

THE WARTIMES ELECTIONS ACT OF 1917 AND

THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

by Gloria Geller

The War-Time Elections Act of 1917 gave the Federal Franchise to Canadian women who were British subjects, twenty-one years of age and over, who had close relatives in the Canadian or British armed forces. This same Act disfranchised all conscientious objectors and persons originating from enemy countries who had become naturalized Canadians after 1902. The major issue fought in this election was conscription. The Conservative Government of Robert Borden formed a coalition with pro-conscription Liberals and appealed for a united front under the umbrella of the Union Party. In opposition were the leader of the Liberal Party, Wilfred Laurier, and other anti-conscription MP's, most of



Sir Robert Borden

them from Quebec and the Maritimes. While history has had a considerable amount to say about the conscription issue, it is not common knowledge that Borden passed this momentous Act enfranchising some women while disfranchising naturalized citizens in order to ensure that his Party would be returned to office and that conscription would indeed become Canadian policy. While it is true that all Canadian women with the requisite qualifications were granted the federal franchise in the spring of 1918, only a few months after the War-Time Elections Act was passed, it is important to examine the Borden measure to determine what meaning it held for the women's movement in Canada at the time. How did the women of Canada, particularly those who were active in the women's movement, react to this measure?

Several women's organizations had been concerned with women's political, legal, economic and social status in various parts of the country for as much as forty years. By September 1917 the women of the five provinces west of Quebec had won the provincial franchise. In order to fully understand this situation, it is necessary to discuss the orientations of a number of key women's organizations and of several influential women who held leadership positions in the women's movement at the time.

It is possible to discern several clearly-defined areas of concern in the

Canadian women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These concerns can be identified within the very organizations women formed to represent their interests in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Four organizations representative of these various orientations are: the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Council of Women of Canada, the Canadian Suffrage Association and the Manitoba Political Equality League--one provincial and three national organizations.

The major orientation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was always clearly expressed. In 1895 Henrietta Muir Edwards talking to the women at the WCTU Annual Convention stated:

Our women as a whole will never move to get it (the vote) as a right. Women may pay too dearly sometimes for their rights, but no sacrifice is too great for duty. When our Christian women are stirred with the truth that it is every woman's duty to seek the Franchise for the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom, the good of her country and the protection of her home, then we will soon get it.(1)

In 1904, Mrs. S.G.E. McKee told the Convention:

Why must we always be singing the same old song? If we dropped every other department in our organization, and worked for woman's enfranchisement, we should be farther

ahead in ten years than we will be in fifty years without it. Let us rise to this question of privilege and not rest until it is settled right.(2)

Women who saw themselves as good Christians and temperance workers were appealed to on these criteria in order to gain the franchise for themselves. The reason they required the vote was to reform and to improve society, but mostly, to stamp out liquor. It was not, then, to gain equality or improve their own status politically, or for any other feminist cause, but rather to extend their traditional role as a "good" influence, as caring for others, as a duty to God and country, which enabled these women to demand anything as radical as women's suffrage.* And indeed in many parts of the country when the franchise was granted to women, prohibition acts were frequently passed as well. To many there was a close connection between granting the ballot to women and prohibition. It was assumed that when women could vote prohibition would be secured for all time.

*This is not to deny that women and children suffered terribly from the effects the consumption of alcohol had on men and the fact that women had no legal rights and were therefore dependent upon men who drank their wages away, took out their anger on the women and children, etc.

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCW) from its very beginnings was believed to be a suffrage society due to the fact that the American founders of the international organization were suffragists. Lady Aberdeen, the first President of the Canadian National Council of Women, clarified the matter at the first Annual Meeting by declaring that Council was "not dedicated to any one propaganda" and that its aim was simply "mothering," thereby allaying the fears of anyone, including Council members, that woman suffrage was to be part of Council's platform.(3) After a prolonged discussion on woman suffrage in which questions as to whether woman suffrage was in accord with Council's constitution, whether members of the NCW would be alienated, whether the sympathy, assistance and influence of men would be lost, were raised, a woman suffrage resolution was passed in 1910.(4) From then on Council was represented on numerous delegations appealing to provincial and federal governments for the enfranchisement of women.

Although the founders of the international movement were ardent feminists and suffragists and even Lady Aberdeen had represented suffrage organizations at the 1893 meeting in Chicago of the international organization, the subsequent Canadian organization was considerably more conservative. Lady Aberdeen, the wife of the then Governor-General of



Lady Aberdeen, July 1909,
Courtesy of the Public Archives of
Canada

Canada, stressed the application of the Golden Rule to society and the traditional woman's role of "mothering" to be extended to all of society. Two addresses which appear to sum up the concerns and intentions of the women of this organization include the remarks of Rosaline Torrington, President of NCW in 1913:

Through our instrumentality we already see forces being set at work which are benefiting the poor, the weak and the helpless, and which are uniting, in truest patriotism, workers hitherto kept apart by lack of opportunity for contact.

We cannot help the sins of omission and commission of our forefathers, but we are responsible for future generations. Present conditions make the enforcement of existing laws and the enactment of new laws necessary to the effectual carrying out of almost every reform. In this great work of uplifting, the women of Canada have definite and personal responsibilities, and we, as members of the National Council, have accepted these responsibilities.

. . . if we do not succeed immediately in all we try to accomplish, we must not be discouraged, for an important part of our work, that of educating public opinion, is necessarily slow; but having decided, after careful investigation and consideration, to pledge

ourselves to any undertaking, let us work with steady patience and courage until success rewards our efforts.

. . . it seems that in the past we have separated matters pertaining to religion and to the Government of our country too much from work-day life, and that the answer to some of our problems is the uniting of these two most important things with the ordinary affairs of life.
(5)

A second is the Report of the Provincial Vice-President for Ontario, Jennie L. Watkins, who remarked:

. . . one of the greatest problems confronting us as a young nation to-day, is the many types of people who are rapidly coming to us from the nations beyond the sea. How shall these people of diverse tastes, temperaments and trainings, be assimilated and be made desirable citizens? How shall they be taught right views on the housing question? How shall we teach them the sacredness of the ballot? How shall the women and children of these incoming peoples be given the high social and moral ideals which are so dear to the hearts of all true Canadians? Our towns and cities in Canada are bristling with problems of this kind, and surely our Council of Women could not incorporate and emphasize a more important subject than this. (6)

These NCW women, who twenty years before had rarely ever ventured beyond their

traditional sphere, the home, sought out those areas which they believed suitable for themselves to handle and began to carve out their own empire. It is not mere chance that they chose the areas they did, nor is it mere chance that they were allowed to take on these concerns. The expansion of the population, creation of towns and cities and the social problems which a newly industrialized society engendered, meant that there were many problems to be handled. The low wages, health problems and misery which accompanied these phenomena stretched the bounds of the existent charitable organizations and neither business nor government were prepared to deal with the problems the system was spewing out. A vacuum was left which women, because of their socialization, religious training and education, were more than ready to deal with. They played a "mopping-up," band-aid function, an essential role in pre-welfare state days, in a burgeoning individualistically oriented capitalist society. This function indeed satisfied the needs of everyone-- everyone except the poor, the immigrant, the oppressed underclass and ultimately, woman, herself. While being involved in these activities, the woman could maintain her position as wife/daughter/mother to middle-class males and yet move outside the home, exerting some degree of power over those in distress, exercising the skills and education which she could not use in the labour force. She was able to do a considerable amount of useful work for the

society and research for the government for which she was not paid and she was performing an important service by freeing her husband/father from having to deal with the dirty work, while still (because her values were much the same as his) imposing upon the under-class the middle-class values the State, the Church and Business desired to see maintained.

The origins of the Canadian Suffrage Association (CSA) may be traced to the Toronto Women's Literary Club founded in 1876 by Dr. Emily Stowe. The Club's aims were to educate women to an awareness of their position in society as well as to agitate for social reform. Suffrage became its major concern when the Club transformed itself into the Toronto Women's Suffrage Club in 1883 and finally into a national organization, the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (later renamed the Canadian Suffrage Association) in 1889. A rival organization to the CSA, the National Equal Franchise League, was formed by Constance A. Hamilton, due it appears, to major ideological conflicts with the women in the CSA.*

*In the F.M. Denison Collection there is a letter indicating that the Equal Franchise League of Toronto "has displayed a spirit of antagonism to the Chief National Officers (of CSA), and since its affiliation its members have adopted ob-

Indeed there was a great proliferation of suffrage groups during the height of suffrage activity when as many as eight organizations could be found in Toronto alone at one time. It seems likely that this proliferation came about, in part at least, due to disagreements about strategies to be taken in attempting to obtain the franchise.(7) The CSA really was interested in women developing themselves qua women and gaining rights for themselves as members of society.

There is considerable evidence as to the orientations of individual suffragists involved in the CSA and similar suffrage groups. The leading members, in particular, were professional or business women who lived in urban centres. Dr. Emily Stowe, her daughter, Dr. Augusta Stowe Gullen, Dr. Margaret Gordon and Flora MacDonald Denison, as well as others, were frequent lecturers and authors on the subject of woman suffrage and women's rights. They were very optimistic about the benefits that would accrue from women's contribution to the greater society once they were given

structive tactics which were inimicable to the harmonious co-operation of the Executive Council and an absolute detriment to progressive work." The Executive Council of the CSA voted to rescind the Equal Franchise League's affiliation with CSA. (March 1914--Manuscript Collection 51, FM Denison Collection).

equal access to the public sector along with men. They had a high level of social consciousness and were frequently critical of capitalist industrial society and of government, especially party politics. They were concerned about the plight of the poor, the immigrant, children and women. However, they too suffered from a degree of prejudice against the "illiterate" immigrants coming to Canada who would soon have the right to vote while educated Canadian women lacked this right. They felt that government had taken over much of the responsibility that had once been woman's in the home so that women had no choice but to enter the political field and to participate in, and influence the "social housekeeping" of, society. They also indicated an understanding of the realities of the lives of the large number of women who had to care for themselves. They were able to see through some of the mythology of romance to the realities of being a housewife. They poked ascerbically at anti-suffragist arguments that proclaimed that the home would fall apart if women got the vote.

These women wrote pamphlets and newspaper articles and gave lectures to educate the public to appreciate their concern. A CSA leaflet entitled "Why Women Need the Vote" argued that women should have the right to vote: Because no race or class or sex can have its interests properly safeguarded in the Legislature of a country unless it is represented by direct suffrage.

Because women, whose special care is the home, find that questions intimately affecting the home are being settled in Parliament, where they are not represented. Such questions include housing, education, the death rate of infants, vaccination, the employment of children, sweating, the labor of married women, unemployment, the care of the aged, and many other matters. (8)

In a lecture given in St. John, New Brunswick, Flora MacDonald Denison stated:

No matter what line of reform, women are laboring to obtain, they are handicapped by not having the power to vote. Today we are welcoming to our shores thousands of immigrants, most of which are ignorant, illiterate and often the scum of the earth and in a few years they will be empowered to vote and make laws for the women of our land. This is the time to combine and obtain suffrage. (9)

In her column in the Toronto Sunday World of Sunday, September 12, 1909, Denison comments:

. . . a great democratic movement is sweeping over the earth and . . . women are playing a big part in it and will keep on playing an even greater part till universal suffrage, including women, shall be here to stay. (10)

In another column she writes of woman's roles and woman's place:

Woman's duty and woman's sphere are

just where her capabilities are making opportunities for her in nearly all the vocations of life.

Labor is not defined by gender, and washing dishes is no more feminine than the sending of a marconigram is masculine. When the industries such as weaving, knitting, spinning were all done in the home this argument of woman's sphere being in the home had more in its favor than it has today, but the industries left the home, and there is no use discussing whether it would not be much nicer for women to have their own little homes, with their own little babies, and their own little husbands to do everything for them, except cook and wash and scrub and sew and mend and nurse and worry, . . . well perhaps it would, but thousands of women have none of these things, yet they must be clothed and fed and housed, and who is to do it? They must do it themselves and this probably is the lever that is going to raise the race into daylight.

Nature did not divide men and women, human institutions and systems have and a sorry story is the tale they have told. Still the cry is, "If women had the vote the homes would be neglected." (11)

One example of how women in CSA reacted to a challenge to the beliefs and values they held with respect to the behaviour of women may be seen in the following exchange. A Toronto Alderman

suggested that women were becoming degenerate because they were becoming involved in intemperance and in gambling. The newspaper which printed this story called upon leading members of the CSA to respond to Alderman Hales' remarks. Dr. Augusta Stowe Gullen's remarks in part were:

. . . (these women are) a very limited class of women . . . who are not interested in moral or reform issues and seek but the idle gratification of the moment, their idea being the false one of seeking individual happiness, unappreciative of the good of humanity.

. . . could not the efforts of Mr. Hales be better employed by remedying the vices of men. . . . If Alderman Hales did voice the truth, then, if so, with man lies the responsibility for having withheld opportunities from women.

Flora MacDonald Denison commented:

. . . who are they? Not the women who are interested in the social betterment of the race, not business women, not professional women, but women in domestic circles, but the pampered society women on one hand and the prostitute class on the other, who are gambling and drinking because they have money furnished them by men. After all, the men are paying dear to keep up the class of women they have been fools enough to encourage. Finally, these unfortunate remarks were



Augusta Stowe-Gullen, Courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada

more wisely followed by those of Dr. Margaret Gordon, who stated:

. . . it is not a very complimentary statement to the character of the women of Toronto. He had better watch and improve the morals of men before he attacks the actions of women. I heartily endorse the temperance workers, but do not think it (sic) is aided by attacking the women of our fair city.(12)

Perhaps the best known of the early feminists is Nellie McClung. A member of a suffrage organization called the Manitoba Political Equality League (MPEL), her numerous interests typify the various strands of reformist thought of the time. She was a pro-

hibitionist, a feminist, a Canadian nationalist and a Christian social reformer all at once. While she strongly believed that women had the ability and the right to live fully in the world, she stated that she believed that women's major satisfaction came from motherhood. This unique woman who argued against war toys and in favour of women having control over their own bodies, also believed that women were morally superior to men and, even if they were given the opportunity, women would not drink.

Another perspective is that of Francis Marion Beynon, Manitoba feminist and MPEL member, who was the woman's editor of the Grain Growers Guide. Her column, "The Country Homemakers" held a strange mixture of suffragist and social reformist and socialist thought, letters to the editor, excerpts from other papers and journals, along with "how to" advice on homemaking. The Guide which was a very influential Western paper entered the homes of many Westerners. Beynon's column, then, in a part of the world where people lived in remote, isolated communities, can be seen as having had a significant influence on the ideas and values of the women of the West. Beynon's views are those of a radical thinker. It would appear that she was very much influenced by socialist thought and that this is the orientation she used in her analysis of the society in which she lived. Beynon's opinions on the war were radically different from those held by many

other suffragists. One source maintains that it was Beynon's pacifist stance which led to her leaving the Guide in August 1917.(13)

In general most of the suffragists were relatively well-to-do women. Many had attended private schools and had received university educations. Those who worked belonged to the professions; many were doctors. They had both the time and the money to dedicate to causes other than the immediate problem of existence. Women in the CSA were professional women who did not have to rationalize why they should have equal rights in society. The founder of the movement, Emily Stowe, came from a Quaker background, which proclaimed equality between the sexes. Sophisticated, educated, and well-travelled, these women, who sought what they believed to be right for themselves, held a unique position in society. They had a considerable degree of economic independence, something that relatively few middle and upper-middle class women of the time had. As they moved out into the society, gaining more self-assurance, the fact that they could support themselves as well as the psychological strength they were gaining in their endeavour to improve their position in society, enabled them to make demands that most Canadian women could not make. These self-supporting women were less likely to couch their demands in "appropriate" terms that indicated either that they were not

doing it for themselves or that it was their "duty," that is, that it fell well within their traditional female role. Some CSA and MPEL women came closest to having a radical perspective, particularly women like Margaret Gordon and Francis Beynon. However, their strength was largely dissipated

by the phenomenal effort they put forth to gain woman suffrage. The unity of the movement was dissolved by the division which arose around the war effort and the Union Government took advantage of this breach by airing it publicly for the entire nation.



Nellie McClung, Courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada

The War and the Woman's Movement

When the war broke out, the CSA executive would not, unlike the British suffragettes, set aside their suffrage campaign. Dr. Margaret Gordon, President of the CSA, headed the Peace and Arbitration Committee of the Toronto Local Council of Women. Laura Hughes led a group she described as "our Woman's Peace Party." On the other hand, the Suffrage War Auxiliary evolved from Equal Franchise Red Cross teas at which Nellie McClung recommended to the women that they could knit while they discussed the suffrage. Constance Hamilton took the lead in founding the Auxiliary which was made up of individuals dedicated to the war effort. Hamilton, President of the National Equal Franchise Union, denounced the CSA for failing to do its share in the war effort and for its connection with pacificists.(14) Margaret Gordon and Flora MacDonald Denison did not belong to the Auxiliary. They led a delegation to Ontario's Premier Hearst and stated that if women had had the vote there would have been no war and if German women had had the vote, the major business of Germany would not have been militarism.(15) Francis Beynon and Helen Gutteridge, who wrote for the B.C. Federationist, praised Jane Addams for organizing an International Congress of Women to discuss the possibility of peace. Most Canadian women, however, felt that talking of peace was premature. The National Committee for Patriotic Service which claimed to represent all

women's organizations issued a manifesto stating that Canadian women would not embarrass their rulers by demands for a premature and illusory peace.(16)

Thus, Canada's participation in the war effort drove a wedge in the already fragmented suffrage movement. Francis Beynon was perhaps the most outspoken pacifist of all the suffragists. In an article entitled "Preparedness" (April 19, 1916), Beynon wrote that at the beginning of the war, economists and other "good-hearted" people spoke of the fact that this was a "war to kill war." (17) Mothers believed that they were sending their sons to fight for once and for all. Now, however, she wrote, even economists who were pacifists were admitting that this was not the final war. On the contrary there were signs that the present war "is only a little preliminary scuffle which would be followed by wars of increasing frightfulness as the genius of man is bent more and more to the monstrous task of creating instruments of human slaughter." American "militarists" were insisting that the way to prepare for peace was to be ready to fight. Britain and Germany had been saying this for fifty years and both had been preparing as hard as they could and "the result is not peace but war." Beynon expressed her concern for the fact that capitalists were making profit "out of the slaughter of their fellow beings." (November 22, 1916) She suggested that a cure for war would be to "prevent capitalists investing money in foreign countries

and then stirring up war so as to bring that foreign country under their own government and make their investment more profitable; to stop governments carrying on secret diplomacy and then suddenly springing a war upon the people without their knowledge or consent; . . ." (18) Beynon, along with many others at the time, maintained that wealth should be conscripted rather than, or at least, prior to the conscription of men. She analyzed the meaning of "flag-waving" and patriotism, saying that for working men and women the way of living represented by the flag of Canada was "anything but the perfect and sacred thing, it is to the rich and well-to-do." She stated that among the most fervent patriots were men who were getting rich on sweated labour and war profiteering. "And when they say it is disgraceful that these men should refuse to be conscripted to fight for a way of living that means absolute misery for them, and more and more luxury for the capitalist until the capitalists' wealth has first been conscripted, they are worse than hypocrites." (19)

Finally, Beynon decried the enthusiasm exhibited by the National Council of Women for military training in the schools. This proved, she believed, that they did not believe that this was the final war. Training of this type and the ideals accompanying it led to subservience to authority by young boys. In her critique she stated that the ideas which would lead to peace

rather than to war would not be acted upon because there was no profit in it for those who "grow financially fat out of the slaughter of human beings." (20) In her article entitled "Freedom" she expressed her fears that Canadians are really not very concerned about this concept. An announcement of a pro-conscription meeting included a warning that the organizers could not be responsible for anything that might happen to anti-conscriptionists who attempted to attend the meeting and that the organizers of this meeting would not permit anti-conscriptionist meetings to be held in Winnipeg. Under these circumstances, Beynon maintained, liberty could not be said to exist. (21) Beynon left the Guide and Canada in the summer of 1917.

Differences which undoubtedly were always present and which were evident in the proliferation of suffrage groups within any one city became sharply defined during the war. CSW women, Beynon and no doubt others presently unknown, were strong pacifists. This attitude spilled over onto the suffrage issue but also onto the possibility of the disfranchisement of Canadian citizens originating from "enemy" countries. The suffrage problem erupted in the "Country Homemakers" pages when Beynon publicly denounced an action taken by Nellie McClung, and McClung's response to the denunciation was printed in a later issue of the Guide. Beynon advised her readers that Nellie McClung, upon meeting Sir Robert Borden in

Winnipeg, had suggested to the Prime Minister that the federal franchise be granted only to British and Canadian born women and that foreign born women be excluded. Beynon pointed out that McClung was speaking for herself only and not for the "organized women of the suffrage provinces." Beynon stated that "the foreign born women are here largely as the result of the colonization program of the Dominion Government. They have come at our own urgent invitation and they will suffer just as great an injustice as we have done in the past if their point of view does not find expression in the government of the country." (22) McClung explained that since many English speaking men had enlisted, leaving in some districts only Austrians and Germans in full numbers along with persons of other nationalities, it meant that the right of English-speaking women whose men had gone to fight "has become indisputable and imperative." She, as an individual, was suggesting a war measure only; "a partial franchise seems to me better than none, and opens the way for the full measure." Stating that she did not wish to divide their forces and that she put woman suffrage above all personal considerations, she withdrew her suggestion of a partial franchise. (23) Beynon's response was conciliatory, accepting McClung's withdrawal of her proposal. In the meantime, the Manitoba Political Equality League went on record as opposing the limiting of the franchise to Canadian and British born women. (24) And there, of course,

the episode should have ended but McClung's suggestion was just the one that the Borden Government needed. Both the enfranchisement of some women and the disfranchisement of some men had been suggested well before the War-Time Elections Act was officially presented to Parliament in September 1917.

The War-Time Elections Act

Early in August 1917, three women, at the request of the Government, sent a telegram to a number of women across Canada in an attempt to determine whether it would be advisable to grant the full franchise to women at the forthcoming election. They found that a limited franchise would be desirable rather than full franchise. The telegram, dated August 2, 1917, read as follows:

Can you ascertain opinion of outstanding reliable women in your district with regard to the following question: Would the granting of the Federal franchise to women make conscription assured at the general election, if such is inevitable, taking carefully into consideration the vote of foreign women? Highly important that we should have this information, or at least some idea of the trend of women's opinion on this question. Please glean your information as quietly as possible. Telegraph results not later than Monday, 6th, . . .

Mrs. Torrington
Mrs. L.A. Hamilton
Mrs. Albert Gooderham(25)*

Mrs. Gooderham, President of the Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), explained that the telegram was sent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. She said that they got the information in order to determine how they could help the men at the front. The August issue of the NCW's paper Woman's Century, discussed the issue as it appeared to a segment of the female population. The fear that conscription might not go through was uppermost in the minds of NCW contributors. Democracy and full female suffrage were only secondary concerns. The question of the federal franchise was raised also during Win-the-War meetings in Toronto. Concern was shown as to whether it would be advisable for the franchise to be granted because of the foreign woman voter and also if Quebec women were enfranchised, they might vote "unfavorable to conscription." The President of the National Equal Franchise League called an informal conference of leaders of women's organizations and telegrams were sent to "outstanding"

women across the country to determine their opinions. The conclusion was reached that granting of the franchise would imperil conscription. The information was forwarded to the Prime Minister and he was told that the women were prepared to waive the franchise. However, it was suggested, the vote should be granted to mothers, wives and sisters of men at the front or in training or given only to women in those provinces already holding provincial franchise with the understanding that "although unfortunately New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island would not be included Quebec being omitted would safeguard the conscription so far as women are concerned."(26)

A Win-the-War delegation visited Ottawa, including the President of the National Council of Women, the President of the National Equal Franchise Union, the Editor of Woman's Century and a representative of the WCTU. The women met with the Premier who discussed with them the "difficulties which surround the granting of the Franchise at the present juncture."(27) Woman's Century stated that it concurred with the decision reached by the members of the conference. It noted that information was constantly being received by the paper which pointed to the dangers of granting citizen rights to people of alien birth. Naturalized Canadians of German birth had been found fighting overseas for Germany. "Once a German, always a German, and once imbued with

* These women were leading members of the National Council of Women, the Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire and the Win-the-War League.

the German principles of morality, such instances prove that no Canadian ideals will rule, even though a Canadian freedom should be granted." Canadian women, therefore, were willing to forego their franchise to ensure that "German ideals and German domination . . . (would be) . . . impossible in Canadian citizenship."(28)

The War-Time Elections Act, which was a war measure to be rescinded after the war, denied the franchise to conscientious objectors and those born in enemy countries who had been naturalized since 1902. It bestowed the franchise on women who were British subjects, 21 years of age or over, who had a close relative serving in the armed forces of Britain or Canada. The debate was limited to four days as closure was used to push the bill through. The Government's action and that of the self-appointed guardians of the War Cause raised a considerable stir across the country as well as in Parliament. Very few people were outrightly supportive of the action, stating that this rather undesirable measure should be a short term one only and that as soon as possible, women should be given the franchise under the same conditions as men. Those who were angry were not always angry about the same thing. It was felt that women of British background who had given their service to the war effort, were being severely slighted. Others maintained that the women in the five provinces who had the provincial franchise were

being disfranchised federally. Borden maintained that they did not have this right. Others called it a political act meant to return the Borden government to office, no more, no less.

Those women who supported Borden and were instrumental in determining the nature of the Act itself were, as noted above, Mrs. A.E. Gooderham, President of the I.O.D.E. (Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire), Mrs. L.A. Hamilton, Chairman, Women's Section of the Win-the-War League and President, National Equal Franchise Union, Mrs. F.H. Torrington, President of the National Council of Women. Other supporters were Mrs. A.B. Ormsby, President of the Ontario Women's Citizenship Association and Mrs. E.A. Stevens, President, W.C.T.U. of Ontario. In a public letter addressed to Sir Robert Borden, the Mrs. Hamilton, Torrington, Gooderham and Stevens pledged Canadian women's unquestioning support of limited enfranchisement as a war measure. Women across Canada responded in anger to this open letter stating that although they were members of one or the other organizations these various spokeswomen represented, they had not been consulted by their presidents. In a letter to the Globe Constance Hamilton stated her concerns that the "arm of Germany's determination is a long one" and explained that it was a war measure which gave the franchise to women of "obvious loyalty" and that good, loyal women who did not have male relatives of military age may "console

themselves in realizing that they have not been called upon to sacrifice loved ones, and with the knowledge that by their own temporary sacrifice of the privileges of citizenship they prevent the woman slacker from voting."(29)

Dr. Margaret Gordon, President of the CSA, responded to Mrs. Hamilton's letter by calling the bill a disfranchise bill and saying that it was a "win-the-election measure. . . .it would be direct and at the same time more honest if the bill simply stated that all who did not pledge themselves to vote Conservative would be disfranchised. This might be satisfactory to some but it is not a Canadian-born woman's ideal of free government, no can anyone who approves of this disfranchise bill claim to represent Canadian suffragettes."(30)

At the Ontario WCTU Annual Convention of 1917, the Provincial President, Mrs. E.A. Stevens, proclaimed that while "many of us lose the right to vote in an election, is that a great hardship in view of the risk of our women giving a majority against conscription?"(31) However, the following resolution was passed at the Convention:

That we resent the action of the Government in creating an arbitrary distinction among the women of Canada by placing on the books the war-time elections act, whereby many of the loyal women who have made sacrifices in the war are deprived of the right of the franchise through no fault of their own.

Mrs. Stevens, however, undoubtedly had some support for her belief, as the following amendment to the above resolution was also carried:

The Convention thank Sr. Robert Borden for establishing the principle of woman franchise but reaffirm their belief in the principle of the equality of the sexes before the law, and respectfully urge that the franchise should be granted to women on the same basis as it is to men.(32)

Francis Beynon, in a letter to the Winnipeg Voice, described the forthcoming election as a "fight of democracy against Canadian militarism, Canadian capitalism, and the Canadian press." She criticized the War-Time Elections Act for its position on woman's suffrage and for the disfranchisement of the alien male population: "That monstrous act of injustice has already raised bitter race hatred which will endure for generations."(33) Mary P. McCallum, Francis Beynon's replacement as woman's editor for the Grain Growers Guide, saw the bill as "evidence of the hold partyism has on politicians." McCallum, however, was no Francis Beynon. What disturbed her was that the bill was "classing the thousands of patriotic women who have sent no relatives to the front with the aliens and the 'conscientious objectors'." McCallum felt that this action was deplorable because "It isn't British fair play."(34) Ultimately, however, she was led to support Borden in the

election since the party "stands for the maintenance of Canada's honourable place among nations and to her own people while the other as surely will see Canada sink gradually into ignominious neutrality which. . . at this time would be little short of an . . . acquiescence with German ideals and methods, . . ." (35)

Augusta Stowe Gullen, in her annual report as Chairman of the Citizenship Committee of NCW, expressed her joy over the fact that women were at long last being accepted in their "rightful" place alongside men in all spheres of life, particularly in the political arena, for which she and others had worked so hard and so long. She noted that at first the War-Time Elections Act "was not appealing" to the majority of suffragists, especially in British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta. "It was thought that the women of Canada were being defrauded of their just rights." The preparations for the election and the election itself convinced many that the Act possessed its "golden as well as silver side." Women who had not previously shown any interest in suffrage were among the supporters and workers "and the still further humorous spectacle of our anti-suffrage friends making speeches on the necessity and importance of women voting; while other anti-suffragists took women to the polls, and acted as scrutineers at the different polling subdivisions--these facts were the last convincing straw." (36) She noted that

British Columbia suffrage societies had protested the passage of the War-Time Elections Act. Ontario women had convened meetings, organized election districts and worked to secure the women's vote. The campaign ended in the great victory of the Union candidates and "continuance of the war to its legitimate conclusion, demonstrating inevitably to all classes that no country can fight without the active cooperation of its women citizens." (37) Stowe-Gullen mentioned with pleasure "the most important step in women's political evolution" in Canada had been the convening of a war council of women at Ottawa on February 28, 1918. In her report she noted that Borden had introduced to Parliament a woman suffrage bill which extended the franchise to all women in Canada having the same qualification as men who had the right to exercise the franchise, on March 21, 1918.

The suffragists had believed that women would rise above partyism but instead they fell into the trap that was set for them. Their own prejudices and their belief in the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon peoples made the trap a fool-proof one. The event of a war drove a wedge between women who had worked together toward the development of a movement. The politicians used a divide and conquer strategy by "confiding" in the leaders of the more conservative organizations, thereby splitting these women off from their own

membership, not to speak of the deep rifts which developed between these women and the women of somewhat more radical bent. As we have seen, it was not simply the older organizations, suffrage or otherwise, that marked the division, but an anti-war stance and a belief in equal rights for all women, even German, even French, against a pro-war stance and a belief that only "loyal" women of British/Canadian origins could be trusted to vote the "right" way. Ultimately, deep-

rooted beliefs which were wedded to a political stance of one kind or another prevented the women from identifying themselves as a class with common concerns and common aims. In feminist terms it can be seen that the women were brought into the political arena to play politics using male politicians' rules and therefore the interests they were fostering were those of the party system they had so frequently stated they abhorred.

NOTES

1. Carol Lee Bacchi-Ferraro, "The Ideas of the Canadian Suffragists, 1890-1920," Unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1970, p.26 (quotation from Dominion WCTU Annual Report, 1895).
2. S.G.E. McKee, Jubilee History of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Whitby, C.A. Goodfellow & Son, n.d.), p.61.
3. Rosa L. Shaw, Proud Heritage (Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1957), p.115.
4. Catherine L. Cleverdon, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1974), p.12.
5. National Council of Women of Canada. The Year Book Containing the Report of the Twentieth Annual Meeting (1913) (Toronto, Parker Bros. Limited, 1913), pp.23, 30, 31.
6. Ibid., p.35.
7. Elsie Gregory MacGill, My Mother, The Judge, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1955. MacGill notes that the Political Equality League of Vancouver split in two over the issue of speaking out from public platforms in the seeking of popular support. The second group became the B.C. Equal Franchise Association. In turn both groups split once again. Her mother, Helen Gregory MacGill, belonged to all the groups. (p.125).
8. F.M. Denison Collection, Manuscript Collection 51, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Roberts Library, University of Toronto.
9. Ibid. 10. Ibid. 11. Ibid. 12. Ibid.
13. Bacchi-Ferraro, p.144. 14. Ibid., pp.114-120.
15. Ibid., p.120. 16. Ibid., pp.120, 121.
17. Francis M. Beynon, "The Country Homemakers," Grain Growers Guide, April 19, 1916.
18. Ibid., Nov. 22, 1916.
19. Ibid., June 13, 1917.
20. Ibid., June 20, 1917.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., Dec. 27, 1916.
23. Ibid., Jan. 24, 1917.
24. Ibid., Feb. 21, 1917.
25. The Globe, Saturday, Sept. 22, 1917.
26. Woman's Century, "Premier Borden and the Federal Franchise: Difficulties Discussed with National Council Women," August, 1917.
27. Ibid. 28. Ibid.
29. The Globe, Letter, Sept. 20, 1917.
30. Ibid., "Dr. Margaret Gordon Replies to Mrs. L.A. Hamilton," Sept. 21, 1917.
31. Ibid., "Ontario WCTU - Annual Convention," Sept. 26, 1917.
32. Ibid., "WCTU Conference - Resolutions," Sept. 28, 1917.
33. Bacchi-Ferraro, p.125.
34. Mary P. McCallum, "The Country Homemakers," Grain Growers Guide, Sept. 19, 1917.
35. Ibid., Dec. 12, 1917.
36. National Council of Women of Canada, The Year Book of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1918, 25th Annual Meeting (Toronto, Bryant Press), p.53.
37. Ibid.