

CLOISTERS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Rough Draft

By FRANCES KELLOR

During his visit to the United States, during the war, the late Lord Northcliffe was heard to inquire: "What becomes of your women in political affairs? I never seem to see or hear of them". It was generally admitted by those addressed that the observation was fairly justified. An equally pertinent question is, judged by the national and international events of the past two years, what, if any, modification of this observation can be made by reason of the enfranchisement of women.

The most far-reaching international question before the country has been to what extent and in what ways the United States would participate in European affairs. European conferences have come and gone. Commissions of one kind or another have been sitting, but amidst the speculation as to what the United States would do, the new woman voter has expressed no definite convictions. While it is generally believed that women's postwar agitation against future wars was largely instrumental, as an undercurrent of political life, in calling the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament, she took no part in the formulation of the agreements and the discussions represented her feelings but hardly her views.

In the more abstract field of international thought, women ordinarily constitute the majorities at discussions, which, however, contain little imprint of their thought and are usually conducted by organizations bearing little trace of their personality. In England, from the moment the British Institute on International Affairs was organized, women served as officers and members, and its first meeting was held at the home of an American-born woman. But this policy was not followed in the United States, in the organization of the Council on Foreign Relations, nor at the Williams College Institute of Politics, nor in the new publication Foreign Affairs. These American movements, however, are establishing precedents in international thought that are not less significant than corresponding movements in England.

Is the situation any different with respect to national political issues? The Tariff Act affected commodities used by both men and women; the soldiers' bonus bill involves matters of sentiment and finance; the ship subsidy bill touches everybody's pocket book - but none of these important matters seems to have been

elucidated, or their course altered, by woman's expressed opinion. ^{This is also true} On the questions of reparations and refunding of the debt, the recognition of Russia, immigration and our wholly domestic labor troubles, ~~little valuable suggestions had come from women.~~

The National Welfare Department, a campaign promise to reward women voters, designed to be the center for much scattered effort and to stimulate and standardize humane movements, appears to have been the victim of women's own indecision, if not disagreement. Under the possession of direct political power, ^{such} humanitarian impulses seem to be disintegrating, if not deteriorating.

These apparent incompetencies prevail, notwithstanding the occupancy by women of positions in Congress, legislatures and party organizations. If virile thought existed among these incumbents, one would expect to find traces of it enter through some original or permanent contribution to political thought, or in the candidates selected to lead such thought. But the changes appear to be so slight, that one must ^{re-examine} ~~suspect~~ ^{now} its existence. This generalization may be epitomized in a single illustration:

A woman was placed upon one of the executive committees of a certain state party organization. When the time came for nominating a Governor, there was one aspirant for the honor whom the bosses desired to eliminate. It was known that the woman member favored this candidate. What more simple than to follow time honored methods and hold a meeting without her. But she heard about it, and went to the meeting. Here she was told it was an informal, not a regular, session, and the door was closed in her face. It was evidently "no place for a woman" with such important matters on hand. But it appeared from the press the next morning that there had been a meeting, and the undesirable candidate eliminated. Now it happened that this woman had a very influential father, and to him she went with the story that she had been insulted by other members of the Committee. The male reaction to this insult was so positive that it caused several important publications to change the candidate they had been advocating, and actually resulted in the nomination of the eliminated candidate in the primaries. In the hands of this candidate, when elected, lies a

significant opportunity to utilize this incident as a constructive force in American political thought.

If further evidence is needed of this tendency to ignore women upon really important occasions, it can be found in the lists of any official committee appointed to receive distinguished guests.

Even though ~~this tendency~~ *may be* readily comprehensible among the conservative political element, it is less understandable in the liberal thought of the country. The New School of Social Research, perhaps the most generous interpreter of liberal thought, apparently holds that women on its board of directors may be sponsors for views which they are not qualified to present in the class room. At any rate, they constitute the background in the one case, and not the substance of thought in the other.

If, however, observations are limited to women's interests, ^{the} inference may be more generous. There women are indeed active in the pursuit of additional powers. The naturalization law, enabling native born women who marry foreigners to retain American citizenship; and compelling foreign born women to be naturalized independently of husbands or fathers; is likely, through many unforeseen consequences, to stimulate both national and international thought.

The proposed Constitutional amendment to equalize all rights between the sexes, has set many Americans thinking, from a new viewpoint, about the foundations of their society. The appointment of women judges in children's courts is already affecting the precedents of that venerable institution -- the latest intention being to nominate for a judgeship a woman who is not a member of the bar.

In a field of conjecture so large, these illustrations in themselves are of little significance; but taken together, they are indicative of a situation permitting the inference that political thought is rather well cloistered within sex lines. And since this is true, we are led to speculate upon what has become of that vast impulse and concentrated activity that helped to win the war, and the vote. Is it perhaps enriching political thought in a more indirect way? Is it, for instance,

to be traced in a greater clarity of thought and warmer sympathy in dealing with the facts of life? Is there, perhaps, a deeper moral impulse and keener spiritual insight stirring beneath our sluggish political thought? Is there a finer perception of the obligation of nation to nation? Are personal strife and discontent yielding to a play of the imagination and a grace of toleration? Does the endless informing of the well informed go monotonously on, or is there a growing appreciation of the need of more fundamental action? Is there a conscious projection of the ideas and ideals that prevailed during the war, into the field of art, literature, or science? Is there any assurance that the vast energy which women put into emotional causes and crises, is capable of direct transference into steady dealing with the somewhat monotonous political affairs of daily life; or that the tremor of their moral indignation will crystallize into calmer contemplation of its causes? In other words, irrelevant as some of these questions may seem to each other, are there signs of a revival affecting the moral, aesthetic, educational and political life, traceable in any way to women's political emancipation?

II

The hiatus that now exists between the vision of the suffragist and the experience of the woman voter, indicates that nothing of the kind is taking place, but rather that women are leisurely drifting with the tide of ready-made opinion, and accepting what they find. Neither friends nor foes of enfranchisement foresaw the rapid decline of the ascendancy women had gained over the American mind during suffrage activities; nor that women occupying positions in which their least word was law, would slip down from that brilliant arena and disappear into the nothingness of political thought; nor that minds distinguished by vision and a high courage, would so soon accept with equanimity ready made opinions and broken party pledges; nor that from the new freedom the flower of youth would be gone before a new leadership emerged, or before a single distinguished contribution could be made to political thought.

But so it is, and for quite obvious reasons. In bequeathing to women the

right to vote, suffrage leaders could not add to that inheritance clarity of thought on public questions, or experienced skill in dealing with them. In fact, they had disinherited women by regulations forbidding them to engage in political activities, and discouraging their participation in public affairs. "Get the vote first" was the order. These women, not trained to study or to think beyond getting the vote, came to the electorate in possession of neither the theory nor practice of political science. They were for the most part strangers to the materials and the processes of deliberative thought which underly constructive political action.

Nor could their leaders help them very much in the practical field. Immensely wearied with the long struggle, grown cynical through disillusion, and egotistical through use of power, they had no enthusiasm to lead a new cause. Embittered by many humiliating experiences, thirsting for revenge against those who had so long delayed victory, they did not find it easy to subordinate their point of view, or to make the adjustments which the new situation required. In the nature of things they could be of little consequence. To see their child adopted by the political organization was a little more than they could bear.

But to misjudge the situation to the extent of clinging to a non-partisan doctrine in the face of a victory in which the only fruit could be partisanship; to go so far as to urge their members to join parties as "rebels" to destroy the organization, was to add suspicion and lack of confidence to the none too cordial spirit awaiting the new voter.

To maintain this doctrine, it was necessary under the same leadership to construct a new organization or else to transform the purely theoretical, highly specialized militant spirited suffrage organization into rather dull agencies of education and cooperation. Burdened as some of these organizations were with traditions of hate, and habituated to methods of friction, and under a leadership gifted with more will than imagination, they could not have the sympathetic understanding required in the first stages of adjustment. So women's power has filtered away through inconceivably infinitesimal and unimportant channels.

It may be asked if all the leadership was in the suffrage organization. By no means. But the victors assumed that the spoils were theirs and at no time were anti-suffragists or those engaged in other fields invited to cooperate; in fact anti-suffragists were rather ridiculed for taking up duties to which they had been opposed. As many of them were distinguished members of society with influence in high political places, it may be assumed that they closed, rather than opened, some avenues essential to the orderly recognition of women in political affairs.

It was, of course, natural to assume that the vote being won, the greater part of the work was done; but, if so, this judgment showed little real understanding of that highly sensitized masculine organization called the political machine. This organization was now put on its keenest mettle by the fear of what the woman voter would do. There exist in this political world traditions so sacred that in the family men speak of them only to their sons; prerogatives so precious that their usurpation arouses the fiercest jealousy; precedents so honored that they are inseparable from pride ever sensitive to the least humiliation. So the welcome to the new woman voter bristled with prejudice and resentment, alive today as the following quotation from a circular recently sent throughout the United States will show:

"Concerning the proposed legislation for further power for women, woman suffrage's legality is yet to be tested. It was forced through in party competition without the men of the country voting on it or consenting to it. The most liberal democracy does not require man's enforced subordination to women. Man's subordination is bound to extend under woman suffrage in politics, commerce, the professions and the home, producing conditions distasteful to a real man's inherent nature, angering some, disheartening others and effecting a persistent decline of man's morale and the consequent injury to the country."

To take everything for granted and to ride rough shod over so delicate a situation, was to risk being fed on political husks while the kernel remained carefully concealed, and hardly suspected. This is precisely what happened.

2 The alienation of women from important political thought of the country and their absorption in unimportant mechanical detail is quietly proceeding. Their exclusion from centers of power and employment in women's interests everywhere prevail. No woman in the national administration holds any appointment not circumscribed or dictated by "women's interests", or has a recognized leadership in ideas; nor are

they to be found in councils held on important state matters.

But the positions occupied by women are of less importance than some of the sophistries appearing as a result of this attitude of mind. For instance, by one of the woman members of a national political organization this statement was quoted:

"Intelligent women who aspire to public office realize that they must begin at the beginning and climb step by step and they are therefore seeking local and not state and national office."

This statement, by reason of its source, has the authority of an approved policy and as such is misleading. Men who have served with distinction in high public office who have not been professional politicians, have been called to these offices ^{not} from some little local office, but because they had reached distinction in their chosen profession or business. It is manifestly absurd to expect women who have achieved similar distinction in their chosen fields to follow a different procedure. For them to accept nominations not in consonance with the dignity of that position, and not furnishing scope for their abilities, is to deprive public life of their real services. To accept the theory that some clerkship in a second rate office or petty duties in an out of the way local office will fit the expert in national affairs, or the capable manager of a home or business, to discharge the duties of public office, is to immensely narrow women's participation in public affairs. The maintenance of their prestige in their chosen fields is quite as important to women as to men; their success in it is an asset to the country which a cheap experience gained in an inefficiently conducted local political office can hardly enhance.

The acceptance by women of posts where their duties are confined to ^{women's} ~~sex~~ affairs; and of the limitation of their mental operations to dealing with woman's aspects of every question, is leading the political thought of the country to regard them as incapable of any broader capacity. A wide acceptance of this theory will kill independent thought among women, for it is impossible for a mind to possess clarity of view and soundness of judgment when it is constantly expected to present only the woman's point of view, or to be colored by sex sensations. art, science, politics, in fact whatever woman's mind touch, must suffer in proportion as their creative

thought is distorted by this consciously imposed limitation. It may be questioned whether women in their light acceptance of political honors, on these terms, have realized the ultimate effect upon political thought of this hobbling of their mental processes; but there is little doubt if there is a woman in political office today who does not hobble her thought.

As a result of this prevailing belief, it is now suggested that no woman be nominated, without the approval of the women members of the party organization. This, of course, means that such a candidate will represent but part of her constituency, and but one aspect of a policy. This procedure will add one more political bloc to those now causing so much concern to party organizations.

From these sketches and tendencies, it is not to be inferred that a great deal of quiet normal adjustment is not taking place in the political relations of men and women. In the chaos of sensation following the vote, the wonder is that mistakes have been so few, and that women have gathered even a slight harvest of experience from their more or less distracted efforts. I think we may say that the political organization has shown a very astute knowledge of mediocrity and that there has been a fair recognition of the services women can render without disturbing the political machine, without stimulating political thought, and without interfering with nominations of candidates. Their negative contribution, if one may so state it, has been considerable. But here we are trying to estimate their impress upon political thought; and are therefore speculating not so much upon numerical distribution as upon what has become of that fine, brilliant leadership that won the vote and is now silent, and upon the reasons for that silence.

III

If this silence is a fact, what of the outlook? While the period of drifting has resulted in little more than inexpression, and a few mistakes, it should not become a habit and there is doubtless a time when women must have a philosophy of life in which political thought occupies a larger place in their scheme of existence.

For they cannot escape the fact that the intellectual inheritance from suffrage is very great. But its wise use and development ^e _g not to be fully comprised in

the agitation for further rights; nor in non-partisan educational and welfare activities, nor in partisan efforts to include women in political organizations. The distances between political science and political organizations are very real; and the satisfaction of thought very special. To deal with political ideas rather than facts might direct the latent powers into new channels. For women's contribution is to be more than initiative. It must, it seems, be defined in nobler terms and follow finer lines than now prevail. I can perhaps do no better than to suggest some of the questions that are the substance of my own thought, and to which I have found no satisfactory answer.

What has the political organization to offer women to aid them toward constructive political thought? With its coarseness of design, its barrennessⁿ of any qualities of beauty, its absence of chivalry between friends when they become political rivals, its brutally ruthless competition, its total absence of fine perception and of high integrity, and its ugliness of motive, it is surely devoid of such aesthetic charm. With its card catalogue of services rendered to constituents to be presented to them on Election Day as a reminder of a lien on their vote, it presents a rather cynical aspect of sympathy and relief, which women might undertake. Its capacity to distribute honors and "jobs" can hardly compete with the greater satisfaction from those afforded in both homes and business. As an intellectual center, its activity is chiefly noticeable in those periods of irrational thought called campaigns, in which propaganda and partisan literature must necessarily prevail.

If women are to have truly educated minds and independent thought, it would seem that their experience should be in the broader fields of art, science, philosophy, economics, and business administration. These are the sources of the ideas and ideals that the political organization executes. Here problems are studied, policies formulated, and important candidates nominated. Here the discussions are held that mould public opinion. The way to political thought is through these sources of power, rather than through organization which is but the evidence of the source. Women too fine to tolerate the vulgarities of so-called practical politics, or un-

willing to lower the standard of taste of their minds to shift with every political wind, may find in these broader fields a congenial place to develop and utilize their thought. It is at least a subject for speculation if experience in practical affairs in homes, laboratories, studios, shops and offices are not fundamentally necessary before women will influence in any profound way the political thought of the country; and if the distinction won there may not determine her fitness to hold public office. We have already seen the futility of proceeding without a high standard of selection, in the few candidates already selected and in the few public utterances, and we confess the outlook is not reassuring.

A second not unprofitable reflection might concern itself with the network of women's organizations, and movements and their relation to the community of thought between men and women; to determine if the time may not have arrived for their elimination. Minds stimulated under such imperfect training tend to accept information without selection; standards without discrimination; sensation without perception; opinion without reflection; and judgment of facts rather than of values. An examination of our educational systems from the point of view of their adaptation to this wider political horizon might not be amiss. But the increase in contacts between men's and women's minds in dealing with practical impersonal affairs might well take the place of some of these women's activities. In the United States we are far from having that community of thought between men and women which obtains in business affairs in France; in political thought in England; and in the exchange of opinion upon aesthetic subjects in Italy. In sex cloisters our women still seem to be searching for information for mere learning's sake rather than for truth to live life.

A finer understanding and observance of the fundamental laws of life might make political progress more certain. To rush into an agitation for equalizing all rights between the sexes, in defiance of natural law, is to create the impression of ill balance in ~~the~~ the use of the new power. So long as mothers work, and young girls work at night, no statutory law can change their need of special protection.

inherent in their own unchangeable relation to life. For women to accept positions where their leadership is over men, rather than over materials or ideas, is to challenge a tradition which must result either in the man treating the matter as a joke to sustain his dignity, or eventually widening the authority of such a position. And for an unmarried and capable woman Judge to permit her relation to an adopted child, to be used as her strength in the campaign for election to a Judgeship, in place of her record as a lawyer, is not to clarify but to befog the situation.

For it is the privilege of women who have achieved distinction in the broader professional and business world to project their competitive sense beyond sex limitations. In whatever leadership may arise in the ~~far~~ future, this capacity is indispensable. Women's desire for security and protection tend to postpone the kind of leadership in thought that is needed. A leadership not constantly in jeopardy loses its edge; and if not held on merit loses its power. Perhaps it is because men understand the grim terms upon which leadership is held, that they are reluctant to offer it to those unable to grasp its significance or unwilling to abide by its rules.

In these reflections, we are also reminded that we are not dealing with one racial type with uniform standards and traditions, but in whatever is done, we have to consider the standards, traditions and customs existing between men and women in every country of the world, and imported into the American situation. Nowhere are the differences in civilization so marked as in the treatment of women, an element not to be ignored in generalizations on their position in American public affairs. Indeed, the problem is not so simple as the selection of organization assistants, of candidates for office, and of spokesmen at meetings, responsible as these matters are for the moment. It is rather the larger question of how we may deduce from this new liberty the sound principles of its operation in obedience to fundamental law. There seems to be no other way than for each one to do her own thinking and to acquire for herself that quality of excellence in conduct, in clarity of thought, in perception of order and beauty, and a balance of judgment which will advance the whole relationship of women to political thought. It may be that generations must pass before

its effects are visible, or its worth in individuals recognized; but this can be no discouragement if the course is right. For, however/ the way turns, whether toward further drifting or piloting, the contributions made by women to political thought during the next centuries, in this great democratic experiment, are likely to be an index to its civilization. Long after candidates and record of votes on election days have ceased to interest posterity, women's political influence will be traced in terms of fine feeling, spheres of thought and in accents of beauty, for such is our judgment of values and aspiration toward perfection.