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### **From Suffrage to Sufferance**

The history of women's suffrage and progression has taken an inordinant amount of time to reach fruition and is stymied with history repeating itself, says the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ).

Whether we consider the first call in British history for women to receive the vote by the Leveller women (1649), or the first published article (1869) in New Zealand by Mary Ann Müller appealing to the men of New Zealand to give women the vote; for the vast majority of women such ambitions were not achieved in their lifetimes.

"On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September we celebrate Suffrage Day – New Zealand women being the first to gain the vote one hundred and sixteen years ago," said Elizabeth Bang, NCWNZ National President. "But today, we mark this day as the drawing of the line in the sand which ushers in the acceleration of women progressing to meet men on equal standing in all facets of life in New Zealand, irrespective of a recessive economic environment."

During the Depression of the 1930's, NCWNZ records the role of women was generally seen as secondary, supportive, family-focused – 'making ends met'. The position of working women, and especially unemployed women, was largely ignored in the national records. The proposed Unemployment Bill of 1930 made no provision for women.

NCWNZ women stated:

*"That the freedom to live and develop along the lines of their natural aptitude and choice is the birthright of both men and women.*

*That the attempt bow being made to adjust economic difficulty by discharging women from lucrative employment is a denial of this birthright and presents only a false solution of the economic problem."*

NCWNZ protested sharply against the policy of banning married women from employment in teaching and they asked especially for women to be included in the Unemployment Act. NCWNZ branches around the country set up initiatives ranging from:

- The first enumeration and classification of unemployed women and girls
- Setting up training schemes and establishing a Women's Employment Centre, which serviced the delivery of meals to needy families and the elderly
- Co-operating with local Authorities in Dunedin to provide food, which was said to have forestalled the food riots in 1932
- Developed a range of policy recommendations for Government to support employment of women

During the current recession, women have again been the first to loose their jobs and are continuing to loose their jobs at a faster rate than men. Women made recently unemployed with

employed partners are not eligible for an unemployment benefit, negating again their economic independence. Partnered or married women who work on a seasonal or contracted basis, and find that the contract work is no longer available, again are ineligible for unemployment assistance and are the invisible population which falls between the cracks of the national statistical record.

Some members of the Council have been frustrated by the cessation of the Pay and Employment Equity Unit; they were also frustrated by the lack of initiatives for women's employment arising from the Job Summit held earlier this year. Many believe that the cutting of the Units work was a cost-saving exercise in response to the recession.

"We signalled that the matter of equal pay for equal work has been on our books since 1896 and that the time for its resolution was well and truly due, and for us it is back on the agenda," said Elizabeth Bang.

As in the last major depression, NCWNZ announced two initiatives internally to address women's employment:

- Members were invited to provide ideas about how women might address employment during this recession.
- Branches were encouraged to submit the details of women's businesses, as well as skilled and professional women who needed to promote themselves, for advertising on the NCWNZ website for no charge.

"We saw both initiatives as 'women supporting women' during these rocky times," said Elizabeth Bang. "These were the easiest ideas for us to initiate within our own limited resource base in the shortest possible time."

"As demonstrated in the 1930's, education and training helped to revitalise the economy and get women employed once more," said Elizabeth Bang. "The cut to funding of Adult Community Education lessens the options for people to retrain and seek alternative employment; it is contrary to enabling economic recovery and it is women particularly who will loose out."

NCWNZ has engaged the Minister of Education on this matter a couple of times and has, like most organisations been told that the budget does not stretch far enough to ensure all courses can be maintained.

"Some educators are looking at taking a cut in their salary if it will ensure the course continues for another term or two," said Elizabeth Bang. "We do not support people sacrificing their own financial sustainability; we believe that the sacrifice by providers and the outrage displayed by the users of these education services should be enough to prompt a most prudent budget bid to resolve the situation."

The NCWNZ National Executive; leaders of Branches, affiliated Nationally Organised Societies and National Members, and elected officers, is currently meeting in Wellington for its three day Annual General Meeting. The theme for the meeting is "Ensuring Women Count", which will focus on the financial sustainability of women. Financial Sustainability is defined as having the means to have insurance; life, health, accident, property, work insurance, and it is about having the means to save for retirement. It is the expansion of paid parental leave and it encapsulates pay equity, and the gender gap.

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*"Women Influencing Policy"*

## **Background:**

Source publication: The National Council of Women – A Centennial History, by Dorothy Page, 1996, NCWNZ.

### **1930's depression and NCWNZ**

Helen Benson and Dr Sophie de la Mare summed up the 1931 NCWNZ conference's attitude to women's unemployment with the following statement:

*That the freedom to live and develop along the lines of their natural aptitude and choice is the birthright of both men and women.*

*That the attempt now being made to adjust economic difficulty by discharging women from lucrative employment is a denial of this birthright and presents only a false solution of the economic problem.*

*That the real solution of the unemployment problem can be found only by dealing with it as a whole, by general and not by individual rationing, by basing a social organisation on human values and not material values.*

*That the attempt to solve the economic problem of unemployment by spurious remedies and by sacrifice of the individual is to deny the possibility of the ordered progress of society and to invite either revolution or reaction.*

### **NCWNZ Resolutions relating to the Depression of the 1930's**

#### **4.7.5 Unemployment Tax**

Under the 1930 Employment Act a special tax was levied on males to provide funds - which were supplemented from Government moneys - for the relief of the unemployed. The Act also provided that no allowance was to be paid to anyone who was not a contributor to the Unemployment Fund i.e no relief for women. The 1931 Amendment imposed further taxation for unemployment relief. Women in receipt of incomes, other than wages or salaries, over 250 pounds per annum were liable (in 1932 this exemption was reduced to 20 pounds) as were all salary or wage earners, male or female, other than workers in private domestic service, who consequently continued to be ineligible for relief.

These resolutions should be read in conjunction with 6.6.3 and 16.3.9.

4.7.5.1 The National Council of Women recommends that women whose total income from all sources does not exceed 52 pounds per annum shall be exempt from the unemployment tax or levy. 1933, reaffirmed 1934

4.7.5.2 The National Council of Women recommends that domestics in private employment should not be exempt from wage tax. 1933

4.7.5.3 The National Council of Women of New Zealand urges that no one class of woman wage earner should be exempt from payment of wages tax. 1934

4.7.5.4 The National Council of Women of New Zealand urges that the Unemployment Bill shall include all wage earners irrespective of sex, benefits and responsibilities. 1934

4.7.5.5 That domestic workers be on the same footing regarding the payment of Unemployment tax as other women. 1935

#### **6.2.6 Marriage as a Bar to Employment**

Marriage ended a woman's paid employment in almost every field, not only because society expected this but also because employers, explicitly in many cases e.g. banks, refused to employ married women.

6.2.6.1 That the National Council of Women should approach the Minister of Education asking that marriage should not be a bar to the employment of women teachers. 1927, reiterated 1929

- 6.2.6.2 That the National Council of Women protests against marriage being regarded as a bar in the employment market for women. 1932
- 6.2.6.3 That the National Council of Women desires to record its grave dissatisfaction with Clause 2 sub-section 12 of the Education Amendment Act, 1932-33 which reads:- "Except in the case of a married female teacher who has completed her course of training at a teachers' training College, but has not completed the term of service required by the regulations, the Board may refuse to appoint any female married teacher", and asks for its deletion. [This statute was one of a number designed to save public funds during the depression by ensuring that all possible employment was available for men, who if unemployed could call on the state for assistance whereas unemployed women could not - see 4.7.5 and 6.6.3] 1934, reaffirmed 1935
- 6.2.6.4 That the Government be asked to repeal the legislation dealing with the dismissal of married women teachers as being an unfair attack upon one section of the community. [The Finance Act (No. 4) 1931, s. 39, provided that an Education Board might, on three months notice, terminate the employment of any married woman teacher. See note under previous resolution] 1935
- 6.2.6.5 That all restrictions regarding the employment of married women as such be removed. 1937

## **6.6 UNEMPLOYMENT**

### **6.6.1 "Buy New Zealand"**

- 6.6.1.1 That the National Council give publicity through their affiliated societies to the importance of buying N.Z. made goods, and so helping to minimise the evil of unemployment in the Dominion. 1927
- 6.6.1.2 That the National Council of Women urge the women of New Zealand to buy where possible New Zealand made goods, or failing these, Empire goods, in order to alleviate unemployment in N.Z. and throughout the Empire. 1931, reaffirmed 1933, 1934
- 6.6.1.3 To endorse in principle [the resolution of] the Women's Division of the Farmers Union that as a body and each member individually undertake for a period (say three months) to purchase and use only goods made and produced within the British Empire, and furthermore each member endeavour to persuade every woman with whom she comes in contact during the said period to follow her example, and "Trade within the Empire". 1932
- 6.6.1.4 That the National Council of Women hereby urges that the Manufacturers Association be asked to supply all store-keepers with a list of New Zealand made goods. N.B. It has been proved in some instances that neither the retailer nor the customer has the necessary knowledge of the full extent of N.Z. products. 1933, reaffirmed 1934
- 6.6.2.2 That with a view to helping to over come the present economic difficulties this Conference of representatives of the National Council of Women gives its cordial support, to the government in any practical scheme whereby suitable types of unemployed men and women may be enabled to take up small holdings of land. 1931

### **6.6.3 Unemployment, Women**

These resolutions should be considered in conjunction with 4.7.5 and 16.3.9. The justification for not providing any form of relief for women seems to have been that they were assured of food and shelter because they could work as domestics. As 6.6.3.5 below indicates, as the Depression deepened some households not only could not pay any wages but ceased to be able to afford even the food for a domestic helper.

- 6.6.3.1 The Council urges the Government to amend the Unemployment Act so as to bring women under the provisions of the Act on the lines suggested by the Commission of Enquiry set up in 1929. It is obvious that any scheme for helping women must break down if it relies on casual domestic or home work. The Council requests the Government to consider the desirability of subsidising factories employing women for

the manufacture of clothing, foodstuffs and other necessities even if it becomes necessary for a time to prohibit the importation of such lines. 1931

6.6.3.2 That this Council being concerned at the reports of unemployment among women and girls asks the government for a grant to be made to the National Council of Women of New Zealand to be expended under the control of N.C.W. (a) For carrying further investigations already commenced. (b) For the establishment of practical schemes such as small home industries. 1931

6.6.3.3 In view of the fact that the Government has set up an Unemployment Board whose function it is to find employment for men, this Council suggests that the Dominion Executive of the N.C.W. be appointed to act as an Unemployment Board for women. 1931

6.6.3.4 That this Conference is of the opinion that no further domestics should be brought to the Dominion while the present economic position continues. 1931 [but see 10.3.1.1 and 10.3.3.7 for more affluent times]

6.6.3.5 That this Conference appeals to the women of New Zealand not to curtail their expenditure in the employment of women or girls as domestic workers or otherwise unless it becomes absolutely necessary. 1931

6.6.3.6 That in view of the increasing seriousness of the unemployment position generally, and of women in particular, due to their savings and other temporary resources for securing food and shelter now being exhausted, and also that those not up to the average standard of competency do not now get the chance to earn a living, the Executive of the National Council of Women asks the Government to make available to the public or at least to the National Council of Women and other interested Women's Employment Committees of the four centres, their report on the relief of Women's Unemployment compiled for the Unemployment Board by the Advisory Committee. 1932

6.6.3.7 That the Unemployment Board be asked that Section 7 of the instructions for all Women's Unemployment Committees issued by the Unemployment Board be amended as follows: 'That the matter of remuneration for officers employed at centres for women and girls be left to the local Unemployment Committees'. 1933

6.6.3.8 That a committee be set up to explore the position of unemployed women and girls with a desire to make constructive suggestions to the Unemployment Board as to its relief. 1933, reaffirmed 1934

6.6.3.9 That the Unemployment Board be requested to furnish the committees in charge of Unemployed Women's Work Centres with the Report of the Women's Advisory Committee which visited the centres in 1933. 1934

10.3.2.2 The National Council of Women hereby urges all Branches of the National Council of Women of New Zealand to do all in their power to awaken public opinion with regard to those employers who take advantage of the present financial conditions to unfairly reduce the standard of wages and conditions of domestic workers. 1933

10.3.2.3 That in the ensuing year all branches of N.C.W. of N.Z. investigate the whole position and status of the salaried domestic worker and report at the next Conference. 1935

### **16.3.9 Unemployment**

16.3.9.1 That in view of the fact that unemployment tax is paid by women as well as men, the National Council of Women recommends to the Government that an adequate proportion be used for the relief of unemployment amongst women. [This resolution and 16.3.9.2 should be read in conjunction with 4.7.5 and 6.6.3] 1933, reaffirmed 1934, 1935

16.3.9.2 That unemployment relief be available to all citizens irrespective of sex. 1935

## The English Civil War - The Levellers

The Levellers were supposedly the pioneers of modern democracy, but they wanted the parliamentary vote only for men. Nevertheless, for the first time, a group of women became involved in direct political action. They mounted large scale public demonstrations and petitions, but were often dragged away by soldiers after trying to thrust petitions into the hands of MPs entering parliament. Hundreds even tried to storm the gates of parliament. As a result, common women were thrown into prison, mental institutions or workhouses. Middle class women were simply escorted away by soldiers and told to 'go back to women's work'.

In 1648 Leveller women demonstrated in London, calling for equal rights for women and presenting a petition. In 1649 ten thousand Leveller women signed a second women's petition to parliament. It is particularly notable because the writers claimed for all women an equal political voice with men:

### From The Petition of Divers Well-Affected Women, 1649

To the Supreme Authority of England, the Commons Assembled in Parliament. The Humble Petition of Divers Well-Affected Women of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, Hamlets and Parts Adjacent. Affecters and Approvers of the Petition of Sept. 11 1648. (May 5, 1649)

*Since we are assured of our creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also of a proportionable share in the freedoms of this commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honorable House. Have we not an equal interest with the men of this nation in those liberties and securities contained in the Petition of Right, and other the good laws of the land? Are any of our lives, limbs, liberties, or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by due process of law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the neighborhood? And can you imagine us to be so sottish or stupid as not to perceive, or not to be sensible when daily those strong defenses of our peace and welfare are broken down and trod underfoot by force and arbitrary power?*

*Would you have us keep at home in our houses, when men of such faithfulness and integrity as the four prisoners, our friends, in the Tower, are fetched out of their beds and forced from their houses by soldiers, to the affrighting and undoing of themselves, their wives, children, and families? Are not our husbands, o[u]r selves, our children and families, by the same rule as liable to the like unjust cruelties as they? And are we Christians, and shall we sit still and keep at home, while such men as have borne continual testimony against the injustice of all times and unrighteousness of men, be picked out and be delivered up to the slaughter? And yet must we show no sense of their sufferings, no tenderness of affections, no bowels of compassion, nor bear any testimony against so abominable cruelty and injustice?*

*Have such men as these continually hazarded their lives, spent their estates and time, lost their liberties, and thought nothing too precious for defense of us, our lives and liberties, been as a guard by day and as a watch by night; and when for this they are in trouble and greatest danger, persecuted and hated even to the death, should we be so basely ungrateful as to neglect them in the day of their affliction? No, far be it from us. Let it be accounted folly, presumption, madness, or whatsoever in us, whilst we have life and breath we will never leave them nor forsake them, nor ever cease to importune you, having yet so much hopes of you as of the unjust judge (mentioned, Luke 18), to obtain justice, if not for justice's sake, yet for importunity, or to use any other means for the enlargement and reparation of those of them that live, and for justice against such as have been the cause of Mr Lockyer's death.*

*And therefore again we entreat you to review our last petition in behalf of our friends above mentioned, and not to slight the things therein contained because they are presented unto you by the weak hand of women, it being a usual thing with God, by weak means to work mighty effects.*

### **An appeal to the men of New Zealand' by Femina (Mary Ann Müller)**

A wise ancient declared that the most perfect popular government was that 'where an injury done to the meanest subject is an insult upon the whole constitution'. What, therefore, can be said for a Government that deliberately inflicts injury upon a great mass of its intelligent and respectable subjects; that virtually ignores their existence in all that can contribute to their happiness as subjects; that takes a special care to strike at the root of their love of country by teaching them that they have no part in forming or maintaining its glory, while it rigidly exerts from them all penalties; even unto death? What can be said, what urged, in extenuation of this crying evil, this monstrous injustice? 'Custom; use; it has always been so'. This may be enough to say of the past – 'let the dead past bury its dead'; but is it to be remedied for the future? How long are women to remain a wholly unrepresented body of the people? This is a question that has of late been agitated in England, and women in this colony read, watch, and reflect. Though their household cares chiefly occupy them, yet many find leisure in the quiet evening hours to read not only their fashions, and colonial papers, but the English papers also. They cannot remain ignorant of the agitation of this, to them, great matter, and it has struck the writer of these few pages that I might not be wholly vain to make an appeal to the men of this our adopted land.

America has in many things stepped in advance of the mother country. How often has she shown us the advantages of things the English mind feared to attempt, though it does not disdain often to adopt these innovations, and, as Mr Gladstone says, 'Americanise our institutions'? Why should not New Zealand also lead? Why ever pursue that hard-beaten track of ages? Have we not enough cobwebs and mists to cloud our mental gaze, enough fetters to impede our onward progress here, that we must voluntarily shackle ourselves with old world principles in the way of Government. But to come to the point. Why has a woman no power to vote, no right to vote, when she happens to possess all the requisites which legally qualify a man for that right?

She may be a householder, have large possessions, and pay her share of taxes towards the public revenue; but sex disqualifies her. Were it a question of general knowledge and intelligence as compared with men, women might submit uncomplainingly; but this is not the case. The point is, is she as capable as our bullock-drivers, labourers, and mechanics?

It may surely be confidently asserted that when a woman is possessed of sufficient skill and management to retain unassisted the guidance of her family, and remain a householder, she develops more than a moderate degree of capability. The weak and incapable generally elect to live in the homes of others, they naturally shrink from the responsibility of such a position and are thus placed out of the question.

The true position is, that educated thinking members of the State are degraded below the level of the ploughman, who perhaps can neither read nor write. And this is 'law' – called 'justice'! How is the word 'just' weakened and falsified! It is enough to 'make the angels weep'. But we must not despair. We have in our General Legislature statesmen, justly so called, whose powers of intellect, eye, of oratory, would make them shine in the English Parliament. Champions from among these men will step forth and fight the good fight for those fettered weak ones who can only think and suffer. Women's eyes turn in hope – nay trust – on some leading spirits who will not fail them. They but need rousing – the knowledge that we claim our right – that we wake and watch.

It is not difficult to learn in whom dwells the fine old chivalrous spirit towards which the world will ever warm. The women read the Hansard as well as our *Punch* and *Cornhill*, though perhaps – *magna est veritas* – we do skip the figures sometimes.

But let us go a little deeper into the case, and inquire what are the just claims of women to vote, and the objection to their so doing. We live under the dominion of a Queen – England rejects the Salique law. A woman may be an heiress of a country, may nominate a minister who takes

charge of the souls of thousands, may vote in joint-stock companies, in vestries for guardians, may, I believe, even be an overseer; while in America women are doctors, lawyers, managers of factories, schools, &c, are Government clerks, and in one place Judges. Indeed, if we ponder on the power of wealth, we are struck with a wholesome feminine awe of Miss Burdett Coutts, who even entered into the matter at issue some time since between the Bishops Gray and Colenso, she having power to withdraw some large endowment bestowed by her upon the Church of Natal. When we consider what great wheels are turned by women, can we fail to wonder at their being so rigidly, so jealously excluded from the touch of this one of voting? And after all, its possession would amount to but a fractional power in our government. What real influence upon society is exercised by a woman like Florence Nightingale? Yet to such women men arbitrarily deny a power granted to a sweep.

*It is excellent*

*To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous*

*To use it like a giant.*

I cannot pretend to follow all the proceedings as they have taken place in England during the close of the last year; but I note that the name of a lady householder had been placed upon the electoral roll in some country, and struck off by the revising barrister. The lady appealed to the Court of Common Pleas, and Judges dismissed the appeal, simply because she was a woman, and therefore had no *locus standi*, and possessed no right of appeal; though it seems that some time, days even, had been fully occupied in hearing, going into the subject, and finally deciding upon this same appeal, which looks rather paradoxical. It is not worth the trouble to repeat, or even refer to all the reasons given by these astute Judges for their decision in this case; – the majority can but provoke a smile. We are compelled to bend to their law, but decline to receive their logic. One, Justice Probyn, sapiently considers that the right of voting demands 'an improved understanding, which women are not supposed to have'. Ample room for improvement in this Judge's understanding, I fancy. Another, named Bayles, considers that granting this power to them would be 'a premium on women to remain unmarried', or 'to desire that their husbands might die, in order to possess votes as widows'. From these, and such specimens of improved understanding, may we be preserved! This same learned Judge holds to our 'legal incapacity as women'. He says, 'Otherwise aliens might vote.' Aliens we truly are – alienated from natural rights. But it were worse than vain to dwell upon this phase of the proceedings, the law as it now stands is against us. 'Long and undisturbed usage', to quote the words of the Chief Justice, settles it.

About 1300 women in one place (Salford) placed their names upon the list of voters, and more than 5000 in Manchester; but of course the whole question of legal claim is now disposed of.

There was much reference during the proceedings to old and new statutes, inquiries instituted as to whether women were included when the word 'man' was used, which was allowed at once in the words 'manslaughter' and 'mankind', though it appears we are not even 'persons' sometimes. However, the gist of it all is that an express enactment is requisite to enable women to vote. Hence this appeal to the common sense of New Zealand men – of New Zealand law-givers. I cannot appeal to a higher quality in a statesman than common sense, for is it not the sense of the common interest. Let them dispassionately ask themselves whether that interest will not be advanced by the admission of a few female votes. There are but few, comparatively speaking, who could claim to vote on the strength of possessing the minimum amount of property and those few would probably bring pretty keen intelligence on the duty. The infusion of a fresher, purer spirit, and higher tone, would result from the concession of this right to women. As to the *bête noir* of women sitting in Parliament with men, rely upon it there is scarcely a woman in New Zealand who would desire or consent to do so. It is a bugbear, and absurdly exaggerated view of a notion taken by men whose intellect must be as weak as it is intolerant. Besides, who makes the laws? Men. Theirs is the power to grant or to deny; let them so frame our admission to the privilege we desire, as to exclude us from that duty which we consider clearly incompatible with our necessitous ones.

We ask you, our rulers, to disembarrass yourselves of those tenets of Government, built up during ages upon a system of senseless and credulous trust in those principles which guided our ancestors. Shake them aside, or subject them to a rigid scrutiny, and see how they fit the requirements of the present day. Women are now educated, thinking beings very different from the females of the darker ages. They might have been contented with their lot in those days, and '*ceux-la sont veritable heureux, qui croient l'autre*'; but this is not so now. The stride of advancement is rapid, 'the roaring loom of time flies on', and while our law-givers 'work and weave in endless motion', we yearn to feel ourselves borne on by the stream of progress, to be improving as all should be, to feel that our claims have become higher, nobler, and our sympathies wider. Let the laws be fitted to the people and times. Do you still persecute for religious opinions? Do you still burn for witchcraft? Why, when the broad road of progress is cleared for so many human beings, is the Juggernaut car of prejudice still to be driven on, crushing the crowds of helpless women beneath its wheels?

Permit them to take, as their right, an interest, and some small part in the Government of their adopted land. That interest will grow apace, enlarging the scope of their ideas, and in time changing entirely the habit of their thoughts. I cannot more highly compliment the intelligence and equity of those who rule, than quietly to submit to their consideration our bitter grievance.

It is one which has been but little alluded to in New Zealand, but it is seething, yeasting in many minds, I believe, and it must bear fruit.

I do not think we are likely to call together a great female convention, like that over which the Lady Mayoress presided in Manchester; nor is it probable that a society for the promotion of female suffrage will be formed here; yet not the less earnestly do we, in all feminine gentleness, ask redress. Few New Zealand women, I dare say, have read even a review of Miss Becker's thesis on women's rights, which was read before the British Association and excited such deep interest; but we know of such a thesis having commanded public notice, and a feather shows the direction of the wind. A change is imminent – all must feel it to be so. It is but a question of when, and why not be now? Why will not men believe in the hidden wealth of mental devotion and sympathy that waits for their unsealing touch – the quiet strength, ready to support their best efforts? How willingly will women enter into the topics discussed by their husbands and brothers, how much better appreciate all their plans for the well-being of society when their privileges develop the *esprit de corps* of which they are so susceptible.

Go to our Government schools. Are girls so far behind boys in intelligence there? Converse in society with girls of sixteen or twenty, and compare them with youths of their own age – are they less sensible? I think I might even venture to assert that most girls of eighteen are better informed upon many subjects of general information than their brothers are. After this I grant that the improvement generally goes in an inverse ratio, and as the young man advances in the cultivation of his intellect, the woman's intelligence – particularly if married – narrows more and more to her own immediate circle of duties. Into these duties she casts herself with an energy that might preach a sermon to the men around her upon the sin of so contracting her vast sympathies. Do but observe the idiosyncrasies of the sex with the interest and care they claim from you. Note the delicately nurtured woman, see her wondrous power and energy, her patient, unflagging cheerfulness during the years of banishment to some back station in New Zealand, where she toils until the waste smiles around her; where she rears her poultry, grows her fruit and flowers – aye, and not unfrequently digs her potatoes and chops her wood, while she yet cheers her husband and teaches her children with anxious care lest they drop from the social sphere to which her heart clings. Mark the persistent faith with which she toils on, till, in some happy cases, she returns to grace the settled town in the evening of her days.

Many, alas! have fallen exhausted, spent in the toilsome march of life, fallen like soldiers, doing their duty. Peace to the martyr pilgrim mothers of the land? Let them not be forgotten, but rather let the memory of their fate deepen your sympathy with the sex.

Our women are brave and strong, with an amount of self-reliance and freedom from conventionalities eminently calculated to form a great nation. Give them scope. At present their grasp and power of mind is 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' to one narrow groove. It is weakened and famished by disuse, and only a close observer can detect the latent force, the unspent energy lying dormant in many seemingly ordinary characters.

Mark the sudden questions of a bright eager girl, or the quiet remark of some sensible matron, upon a political matter in the newspaper before her, and see the cold stare of surprise, or hear the rebuke about women seeking to step beyond their province, with which the paterfamilias stops the innovation, and can you marvel that the girl turns to gossip about the new fashions, or the mother takes refuge in discussions upon servants, sewing machines, and other minor domestic details? Women of the middle class suffer most from this open, systematic 'putting down'; for deference to the sex is the best test of real civilisation, and a truly well-bred man will never wantonly give pain to, or tyrannise over a woman, even though that woman be his wife or daughter, and therefore utterly at his mercy. When women shall be interested in the entire contents of newspapers, there will be found fewer inferior novels and serials upon the table. When her enthusiasm can find vent upon topics of world-wide interest, she will furnish criticisms with fewer startling eccentricities. She will become more truly feminine, and our journals will less abound in smartly satirical articles upon 'the girl of the period'; &c. How often now are we pained to read the attacks made upon our dress and manners; many of them, too, having in them the grain of truth that gives a false colouring of sincerity to the whole libel; but the critics of the day delight in nibbling at results instead of dipping deep into causes – they revel in detail, rarely rising to great principles. Thus much venom is spent upon feminine follies, while the cure lies in their own hands – that is, premising them to be male critics, as I take it for granted they be. Men alone can give us the power to rise above our present degradation: they must cease to consider inactivity to be delicacy, and frittering away time upon elegant fancies to be refinement. Women's minds require hardening by the principle of reasoning. Watts says, 'What is it but custom that has for past centuries confined the brightest geniuses, even of the highest rank, in the female world, to the employment of the needle only, and secluded them unmercifully from the pleasures of knowledge, and the divine improvements of reason. But we begin to break these chains, and reason begins to dictate the proper education of youth.' We do but begin now; still having begun, let us make good strides in the noble race for knowledge – knowledge of all kinds tending to the welfare of the community, and some knowledge of and share in the government of our country is imperative. And where, in what land upon the face of the earth, was there ever a finer field for educating the people in the art of government? We have it so satiated. It is a colonial vice, and

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to scourge us.*

Mushroom provinces crop up, shedding forth showers of embryo senators, whose amusing blunders supply fun for the excluded sex; for on the acknowledged rule that lookers-on see the most, women, outside the strife and confusion of party bickerings, often detect the coming storm that will overwhelm the self-satisfied, obtuse senator, and know the mine that will infallibly be sprung beneath his clumsy incautious tread. Truly, if, as has been said, 'we learn by our failures', we shall become a wise nation in the heart of government. And we are improving, we begin to see our faults, and to use the language of Sir James Macintosh, 'who will be hardy enough to assert that a better constitution is not attainable than any which has hitherto appeared? Is the limit of human wisdom to be estimated in the science of politics alone, by the extent of its present attainments? Is the most sublime and difficult of all arts, the improvement of the social order, the alleviation of the miseries of the civil condition of man [Query, woman also?] to be alone stationary, amid the rapid progress of every other art, liberal and vulgar, to perfection! Where would be the atrocious guilt of a grand experiment to ascertain the portion of freedom and happiness that can be created by political institutions?'

In the face of these thoughts, how small a matter seems the simple concession here pleaded. And for that cause how frail a hope seems these few pages, penned in jealous secrecy from

every human eye, for such is the ban we live under that a woman naturally learns to shrink from drawing down upon her devoted head the avalanche of man's condemnation, and travels on with 'bated breath', hiding her noblest, highest aspirations! Yet it is a hope. Though like a rope flung to a drowning creature, when we close our eyes in dread of seeing it fall short, it is sent forth. It is the cry of aliens for naturalisation, the wail of the fettered for freedom, and I feel constrained to put forth the prayer – to strive to utter 'the thoughts that lie too deep for tears'. Fully is the difficulty of the task realised, weakness and inability press painfully, yet the counsel of the gentle Italian prevails:

*Tanto ti prego piu gentile spirto  
Non lassar la magnanima tua impresa*

I do but ask for my sex a calm unprejudiced consideration of their condition. I feel that our claim will be granted, that the time is coming, but the hours are passing, '*Periunt et imputantur*', and my whole soul yearns to see it 'before I go hence'.

The change is coming, but why is New Zealand only to follow? Why not take the initiative? She has but to inaugurate this new position, all will applaud. 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' It will be the spark to the train now laid in most civilised countries.

*Take the instant way:  
For honour travels in a strait so narrow.  
Where one but goes abreast; keep then the path;  
For emulation hath a thousand sons,  
That one by one pursue; if you give way,  
Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,  
Like to an entered tide, they all rush by  
And leave you hindmost.*

This version, published in the *New Zealand Mail*, 1 June 1878, p. 7, is taken from C. MacDonald (ed.), *The vote, the pill and the demon drink*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993

<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/an-appeal-to-the-men-of-new-zealand>

1869: Mary Ann Müller ('Femina') wrote 'An appeal to the men of New Zealand', advocating votes for women.