

Suffragette Humbug

Not long ago the hoardings of London startled the man in the street with ugly black and white posters asserting that women were poor, that women were sweated, that women walked the streets, and that misery and vice stalked in our midst, all because women had not the vote. Those statements, issued by the Suffragettes, were and are unblushing falsehoods, unsustained and unsustainable by any shred of evidence.

The Socialist is in no quandary as to why the many are poor. It is not because propertied women have not the vote, nor even because women in general are not electors—it is because the many are robbed. And the stopping of this robbery depends not upon a mere all round increase in the number of votes, but upon the intelligence of the workers and the correct use of the vote in their hands.

Democracy is not an end in itself, but a means to an end; and for us that end in Socialism. And were the workers to understand rightly their position and their policy, the political freedom they now possess would enable them to achieve their emancipation irrespective of sex.

It is, moreover, not a sex war that exists in Society but a class war, but the Suffragettes endeavour to blur this class issue by screeching qualifications.

What are the facts regarding the Suffragettes? Under the pretence of sex equality they are buttressing class privilege. Under the guise of democracy they are endeavouring to strengthen the political power of property. They plausibly propose that women be admitted to the franchise on the same terms as men, and since all Socialists want sex equality this looks attractive. But wait. What does it really mean? Men vote at present under the £10 franchise. The suffrage is thus upon a property basis with plural voting for the wealthy. Therefore, according to the proposals of the women Suffragists, only those women having the necessary property qualifications are to be allowed to vote. This excludes not only all those single working women unable to qualify because of their poverty, but it also bars practically the whole of the married women of the working class who have no property qualifications apart from their husbands'. Further, it increases enormously the voting power of the well-to-do, since the head of the wealthy household can always impart the necessary qualifications to all the women of his house, while the working-man, through his poverty, is entirely unable to do so.

The limited suffrage movement is consequently only a means of providing votes for the propertied women of the middle class, and faggot votes for the wealthy; possibly tipping the balance of votes against the workers—men and women. Yet the Suffragettes pretend that this is a movement for the benefit of working women! The huge sums spent in this agitation prove that it is not a workers' movement. It is a movement by women of the wealthy and middle class to open up for themselves more fully careers of exploitation, and to share in the flesh-pots of political office, to get sinecures, position and emoluments among the governing caste.

In their cry for "equality" do not their methods betray them? Every move on their part is an appeal not to sex equality but to sex fetishism. Their tactics rely upon and appeal

to the worship of sex. They know that their sex gives them privileges before the magistrate and protects them from the usual police brutality, and that any strong measures against them would immediately raise a storm in their favour amongst the sex worshippers. Hence their peculiar tactics, which have no other explanation. Let anyone compare mentally the treatment that would be meted out to working men did they pursue a similar policy to these Suffragettes. Let them compare the way the suffragist invasions of Downing Street or the House of Commons were dealt with, with that which would follow persistent forcible entries of the Commons by bands of unemployed. Broken heads, bullets, and long terms of imprisonment—and not in the second division—would be their lot, and instead of hysteric sympathy being created for the ill-treated unemployed, horror at their audacity and a determination to repress them brutally would take its place. And the middle class examples of sex arrogance rely upon this very woman worship and sex inequality to further their demands.

The Suffragette movement is upon all counts but a bulwark of capitalism. It is directly opposed to the interests of the working class—women as well as men, and the Independent Labour Party shows its capitalistic nature when it supports that movement in strengthening the political power of the propertied against the propertyless.

Both sexes of the workers are exploited and suffer. Both are victims of those who live by the ownership of the means of life. Therefore the salvation of working class women lies in the emancipation of their *class* from this wage-slavery. Their interests are identical with those of working men, and the women of the middle class do but attempt to lure them with false phrases to desert their fellows and to aid the propertied enemies of their class.

The duty of working women is to refuse to allow themselves to be used as catspaws of the wealthy, and to join with their fellows in The Socialist Party, the organisation of their class; thus working for the emancipation of the toilers as a whole, irrespective of sex. Sex-equality cannot be the fruit of the Suffragette humbug, it can only come through economic equality—and economic equality is impossible except through Socialism.

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