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Homemaker as Citizen

Is Woman Suffrage A Failure?

By JEANETTE BEYER

YES, says the butcher, the baker and every chronic acher, woman suffrage is a failure, it has not bettered our politics or government, women are not interested in public affairs, do not care to vote, and are unwilling to accept suffrage responsibilities. No, declares Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffrage leaders. Give women a chance.

The Case Against Us

According to many current writers, our case is bad.

Says Charles Edward Russell in the March Century:

"Nothing has been changed, except that the official ballot-dropers has approximately been doubled. Not a boss has been unseated, not a reactionary committee wrested from the old-time control, not a convention has broken away from its familiar towage.

"There are no women governors of states. And is the least promise that there will be. No woman has a place in the nation’s Cabinet, or within miles of it. After four years of woman suffrage the Congress of the United States contains one woman member, and she was elected as a tribute of respect to her late husband, a representative who had been suddenly stricken with death after years of public service.

"One thing was demonstrated: women would not vote for women. In the forty-eight states nearly five thousand members of legislatures were chosen, and of these only sixty-three were women. Two of the states reported no women elected to anything; two others reported that there were not women candidates for any office. In twenty-six state legislatures not a woman sits after four years of woman suffrage.

"Instead of forming half of the effective electorate in the Presidential election of 1920, it is to be doubted if women composed anything like their normal share of it. Only 49 percent of the qualified electorate went to the polls that year, anyway, and by common report the greater number of absentees were women."

The English Women Citizen

Mr. Russell says that women in America take virtually no part in politics because they feel they do not know enough about such things. “Astonishing it is to contemplate the difference in this respect between the American and the English woman. In the country accustomed to the greater democracy, access to the suffrage controversy, the English women are timid. In the country with the less democracy, it makes them confident, aggressive and independent. lace the blame on the government to be made common to every one; the government to be made common to every one; the English women vote as they please, they do not feel at all; that, while they had heard the name, they didn’t know what the World Court was.

"A man in my hearing brought up the Sheppard-Towner law in a group of men and women. The ensuing discussion waxed interesting, but it was a masculine discussion in which the women had a point of view to advanced, or a position to defend, they did not embrace their opportunity.

"Can it be that we brought enfranchisement upon ourselves when, on the whole, the American women in the mass, did not care for it; that we were not, and are not, interested in having it; are not awake to what it signifies, or alive to the responsibilities our acceptance of it implies?"

Mrs. Catt to the Rescue

Carrie Chapman Catt accepts the challenge given by Mr. Russell referred to above, and makes a vigorous reply in the April 6 Woman Citizen. In answer to his question, “Is woman suffrage a failure?” she says:

"Well that depends: if one measures the brief experiment in our country by the hypothesis that women make supermen and therefore in four years ought to have removed the last vestige of dis-appointment in the one hundred and twenty-five years’ experiment in man suffrage, then the conclusion that woman suffrage has been a failure is justified. On the other hand, if one measures the practical results of woman suffrage in operation by the understanding that American women are born, human of American fathers and mothers, with inherited notions of inheritance to rise little higher than their dads, woman suffrage is relatively a pronounced success. It may not be strong enough to bring the millennium before its time, but it is going, and steadily, too, along the road of certain progress."

The Superiority Complex

Mrs. Catt contends that the only objection which men have ever had to woman suffrage was the “superiority complex of the male”, and the objection of women has been the “inferiority complex of the female.”

"Now comes Mr. Russell, who despite the fact that he thinks he has conquered his cave-man’s complex, rises up and whacks women voters because they have not achieved a super-superiority over men.

She maintains, ’Bosses have been unseated and reactionary committee have been wrested from their old-time control and so progress progresses. It has taken a billion years for men to climb from their cave-dwelling habit of mind to the present operation of self-government. Why not grant women more than four years to remove all the unsatisfying outgrowths of men’s political evolution?”

Mrs. Catt gives two reasons why women are reluctant to run for office. "First, the candidate is likely to be forced to wade thru mud to her victory, to make concessions to interests which nauseate her, and to arrive at the goal with a reputation in tatters. Second, ‘Why endure this torture,’ they ask, ‘when we know in advance that the party which supernaturally us will vote at the polls, not by votes of party women, but by men?’"

Women are not neglectible in municipal affairs, contends Mrs. Catt. They have been such a factor that Premier Mussolini has been led to promise municipal suffrage to Italian women.

In regard to the ignorance of American women in political affairs, Mrs. Catt writes:

"The women of England have a powerful advantage over American citizens. They have one parliament where practically everything is done and where every cabinet member may be questioned thru members who one wants to know anything. In this country the well-informed must know the politics of his election district, his ward, his city, his county, his state, his national Congress and then he must add information concerning 47 other states. Yes, women do feel ignorant and so do men. Every American citizen is so deluged with the task of trying to keep up with the news and our helplessness is due not to the timidity or incapacity of women or men, but to our system.

"Who’s discouraged?” concludes Mrs. Catt, “not I, Mr. Russell.”