

failed. It did not make housewives professionals. Manufacturers increasingly took away their functions, offering appliances and convenience foods in their place. They even enticed the domestic science professionals into their employ to give their offerings credibility and the stamp of approval. This left little to women in the home beyond the most basic repetitive tasks.

While domestic scientists had tried to help woman in her homemaker role, they had ignored her nurturant responsibilities. Child care experts, in the guise of psychologists, concentrated on these and gave advice on how to raise children properly. In the early twentieth century the factory model became the goal with behaviourists stressing the need to mold the child in order to create a disciplined worker. With the 1920s permissiveness held sway linked as it was to the rise of consumerism and the encouragement of instant gratification. Free expression was the key and stress was placed on instinctual mother love, although the experts explained to women what their instincts were. No matter what the theory if anything went wrong, the mother was blamed, not the theory. When, in the 1950s, it was discovered that young American soldiers in Korean POW camps had quickly succumbed to brain washing, experts worried about whether American children were weak and decided mothers had been over-permissive and had interpreted their advice incorrectly.

In their study of the experts, Ehrenreich and English have portrayed women as victims, as passive agents being acted upon. Anyone familiar with the history of women knows this was not the case. This discrepancy focuses on one of the main problems of studying prescriptive literature. How do you determine how influential it was? A victimology interpretation is too simplistic to account for what was happening. Ideas are related to society and the needs of society. In her recent study *Psychoanalytic Politics*, Sherry Turkle has described the differences between the United States and France with respect to their reaction to Freud. In America his ideas were quickly accepted and watered down to make them serve the

American status quo. Freud quickly became part of the establishment and consequently hostile to those outside it, namely women. Hence the opposition of American women to Freudian analysis. In France, however, Freud was not accepted until the 1960s and, when he was, it was by the left. In France, Freudian theory is subversive to the status quo and as such has been taken up by feminists. Thus, in two different countries you have one man's theories interpreted in diametrically opposed ways to meet the needs of each society. It is the needs of the society, the context that has to be stressed in any study of ideas. This is the major weakness of *For Her Own Good*, for the context is lacking, a context which the authors of *For Her Own Good* have been unable to provide since they are overly dependent on secondary research. Nevertheless, with the research at their disposal, they have written a fascinating and provocative book which should make any reader think twice when next they hear pronouncements by so-called "experts" on women's role in society.

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**A NOT UNREASONABLE CLAIM:  
WOMEN AND REFORM IN  
CANADA, 1880s-1920s. LINDA KEALEY,  
ED. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979. Pp. 233.**

Many of us have waited impatiently for almost four years for the publication of this book.<sup>1</sup> Although we could have wished for its earlier appearance, it has been worth the wait. The volume's contributors and editor represent some of the historians of Canada most actively and fruitfully engaged in researching, writing and promoting women's history. The fruits of that labour published here augur well, at the same time that they demonstrate the need, for continuing harvests.

The nine essays are joined by the common theme, announced in the subtitle, of *Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*. Linda Kealey provides a cohesive Introduction by sketching in the background of the North American reform movement of the late 19th and 20th centuries, and by reviewing some historiographical schools of interpretation on the relationship between feminism and women's involvement in reform. In addition, the editor has introduced each article with a brief synopsis.

The first piece, written by Wayne Roberts in a crisp, punning style, argues that the women's suffrage movement in Toronto (1877-1914) evolved from equal rights to "maternal" feminism as a result of the compromises middle-class women had to make in their struggle to enter the professions and of the small direct participation by "working women" in the fight for female enfranchisement.

If one purpose of women's history is to reclaim from the obscurity of the past female lives which demonstrate strength of character and independence of mind, Deborah Gorham's "Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist" fills the bill. It is a sensitive evocation not only of the thought but also of the life experience and person of the unconventional suffragist. Alive with intuitive insight, the account captures the ambiguities and inconsistencies of a Flora "spared any ill-judged flirtation with dependency," defiant of bourgeois respectability and religion, but "not immune to conspicuous spending" and middle-class comfort (pp. 52,54).

Chapter Three makes available in English "The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Women's Movement in Quebec" by Marie Lavigne, Yolande Pinard and Jennifer Stoddart.<sup>2</sup> Illuminating an important aspect of the women's movement in French Canada, the three authors succinctly tell the story of the FNSJB from its founding in 1907 to its eventual foundering on the anti-women's-rights stand of the Church.

Breaking away from the Montreal Local Council of Women, the well-to-do Francophone founders dedicated the society to the improvement of women's lot through charity, education, trade associations, and the promotion of equal rights. These goals were to be pursued "under the twin banners of Catholicism and the French language" (pp. 73-4). But allegiance to the former, in the form of the Bishop of Montreal, exacted a rather high price: *inter alia*, withdrawal from the women's suffrage campaign in 1922.

Carol Bacchi's "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage" adds to our understanding of social and economic ties in pre-World War I Canada which militated against women's unification on the basis of sex. From "a study of active suffragists" (p. 91), Bacchi shows that the leaders of the city-based suffrage societies tended to be Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, professional women or wives of professionals, civil servants and businessmen. This urban, middle-class bias distanced the suffrage societies not only from city-dwelling proletarian women but also from rural farm women. For farm wives as well as labour women, economic oppression took precedence over sexual discrimination.

Canada's first woman physician founded Canada's first women's suffrage society. Veronica Strong-Boag's cogent "Canada's Women Doctors: Feminism Constrained" postulates a reciprocal relationship between the women's movement in Canada and Canadian women's breakthrough into the medical profession. Examining this reciprocity from different angles, Strong-Boag shows it to have had many dimensions. For example, the notion of women's uniquely nurturing instincts was used to justify women's attempt to break into medicine at the same time it conveniently meshed with some female patients' mistrust of male doctors and a widespread conviction that women doctors would be better with children. Ironically, Strong-Boag observes, the argument from women's distinctive nature as well as the sympathetic commitment to helping their sex whether in

Canada or the missionary field, worked largely to lock female doctors into "the service of women and children" (p. 123) and to block female advancement in the medical profession.

Nonetheless, a few women doctors, as Strong-Boag points out, managed "to base powerful careers" on their commitment to mothers and infants (p. 124). One such was Dr. Helen MacMurchy who headed, within the new federal Department of Health, the Division of Child Welfare from its founding in 1919 until her retirement in 1933. MacMurchy's career figures in Suzann Buckley's astute examination of efforts in Canada from the 1880s into the 1920s "to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality." Buckley posits an accord between the societal expectation and the socialized self-image of "the respectable female reformer" "to accept the role of mother of society" and to restrict her activities to "matters affecting children and mothers" (pp. 133-4). One such matter was the high rate of infant and maternal mortality which could be traced in part to the inadequate pre- and post-natal care in many areas of rural Canada. Buckley's study casts light on the opposition to one solution to the problem: an increase in medical personnel through widespread use of mid-wives. Doctors, female as well as male, opposed it out of fear of economic competition and desire to preserve a monopoly in obstetrics. Nurses opposed it out of anxiety over their precarious professional status, so dependent on their dissociation from domestic work which mid-wives stooped to do. Buckley rightly emphasizes the hamstringing effect these "complex professional rivalries" had on reform efforts in the area of infant and maternal care (p. 149).

If Buckley's essay focusses on restraints, Wendy Mitchinson's lucid "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism" demonstrates how organized middle-class "Canadian women were able to use what some historians have seen as restrictive concepts to extend and exert their power in society" (p. 167). Mitchinson has discovered a

kind of dialectical process at work in comfortable urban homes of late 19th-century Canada where the mother-child relationship intensified as fertility declined and a cult of domesticity emerged as reduced child-bearing gave middle-aged women new leisure. One result was women's coming together to form organizations, not to repudiate the home, but to apply maternal traits and housekeeping skills to the uplift and clean-up of the larger society. One such organization was the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Mitchinson argues that it was opposition to their cause which impressed the WCTU women with their political powerlessness and led them in the 1890s to take up the fight for female enfranchisement not "as a right owed to them as individuals, but as a useful means by which to meet their feminine responsibility—the care of the family" (p. 158).

The last two chapters take the reader into the history of British emigration and Canadian immigration. Joy Parr's " 'Transplanting from Dens of Iniquity': Theology and Child Emigration" is an incisive "exploration of the links between theology and the formulation of Christian social action" (p. 172), in particular the link between evangelical revivalism and child rescue work. As a study of evangelicals, many of whom were female, and the "rescued" children, girls as well as boys, it contributes importantly to our knowledge of women's past experience. For the full story readers are referred to Parr's recently published *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, Eighteen Sixty-Nine to Nineteen Twenty-Four* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1980).

Barbara Roberts' " 'A Work of Empire': Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration" sketches the process whereby British single women, sent overseas by emigration societies, were received in Canada and dispatched to employment mainly as domestic servants and farm-helps." The Canadian women "immigrationists" were largely motivated, Roberts maintains, by imperialism, in the sense of the desire to populate Canada with good British stock, and by a

bourgeois interest in domestic help. Many of the details of this chapter in the history of Canadian immigration, however, still need to be filled in.

If Canadian women's role in reform from the 1880s to the 1920s is the main theme of the book, the relationship between feminism and female reformers figures as a sub-theme in all but Parr's chapter. The various articles take their places in an ongoing historiographical debate on the history of feminism, its origins, its changing nature, the reasons for its rise and fall. These essays merit serious consideration for their probing of the questions and hence advancement of the debate.

The debate, of course, is still open. Confusions still becloud it; many questions remain unanswered. One concerns the very definition of the term feminism. In her Introduction, Kealey informs us that "'Feminism' itself became a widely used term only in the 1890s" (p. 7). Would that she had given us a definition from the period. Instead she immediately proceeds to explain that "feminism" has been used in the book to refer "to a perspective which recognizes the right of women not only to an increased public role, but also to define themselves autonomously." Gorham reasons that the notion of female autonomy functioned in Flora MacDonald Denison's decision to call herself a feminist (p. 59). But is that how most people from the period used the term?

Without providing an answer to that question, Kealey discusses the distinction the U.S. historians Aileen Kraditor and William O'Neill have drawn between an earlier generation of equal rights feminists, who appealed to the 18th-century notion of inalienable human rights, and a later one of "social feminists" who invoked the notion of unique female characteristics to justify women's participation in the public sphere, particularly as social reformers. After a brief review of Daniel Scott Smith's idiosyncratic use of the term "domestic feminism" to refer to an alleged increase in women's power and autonomy within the Victorian American family, Kealey announces that the term "maternal

feminism" will predominate in the following essays. This term expresses feminists' emphasis on the innate nurturing qualities of all women to support their claim to participation in the public sphere.

An exaggerated dichotomy between "maternal" and equal rights feminism creates certain problems. Kealey's phraseology at one point has the two in a survival of the fittest struggle: "Feminism based on the natural rights argument quickly disappeared in Canada under the onslaught of maternal feminism" (p. 9). The chronology of Wayne Roberts' article rests on an assumed sharp antithesis between "basic notions of equality and independence" and "maternal feminism" (p. 19), but the very evidence he adduces challenges his claim that the suffrage or increased educational and employment opportunities for women were ever desired exclusively as abstract human rights. In Strong-Boag's account, "almost without exception the first women [medical] students pledged themselves" not only to "the improvement of their world" but also "to the assistance of their sex" which meant mothers in some large proportion of cases. Is it an unrealistic expectation of logical rigour or an unconscious reference to the human male as normative that makes the combination of an assertion of female equality with a concern over motherhood appear "schizoid" (p. 34)?

The conflicting claims of equality and female difference have bedeviled the women's movement from the start. That issue also creates difficulties for historians of feminism. Lavigne, Pinard and Stoddart see the FNSHB's demand for female political equality as inherently in contradiction to their demand for "more extensive protective legislation for women's work" (p. 85). Bacchi's article associates promotion of protective legislation with bourgeois blindness to the working woman's necessity, not choice, to be employed. For Strong-Boag, who rightly does not expect logical consistency from human experience, the picture is less cut and dried. She presents her women doctors as "confident of women's equal but distinctive nature" and "like other

feminists . . . divided over the question of equality or protection for the female worker" (p. 126).

The hypothetical in history is always problematic, but a cross-cultural comparison might give a new perspective to Wayne Roberts' hypothesis that if Canadian socialism had been stronger and more "working women" suffragists, "maternal feminism" would not have got so sure a foothold in the Toronto suffrage movement. One recent study of socialist feminists in the German Social Democratic Party during the same period reveals them to have been as committed to the exaltation of motherhood and to the notion of unique female characteristics as many a bourgeois feminist.<sup>3</sup>

The very term "maternal feminism" has serious limitations. In the Introduction, Kealey defines it as the "conviction that woman's special role as mother [not her position as wife] gives her the duty and the right" to enter the public sphere (p. 7). That covers the phenomenon of "social mothering." But what about the conception of "social housekeepers?" Does housekeeping derive more from motherhood than wifehood? In such instances the term "domestic feminism" could perhaps have been called into service had it not been pre-empted by Daniel Scott Smith. When "maternal feminism" is contrasted with a feminism that calls for female autonomy there seems to be the implication that "true" feminists would not have concerned themselves with motherhood or addressed themselves to women as mothers. That is, to say the least, an ahistorical expectation. More ingenuity is required to account for the few feminists who challenged the prevailing social and material conditions of child-bearing and child rearing, as Gorham does for Flora MacDonald Denison. But even that unorthodox Canadian feminist, according to Gorham's account, would qualify as a maternal feminist insofar as "Both in theory and from her own experience, motherhood appeared to her to be fundamentally different from fatherhood" (p. 65) and a major source of happiness in her life.

Finally, I have difficulty with two qualifiers used in

combination with feminism. What do Lavigne, Pinard and Stoddart mean by Catholic feminism? And is "constrained" the word to describe the feminism of Strong-Boag's women doctors? I ask the latter because her article depicts women who were so strongly motivated by "feminist sympathies" that some dedicated their lives to helping their downtrodden sisters of other cultures.

The above questioning will testify, it is hoped, to the importance of this collection. No one seriously interested in the history of Canadian feminism or the history of *Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, could afford to ignore *A Not Unreasonable Claim*.

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#### NOTES

1. Recently Naomi Black did this book's potential readers an unreasonable disservice. In a review published in the *Status of Women News*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Winter 1979-80), Black dismissed six of the chapters as well as the Introduction for subscribing to a viewpoint with which she disagrees and discussed only two of the remaining three in sufficient detail to inform anyone of their content. Furthermore, she committed a possible violation of copyright, certainly an irresponsible disservice to the authors, editor and publisher, by implying that "the non-historian" need not buy the book but only "borrow or copy" the three articles deemed interpretatively correct.
2. The French version appears in *Les Femmes dans la Société Québécoise: Aspects historiques*, ed. by Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard (Montreal: Les éditions du Boreal Express, 1977), pp. 89-108.
3. Jean H. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 90-106.