Feminism and the Servant Problem

In the early twentieth century, women fought for the right to professional employment and political influence outside the home. Yet if liberation from household ‘drudgery’ meant employing another woman to do it, where did this leave domestic servants?

Both inspired and frustrated by the growing feminist movement, servants began forming their own trade unions, demanding better conditions and rights at work. *Feminism and the Servant Problem* is the first history of how these militant maids and their mistresses joined forces in the struggle for the vote but also clashed over competing class interests. Laura Schwartz uncovers a forgotten history of domestic worker organizing and early feminist thinking on reproductive labour, and offers a new perspective on the class politics of the suffrage movement, challenging traditional notions of who made up the British working class.

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Class and Domestic Labour in the Women’s Suffrage Movement

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2 Postcard featuring charwomen’s banners from the Pageant of Women’s Trades and Professions (27 April 1909). The Women’s Library at the London School of Economics, London, TWL.2000. 40, Postcard Box 4 (reproduced by kind permission of The Women’s Library at the LSE). 83

3 Cartoon of servants and housewives protesting against the ‘servant tax’. Vote 6 July 1912, p. 185 (reproduced by kind permission of The Women’s Library at the LSE). 87


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