

Women's Activism during the Revolution: Louise Otto's Statement of Principles in the First Issue of *Frauen-Zeitung* (April 21, 1849)

Abstract

In this statement of principles published in the first issue of *Frauen-Zeitung*, or *Women's Newspaper*, [Louise Otto](#) (1819–1895) encourages women to fight for a share in the ongoing revolution and to support their underprivileged sisters above all. She clearly distances herself, however, from “emancipated” feminists who had deprecated marriage and motherhood, thereby “degrading women into a caricature of men.”

Source

FRAUEN-ZEITUNG [WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER]

A mouthpiece for higher female interests

Motto: I recruit female citizens for the realm of freedom.

Founded by Louise Otto, Volume 1, 1849, Großenhain/Saxony
no. 1, Saturday, April 21, 1849

Program

The history of all ages, and especially of today, teaches us that those who forget to think of themselves will be forgotten! I wrote this in May of 1848, when I was addressing primarily the men in Saxony who were concerned with the labor question – admonishing them to think of the poor women workers by speaking up for my sisters, so that they may not be forgotten! (i.e., “Address of a young woman” to the liberal Oberländer Ministry, D.H.).

It is this same principle derived from experience that prompts me to publish a women's newspaper. In the midst of the great upheavals in which we all find ourselves, women will discover that they are being forgotten if they forget to think of themselves!

Well, then, my sisters, join with me so that we shall not be left behind, as everything around us and beside us is pushing forward and struggling. We want to demand and earn our share of the great world-redemption that must at long last come to all of humanity, of which we are one half.

We want to demand as our share:

The right to cultivate what is purely human in us with a free development of all our powers, and the right to come of age and be independent in the state.

We want to earn our share:

We want to exert our strength to advance the work of world-redemption, first by seeking to spread the great ideas of the future – liberty and humanity (two words which essentially mean the same) – in all circles open to us, in the wider ones of the world at large through the press, in the narrower ones of the family through example, instruction, and child-rearing.

But we also want to earn our share by not striving individually, each one for herself, but rather each for all,

and above all by looking after those who languish forgotten and neglected in poverty, misery, and ignorance.

Well, then, my sisters, help me in this work!

Help me to work for all the ideas I have mentioned, first of all through this newspaper! –

I believe that I have now said everything that needs to be said about this paper's goals – but unfortunately I must agree with those who whisper in my ear (reversing the usual saying), 'being positive is not enough': I must also add something negative – meaning in this case: I must protect myself and this newspaper against misunderstandings. –

No!

I cannot make up words to do this:

I invoke my life, my work as a writer since 1843 – anyone who is familiar with any of it knows that I am not one of the so-called 'emancipated' women, one of those who have brought discredit upon the words 'women's emancipation' by degrading woman into a caricature of man. And let me reassure those who do not as of yet know anything about me that it is precisely through this paper that I hope to correct the error that often prompts the most talented women to satisfy their striving for intellectual freedom by succumbing to unbridled passion. –

And so no one can lump me or the sisters working together with these 'emancipated ones,' though we shall be proud to be called successors of that noble virgin of Bethany, of whom the shining exemplar of all humanity said:

"The part that Mary has chosen is best!" –

And so I hereby call upon all like-minded writers, male and female, who support the cause of women's rights, to support me in this endeavour by submitting contributions.

I also ask those of my sisters who are not writers to send me reports – first of all the oppressed, the poor working women, even if they do not feel skilled at stylish writing; if necessary, I shall be happy to edit their simple statements – but it is important to me that their concerns, above all, are placed before the public, for in this way they can be helped first.

I invite all who think alike to take out subscriptions so that this endeavour may succeed!

Louise Otto

Source: *Frauen-Zeitung*, vol. 1, 1849, Großenhain/Saxony, no. 1 (Saturday, April 21, 1849); reprinted in Margrit Twellmann, *Die Deutsche Frauenbewegung im Spiegel repräsentativer Frauenzeitschriften. Ihre Anfänge und erste Entwicklung. Quellen, 1843-1889*. Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1972, pp. 34–35.

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