

EARLY FORMS
OF
POLITICAL ACTIVITY
AMONG
WHITE WOMEN IN BRITISH COLUMBIA
1880 - 1925

by

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Early Forms of Political Activity Among White Women in British
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ABSTRACT

It is the object of this study to examine the earliest forms of political activity among white women in British Columbia. Their political involvement can only be fully understood when viewed historically and within the social context of the period: women were compelled to enter the political arena as a response to the social conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This thesis will attempt to analyze the class nature of those organizations which were established by women to combat the injustices produced by sexual inequalities. Furthermore, it will assess the influence of class forces on the development of political movements created by women in this period. Specifically, it will be argued that because early political activity was led essentially by middle class women, the reforms achieved did little to alter the status of women in a fundamental way.

The first expressions of a new awareness among women arose within both the middle and working classes. Women wage earners initiated early struggles to press for better working conditions and higher wages. For a variety of reasons, (which will be investigated), instances of organization among women

workers were, however, sporadic and short-lived. The expression of middle-class discontent came from a group of women concerned primarily with the abolishment of liquor traffic in the province. Although these women, led by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, (W.C.T.U.), pressed for a wide variety of ameliorative measures, the regulation of liquor traffic rather than an alteration in the condition of women was their ultimate goal. Both these developments, however, had only a limited impact upon broad layers of women in British Columbia.

In 1910, a resurgence in organization occurred. During the years between 1910 and 1914, the major thrust of agitation was directed towards the attainment of suffrage. The predominately conservative ideology of the suffrage movement had grave implications for the strategy and tactics employed and the consequent direction which the movement took. The vote was seen essentially as a tool with which woman could better fulfill her traditional role as mother and homemaker. Tactically, petitions and delegations to the Legislative Assembly were devised as the means to achieve suffrage.

Upon the attainment of suffrage, some controversy arose as to the beneficial effects of the voter. An investigation of this debate will be made with reference to the wave of social legislation which occurred during the 1920's.

"Solitude, quiet and sleep!"

I stand by the roaring loom
And watch the growth of the silken threads
That glow in the bare gray room.
I hurry through darkling streets
In the chill of the wintry day,
That women who talk from their cloistered ease
May rustle in colors gay.

"Solitude, quiet and sleep!"

In the dripping, humid air
I whiten the flimsy laces
That women may be fair;
I clothe my orphaned children
With the price my bare hands yield,
That the idle women may walk as fair
As the lilies of the field.

"Solitude, quiet and sleep!"

Is it given to me to-day,
When I march in the ranks with those who fight
To keep the wolf at bay?
Do my daughters rest in peace
Where a myriad needles yield
Their bitter bread or a sheet of flame,
And the rest of the Potter's Field?

"Solitude, quiet and sleep?"

To factory, shop and mill,
The feet of the working women go,
While their leisure sisters still
Boast of the home they have never earned,
Of the ease we can never share.
And bid us go back to the depths again,
Like Lazarus to his lair.

The Champion, December,
1912.

Written by a working woman in response to an anti-suffragist who argued illogically that women should not vote, as they need "Solitude, quiet and sleep".

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The fact that history is recorded by men - indeed, by a particular class of men - is never so apparent as when one attempts an historical investigation of the activity of women. British Columbian historians provide no exception: accounts of women and other oppressed groups (whether they be members of the native population or the Oriental community) are sadly lacking. Their absence is just one more indication of their subordinate class position in early west coast society. The sexist and racist ideologies which played an integral role in the development of the west were powerful manifestations of the structural basis of the society.

Any minor changes in the precise formulation of sexism and racism which may have occurred can generally be traced to new economic stages of development and the subsequent, redefined needs of those who controlled the direction of development. These ideologies continue to exist today and the socio-economic development of British Columbia continues to proceed towards higher forms of industrialization, based upon the accumulation of capital.

Very early in British Columbia women challenged the prevalent ideology which prescribed a narrow and rigidly

defined role for them. Because these women did not, and in many cases due to their class interests, would not, extend their critique to press for more basic socio-economic changes, the movement declined prematurely. A strong argument can be made to demonstrate that women involved in the first waves of organization simply did not understand how deep were the roots of their oppression.

The deluge of recently published material on 'the woman question' constitutes the first step in refuting the very same traditional attitudes which the early activists encountered. Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that any arbitrary definition of sexual roles (which inevitably relegate women to a minor role) are either totally unacceptable or at least open to serious questioning both in progressive academic circles and among women themselves.

In the past, however, a large proportion of the research initiated on the subject of women relied upon a wide variety of assumptions - all of them false, yet reinforced and perpetuated by those who profit from such notions (i.e. the ruling class). Very simply, social scientists have consistently failed to pose the most basic questions and consequently their analyses lack a critical spirit at the most fundamental level. Instead of examining if women were inherently inferior, these scholars were (and often still are) content to analyze why this 'self-evident' in-

feriority existed. If such investigations had remained within the precincts of academic circles perhaps the consequences would have been less disastrous. This has been, of course, impossible given the systemic nature of industrial social structure. However, the lack of serious challenges from the realm of the academic world where it should have been most readily forthcoming, has enabled the subjugation of women to proceed that much more smoothly. This past scarcity of critical studies also clearly indicates the strength which sexist assumptions possess in this society. Bearing this consideration in mind, it is both necessary and helpful to examine more assiduously the content and consequences of traditional theory.

THEORETICAL BASIS OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

One of the most common arguments developed to maintain the subordinate position of women has been the promulgation of biological factors. In British Columbia, for example, it was used to justify everything from why women could not vote to why they should remain in lower status employment. This level of argumentation is not surprising because physiological distinctions form the most obvious demarcation between the sexes. However, what has developed on the basis of such differentiation is more complex social

attitudes and, indeed, institutions have been developed which enhance and reinforce the obvious sexual differences to such an extent that the concepts of 'masculine' and 'feminine' have come to assume secondary connotations only remotely related to the basic biological dissimilarities. Germaine Greer's point that the sexual distinctions can, in fact, be traced to the presence, or absence of only one different chromosome, the Y chromosome, is well taken; it illustrates the tremendous role that culture plays in formulating sexual characteristics. She argues that "of forty-eight chromosomes only one is different: on this difference we base a complete separation of male and female, pretending as it were that all forty-eight were different."¹ For Firestone, the role of culture is clear: "Women, biologically distinguished from men, are culturally distinguished from human."²

One of the basic assumptions of the biological argument is that women are primarily child bearers. The

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1. Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, (London: Paladin 1971), p.29. The author goes on to add, however, that the role of the hormonal system (also determined by the presence or absence of the Y chromosome) is paramount in the sexual differentiation process.
 2. Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectics of Sex, (New York: Bantam 1971), p. 205.

resounding political and economic implications of this presumption have been central to the oppression of women. The sweeping achievement inherent in this notion is the relegation of women to the narrow realm of biological experience and the assignment of other aspects of 'human achievement, interest and ambition to the male'. In other words, 'all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity (in their own way animals also give birth and care for their young) is largely reserved for the male.'³

Now, while it is true that child birth dictates women's activities to some extent, it is crucial to note that very early, child birth became inextricably linked to child rearing. Historically child birth was centred in the home and consequently women became domestic custodians. A wide spectrum of other duties, varying slightly between cultures, was added to her responsibilities.⁴ This division of labour occurred in pre-industrial society and it has existed since.

3. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, (London: Rupert Hart-Davis 1971), p. 26.

4. For example the first domestication of plants has been attributed to women. See Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, Volume I, (London: Merlin Press 1968), p. 29.

The one significant difference is that the value placed upon household duties has altered. In hunting and gathering societies, for example, men assumed responsibility for procuring meat (clearly a more aggressive and active role), while women gathered berries and herbs. It is undeniable that 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles were established, but the crucial point to note is that because the produce of the gatherers formed a greater portion of the diet than did the meat, the economic contribution of women was esteemed.⁵

In contrast, woman's domestic labour has become valueless since the industrial revolution. Engels traces the oppression of women to the development of private property, and inheritance, resulting in the nuclear family as the primary unit for the functioning of the society.⁶

What can now be seen is that after industrialization and with the growth of factory-based production (and the resulting destruction of domestic industry), women remained responsible for long hours of household duties, but, when measured by the values of the new (class) society, their work was, and is, marginal. As Benston points out, it lacks exchange value.⁷

5. See Elman R. Service, The Hunters, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1966), pp. 10-11.

6. Frederick Engels, Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works, (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1968), p. 496-7.

7. Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation", Monthly Review, Vol. XXI, September 1969.

A great majority of women were forced to seek employment outside of the home (in addition to household labour). Hailed at one time as the key to woman's economic independence, it has never materialized as such. In the labour market she was (and is) channelled into domestic and personal service positions where the economic rewards were low and the tasks required little mental creativity. Often the jobs have been nothing more than extensions of household activities. In British Columbia, for example, women remained concentrated in only a few occupations, such as domestic servants, launderesses, tailoresses and telephone operators.⁸ The differentiation of occupations on the basis of sex has often been falsely ascribed to sexual inequalities in terms of strength. As Millett argues: 'The heavier musculature of male, a secondary sexual characteristic and common among mammals, is biological in origin, but is also culturally encouraged through breeding, diet and exercise.'⁹ But even if one were to accept that men are stronger in this culture, this theory cannot be substantiated practically. British Columbian women workers in the first coal mines provide a most illustrative example. Millett correctly introduces the concept of class to expose the incongruity of the argument:

8. After all, who does all the talking on the telephone? The mechanical aspects of the industry remained in the hands of men, however.

9. Kate Millett, op.cit., p. 27.

Male supremacy, like other political creeds, does not finally reside in physical strength, but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological. Superior physical strength is not a factor in political relations. Civilization has always been able to substitute other methods (technic, weaponry, knowledge), for those of physical strength. At present, as in the past, physical exertion is very generally a class factor, those at the bottom performing the most strenuous tasks, whether they be strong or not.¹⁰

In the cases where women have displayed upward mobility in the labour force, their ability to achieve employment security has been curtailed. Their role as child bearers has been falsely utilized to relegate their sex to the reserve labour force, and as a result, women are one of the first groups to suffer as a result of any economic instability.

The reasons behind this phenomenon are clear: in a society based upon the profit motive and the accumulation of capital, the owners of the means of production find it both useful and economically beneficial to maintain a flexible and inexpensive labour supply. For this reason, and particularly because of the shortage of labour in British Columbia at the end of the 19th century, the introduction of women into British Columbia was especially urgent. Not only would positions be filled, but this feat would be accomplished at a low cost to employers. In addition, due to woman's reproductive powers, she would ensure more workers for the future.

10. Ibid. p. 27.

One other pre-condition for profits is a stable labour force, and here, once again, women played a prominent role - employers felt that with a family to support men would be less likely to participate in strikes or to leave their places of employment even if subject to poor conditions.

THE BRITISH COLUMBIAN SITUATION

To understand how this condition remained essentially unchallenged for so long in British Columbia is more complex. One of the major mechanisms operating against change has been the socialization process through which the general population is imbued with the values of the ruling class so systematically that they internalize and accept them as their own.

Many of the same general social mechanisms determining the status of the province's native population were operative with respect to women as well. The formulation of an 'ideal type' was, for example, one such mechanism. The most essential elements making up the images of 'perfect' women were drawn from Christian and Victorian ideals. For instance, women were socialized to see themselves as superior moral individuals through whom the cultural ideals of civilization were to be imparted to the rest of the community. Ultimately women were viewed as the embodiment of these ideals. The Christian Bible is explicit as to the nature of

these qualities:

In the Book of Proverbs, an illuminating passage entitled "A Capable Wife" stresses the themes of loyalty, virtue and efficient household management.¹¹

Popular ideology contained similar images of woman's role, such as the Victorian precept which assigned women the 'function of serving as the male's conscience and living the life of goodness he found tedious but felt someone ought to do anyway'.¹²

This role was severely restrictive: its boundaries seldom extended beyond women's private lives (the family). Any public activity with the potential of social relevance was clearly unacceptable, except insofar as it involved a mere extension of the roles she played within the family. The function was obvious women re-inforced the social structure within its primary unit (the family) and by such a process of simple extension, within the wider society. Thus, she was responsible for socializing the present and future generations to fit into the status quo. This may appear to be a rather important responsibility for a 'second class citizen' in reality, however, quite the contrary is true. Moral and Spiritual leaders have never played particularly crucial roles

11. See Proverbs 31, 10-31.
Simone de Beauvoir discusses how this view of woman has been utilized to free woman 'from her original taint' (referring to the role of Eve in the Garden of Eden) thus justifying her indispensability in society. See The Second Sex, (New York: Bantam 1970), p. 74 and 176.
12. Kate Millett, op. cit. p. 37.

in a profit motivated economy.¹³ Secondly, within the nuclear family unit women have always acted from a position of powerlessness: while men ultimately make all the important decisions, women are left to operationalize them. The real power of the male 'head' of the family may remain dormant but is readily displayed when disagreements arise: 'he has the final word.'

In British Columbia his power was reinforced by statutes which denied women recognition to the point that she was little more than a chattel. In essence, she lacked any means (formal or informal) by which to alter this dependency.

The power of the socialization process curtailing women's ability to raise basic questions about their status becomes dramatically evident when it is realized that the contradictions inherent in their roles were so acute. The majority of women could never attain the ideal which they were expected to live up to. Those women who could most easily approximate this image were drawn from the ranks of the middle class.

It was also these middle-class women who first began to agitate for reforms. On the surface this appears to be

13. The declining role of the Church in industrial society is one indication of this.

paradoxical; but in fact it reflects the specific dilemma of the working class woman. It was only the middle-class woman who had the resources to become involved in those activities which were at the same time both socially acceptable and at the least minimally relevant to social questions. In its formative stages, the first women's organization in British Columbia, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, partook in activity which affirmed the Society's principal values. Nevertheless, as it began to direct its attention towards the political arena, hostility towards it developed. Public life was exclusively male territory. It is here that the principal contradiction of the women's movement becomes evident: the W.C.T.U., and later the suffrage groups could not effect any basic social changes precisely because they were led by middle class women. Although their actions were radical in form, their content was shaped by a definite class interest. For example one of their first campaigns centered on the content of education - hardly a working class priority at a time when most workers' children were entering the labour market at an early age.¹⁴ Because of this parochial class orientation, large sectors of the population were never mobilized in any of the campaigns initiated by these movements.

14. In contrast, United States women focused early demands on the broadening of educational privileges to include members of their sex.

Opposition to women in politics did not reach the level experienced in other countries. This is best explained by the fact that the majority of early activists in British Columbia merely sought reforms that would enable them to carry out their designated roles more effectively. Within this framework it was impossible to pose questions which had the potential of challenging basic attitudes and institutions.

Mobilization of working class women, unwilling and unable to become involved in established organizations, was limited to actions about immediate labour conditions. This activity, while often militant, occurred only sporadically. Although women workers clearly had less of a stake in the class system than their middle-class counterparts, they were slow to organize. Millett attributes this to their depressed living conditions, 'which frequently renders them conservative, for like all persons in this situation (slaves are a classic example here) they identify their own survival with the hand that feeds them.'¹⁵ One other explanation is that women workers were more isolated and had less of a chance to interact socially with other women. Even when working side by side, women were often forced to pay fines if they talked. Consequently, their problems remained individualized and the possibility of consistent collective solutions was an alternative beyond their consciousness.

15. Kate Millett, op. cit. p. 38.

Whatever the problems confronted by white women, native women faced double barriers. During the period when the Hudson Bay Company controlled the west coast, the native population played a crucial role in economy. Their vast knowledge of the terrain was a necessary precondition for the efficient conduct of the fur trade. Relationships between white men and native women were common¹⁶ and certainly her useful knowledge was an asset to any frontiersman. However, when the basis of the economy shifted, following the gold rush and the growth of industrialization, the skills of the native population were no longer as important. The destruction of the Indian culture and economy was followed by attempts (on the part of the white rulers) to force the Indians to become wage-earners. Various methods were utilized to accomplish this: for example Christian mission schools were established to socialize the native children into the ways of white society. Compelled to enter the labour force at minimal wages (or face starvation), Indian workers met hostility from their white counterparts who fell prey to the employer's methods of dividing the working class. Not surprisingly, native women received even lower wages.

In addition, native women were the object of a

16. For example, the first Governor General of the Province, James Douglas, married a native woman. See M.E. Campbell, "Her Ladyship My Squaw", The Beaver, Autumn 1954, p. 17.

specific racist campaign that originated with the first moves towards permanent settlement. During this period, the description of native women as slovenly, lazy, lacking in virtue, etc., was used to discourage the association of white men with them, and to justify the importation of white women. The reasons for this campaign are obvious - when a society is built upon the exploitation of a particular race by another, it is too blatantly contradictory to have members of the oppressed race (especially women, who hold the power of reproduction) forming an integral part of that society.

The subjugation of the province's native women is reflected in the lack of documentation of their history: the absence of material is even more serious here than in the case of white women. Historically censured on the basis of race and sex, native women have yet to be the subject of serious study. The lack of mention in this thesis is therefore not attributable to a disregard for their important role in shaping the province's history, but to the difficulty of readily locating adequate information.

In summary, women have a long history of oppression. It is my hope that this thesis will reveal the major dimensions of this oppression as experienced by British Columbian women. More importantly, however, I will investigate the first challenges raised in opposition to this oppression and to demonstrate the limitations on them imposed by the class

nature of the movement. Only when women have a sense of their heritage of struggle, which has heretofore been buried, will they begin to understand the significance of collective inequities.¹⁷

17. This is not to mention the difficulties involved when a member of the oppressor race attempts to document this history of the oppressed race.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN TO THE WEST COAST

The population of white women on the west coast remained at a relatively low level until after the first decade of the twentieth century. Their absence can be attributed to various social and economic factors - factors which influenced the growth rate of the general populace, but which had an additional and specific impact upon the immigration of women.

The economy of the west coast was originally based upon the fur trade - a staple industry inimical to settlement. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the Hudson's Bay Company guaranteed that settlements would be established in return for exclusive trading rights, few genuine efforts were launched to fulfill this promise. For example, while land was being given away to settlers in Oregon (under the Donation Law), the Hudson's Bay Company charged 1 sterling per acre and refused to sell land in blocks of less than twenty acres.¹ Although the company did establish farms, these were viewed merely as a means to maintain trading posts and were never seen as a basis for settlement.²

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1. John Garner, The Franchise and Politics in British North America, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 118.
 2. Paul Phillips, "Confederation and the Economy of British Columbia" in George W. Shelton, British Columbia and Confederation, (Victoria: Morris Printing Company, 1967), p. 44.

The discovery of gold in the Fraser and Cariboo regions laid the basis for the first extensive increase in population. Thousands of miners arrived on the coast, sparking off the development of commercial centres catering to their needs. Within a short space of time, land values soared, hundreds of stores and hotels were built, American companies opened offices and roads were constructed:

Within six weeks, two hundred and twenty five buildings, near two hundred of them stores, fifty nine owned by jobbers or importers, were constructed. Land values rose: the Hudson's Bay Company, which owned water frontage and all the good building sites near the harbour, raised the price of town lots from \$50.00 and \$75.00 to \$1500.00 and \$3000.00 and even higher....

... exports to Vancouver Island which had amounted only to \$29,448.00 in 1857 rose to \$808,954.00 in the single month of July, 1858 ...³

This increase in population had a profound impact on the economy of the west coast. Although expansion was short-lived, the foundation of settlement was laid. A serious challenge to the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company developed with the emergence of a burgeoning class of capitalists and petit bourgeois. The economic basis of west coast society changed rapidly: the fur trade gave way to an economy based upon the development of primary industry.

3. Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia: A History, (Toronto: MacMillans, 1958), p. 141.

However, although a new economic basis had been established, the populace required to sustain this new order was not yet present. Small numbers of gold miners, in particular those who fared poorly, found employment in the newly developing lumber, coal and fishing industries. But, on the whole, the gold mining population was of a transient nature. The permanent labour force was by no means stable either. Isolated in company mining towns or in logging camps, men often left their employers to seek fortunes in newly discovered gold fields or moved south in quest of better wages.

Permanent settlement and the immigration of women, in an organized way, was seen as a practical solution to this pressing situation. Hence with a logic similar to that applied at the time of settlement on Canada's eastern coast, women were introduced to encourage the development, through the family, of a conservative and stable society.

By Sea ...

The first organization to seriously deal with increasing the population of white women was the British Columbia Emigration Society. It aimed to " ... encourage the emigration of respectable, industrious women to the colony as a step towards supplying wives to the miners and

others..."⁴ On April 17, 1862, the Society's first 'bride ship' arrived in the colony. It carried twenty young women aged mainly from twelve to eighteen years. They had been carefully chosen from London orphan asylums:

Some of them were pretty; most of them were more or less buxom, for they had been chosen with a desire to create a pleasing first impression ...⁵

The next month sixty additional women arrived. To ensure their virginity, and hence their 'marketability', the women were closely chaperoned by a clergyman and matron. They were kept in isolation under extremely cramped conditions for the entire voyage around the Cape. Upon arrival, the women were marched (amid crowds of spectators), to the Naval Barracks, where they were temporarily housed. Many had domestic positions waiting for them, but the majority of them married soon after arrival.⁶

4. N. de B. Lugin, (Mrs. E.B. Shaw), The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island, 1843-1866, (Victoria: Victoria Women's Canadian Club, 1928), p. 147. (Emphasis mine). This quotation is an excellent indication of the racism evident in early years of British Columbian development. It is clearly an attempt to suggest that the only feminine inhabitants (native women) lacked these qualities.

5. Ibid, p. 149.

6. Ibid, p. 149.

... And by Land

Not all women arrived on the west coast by ship, however. Some accompanied their husbands overland to set up homesteads in the interior. These women often encountered extra hardships arising from their roles as mother and child-rearer. Unable to regulate continual pregnancies, isolated, and lacking any facilities to alleviate their condition, they were forced to subordinate their personal burdens to the demands put upon them by their day-to-day existence as homesteaders. The following quotation, from one of the few descriptions available depicting the plight of the pioneer woman, demonstrates this hardship:

Members of the party were drowned in the Thompson and weary miles of unmarked trails were travelled by her (Mrs. Schubert) before reaching Kamloops. She arrived at Kamloops on October 11, 1862 after being on the trail one hundred thirty days, eighty two of which were spent from Edmonton to Kamloops. The day following her arrival at Kamloops Mrs. Schubert gave birth to a daughter ... the first white child in Central British Columbia. One cannot picture the hardships encountered by that remarkable woman on that historical trip, but she was of the type that does not admit defeat.⁷

Other women, numbering three to four hundred, accompanied their husbands to the gold fields.⁸ One woman,

7. From the scrapbook of J.C. Young of Jasper, Alberta. Held in British Columbia Provincial Archives.

8. N. de B. Lugin, op. cit., p. 149.

Della Murray Banks, who accompanied her husband and thirteen other miners to the gold fields, agreed to do so only if they paid for her additional labour as the cook.⁹ This spirit was not evident among the majority of women, however. The precepts of Victorian morality dictated that gold fields were not fit residences for women. Indeed, wild tales of mining-town life were utilized to put fear in the hearts of women who were instilled with the traditional ideology. Nevertheless, the flexibility of such precepts were soon demonstrated: in spite of admonitions to the contrary, women arrived in mining camps and, faced with this fait accompli, some men, at least, began to condone their presence. This reversal in attitude was attributed to the profound changes she was able to effect among miners' attitudes as a result of her 'natural' ability to bring justice and integrity to society. This idea was aptly and colourfully described in 1877:

The denizens of that mountain camp slid, by an irresistible law of gravitation, away from civil order, from social beneficence and from humanity. They gorged themselves, and swore, and wrangled, and fought, and like dragons of the prime they tore each other in their selfish greed for that which was their only care. In this savage semi-pandemonium entered one day, two unwanted visit-

9. Della Murray Banks, 'Klondike Goldfever', Alaska Sportsmen, January 1945, p. 25.

ors - the wives of miners who had come to join their husbands. Polite, kind, gentle, intelligent, and pious, their very presence seemed to change the moral atmosphere of the place. All the dormant chivalry of man's nature was awakened. ¹⁰

In summary, the first white women to arrive in British Columbia came via two main routes. First, a sizable portion were shipped to the west coast, initially to take up employment as domestic servants, but ultimately to provide men with wives. Another group of women, already married, arrived with their husbands to mine gold or to homestead.

Faced with frontier conditions, women often became involved in tasks not normally associated with 'womens work'. However, emphasis has been unduly placed on "women's role in building the west" as an explanation of their early political activity. All available evidence suggests that while it might have been necessary for women to undertake strenuous physical labour not normally seen as "women's work" in the establishment of their homes, this did not produce any permanent restructuring of women's roles. Traditional Victorian attitudes towards women developed and persisted throughout the early years of the west coast. As a result, women were forced to continue in the roles into which they had already been socialized before their migration to British Columbia.

10. William Worthington Fowler, Women on the American Frontier, (Hartford: no pub., 1877), p. 523.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY LABOUR ACTIVITY AMONG WOMEN

As industrialization developed in British Columbia, the class structure became more clearly articulated. In commercial centres such as Victoria (and later on Vancouver) a class of professionals and small businessmen emerged relatively early. However, in industrial centres, where no similar middle class strata existed, labourers and employers became distinct and polarized groups in the wake of industrialization.¹

The employers manifested an intransigent attitude towards labour discontent that was first challenged by the British coal miners who struck at Nanaimo in 1870.² From this date strikes were frequent and militant in all sectors of the economy. Black lists, evictions from company homes, the importation of strike breakers, and the use of the militia were tactics persistently used by the employers to break this new spirit of labour militancy. Women wage earners, (comprising 11% of the British Columbian Labour force in 1891³)

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1. Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930, (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1968), p. 46.
 2. Paul Phillips, No Power Greater, (Vancouver: British Columbia Federation of Labour, 1967), p. 5.
 3. Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada, Volume II, 1890-91, (Ottawa: Queen's Printers, 1893), pp. 142-5.

were particularly affected by such harsh measures due to the abysmally low level of their wages.

WOMEN AND ORIENTAL WORKERS

That arbitrary division of labour on the basis of sex which relegates woman to jobs that are essentially extensions of household duties was operative in British Columbia when the first small manufactories and service industries emerged. Invariably, women were channelled into occupations requiring strenuous physical exertion. The rewards they received for this labour were usually marginal.

A cursory glance at labour reports during this period reveals that the Oriental worker shared a similar status in the labour force. The presence of such clearly defined groups within certain occupations has frequently been utilized by employers to split the working class by creating competition and rivalry between the groups. The successful employment of this tactic creates an atmosphere in which effective and unified challenges from the workers are almost impossible.

In British Columbia, the labour movement fell prey to this tactic, and saw Oriental workers as alien competitors to white women:

In Vancouver, they (the waitresses) work ten to twelve hours under the supervision of the Chinese or the Japanese. In ninety nine of one hundred cases if she complains the Asiatic remains.⁴

4. B.C. Federationist, December 13, 1912, p. 1.

The Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration provided figures to demonstrate the predominance of Chinese labour in various industries. The Labour Gazette's report on the Commission, published in 1902, was primarily concerned with the displacement of women from their traditional employment areas. One example referred to in this Report was the case of tailor shops. In 1891 in Victoria, one hundred and fifty white men and women worked in eighteen shops; by 1901, the numbers of white employees had dwindled to twenty one men and thirty women, although the trade continued to flourish using Chinese labour. Another area demonstrating this trend was the canneries where six thousand of the ten thousand jobs were held by Chinese. Even women domestic servants were reported being forced out of employment by Chinese who would accept wages as low as ten dollars a month.⁵

The reflection of this racist ideology in an official government publication connected with the labour movement (its regional reports were often submitted by trade unionists) did much to reinforce similar attitudes among the working class.

The trade unions considered the possibility and indeed the necessity of organizing women relatively early. However, their acceptance of racist ideology prevented them from taking similar steps towards the Chinese: the myth that Oriental workers were 'un-organizable' was accepted unquestioningly. Con-

5. Labour Gazette, Volume III, September 1902, p. 163.

sequently these workers were forced to accept whatever trifling wages they were offered, thus, ironically, entrenching their competitive status as 'cheap labour'.⁶

ORGANIZED LABOUR

The attitude of organized labour was frequently opportunist: while constant concern for the plight of women workers was evident in the pages of their newspapers, actual efforts at organization often only arose from immediate practical necessity. That is, women were invited to join trade unions only when their unorganized status endangered a particular strike. But the contracts negotiated after a strike invariably left women as the lowest paid workers in the trade. In other words, women were encouraged to organize as long as they tacitly agreed not to invade the better paying areas of employment - men's jobs.

6. Thomas Robert Loosemore, British Columbia Labour Movement and Political Action - 1879-1906, Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1954. Loosemore aptly describes how and why the Chinese were viewed as competitors with white labour. His analysis traces this competition back as far as 1871, when the Orientals were imported to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.

While there are examples in American Labour history of strikes directed against women entering a particular occupation,⁷ in Canada there is no evidence to suggest that such blatant anti-women activities occurred. The fact remains however, that the issues of equal pay for equal work, and the confinement of women to unskilled and low paying jobs, were never dealt with by organized labour in Canada.

In 1881, the Toronto Trades and Labour Council addressed a set of demands to the federal government concerning the intolerable state of working conditions.⁸ These contained specific references to the problems of women workers – one of the first times that Canadian labour had taken up their cause.

Women began to enter the labour force in Quebec and Ontario during the 1880's. Here, the establishment of small manufactories in the textile and tobacco industries prompted employers to turn to women as a source of cheap labour. Sweat shops, violent beatings, heavy fines for talking, long hours, sexual advances by employers, and poor wages constitu-

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7. John B. Andrew, W.D. Bliss, United States Senate Committee of Women and Child Wage Earners in the United States, Volume X. History of Women in Trade Unions, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 46. Phillip S. Foner - History of the Labour Movement in the United States, Volume 2, (New York: International Publishers, 1955), p. 190. Andrew & Bliss recount the example of the journey man tailors strike in New York in 1891. Foner discusses the conservative craft union's view of women as a group which served only to depress the entire wage level.
8. Charles Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959, (Montreal: Canadian Social Publications, 1966), p. 74.

ted the quagmire in which working women existed. In 1901, women's wages nationally were less than one third of men's: Women received an average wage of \$119.98 per annum while men earned \$387.16.⁹

Widespread public knowledge of these conditions, and a growing concern, was partly responsible for the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Relation of Capital and Labour in 1886. In its 1889 Report, the Commission recommended:

1. Maximum hours of ten per day and fifty four per week for child and female labour.
2. A ban on employment of children under fourteen, and night work for children under sixteen.
3. Abolition of fines.
4. Appointment of female factory inspectors.¹⁰

While the Commission had little real effect on the status of women, it was important because it represented the first formal recognition (by both the labour movement and the government) that this problem existed.

9. Labour Gazette, Volume VIII, May 1907, p. 1269.

10. Charles Lipton, op. cit. p. 74.

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SITUATION

Strikes among women workers on the west coast were sporadic and comparatively rare in the early period. The first strike involving women was seen as a success by the labour movement, but to the women involved it could hardly have appeared as such. In December, 1902, Vancouver Telephone operators, linemen, and repairers, struck against the New Westminster and Burrard Inlet Telephone Company for wage increases, shorter hours, and for recognition of their union.¹¹ Victoria telephone workers went out in sympathy and on December 15, 1902, the strike was settled. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 213, was recognized. The contract included the eight hour work day, closed shop regulations, and contained clauses which forbade employers from discriminating against union members. The wage stipulations were particularly telling. All employees received an immediate five dollars a month raise. However, whereas the lowest paid male employee (lineman) received a new wage of three dollars a day (sixty dollars a month), the women (operators) were to receive a mere twenty dollars a month starting salary. After three years employment the wage of an operator would rise to thirty dollars a month.¹²

11. Labour Gazette, Volume III, December 1902, p. 479.

12. Agreement printed in full - Labour Gazette, Vol. IV, January 1903, p. 517.

In March of 1906,¹³ the next reported telephone employees strike in British Columbia occurred. The problems of overloading the operators was a continual grievance and sparked strikes all across Canada.

After a particularly intense Ontario strike, a Royal Commission finally investigated the Toronto situation. The evidence given in this case provides some clear insights as to the nature of conditions which faced telephonists across the country (including in British Columbia). On the first day of the hearings twenty-five persons were chosen randomly from employees and brought to Toronto to testify.

On that day a medical certificate from Dr. Alton Garratt was produced, in which it stated that of twenty-five persons selected, thirteen were in too precarious a condition of health to permit of their giving evidence. Dr. Garratt, on being examined in reference to the certificate, stated that all were suffering from a good deal of nervousness, that some were suffering from sore throat, laryngitis, tonsillitis, etc.¹⁴

The Royal Commission accomplished little, and the real problem of excess loading continued. As late as 1912, the B.C. Federationist criticized the telephone company for hiring

13. Western Clarion, March 31, 1906. p. 4.

14. "Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire Into Dispute Between Bell Telephone Company and Employees at Toronto", Labour Gazette, Volume VIII, October 1907, p. 399.

experts to investigate the 'breaking point of women employees.'¹⁵

It must not be forgotten that with each signal there is not only the flashing of a small light in the operator's eyes, but there is a clicking sound in the ears through the receivers fastened to her head. So when the impatient subscriber, angry because his call has not been answered, moves the receiver hook of his 'phone up and down rapidly, he flashes the signal in front of the operator ... a supervisor is standing behind her either hurrying her or calling her numbers to be taken by other operators ... a monitor may plug in and criticize her any moment - these, with the height of up-reach and length of side-reach, go to form elements of strain on the operator who is 'over-loaded'.¹⁶

In every trade conditions were just as intolerable. The laundry workers also formed an early trade union. On March 12, 1902, Local 105 of the Shirt, Waist and Laundry Workers Union was established under the leadership of a Mrs. Henderson and a Miss Lomie.¹⁷ At the end of the year seventy members belonged to the union in Vancouver, but wages remained pitifully low. In 1907 women continued to work in laundries nine hours a day, to be paid only \$1.10 to \$1.75 per day. The first reported strike among women in this trade

15. The report concluded that two hundred twenty five calls per hour could be processed before women reached a breaking point and before the quality of service declined.

16. B.C. Federationist, December 13, 1912. p. 3.

17. The Independent, September 5, 1903.

occurred when Excelsior Laundry refused to endorse work schedules.¹⁸ A description in the Western Clarion of a 1903 strike in Victoria at the Crystal Laundry clearly depicts the plight of laundresses:

... for some reason best known to the employers the strikers had not been paid the previous week's wages on Saturday night as usual ... some of the female workers were so emphatically out of funds as to have nothing to carry them over Sunday and were ordered to accept assistance at the hands of good samaritans ... one of their number, a woman with three small children, had been turned out into the street by the landlord and the only breakfast her little ones got on the morning of the strike came from the lunch pails of the strikers; ... of thirty employees, twenty two were girls and women, some of whom were in very hard circumstances and the amount of wages due the strikers reached the fabulous sum of four hundred dollars.¹⁹

Other early attempts at organization among women included the Retail Clerks²⁰ and tailoresses.²¹

18. B.C. Federationist special edition 'Twenty Five Years of The Labour Movement in Vancouver'. December 27, 1912. p. 18.

19. Western Clarion, June 24, 1905, p. 4.

20. The Independent, May 17, 1902. One article noted that women retail clerks attended the convention in Victoria. The January 31, 1903 issue reported that the numbers of men and women in this union was growing.

21. The Western Wage Earner, June 1909, p. 8. In 1909, Miss Daly of the United Garment Workers was brought to the Trades and Labour Council to speak on the necessity of union labels and the role of unionists' wives in buying only trade union goods. Helena Gutteridge was an early organizer in the United Garment Workers Union in Vancouver. She later attained prominence as recording secretary of the Trades and Labour Council.

By 1909, some six thousand women wage earners lived in British Columbia. They remained concentrated in the lowest paying jobs:

Domestics	1440
Clerks & Saleswomen	1250
Stenos & Bookkeepers	1200
Waitresses	450
Tailoresses	450
Launderesses	390
Teachers	360
Factory Workers	270
Nurses	200
Telephone Operators	100

In trades where employees were dispersed organization took the longest, but often resulted in the most far-reaching demands. For example, it was not until 1913 that a Home and Domestic Employees Union was established. On March 19, 1913, thirty-five "governesses, lady companions, nurse-maids, cooks and others, who work in the homes of those who hire domestic help" met in the Labour Temple to decide how to achieve their goals: a nine hour day, a minimum wage, and recognition as a body of industrial workers.²²

An interesting feature of this meeting was a discussion on the possibility of establishing a co-operative rooming house 'where they could live, and spend their leisure time in healthful surroundings and social pleasures which hundreds of them are not able to do as they are now situated'.²³ Over two

22. B.C. Federationist, March 28, 1913, p. 1.

23. Ibid, p. 4.

thousand women were then employed as domestics in Vancouver alone, and the fact that within a month, only fifty members had signed up (2½% of the potential constituency) shows the difficulties that such an organization faced.²⁴

One other union, composed exclusively of women, was organized by waitresses. Whereas men and women in the trade had belonged to a Knights of Labour local as early as 1898, and later to the Waiters and Cooks Union, in 1910 the waitresses decided to organize on their own. In September of that year, Local 766 was established with the aid of the Trades and Labour Council.²⁵ Immediately after formation of the union, thirteen women went to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council to request their boycott of 'unfair' (non-unionized) restaurants. In addition, they asked men in trade unions to enquire of waitresses whether they belonged to the union and to tell them why they should.²⁶

Not all women remained in jobs which were essentially extensions of household chores. For example, when the British Columbia coal seams were first being exploited, women were employed as miners. It was not until Coal Mine Legislation was enacted in 1902 that intolerable work conditions were

24. Ibid, April 18, 1913, p. 1.

25. Labour Gazette, Volume XI, October 1910, p. 421.

26. Western Wage Earners, July 13, 1910, p. 11.

acknowledged - and alleviated (in theory at least). It then became unlawful in British Columbia to employ women and children under twelve years of age in underground work. In addition, employment of women and children was prohibited between the hours of nine at night and five on the following morning.²⁷

Unable to exist on the low wages offered to them, many women were forced into prostitution. By the early years of the twentieth century prostitution had become a pressing social problem in British Columbia. Somewhat enlightened segments of the society saw the cause in terms of women's wages.

Prostitution is not a new thing ... it is difficult to believe that the majority (of women) adopt the life for purely voluntary reasons ... Denunciation of loose women won't accomplish anything ... While the bodies and souls of women are exploited for profit in the department stores and factories and shops it is not possible for thousands of them to earn enough to preserve their honor and chastity.²⁸

Another article added that 'If the idea of prostitution as a means of supplementing her income does not occur to her - it will most likely be suggested to her by the prospective employers - it is often done.'²⁹

27. Labour Gazette, Vol. IX, March 1908, p. 113-114.

28. B.C. Federationist, June 22, 1912, p. 1. (J. Hawthornthwaite, M.L.A. had discussed prostitution in the Legislative Assembly as early as 1906).

29. B.C. Federationist, June 15, 1912, p. 1.

Marriage remained another alternative to this depressed labour status for women, but this imposed clear class distinctions upon them. If a woman chose to marry, she assumed the social status of her husband. If she married a wage-earner, she was generally compelled, through financial necessity, to remain in the labour force. As the B.C. Federationist pointed out '... the demands which marriage make (on a working man's) income are such that he must ask if he is justified in asking a woman to share his income.'³⁰ Women who did remain in the home were still subjected to the unstable conditions of the labour force. Often women were compelled to confront the same issues facing their striking husbands and were thus drawn into labour conflicts, undermining the role of stabilizing social unrest that the employing class had seen for them. An illuminating example occurred during the Nanaimo miners strike in 1913. At the trial of the miners, Judge Howay testified to this fact:

Fully 90% of the women ranked with the men in their disregard for property and even life ... I find your women singing 'Drive the scabs away.'³¹

Wives of imprisoned miners fighting restrictive visiting

30. Ibid, June 22, 1912, p. 1.

31. B.C. Federationist, October 24, 1913, p. 7.

rights stated: 'If by thus beating us they think to make us give in, they are greatly mistaken, for most of us are as determined as our husbands, and will do all in our power to help our men with this great struggle.'³² The sixty women involved ultimately presented themselves at the Legislature to demand prison reforms.³³

If a woman married a member of the employer class, she enjoyed financial security and became involved in the round of upper class social life. Although in doing so she escaped oppressive working conditions, she nevertheless remained essentially in bond to her husband through archaic legal statutes. Hence, in reality a woman's position depended entirely upon the whim of her husband. If, for instance, he deserted her, and she was left penniless, she had no recourse in law.

This subordinate legal status was shared by working and middle class women, but this alone could in no way bridge the economic and social gap existing between the classes. The profundity of class divisions were deeply rooted in the dominant ideology. This is exemplified by Marion (Dudley)

32. Ibid. September 19, 1913, p. 8.

33. Dorothy Steeves, The Compassionate Rebel, (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1960).

Cran in her book A Woman in Canada.³⁴ In response to a widely circulated article in Europe, 'A Transplanted Englishwoman', she argues:

The writer advises any working class woman to go to the colonies - and not the middle class woman. I strongly oppose such advise. The working class woman does not bring the intelligence to bear on domestic emergencies which a cultured woman can, out of her ignorance how can she reduce disorder to comeliness, and make the home a beautiful thing. It can be done. I have seen it. Then the next generation deserves some attention. If ignorant women of our lower orders go out and marry as they will ... their children will go down, not up, in the scale of progress; a woman of refinement and culture, of endurance, of healthy reasoning courage, is infinitely better equipped for the work of homemaking and race-making than the ignorant, often lazy, often slovenly lower class woman.³⁵

It is clear from the above description that working class women faced a particular oppression which arose not only from the sexist nature of the society, but more importantly, from its class nature. The implications of the class structure for political activity among working women was profound. It meant first of all, that women themselves were divided and thus any unified challenges to their situation were precluded.

34. Mrs. Marion (Dudley) Cran, A Woman in Canada, (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, n.d.), p. 109. Cran was contracted by the Canadian Pacific Railway to write this book for women. Although quite obviously part of the CPR emigration program, Cran insists that anything she wrote would have been published.

35. Ibid., p. 109. Although Cran applies this particular section specifically to prairie women, the ideology cuts across geographic regions.

For working women this meant that activity in the early periods occurred as direct responses to their immediate work conditions. In essence, women wage earners responded to their oppression as workers. While it is true that they frequently explained their actions in terms of their role as mother, this was always viewed within the context of their work situation. For example, if a woman stated she was on strike because she needed more money to feed her children, she was not challenging her culturally-imposed role of child-rearer, but only attacking social obstacles to the effective fulfillment of this role.

If women had begun to analyze the links between their position in the labour force and their subordinate position in the broader society, their agitation would have assumed a much more radical form. For example, had women questioned why they remained in so-called 'women's jobs' when those jobs were also held by oppressed groups of men (e.g. Orientals), and had they challenged why they were invariably the poorest paid workers, then not only the class nature of the society, but also its sexist nature, would have been revealed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRANCHISE AGITATION

The history of agitation for franchise law reform in British Columbia pre-dates the period when women first took up the suffrage cause. With the proclamation of the Act of Union on November 18, 1866 voting regulations were finally standardized on Vancouver Island and on the mainland.¹ Governor Seymour, the province's first governor, hoped that the new regulations would prevent the occurrence of the sort of unrest that had previously developed over this issue. However, under the new regulations only nine of twenty-three Assembly positions were to be filled by popular election (the remainder were appointed by the Governor); moreover, severe restrictions were placed on the franchise. So in fact, this new measure touched off further discontent and encouraged the creation of a pro-confederation movement in the belief that responsible government and liberal franchise laws would accompany the union.² But throughout this entire period of agitation not

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1. Prior to 1866, voting regulations were controlled locally. Thus, while some areas possessed extremely restrictive qualifications, others endorsed universal suffrage. Although instances are cited where Chinese men exercised the franchise, I have been unable to find reference to women's participation in the electoral process during this early period.
 2. John Garner, The Franchise and Politics in British North America, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p.120.

one mention of women was made in the discussions of liberalizing franchise laws. Consequently, it was left up to women themselves to advance their particular demands at a later stage.

The lead in suffrage agitation had been taken in Ontario. In 1881 a deputation sponsored by the Toronto Women's Literary Club waited on the Ontario Provincial Government with a view to discussing women's suffrage - the first time in Canadian history that any government was confronted with this question. Just two years later, this club held the first public votes for women meeting in Canada, and later transformed itself into the Toronto Women's Suffrage Organization.³ In addition, attempts were made for the first time to form suffrage societies in Nova Scotia, in New Brunswick and in Prince Edward Island.

In Quebec, suffrage had a somewhat different history. There women had actually voted in elections as early as 1807 - the time at which Madame Papineau uttered those famous words "(I vote) for my son M. Joseph Papineau, for I believe that he is a good and faithful subject."⁴ However, in 1820 the House ruled the votes of twenty-two married women, who had

3. Catherine Lyle Cleverdon, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 21.

4. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 215. Oral voting was the practice at the time.

voted in Trois Rivieres, illegal. This ruling when challenged eight years later, was over turned by the British Colonial office, and no further attempts to disenfranchise women were initiated until 1834. This time J.L. Papineau, 'the great Reformer', insisted upon the restriction of voting rights to men, but once again it was disallowed by the Colonial Office. Attempts in other provinces proved more successful: New Brunswick explicitly prohibited women from voting in 1834, Prince Edward Island followed suit two years later, and Nova Scotia joined them in 1851.⁵

In 1840, after the Act of Union, the Reformers presented a bill to disenfranchise women - this time successfully. Their action has been ascribed to the defeat, by four votes, of the Reform candidate in Halton County, Ontario. When it was discovered that seven women had voted for the Tory opponent, the response from the Reformers followed a crude logic - if Women had not voted, the Tory would not have won!

It had not been necessary to introduce an act with the specific purpose of barring women from the vote in British Columbia;⁶ this had been effected by the statutory

5. Garner, op. cit., p. 155.

6. Clauses existed specifically excluding Indians and Chinese however. See for example, Statutes of B.C., 1881, Chapter 16, Section 24: "No Chinese or Indians shall be entitled to vote at any municipal election for the election of a Mayor, Reeve or Councillor."

definitions of an elector. While there had been several amendments to this definition, the qualification of "male" subjects was maintained throughout. In British Columbia, as in most other provinces, the W.C.T.U. was the first to respond to this inequity.

IDEOLOGY OF THE WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

Comprehension of the early period of suffrage activity in British Columbia necessitates a distinction between the form of this activity and its content. In other words, although the demand that women be allowed to vote was not in line with mores of the society, (and in fact, challenged the political status quo) that demand remained rooted in an extremely conservative analysis of the role of women in society.

The W.C.T.U. never posed the vote as a means of qualitatively altering the status of women. Aware of labour unrest, corruption and graft in the government, and (particularly) the unrestricted flow of liquor, the W.C.T.U. believed that the situation could only be changed by women. This belief was founded on the ascription of certain inherent characteristics to women - qualities derived from the W.C.T.U.'s concept of Christian morality. For the W.C.T.U., women were the embodiment of an ideal - the defenders of morality and the moral guardians of successive generations. Societal evils, especially liquor, thwarted these efforts and even misguided some women:

Our little ones come to us and by their very helplessness appeal to all that is pure and holy, all that is tender and loving in our natures ... yet as they pass out of the gates of their homes, we tremble for them, surrounded as they are by houses of vice and dens of iniquity, which infest our cities and towns, many of them being sustained by a law which licences them and makes their murderous business legitimate and respectable. ⁷

The vote, therefore, was to facilitate the election of morally conscious politicians thus allowing women to withdraw from the arena of political struggle and better carry out their duties within the frame-work of the family.

Suffrage reform was never posed in terms of fundamental human rights. Rather it was an unfortunate duty which women were either forced to carry out or else remain complicit in the destruction of the society:

It is a duty we owe our homes, our children, our country, to use every effort to gain the power which will enable us to unite our votes to those of our worthy fathers, husbands and brothers to place in positions of trust and in the halls of legislation men who are not intellectually, but morally, capable to fill the office. ⁸

Several points become clear. On the one hand, the role of women projected by the W.C.T.U. was so thoroughly of

7. Mrs. Gordon Grant, 'Paper on Franchise', W.C.T.U. Minutes of Annual Report, 1888, p. 33.

8. Ibid, p. 34.

middle class origin that the majority of women workers could simply not identify with it.⁹ Forced to labour ten hours a day under intolerable conditions and to send their children to work under similar circumstances, women workers found the W.C.T.U.'s conception of women as the 'fountainheads of grace, innocence, and purity' quite alien: it was not an identity they could ascribe to themselves.

The orientation of the W.C.T.U. led it to denounce any spontaneous movement of militancy among women (such as trade unions activity) as futile - women's suffrage and prohibition was the universal panacea, and the only worthwhile cause. For example, a W.C.T.U. woman whose husband insisted upon spending his pay check on alcoholic beverages would be told that she must eliminate his choice through the abolition of liquor.¹⁰

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9. The middle class nature of the W.C.T.U. is reflected in the composition of the leadership in particular, but also in the membership. The social status of the W.C.T.U. was clearly not working class - their husbands invariably came from the ranks of professionals, small businessmen or government officials.
 10. British Columbia workers became involved with temperance in an organized manner in 1916, and possibly earlier. In Charles Stezle's 'A Temperance Society Composed of Labour Leaders', (Vancouver: n. pub., 1916) it is apparent that unlike the W.C.T.U., the labour movement did not see liquor as the source of social problems: rather it was concerned with drink as an obstacle to the organization and effective activity of the working class. "It was not held that working people were more intemperate than any other class in the community, but that of all people, the working class can least afford to be associated with the drink traffic ... clear thinking and perfect control are necessary at this time."

This process prevented the raising of broader questions as to the nature of the society which produced a woman's dependency upon her husband's pay check and which produced the husband's dependency upon alcohol. In a nut shell, although the W.C.T.U. addressed itself to real problems, the ideological framework within which its solutions were set deprived them of any genuine efficacy.

The close interrelationship between suffrage and prohibition was never questioned in British Columbia, primarily because no suffrage force independent from the prohibition movement existed. On the American west coast, however, (where a similar situation existed at one time) many suffragettes came to feel that the identification of those two issues impeded the growth of the suffrage cause. For example, in an 1896 letter to Abigail Scott Dunway (a militant from Oregon), Susan B. Anthony confided: "My personal belief as to prohibition pro or con is nobody's business but my own, but I have done all I could to keep the two questions separate in the California Women's Suffrage campaign. The two movements cannot successfully unite to win for either cause."¹¹ Anthony's hesitancy in revealing her reservations undoubtedly flowed from the importance of the prohibition forces in the suffrage movement - without their organizational abilities, the movement certainly would have developed more slowly.

11. A.J. Dunway, Path Breaking, (Portland: James, 1914), p. 199 See Constance Rover, Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967) pp. 1-4 for a discussion of such difficulties in Britain.

The W.C.T.U. was never a broadly based movement in British Columbia although small locals were established throughout the province quite early on. Their superb organizational skills particularly their use of the press, allowed the group to wield much more influence than their numbers warranted. In 1883, the W.C.T.U. was established in Victoria;¹² by the turn of the century locals had appeared in such places as Ashcroft, Aggasiz, Comox, Chilliwack, Grand Forks, Greenwood, Kamloops, Nanaimo, Rossland, Revelstoke, Vancouver, etc.¹³

The tactics employed by the W.C.T.U. to achieve suffrage were limited to pressure group techniques such as petitions and delegations to the Legislative Assembly. The employment of such tactics had a dual thrust: on the one hand, the women sought to win their objectives, and on the other hand, even when their efforts were unsuccessful they had an educational value for the public and the Members of the House.

The first petition was presented in 1885, followed by further petitions in 1894, 1895, 1898 and 1899.¹⁴ When it was obvious that a particular government would not enact legislation, the W.C.T.U. waited upon MLA's to attempt to persuade them to present private members' bills. This latter

13. W.C.T.U. Minutes of Annual Report, 1901, p. 120.

14. From the Journals of the B.C. Legislative Assembly of the above respective years.

method, notoriously unsuccessful within the parliamentary system in British Columbia, proved to be disheartening. Without the government's support, the introduction of private bills met ridicule and mockery and were soundly defeated on party votes. Although the primary focus of their aspirations remained the achievement of suffrage on the provincial level, during the first period of activity, the W.C.T.U. was forced to engage in actions to defend the right of women to vote in those areas where women had made these gains. In addition, the group was sporadically involved in federal campaigns which entailed gathering names for federal W.C.T.U. petitions.

ELECTORAL GAINS

The first electoral rights were granted to (propertied) women in 1873 through the extension of the municipal franchise. The Act now stated: "any male or femme sole of the full age of twenty-one years, being a free holder, house-holder, free miner, pre-empter, or lease holder .. resident in a municipality shall be entitled to vote at the first municipal election; no such femme sole shall be qualified to sit or vote as a Councilor".¹⁵ The enactment of this amendment did not stem from a new governmental benevolence. Only a negligible number of women actually owned property so that the newly enfranchised women did not pose a serious threat as a potent political force.

15. Statutes of B.C., 1873, Chapter 2, Section 5, which amended Chapter 13, Section 35 of the corresponding statute in 1872.

In fact, in the first election after this amendment (1875), only three women went to the poll to cast their ballot.¹⁶

The next extension of the franchise occurred in 1884 when women became eligible to vote in school board elections. Although this amendment was not solicited, its passage is hardly surprising as women have traditionally be inextricably linked to the welfare of children. Once again, this revision affected only propertied women: "Any householder or freeholder resident in any school district ... (shall be entitled to vote)."¹⁷ The impact of the W.C.T.U.'s agitation was evident in the ensuing school board election. The Honorable J. Robson, Provincial Secretary, stated in his election report that seven hundred sixty-three men and two hundred sixty-nine women had voted on June 16, 1884.¹⁸ In 1885, the clause 'and the wife of any such householder or freeholder' increased the number of enfranchised women but plainly kept the vote within the ranks of the middle class.

The W.C.T.U. welcomed these changes, and went further to suggest that women should be able to become trustees:

16. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 87.

17. Statutes of B.C., 1884 Chapter 27, Section 10, which amended Section 23 of original Act.

18. Sessional Papers of the Province of British Columbia, 1885, Victoria p. 466.

To the praise of British Columbia, let me say, we enjoy the municipal franchise here - we enjoy the privilege of voting for school trustees - but why stop there? Have we not cast our votes in these two instances in a womanly, intelligent manner; has it resulted in bickering and quarelling in the home; has it caused a disturbance at the polls if not then, wherein is the objection to extending this privilege. Woman's work is to cleanse, beautify and restore the broken harmony of the home, and has or will the franchise interfere with this work, will it not rather make her work more effectual.¹⁹

Although this right was ultimately granted to women in cities in 1895, several complications concerning the School Board Act arose in the interval. For example, in the 1892 Amendments to the Public Schools Act, 'voters' were completely re-defined. Instead of the definition including women householders, freeholders and the wives of the same, a clause now stated:

The Board of Trustees for each City School District shall be elected in this manner hereinafter provided by the votes of electors duly qualified to vote for a Mayor, as provided for in Section 33 of the Municipalities Act, 1891²⁰

However, the Municipalities Act had never been extended to include the wives of landholders or free holders appearing on the assessment rolls! Consequently, women who had been entitled to vote for the past seven years on the basis of their husband's status, now became disenfranchised.

19. W.C.T.U. Minutes of Annual Report, 1888, pp. 33-34.

20. Statutes of B.C., 1895, Chapter 48, Section 4, which amended Section 9 of Act of 1892.

It appears that the W.C.T.U. did not recognise this fact for several years. But once they had taken cognizance of it, a petition was presented to the Legislative Assembly. The women felt:

That the said amendment was a retrograde movement and that it would be conducive to the best interests of the children and schools of this province of the repealed law were re-enacted.²¹

The government, however, chose to leave this amendment intact for several more years. Throughout the statutes there is no mention of repeal. With the drafting of the Consolidated Statutes of 1897, however, the definition of voter once again reverts back to the 1891 formulation. The seriousness of this delay in redefinition was compounded by the provisions of the 1895 Amendment to the Public School Act. This permitted women to stand for election as trustees if they were householders, or freeholders of twenty-one years of age and "were otherwise qualified by (the) Act to vote at an election of School Trustees."²² In other words, women were able to stand for school trustees if they fulfilled the

21. B.C. Journals, 1894, p. xxiii.

22. Ibid., 1895, p. 85, showed that after a discussion on the second reading, the amendment passed 18-5.

stipulations for voting - but the 1892 amendment thus had the effect of drastically reducing the number of women as qualified. As no electoral records exist, the precise impact of this legislation is impossible to gauge. It seems probable that the disenfranchisement of women voters qualifying on their husband's property was an error which the government enacted quite inadvertantly. Therefore, in the 1893 election, it is quite likely that women exercised their voting rights. By 1884, the implications of this 'error' were realized and electoral officials banned women, prompting the W.C.T.U. to present their petition. Although the Government did not formally present a statutory amendment, it seems to have taken informal steps to correct its error in 1894, as it would appear that previously disenfranchised women voted again in the following year's election.²³ One woman also stood for (and won) the position of school trustee.

The success of women as school trustees has proved highly satisfactory, so much indeed that a member of our legislature, in supporting our petition that the privilege of a seat on school boards be accorded women in rural districts as well as cities; declared it to be his opinion, after having watched the experiment in our capital city, "that the lady on that board was the best man amongst them."²⁴

23. One strong indication of this informal arrangement was simply that the W.C.T.U., noted for its precision in presenting annual petitions, to publicize grievances, failed in 1895 to present a petition on this matter. Their Annual Reports also fail to include any mention.

24. W.C.T.U. Minutes of Annual Report, 1895, p. 30.

Vancouver women were not so fortunate. In 1895, the W.C.T.U. reported that an effort had been made to "elect two ladies to the School Board."²⁵ City officials denied women this right on the basis of a legal point: where City Charters exist, their by-laws take precedence over provincial rulings. Vancouver was one of the few Canadian cities with its own charter, and so remained unaffected by alterations in the School Board Act, but because the City Council had not yet dealt with the question of women's involvement in school elections, the women were still not permitted to be school trustees.

Women living in rural areas (county voting districts) did not receive the right to become school trustees until 1911, a right which was withdrawn two years later. The 1913 amendment to the School Board Act now defined a Trustee as a "male, British subject".²⁶ Women's rights advocates indignantly responded in public statements that this move had "expressly deprived women in county districts of the only practical power they possessed in connection with the education of their children".²⁷

Upon confronting the Superintendent of Education, the women were told that he was "unable to explain how or why except through an inadvertance", the disastrous alteration

25. Ibid., p. 44.

26. Statutes of B.C., 1913, Chapter 38, Section 2.

27. The Champion, July 1913, p. 4.

occurred. Their response was: "We quite believe that both the Minister of Education and the Superintendent of Education were both totally unaware of the iniquitous blunder, or worse, but we would like to know what excuse they can offer the country for their ignorance on the subject."²⁸

Attempts to disenfranchise women were also made on the municipal level. In 1898, the W.C.T.U. reported that their Superintendent learned that the City Council of Victoria was endeavouring to have the Municipality Act amended so that all women who did not own real estate would be disenfranchised. Their fears were soon allayed:

After interviewing the Mayor and each Councillor, we found the large majority were determined upon pushing the amendment. We then waited upon the Attorney General and were delighted that he had no sympathy with the amendment, because he believed in women's full enfranchisement. The amendment was not even brought before the House.²⁹

Quite the opposite occurred a decade later, and because this particular campaign was extended over several years and displayed important aspects of W.C.T.U. organizing, it should be examined in detail.

In 1906, due to an error on the part of the Conservative Government, women received the unqualified right to vote in municipal affairs. The government did not realize, until

28. Ibid., August 1913, p. 4.

29. W.C.T.U. Minutes of Annual Report, 1899, p. 47.

after the House had prorogued, that the amendment to the Municipal Elections Act, ostensibly granting militia men the franchise was so broad that it also included women. As previously stated, before 1906 both men and women with sufficient property qualifications were able to exercise the municipal franchise, but during the years 1906 through 1908, women were in a position where they had fewer voting restrictions than had men in municipal matters. The flurry of activity occurring in 1906 can be traced to the March 12th amendment which was passed by the Legislative Assembly in order to rectify an error of the previous House whereby a 1905 amendment deprived militia men of the vote. The 1906 amendment involved an alteration to the definition of the word 'householder':

Householder shall mean and include any person of the full age of twenty-one years who occupies a dwelling, tenement, hotel or boarding-house, and who shall, unless exempt by Statute or Municipal By-Law, have paid directly to the Municipality rates, taxes or fees of not less than two dollars for the current year. ³⁰

The key section of the amendment which applied both to militia men and (as it was discovered in October of 1906) to women, and which gave both groups the right to vote was "unless exempt by Statute or Municipal By-Law." Once again, this by-law applied to British Columbia women living in areas other than those cities having their own charters - Vancouver was not affected.

30. Statutes of B.C. Chapter 18, Section 2.

On October 30, 1906, the Victoria Daily Times reported the first rush of activity on the part of women. Eighty-three women had been fully signed up on the voters' lists and a further 1,088 declarations had been filed requesting that the applicant be placed on the list under the qualification of property and road taxes, trade licences and dog taxes.³¹ This latter figure was not composed of women alone, and although there is no break down as to its' composition in the newspapers, it seems significant that such a large number of individuals had rushed in one day, to declare their voting eligibility.

The Daily Times saw the activity as a 'war' between temperance and saloon elements. According to the newspapers, when it was discovered that women could be on the voters list, the Licenced Victuallers Association rallied feminine supporters. However, the news shortly reached the ears of the Citizens' League and the 'war' began. The Victoria Daily Times was rather skeptical of the day's events:

An interesting feature of the present list is the large numbers of ladies who have registered. Many of them state as their qualifications the payment of a dog tax, and a strange fact in this connection is that in several instances a couple of ladies have qualified on the same dog. The majority claim to be exempted from taxes however. Thirty-one dogs is the total employed by their mistresses to secure the vote.³²

31. Victoria Daily Times, October 30, 1906, p. 2.

32. Ibid., October 30, 1906, p. 2.

The Times further reported that there was a great conflict of opinion among members of the legal professions as to whether women not owning property could vote. Reverend T.W. Gladstone, president of the Citizens League, was adamant that the names should remain and told the newspaper that "If the Court of Revision removes the names of these ladies I will take it to the court of appeal."

The Property Association soon took up the struggle in a fashion quite different than that initiated by the Licensed Victuallers Association.³³ On March 16, 1907 at the annual general meeting of the former group, a motion was passed "declaring that the vote had been given to irresponsible persons and asked for the repeal of the amendment".³⁴ This motion was a short time later submitted to the Municipal Committee of the House.

The W.C.T.U. rapidly organized a public meeting, with Mayor Morley of Victoria presiding in response to the action of the Property Owners Association. After several delays, the meeting was finally held on March 25, 1907 at the City Hall. Although two hundred persons attended, the majority of them women, no members of the Property Owners Association appeared. However, a copy of the motion adopted by the Association (drafted by Mr. Sorby, its secretary-treasurer) was read out. It revealed that the aim of the Property Owners was to "strike

33. Although I have not researched it, I would suspect that the membership of the two groups overlapped, or at least that similar interests were at stake.

34. Daily Colonist, March 27, 1907, p. 11.

out the right to vote on the payment of a two dollar dog-tax".³⁵ Hence, payment of real estate or poll taxes would be required to obtain the right to vote.

Mrs. Spofford's speech at the meeting illustrated the philosophy of the W.C.T.U. She said that it had been considered that the granting of suffrage would produce competition between men and women and that although she recognized a difference between the sexes, this difference was not of an antagonistic nature, but of a complementary nature. "Women share responsibilities in municipal affairs and should have the right to assist in discharging the responsibility."³⁶

The meeting passed a motion declaring itself as opposed to any further restrictions on the municipal suffrage and adjourned after establishing a committee "to wait on the Provincial Government so that the Property Owners Association Bill is not sneaked through."³⁷

As an election was not due to take place until the following December, 1907, the committee continued to watch parliamentary debates closely. Although not reported in the newspapers, the minutes of the W.C.T.U. reveal that this continuing scrutiny was successful. In Mrs. George Grant's 'Legislation, Petition and Franchise Report', given on June 26, 1907, she stated:

36. Ibid., March 25, 1907, p. 2.

37. Daily Colonist, March 27, 1907, p. 7.

An effort was made by the Victoria Property Owners Association to have the law amended in such a way that if secured would prevent a large proportion of the womens' votes from being cast. A deputation waited on the government opposing this change. They were graciously received, their petition considered with the result that no change in the law was made.³⁸

However, just before the Court of Revision had completed its duties, Mr. Higgins, attorney for the Property Owners Association, declared that he intended to have between four and five hundred women struck off the list "on the grounds that they were not entitled to vote."³⁹ When the Court of Revision, upon the ruling of the City Barrister, refused to remove the names from the voters list, Higgins took a test case, Mrs. Bernice Snowcroft, before Magistrate's Court. Higgins argued in court that "If she paid the water rate, dog tax or if she was a licence holder, she would be entitled to vote, but there is no enactment in the statute exempting her from payment of the taxes."⁴⁰

Mr. H. Taylor, appearing for Bernice Snowcroft maintained that women were exempt from taxes, to no avail, for Magistrate Jay ruled that the exemption clause applied specifically to militiamen who were relieved of the road tax,

38. W.C.T.U. Minutes of the Annual Report, June 25-27, 1907, p. 19.

39. Daily Times, December 20, 1907, p. 1.

40. Daily Colonist, January 8, 1908, p. 3.

and that women were not exempt, as the city had no power to tax them in the first place. On January 8, 1908, Mrs. Bernice Snowcroft's name was removed from the voters list and a notice was given in the press to 486 other women whose names were also removed.

Just one week later, however, the women turned up at the polling stations and cast their vote. The right to vote in this 1908 election did not result from a reversal in the decision of the Magistrate: instead it was a consequence of the successful challenge of his decision on technical grounds. Mr. Justice Clement, in the Supreme Court of British Columbia, granted an injunction restraining the Mayor from removing any names of persons from the list who had not been served a notice to appear before Magistrate Jay. In other words, the women charged that because they did not have the opportunity to appear before the courts when their case was decided, the Mayor should be restrained and Magistrate Jay's decision should not be extended to other women. The women won the case and in 1908 only Mrs. Bernice Snowcroft was denied her right to vote as she was the sole defendant who had been presented in Court.⁴¹

41. Daily Times, January 15, 1908, p. 1.

Several weeks prior to this reversal, the Victoria Daily Colonist reported that 'some individuals' were planning to apply for a Court order to compel the Mayor to remove the names from the voters lists, as he had not removed all of the names. However, before that was accomplished Mr. Justice Clement handed down his ruling.⁴² The women realized that the reversal was not permanent however. Just as the franchise had been extended by chance, so had the injunction been granted on the basis of a technicality. As the Daily Times reported:

The ladies of Victoria are not sitting idly by while the men do the legislating. They are up in arms and are preparing a giant petition asking the provincial government to grant suffrage. Besides that, they plan an interview with Premier McBride and other members of the Cabinet and if they do not acquiesce in the scheme proposed by the ladies, the members of the government will know what to expect.⁴³

Mrs. Gordon Grant, supervisor of the W.C.T.U. Department of Franchise, Legislation and Petitions, validates this statement in her report to the Silver Anniversary Meeting: "In conjunction with the Local Council of Women, a petition was circulated in Victoria and a thousand names were secured in three days."⁴⁴

42. Ibid., January 15, 1908, p. 1.

43. Ibid., February 8, 1908, p. 2.

44. W.C.T.U. Silver Anniversary Report, Victoria, 1908. p. 69.

Both groups saw the immediate necessity of the petition, for the government was once again in session and the Municipal Elections Act was to be open for discussion. An amendment, formulated by Attorney General Bowser, to restrict the vote of women was to be presented. On February 22, 1908, Mr. Naden (Liberal Member from Greenwood) spoke in favor of adult suffrage. "He chided the government who wanted to shelve the question" and "when the Premier was forced to open debate on the question, he said that he personally had voted against it on different occasions, but that he could change his opinion—he was a great friend of the Women's Council."⁴⁵

Naden then proposed to strike out of the Bowsler Bill those words which would disenfranchise women, but the bill was carried unamended by a party vote. When another Liberal Member said that it had not been explained why the bill had been changed to limit the women's franchise, McBride replied that it had been made clear in the Municipal Committee.

The disappointment of the women is reflected in Mrs. Grant's report:

Our petition (of 1,000 names) was sent to the Legislature protesting against the change. Every effort was used to influence the Premier, the Attorney General and the Legislative Committee and the members representing municipalities to prevent such legislation from becoming law, but when the vote was taken, we were sadly disappointed;

45. Daily Times, February 22, 1908, p. 5.

but not discouraged because we all felt that everything had been done to prevent the measure from going through.⁴⁶

This does not mean that the women were not angry. The first section of her report reveals the intensity of that anger:

"Let me first mention that (activity) of franchise. How this department has exercised some of us during this year ... and the humiliation we have been subjected to through the disenfranchisement of the householders of British Columbia, which, I repeat, has been accomplished through the liquor interests in this fair city—this Queen City of Victoria."⁴⁷ Mrs. Grant presented a resolution to that convention which displays the determination of the W.C.T.U.: "Resolved, that the members of the B.C. W.C.T.U. in convention assembled, express their indignation at the retrograde step taken by the government in depriving the women householders of British Columbia of the right to vote, and that we pledge ourselves to renewed action to secure the franchise for the women of this province."⁴⁸

The W.C.T.U. women were not the only disappointed group. The Daily Times editorial of February 24, 1908 reflected a general sentiment. It questioned the motives of

46. W.C.T.U. Silver Anniversary Report, Victoria, 1908, pp. 67-68.

47. Ibid., Victoria, 1908, p. 68.

48. Ibid., Victoria, 1908, p. 68.

the government. "It is usually said that municipal bills are shaped by those suggestions of interested people—but (the Victoria City) Council is interested. Did the Attorney General draw up a bill without thinking of them?"⁴⁹ A letter to the Editor in the same paper displays similar indignation. "If Mr. McBride and Bowser see fit to line up their forces on the side of the Property Owners Association and the saloon, as against the homes and the moral well being of our city, they will have themselves to blame if all the respectable men of the Conservative party get out." The letter was signed "A Conservative."⁵⁰

The Victoria women began to act upon their anger and disappointment. The headlines of a front page article in the Victoria Daily Times stated: "Suffragettes are Indignant — Public Meeting — Demand that Local Members of the Legislature Explain Their Votes."⁵¹ This idea came from a motion presented by Mrs. Spofford at a W.C.T.U. meeting held on March 9. The meeting decided that they would talk with the Premier, the Attorney General, and Victoria Members of the Legislative Assembly. They stated further that "those members must have a good reason and be able to explain the

49. Daily Times, February 24, 1908, p. 4.

50. Ibid., p. 4.

51. Daily Times, March 10, 1908, p. 1.

recent legislation."⁵² The Times reports that the Attorney General had previously given his reason, but that the women remained dissatisfied. (Bowser had said that he had no intention of disenfranchisement, but that he just wished to keep undesirable women from voting). In addition, the women had previously approached the Victoria Members, who had said that they must back the government on this issue. The government had not even wished to accept a compromise: "They (the women) then wrote to the premier and the Attorney General asking that the word 'householders' might include women who paid sixty dollars per year rental, but after 'careful consideration' these gentlemen decided only men could vote."⁵³ On March 14, the reply from the government arrived. It was just as disheartening. The letter stated that they "were unable to see that any benefit would result from the meeting and 'declined the invitation'".⁵⁴

But the issue had not died. In October of the same year, a challenge to the new definition of 'householder' was initiated by Mr. R.T. Elliot, a lawyer. On October 16, Elliot applied for a writ of mandamus to compel the City Clerk, Mr. Dowler, to place a Mrs. Hucknell's name on the voters list.⁵⁵ She was to act as a test case. If this

52. Ibid., p. 1.

53. Ibid., p. 1.

54. Daily Times, March 14, 1908, p. 1.

55. Daily Colonist, October 17, 1908, p. 7.

application was accepted by Chief Justice Hunder, then over four hundred and eighty women would again be placed on the municipal voters list.

In court, Elliot argued vigorously that because the clause "Householder means and includes" (which appeared in the new 1906 amendment) should be interpreted as the original common law meaning, plus a new meaning, designed specifically for the act, and because Mrs. Hucknell had paid her taxes and was a householder in the original meaning of the word, she should be eligible to vote. Mr. Dowler, the City Clerk, represented the City, although his lawyer did not argue the case. The Victoria Daily Colonist attributes this to the fact that "the City Administration is not throwing any obstacles in the way of anyone getting a vote, and so the City Barrister will only formally oppose the application."⁵⁶ Chief Justice Hunter ruled, however, that the last legislature had restricted enfranchisement and refused Elliot's application for a writ of mandamus. Activity around suffrage was continued, but at a much lower level, after this defeat.

In 1909, the W.C.T.U. and the Local Council of Women once again waited upon the government. They asked, along with the Mayor, for the enfranchisement of men over sixty years of age and of women. "The petition of the former was granted, but the latter ignored. Why? Because without a vote women

56. Ibid., p. 7.

cannot to any great degree effect the elections."⁵⁷

In 1910, the W.C.T.U. launched an intensive campaign to educate both its own members and the public. "Nineteen thousand and four hundred pages of literature were distributed in homes, offices, schools and public gatherings."⁵⁸ The campaign appears to have been successful, at least in Vancouver, when women were enfranchised for the first time on the municipal level, probably as a result of this campaign.

CONCLUSION

This particular period of activity is important not only because women made a series of small electoral advances, but also because the basis for future organizing was laid. The most important development during these years was the implantation of the movement in the middle-class, from which its entire leadership came. The implications of this were profound: it meant that the membership, the scope, and the methods utilized by the movement were severely restricted. For example, the simple fact that parlour meetings were held during the afternoon meant that interested working women were prevented from attending. However, the middle-class bias of the movement is perhaps most strongly demonstrated in the nature and scope of the demands it raised. For instance, it is

57. W.C.T.U. Minutes of the Annual Report, 1909, Victoria, p. 89.

58. Ibid., 1910, p. 62.

difficult to imagine how broad sectors of women could have been mobilized around the W.C.T.U.'s campaign to liberalize school trustee election regulations: the realities of life did not permit working class children the luxury of attending school for any length of time and thus precluded the emergence of the school as an important institution for working class women. In addition, the ideological context and the abstract and moralistic manner in which demands were raised (obviously a reflection of middle-class consciousness and education) curtailed potential mobilization of other social strata. Discussions concerning the moral quality of education were hardly related to the real problems that the bulk of women confronted each day.

On one level, the question of prohibition could have conceivably mobilized a much broader sector of women, however; it did address itself to the real experience of women — their total subordination to their husband's authority. However, the W.C.T.U. posed the question of prohibition in terms of women's traditional role as moral guardian, rather than as a response to the traditional subjection of women to the whims of male authority.

The methods utilized to achieve their goals also reflected a strong middle-class bias. Most women had neither the time nor the financial resources necessary to 'wait upon' the

government in Victoria with their petitions. The manner in which the W.C.T.U. women handled the 1906 controversy is central to understanding their strategy and tactics: by keeping the struggle focused on courtroom activities, the onus for altering the status of women remained with the law makers. Mass mobilization and propaganda, to the extent that it was carried out at all, was always geared to the expectation that justice would come from the government or the courts as a result of steady but moderate pressure-group activity. The growth of a powerful mass movement was impossible on this basis.

But more important was the mentality which this courtroom strategy reflected and which characterized the W.C.T.U. in general: in seeing the courtroom as a place where struggles could be logically solved, the W.C.T.U. demonstrated the serious gap which separated them from the mass of the province's women. Even if women accepted the strategy that inequities could be ameliorated in the courtroom, the possibility of their being able to conduct their particular struggles in this way was precluded on several grounds: working women could not miss work to make court appearances, but more importantly, they could not afford the expenses of lengthy litigation.

Of course this direction which the movement followed at an early stage was not irreversible. A period of general

radicalization in the province, for example, could have had a serious impact upon its direction. Unfortunately, as will be demonstrated, the movement continued on an essentially similar course throughout its duration. The continuity of later developments with the early character of the movement is clearly seen in the concentration of the movement after the winning of suffrage on purely legislative victories.

CHAPTER FIVE

LATER PERIOD OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY

The next upsurge of suffrage activity began in December 1910, when the Political Equality League was established in Victoria "at the insistence of the Local Council of Women."¹ The Council, sporadically interested in suffrage question prior to 1910,² now began to organize in a concerted manner.

Founded in British Columbia in 1887, the Council affiliated with the National Council of Women shortly after its formation in 1893. According to Powell, this latter organization was "recognized soon after its founding as the most influential group of women in Canada!"³ She attributed this status to the fact that the wife of the Governor General founded it and became its first President.

Federally, the group was composed of a variety of organizations. Its purpose was to combine these diffuse voices into a single unit:

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1. Audrey Marilyn Adams: A Study of the Use of Plebiscites and Referendums in the Province of British Columbia, unpublished Bachelor of Arts thesis, (Vancouver: U.B.C., 1954,) p. 44.
 2. For example, they presented a petition to the Government in 1895, requesting women be entitled to stand as school trustees.
 3. Mary Patricia Powell, Responses to the Depression: Three Representative Womens' Groups in British Columbia, unpublished Master of Arts thesis, (Vancouver: U.B.C., 1967,) p. 45.

The Council was to serve as a forum for discussion of topics in which women were interested and (to) make known to the government on all levels the legislation which women wanted. If women were fragmented into many different clubs and societies, they would not be effective in any way. The Council would enable women to speak with one unified voice.⁴

Although the International Council of Women had passed a resolution in favor of suffrage in 1905 at the Budapest Convention, the Canadian group did not address itself to the problem as a federal body until 1909. In that year the International Council held its Fourth Quinquennial meeting in Toronto and suffrage was the dominant item on the agenda. Cleverdon argues that Lady Aberdeen's (wife of the Governor General) official public endorsement of the cause at this meeting must have swayed thousands of men and women.⁵ The following year the Canadian delegates confronted the issue at their national convention in Halifax, where women's suffrage was endorsed. In addition, a suggestion was made to set up Political Equality Leagues. Two cities in British Columbia responded: Victoria and Vancouver each set up a League in 1910, to be followed in 1912 by Winnipeg and Toronto. In many areas this was unnecessary, as viable organizations already existed. By February of 1912, eight societies were functioning in the city of Toronto alone.⁶

4. Ibid., p. 46.

5. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 31.

6. Ibid., p. 36. The establishment of the League in Toronto, causing obvious duplication, was seen by Cleverdon as a personal ambition on the part of the leadership.

THE WASHINGTON EXPERIENCE

In Washington a parallel resurgence was also discernable. There it came from somewhat different sources than in British Columbia, however. Through successful agitation women had been granted voting rights in 1883 – only to have them annulled in the courts four years later.⁷ In 1888, another Franchise Act was passed – this time it was rendered void when Washington became a state: somehow the framers of the new constitution neglected to include provisions for women's franchise. Suffrage agitation virtually came to a standstill for the next ten years following this set back.

In 1908, the next upswing of activity developed: women attended a Washington Equal Suffrage Convention and planned a mammoth campaign which succeeded in winning voting rights at the end of a year of intense activity.

Their immediate accomplishments, closely scrutinized by suffrage forces in British Columbia, were summarized by Baily:

7. The accomplishments during these four years were put succinctly by Adella Parker in a Suffrage leaflet: "Women first voted in Washington in 1814 ... They voted in 1885 and 1886 and voted so well they drove most of the thugs and gamblers over to British Columbia." Perhaps this explains early suffrage activity in British Columbia! Leaflet information is from N.A. Ault, "The Earnest Ladies: The Walla Walla Women's Club and the Equal Suffrage League of 1886-9". Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Vol. 42, 1951, p. 129.

In other words, within the space of a month, the women have 'fired' one mayor, elected another, chose their own legislative body, and showed politicians that advertising and organization and paid workers cut not the slightest figure with women when women decide to insurge.⁸

PROGRAMME AND ACTIVITY OF THE POLITICAL EQUALITY LEAGUE

Shortly after the founding of the Victoria P.E.L. in May 1910, a branch was established in Vancouver. These two groups officially united to form the British Columbia Political Equality League (BCPEL). Membership was non-exclusionary upon the payment of a fifty cent fee and although men could become honorary members, the major part of organizing was carried out by women.

The Leadership of the B.C.P.E.L. was familiar: for example the first President of both the Victoria and the B.C.P.E.L. groups was Mrs. Gordon Grant, Superintendent of the W.C.T.U.'s department of Legislation, Petition and Franchise. Mrs. Lashley Hall, the Vancouver President was also a W.C.T.U. member in the Evangelistic Department.⁹ The

8. C.H. Bailey, 'How Washington Women Regained the Ballot', Pacific Monthly, July 1911, Volume XXVI, p. 2.

9. Elsie Gregory MacGill, My Mother the Judge, A Biography of Judge Helen Gregory MacGill, (Toronto; Ryerson Press, 1955,) p. 125. Note: The overall influence of the W.C.T.U. does not appear to have extended to policy decisions. The question of prohibition was never adopted by the League nor were references made to it in their programme.

organizational skills of these women proved valuable – the growth of the League was rapid. A province wide campaign was launched, in October of 1912, and Dorothy Davis was appointed 'Organizer for the Interior of British Columbia'. She began an extensive tour of the province in December. At each small town she contacted local individuals or organizations in attempts to interest them in her cause:

The work of organizing meetings was no small one, as with only a few hours in most case at her disposal, she had to get a hall, find a chairman, then distribute bills and secure her audience at each place she visited.¹⁰

At the end of her trip the idea of 'votes for women' had been introduced to over thirty centres and, in the majority of them, viable groups had been established. Kelowna and Penticton held the largest meetings (with over one hundred persons present) and contributed the greatest numbers of new members. The Fraser Valley Region was organized by Mrs. Lashley Hall who met with women in Ashcroft, Aggasiz, Mission City and Kamloops, establishing League branches in each centre.¹¹

By February of 1913, the Vancouver district had nine operating branches – Point Grey, New Westminster, Central Park, South Vancouver, Sapperton, Mount Pleasant, Fair-

10. The Champion, January 1913, p. 13.

11. Ibid., November 1912, p. 12.

view, North Vancouver and Port Nancy.¹² Three months later, The Champion reported that "thousands of members belonged", although only three to four hundred women carried the work load.¹³ On the basis of these numbers alone, it is likely that at least certain sectors of the working class were involved. One piece of evidence to substantiate this claim was a report from Revelstoke that "women of leisure, women with no leisure, women with position and women without, have also massed together ... in one long strong pull for women's freedom."¹⁴ The leadership and most of the active membership came from the middle class, however. The continually reported teas at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, afternoon parlour meetings and member's trips abroad were clearly no pleasures which working women could afford.

The programme of the League, featured on the front page of each edition of their monthly paper (The Champion), centred on, but was not limited to, the attainment of the vote. The group's first programmatic point was "to establish the Political, Social and Individual Rights of men and women." In addition, the League sought to "remedy evils in the society and to educate the public on the efficiency of

12. Ibid., February 1913, p. 14.

13. Ibid., May, 1913, p. 4.

14. Ibid., January, 1913, p. 8.

some British Columbia laws as they affected women and children." The legal status of women was appalling, according to the League, and they must campaign so:

... that women might obtain recognition as human beings. On the statute book she was treated generally as a piece of personal property, a chattel, which was a thing which any woman, or many worth anything, find intolerable.¹⁵

To these ends "the attainment of the vote was indispensable." Women's franchise was once again therefore, a derivative goal of suffrage forces. The Champion put it this way:

We are striving for the enfranchisement of women, but the vote is not the end, but a means to an end. It is not an ideal which women set before them, but an indication of a changed mental attitude towards outer circumstances and the environment, which in turn is the outcome of an internal process of unfoldment and development in harmony with the Law of Life ... It is not the vote that will work miracles, but the spirit that discerns the need and makes the demand.¹⁶

But the challenges the women were prepared to make as a result of this new 'spirit' were never extensive. Inequities, for the League at least, would be ultimately solved through changes in the Statute books — and changes were badly required, as the women discovered upon investigation.

15. Ibid., January, 1913, p. 13.

16. Ibid., December 1912, p. 20.

THE LEGAL STATUS OF WOMEN

The University Women's Club began to investigate the legal status of women shortly after its formation in Vancouver in 1910.¹⁷ Helen Gregory MacGill, later to become the first woman judge in the province, chaired the Club's 'Committee for Better Laws for Women and Children in British Columbia.' In that capacity, she arranged for lawyers to address club meetings on the subject.

After a more thorough research of her own, MacGill discovered some astounding facts: "Domestic legislation", she reported, "was more antiquated in British Columbia than anywhere else in Canada, in Great Britain and in the United States."¹⁸ The Imperial Proclamation of 1858, making the mainland a Crown Colony contained a section which stipulated that "the current law in England prevails in the Colony subject to change by Colonial legislation." Of course, — by 1910 — very little legislation concerning the welfare of women had been enacted. The result was that women continued to be subject to the British laws of 1858 — which themselves often had not been amended for centuries. The most striking example of this was a provision sanctioning the marriage of twelve to

17. The membership of this club was confined to university graduates. Within this select group, degree holders from any university in the world qualified.

18. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 119.

fourteen year old girls with the father's consent only. MacGill traced the origin of this law to the Sixth Century A.D.! The Guardianship Law was almost as ancient. This statute gave total guardianship rights to a father. The only recourse open to the mother was a provision enabling her to petition the court. However, if the child was over seven years of age, the mother's petition could only apply to visiting rights. Because it required court action, and the attendant expenses, to obtain even this minimal protection, in practice it meant that one parent, the father, had total guardianship rights.¹⁹ MacGill traced this statute to a British law passed in 1660.²⁰

The Divorce Laws, traced back to the English Marriage and Divorce Act of 1857, gave men the right to divorce women on the grounds of infidelity. A woman, on the other hand, was forced to prove that her husband was bigamous or had inflicted gross cruelty on her.

Other unfair laws which MacGill researched included the Property Act and the Deserted Wife's Act. The former gave women limited rights in her husband's estate upon his death.²¹ For example:

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19. B.C. Political Equality League, Points in the Laws of B.C. Regarding the Legal Status of Women, n. pub., n.d., p. 6.
 20. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 120.
 21. The Property Act clearly was inapplicable to large numbers of people simply because few workers owned property.

(a) If a husband died without a will, his wife and children divided his estate. One third went to his wife - providing deeds had not been drawn up which forbade dowers. The children were entitled to two thirds and, upon the death of the wife, her share.

(b) If there were no children in a particular family, only one half of the estate could be claimed by the wife; the remainder was distributed among her husband's relatives regardless of how distant they may be. If relatives could not be located, the Crown assumed that half of the estate.²²

The provisions operative upon the death of a wife were slightly different. If children were involved the procedures remained as above. If there were no children, however, the husband could claim the entire estate. At the death of a child, circumstances were similar: the father received the entire estate.²³

The Deserted Wives Act was just as discriminatory and could, if implemented, affect larger segments of the population. This Act gave men who deserted their wives the right to return and claim all of the children's earnings. In some situations, he could even demand those of his wife.

The University Womens' Club and the Local Council of Women, upon completion of this investigation, prepared a

22. B.C. Political Equality League, op. cit., p. 4. (central points paraphrased).

23. Although most children had no estates, the formulation of the law is important simply because of the social attitude it reflects.

petition to present to Attorney General Bowser, with a request for revised legislation. The League women devised a different strategy. Although they published the research widely, they refrained from addressing themselves to specific laws. They explained their strategy by stating that if specific legislative requests were granted, men would argue that women had all their legal rights, and therefore the vote was unnecessary.²⁴ Consequently, they concentrated solely on the attainment of the vote. This process, they stressed was "clearly evolutionary, not revolutionary".²⁵ Their role was simply to encourage this social evolution. As a result, the strategy employed, while somewhat more colourful, was essentially the same as that used by the W.C.T.U. in the preceding decades.

TENSION AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN SUFFRAGE ORGANIZATIONS

However, because of the increasing numbers of women involved, and their divergent tactical approaches, several controversies arose. This approach agreed upon by all women was one of educating the public. To this end, the P.E.L.

24. The Champion, February 1913, p. 4.

25. Ibid., August 1913, p. 7.

initiated a series of parlour meetings. In Vancouver, a difference of opinion occurred at once:

Some maintained they should have the public platform in seeking popular support. Others looked askance at suggestions of such unwomanly behaviour and favored quiet 'educational' meetings in drawing rooms and parlours. Finally the verbal skirmishes became too brisk, feeling overflowed, and the minority retired to form the B.C. Equal Franchise Association under the equally able and equally charming Alice Ashworth Townley, the writer.²⁶

The parting of the ways was not hostile and MacGill, among others, welcomed the split for it had the potential of involving broader and more diverse layers of the population.

"We grow like pests," she wrote, "by segmentation".²⁷

In Victoria, this particular controversy never arose in the early years and ultimately the P.E.L. in both cities resorted to the public meeting format, although smaller study groups were still maintained. The women who attended discussed the inequities they faced each day. For example, one member of an educational group reported that in Vancouver three hundred children had died during four months of the year 1910, due to impure milk. When the woman had the milk analyzed, it was revealed that, rather than 'milk', the liquid being sold under that name was a chemical concoction.²⁸ Instead

26. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 125.

27. Helen Gregory MacGill, History of Women's Suffrage in B.C., n. pub., n.d., (document held in Vancouver City Archives.)

28. The Champion, November 1912, p. 7.

of acting upon immediate grievances however, the League channelled women's energy into suffrage work.

Later controversies, and there were several, were viewed with an attitude similar to MacGill's. In April of 1913, the Vancouver branch of the P.E.L. severed connections with the provincial group and became the Pioneer Political Equality League. The membership of this group was diverse – perhaps the basis for the next division which resulted in a group called the Vancouver Suffrage League.²⁹

References exist which name yet one more organization, the British Columbia Women's Suffrage Society. The organ of this group was The Outlook.³⁰ Under the leadership of Helena Gutteridge, an organizer for the United Garment Workers Union, the group met once weekly at evening meetings in the Labour Temple. Gutteridge was able to use the facilities of this building, since she was a representative to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. Other suffrage organizations in the city felt that evening meetings for women were 'uncomely' and consequently Gutteridge never attained prominence among the 'proper' middle-class leadership.³¹

29. The group published a bi-weekly 'The Pioneer Woman'. To my knowledge copies of this paper are not in existence and the basis of the division has not been documented.

30. Copies of The Outlook have also disappeared.

31. This fact is based on a private conversation with Mary Norton, a suffragette of the P.P.E.L. now residing in Vancouver. Gutteridge later achieved recognition as the first Alderwoman elected upon a socialist platform primarily concerned with Vancouver housing problem.

The first and only strong disagreement recorded in Victoria occurred in December of 1913, and resulted in the establishment of the Women's Freedom Union, commonly known as the 'Go-Aheads'. Dorothy Davis, previous P.E.L. Organizer of the Interior, assumed the leadership of this new group. Just prior to the division however, she married and left for a three month trip to England. As a result, the group stated "for the next three months it would devote its energies to helping along suffrage work generally and the sale of The Champion until organizer Dorothy Bishop returns from the old country."³² The P.E.L. reported the disagreement with little hostility:

Division is not by any means dissension, much less rivalry; it implies rather a quickening of individual faith and a sense of individual responsibility.³³

Although the basis of disagreement is not specifically outlined, some suggestions can be gleaned from the same issue of The Champion in which this statement was inserted:

It is said in some circles that this League is Conservative in principle and supports the present government ... (this is) foolish ... It is essentially a non-party organization and imposes no political party obligations upon its members.³⁴

32. The Champion, January 1914, p. 3.

33. Ibid., December 1913, p. 5.

34. Ibid., December 1913, p. 5.

In spite of these disagreements, all groups united in carrying out the educational tasks which they saw as fundamental. Most groups contributed news items to The Champion which was an important educational tool serving all the groups.³⁵ As a result of the divisions, each group developed independent and varied tactics to raise the level of consciousness of British Columbia women. Distribution of The Champion was carried out by other women's groups, such as the W.C.T.U., as well as by large companies: The Canadian Pacific Railways News Department began to take six hundred fifty copies for the railway and one hundred for magazine shops aboard ferries travelling between the Mainland and the Island.³⁶ Other joint activities included tag days which were held to raise money and to talk to shoppers, satirical plays were performed — such as 'How The Vote Was Won' (a portrayal of a role reversal between men and women), mock Parliaments were presented, etc.

In summary, although numerous organizations existed at different times, working relations were developed between them — they shared a common ideology and employed the same

35. The Champion, the most firmly established suffrage newspaper, was recognized as the legitimate voice of women in the province. Distribution was extensive.

36. The Champion, June 1913, p. 4.

general tactics. That is, although controversies existed as to the time and location of meetings, the important point is that meetings were the medium through which educational efforts were channelled. Tactics beyond this scope, such as the militant actions and confrontation politics exercised by the British suffragettes, were never indulged in by British Columbia suffrage forces.

BRITISH-CANADIAN RELATIONS

The attitude they displayed toward the British movement was interesting. According to Cleverdon, "the coastal suffragists had to contend with a type of press campaign" which disturbed other suffrage forces very little.

This was a tendency on the part of some west coast newspapers to play up stories of British militant suffrage activities. Between 1912 and 1914, the influential Victoria Daily Times featured lurid items calculated to catch the reader's eye the moment he unfolded his paper.³⁷

This attitude she attributes to a strong attachment by British Columbians to the 'Mother Country'. Such a perspective was not shared by B.C. suffragettes however: references made to the British militancy continually located the cause of their actions as the intransigency of the British government. In fact, British Columbian women occasionally used

37. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 85.

veiled threats of militant action if the government retained its irresolute position on the vote.

Suffragettes from England were brought to Vancouver and Victoria by the franchise groups to act as drawing cards for public meetings.³⁸ Emmeline Pankhurst visited the province in 1911 and resided in "the select residential districts of Victoria" between August 1920 and January 1922.³⁹ British Columbian women were greatly disconcerted when the British suffragette, Mrs. Pethwick Lawrence, addressed a Vancouver parlour meeting "mounted on a window seat",⁴⁰ but she quelled the concern of the provinces' suffragettes by stating that circumstances in British Columbia did not warrant militant action.⁴¹

With the exception of a single incident, British militancy appears to have been confined to the homeland. The exception occurred on the closing day of the Ontario Legislative Assembly's 1910 session. Just as the Lieutenant-Governor reached the end of his address, a young woman arose in the galleries to state:

There is just one thing you have forgotten. I object to this Parliament closing without doing

38. According to Mary Norton, *B.C. Suffragette*, this tactic proved successful and the halls were filled.

39. David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, (London: Cape, 1967,) p.p. 138-45.

40. Elsie Gregory MacGill, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

41. *The Champion*, September 1912, p. 15.

justice to women. Women are just as much entitled to vote as men. I hope that at your future meetings you will do more justice to the cause of women. This is all I have to say at the present. Thank you.⁴²

Cleverdon aptly describes the response of the "thunderstruck House": "Before House officials had recovered sufficiently from their paralysis to eject the young woman by force, she had disappeared. Later it was revealed that she was Miss Olivia Smith, of London, England, and had already suffered imprisonment for disturbing the British House of Commons."⁴³

But when the Canadian prime minister visited their homeland in 1910, the English suffrage forces made certain they had the opportunity to confront him. The Champion, which showed great interest in the encounter, reported that after one unsuccessful attempt, Sir Robert Borden finally agreed to meet with Miss Barrett of the Women's Social and Political Union. Miss Barrett asked Borden just one question — would he introduce a bill which would give votes to women on his return? She explained, when posing this question, that "we are considering sending women to Canada and the type of deputation will depend upon your answer."⁴⁴ She added that

42. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 33.

43. Ibid., p. 33.

44. The Champion, September 1912, p. 10.

they had discussed "an immigration boycott as other colonies had already received the vote."⁴⁵ Borden's reply was firm — he stated that the granting of the franchise was a provincial matter but the Federal government was researching the "general franchise law." He imparted also that he "didn't know, personally, of any injustices" but he would be "happy to look at them" and would be "glad to meet with delegations in Canada". He emphatically discounted the seriousness of the threatened emigration boycott and the meeting abruptly ended when Miss Barrett walked out, stating that she was not satisfied.⁴⁶

This type of meeting with governmental officials was typical of many held in the hall of the Victoria Legislative Assembly.⁴⁷ In fact, from 1910 until the granting of the vote in 1917, the major thrust of the united suffrage forces was directed towards the Government. This involved the same process initiated by the W.C.T.U. in the preceding decades: petitions to the Government, and, if it was obvious that there would be no positive response during that year's session, visits with M.L.A.'s in the hope that one would present a

45. Women's Suffrage was achieved in 1893 in New Zealand and in 1894 in Australia.

46. The Champion, September 1912, p. 10.

47. However, the B.C. Suffragettes did not use the militancy often displayed by the British counterparts. In fact in March 1914, when smoke from a Vancouver mailbox, newspapers jumped to the conclusion that women's rights advocates must have been involved. The Champion vigorously denied this charge, stating that reports of militant activity served only to hurt the cause.

Private Member's Bill to enfranchise women.

Throughout this entire period of activity, the Government remained in the hands of the Conservative Party. Party lines had first been drawn in the House at the turn of the century, following the establishment of the Liberal and Conservative Party Associations in British Columbia.

In 1903, Richard McBride headed the earliest government which was based on Dominion party lines.⁴⁸ A Dalhousie law student, McBride began his political career when he contested a seat in the 1898 election. He ran as "a Turner man."⁴⁹ The Turner Government, infamous for the corruption charges levied against it and for the freedom with which it disposed of land grants, finally toppled in 1898. After a series of attempts by the Lieutenant Governor to appoint a new government, James Dunsmuir became Premier.⁵⁰ McBride was made a member of Dunsmuir's Cabinet and succeeded him at the time of the latter's resignation. This fourteen year term was riddled with social unrest: racial tensions had developed into anti-Oriental riots,

48. Eleanor Brown Mercer, Political Groups in British Columbia, 1883-98, (Vancouver: U.B.C., unpublished M.A. thesis, 1937) p. 185.

49. Margaret A. Ormsby, op. cit., p. 330.

50. Dunsmuir was a member of the first group of Scottish Miners to work in the coal mines of the Hudson Bay Company. When his fellow workers struck for better conditions, Dunsmuir refused and was extravagantly rewarded with his own mine. (Dunsmuir Mines).

federal-provincial relations were strained⁵¹ and opposition to McBride's railway policy was growing. With the aid of his Attorney General, McBride was able to hold the government together. By 1914, A.G. Bowser had, in fact, assumed responsibility for almost all of the political planning and McBride's role had diminished into that of a governmental figurehead.⁵² Bowser carried out his duties aggressively. For instance, when McBride was in England, Bowser undertook to crush a strike in the Dunsmuir Mines by calling out the militia. Such was the political context in which suffrage advocates had to carry on their struggle.

51. This tension arose from the provinces wish to pass anti-Oriental legislation. Because the Federal government desired trade with China, the Lieutenant Governor disallowed each provincial attempt.

52. Ormsby, op. cit., pp. 383-391.

CHAPTER SIXTHE HEIGHT OF SUFFRAGE ACTIVITY, 1912-14

The newly activated women first discovered the intransigency of the McBride administration in 1911. "A large deputation" of W.C.T.U. and P.E.L. women waited on the Premier to ask for franchise rights similar to those enjoyed by men.¹ However, in light of the ensuing election, the Government was doubly opposed to making any concession to the women. The 1912 election was one of the most outstanding political victories ever achieved by a party in British Columbia: two Socialist candidates who won seats were the only non-Conservatives returned.

The women, realizing the negative implications of this victory for women's suffrage, immediately began to involve their expanding membership in the preparation of a petition. During the next sitting of the House, on February 14, 1913, the largest suffrage delegation ever to lobby the government appeared at the Legislative Assembly. It was announced in the Vancouver Province:

This afternoon at five o'clock over sixty suffragettes from all parts of the province will for-gather in the rotunda of the Legislative Buildings under the great dome where they will present a petition to the Premier signed by 10,000 persons.²

1. W.C.T.U. Annual Convention Report, 1912, p. 56.

2. Vancouver Daily Province, February 14, 1913, p. 1.

Between fifty and sixty women from places as distant as Vancouver, Nanaimo, Fernie, Creston, Cranbrook, Rossland, Penticton and Kelowna were present when McBride arrived. The speeches delivered by three of the women reflected the diverse outlooks of each of the groups involved. Mrs. Maria Grant, in her capacity as head of the B.C. P.E.L., spoke first: "Women all over the Pacific Coast save in British Columbia now had the right to vote," she said, "and the women of this country protested against the injustice of the position." The next speaker was Dorothy Davis from the 'Go-Getters' offshoot of the Victoria P.E.L. : "Men could not understand the opposite sex," she said, "and it would be a crowning achievement and a most chivalrous action on the part of this government were it to extend the franchise to women out of a generous impulse and without the pressure of struggle."³ The W.C.T.U. influence was most noticeable in the last speech, given by a Mrs. P. Tuckwell, who talked about how the vote "would relieve many downtrodden mothers from destitution and from the sorrows and hardships consequent upon the incompetence of men being able to support them. If the vote were given women, they would speedily remove from their husbands and sons the temptations to which they were subject and which are now legalized by law. They would vote out of existence everything which now goes to make havoc out of the home."⁴

3. Ibid., February 15, 1913, p. 16.

4. Ibid., February 15, 1913, p. 16.

Sir Richard McBride did not respond directly to the petition, but made a few general comments at the time, which stand out in sharp contrast to the government's official reply, delivered several days later.

Let me say at once that the government very greatly appreciated the presence here this afternoon of so large, so representative, and so influential a delegation ... Many of you have evidently performed long journeys in order to be with your colleagues at this meeting, and take part in the presentation of the case to which we have been so privileged to listen ... The present administration has never made the question a matter of policy ... It seems to me that because of the very splendid effort which you and your associates have put forth (that) I may discuss this question with the Members of the Cabinet early next week and acquaint you as soon as possible with the results. 5

McBride concluded by assuring the women that if the government could not introduce a bill that session, the option of a private member's bill remained open. He pointed out that Mr. J.W. Place, Nanaimo Socialist M.L.A. had such a bill on record. (Place subsequently stated that he would be willing to withdraw his bill if the government agreed to put in its own measures).

The Premier suggested that the women might consider meeting with the M.L.A.'s while waiting for the government's official response. Consequently, the Alexandra branch of the

Vancouver P.E.L. called a public meeting with open invitations extended to each M.L.A. A large crowd appeared but the M.L.A.'s were conspicuously absent – in fact, all but nine had not even bothered to reply.⁶ This meeting was an omen of future events – the government persisted in its former policy of rejecting womens' enfranchisement.

We find ourselves still of the view which we have consistently adhered to for now upwards of ten years, and that is that as a matter of government policy, we are unable to agree that it would be in the public interest to bring down proposals of the character asked for, for the endorsement of this Parliament ...⁷

The discrepancy between McBride's first reponse and the Government's official reply may be explained in several ways. On the one hand, McBride may have adopted a conscious policy to be amenable, respectful etc., towards the women so that when the official negative reply appeared, they would have a more difficult time to rally support in response. A more likely explanation, and one which is borne out when examining other encounters between McBride and the suffragettes, is that although McBride himself might have been more willing than the rest of the Government to make concessions, he was continually being checked by other members of the Cabinet. Therefore, during initial encounters McBride reacted how he felt he should, but after the Cabinet discussed and criticized

6. The Champion, March 1913, p. 6. The 9 who did reply declined the invitation.

7. Ibid., March 1913, p. 4.

his actions, he was then obliged to carry the position of the majority or at least the most influential sector of the Cabinet.

When Place's bill was finally presented to the House on February 27, 1913, the anti-suffrage policy of the government was made quite clear – the bill was defeated a week later by a vote of 24 to 9 on the first reading.⁸

By the next session, the advocates of womens' rights had grown in number and their influence was at a peak – the arguments of the McBride government shifted correspondingly. Now, rather than arguing that suffrage was 'untimely' and said that he was not "certain that the women of British Columbia really wanted it". In the middle of December, twelve women representatives travelled to Victoria for their 'annual meeting' with McBride and Bowser.⁹ The Champion's report gives the following account of the Premier's position:

The upshot of the affair was ... a clear pronouncement by the Premier as to his unflinching opposition ... He told the women he could only repeat what he had said fifteen years ago: that if a referendum was organized by the women in the province and two thirds asked for the vote, then and only then – the government would be prepared to consider the advisability of intro-

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8. See B.C. Journals, 1914, p. 115, for an account of how each M.L.A. voted.
9. B.C. Federationist, December 12, 1913, p. 1. This paper reported that Mrs. McConkey represented the P.P.E.L.; Mrs. Drummond, the Equal Franchise Association; and Helena Gutteridge the B.C. Women's Suffrage League.

ducing a government measure, otherwise women would have to depend on a private member's bill.¹⁰

When asked why he was so opposed to women's franchise, McBride replied that "while he believed the vote would not affect politics generally or legislation in particular, ... he felt that it would lead women to neglect their homes and would prove disastrous to the welfare of the nation."¹¹

This reply necessitates some analysis. First, there is no evidence of McBride's claim to a fifteen year old public stand on a woman's referendum. His motivation for this statement can be attributed to the changing political atmosphere — one which any vote-getter had to take into consideration, particularly one whose party was meeting increasing opposition. The Liberal Party had already accepted suffrage as part of its programme in British Columbia.¹² In the previous summer, members from the British Columbia Womens' Political Union had presented their ideas at the Liberal convention in Revelstoke.¹³ In 1914, Ontario and Manitoba

10. The Champion, January 1914, p. 4.

11. Ibid., p. 4.

12. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 146.

13. The Champion, July 1913, p. 7.

Liberals in the Opposition introduced franchise bills and had even gone so far as to promise womens' franchise if they won the next election.¹⁴

The other striking point about the Government's reply is the concern it showed that suffrage forces, in which the W.C.T.U. played a significant role, would neglect their families! It is quite clear that this was only a rationalization, and the conservative ideology which McBride demonstrated was thoroughly opportunistic. If he had felt in 1914 that 'votes for women' were synonymous with 'votes for McBride', it is highly likely that his 'ideological' opposition would have disappeared.

During the 1914 session it became clear that McBride's party was experiencing internal difficulties. A further setback to government policy came in the Victoria civic elections of that year. The suffrage movement had responded to McBride's proposal and a referendum on the enfranchisement of women was held. The women were pleased with the results: in one of the most conservative cities in the province, the majority of the four hundred voters had voted in favour of suffrage.¹⁵ Armed

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14. The first political party to place women's franchise on its platform was the short-lived Provincial Progressive Party, founded following the Kamloops Convention in 1903.
15. The Champion, February 1914, p. 4. The Colonist reported that the referendum had lost. Even after the women brought this error to their attention, The Colonist refused to retract their statement.

with this information, the women approached some Conservative M.L.A.'s about presenting a private member's bill, and met with a favourable response. However, Place had already given the House notice of his intention to reintroduce his bill. Consequently, the women were put in the position of having to request Place to withdraw his bill. He refused to do so unless the government agreed to put the measure before the House.¹⁶ His refusal is difficult to understand. Presumably it would have been better politically to cause an open split within the government ranks on the question. At any rate, the women spent the rest of the session organizing unsuccessfully around Place's bill.

At the time of the bill's second reading, the convention of the Local Council of Women passed a resolution addressed to the Government and the M.L.A.'s:

Be it resolved that this Council of Women, in session assembled, representing six thousand women of this city ... (ask them) to vote in favour of the bill ...¹⁷

The M.L.A. from Alberni, Mr. Corey, also attempted to influence the vote: the women presented him with a petition of seven thousand names which he laid at the foot of the Speaker. In spite of these attempts, Place's current bill shared a fate similar to most private bills and was defeated

16. Ibid., p. 4.

17. Ibid., March 1914, p. 5.

on a party vote.

In the summer of 1914, with the outbreak of the war, suffrage forces were quickly channelled into service on behalf of the war effort. Membership doubled in groups such as the Women's Club of Victoria, which aimed "to foster patriotism by encouraging the study of institutions, history, (etc) ... and by endeavouring to unite Canada for the welfare and progress of the Dominion."¹⁸ The Champion ended publication in the same year.

LABOUR'S ATTITUDE TO WOMEN

In fact, the only source which addressed itself to the suffrage issue in 1914 and 1915 was the B.C. Federationist and its approach, while endorsing suffrage, was often critical of the suffrage movement.¹⁹

As previously noted, working women played a comparatively minor role in the movement. During the later resurgence in activity (1910-14), the Trades and Labour Council, (T.L.C.) programme in Vancouver included a policy favoring full male and female suffrage and the T.L.C. organ began to publish articles on the subject. Often, however, their support for suffrage was marred by an ideology imbued

18. Women's Canadian Club of Victoria B.C. Annual Reports (Constitution and By-Law) (Victoria: n. pub., 1918) n.p.

19. Most criticisms were generally well-founded and demonstrated an understanding of the class-based limitations of the suffrage movement.

with male supremacy. For example, in 1909, the Western Wage Earner (then official organ of the T.L.C.):

Women should vote because their vote would supplement man's and while he looked after the big things, they would look after the little things.²⁰

The "little things," of course, referred to extensions of the domestic duties surrounding family life.

On the other hand, however, the labour organ criticized the W.C.T.U. for taking essentially the same position. For example, in 1911, the B.C. Federationist disparagingly referred to them as being only concerned with "home protection."²¹

The B.C. Federationist was particularly critical of schemes which the W.C.T.U. and other groups devised to aid working women.²² When the groups planned to build a home for working women with low wages, the B.C. Federationist stated:

If they gave as much thought to the wage proposition as to the trimmings of a hat or to their poodle's health (they) would see that their action maintains low rate of wages and recruitment for red-light districts ... One (working woman) in such a home can quote a lower

20. Western Wage Earner, February 1909, p. 19.

21. B.C. Federationist, November 4, 1911, p. 2.

22. The B.C. Federationist's response to the P.E.L. was interesting - they announced its membership drive by stating "The Political Equality Leagues throughout B.C. are waging a campaign of education among gentlewomen." (See B.C. Federationist, March 21, 1913, p. 2.)

price for her labour as she can pay cheap rent ... this means the price for labour will be set too low for the majority of women.²³

Therefore although the Trades and Labour Council correctly grasped the class weakness of the suffrage forces, they undermined any possibility of understanding the plight of women by continuing to hold essentially conservative ideas concerning the role of women.

The only time, during this period, when the T.L.C. was willing to work with the various women's organizations²⁴ occurred in June 1912, when T.L.C. delegate McVety introduced a resolution requesting the City Council to appoint a committee to inquire into the conditions of employment, and the wages paid, to women engaged in department stores, shops, factories and other individual activities in the City of Vancouver.²⁵ The response of the Mayor, in spite of support resolutions from each women's group contacted by the T.L.C. was to state that "the city has no power to go into an investigation of this kind" and that "the communication of the 6th is filed."²⁶

23. Ibid., June 15, 1912, p. 1.

24. These were not specifically suffrage organizations although many suffragettes were in their ranks. For instance, the W.C.T.U., Women's Club and University Women's Club were all contacted.

25. B.C. Federationist, June 22, 1912, p. 4.

26. Ibid., September 28, 1912, p. 3.

In 1913, when the pre-war depression struck Vancouver, the B.C. Federationist was particularly concerned with women, the first group of workers to experience its effects:

"Department stores and bankrupt real estate sharks have discharged stenographers at a rate that has left hundreds in this class of female labour unemployed."²⁷ However, at this time, organized labour saw the development of trade unions, rather than the vote as a solution to the difficulties of working women.

This stance was altered somewhat later in the year after Helena Gutteridge was seated as a tailoress delegate to the T.L.C.²⁸ As the organizer of the B.C. Women's Suffrage League, she no doubt insisted that suffrage and labour should be more closely united. J. Pettipiece, editor of the T.L.C. Paper, agreed to publish a weekly column edited by Gutteridge, entitled 'Women's Suffrage'. The column first appeared in October of 1913. The following quote exemplifies the manner in which working women were approached:

The political organization of women and the organization of women into trade unions, although two separate and independent movements, are nevertheless supplementary and necessary to each other if the economic freedom of women is to be obtained ... Women (have been) organized into collective units in trade unions. Now (this) must be used politically to back up demands for minimum wages, equal pay for

27. Ibid., September 13, 1913, p. 1.

28. Ibid., September 19, 1913, p. 1.

equal work, standardization of wages, better conditions and hours of employment.²⁹

Consequently, while having the potential to reach broader layers of women on the question of suffrage, organized labour began to present the issue to women workers in essentially the same manner as the Political Equality League. They saw the vote as a means for women to legislate better conditions at work. In contrast, the P.E.L. wanted the vote to encourage legislative reforms which concerned them as middle-class women (for instance, reforms in property acts, etc.) The P.E.L. later agitated for reforms around work conditions such as the minimum wage law. However, their concern did not result from an identification with the working women, but rather a paternalistic concern for her. This distinction is significant because it laid the pattern for the relationship which developed between the two groups. The strategical implications are obvious - middle-class women simply did not understand the oppression of the workers, but because they had the necessary resources, (time, money, and educational skills), they were able to win certain significant reforms. However, these reforms, despite their immediate importance, did not have the significance they could have had, were they the direct products of working class action and not legislated 'from

29. B.C. Federationist, October 17, 1913, p. 5.

above'. In addition, once working women became involved in suffrage, particularly if they joined the P.E.L., militancy at their place of employment was discouraged. To the P.E.L. women, strikes without votes were 'useless'. In other words, the B.C.P.E.L. leadership, whose middle-class outlook placed them naturally in opposition to strikes and labour militancy, now used the importance of the franchise as a means to legitimate their anti-labour prejudices.³⁰

The wives of the imprisoned Nanaimo miners are a prime example of the links that were drawn between labour and suffrage forces.³¹ The November 21st issue of the B.C. Federationist, in an article entitled "Miners Wives Keen Suffragists", reported that the women had organized a meeting where the five hundred individuals in the audience passed a pro-suffrage resolution:

The women, as a result of the action taken by the government during the recent strike and the excessive sentences passed on miners now in prison, realize how valuable will be the possession of the franchise.³²

and further:

... they are going to help in changing the present conditions, they have to obey the indifferent laws

30. It is only fair to state that Gutteridge, who theoretically had more access to women workers, never posed strikes and suffrage as mutually exclusive.

31. See Chapter Two.

32. B.C. Federationist, November 21, 1913, p. 5.

of the province and they are going to help make them. The march of progress is ever onward and the women, too, are going to fight for emancipation at the ballot box.³³

The Socialist Party was even more critical of the suffrage forces than the B.C. Federationist. An open letter to the P.E.L. women published in 1911 laid the ground for future criticisms:

After going to your meeting, I concluded that I, being a member of the Socialist Party, could not possibly join, nor could anyone else who was consistent ... You talk of insurance for widows, yet you uphold the system that makes widows. You are like a physician who tries to cure by going after the effect, lulling pain by the use of some powerful drug, instead of removing it by getting after the root cause and changing the patient's diet or environment. You will still be subjects, therefore slaves, when you do get the vote. To a socialist, there is no inequality between the sexes, there is inequality in prevailing economic conditions.³⁴

This critical attitude, demonstrated by the Socialist Party was never presented as opposition to suffrage per se; instead, it was a critique of the political approach of the B.C. suffragettes. Women's franchise was seen as a means of temporarily alleviating certain aspects of women's oppression: total freedom would only occur with the advent of a socialist society.

33. Ibid., November 7, 1913, p. 5.

34. Western Clarion, December 2, 1911, p. 1. In light of this position, it is interesting to speculate whether a consistent injection of Socialist ideals would have altered the way in which suffrage was posed.

FINAL STAGES OF THE PROVINCIAL FRANCHISE STRUGGLE

J.W. Place (Socialist MLA from Nanaimo) introduced his third franchise bill after a year of relative calm on the suffrage front. Since the presentation of his last bill, a whole new range of economic and social forces had developed. For example, the pre-war depression had been superseded by a war-time economy. The social implications for women were profound. Thousands of women moved into employment positions vacated by men who had volunteered for the armed services. This shift had two principal effects: first, contrary to traditional analysis, the greatest impact was felt by certain sectors of middle-class women. Regardless of the motivations involved, these women moved into the labour force for the first time and furthermore, they could justify venturing outside their homes on the basis of patriotism. In contrast, women workers had always been an important part of the economy simply because they were forced to accept low wages. However, and here the second effect of the shift towards female labour was felt – they left their traditional areas of employment and moved into sectors that had previously been the exclusive preserves of male labour. This drastic changeover demonstrated that the reason why women had previously been concentrated in low paying positions was not because they lacked the skills required for men's jobs. It became clear to many that the definition of a 'woman's' job had been based on arbitrary

assumptions and that employers had used these assumptions to justify the low wages accompanying these positions.³⁵

In addition to changing patterns of employment (a national phenomena) women now experienced a new legal status in several of the provinces: as a result of intense suffrage activity, the franchise had been granted to women in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Clearly a new trend was developing with which the Conservatives would ultimately have to contend. The administration, slowly crumbling under corruption charges concerning the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (P.G.E.), was facing a major challenge from the Liberal Party which was beginning to recruit large numbers of women as a result of its positive stand on suffrage.³⁶ In addition prohibition forces, led by 'The Committee of One Hundred' had grown in strength and numbers.³⁷ McBride finally departed for England after dissolution of the House on March 6, 1915, and A.G. Bowser headed the new government.³⁸

35. The media was used extensively during the war years to perpetuate a new image of women and was in a quandry following the soldier's return after the war. Women workers were the first to be affected by the unemployment situation in post-war years. The next media project directed towards women, therefore, exalted the glories of motherhood and the family.

36. The Champion, March 1914, p. 6.

37. B. Smith, Sir Richard McBride - A Study in the Conservative Party of British Columbia, 1903-1916, unpublished M.A. thesis, (Kingston: Queen's University 1959), p. 321.

38. Ormsby, op. cit., p. 391. Soon after his arrival in England, McBride died of Bright's Disease.

By the time of the presentation of Place's bill, the internal tensions within the Conservative Party had reached their height. During the bill's second reading Bowser asked Place to withdraw it as the Government had devised a method of dealing with both suffrage and prohibition. When Place refused, 'five days of debate and bitter recrimination' followed.³⁹ Price Ellison and H.F. Foster, Conservative M.P.'s, joined with the Liberals and Socialists to challenge Bowser's "change of heart".⁴⁰ Bowser's plan produced even more disagreement. He proposed to institute a referendum at the time of the 1916 provincial election which would submit to the electors the following questions:

(a) Are you in favour of bringing the British Columbia Prohibition Act into force?

and

(b) Are you in favour of the extension of the electoral franchise to women?⁴¹

If the latter passed, women would be eligible to vote as of January 1st, 1917. Why could the Government not pass such a bill during that session, thereby allowing women to vote in the election,⁴² asked the opposition. But Bowser had obviously

39. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 96.

40. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., MacGill mistakenly states that these two MP's introduced the bill.

41. B.C. Statutes, 1916, Chapter 50, Section 3.

42. Ibid., 1916, Chapter 50, Section 3.

devised the plan with the utmost caution. Political expediency was its motive: he did not wish suffrage to become an issue in the election. A referendum would both deal with the question and take it out of the realm of partisan politics, thus making it possible for the Conservative Party to avoid taking a clear stand on this controversial problem. Place's bill was defeated on the second reading, by a vote of 24-6, and the "Prohibition and Women's Suffrage Referendum" bill received Royal Assent on May 31, 1916. "An Act to Extend the Electoral Franchise to Women" was passed, to become operative in the event of a positive result from the referendum. It stipulated that "it shall be lawful for females to have their names placed upon the register of voters for an electoral district and to vote at any election of members to serve in the Legislative Assembly, upon the same terms ... as males; and thereafter females shall be capable of being elected as members of the Legislative Assembly."⁴³

The women responded to this referendum with vehement opposition similar to that displayed during the House debate. Criticisms arose from many sources. First, they argued it was unfair to have a male electorate determine the destiny of women's franchise. They also objected to the technique employed - "If a group could be enfranchised by the plebiscite, they argued, it or any other group could be disenfranchised by the

43. Ibid., 1916. Chapter 76, Section 2, Subsection 1.

same irresponsible technique."⁴⁴ A widespread argument, presented by the B.C.P.E.L. in particular, was that the referendum imposed on the suffrage groups the necessity of a political campaign that would distract women from the war effort.

The B.C. Equal Franchise Association was the first group to declare its opposition. At their 1916 annual general meeting, held during the House debate, a resolution was passed stating:

That in the event of the government insisting in submitting women's suffrage to a referendum we will not work for the passage of the same.⁴⁵

The B.C.P.E.L.'s response was also immediate. An emergency convention (in Vancouver) was called on May 15th and 16th. The first session was open to the public. Mr. F.W. Welsh, a Conservative candidate for Vancouver, was scheduled to be the first speaker in favour of the government's offer. However, because "he had been detained in Victoria, and no other champion of the Conservatives appeared to take his place", Mr. J.S. Cowper, Liberal candidate, was the only speaker. He assured the women "if his party ever deserted the suffrage cause, he would cease to be connected, and (would) continue

44. MacGill, op. cit., p. 149

45. Vancouver Daily Province, May 15, 1916, p. 18.

to work for women's suffrage as he had done for the past fifteen years."⁴⁶ The essence of his argument reported in the Vancouver Daily Province, is important because it demonstrates the role which the Liberal Party assumed vis-a-vis the suffragettes:

He would not say that the Conservatives would not introduce women's suffrage if the referendum carried, but for his part he would far rather trust the matter in the hands of the Liberals who, he declared, had stood by the principle when it was by no means as politically popular as it was today. There was danger ahead, he said, even if the referendum did carry, it still left the matter of applying its mandate in the hands of the Conservatives if they were returned to office. On the other hand, he felt that he need not dilate on the promise of the Liberals if they were elected.⁴⁷

During this new mobilization, the Liberals were able to gain a great deal of political capital due to their early commitment on the question. In reality, their suffrage work until 1916 had been minimal: resolutions at conventions appear to have been the extent of their activity. With the Conservative Party undergoing serious crises, the perspective of their forming the government in the near future became a real one. But the realization of this possibility would depend on the development of new electoral strategies. Women, well educated, politically aware and at least minimally

46. Ibid., May 16, 1916, p. 5.

47. Ibid., May 16, 1916, p. 5.

organized could form a solid source of potential Liberal voters. In turn, many of the suffragettes, seeing the vote as the key to a new social status, and continually rebuffed by the Conservatives, viewed the Liberals as their saviors.⁴⁸ There was one notable exception; at the next day's session of the B.C.P.E.L.'s convention, Helena Gutteridge challenged the role of the Liberal Party and declared that both parties were using the issue as a political football. "It was her belief that if the referendum were lost, neither party would give women the vote at the next session of the Legislature."⁴⁹ Her solution, however, was to work for the passage of the referendum by appealing to the voters to "lay aside all party feeling."

Women at the conference, feeling strongly that the issue should never reach the referendum stage, unanimously passed a resolution (later telegraphed to Bowser) urging the government to pass a bill giving women a vote during the 1916 session rather than submitting it to a referendum. The argumentation in the preamble to this resolution was based entirely upon the importance of women's contributions to the war effort:

48. Ibid., May 16, 1916, p. 5.

49. Ibid., May 16, 1916, p. 5.

We believe this is an inopportune time to submit a referendum, it being neither loyal nor patriotic to divert the efforts of the women from the important work in which they are engaged.⁵⁰

The afternoon session of the conference, to which all women's suffrage societies were invited, began to plan an enormous educational campaign. In anticipation of the approaching referendum vote just two weeks hence, an ad-hoc body, the Women's Suffrage Referendum League, was established. Cleverdon describes their feverish activity:

Under the chairmanship of R.T. Elliot, K.C., the League appointed workers for every city ward, held campaign meetings and invited all sympathetic organizers, whether men's or women's, to send delegates to the central committee.⁵¹

Women not affiliated to organizations also took part in the campaign. Mary Norton, in Campbell River at this time, walked miles each day to talk to distant neighbours on the subject.⁵² The women's efforts were rewarded: the referendum passed, and not surprisingly, the Liberal Party was elected.

50. Ibid., May 16, 1916, p. 5.

51. Cleverdon, op. cit., p. 5.

52. Personal communication.

The following table gives the details of the voting:

REFERENDUM RESULTS SUFFRAGE⁵³

Civilians	For	43,619	Soldiers	For	8273
	Against	18,604		Against	6002

The Liberals won thirty seven seats and the Conservatives were reduced to only nine members. The Socialists were left with only one seat.⁵⁴

At the opening of the 1917 session of Parliament, the Throne Speech outlined the new Government's suffrage proposals. Because all of the soldiers' votes had not yet been returned, the women remained disenfranchised.⁵⁵ Consequently, the Premier, H.C. Brewster, decided to repeal both of the bills brought in by the previous government and to institute women's suffrage immediately. In addition, he sought to remove the barrier stipulating that women could only vote in the first election and would not be eligible for office until the following election. This involved presenting

53. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 342. Prohibition also passed, but not by such a large majority.

54. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 152.

55. The previous government's bill was to come into effect only upon the basis of the referendum results.

another bill: "An Act to Amend the Provincial Elections Act".
It began with new definitions:

Whenever in this Act words are used which import the masculine gender, such words shall include females as well as males.

and

In this Act the word 'person' shall include females as well as males ...⁵⁶

On April 5, 1917, the bill received Royal Assent from Lieutenant Governor Barnard. Members of the Women's Liberal Associations from Vancouver, South Vancouver and Victoria attended the session and were seated on the floor of the House. "A large bouquet of pink and white roses sent by the ladies adorned the desk of the Premier".⁵⁷ After the Parliamentary formalities, the leaders of the suffrage forces were invited to a victory dinner that evening.⁵⁸

Vancouver women became the first Canadian women to vote in a provincial election when a Vancouver by-election was called in first. The federal (Khaki) election, held later that year, was more restrictive in its franchise. Although Borden had introduced a federal suffrage bill, it

56. B.C. Statutes, 1917, Chapter 23, Section 2.

57. Daily Colonist, April 6, 1917, p. 7.

58. Helen Gregory MacGill, Story of Women's Suffrage in British Columbia, N.D. N.P. (Held in Vancouver City Archives.)

extended only to service women (nurses) and the mothers and wives of service men in the hope that these women would support his Conscription policy. Consequently women were not permitted to vote federally until 1921. The intense opposition this delay aroused in women was demonstrated in a speech given in Toronto by Mary Ellen Smith, who later became the first woman M.L.A. in British Columbia. The Toronto News recorded her comments as follows: "She bitterly denounced the Franchise Act, and said she would go to the polls with a sore heart because a number of her sisters could not go with her."⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

It is clear that more women than ever before became involved in, or at least influenced by, this final wave of activity. One of the most pertinent questions remaining unanswered is why, then, did the political organizations of women dissipate so readily after the gaining of suffrage in 1917. Any explanations for this fact must relate to the strategy of the pre-1917 struggle. The most obvious answer is that the suffrage organizations had posed the question of

59. As reported in the Vancouver Sun, November 22, 1969, p. 14. See also S. Jameson Sheilagh, "Give Your Other Vote to the Sister", Alberta Historical Review, Autumn 1967.

the franchise as an end in itself, rather than a tool with which to shape the future of the social order. Because the leadership saw the granting of suffrage as the ultimate victory, the membership was left with a lack of direction and saw no other worthwhile purpose to which future activity might be directed.

The W.C.T.U. found themselves in a similar situation: the vote had been seen as a way to achieve prohibition in the province — but both suffrage and prohibition had been granted with the implementation of the referendum results. Although the W.C.T.U. leadership argued at their 1918 convention that much remained to be done, their words seemed to ring hollow.

Another explanation for the decline in organized political activity is that the post-1917 work that did go on, specifically the promotion of legislative reforms (to be investigated in the next chapter) was of such a nature that it did not require any kind of mass movement: the campaign for reform was channelled through one woman M.L.A. and only required broader participation of those women with the time and ability to carry out detailed legal research.

Quite clearly the dissipation of the suffrage forces after the attainment of the vote is closely related to the middle-class nature of the leadership: the movement did not go beyond the legislative reforms simply because

the leadership, given its ideology, could see no alternative. This restricted outlook was further re-inforced by the cooptation of the movement's leadership into the machinery of government and Party (in particular the Liberal Party). Thus, a small minority of women came to reap the benefits of political influence won by the struggles of the mass movement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PERIOD OF LEGISLATIVE REFORM 1917-25

The organizations which were behind the new drive for legislative reform were the University Women's Club, the Local Council of Women, and the New Era League. The latter group was the successor of the Pioneer Political Equality League. The League had simply redefined its aims in light of the attainment of the vote and formed the new organization to:

- (1) interest women in civic, provincial, national, international affairs
- (2) carry out benevolent, patriotic and educational work
- (3) obtain world-wide equal suffrage, equal justice for all men and women, protection for children, equal pay for equal work, equal moral standards, and world wide peace.¹

In more general terms, members sought to achieve 'justice and charity', through the influence of the vote.

The inclusion of the working class issue of equal pay for equal work demonstrated a new concern for women workers – one which was evident among many early British and American women's groups much earlier. In British Columbia, sporadic organizing had occurred around issues of concern to the working class in previous years. In 1909, for example,

1. Western Women's Weekly, Vol. I, no. 2., December 20, 1917, p. 4.

a group of Vancouver women (including MacGill and Smith) established a free day-care nursery for the children of workers.² After 1917, however, this organizing was carried on much more consistently. The root of this concern was not so much an identification with these women workers as women who faced similar problems, but was the paternalism so often displayed by privileged members of the society. Due to this attitude, working class women were almost totally absent from the membership of these organizations and few efforts were made to get them in. It is hardly surprising on several counts that the government itself accepted the need for such reforms. The Liberals had been elected as a result of a mass campaign waged on their behalf by the women's organizations. Hence, they displayed a certain benevolence and gratitude towards women's groups after the election.

In addition, the implementation of these measures can also be explained by the fact that they did not challenge the fundamental structure of the social order, but rather functioned to reinforce its most serious weak spots. On a wider scale, the government's attitude reflects the social conditions of the era. A period of labour radicalism was

2. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 130. Helen MacGill later became the first woman judge in Vancouver and Mary Ellen Smith, the first woman M.L.A. By 1912, the Creche was accomodating 750 children a month.

developing and strikes were frequent: a particularly intense strike was waged in the Fernie coal mines; a 24-hour general strike occurred in 1918 after Ginger Goodwin, a draft-dodger, was shot by police officers on Vancouver Island. Moreover, unemployment at the end of the war was high. Consequently, social measures were enacted in many areas other than those specifically concerning women.³

The social legislation advocated by women's organisations can be roughly divided into two categories:

- (1) Reforms to consolidate the position of middle-class women.
- (2) Reforms to alleviate the plight of women workers.

Millett characterizes this type of reform as follows:

In many places there was a real sympathy for the sufferings of women in industry, but a great deal of the motivation behind reform was little more than protection of patriarchal culture and institutions: family structure was becoming disrupted (including the authority of the father as provider and head of the household); women in industry had access to sexual freedom; they worked too hard in one circumstance (the factory) to serve properly in another (the home).⁴

The content of the social legislation enacted in this period validates such an analysis: the reforms enacted applied to secondary phenomena such as minimum wage schedules, and never

3. For example, a department of Labour was established.

4. Millett, op. cit., p. 87.

really tackled the more basic inequalities inherent in the wage system. This is not to suggest that these measures of social reform were valueless, but merely to point out that such legislation alone could not alter the basic position of women.

The 1917 Throne Speech announced the first governmental reform measure, the Equal Guardianship Act. As previously mentioned, inequities in guardianship rights had been well researched and publicized by the University Women's Club. This new legislation formulated by Attorney General MacDonald (on the basis of MacGill's research) "recognized the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration". Both parents now shared legal responsibility for their children, and, in the event of marital separations, the courts would deal with parental claims "for the benefit of the child."⁵

The appointment of MacGill as the first woman judge in Vancouver (in the Juvenile Court) was regarded as the next major break through. Upon learning that there were women judges in Calgary and Edmonton, the British Columbian women's organizations had petitioned the government, and when invited to recommend a woman for appointment, "the University Women's Club, the new Era League and the Vancouver Local Council named

5. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 156.

Helen (MacGill)".⁶ Her rapid appointment is no doubt partially attributed to the fact that a past president of the University Women's Club, Dr. Evelyn Farris, was married to the Attorney-General. At the insistence of women extensive changes in the system of Juvenile Courts followed. In April 23, 1918, an Act Respecting Juvenile Courts⁷ received Royal assent, thereby providing for the establishment of such courts on a much broader basis. The authority within these courts remained the exclusive prerogative of the appointed judge, who had the power to appoint acting judges and probation officers. This is perhaps the most illustrative example of the reformism of the women's organizations. By petitioning the government to make changes in the structure of the judiciary, women avoided the more basic questions about the nature of the society which made such structures necessary. What type of society was it, for example, that entrusted the future of a child to a person who made his or her judgement on the basis of a half-hour interview? This line of questioning would have reduced the right of women to become members of such a tribunal to a secondary consideration. It is only fair to state that, in spite of the reluctance and inability of the women to offer more far-reaching

6. Ibid., p. 156.

7. Statutes of B.C., 1918, Chapter 20.

challenges, MacGill did play a generally positive role within this framework. According to her daughter, women of all classes flocked to MacGill's home to ask legal advice and she emerged something of a tribune of women's rights.

Mary Ellen Smith, first woman M.L.A., also became somewhat of a symbol to many women. They looked upon her victory as tangible proof that their political efforts had been rewarded. Smith contested the 1918 by-election as an Independent to fill the seat left vacant following the death of her husband, Ralph (the former Liberal Finance Minister). Her platform supported by various women's groups, was an indication of the sentiment of the times. It included proposals for minimum wages in industry, equal pay for equal work, pensions for indigent mothers with dependent children, and training and rehabilitation for juvenile delinquents.⁸ Uncontested by the Liberals, Smith emerged victorious. Her maiden speech delivered on March 1st, opened with the statement that she had "faith in the intelligence, honor and integrity of every member in the House". Such lavish (non-partisan) praise was hardly a common occurrence in the Legislative Assembly, where party lines were rigidly drawn. Even after she joined the Liberal Party this non-factional attitude persisted, much to the dismay of her Party.⁹

8. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 159.

9. Ibid., p. 159. Smith's husband followed a similar course of action. Elected as a labour candidate, he deserted their ranks to become a prominent member of the Liberal party.

They viewed her election as a clear mandate for reform and while the women's organizations researched the progressive legislation of other countries, Smith played a prominent role in guiding similar measures through the House.

One of the most important Bills assented to in her first term was An Act to Fix a Minimum Wage for Women.¹⁰ Section three of the Act established a minimum wage board which consisted of three members: one was to be the Deputy Minister of Labour and the other two were to be appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor. It was further stipulated that one of these two latter positions would be filled by a woman. The powers of the Board were outlined in Section 5.

It shall be the duty of the Board to ascertain the wages paid to employees in the various occupations, trades and industries in which women are employed in this province, and to fix the minimum wage. The Board shall have full power and authority either by any member of the Board or by any duly authorized representative, to inspect, and examine any and all books, payrolls and other records of any employer that in any way appertains to or have any bearing upon the question of wages of the employee.¹¹

The mechanism to establish minimum wage levels was a system of conferences at which an equal number of representatives

10. Statutes of B.C., 1918, Chapter 56.

11. Statutes of B.C., 1918, Chapter 56, Section 5.

from employers, employees and "the public" would draw up recommendations for a fair wage, deemed "proper in the occupation or industry, and adequate to supply the necessary cost of living."¹² One of the many shortcomings on the Act, was the extensive power of the board: the recommendations of the joint conferences were not binding and the Board retained the power to make the final decision. Violations of the Act, either by failing to pay the established minimum rate or by intimidating employees, resulted in a penalty of \$25 to \$100 fine. However, in order for the employee to recover wages to which she was entitled under the Act, the matter had to go to the courts. While it is true that she would ultimately be re-imbursed court costs and solicitors' fees, few women had the money required to begin proceedings and fewer still could take the time to make the many court appearances which would be required. The scope of the Act was also limited: "This Act shall not apply to farm-labourers, fruit pickers, domestic servants or their employers."¹³ Yet it was precisely in these areas that some of the worst exploitation of women took place.

The appointment of Helen MacGill to the Minimum Wage Board indicates a further limitation of the Act - in the stipulation that one woman was to sit on the Board, there was no provision that she must have any direct experience of

12. Statutes of B.C., 1918, Chapter 56, Section 7.

13. Statutes of B.C., 1918, Chapter 56, Section 15.

the situation of working women. While it would be unfair to say that MacGill was not sympathetic to women, she never saw herself as representing them therefore she was not accountable to anyone for her actions. MacGill's endorsement of the idea of a minimum wage in the following statement gives some indication of her outlook on such matters.

The advantages of fixing a minimum wage are not alone to the employee. Such wage is the fair employer's protection against the unfair employer who otherwise is able to undersell by paying starvation wages.¹⁴

The following year, a bill was passed which was later to be widely cited by suffragists as one of their most important achievements – the Testator's Family Maintenance Act.¹⁵ By this act, power was given to the Supreme Court to make further provisions for the proper maintenance and support of the "testator's wife, husband, or children" upon determining that the amount provided in the will was insufficient. In order to begin such proceedings, the surviving members of the family (or guardians) were required to file an appropriate application with both the Court and the Land Registry Officer. The class nature of this piece of legislation needs little elaboration – it is sufficient to note that the majority of workers lacked

14. Elsie Gregory MacGill, op. cit., p. 160.

15. Statutes of B.C., 1920, Chapter 94.

property, and legal proceedings were so costly to initiate that this new procedure was hardly a realistic course of action for them.

A provincial election intervened before the next round of reforms were enacted. Smith again contested a seat (this time as a Liberal), and was opposed by two other women.¹⁶ The election returns were impressive – she polled a 7,000 vote plurality, the "greatest number of votes any person has ever received in any election in British Columbia."¹⁷

'Honest' John Oliver, the Delta farmer who became Premier following the death of Brewster, rewarded Smith's outstanding election results by offering to make a Cabinet Minister, or even Speaker of the House. Although no woman had ever filled the latter position, she declined it in favour of a Cabinet position – she became a Minister without Portfolio, only to resign six months later. Her letter of resignation is telling:

Dear Mr. Premier:

I herewith tender my resignation as a member of the Executive Council and member without Portfolio.

For sometime I have felt, as you know, that I should take this course, as I have been in the unfortunate position of having to assume the

16. A Conservative Party woman and a Liberty-Leaguer (Conservative splinter group).

17. The Vancouver Sun, January 9, 1971, p. 25.

responsibility of acts of the government without being in a position to criticize or advise – as a member of the council I have precluded (sic) from criticism.

I am, after all, primarily interested in women and children and no matter what government has power as long as I have the honor to represent them I shall find the happiness that public life gives.

Public life is not a virtue we boast of, but there is always the satisfaction of having rendered service.

Believe me to be, yours sincerely--¹⁸

Subsequent newspaper reports provided a more pointed analysis of her resignation:

Premier John Oliver didn't think much of women in public life, let alone (sic) in his cabinet. He thought women should stay home and mind the kids. Women of the time were so noisy about having a woman in the cabinet that he capitulated, and made Mary Ellen a minister without portfolio. He attempted to silence her by making her Madame Speaker, but she would have none of it. She insisted upon using her tongue ... He took it very well (her resignation), happy no doubt to see the end of her at his cabinet meetings.¹⁹

The year 1921 has been referred to as the 'women's year': federally, Agnes MacPhail was the first woman to be elected a Member of Parliament; and, provincially, a new range of social reforms were enacted. A 1920 act providing pensions for mothers stipulated that Local Advisory Boards be

18. As quoted in The Vancouver Sun, January 25, 1971, p. 22.

19. Ibid., January 28, 1971, p. 22.

established "to report on applications (for such pensions) and to visit families requiring assistance."²⁰ By 1921, this Board was operating throughout the province. Once again MacGill filled the seat reserved in the Act for a woman, and once again the pattern of highly centralized decision making was evident in the extensive powers of the Board. A Woman could apply for aid if she was (1) a British subject, (2) a B.C. resident for eighteen months (3) the mother and sole supporter of a child under sixteen years of age, and (4) without means with which to support the child. The Board could deny such support if it felt:

- (1) The mother was neither a 'fit' nor a 'proper' person to have custody.
- (2) The best interests of the child, would not be served if he or she remained in the custody of the applicant.²¹

Although the implications of such a denial were left unspecified in the Act, presumably it meant that the mother would be forced to give up her child to the Superintendent of the Department - who also happened to be Superintendent of Neglected Children under the 'Infants Act'. In other words, the Act could have beneficial results by providing deserted or widowed mothers and their child with minimum support, but, on the other hand, by allotting such broad powers to the Board, disastrous results could ensue, depending upon the sentiments and judgments of its three members.

20. Statutes of B.C., 1920, Chapter 61.

21. Ibid., 1920, Chapter 61, Sections 4 & 5.

In the 1921 session, two bills designed to aid working women were introduced: an Act concerning the Employment of Women before and after childbirth²² and an Act concerning the Employment of Women during the Night.²³ The former piece of legislation was almost worthless as it did not cover vast numbers of working women; moreover the government did very little to draw the provisions of the Act to the attention of those whom it did cover. The Act in fact, included only three general categories of employment, mines, factories and construction; but the provisos of these groups were well formulated. Section three of the bill permitted a pregnant woman to leave her place of employment for six weeks prior to and six weeks following her confinement, without the fear of dismissal. Upon her return to work, she was allotted half an hour, twice daily, to nurse her child. Wage reductions for lost time remained a possibility, however, as the bill contained no provisions precluding such action. The penalty imposed on any employer contravening the Act was a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars. However, no machinery to initiate prosecutions was provided for.

22. Ibid., 1921, Chapter 37.

23. Ibid., 1921, Chapter 64.

The latter bill, the Night Employment of Women's Act, was even more restrictive. It applied to the same limited categories of women, and even within these limited numerous exceptions were provided for. For example, women were not to be hired "between the hour of eight o'clock in the evening and the hour of seven o'clock in the morning" except in cases where "there occurs an interruption of work which it is impossible to foresee, and which is not of a recurring nature" or "in cases where the work has to do with raw materials or materials in the course of treatment which are subject to rapid deterioration, when such night work is necessary to preserve the said materials from certain loss."²⁴

The scope of this thesis does not permit an investigation of every bill concerned with the welfare of women; nor is it necessary, for the general characteristics of such legislation have been adequately demonstrated by the preceding analysis. On the basis of the few examples discussed, it is apparent that such legislature provisions as were enacted only had a limited impact on the oppression and exploitation of women workers in the workplace. This is not surprising — legislation alone has never been sufficient to produce a radical change in working conditions. The important point, however,

24. Ibid., 1921, Chapter 46, Section 4.

is that women who agitated for such reforms thought they were! They argued that liberation could be enacted, although it may take time. With this in mind five such women petitioned the Supreme Court, in 1927, to declare that women could legally be called 'people' thus rendering them eligible to become Senators.²⁵ But token Senators like token MLA's can accomplish little and women do not become 'people' upon the judgement of the Supreme court.

After a further half century of 'progressive' legislation, it becomes apparent that such measures are not the answer: by their very definition, they are enacted to stabilize the status quo. Women's freedom is beyond the realm of the status quo for it challenges the very basis of a society built upon patriarchal foundations.

THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF WOMEN IN RETROSPECT

The political awakening of women in British Columbia at the turn of the century was a reflection of basic structural alterations of the economy. The development of a political consciousness among women should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon: it was a response to genuine grievances that arose from the structure of the newly developing economic order.

25. See Una MacLean, "The Famous Five", Alberta Historical Review, Vol. 10, No. 2., 1962.

The rapid industrialization of the economy at the turn of the century had a profound effect on the social conditions under which women lived and worked. The new order subjected women to abominable abuses in the work force, placing them on a par with oriental and native labour: racism and sexism played similar functions in the structuring of the labour market. At the same time, however, economic development produced a differentiation of social classes and thus, a new layer of women merged with the ability and resources to criticize such social evils. The development and direction of the emergent social movement of women was thus initially linked with the rise of new patterns of social stratification. According to Kraditor, the middle class women of the 19th century United States had "acquired education, leisure time, and the opportunity to participate in activities outside their homes, all of which made them aware of the gap between their social standing and economic status on the one hand, and their political power on the other. This awareness bred a sense of grievance and a motive for the struggle to secure redress."²⁶

In other words middle class women were first mobilized in order to consolidate their privileged class

26. Aileen S. Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, p. 260.)

position. To achieve this goal, the women relied upon arguments affirming the dominant social norms of justice and democratic rights. In B.C., the working women who took part in Labour struggles did so out of concrete necessity, and not in order to preserve class privilege: it was not a question of consolidating their existing social position (extending to women the status already attained by men of their class), but of struggling for a totally new social status in a manner that implicitly attracted the subordinate class status of all workers, men as well as women.

Working class women were not drawn into the suffrage movement because the vote could not be a panacea for the social problems they confronted - it could at best have been only one weapon in a much broader strategy. Thus a movement whose demands and activities were totally occupied with the vote could have little appeal to working women. Moreover, the dominantly middle-class ideology within which even these very limited demands of the suffrage movement were set (the vote seen as a means to further entrench middle class values etc.), could only serve to further alienate working class women.

This absence of working class women in any of the women's organizations is one of the most profound failures of the groups of this period, for it meant that a small sector of privileged women reaped the benefits of agitation and

struggle. It is these women that are held up by 'progressive' academics as proof that the condition of women improved in the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The advancement of this small group of women, however, was predicated on their acceptance of the patriarchal rules of the society and only within this framework have they attained esteem. Simone de Beauvoir argues that the reigns of Queen Elizabeth, Catherine the Great and Queen Isabella are lauded because, as Queens, women become neither male nor female, but sovereigns:

It is remarkable that their femininity, when socially abolished, should have no longer meant inferiority; the proposition of queens who had great reigns is infinitely above that of great kings.²⁷

Women workers exploited both as domestic custodians and as employees, have been slow to organize. The dominance of family roles in their life situation has severely limited their ability to become politically involved. Any organization attempting to make contact with working women must respond to this problem. The suffrage groups in British Columbia did not. However, even when women joined the trade union movement, authoritarian and chauvinistic attitudes on the part of the male leadership quickly dampened any autonomous assertion of the specific needs of working women.

27. de Beauvoir, op. cit., p. 120.

Bureaucracy reinforced by the social norms of a patriarchal society effectively stifled any trends towards independent activity.

It is clear that the liberation of women has not taken place through legislative reform: this is an historical judgement of the organizations that were so preoccupied with this form of political action. At the present time a radically new wave of politicization and political mobilization is taking place among women. The new organization spawned by these developments have attempted (sometimes consciously and sometimes not), to avoid the type of outlook that characterized women's political activity in the past as typified by such groups as the W.C.T.U. and the B.C.P.E.L. For instance, on a simple organizational level, meetings are held at times convenient for working women. More importantly, however, is that contemporary political groups see the oppression of women as part and parcel of a capitalist social order which must be transformed in order to make the liberation of women possible. Consequently, the narrow focus of past political movements among women on legal reform and parliamentary channels has been transcended. The new movement is an explicitly revolutionary one - a movement of total contestation.

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