

Right of Women to Vote, 1910
By Katherine Metzel Debs

Kate Metzel Debs was a long-time supporter of women's suffrage. She was active in her local chapter of the Women's Franchise League, which drew much support from working-class women. Kate Debs was the wife of labor organizer and Socialist Party presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs. This article was published in the weekly *The Appeal to Reason*, the largest paid circulation socialist newspaper in the country in 1910 (with a circulation of half a million).



Right of Women to Vote

BY KATHERINE M. DEBS

To my mind there is no valid argument against the right of women to vote on equal terms with men. The proposition is self-evident that woman, being a human being and a citizen of the community, the same as man, is entitled to equal rights, privileges and opportunities.

Let me ask this simple question: What justice is there in compelling women to obey laws they have no voice in enacting? This question has never been answered and never can be answered except in one way.

If woman is less than a human being, less than a citizen, a mental weakling, requiring man as a guardian; if she is but the property appendage and convenience of her lord and master, then I submit she ought not to have the right to vote, but should in all meekness resign herself to her divinely (?) appointed lot, the echo of her husband, the servant of her sovereign, satisfied to spend all the days of her life in the realm of mental inferiority and political non-existence.

But woman has all the essential qualities of man, not excepting mentality and initiative, and if she is to develop the best there is in her, she must be free and she must be the equal of man in respect to every right and every opportunity required for the untrammelled expression of her voice and will.

Lester F. Ward, greatest of American sociologists, says: "We have no conception of the real amount of talent or of genius possessed by woman." No, for the reason that woman has never had the chance to unfold, to develop her latent powers and energies and to show the world what she is really capable of accomplishing.

But there has been a wonderful change of sentiment upon the woman question during the last few years and the change will be still greater during the years immediately before us. Old prejudices, ignorant customs and barbaric traditions are being swept aside. The new spirit, the spirit of the coming social democracy, is asserting itself everywhere and the world is beginning to heed its cry and to reshape its institutions, based upon mutual economic interests and the absolute equality of the sexes.

As a Socialist I see no reason why woman should not be the comrade of her husband upon equal terms in all the social, moral and political affairs of life as well as in the struggle for existence, and I am proud that the Socialist party, the party that is spreading so rapidly over all the world, proclaims as one of its cardinal principles, that woman is and ought to be, and shall be the equal of man in all essential respects, and his inferior in none.

Those who declare that to engage in politics would degrade woman will pardon me if I venture to suggest that they would better change their politics. The kind of politics that will degrade a woman will also degrade a man, and no man ought to engage in the kind of politics that degrades his wife and mother.

As for the women who protest that they do not need and do not want the ballot, I think they unconsciously offer the strongest possible evidence in favor of the ballot.

But it is particularly in the name of the five millions of wage-working women in the United States that I raise my voice in behalf of unrestricted woman suffrage. These women have to go out in the world and compete with men in industry, in business, in educational and professional life, and why should they not have the same political rights and privileges? As a rule they are the victims of the most unjust discrimination in respect to wages and treatment, because they lack even the limited means of self-defense with which their male competitors are provided by their manhood suffrage.

If the pampered pets of society do not want to vote, the working women do, and for reasons that no society queen, such as Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, with all her brilliant sophistry, can successfully deny.

Thirty years ago Susan B. Anthony, the noble champion of woman suffrage in the early days of the movement, was treated with almost brutal contempt by the "better element" of society, in the city of Terre Haute; today her name is honored throughout the civilized world.

The cause of woman's rights is advancing with the cause of man's intelligence, and no matter how many obstacles may be thrown in its way by ignorance, prejudice and sordid self-interest, the time is coming when women will be the equal of man, when both will be free, when society will rise to a higher plane, and enter into a larger and nobler life.

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