... the authentic discourse of the dominated, ‘prior’ to any hegemonic use, cannot be isolated as such. It appears mainly as a forgotten origin, or is testified to not so much by actual words as by practical resistance, the irreducible ‘being there’ of the dominated.¹

This paper enquires into the relationship between social movements and what Étienne Balibar calls ‘the proposition of equaliberty’, which he sums up as ‘no equality without liberty, no liberty without equality’.² I argue that social movements per se, even the ‘new’ social movements that emerged in the 1960s, are not unambiguously a force for or against equaliberty. Rather, questions of social class and political strategy mediate the relation between social movements and equaliberty. The paper is a contribution to thinking about when, under what conditions, and through which organisational forms and strategies might a genuinely equalibertarian politics be pursued by social-movement organisations.

² Balibar 1994a, p. 47 and 1994b. I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their comments and the participants at ‘History Matters: Social Movements Past, Present and Future’, a conference held at the New School University, New York City, May 2003 for their helpful feedback on an earlier version of this paper.
I advance my argument about equaliberty through a case study of Union Women’s Alliance to Gain Equality (Union WAGE), the first women’s liberation group of independent women trade unionists in the USA. In California, in 1971–2, Union WAGE struggled to save women’s protective labour laws from their anticipated abolition by the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as ‘sex-discriminatory’, by campaigning for what its founder, Anne Draper, called a ‘Labour ERA’, that is, legislation to ‘protect women workers gains by extending them to men’. Union WAGE warned that, unless the ERA was amended, it would ‘have the disastrous effect of also nullifying a large body of truly beneficial legislation covering women workers achieved over decades of struggle’. I argue that the Union WAGE strategy was a small example of equalibertarian politics and of what Balibar calls ‘ideal universality’, while the campaign by the National Organization of Women (NOW) for an unamended or ‘Pure’ ERA never escaped a liberal feminism at odds with equaliberty, an example of what Balibar calls mere ‘fictive universality’.

**Introduction: the ‘Labour’ ERA vs. the ‘Pure’ ERA**

California became the site for a sharp conflict within feminism over the ERA because so much was at stake. Ten per cent of the thirty million women workers in the US were employed there and the state possessed the nation’s largest body of protective legislation, ‘acquired and consolidated in painful struggles over most of a century’. With only one in five women workers...

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3 The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a proposal to write into the American constitution the words, ‘Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex’. It was passed by the Senate in March 1972 but, despite an early rush to ratify, the ERA eventually died in 1982, three states short of the thirty eight required.

4 Anne Draper was born on 4 March 1917 in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. At the age of 15, she joined the Young People’s Socialist League and remained a member of the third-camp independent socialist tradition all her life. After working as a steelworker’s union organiser in the 1930s and as a welder in World War Two, she became a highly talented trade-union organiser, first for the Hatters’ and Millinery Workers’ Union, later for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. A founder of Citizens for Farm Labor, Labor Assembly for Peace and Union WAGE, Anne Draper died in 1973.

5 Quoted in Hal Draper 1976, p. 8.

6 Anne Draper 1972a, p. 1.

7 Hal Draper 1976, p. 5. California was unusual in this regard. In other states such as New York and Illinois the courts using Title VII of the Civil Rights Act eliminated similar legislation. There the immediate impact of a ‘Pure’ ERA was not so obvious. In California, it was ‘the drive for an ERA that business interests hope to use to break...