

Séverine (1855–1929)

Séverine, the pen name of **Caroline Rémy**, who was born in Paris on 27 April 1855 and died on 24 April 1929, was a French writer, journalist, libertarian and feminist.

Early journalism career

She met Jules Vallès (a far-left French journalist, writer and political activist) and became his secretary, retaining the male form of the job title. Working alongside Vallès, she learned journalism and was introduced to socialism.

She also revived his newspaper, *Le Cri du Peuple*, which she managed jointly with him, subsequently taking it over following his death in 1885. She was the only woman on the editorial staff and wrote her first articles under the masculine name Séverin, before switching to the feminine form, Séverine.

The first woman to lead a major daily newspaper, she was forced to leave *Le Cri du Peuple* in 1888 due to an ideological conflict with the Marxist Jules Guesde. She continued to write on a freelance basis for many different publications, including the conservative periodicals *Le Gaulois* and *Gil Blas*.

Starting in 1897, she published a daily column, “Notes d’une frondeuse” (“Notes of a Rebel”) in *La Fronde*, the feminist daily newspaper started by her friend, journalist Marguerite Durand. She became friendly with Madame Daniel-Lesueur when they worked together on *La Fronde*, then helped to create the Vie Heureuse prize, the forerunner to the Prix Femina, in 1904. She acted as president for the prize in 1906 and remained a member of the jury until her death.

Commitment to women’s rights

Séverine defended women who resorted to abortion, and her commitment led to accusations that she was seeking to justify abortion and threats that she would face charges. She also supported women’s rights to plead as lawyers, a position which provoked strong opposition. Séverine was involved in the fight for women’s suffrage, including via the publication, from 1906, of a weekly article in *Nos Loisirs*, which had a circulation of more than 500,000.

In 1905, together with Marguerite Durand, she led a suffragette protest, which brought together 6,000 women in Paris to demand the right to vote.

She continued to write for a number of publications, in which she promoted the cause of women’s emancipation and denounced social injustices. She also got involved in the Dreyfus Affair, alongside Dreyfus’ supporters, notably Mécislas Golberg.

Links with Monaco

A friend of Prince Albert I, Séverine shared his pro-Dreyfus and pacifist beliefs. The two moved in the same circles and attended the same dinners. Séverine was a frequent visitor to the Monaco court, where she was treated “as a close friend”, according to historian Gustave Schlumberger. She represented France at the 11th Universal Peace Congress held in Monaco in April 1902. She suggested that the international pacifist movement should adopt a flag designed by Kaiser Wilhelm II himself, and proposed that the flag be based on the colours of Monaco, the first country to which the Peace Congress had been officially invited. Prince Albert I, who was keen to bring this idea to fruition, wrote in his journal on 1 July 1902, during Kiel Week: “I told the Kaiser that during the Peace Congress in Monaco last winter, Madame Séverine had expressed to me a wish to propose, at the next congress, plans for a flag designed by the Kaiser. The Kaiser was interested and immediately sketched a draft on the back of a menu with two pencils: a red background with a white star for each nation that participated in the congress; a large red cross covering the whole area between white stripes; a large white star at the centre of this cross.” The following year, at the 12th Universal Peace Congress in September 1903, the Prince gave

a large dinner on board the *Princesse-Alice*, in honour of several members of the International Peace Bureau and notable figures attending the Congress, in particular Baroness von Suttner, Séverine, Gaston Moch and Abbot Pichot.

Séverine described Prince Albert as “the natural intermediary between the peacekeepers and his cousins, the kings.”