

established that a modified extended family exists, that many exchanges take place between elderly individuals and their families. The neglect of elderly individuals by their families has been documented overwhelmingly as false.

Chapter 6 starts on page 147 and speaks about magnificent survivors. Here it is argued that a very small group has managed by superhuman efforts to live relatively happy lives during old age. These individuals have maintained dignity and self-respect through two major themes: intergenerational support and self-help. Chapter 7, the last chapter before the conclusion, discusses emerging political activists. It is argued that the current generation of feminists will demand and expect a major role during old age. These are probably the two most stimulating chapters in the book.

Even here, while the analysis is interesting, it does not show originality or insight. There is no discussion by this author of the fact that by simple numbers more individuals are living to old age. That means not only each of us will likely experience old age in the future, but that all of us are currently more likely to experience having elderly parents or grandparents. This to my mind will be an enormous catalyst to social change, one that will take place in an evolutionary, not revolutionary manner. This is not mentioned and is seemingly unrecognized by the author.

Finally, the author claims in her chapter on magnificent survivors, that "The experiences presented here portray how intensely individual an experience aging is. Yet society tends to lump older women together and deny their uniqueness" (page 167). The author herself does precisely that, except for a hint of some heterogeneity in the epilogue. That in fact would be my major criticism of the book - by spending by far the majority of time lumping all elderly women together and emphasizing their inability to cope and share disadvantages, the author does not con-

vey the tremendous heterogeneity amongst elderly individuals and the fact that many elderly individuals cope and cope well despite society's expectations of them. Instead, the book tends to promote yet another problem-oriented view of aging.

Nevertheless, the book is easy reading and does provide important information and a valuable perspective. Many of her points are important and worthwhile, even though they may be drawn to an extreme in the book.

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Women and Legal Action. Precedents, Resources and Strategies for the Future. M. Elizabeth Atcheson, Mary Eberts and Beth Symes, with Jennifer Stoddart. *Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1984. Pp. 200, \$4.95.*

Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect on 17th, April, 1985. It contains a constitutional promise of equality for everyone in Canada, specifically forbidding discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Many questions will have to be addressed with respect to the effect of this provision on Canadian society. What is the meaning of equality? What is the scope of section 15 - does it apply to statute law and government action only? Are all distinctions forbidden? If not what does this

mean for women, to whom difference has often meant inferiority?

The federal government and the provinces had three years to bring their laws and practices into conformity with the Charter. No doubt the process of review and the lobby for reform will continue. Since April this process has been supplemented by the right to litigate on the basis that section 15 has been infringed. And yet litigation as a process for promoting equality is expensive and extremely burdensome for the individual plaintiff.

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women commissioned the study, which is the subject-matter of this book, by three leading feminist lawyers. The book examines a number of areas: the rationale for trying to achieve change through legal action within the context of previous Canadian decisions involving the rights and status of women; the practical aspects of going to court, sources of funding in Canada and legal action funds in the United States. Lastly, conclusions are drawn about litigation strategies and the necessary funding for such litigation.

The book is fascinating right from the start. It has short descriptions of the cases involving women litigants whose names will be familiar to those with an interest in the struggle for equality in Canada. Here is a record of the story of Clara Brett Martin, the first woman to practise law in the Commonwealth, and of Annie Macdonald Langstaff, who died in 1926, never having been allowed to practise law in Quebec. The "Persons Case" is described, which will be useful for those who have a vague sense that it happened, but know very little about it. The women who challenged the Indian Act are included: Jeanette Lavell, Yvonne Bedard, Flora Canard, Mary Two-Axe Early and Sandra Lovelace. Stella Bliss is here - she provided the Supreme Court of Canada with the opportunity to decide that discrimination on the basis of pregnancy is not dis-

crimination against women. I hope that section 15 will make it impossible for such a decision to ever be reached again.

Chapter II, on Getting to Court, is a sobering look at some of the barriers to and costs of litigation as a strategy. Chapter II goes on to outline the existing advocacy groups already in existence, such as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. The conclusion is reached that no existing group is an ideal vehicle for woman's equality rights litigation.

On that basis, as well as on the basis of the discussion of the American experience of public interest litigation in Chapter IV, the conclusion is drawn that:

a legal fund action to concentrate on issues of sex-based discrimination is an essential component of an effective strategy to promote the interests of women in the Canadian legal system.

The word component is important. Section 15 will not cure all the inequities in Canadian society. There are severe practical limits on effective legal action. Nor will litigation be the only strategy required to maximize the potential that section 15 does indeed have. Nevertheless, it is an important strategy. This study is timely and informative with respect to the issues which have to be addressed in utilizing such a strategy.

What the book is not is an academic discussion of the nature of equality. This is unfortunate in one sense as the reader will get little sense of the authors' vision of an egalitarian Canada, except in the negative sense that decisions like *Bliss* will not be possible. Is, for example, gender neutrality to be pursued at all costs, or should differences in the reality of the lives of men and women be acknowledged, at all costs? On the other hand, the book is pragmatic and very readable. It is an organiser's book not a theorist's. It is attractively presented and its price makes it

accessible to many women. There is as well a useful, short bibliography for those who wish to read further.

It can be obtained by mail from the Canadian Council on Social Development, 55 Parkdale Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, K1Y 1E5. I recommend it highly.

As a final note, readers may be interested to know that the type of national organisation proposed by the authors has come into existence. It is the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (L.E.A.F.) and its objectives are:

1. To fund equality cases important to the advancement of women, and to pilot them through the complex legal process;
2. To provide resources in the form of legal research, education, and expertise for the litigants, professionals and the public at large.

It can be reached at P.O. Box 6989, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1X7.

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Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917. Linda Harriet Edmonson. *Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984. Pp. 197.*

Historians of feminism often have to assemble diverse sources and establish the significance of movements that conventional historians have ignored or dismissed as marginal. When studying liberal feminism in pre-revolutionary Russia, historians also confront Soviet hostility or at best contempt for bourgeois feminism and the survivors' silence after the Revolution. To compensate for the absence of Russian archival material, Linda H. Edmonson has relied on prin-

ted sources and international archives, notably those of the International Council of Women in the P.A.C. Perhaps the resort to printed material accounts for her institutional approach and her reluctance to draw profiles of feminists. Acknowledging the bourgeois character of the movement and interjecting brief biographies of leaders into discussions of specific organizations do not substitute for social analysis or even speculation about the prominence of certain professions such as medicine. Comparing equal rights feminism in Russia, Great Britain, and the United States does produce interesting suggestions about causation. Edmonson contends that the Russian case disproves the theory of feminism following from industrialization and proposes, as a "common cause," the coexistence of the hierarchical and authoritarian family with democratic ideals. Similarly, she identifies the Russian feminists' association with other liberation movements as its distinguishing feature and interprets this as a consequence of the absolutist state and an intelligentsia eager for change.

Contrasts to Great Britain and the United States also highlight the particular problems of government repression and the absence of a moderate party, as well as Russian feminists' inadequate press and distance from working-class women. The inadequacy of the press is explained largely by male domination of journalism, while their distance from working women appears as *their* fault (their philanthropic approach and their distaste for racial action). Although *Feminism in Russia* describes classic conflicts with social-democratic women in the feminist "unions" and congresses, the competition gets little coverage outside these contexts. This oversight precludes serious consideration of the real possibilities of organizing or acting with working women and leaves her conclusions about liberal feminism pushing social-democratic leaders to pay attention to women unsubstantiated. To be fair, Edmonson is primarily and properly interested in documenting liberal feminist advances, notably in higher education and