

Feminism Is Taking Hold in West Ger.

By HENRY KAMM

Special to The New York Times

FRANKFURT—A group of politically active women has taken Chancellor Willy Brandt's decision to hold national elections before the end of the year as the occasion to strike the first organized blow at male domination of West German political life.

A dozen women's organizations, including the women's branches of both the national parties that form the Federal Republic's coalition Government, have banded together into an action committee to conduct an "operation Women Elect Women." The action has received wide publicity in this important city, and the women hope to extend it throughout the country.

The aim is to change the heavy disproportion between women voters, who make up 54 per cent of the nation's electorate, and members of the Bundestag, or Parliament, of which only 6.6 per cent are women. This percentage has steadily declined since the founding of the state in 1949.

"My phone hasn't stopped ringing since the first announcement of our program," said Mrs. Inge Sollwedel, spokesman for the group. "Everyone wants to join."

Law Is 'Discriminatory'

The women believe, she said, that the predominantly male Parliament is incapable of putting into practice the constitutional equality of women that was written into the basic law of West Germany.

Even the law is still discriminatory, Mrs. Sollwedel, a 45-year-old free-lance journalist specializing in women's affairs, said. It specifies, for instance, that a woman "may" take a job if she fulfills all her housewifely duties as well, but "must" work if the husband is incapable of meeting the family's needs.

A woman must, under the law, take her husband's name on marriage, Mrs. Sollwedel said, but in case of divorce the husband may forbid her to continue to use it.

Far more important than the legalities, Mrs. Sollwedel said, was Germany's rigid abortion law, which outlaw's abortion except when the mother's life is in danger, in all cases, even pregnancy resulting from rape. This has been the most important impetus to the German women's rights movement, which has become increasingly active in the last two years.

"It is not women's libera-

tion," Mrs. Sollwedel, the wife of an architect and mother of three children, said. "But the movement has encouraged the potential that has always been there."

Women's liberation as it is known in the United States is considered an extremist movement here. Its German adherents, according to Mrs. Sollwedel, are women who draw their inspiration from the revolutionary New Left, which is involved particularly in student circles.

The social status of women among the most educated classes has progressed in Germany, Mrs. Sollwedel said.

"In the upper classes, where men used to say, 'My wife doesn't have to work,' men are now positively boasting about their wives' jobs," she said. "But now it is in the middle and working classes that men are saying, 'My wife doesn't have to work.'"

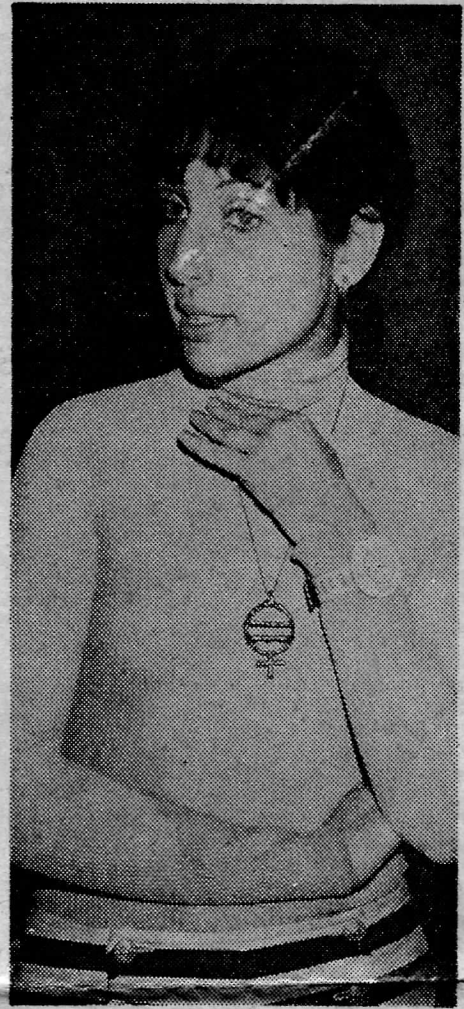
Equal pay for equal work is an accepted principle, Mrs. Sollwedel said, and applies

generally where men and women work side by side, particularly in government jobs. But in large categories of industrial work done mainly by women, she said, pay scales are lower than equivalent work for men.

"German industry still judges the value of a person's work by the amount of muscle needed," Mrs. Sollwedel said, "although in much modern industry what counts most is nimble fingers."

Women Deputies Sought

"Operation Women Elect Women" is calling for the election of women deputies, regardless of the voters' party affiliation, to rectify not only those inequalities but also to provide for more kindergartens and all-day schools to free women to achieve equality of opportunity. Paraphrasing John Kennedy, the group's appeal declares, "Do not ask what others can do for you, ask what you are doing for yourselves."



The New York Times/Barbara Bell

Dana Sardet, left, and Lucy Komisar, above, were among the American women who attended organizational meeting of the Paris chapter of NOW.

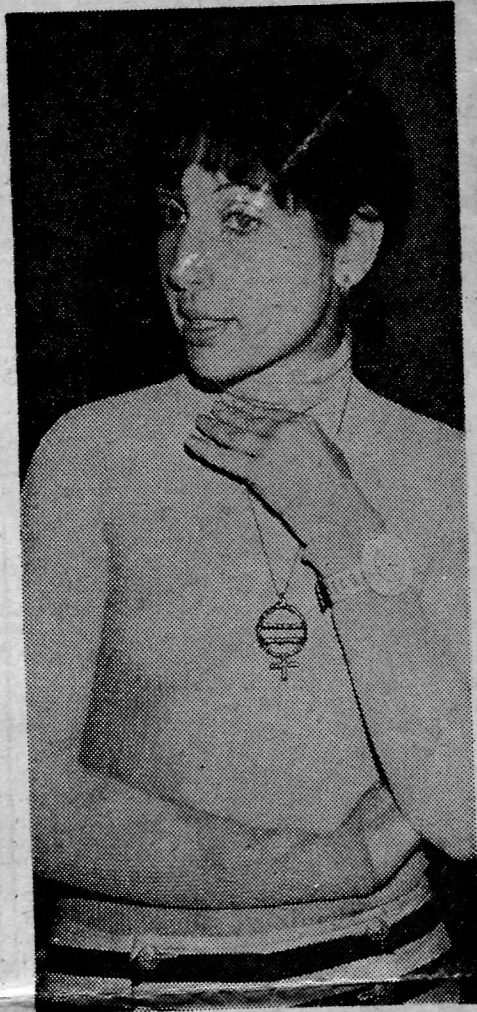
Her interests in women's rights has propelled Mrs. Sollwedel, as well as an increasing number of women, to become active in party politics. She is an elected member of the ruling body of the moderately conservative Free Democratic party for the State of Hesse, and is running for election to the City Council in October.

Beyond the goals of particular women's interests, Mrs. Sollwedel said, the whole nation stands to gain by the election of more women to Parliament.

She Explained:

"We are in a period of strong political polarization, perhaps radicalization. Women can face this trend with a more sober intelligence. They are more interested in practice than in theory. I wouldn't want to say they are more reasonable, but they are certainly more matter of fact. They do not have the male tendency to fight about heaven and neglect the earth."

Making Hold in West Germany and France



The New York Times/Barbara Bell
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PARIS—The laments vary.

"After living here for three years," complained one woman, "I still can't identify with the French women's liberation movement."

"I was manhandled by a French gynecologist," insisted another, adding the plea, "Can somebody please help me find a better one?"

What it all adds up to is that women's liberation, American style, has arrived in Paris.

"What you are setting up here will be the first NOW chapter abroad," Jane Pollack, a member of the national board of the National Organization for Women, recently told some 50 feminists crowded into the basement of a restaurant called Mother Earth's Lost & Found in the Les Halles quarter.

Jobs Are Limited

"In the United States, you can fool yourself into thinking there's already been a revolution in women's rights; in France, that doesn't work," insisted Dana Sardet, an American who is married to a Frenchman.

"After four years of college and three years of experience as a film editor," continued Mrs. Sardet, who has been job-hunting since January, "I finally got my first offer of a full-time job in this country—as a salesgirl in the shop at the Louvre. I don't think American women can help becoming radicalized in France."

Predominantly under-30, female, American and identifying themselves as either temporary or permanent residents of France, most of the prospective members of the NOW group first met last month in response to an appeal for American feminists to start a Paris chapter.

The appeal was made by Lucy Komisar, a free-lance writer and lecturer who is a former vice president of NOW.

Paris Changed Views

"I came here in May to work on a book about the American welfare system, with no intention at all of organizing for women's liberation," she explained. "But then at parties and in brasseries I kept running into Americans who told me that they thought there was a need for a group like this in Paris."

Several of the women indicated that they had never really felt discriminated against until they came to Paris. Like Dana Sardet and Nikki Economos (who has offered to serve as leader of the chapter until elections

are held in the fall) many said they feel especially frustrated in their search for work.

"The only jobs available to American women in Paris are secretarial," said one girl bitterly.

"And even if you worked for years and helped to legalize abortion in your home state, you find yourself back at square one if you need an abortion here," another woman commented with a shrug.

Others at the meetings spoke of their "very deep sense of isolation" in France.

No Membership Limit

One American woman who attended several meetings of the MLF (La Mouvement de la Liberation de la Femme), said, "I came here because I needed desperately to talk to American women instead of French women—I feel that there's such a great difference in our mentalities."

Since NOW's by-laws forbid discrimination against any person, French women—and men—will not be excluded from membership in the Paris chapter. But, Miss Komisar said, they won't be encouraged to join, either.

"French feminists should be dealing with the French Government," she said. "We Americans do not have the same right to do that. But I feel that a NOW action group here will probably work best on the kinds of problems we have to deal with if it is composed mainly of Americans."

A NOW liaison committee to work with the MLF has been proposed. Other committees are planned to deal with child care, abortion (perhaps referring women to other countries, since abortions are illegal in France), the possibility of an international conference in Paris on women's rights, employment practices of American companies abroad and of UNESCO ("Very sexist," Miss Komisar said, "like the entire United Nations") and sex roles as portrayed in both French and English language books read by children living in France.

At the request of such women as Sheila Anderson, consciousness-raising groups are to be formed. "I never got around to doing this in the States, but I'd finally like to find out why I always wanted to marry a rich doctor instead of be one," she said. (Actually she's a dental assistant and husband, Don, a student of French linguistics, is working in France on a Fulbright research grant).

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