every feminine characteristic, so far as I can judge, and many become overemphasized.

The only times she took it upon herself to chide her sister inmates was when they risked punishment by seeking to contact husbands or friends in the men's section of the prison. Her own blood ran cold, she commented, when she witnessed the risks some took "to send their tragically pathetic little love notes over the walls..." But when reminded by an inmate that she did not have to wait months and years for word from a husband who in her case wrote daily and visited monthly, O'Hare realized that without her own support system, she would be as defenseless and foolhardy as the others. In her later book on her prison experience, she commented more sympathetically that the sexual segregation added an extra strain which was understandably unbearable for the prisoners. The solution she offered, however, was the greater separation of the sections, as a lack of proximity would mean a more intelligent segregation."

So O'Hare remained for the most part the student and the philanthropist examining the inmates' plight. The psychological space she maintained between herself and the others was no more pronounced than in her relationships to the two-thirds of the women who were black. She entered prison a firm believer in black inferiority and the necessity of social segregation, attitudes not unusual at the time among educated whites of all political persuasions. She did not believe that blacks could compete with whites nor could they profit from higher education. Once in prison and in close contact with many black women, her views remained constant. But as a basically humane individual, O'Hare was able to interact with these prisoners, and she shared her bounty with them as with the white prisoners and distributed candy, wrote letters for them, and provided a sympathetic ear as necessary.

She made it a point to tell her husband, "It really is amusing to see how much joy... fifty colored girls can extract from a supply of gum." These childlike women, she thought, at least could tolerate the hellish heat in the industrial shop, immune to the conditions that caused O'Hare to suffer heat prostration. But she did see them as victims of society, victimized because they were workers, because they were women, and because they were black. They represented a social problem to her, aside from whatever sympathy she might..."
feel. While as prisoners they needed a few luxuries, especially sweets, they needed "most of all social justice, decent living conditions outside and sane, scientific handling here."

She also took special note of the three Jewish prisoners, particularly writing of "Jew Lil," a prostitute. But because O'Hare had had Jewish comrades in the socialist movement, and because Emma Goldman, her fellow "political" during her early months of incarceration, was Jewish, O'Hare did not view them as being so very distinct from the human condition as she did blacks. Rather, they were people with a background of oppression to whom she could relate as a fellow human being, which she could not easily do with the black inmates. O'Hare's views in general remained markedly unchanged by her experiences. Her political, economic, and social criticisms of society appeared to her to be borne out by life at the Missouri State Penitentiary, and her socialist ideology thus held firm. The one area of her thought that turned out to be vulnerable and became modified by the prison experience was her appraisal of the Woman Question. Imprisonment imparted in her a broad sense of sisterhood that she had never known before, a sisterhood which was not that of women inmates but an abstract sisterhood that encompassed the entire gender. The exceptional woman no longer existed. While before prison O'Hare's social criticisms had always demonstrated a deep strain of concern for women's plight, her tone had been objective, and she held herself apart from whatever conditions or fate she addressed. But very early in her incarceration her perspective began to change as she came to believe that her own struggles were often within the framework of the struggles of all women. At first, after one month at Jefferson City, she recalled with pleasure the way she had been treated in Europe by the leaders of the Second International as the expression of "the New Woman who was beginning to shoulder up the responsibilities of life, as well as the burdens and sorrows . . . ." But within the next month her outlook changed. A recurrent theme appeared in her letters to her family in which she deplored her treatment and neglect by the National Office of the Socialist party. She complained of her " never had a letter or a scratch [sic] of information" from the executive secretary since her incarceration. When an amnesty campaign was initiated by the party on behalf of political prisoners during that year, at its greatest rally, held in Milwaukee, "none of the male speakers, and there [sic] were all male, remembered that I existed." Party funds and support seemed to be available only for the male prisoners. "They did not overlook Flora Foreman or me because they were bad, or unfriendly, but simply because that is the psychology of the male." That same obtuseness seemed to her to mark media coverage of prisoners as well. While the press showered O'Hare with publicity at the time of her trial, after her imprisonment she noted that the press did not have "one spark of interest in the women," while it ran series exposing the conditions and treatment of men prisoners in federal penitentiaries. As a result, O'Hare began to comment on women's marginal and inadequate treatment and included herself in that appraisal. And she went on to ask, "do not all women suffer . . . .?"

Increasingly, she acted in ways that reflected a sense of being part of a common cause. She asked that women, especially those in female suffrage states, write to their representatives and senators demanding a congressional investigation of the O'Hare case. She also asked Frank O'Hare to encourage the establishment of several committees of women, the most important of which was the Kate Richards O'Hare Defense Committee of New York, to publicize her cause and promote amnesty for her. Such efforts indicated self-conscious attempts at effective publicity, but they also reflected her sense that women more than men might empathize with her situation. They all shared the same framework. Consequently, she came to a declaration that she could not have made only a few years before:

You know that I have never been a particularly rampant feminist; but my . . . months here have changed my views materially, and I know now, as never before, that "women bear the heaviest burdens and walk the roughest road" and that this is true in all walks of life.

On May 29, 1920, Kate O'Hare's prison sentence was commuted by Pres. Woodrow Wilson after she had served nearly fourteen months in the Missouri State Penitentiary. She had refrained from asking for a pardon, so the commutation was most welcome, as was the full pardon and restoration of her civil and political rights.

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45. O'Hare, "Nigger Equality" (St. Louis: National Rip-Saw, 1912); O'Hare letters, March 17, 1920, May 21, 1920, Frank P. O'Hare to "Mother; Kinfolks, and Friends," July 3, 1919, Prison Letters.
rights by Pres. Calvin Coolidge thereafter. But her connection to the cause of the convicts she left behind was not so easily broken. Marked by her experiences and, additionally, finding the socialist cause in disarray, she embraced penal reform as the raison d'etre of the final decades of her life. She and Frank organized amnesty campaigns for the remaining World War I prisoners, and she investigated conditions of contract labor, led a successful national fight to undermine the prison contract system, and surveyed general prison conditions, publishing books and reports on the subject for which she received public recognition. Nearly twenty years after her own imprisonment she was appointed by the governor of California, Culbert L. Olson, as assistant director of the state's Department of Penology, and in that capacity, she assisted in the modernization of that state's prison system. In her final public role, O'Hare participated at the invitation of Gov. Earl Warren in the 1940s in sessions of the State Crime Commission. 49

Involved also in worker education and political campaigns that were only slightly left of center in those decades, Kate Richards O'Hare died in 1948, at the age of seventy-one. She left behind a record of public involvement, with a special commitment to publicizing the particular problems and disparities that marked women's lives. She spotlighted women's underpaid labor, their inadequate wages, the danger of prostitution, the loss of their children to factories or to war, their faulty education, their disenfranchisement, their ignorance on sexual matters, and their degradation in prison. Through all of her adult life, she held as one of her goals the eradication of the inequities in women's lives. However acute or narrow her vision might have been, O'Hare's commitment to the cause of women was marked by a degree of ambivalence until her own perceived victimization by society enabled her to recognize how her own life too was touched by the inequities the masses of women faced. As a result of her fourteen months of imprisonment at the age of forty-three and her experience of the basest conditions that American society imposed, she came to understand more fully the helplessness and subservience that women knew. While O'Hare refrained from developing that knowledge into a feminist ideology, it nevertheless brought her nearer to feminism than had her previous two decades of lecturing and writing on the role of women.

49. See her report entitled In Prison (St. Louis: F. P. O'Hare, 1920) and her book by the same title cited above. Also see her "Prisons, Profits, Politics, and Patriotism," American Vanguard (November 1922): 8-9, 12-13.