

## Women's Votes in Labor and Politics

*Enlightened Men Know only too Well that Women Should be Welcomed with Both Hands into the Field of Labor Today*

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It has become a platitude to say that under the epoch-making events of our day, the world will never be the same again—that, indeed, we are on the threshold of a new age and a new epoch. And yet this point of view must be constantly emphasized if we are to properly appraise the position of women with respect to their work and environment. Only after a tremendous struggle did men overthrow, in turn, the feudal system, the monarchical system and the various superiorities that have hampered the march of political and economic progress. What men have accomplished it remains still in large part for women to do; and everywhere, in the field of labor, or politics and of social life, women are beginning, slowly but surely, to come into their own. Taking things by and in the large women are still in a state of feudalism—a condition in which the reactionaries and the Black Hundreds of America and Europe would be only too glad to keep them. But the reactionaries made one gross error in their calculation, in teaching women to read and write. Women realize that their fight for the vote, seen in its proper perspective, is but part of that long battle of a common humanity against superiorities, financial, royal and feudal. This conception of women's place in the scheme of things throws a new light upon their future condition in the industrial and political world. They are at length prepared to penetrate man-made mysteries of capital, labor and politics; and are, moreover, better equipped to use the franchise than was the common man when he received it. It is imperative that this fact should not be overlooked.

We may first glance briefly at the probable effect of extending the franchise to women, in the field of labor. Women are more concerned than men in the maintenance of a decent standard of living, realizing to the full the effect of the standard upon the future welfare of their children. They realize intensely, too, that a high standard of living means fewer children and better children; and that it affords an opportunity that would be otherwise denied to pass along the culture and the education as well as the social position they have achieved at so great a cost. Women have more quickly perceived also the bearing of the standard of living upon wages. They know that, once a high standard of living has been achieved it tells with cumulative force in maintaining, not only a living wage but a wage that will afford some of the comforts and conveniences as well as the decencies of life.

### AS CIVILIZATION ADVANCES.

Some men have opposed women's entrance into the field of labor because they believe it subtracts from the sum total of work available for them. This is the old "lump of labor" theory in a new form—that there is only so much work to be done in the world and that it must not be divided among too many. Needless to say the theory is ready to be thrown on the scrap heap of the accumulated debris of the days of barbarism. The world's work is, in fact, quite beyond the capacity of the people to perform; and no limit can be set to it for the simple reason that to do so would be to place a term on the physical, mental and spiritual needs of mankind. As civilization advances new wants develop—wants that stretch far into the future in an interminable vista that only the eyes of the discerning can see. Those wants, necessities and desires mean a demand for goods, a demand that cannot be satisfied with the world's present economic equipment. Enlightened men know only too well that women should be welcomed with both hands into the field of labor today.

Unfortunately it must be admitted that women are however, a menace to men inasmuch as their wages are, in general, lower than those of their male competitors. This is due broadly to the fact that women have never received adequate training; that they are sadly wanting in organization and leadership; and that they are subsidised by their fathers and brothers at home. Employers are only too glad to take advantage of this state of affairs for which no remedy will be found until equal pay is given for equal work. Less emphasis must be placed in the future upon marriage as the inevitable avocation of women. They must be given training of the right sort that will fit them to do their share of the work of the world well. Above all, whether by legislation or otherwise, an end must be placed upon the practices of parasitic employers who pay women in-

adequate wages and expect the balance to be made good at home. Already this has been accomplished in large part in Australia, in England and in the United States. Some twenty years ago the state of Victoria created a number of Wages Boards whose duty it was, if not to determine minimum wages in certain industries in which women were mostly engaged, at least to fix upon a standard wage which must be paid by the trade as a whole. This legislation has been taken up and amplified in the various Australasian states. In 1909 the United Kingdom set up Wages Boards based upon the Australian model, to determine a minimum wage for women workers in the box, lace and chain-making as well as the tailoring trades. In 1912 the state of Massachusetts established a Commission to investigate every phase of women's work as well as the wages paid. It was given the power, not to determine a minimum wage, it is true, but to publish the names of employers who would not pay a living wage after due notification. The compulsory minimum wage for women has been adopted by quite a number of the most progressive states in the American union—among others by Wisconsin and Minnesota, Colorado and California, Washington and Oregon. As long as women are weak in organization they must depend upon the power to vote to secure their industrial rights.

### THE WAGE QUESTION.

It may be objected, however, that certain industries cannot possibly pay increased wages, and to make them do so will simply force them out of business. If the industry as a whole cannot pay increased wages, some other expedient must necessarily be adopted; but if only a few employers within the trade cannot do so they should be compelled to close their establishments, as they are merely parasites on the body politic. If, however, the trade in general cannot pay higher wages without increasing prices to the consumer, prices should certainly be raised. Indeed, the National Consumers' League of the United States has adopted this as its deliberate policy, its members refusing to buy goods that are not produced under sanitary and living conditions. But it may well be that higher wages for women will lay a burden neither upon the employer nor the consumer; for it is a well known fact that a decent standard of living reacts upon the worker and immensely increases the industrial outlook.

In Saskatchewan particular attention must be paid by women to the question of child labor, of which there is altogether too much evidence. In this connection it is especially pleasing to note that the government has recently passed legislation providing for the lengthening of the school year. Women must be alert too, to see that all occupations and professions for which they are fitted are open to them. It goes without saying that a considerable amount of missionary work remains to be done to impress upon the husband and father that women play an equal part in building up the family income, and that they are thereby entitled of right to a fair share of the decencies, comforts and even a few of the luxuries of life. In a word it may be said that women's work on the farm is of equal economic and social importance with that of the men and that there is imperative need that this be recognized today. It is well, of course, to impress upon all the duty and discipline of thrift; but some men carry thrift to such an extreme that they thereby compel themselves and their wives to commit slow suicide to provide for a "rainy day" that may never come.

### VALUE OF THE VOTE.

All history proves the value of the vote in safeguarding the economic position of a particular class. It was so in the case of the Reform Bill of 1832 which was designed to protect the industrial classes against the greed of the landlords. The Uitlanders demanded it in the Transvaal in order to safeguard their economic interests, and brought on Civil War to obtain it. It was the same motive that lay behind the "one man, one vote" agitation in Belgium and Germany before the war. Upon all these extensions of the franchise history has placed the stamp of approval. It is in the fact that women actually have different class and group interests that the justification for extending the franchise to them lies. It is the only honest policy that can be followed to give women equal opportunities with men to

protect their own property, economic and social rights. We have to deal here with a question not of abstract rights but with one of vital interests. There are no figures available for Canada but the following data are significant as showing the extent to which women are unprotected in the United States: In the shoemaking trade one woman is employed for each two men, and one woman controls a unit of the industry for each 120 men. In the cotton industry three women are employed for each four men, and one woman controls a unit for each 316 men. It may be fairly said that the women in the large industrial towns of the United States are as much at the mercy of capital as the mining camp peon in Colorado. It is abundantly clear then, that women need the vote to the end that they may protect their economic position through exercising a decisive influence in the field of politics.

Moreover the fact cannot be blinked that sex does make for a real difference in the thinking of men and women, and that women have a right to express through the vote their own particular point of view. Men lay much stress upon property rights, women on personal rights; men upon the production and distribution of wealth, women upon the sanctity of the home. The recent presidential elections in the United States proved that women could not be classed as pacifists any more than the men; and yet the death of 20,000 men on the field of battle is, it must be conceded, a greater tragedy for the mothers who reared them than it can ever be for the statesmen who guide the destinies of the nation. On these and other matters women's thinking is prone to be quite different than that of men.

There are not lacking pessimists who are appalled with the complexity of life, and who stand aghast at the thought of extending the franchise of women where the common man has failed. It is not to be denied that the issues of public life are complex; and municipal, national and international problems sometimes appear too great for even the brightest intellect to solve. And yet these pessimists at one and the same time exaggerate the responsibilities and minimize the importance of the vote. The common individual determines issues as well as candidates, and compels leaders to do things. The amplifying of the electorate has always widened and liberalized party programmes and policies. While we may all admit that the vote in itself is only one of the instruments needed for the revision of our social system, it cannot be forgotten that it has been invariably used to destroy the inequities of pre-franchise days. Intelligent women therefore, no longer remain content with the inherent cowardice involved in a sheltered life. In private life they have demonstrated their ability to hold their own with men in will and sympathy and in character. Here the wise male pretends to no superiority. Only that society can be considered civilized which gives to women as well as to men their fair share in the work of the world.

### YOUR MONEY OR YOUR CHILDREN.

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such as pity, courage, faith and honor, are dedicated to the services of mankind. The criminal code may exalt theft above assault, but it changes its tone when murder is done. That, and no offence against property, is a hanging matter. Passengers are first in time of shipwreck. The financier may neglect his home on common days, but he will spend his last cent to save his child in sickness. Our fault is not so bad as that we have deliberately put money above humanity, but is rather that we have not rationalized our principles. We have not thought the thing through. We have not followed the gleam. We have not brought our customs into subjection to our beliefs.

John Ruskin has a stirring passage in which he contrasts the captain of a liner with the owner of a factory. In a storm at sea the captain provides for his own safety last, whereas, in time of financial storm the business man thinks of his own safety first. He will turn his workmen into the street, already thronged with the unemployed, and sit tight on his capital. Perhaps, in present conditions, he can do nothing else; in which case it is plain that present conditions need mending. Business is only justifiable for its social usefulness. And if its usefulness is shattered in times of crisis, if it selfishly deserts those dependent on it, there is evident need that business should be reconstructed.

Most of us, perhaps, are doubtful of the confident promises of a score of mutually contentious remedies that are suggested for the cure of the meanness and cold-heartedness of modern business. But it is at least something to have recognized the disease.