

予習課題：次の英文を読んで、内容を理解しなさい。

Helen Keller is best known as a deaf and blind girl who learned to communicate by touch. According to orthodox biographies, she was an unruly child who, in 1888, at the age of eight, was “tamed” by a saint-like teacher, Anne Sullivan, who taught her manners and the manual alphabet.

The popular image of Keller suspends her adolescence—a nice, brave, patient girl whose sightless eyes stare placidly into space as she fingers a Braille manuscript.

But what was she reading?

Keller attended the prestigious Radcliffe College, thanks in part to a fund set up by Mark Twain to fund her education. As a university student, she became radicalized through her research on the social and economic causes of blindness. Noting her growing interest in social and political issues, Anne Sullivan recommended H.G. Wells’s *New Worlds For Old*, for its “imaginative quality” and “electric style”, although Sullivan herself did not agree with Well’s socialism. Keller found the book a revelation.

Sullivan’s husband, John Macy, was a socialist intellectual with an extensive library of political books that Keller consumed voraciously. By her late 20s she was reading socialist periodicals in German Braille and a friend came three times a week to spell books on Marxist economics into her hand, letter by letter.

The selection of speeches, essays and articles in this book, largely written by Keller herself, reveal a woman of fierce intellect, driven by the strength of her political convictions to champion the most radical of causes at a time when to be a left radical was to risk vilification and imprisonment.

Despite vitriolic and insulting attacks in the press, Keller became a passionate advocate for working people and joined the U.S. Socialist Party in 1909 and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) soon after. She campaigned against World War I, advocated reproductive rights and votes for women and supported Lenin, the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution. The FBI kept her under surveillance for most of her adult life.

To those who ascribed her political “mistakes” to disability, she gave as good as she got:

If I cannot see the fire at the end of their cigarettes, neither can they thread a needle in the dark. All I ask, gentlemen, is a fair field and no favor. I have entered the fight against preparedness [for U.S. entry into World War I] and against the economic system under which we live. It is to be a fight to the finish and I ask no quarter.

A search for materials on the life and work of Helen Keller yields hundreds of essays, texts and dedications, but the story contained in most is disturbingly homogenous; a young Helen Keller overcomes deafness and blindness and learns to communicate. Some sources make vague references to her being a great humanitarian, or a campaigner for the rights of the deaf and blind, but few mention her “rebel years” in the first two decades of the 20th century.

(From John Davis ed. *Helen Keller*)

(注) manual alphabet : 手話法アルファベット、placidly : 静かに、Braille manuscript : ブライユ式点字、causes (of) : (～のための) 運動、voraciously : 貪るように、champion : 擁護する、vilification : 中傷、vitriolic : 辛らつな、reproductive rights : 生殖の権利、preparedness : 戦時への備え、quarter : (敗者への)助命、yields : 明らかにする、disturbingly : いらいらさせるほど