

Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship

Suffrage, Gender and Citizenship:
International Perspectives on Parliamentary
Reforms

Edited by

Irma Sulkunen and Seija-Leena Nevala-Nurmi
and Pirjo Markkola

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-0162-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0162-1

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INTRODUCTION

IRMA SULKUNEN AND PIRJO MARKKOLA

In 2006 Finland celebrated the centenary of universal and equal suffrage. A century had elapsed since the parliamentary reform in Finland, then an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, resulted in the country becoming the spearhead of state democracy in Europe. The radical nature of the reform is indicated by the fact that women gained the right both to vote and to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. This was exceptional by international standards, and meant a great leap forward in the general progress towards female suffrage. Finland was the third nation-state, after New Zealand and Australia, in which women were admitted to full political citizenship. Women immediately used their right to vote; however, what made the Finnish case exceptional was that women candidates were elected to Parliament. Indeed, a significant number of women belonging to different social classes were elected to the first *eduskunta* (the Finnish unicameral parliament) in 1907. In this respect, Finnish women were global trailblazers.

Among the scholarly events organised to celebrate the centenary was a conference held at the University of Tampere in October 2006, the theme being the implementation of female suffrage in different countries against the background of general parliamentary reforms. At the same time, the conference strove to trace the various cultural, social and political forms of gendered citizenship. The conference attracted scholars from 18 countries, thereby opening up significant opportunities for a comparative examination of the subject. Each participant made a valuable contribution to the discussion on the relationship between women's suffrage and parliamentary reforms; although in this book it is possible to include only some of the articles written on the basis of the papers read at the conference. These papers demonstrated just how many thematic levels the issue of female suffrage involves. The presentation of cases from different countries also revealed how many factors have to be taken into account to create an even passably viable methodology for the international comparison of reform processes. One of the most significant outcomes of the conference was the observation that the age of suffrage narratives

based on a view of universal emancipation is irrevocably over – and has been so for some time. By contrast, the significance of deconstructive approaches and analyses more deeply embedded in local factors has increased.

Regionally, the point of emphasis has shifted, on the one hand, from the so-called centre to the periphery and, on the other, from the core countries of suffragettism to those areas where female suffrage was realised at an early stage. This change has been accelerated by the anniversaries celebrating the awarding of the franchise to women, which over the last fifteen years have produced numerous anthologies and thus opened up this field of research to new, comparative approaches.¹ In the Nordic countries, which were pioneers of women's suffrage in Europe, the interest in the subject was bound in the 1970s to research projects studying popular movements. For example, in Sweden the extensive research into civil movements that began in the late 1960s initially ignored women, but studies of women's activities in the temperance movement and philanthropic associations set out to remedy this. Another strand in Nordic women's studies has been research on the organised suffragette movement. A research project dealing with the civil rights and suffrage struggle of Swedish women has produced several new studies in the early 21st century.²

¹ See, for instance, *Suffrage & Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994); *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Directions in British Suffrage History*, ed. C. Claire Eustance and Joan Ryan (London: Cassell, 2000); *Women's Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Grimshaw, Katie Holmes and Marilyn Lake (Palgrave MacMillan, 2001); *Yksi kamari – kaksi sukupuolta: Suomen eduskunnan ensimmäiset naiset*, ed. Pirjo Markkola and Alexandra Ramsay, (Helsinki: Eduskunnan kirjasto, 1997); Irma Sulkunen, Maria Lähtenmäki and Aura Korppi-Tommola, *Naiset eduskunnassa. Suomen eduskunta 100 vuotta* (Helsinki: Edita, 2006).

² See, for instance, Ingrid Åberg, "Revivalism, Philanthropy and Emancipation. Women's Liberation and Organization in the Early Nineteenth Century". *Scandinavian Journal of History* 13, 1988; *Charitable Women – Philanthropic Welfare 1780–1930*, ed. Birgitta Jordansson and Tinne Vammen (Odense: Odense University press, 1998); *Kvinnor på gränsen till medborgarskap. Genus, politik och offentlighet 1800–1950*, ed. Christina Florin and Lars Kvarnström (Stockholm: Atlas, 2001); Josefin Rönnbäck, *Politikens genusgränser. Den kvinnliga rösträttsrörelsen och kampen för kvinnors politiska medborgarskap 1902–1921* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2004); Ulla Manns, *Upp systrar, väpnar er! Kön och politik i svensk 1800-tals feminism* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2005); Åsa Karlsson

In Finland, the question of female suffrage likewise came to the fore in the 1970s in connection with research projects studying popular movements and civic associations. The location of political mobilisation in its broad social context revealed the central role played by women, particularly in the temperance movement, but also in other civic associations at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All these united to spearhead the suffrage movement.³ On the other hand, the anniversary celebrations of female suffrage have accelerated research in which the subject has been addressed both from the point of view of the achievement of separate rights for women and in connection with nation-building and the creation of a civil society.⁴

* * * * *

In research in the Pacific countries, methodological shifts have given rise to emphases associated particularly with the postcolonial approach, and since the 1970s, these have also become general in feminist research.⁵ Here attention has been focussed on issues like the deprivation of indigenous peoples' common human rights and the invisibility of ethnic groups in the struggle for female suffrage. In particular, Australian scholars have brought the latter issue clearly to the fore and at the same time considered the price of the early implementation of female franchise.⁶ Thus in the present book, Patricia Grimshaw analyses the problematic relationship between women's suffrage and the aboriginal population at the

Sjögren, *Männen, kvinnorna och rösträtten. Medborgarskap och representation 1723–1866* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 2006).

³ Irma Sulkunen, *Raittiuskansalaisuskontona. Raittiusliike ja työväestön järjestäytyminen 1870-luvulta suurlakon jälkeisiin vuosiin.* (Juva: SHS, 1986; published in English: *History of the Finnish Temperance Movement*. Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); Henrik Stenius, *Frivilligt, jämlikt, samfällt: föreningsväsendets utveckling i Finland fram till 1900-talets början med speciell hänsyn till massorganisations principens genombrott* (Helsinki: SLF, 1987; *Kansa liikkeessä*, ed. Risto Alapuro, Ilkka Liikanen, Kerstin Smeds and Henrik Stenius (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1987).

⁴ Of the centenary publications, see e.g. *Yksi kamari – kaksi sukupuolta: Suomen eduskunnan ensimmäiset naiset* 1997; Sulkunen, Lähteenmäki and Korppi-Tommola 2006.

⁵ For good examples of such research, see *Feminism and Internationalism*, ed. Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott (Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Angela Woollacott; *Gender and Empire* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2006).

⁶ For example *Women's Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2001).

federal state level. Grimshaw's chapter shows how colonial ideas on race were taken for granted as a criterion of segregation in the liberals' definition of citizenship and, on the other hand, how the regional relative strengths of the ethnic groups determined the visibility or concealment of different views in determining the criteria for citizenship. A more equitable negotiating climate between the races prevailed in another pioneering country of women's suffrage, New Zealand, where the integration of the relatively numerous indigenous population, the Maoris, went much more smoothly, as Charlotte Macdonald shows in her own chapter.

Another aspect partly connected to the preceding one, has been the shift during the past few decades in the emphasis of research on suffragettism from a tradition that took for granted the connection between female suffrage and the progress of feminist emancipation⁷ to an examination of the phenomenon in its broader social and political contexts. These themes, like the general suffrage reforms, recur in several of the chapters in the present collection. In particular, the connection between women's suffrage and nation building has been, and continues to be in this book, a central element in the parliamentary reforms of very different countries.

The connection seems to have been particularly close in those countries in which democratic projects were bound up with nationalist independence aspirations, as was the case in European countries that adopted female suffrage at an early date like Finland and Norway, and also in New Zealand and Australia on the other side of the world. In all these countries, attempts were made to present the integration of women into the nation in terms of equal political rights, thereby significantly lowering the opposition to female suffrage. However, this was not universally the case, as seen for example in Hungary and Slovenia. In these countries, women's suffrage was not realised until after the Second World War, and in this respect the process followed the pattern of the Catholic countries of

⁷ This research tradition coincided with the organisation of the feminist movement and subsequently became associated with women's studies. For a good example, see Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn, and Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage 1-6*. 1887-1922; in a way Richard Evans' widely read work *Feminists* (London, 1977) is connected with a research tradition that celebrates the triumphal march of female emancipation through suffrage. Of those scholars who legitimated this research tradition in Finland, Alexandra Gripenberg and her book *Naisasian kehitys eri maissa* (Porvoo, 1905) deserves special mention.

southern Europe rather than the development in the Protestant countries of the north.

A good example of the value of a comparative approach is offered in this book by Birgitta Bader-Zaar's multi-level analysis of the influence of the First World War on the ideological policies of the suffragette movement and the development of political rights in four European countries and the United States. The comparison not only shows the multiplicity of attitudes to war and peace, but also opens up interesting perspectives on the disparate background factors; one of the most interesting of these, apart from the parliamentary systems, is the relations between different religious groups. In addition to Bader-Zaar's study, several other chapters in the collection show that in certain countries religion played a crucial role in attitudes to female suffrage and women's political activity in general. For example, in Israel, religion created a clear divide between Orthodox Judaism and more liberal political orientations over the question of suffrage, as Margalit Shilo and Esther Carmel Hakim demonstrate. Similarly, in strongly Catholic countries, the attitude to female suffrage was a complex one, especially after the workers' movement gained a significant footing in them.

To generalise, it can be stated that the Social Democratic parties in northern European Protestant countries adopted the principle of universal and equal suffrage and emphasised the fact that the demand also concerned women. This was particularly the case in those countries where the suffrage reform was delayed, with the number of the unenfranchised among men also remaining very high. Finland is an extreme example of this. Although in principle favourably disposed to female suffrage, the workers' movement vacillated in those Protestant countries (like Britain) where parliamentary reform had got under way earlier, and suffrage had been extended to cover a significant section of the male population before the female suffrage movement became organised.

* * * * *

As the chapters in this book also show, women's suffrage has both national and international dimensions. The significance of the international dimensions and at the same time the common tradition of research on female suffrage narratives is interestingly evidenced by the reference in several of the chapters to John Stuart Mill's work *The Subjection of Women* as an important source of suffragettism. However, without denying the importance of Mill, it should also be remembered that the struggle for women's suffrage did not get under way on a large scale until the turn of

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, decades after Mill's book was published. It is also important to note that as mobilisation became more intense, attempts to promote women's suffrage in many countries were more closely connected with the determination of the content and limits of modern democracy than with the Millian ideological tradition of liberalism in its classical form.

In many countries, indeed, traditional liberalism seemed to hinder rather than to support the implementation of political rights irrespective of sex. This is indicated in June Purvis's in-depth study of the suffragette activities of Emmeline Pankhurst; Purvis demonstrates that it was in fact the policy of the Liberal government with which militant British women took issue in the final stage of their struggle for suffrage.⁸ In Finland, too, the only members of the Diet who in principle opposed the inclusion of women in universal and equal suffrage represented liberal circles. Thus, although long historical ideological traditions go back to the liberalisation process initiated in the eighteenth century and associated with individual demands that political citizenship be extended to women, there was certainly no straightforward universal progress towards emancipation. On the contrary, from an international point of view, the realisation of female suffrage was a long and complicated process, the nature and content of which took very different forms in different countries.

In this collection, the perspective on women's suffrage is opened up through a study of general parliamentary reforms. This choice is justified in that the simultaneous examination of reforms carried out in different environments enables us not only to better analyse common features and differences in the parliamentary systems but also to draw tentative conclusions about the social factors that possibly influenced these differences. By highlighting national differences in female suffrage, we strive to disperse the universalising trend of research on suffragettism and at the same time to trace the various paths taken in the formation of modern citizenship and to outline different interpretations of it. By locating suffragettism in the dissolution of the patriarchal-corporative system of representation initiated in the eighteenth century and expanded during the following centuries and against the concomitant struggle for political power, we also seek new perspectives on the study of the whole historical tradition of feminism. For example, we ask to what extent 'gender' as an analytical category can be reconciled with historical contexts preceding the birth of the modern concept of citizenship. The

⁸ In addition to her chapter, see June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst* (Routledge, 2003).

problematics of this question is addressed by Åsa Karlsson Sjögren in her chapter on the background factors to the suffrage issue in Sweden from a long historical perspective. She also asks how women's suffrage can be studied before the implementation of political citizenship based on the rights of the individual.

Again – and partly in connection with the preceding point – the concepts ‘public’ and ‘private’, which have been used for some time in women's studies, appear in a new light when located in different historico-cultural contexts.⁹ As Natalia Novikova shows, traditional Russian society hardly recognised this dichotomy, and the same observation is emphasised by Irma Sulkunen and Gro Hagemann in analysing the background factors influencing the early realisation of women's suffrage in Finland and Norway. An undifferentiated division of life into spheres has been regarded as applying on the one hand to the agrarian way of life and the corporate system of representation and on the other to societies in the early stage of industrialisation, and in them particularly to the lower orders of society and their survival strategies, which required cooperation between the sexes.¹⁰

An examination of the line dividing the spheres of life – or its absence – is also important because it has been common in women's studies to define the criteria for gendered citizenship through the dichotomy between public and private spheres. However, the border was often fuzzy, and thus the conception of citizenship defined in modern parliamentary reforms was by no means always based on a dichotomous division into spheres of life. Rather, it seems that a new dividing line was drawn based on numerous elements connected with the concept of citizenship. In connection with this, the definition of gender as a general category in relation to race and class was also negotiated.

Parliamentary reforms constitute an important object of study because they offer the opportunity to examine the criteria used by emerging nation states to define the borders of political and national citizenship for their own peoples. At the same time, they reveal the location of sex in the power struggle over political citizenship. Certainly, it should be remembered, as T. H. Marshall, Nira Yuval Davis¹¹ (and many others)

⁹ For a good survey of the discussion see, for instance, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes, (Oxford University Press, 1998 and 2007).

¹⁰ For Britain, see e.g. *Equal of Different: Women's Politics 1800–1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Basil Blackwell, 1987). See in particular the “Introduction” and the chapter by Deborah Valenze: “Cottage Religion and the Politics of Survival”.

¹¹ T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950); T. H. Marshall and Tom Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class*

emphasise, that citizenship has dimensions other than the political one. In this book, however, the emphasis is specifically on political/national citizenship, although in several chapters the dimension of local/municipal citizenship also appears as a matter of course. As many of the chapters show, the negotiation – or rather dispute – over political power may go on for a very long time. Rights might either be accorded or removed according to the prevailing power configurations, as happened, for instance, in Hungary and Israel. On the other hand, the situation could turn out like that in Finland, where an exceptionally radical reform suffered a rapid setback and in the course of just over a decade led to a civil war with ensuing restrictions on citizenship.

The continuous change in the concept of citizenship and the transnational negotiating positions created by new political conditions are well illustrated in the last article in the collection, in which Snjezana Vasiljic examines EU citizenship from the perspective of gender. The issue of rights is not a permanent and static phenomenon but rather highly volatile and transmutable. Rights are constantly being negotiated both in Europe and in other parts of the world. An illustrative example of this is offered by Mohamed Mousavi's review of the opportunities for female members of parliament in Iran. Equally illustrative is Dorota Anna Gozdecka's chapter, in which she describes the dramatic change in how the social position of women is regarded in Poland.

* * * * *

The structure of the book is partly thematic, partly chronological. Thematically, suffrage, citizenship and parliamentary reforms are placed in different socio-political contexts, the first of which is constituted by the peripheral regions of former empires. The periphery turned out to be more radical than the centre, and, in the cases of New Zealand and Australia, its need for radical reforms greater than those of the centre. In beginning with parliamentary reforms in the new world from the 1890s on, we also trace the history of universal and equal suffrage chronologically. The citizenship and political rights of New Zealand and Australian women lead the reader into the intersectional construction of political rights, involving factors other than gender. In the cases of New Zealand and Australia particularly, the question of the relationship between ethnicity and gender prompts

numerous further questions worth taking into consideration in other contexts.

The second part of the book moves to the other side of the globe, thematically to a situation of nation-building and the construction of a national identity. We move into the following decades when universal suffrage was introduced in the Nordic countries: simultaneously, we take a step back in time. Of the Nordic countries, both Finland and Norway granted women the vote and the right to stand in elections before the outbreak of the First World War. In Finland, a rapid reform led to Finnish women being the first in Europe to have their political rights extended. However, although the reform was extremely radical, some groups remained still without civil rights. In the Nordic context, female suffrage was implemented relatively late in Sweden, between 1919 and 1921. Even so, the Swedish case is interesting in that it demonstrates that the extension of women's political rights was anything but a linear process. In connection with the individualisation process, the nature of political rights changed in a way that problematised gender in a new way in the definition of political citizenship. In this process, gender became a category on the basis of which the rights and responsibilities pertaining to modern citizenship began to be defined. In the Nordic countries, the struggle over sex and its relation to class, language and birth led both to restrictions in women's rights and to the birth of movements demanding rights for women, but the process was neither straightforward nor simple.

The period after the First World War was above all characterised by the dissolution of the great empires. When the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy broke up, the question of nationality actualised in numerous different ways. The Revolution brought universal and equal suffrage to Russia, and women gained political rights in conjunction with it, but this was not just the result of the activities of the Bolsheviks. Russian historical research has started to study the activities and aims of other revolutionary groups defeated in the power struggle. This brings new dimensions to the picture of women's political rights. The fall of the empires was certainly far from painless, as illustrated, for example, by the bitter civil war which broke out in Finland immediately after the gaining of her independence.

There was no common pattern in the situations created by imperial collapse, as the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its aftermath demonstrates. The chapters show that each of the countries involved pursued its own course, adapted to the context of its own developing nation. In this process, religion was one factor influencing conceptions of men's and women's citizenship and political rights.

The British Commonwealth constitutes a special case in the history of female suffrage: it witnessed probably the hardest struggles over women's political rights. In international research, the unique and bitter suffrage struggle in Britain, in particular, was long taken as the model against which attempts to extend or limit women's political rights in other countries were compared. This anthology attempts to diversify this picture, focusing also on those countries unaffected by militant suffragettism in their implementation of universal and equal suffrage. At the same time, it shows how the militancy of the suffragettes can be placed in its proper context. This was no unified movement but rather incorporated many different goals and aims.

The issue of women's civil rights is certainly not a matter concerning only the past. The fourth part of the book takes us into the 21st century and shows what kind of new challenges the question of citizenship presents. Contemplated from an international perspective, suffrage, gender and citizenship continue to be highly relevant matters.

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PART I:

RADICAL PERIPHERIES:
PACIFIC COUNTRIES AND SCANDINAVIA

SUFFRAGE, GENDER AND SOVEREIGNTY IN NEW ZEALAND

CHARLOTTE MACDONALD

In 2006 Prime Minister Helen Clark was just one of a concentration of women occupying leading public offices in New Zealand.¹ The prominence of women in national life 113 years after New Zealand women were the first in a nation state to be enfranchised in 1893 is something nineteenth-century campaigners might only have dreamed about. Over a century later it brought admiration from some quarters, while from others, the anxious observation that the country had become 'unbalanced', or that 'political correctness' had gone too far.² Similar misgivings, though articulated much more vociferously, were prompted by the centrality of Maori and 'Maori issues' (including the Treaty of Waitangi) in contemporary political life. The newly formed Maori Party's success at the polls in the 2005 election (winning four seats), and more provocatively, calls for 'te tino rangatiratanga' (self government or autonomy) under the popular black, red and white Maori sovereignty flag, affront those who insist on a nation in which 'all New Zealanders' stand under one New Zealand flag.³ Gender and race identities constitute

¹ The group included Governor-General Sylvia Cartwright (representing the head of state Queen Elizabeth II), Chief Justice Sian Elias (head of the judiciary); Speaker of the House of Representatives Margaret Wilson; Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu ('The Maori Queen'), leader of the independent Kingitanga movement, and chief executive of Telecom (the country's largest corporation) Theresa Gattung.

² See, for example, 'Girls can do...everything', *The Press*, 4 Mar 2005, A1; 'What's left to feminise?', *The Dominion Post*, 27 Dec 2004, B4; Colin Espiner, 'Women at the top', *The Press*, 24 Sep 2003, A2; Keith M. Harry, 'Feminist flavour', *Waikato Times*, 14 April 2001, 6; Jonathan Milne, 'Dame joins women in power', *The Press*, 5 April 2001, p.1; Brent Edwards, 'Dame Sylvia completes constitutional quartet', *The Dominion Post*, 4 April 2001, 1.

³ Ranginui Walker, *Ka whawhai tonu matou – struggle without end*, rev. ed, Auckland: Penguin, 2004; Don Brash (Leader of the Opposition National Party) 'Nationhood', speech to Orewa Rotary Club, 27 January 2004,

sensitive fault lines for political contest in the postcolonial present. While suffrage is no longer the central issue, citizenship remains entwined with gender and with nationhood defined by conflicting versions of the national story, ie history.⁴

Women in New Zealand fought for, and won, the prized goal of suffrage remarkably early, relatively easily and unusually inclusively. Both indigenous Maori and Pakeha⁵ (white) women gained the franchise with the passing of the Electoral Bill in September 1893. A milestone of local and international significance, the wider history of suffrage, gender and citizenship reveals a more complex and less triumphant story. A story that is integrally linked to the colonial relations in which the New Zealand nation state had been forged since its foundation in 1840 and in which, by the turn of the century, women and indigenous Maori enjoyed a large degree of formal equality in political rights while remaining marginal to real political power. For Maori the overriding question was sovereignty: the power assumed by the state from which citizenship rights such as the franchise were derived. The legitimacy of power which had been gained by subordinating and dispossessing indigenous Maori inhabitants over the previous fifty years was fundamental. Gender remained a critical determinant of political agency after 1893, women gaining the right to stand as candidates only from 1919. It was a further fourteen years before a woman won a seat in parliament and a further three decades before women represented more than a tiny minority of elected Members of

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PA0401/S00220.htm>, accessed 31 Jan 2008. Maori Party home page: [/www.maoriparty.com](http://www.maoriparty.com).

Further information about Maori sovereignty and te tino rangatiratanga see Mason Durie, *Te mana, te kawanatanga: the politics of Maori self-determination* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998).

On the issue of the flag, see, for example, 'Letter to the Board of Transit NZ: Maori flag', 16 January 2008, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0801/S00101.htm>

⁴ Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (Auckland: Broadsheet, 1984); Claudia Orange, *An illustrated history of the Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2004); Ranginui Walker, *Ka whawhai tonu matou – Struggle without end* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990, rev ed, 2004); Stuart C. Scott, *The travesty of Waitangi: towards anarchy* (Dunedin: Campbell Press, 1995); *Histories, power and loss* ed. Andrew Sharp and Paul McHugh (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001).

⁵ 'Pakeha' generally describes New Zealanders of European descent, or non-Maori New Zealanders. Its use as an ethnic category is contentious.

Parliament (MPs).⁶ Political institutions, and the nation state more generally, appeared remarkably unchanged by the early advances in democratic rights.

Kate Sheppard, the leader of the New Zealand campaign, reflected on these issues in a speech in 1919, nearly 26 years after women first voted in New Zealand in 1893 but at a time when the long and hard fought campaigns in England, the United States and elsewhere, were finally gaining ground. She noted that while ‘progress was slow’ and had come ‘first in the smaller centres of population’, mentioning Finland, along with Norway and Denmark, as places where women had long ‘enjoyed the vote’, at last, ‘fossilized prejudices’ had ‘crashed in all directions’, and ‘that opposition to the right of women to full citizenship is breaking down. The desire among women for a change in their political status may be said to be world-wide.’ ‘How could it be otherwise?’ she asked, given the ‘[c]ontinuous appeals to reason and justice for more than half a century.’⁷

Reason and justice were not, as we know, sufficient in themselves to achieve results. Moreover, the struggle through which women’s suffrage campaigners and their supporters pressed their cause varied immensely in timing and character, operating within specific contexts of time and place. In discussing the history of the women’s suffrage campaign in New Zealand this paper briefly sketches the main contours of the campaign and the interpretations through which it has been understood, paying particular attention to the newer frameworks in which the subject has been approached. ‘Progressivism’, the common patterns across societies on ‘the margins’ where women’s suffrage was won early, the British empire, and popular forms of citizenship are considered, as is the post-1893 fate of gender and citizenship. In the New Zealand setting, sovereignty, understood as the source of political power is also a key concept.

What is suggested, in what must remain a very broad overview of the subject, is that a small, newly formed state such as New Zealand was in the late nineteenth century offered a highly pliable context for democratic experiment. This was a context in which liberal inclusiveness supported the nation building efforts of a settler society keen to portray itself as a

⁶ Elizabeth McLeay, “Women and the problem of parliamentary representation: a comparative perspective”, in *Women and politics in New Zealand*, ed. Helena Catt and Elizabeth McLeay (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1993), 40-62.

⁷ Kate Sheppard, ‘President’s address to the National Council of Women’, 1919, NCW Session, MS-Papers-1371, folder 107, Alexander Turnbull Library, in *The vote, the pill and the demon drink: a history of feminist writing in New Zealand, 1869-1993*, ed. Charlotte Macdonald (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993), 82-3.

distinctive exemplar within the wider British world, but where ‘the nation’ afforded women and Maori accessory rather than integral membership.

The Suffrage Campaign

The New Zealand suffrage campaign can be briefly summarised as follows.⁸ An Electoral Bill passed by majority vote in an all male two chamber legislature was the means by which women gained the franchise in September 1893. The elected House of Representatives and appointed Legislative Council constituted a unitary system of government there being no federal structure. A clause giving women the vote was only one, but by far the most controversial, clause in the Bill. Support came from both sides of the House (as did opposition); the measure was not one around which party allegiances formed. While the governing administration was a Liberal one, the key champion of the women’s suffrage cause was senior conservative politician Sir John Hall.⁹ The Liberal leader and premier, former publican Richard (‘King Dick’) Seddon, was an opponent - he was later to change his stance, loudly proclaiming his pride in the New Zealand women’s vote. The successful parliamentary vote was the culmination of an energetic, concerted and co-ordinated campaign advanced by supporters of the women’s vote inside parliament and a large scale organised agitation by (and largely of) women outside parliament.

Women’s rights generally, and the idea of the women’s franchise in particular, had been a subject of sporadic public discussion from the 1860s – notably through the work of two women who championed their ideas in

⁸ The classic account remains Patricia Grimshaw, *Women’s suffrage in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland/Oxford University Press, 1972, reissued 1987). See also, *Suffrage and Beyond: international feminist perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland and Annandale: Auckland University Press/Pluto Press 1994) ; *Sites of Gender. Women, men & modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890 – 1939* ed. Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003) ; Raewyn Dalziel, “Political organisations”, in *Women together: a history of women’s organizations in New Zealand*, ed. Anne Else (Wellington: Daphne Brasell with Historical Branch, 1993), 52-106.

⁹ W. J. Gardner, ‘Hall, John 1824-1907’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, www.dnzb.govt.nz, updated 22 June 2007; A. B. White, ‘Hall, Sir John (1824-1907)’, rev. Elizabeth Baigent, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33655>, accessed 31 January 2008; Jean Garner, *By his own merits: Sir John Hall – pioneer, pastoralist and premier* (Hororata: Dryden Press, 1995).

the popular press under the cover of pseudonyms. In 1869 Mary Ann Muller, writing as 'Femina', published a lengthy article, *An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand*, in the *Nelson Examiner* keenly advocating women's legal, educational and political rights. Mary Ann Colclough – writing as 'Polly Plum' – engaged in a lively correspondence in the Auckland newspapers in the early 1870s on the question of women's political rights as well as their entitlement to higher education, professional work, and equal pay.¹⁰ Muller and Colclough (and a number of their readers) were aware of the writings of John Stuart Mill and were connected, by correspondence as well as the circulation of books and periodicals, with the ideas emanating from the Langham Place group, the *Englishwoman's Journal*, and arguments being made elsewhere in support of women's access to education and in critique of women's dependence within marriage.

In the colony such ideas fell into a setting where local self government was relatively new, where full manhood suffrage was in place by 1879, and where there was the possibility of innovation in political as well as educational and social institutions. Between 1840, when New Zealand became a formal part of British Empire and large scale European (largely British and Irish) settlement began, and 1852, New Zealand was ruled directly by Governor under instruction from London (via the Colonial Office). With the advent of self government, through the 1852 Constitution Act, a New Zealand Parliament was established with locally elected representatives and a high degree of self government. The threshold for the franchise was set at a low level thereby enfranchising the majority of adult men; by 1890 remaining property qualifications were abolished ushering in 'one man, one vote'. Thus, the core democratic

¹⁰ Macdonald, ed, *The Vote*, chapter 1. See also Jenny Coleman, "Philosophers in petticoats": a feminist analysis of the discursive practices of Mary Taylor, Mary Colclough and Ellen Ellis as contributors to debate on the 'woman question' in New Zealand between 1845-1885" (PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 1996); Aorewa McLeod, "Mary Ann Muller 1820-1901" and Judy Malone, "Mary Colclough 1836-185", in *The Book of New Zealand Women/Ko kui ma te kaupapa* ed. Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams, eds, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 461-464, 142-145; Judith Elphick Malone, "What's wrong with Emma? The feminist debate in colonial Auckland", in *Women in history: Essays on European women in New Zealand history*, ed. Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 69-85.

principle had been won prior to women gaining the vote while its achievement highlighted gender as a determinant of citizenship defined by suffrage.

Two Bills providing for female suffrage were debated in parliament as early as 1878 and 1879. While attracting considerable support, they fell short of the needed majorities. Not until the mid 1880s did real pressure begin to be applied and it was with the advent of women's campaigning that the women's vote became a major political question. Central in building this pressure was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Founded in the United States in 1874, WCTU branches sprang up in New Zealand in the wake of Mary Clement Leavitt's tour of 1885.¹¹ Her message of the need for women to band together to support measures to protect home and family from the predations of male drunkenness met an eager response. As has been noted, temperance of the WCTU kind was a radical manifesto in communities built on the predominant muscular male culture of the 'frontier'.¹²

WCTU branches were quickly established throughout the country. Within its broader programme, the demand for women to have a direct influence on law-making rather than the indirect voice of plea or persuasion, made the women's vote an urgent priority. As a nationwide organisation the WCTU provided a hugely powerful body in mobilising women into political action and in providing a highly effective organisational tool to run a sustained campaign. In 1887 Kate Sheppard became leader of the Franchise and Legislation Department within the WCTU and from this point the campaign for women's suffrage stepped up. Forty years old when she took up leadership of the political arm of the WCTU, Kate Sheppard had lived in New Zealand for almost twenty years emigrating with her widowed mother and siblings from Liverpool. The daughter of Scots parents and influenced by Christian socialism, she was

¹¹ See, for example, report of Mrs Leavitt's lecture at St Paul's Church, Christchurch on the subject 'Woman, her Duties and Responsibilities, *Lyttelton Times*, 23 May 1885, 3, in Macdonald, ed, *The vote*, 36-8.

¹² Patricia Grimshaw, "Women's suffrage in New Zealand revisited: writing from the margins", in *Suffrage and Beyond: international feminist perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Pluto Press, 1994), 25-41; Jock Phillips, *A Man's country: the image of the pakeha male, a history* (Auckland: Penguin, 1987, rev ed, 1996); Ian Tyrrell, *Women's world/woman's empire: the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in international perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

an active member in her early years, in one of Christchurch's congregational churches.¹³

In letters, public meetings, pamphlets, and, from 1891, in a page she edited in the temperance newspaper *The Prohibitionist*, Sheppard pressed the case for women's right to vote. Arguments put in her 1888 pamphlet 'Ten reasons for supporting women's suffrage', and extended 1891 version: 'Sixteen reasons for supporting women's suffrage' can be traced throughout the New Zealand campaign. To claims for justice – 'Because it is the foundation of all political liberty that those who obey the law should be able to have a voice in choosing those who make the law', and representation 'Because a Government of the people, by the people, and for the people, should mean all the people, and not one half', were claims that women would bring something unique to the political realm: 'Because the enfranchisement of women is a question of public well-being', 'Because public-spirited mothers make public-spirited sons', 'Because the vote of women would add weight and power to the more settled and responsible communities.'¹⁴

A Women's Suffrage Bill was introduced to the House in August 1890 by Sir John Hall. Although it was stymied, the level of support was encouraging. From 1891 the efforts of women campaigners accelerated. In addition to meetings, pamphlets, and lobbying of local candidates, women began gathering signatures on petitions to parliament indicating strength of feeling amongst women of New Zealand for the vote. Petitions were a key tactic in campaigning. The aim was to demonstrate to existing politicians just how numerous and varied were women supporters of the measure throughout the country. The work of circulating petitions, gaining signatures, and returning petition sheets between small population centres spread over a large geography was considerable, requiring much active canvassing. In 1892 the Women's Franchise League was formed to bring together those women not drawn into the temperance activism of the WCTU. A further nationwide petition and parliamentary bill that year

¹³ Charlotte Macdonald, "Kate Sheppard 1848-1934", in *The Book of New Zealand Women*, ed. Charlotte Macdonald et al, 604-607; Tessa K. Malcolm, 'Sheppard, Katherine Wilson 1847-1934', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, www.dnzb.govt.nz, updated 22 June 2007; Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard: a biography*, Auckland: Penguin, 1992; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Sheppard, Katherine Wilson (1847-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53522>, accessed 31 January 2008.

¹⁴ Kate Sheppard, 'Sixteen reasons for supporting women's suffrage', *The Prohibitionist*, 7 November 1891, 3, in Macdonald, ed, *The vote*, 41-2.

failed to persuade sufficient legislators but added resolve to pro-suffrage campaigning.

In the largest, and last, of the ‘monster’ petitions raised in 1893, 31,872 women (around a quarter of the total adult female population) signed petition sheets calling for women to be enfranchised.¹⁵ Presented to parliament with great drama on 28 July 1893 by Sir John Hall, the huge roll formed by the glued sheets carrying a massive number of signatures, indicated incontrovertibly, that women wanted the vote – not a few of them, not some, but a great many, and they were prepared to get out and say so. The petition was judged to be the largest raised anywhere in Australasia to that date.

The petitions were not only a vital lobbying and mobilising tool, but are highly significant as historical sources leaving a massive record of names and addresses of women supporting the franchise. Recent theses by postgraduate students Kirsten Thomlinson and Linda Moore have made detailed studies of the mass of women who signed petition forms in 1893 and voted at elections from 1893 to 1954, enabling much closer study of the composition and character of general women’s support for women’s suffrage campaign and wider voting participation. In Thomlinson’s study names and addresses of women on petition sheets in one locality, south Dunedin, were closely mapped against other sources in an endeavour to establish more closely exactly where support came from and who made up the majority of supporters for the women’s vote behind the pamphlets and leaders.¹⁶ Women in communities of skilled workers emerged as the most likely to have signed but the representation was across all occupational and residential layers. The analysis indicates that support amongst women for the franchise was spread widely across classes, regions and denominations. While women organised through the WCTU, workers’ organisations such as the Tailoresses Union or local franchise league were prominent as petitioners, support for the campaign and amongst women registering to vote at the first election was widely spread across all

¹⁵ The original petition is now held by Archives New Zealand, Wellington. Further information and some of the original sheets can be viewed at www.archives.govt.nz/exhibitions/permanentexhibitions/suffrage.php

¹⁶ Kirsten Thomlinson, “We the undersigned: an analysis of signatories to the 1893 women’s suffrage petition from southern Dunedin” (MA thesis, University of Otago, 2001); Linda Moore, “Gender counts: men, women and electoral politics, 1893-1919” (MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 2004) and Linda Moore, “Was gender a factor in voter participation at New Zealand elections?”, in *Class, gender and the vote: historical perspectives fro New Zealand* ed. Miles Fairburn and Erik Olssen (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005), 129–142.

sections of the society. Gender proved the key mobiliser in the extra-parliamentary pressure for women's suffrage.

A Bill allowing provision for women to vote was once again before Parliament, in September 1893. Lobbying was intense: campaigners presented supporters inside House with white camellia flowers, symbol of their cause, while outside an anti-franchise league sprang up in some centres (mostly members of the drink trade). This time supporters were in the majority in both the House of Representatives and Legislative Council (while voting was strategic and majority only narrowly won in upper house, the measure gained crucial support). Under the 1893 Electoral Act both Maori and Pakeha women gained the vote (on the same terms as their men). The Act withheld the right to stand as candidates from women, preserving the parliament, for the meantime, as an exclusively male domain.

Any doubts about women's enthusiasm to exercise their vote, or interest in politics, were cast aside by their participation in the first general election. On Saturday 28 November 1893, just ten weeks after winning the franchise, thousands of New Zealand women, for the first time, set off to do something none had ever done before: cast their vote for their local candidate in a polling booth. Apprehensions that women might be jostled by unruly men at the booths, that houses would be abandoned by women letting their children and kitchens languish in their enthusiasm to vote, and most of all, by incumbent candidates, that women would vote them out of office, proved unfounded. None eventuated. In South Dunedin, an urban industrial area, the local paper reported women turning up to vote early in the day, some even arriving at the booths well before opening time. Mrs Clegg was noted as the first woman to register her vote at the principal polling booth at Caversham Hall.¹⁷ To its relief, the Liberal government was returned to power. Overall, a large number of women registered and the proportion of women who then voted at poll in November, at over 80 per cent, was higher than the proportion of men (75 per cent).¹⁸

Forgotten and Disappointing Histories

While women in New Zealand took up the opportunity to vote with alacrity, and maintained their organisational activism through the WCTU, the National Council of Women (formed in 1896) and other groups, the

¹⁷ Thomlinson, 1.

¹⁸ Though these rates have recently been disputed by Linda Moore, see 'Was gender a factor', 136 and footnote 56.