

Congressman Davis Before the United State Senate Committee

Congressman John Davis of Kansas testified for political rights for women before the United States Special Committee on Woman Suffrage on February 21, 1894. He was introduced by Mrs. Annie L. Diggs. Her introduction and his testimony were published in the May 1894 issue of The National Bulletin, Vol. 3, No. 2, Washington, D. C. Davis offered a number of arguments in support of voting rights for women.

Creator: Davis, John, 1826-1901

Date: May, 1894

Callnumber: K 324.3 Pam. v. 2 no.7

KSHS Identifier: DaRT ID: 204239

Item Identifier: 204239

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THE NATIONAL BULLETIN.

Governments Derive Their Just Powers From the Consent of the Governed.

Vol. 3.

WASHINGTON, D. C., MAY, 1894.

No. 2

Congressman Davis Before the United States Senate Committee.

The Hon. John Davis of Kansas, is the first Member of Congress to plead for political rights for women before a Committee at the Capitol. In company with other speakers representing many States he appeared before the United States Special Committee on Woman Suffrage Feb. 21, 1894, and delivered the able argument here given. He was introduced by Mrs. Annie L. Diggs the first speaker from Kansas, who said:

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE: I think it may be fairly said that woman suffrage has been more fully and largely tested in Kansas than anywhere else—not forgetting at all that Wyoming and the State of Washington have tested full suffrage, whereas we in Kansas have only tested it along the lines of municipal action. In two instances, at the last municipal election, the woman vote exceeded the vote of the men in two cities. Whether the election was exciting or not we have gained in proportion to the men. There has been a steady increase of sentiment in favor of woman suffrage all the way through. All the old theoretical objections have long since ceased to be used against the ballot in the hands of women in Kansas. There is not a single living theoretical objection there. They have been all dissipated by actual facts. We see that our homes are well taken care of. The idle, false objection that women would neglect their homes if they got the ballot, has died long ago.

No man could possibly make himself more ridiculous than to rise before a Kansas audience and make such an objection. Some men may still fall into the trap by saying that governments are based upon force and that women should not vote because they can not fight. Some men may still make that objection because it has not been tested. We have not fought, we know; we might, but we do not want to.

Now I am going to show you in the most practical way I can the state of public sentiment that has grown up out of our use of the ballot in the municipal elections of Kansas.

I assure you that no politician there to-day who had the slightest hope of gaining favor from the public, or who had any political ambition whatever, and expected to gain office, would rise before a Kansas audience and say anything derogatory to the ballot in the hands of women. The very last thing

that a man seeking office and desiring to get it would do would be to declare against woman suffrage; but no party or politician that hopes to gain anything will for a moment oppose the enfranchisement of women. The public sentiment in favor of equal rights has grown, and I am going to show it to you practically to-day by yielding the rest of my time, and foregoing the pleasure to myself of addressing the committee any longer. I now introduce to you a Representative in Congress from our State—the Hon. John Davis. He will speak for Kansas.

REMARKS OF HON. JOHN DAVIS, M. C.

Mr. Davis said:

MR. PRESIDENT AND SENATORS: By request of the ladies present I beg to present a very brief statement and argument of the subject of equal or impartial suffrage.

Suffrage is the soil out of which grows government. If the soil is narrow and meager, permitting the exercise of a single will only, we call the government a monarchy or despotism. When the suffrage soil is broader, permitting the exercise and expression of the will of a class of citizens, the government is called an aristocracy.

When suffrage is still wider and more liberal, conforming to the laws of nature and justice among all classes of citizens, we call the government a democracy.

Suffrage is founded on natural right, and all citizens have equal claims to it; but, like all natural rights, it is subject to restraints and limitations when citizens enter into a state of civilized society. Civilized governments justly claim the right to limit citizenship to native-born persons, and aliens can become citizens only on certain prescribed conditions which shall purge them of their alienism. Even the natural right to life and liberty may be restrained and limited when the safety and welfare of society demand it. But no natural right can justly be restrained and limited unless society can render just and sufficient reasons for doing so. It does not devolve on the individual, nor on any class of individuals, to show that they possess the right of suffrage. It is a pre-existing natural right possessed by all alike, and unless society can show that in given cases it is for the safety and welfare of society that said natural right shall be restrained and limited, it must be conceded.

The question as to what the restraints and limitations shall be and to whom they shall apply is always answered by the governing power. If the governing power is a monarch or despot, the king is little restrained and his subjects are much restrained, and

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perhaps oppressed, reducing them to great inconvenience and distress. If the governing power is an aristocracy, then we find class laws, favoring the few and oppressing the many. In a democracy or republic, where the will of the people is supreme, restraints should be equally borne and all rights equally enjoyed as the welfare and best interests of society may demand.

Society has many ways of expressing its opinions and judgments on economic and political questions, but the tangible and ultimate plan is by the ballot. The ballot is a means of recording an individual opinion, which, when counted and computed with other individual opinions, recorded in the same authoritative way, shall indicate the aggregate public opinion on any given subject. Plainly, then, in civilized society, only those should vote who can form or entertain opinions, and whose opinions when formed are in friendly accord with the principles of the civilized society in question. Infants, lunatics, and idiots can not form opinions, hence infants, lunatics, and idiots should be restrained from voting. Criminals do not entertain opinions friendly to the society with which they are at variance, and aliens are not supposed to form friendly opinions toward a society which is in competition with that of which they are native-born members, or with a society whose genius they have had no opportunity of understanding. Hence criminals and aliens should be restrained from voting. But if infants, idiots, lunatics, criminals, and aliens should in any just and lawful manner be come purged or free from their disabilities, then they should be permitted to cast the ballot. Infants are purged of infancy at the age of 21 years. There are fixed lawful rules prescribed by which aliens are freed from their alienism. When thus freed from their disabilities infants and aliens very properly become voters. If it is practicable to relieve idiots, lunatics, and criminals of their disabilities, then they should become voters, but not otherwise.

In our judgment sex should form no bar or disability in the matter of voting. We find adult sane men and women equally capable of forming and entertaining opinions. The ballot is a means of commanding respect and of protecting personal rights and interests. Men and women are equally entitled to respect, and both have personal rights and interests requiring protection.

It is maintained by some that the ballot rests ultimately on the bullet; that majorities rule minorities, because majorities can defeat minorities on the battlefield. Then it is assumed that, therefore, woman should not cast the ballot because she may not or can not bear arms on the battlefield. The conclusion is wrong. The assumption is

founded on the lowest ethics of savagery, and has no place in civilized society. It is assumed that, in some imaginary exigency of government, most of the non-combatants may vote in the majority; that the most of the fighting men able to bear arms may vote in the minority; and that, in such case, a rebellious minority could not be coerced into submission. On the ethics of savagery such contingencies may arise, but not in civilized society.

In the ethics of savagery women have little influence, and a dozen braves may bully and defy a thousand children and squaws. Their respect for the helpless is slight and their sense of patriotism scarcely extends into the future. Savages are little troubled with anxiety for the welfare of posterity. In the ethics of savagery it is assumed that woman is not a combatant, and hence should be excluded from the ballot.

In a thousand ways civilized society differs from savagery. There are social ties and sentiments of patriotism, and feelings of obligation to our fellows in civilized society, not found in savagery. The armies on both sides were fuller during the late war because both male and female hearts swelled with the same patriotism; because mothers, wives, and sisters said to sons, husbands, and brothers, "Go;" and noble men at Shiloh, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga fought more bravely, fell more willingly, and died more cheerfully because of the well-thumbed pages of encouragement from mothers, wives, and sweethearts, carefully stowed away among the soldiers' personal treasures. Female courage, female patriotism, and female voices were a *war power* in that great struggle, powerfully felt and grandly acknowledged on both sides.

But this part of the subject must be built up from the lowest bed-rock. Let us appeal to physical facts plain to the comprehension of the humblest. In what consists the war power of nations? All history and philosophy since the Middle Ages, reply, "The war power of nations and peoples consists of the purse and the sword." That statement being true, what is the percentage of purse and what is the percentage of sword in the most effective war power?

Russia is a military nation. There are, say, in the entire Russian Empire 100,000,000 of people. On a war footing the Empire musters 3,000,000 of soldiers. What is the percentage? The swords amount to 3 per cent. of the people. Ninety-seven per cent. of the people are devoted to the purse and to the recuperative purposes. Let us say, then, as we safely may, that when the Empire of Russia is on an active war footing, with 3,000,000 soldiers in the field, putting forth her utmost power on a hundred battle-fields, only about 3 per cent. of her

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population is under arms. Ninety-seven per cent. is devoted to arming, clothing, feeding, encouraging, paying, recuperating, burying, and replacing the soldiers. One-half of the money earners and army supporters in Russia are females; one-half of that incomprehensible, powerful military arm of the Russian Empire rests on the hearts and bones and sinews of women. What is true of Russia is true of Germany, of France, of England, and of America. Behind every body of armed troops in the field there must be an adequate supporting population. This is the rule and history of the modern, half-barbarous war power. One-half of any national population may be reckoned female. Every loom and spindle run by a pale-faced girl is a "war power." Napoleon beat the armies of continental Europe, but was sent into exile by the spindles and looms of the British Islands, mainly operated by female hands.

Mr. Allison attributes England's wonderful success to the "persevering industry of the British people and the extent of the commerce which they maintained in every quarter of the globe," and to their "admirable system of finance, which seemed to rise superior to every difficulty with which it had to contend." In short, England conquers with the purse more than by the sword. The purse is fed and sustained by the women and non-combatants of the Empire. The sword is scarcely 1 per cent. of her inexhaustible war power. The Duke of Wellington and the mightiest generals of the continent could only hold Napoleon in check—the women and girls of Manchester captured him, disarmed him, and sent him into exile.

In the United States over twenty millions of people above the age of 10 years are engaged in gainful occupations. Fully two-thirds of them are non-combatants—unfit for military duty in the field by reason of age or sex, yet every one of them is a wealth producer and swells the war power of the nation. This is indisputable. Shall all non-combatants be deprived of the ballot because, by ultimate logic or chance, in some imaginary exigency, it may be necessary to enforce the decisions of the ballot by the use of the bullet? And as non-combatants can not carry the musket, must they therefore not vote? Where is the much lauded gallantry of man, that he would fire bullets and charge bayonets in the face of his mother, his sister, his wife, his daughter, or his sweetheart, with not another man noble and gallant enough to object? Such brutality and lack of gallantry must be sought in a State of savagery or in the restricted suffrage countries of Europe. It will never be found in countries where the political ad-

vancement of man depends on the ballot of woman.

The ballot was given to the negro, not as a war power—it was not given until five years after the war was over—but for personal protection. Is the negro with a ballot in his hand respected more or less on that account? The question is too silly for serious consideration. Woman needs the ballot for self protection. Will man treat woman with more or less respect and gallantry when he finds her vote necessary to the gratification of his "manly aspirations?" Does a lad treat his lass with more or less respect and gallantry when on bended knee he avers that "her consent" is necessary to his future happiness? What sort of a figure would he cut, musket in hand, marching and shooting with the rebellious minority, with his mother, sister, and lady love standing unarmed on the other side to be shot? Such absurdities belong to the ethics of savagery, or to the narrow-suffrage countries of the world.

The units of civilized society are dual, yet united, consisting of the strong right arm of man and the warm beating heart of woman; with a unity of intellectual and moral forces. Show me an institution of society where a man delights to enter in company with his mother, sister, wife, or daughter, and I will show you an institution which tends to civilization. Show me an institution where man does not desire to meet his mother, sister, wife, or daughter, and I will show you an institution which tends to barbarism. Show me the voting place where women are excluded and I will show you a place repulsive to the best elements of society and frequently in need of police guardianship. Show me a place where women cast their ballots, and I will show you carpeted rooms and tables embellished with flowers, and not requiring police protection.

The question to day is not whether women desire to vote. But, is it better for society that men and women should vote together? It is the duty of wisdom and patriotism to consider and decide this question. Our Christian civilization depends upon its right solution. The exercise of the voting franchise is a duty, as well as a privilege.

Mr. President, we should approach new experiments in government carefully. Our system of government with a union of States under one general head is wise and fortunate. New advancements in the upward march of progress may be tested on a small scale at first, and then adopted more widely or laid aside, without harm to the General Government or to sister States. The State of Kansas has adopted municipal suffrage for women, with great benefit to society. It is now proposed to extend the franchise for

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woman in that State to an equality with man. Many other States have done as much as Kansas has, and some have done all that we propose to do, with no harm reported from any. Mr. President and Senators, it is now asked of you to earnestly consider the subject of making equal suffrage for man and woman the policy of the nation, either State by State or the nation, as in your judgment may be thought best for society.

Shall Women Vote?

It is objected that women are already represented by men to whom the world of politics and affairs belongs; and that to give women the ballot would be to increase the numerical vote without altering for the better the proportional vote.

But: First, if all women felt themselves to be represented by the vote of men, no woman would seek a change; second, to give them the suffrage would not only increase the numerical vote, but add a new moral element to political action.

It is objected that this theory of a betterment of morale is an assumption.

But: the theory that no betterment would occur is an assumption also, and one may offset the other.

It is objected on the one hand that women being essentially like men, do not need the vote, and on the other, that being essentially unlike men, they ought not to vote.

But: if they are essentially like men, the State has equal need of their votes, and they have the same right to vote. If they are essentially different, then that difference is the measure of the injustice done them in a denial of the ballot.

It is objected that women ought not to vote, because their physical peculiarities remove them from arduous contact with affairs, and make it necessary that they should give the greater part of their time to the care and rearing of children.

But: as a matter of fact, only a small class of women is sheltered from arduous contact with affairs, and even among these no difficulty is now experienced in adding the most absorbing interests, social, charitable and intellectual, to the duties of the wife and mother. Moreover, there is a large and growing class of intelligent unmarried women, unaffected by this consideration.

It is objected on the one hand that women are too good for politics, and must not be contaminated by them and, on the other hand, that they are too untrustworthy and too uninformed to be permitted to vote.

But, politics, whether considered as a science or an art, is one of the loftiest studies known to the human mind. Neither

man nor woman can be too good for that study; and, if women are untrustworthy and uninformed, then the most efficient remedy for these short comings will be the opportunity and the necessity for improvement which the duty of voting would bring.

It is objected that if women voted they would be liable to military service, to jury-duty, and to the holding of office, all of these being impossible to women in the nature of things.

But: the direct relation between voting and bearing arms ceased on the day when soldiers were first hired to fight.

All modern warfare is carried on by paid armies, which the taxes of women help to pay. If it becomes the duty of women to serve on juries, they will doubtless serve with the faithfulness and intelligence that they now bring to charity-boards, church-committees, school-boards and improvement associations. As to further office-holding, conspicuous ability and a general demand for their services would probably induce some women, as these considerations now induce some men, to consent to take office, even against their self-interest. In any case, capacity would be the test of fitness, and not sex.

It is objected that to give women the vote would be to sow dissension in families, because if the husband and wife do not agree as to candidates and measures, quarrels must ensue which would break up family peace.

But: this position is that of the old common law which declares that husband and wife are one and that that one is the husband. Public opinion long ago pronounced this an untenable doctrine, and the statutes of every civilized State expressly disavow and discountenance it. Why should the old theory of the common law be expected to survive in the domain of politics alone?

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Published monthly at the office of THE WOMAN'S TRIBUNE, Washington, D. C.

Subscription price 15 cents per annum; 10 cts. for 25 copies of any number; 30 cts. per 100; \$2.50 per 1,000. Many speeches of Mrs. Stanton and others are kept in stock.

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