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The Woman Suffrage Chameleon

Emma Goldman

May 1917

For well-nigh half a century the leaders of woman suffrage have been claiming that miraculous results would follow the enfranchisement of woman. All the social and economic evils of past centuries would be abolished once woman will get the vote. All the wrongs and injustices, all the crimes and horrors of the ages would be eliminated from life by the magic decree of a scrap of paper.

When the attention of the leaders of the movement was called to the fact that such extravagant claims convince no one, they would say, "Wait until we have the opportunity; wait till we are face to face with a great test, and then you will see how superior woman is in her attitude toward social progress.

The intelligent opponents of woman suffrage, who were such on the ground that the representative system has served only to rob man of his independence, and that it will do the same to woman, knew that nowhere has woman suffrage exerted the slightest influence upon the social and economic life of the people. Still they were willing to give the suffrage exponents the benefit of doubt. They were ready to believe that the suffragists were sincere in their claim that woman will never be guilty of the stupidities and cruelties of man. Especially did they look to the militant suffragettes of

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England for a superior kind of womanhood. Did not Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst make the bold statement from an American platform that woman is more humane than man, and that she never would be guilty of his crimes: for one thing, woman does not believe in war and will never support wars.

But politicians remain politicians. No sooner did England join the war, for humanitarian reasons, of course, than the suffrage ladies immediately forgot all their boasts about woman's superiority and goodness and immolated their party on the altar of the very government which tore their clothing, pulled their hair, and fed them forcibly for their militant activities. Mrs. Pankhurst and her hosts became more passionate in their war mania, in their thirst for the enemy's blood than the most hardened militarists. They consecrated their all, even their sex attraction, as a means of luring unwilling men into the military net, into the trenches and death. For all this they are now to be rewarded with the ballot. Even Asquith, the erstwhile foe of the Pankhurst outfit, is now convinced that woman ought to have the vote, since she has proven so ferocious in her hate and is so persistently bent on conquest. All hail to the English women who bought their vote with the blood of the millions of men already sacrificed to the monster War. The price is indeed great, but so will be the political jobs in store for the lady politicians.

The American suffrage party, bereft of an original idea since the days of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Susan Anthony, must needs ape with parrot-like stupidity the example set by their English sisters. In the heroic days of militancy, Mrs. Pankhurst and her followers were roundly repudiated by the American suffrage party. The respectable, lady-like Mrs. Catt would have nothing to do with such ruffians as the militants. But when the suffragettes of England, with an eye for the fleshpots of Parliament, turned somersault, the American suffrage party followed suit. Indeed, Mrs. Catt did not even wait until war was actually declared by this country. She went Mrs. Pankhurst one better. She pledged her party to mil-

itarism, to the support of every autocratic measure of the government long before there was any necessity for it all. Why not? Why waste another fifty years lobbying for the vote if one can get it by the mere betrayal of an ideal? What are ideals among politicians, anyway!

The arguments of the antis that woman does not need the vote because she has a stronger weapon—her sex—was met with the declaration that the vote will free woman from the degrading need of sex appeal. How does this proud boast compare with the campaign started by the suffrage party to lure the manhood of America into the European sea-blood? Not only is every youth and man to be brazenly solicited and cajoled into enlisting by the fair members of the suffrage party, but wives and sweethearts are to be induced to play upon the emotions and feelings of the men, to bring their sacrifice to the Moloch of Patriotism and War.

How is this to be accomplished? Surely not by argument. If during the last fifty years the women politicians failed to convince most men that woman is entitled to political equality, they surely will not convince them suddenly that they ought to go to certain death while the women remain safely tucked away at home sewing bandages. No, not argument, reason, or humanitarianism has the suffrage party pledged to the government; it is the sex attraction, the vulgar persuasive and ensnaring appeal of the female let loose for the glory of the country. What man can resist that? The greatest have been robbed of their sanity and judgment when benumbed by the sex appeal. How is the youth of America to withstand it?

The cat is out of the bag. The suffrage ladies have at last proven that their prerogative is neither intelligence nor sincerity and that their boast of equality is all rot; that in the struggle for the vote, even, the sex appeal was their only resort and cheap political reward their only aim. They are now using both to feed the cruel monster war, although they must know that awful as the price is which man pays, it is as naught compared with the cruelties, brutalities, and outrage woman is subjected to by war.

The crime which the leaders of the American woman suffrage party have committed against their constituency is in direct relation of the procurer to his victim. Most of them are too old to effect any result upon enlistment through their own sex appeal or to render any personal service to their country. But in pledging the support of the party they are victimizing the younger members. This may sound harsh, but it is true nevertheless. Else how are we to explain the pledge, to make a house-to-house canvass, to work upon the patriotic hysteria of women, who in turn are to use their sex appeal upon the men to enlist. In other words, the very attribute woman was forced to use for her economic and social status in society, and which the suffrage ladies have always repudiated, is now to be exploited in the service of the Lord of War.

In justice to the Woman's Political Congressional Union and a few individual members of the suffrage party be it said that they have refused to be cajoled by the suffrage leaders. Unfortunately, the Woman's Political Congressional Union is really between and betwixt in its position. It is neither for war nor for peace. That was all well and good so long as the monster walked over Europe only. Now that it is spreading itself at home, the Congressional Union will find that silence is a sign of consent. Their refusal to come out determinedly against war practically makes them a party to it.

In all this muddle among the suffrage factions, it is refreshing indeed to find one woman decided and firm. Jeannette Rankin's refusal to support the war will do more to bring woman nearer to emancipation than all political measures put together. For the present she is no doubt considered anathema, a traitor to her country. But that ought not to dismay Miss Rankin. All worthwhile men and women have been decried as such. Yet they and not the loud-mouthed, weak-kneed patriots are of value to posterity.