



In 1910, Crystal Eastman was one of the most conspicuous progressive reformers in America. By the 1920s, her ardent suffragism, insistent anti-militarism, gregarious internationalism, and uncompromising feminism branded her “the most dangerous woman in America” and led to her exile in England. Yet a century later, her legacy in shaping several defining movements of the modern era—labor, feminism, free speech, peace—is unquestioned.

A founder of the ACLU and Woman’s Peace Party, Eastman was a key player in a constellation of high-stakes public battles from the very beginning of her career. **She first found employment investigating labor conditions—an endeavor that would produce her iconic publication, *Work Accidents and the Law*, (1910), a catalyst for the first workers’ compensation law. Crystal conducted her research**

of Pittsburgh area work places in 1906-07.

She would go on to fight for the rights of women, penning the Equal Rights Amendment with Alice Paul. As a pacifist in the First World War era, she helped to found the Civil Liberties Bureau, which evolved into the ACLU. With her brother, the writer Max Eastman, she frequented the radical, socialist circles of Greenwich Village. She was also a radical of the politics of private life, bringing attention to cutting-edge issues such as reproductive rights, wages for housework, and single motherhood by choice.

The social justice issues to which Eastman dedicated her life – gender equality and human rights, nationalism and globalization, political censorship and media control, worker benefits and family balance, and the monumental questions of war, sovereignty, force, and freedom – remain some of the most consequential questions of our own time.

Shortly after the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment, every feminist in the country had a take on the ERA, and many of them included some very telling complaints. Eastman delivered a speech called “Now We Can Begin” in which she laid out all the issues on which equality had yet to be won, and among them was embedded one gripe that had never softened in her:

"It must be womanly as well as manly to earn your own living. And it must be manly as well as womanly to know how to cook and sew and clean and take care of yourself in the ordinary exigencies of life. I need not add that the second part of this revolution will be more passionately resisted than the first. Men will not give up their privilege of helplessness without a struggle. The average man has a carefully cultivated ignorance about household matters—from what to do with the crumbs to the grocer’s telephone number—a sort of cheerful inefficiency which protects him better than the reputation for having a violent temper.... Even as a boy he was quick to see how a general reputation for being ‘no good around the house’ would serve him throughout life, and half-consciously he began to cultivate that helplessness until today it is the despair of feminist wives."