

tures year after year. The women themselves were far from united. Embracing and embraced by an immense variety of causes and goals, the women's movement must have devoted enormous amounts of energy to creating networks and trying to analyse the sources of women's discontent. Perhaps there was little energy left over after the analysis and debate and the organizing were done. Cook and Mitchinson also imply the existence of an immense weight of feminine apathy about women's issues in Canada. One is inclined to label such commentary "blaming the victim," but there is no doubt that it contains a grain of truth. Many women were too busy surviving to respond to the turn of the century women's movement but for many others a measure of upward mobility or material improvement in their lives seems to have produced a complacent mentality that led away from active involvement in any social or political cause. Such are the hidden actors who never appear on the pages of documentary studies but whose importance historians--and modern feminists--neglect at their peril.

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The Parliament of Women The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976. Pp. 487.

Even in the 1970s, the National Council of Women of Canada claims to speak for large numbers of Canadian women. The council's claims have a hollow ring today, but when the organization was founded at the turn of the century it did provide a focal point for a wide spectrum of female activity, both progressive and conservative. The history of the Council's development, from its founding in 1893 until the end of the 1920s is the subject of Veronica Strong-Boag's book The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929. Strong-Boag has provided an important guide to the origins and development of an organization that was central not only to the activities of middle-class Canadian women but also to the development of moderate social reform in Canada.

In her narrative account, Strong-Boag attempts to give a just and balanced assessment of the achievements of the National Council by emphasizing the genuine, concrete contributions it made to Canadian society. However, her overall picture stresses the weaknesses of the organization. The height of the Council's strength and influence occurred in the first few

years after its founding. Since World War I, it has been in a state of decline, a decline that Strong-Boag explains by an analysis of the limitations and weaknesses of the organization's ideology.

Strong-Boag places the National Council of Women of Canada in the tradition of North American Progressivism and she reiterates an indictment of progressivism that has become popular among both American and Canadian his-



Committee of the National Council of Women, October, 1898. Courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada.

torians during the last few decades. Progressivism, according to this interpretation, was severely limited by the middle-class origins of its major participants: although these participants may have defined themselves as "progressive," they were, in fact, intelligent conservative reformers, working to bolster the existing economic system.

Strong-Boag analyses the position of the most interesting council members in this way. Moreover, she demonstrates that the Council's work was further limited by the views of those member organizations and individuals who defined themselves as conservative rather than as progressive. The Council's usefulness was also limited by the narrow base from which it drew both leadership and membership. The Ontario-based, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestant nature of its membership was more important in determining the positions it held about Canadian social reform than the fact that it was an organization of women. As an organization of women, Strong-Boag demonstrates that the Council's policy was one that accepted the conventional Victorian image of women. Although the organizations that made up the Council were designed to be active in the public sphere, these public activities were defined in a way that did not challenge the bourgeois view that women's proper sphere was the private world of the family. Public activity was seen as an extension of the mater-

nal role. Thus, the National Council of Women of Canada was non-feminist in ideology, in that it in no way advocated autonomy for women. To sum up, the Council emerges from Strong-Boag's account as the ladies' auxiliary of the class that controlled Canada.

The Parliament of Women is useful and informative, providing the reader with an outline of the history of the National Council of Women and also with an introduction to the history of the development of a middle-class style of life for women in Canada. However, the book does have some important weaknesses. These weaknesses stem in part from the fact that the author has tried to do too much. Her narrative covers such a lengthy period that we are offered only contours and are left with a desire to know more at many crucial points. Her interpretation of the ideology of the Council is also not entirely satisfactory. While her explanations for the weaknesses of the Council are plausible, her interpretation is neither as well developed nor as original as it might have been. Although this is a work of greater scope, it is not nearly as polished or as incisive as the author's excellent introduction to the University of Toronto's recent reprint of Nellie McClung's In Times Like These. Some of the weaknesses may be explained by the fact that the book as published is Strong-Boag's Ph.D. dissertation, printed with little or no revision. Although we should be grateful to the

author and to the National Museum of Man for providing us with a useful book, both author and publisher would have been well advised to have delayed publication while the author worked on some revisions to her manuscript.

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A Harvest Yet To Reap A History of Prairie Women. Linda Rasmussen et al. (eds.). Toronto: The Women's Press. Pp. 240.

The epigraph which introduces A Harvest Yet to Reap quotes Nellie McClung, who vowed that she "would write it from their side of the fence." Like the four authors of the book, she was indignant that common lives remained unrecorded, deemed insignificant. Women's experiences, gathered from the writings of the elite and non-elite who lived them and the men who observed them, are linked by Candace Savage's introductions to each of the volume's seven chapters. The quotations from primary sources and the reproductions of photographs form a history of white women in the prairie provinces--"a collective history from the tangle of individual experiences." A Harvest Yet to Reap is also a search by its authors for contemporary women's place in a continuum. They sought foremothers, a his-

tory of their own, in women whom they believed were not merely assistants of men engaged in "real life," they found spiritual resources in the details of rural women's life cycles and personal experiences. Expecting quaintness, they found heroines in seemingly unlikely places, among the people who do the work of the world.

We began to realize how powerful our image of the past had been in limiting our sense of our own possibilities. There is strength in the knowledge that among our foremothers were women who confronted their pain and frustration with sincerity and intelligence, just as we try to meet our own. As prairie women, we are part of a tradition, rooted in the past. (p.9)

The first section, "Moving West," describes the harsh conditions under which migrating women had to work. Sought by men like Clifford Sifton, who demanded quality in the shape of stout wives with six children, by marriage agencies offering a prospect better than "living and dying as old maids," by bachelors desperate for company, food and an extra pair of hands, they came. They were deceived: promised prosperity, the prairie ate them instead. Homes were sodden huts, failures frequent, larders meager. Nonetheless, this evidence indicates that some of the women felt that they were fulfilling a special destiny,