Eleanor Roosevelt

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Women Must Learn to Play the Game As Men Do

By Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

Women have been voting for ten years, but have they achieved actual political equality with men? They go through the outward forms of voting, but too often without real power. But it is mostly a game without real stakes. While there are some winning exceptions, women who have gone out to vote have often been considered as second class citizens. Women leaders generally they are treated with the utmost courtesy, but they want what they want, and what they have to say, is regarded as of little weight. In fact, they have no actual influence or say at all in the consequential councils of parties.

In small things they are listened to, but when it comes to naming for important things they generally find they are up against a blank wall. This is true of local committees, State committees, and the national organizations of both major political parties.

From all over the United States, women of both camps have come to me, and they have said that their experiences are practically the same. When meetings are to be held at which momentous matters are to be decided, the women members are often not notified, and if they are notified, they are not allowed to attend. When they are notified of formal meetings where important matters are to be raised, they usually find all the things that have been planned and prepared without consultation with them.

In those circles which decide the affairs of national politics, women have no voice or power whatever. On the national committees of each party there is a woman representative from every State, and a woman appears as vice-chairman. But when national elections are held, their votes are usually solicited as well as party politicians, they are rarely invited. At the national conventions no woman has ever been asked to serve on the platform committee.

Politically, as a sex, women are generally “out” in any intrinsic share of influence in their parties. The machinery of party politics has always been in the hands of men, and still is. Our statements and legislation are still based in form on the successors of the early warriors gathering around the camp-fire plotting the next day’s attack. Yet there are grumblings from the women indicating they are willing to take women into the higher councils of the party. Such is the history of women throughout the States. A woman has not been asked to raise funds, but when it comes to these grave councils at which candidates are discussed, women are rarely invited.

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The political game will tell you they are excluded from any actual kind of important participation. They are called upon to endorse votes, but they are kept in ignorance of noteworthy plans and affairs. Their requests are seldom refused outright, but they are put off with a technique that is an art in itself. The fact is that generally women are not taken seriously. With certain exceptions, men still as a class dismiss their consequence and value in politics, cherishing the old-fashioned concept that their place is in the home. While women’s votes are a factor to be counted upon and figure largely in any impending campaign, the individual woman who figures in party councils are regarded by their male colleagues as having no real power back of them. And they haven’t.

Men who work hard in party politics are always recognized, or taken care of in one way or another. Women, most of whom are voluntary workers and not at all self-seeking, are generally expected to find in their labor its own reward. When it comes to giving the offices or dealing out favors, men are always given precedence.

They will ask women to run for office now and then, sometimes because they think it politic and wise to show women how generous they are, but more often because they realize in advance their ticket cannot win in the district selected. Therefore they will put up a woman, knowing it will injure the party less to have a woman defeated, and then they can always say it was her sex that defeated her. Where victory is certain, very rarely can you get a woman nominated on the party ticket.

Of course there are women all over the United States who have been elected to high and important offices. There are three women in Congress; there have been two woman governors; and women sit in various State legislatures and hold State offices.

In New York City one could cite several who have not only been elected but who have conducted themselves in office with ability and distinction. But does that indicate any equal recognition or share in political power? Infinitely more examples come to mind of women who were either denied a nomination or who were offered it only when inevitable defeat stared the party leaders in the face.

When, some years ago, it came to putting women on the Democratic State Committee in New York, only two outstanding men openly approved of the move. A number were willing, but a great many more were indifferent. Governor Smith wanted women on the committee, believing they had something to contribute, and that they should have recognition for what they could do. Quite unlike Governor Smith, many other men come to mind who hold important positions of power in New York State. They deal with the women in a spirit of most deferential courtesy; but as many of us know, they heartily dislike the idea of women mixing in politics, are antagonistic to those who are active, and can be depended upon to do all in their power to render the women’s influence negative.

Beneath the veneer of courtesy and outward show of consideration universally accorded women, there is a widespread male hostility—age-old, perhaps—against sharing with them any actual control.

How many excuses haven’t I heard for not giving nominations to women? “Oh, she wouldn’t like the kind of work she’d have to do!” Or, “You know she wouldn’t like the people she’d have to associate with—that’s not a job for a nice, refined woman.” Or more usually: “You see, there is so little patronage nowadays. We must give every appointment the most careful consideration. We’ve got to consider the good of the party.” “The good of the party” eliminates women.

When no women are present at the meetings, the leaders are more outspoken. (Continued on page 83.)
WOMEN MUST LEARN TO PLAY THE GAME AS MEN DO

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“Now, we’re not going to have any woman on the ticket,” declared one leader according to a report once made to me. "These fool women are always making trouble, anyway. We won’t have any we don’t have to, and if we have one, let’s get one we understand.”

It is a strong and liberal man, indeed, who speaks on behalf of the women at those secret conventions, and endeavors to have them fairly treated.

To many women who fought so long and so valiantly for suffrage, what has happened has been most discouraging. For one reason or another almost all the women who carried the early fight to success have dropped out of politics. This has been in many ways unfortunate. Among them were women with gifts of real leadership. They were exceptions to the high type of women, idealists concerned in carrying a cause to victory, with no idea of personal advancement or gain. In fact, attaining the vote was only part of a program for equal rights—an external gesture toward economic independence, and social and spiritual equality with men.

When the franchise was finally achieved, their interest was not held by any ambition for political preeminence or honors. To learn the intricate machinery of politics and play the men’s game left them cold. The routine of political office held little interest. One of the most prominent of those early crusaders today gives her energies to campaigning for women’s rights. By nature a propagandist, it would be impossible to interest her in either of the political parties. Another woman, who donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the cause, frankly admits she has never even cast a vote. She considers the situation, with women coping with men in the leaner and more urgent hours, a victory.

Personally, I do not believe in a Woman’s Party. A woman’s ticket could never possibly succeed. And to crystallize the issue on the basis of sex-opposition would only further antagonize men, complicate their age-old prejudices, and widen the chasm of existing differences.

HOW, then, can we bring the men leaders to conceive participation in party affairs, adequate representation and real political equality?

Our answer is to elect, accept and back women political bosses.

To organize as women, but within the parties, in the counties and States just as men organize, and to pick efficient leaders—say two or three in each State—whom we will support and by whose decisions we will abide. With the power of unified women voters behind them, such women bosses would be in a position to talk in terms of “business” with the leaders. Women bosses would be, because their authority and the elective power they could command would have to be recognized.

Women are today ignored largely because they have no hand in the councils of government as representatives and spokesmen capable of dealing with the bosses in the councils of government. They have the power of coordinated voters behind them. Our helplessness is that of an innocent anarchy.

Perhaps the word “boss” may shock sensitive ears. To many it will conjure all the disillusionment and corruption in our political machinery. Yet when I speak of women bosses, I mean bosses actually in the sense that men are bosses. The term boss does not necessarily infer what it once did. Politics have been purged of many of the corruptions prevalent a quarter of a century ago. In neither of the political parties are there many, if any, such bosses, great or small, as were such common types in the heyday of Quay and Tweed. As things are today, the boss is a leader, often an enlightened, high-minded leader, who retains little of the qualities imputed by the old use of this abominable word, but who still exercises authority over his district. I therefore use the word, as it is the word men understand.

If women believe they have a right and duty in political life today, they must learn to talk the language of men. They must not only master the phraseology, but also understand its machinery which men have built up through years of practical experience. Against the men bosses there must be women bosses who can talk as equals, with the backing of a coherent organization of women voters behind them. These women bosses must be not only substitutes for men, but are the following of the old leader. The important thing is the choosing of the leaders.

We must be fair, and admit the blame of our present ineffective politics in politics does not lie wholly with the men. If we are still a negligible factor, ignored and neglected, we must be prepared to admit in what we have ourselves failed.

The trouble with many women is that they went to work. They went to take up their jobs as men do and put in seven or eight real working hours a day. They lack knowledge, and at that many would take the pains to study history, economic, political methods or get out among human beings. If they take a voluntary political job, it is a thing of constant interruptions, with no one to supply counsel, concentration, become efficiency or order. One of the reasons why men leaders so often do not consider as important what a woman says is that they do not feel sure she has been active among the mass of women voters and has learned what they want. In fact, many women do make the mistake of “talking out of a blue sky” instead of going about, mixing with women, and getting their point of view from close personal contact and practical experience.

When a man leader says his following want certain things, the men higher up realize that he knows what he is talking about, and that he has gone through his district.

There are two classes of men in politics—those for whom it is a game or recreation, and those for whom it is bread and butter. These latter are usually small office-holding politicians, bosses of small groups of men. At their head are men who are deeply interested for the good of their country as they see it, and who often for patriotic reasons hold government offices for a time. But you will find that the men who insist that in some other career in which they have made a name, worked their best and hardest, and gained the wherewithal to live and support their families, politics—public service—is something apart.

Women are different. Many of them have no professional careers. If they go into politics it is usually because of some interest which they realize is dependent on government action. I know women who are interested in education, in health conditions, in the improvement of rural life, in social problems, in housing, and all active in politics
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because they have come to realise by that way they may further their particular cause. Politics is less of a game to them because they haven’t had the same training for games as men, and their first contact with great groups of people is an exciting and disturbing experience, not to be taken lightly but almost prayerfully.

In this I am not speaking of the small army of women who are trained in some profession, some of whom hold minor political offices, and a few of whom hold positions of influence in the parties. Some of these have attained the status of men, and meet them on the same ground. Then there are women, as there are men, who frankly are in politics for what they can get out of it. I remember one woman who had worked hard in an organization and was denied recognition in the tangible way she desired—namely, a paid job. Whereupon she announced she was going over to the opposing political party, where, when they wished to reward a worker, they created a job if one was not available at the time.

This attitude is comparatively rare, however, because most women working in all political organizations are volunteers. Their motives for being volunteers may be mixed. I am far from claiming that as a sex we have a monopoly of disinterested desire to serve our country. Human nature is much the same in men and women. But the fact remains that the great mass of women working in political organizations all over this country are unpaid, and they are so far allowed to do the detail work which bores the men.

In the average home a woman’s job is full of interruptions; and so, unless she sets out to methodize her life, she is apt to go through many wasteful motions. New many volunteer political workers come out of such unorganized homes. When the children are small, if you have little help in their homes, the mothers cannot do outside work. But as the children grow up—or in rare cases before they are married—they may turn to politics as an outside interest. If they are women of nature and have more help at home, they may still have led disorganized lives, for of necessity is largely a home and children make unexpected demands.

I should not want the average woman, or the exceptional woman for that matter, who well as it could. “I don’t think Philip Helm would,” she said; “he didn’t seem like that to me. I thought he was terribly proud and all that.”

“Well, he’ll need to,” said Botsford sarcastically.

“Dick, you think you’re awfully unfair,” said Lily.

“Oh, am I? Botsford was not to be moved from his satisfaction.

“Get me a paper, will you?” he asked the waiter.

They were dining at the Town Club, by themselves. Lily and Botsford had been making the best of each other lately, as if they saw inevitable marriage in the distance. But they were always apart. . . .

Dick leaned forward, the paper folded to a long column on the front page.

“It’s certainly got a headline. Entrance will of late David Ranger. Beloved men should earn own money. Niece gets large inheritance. . . .

“He must have been rich!”

“Oh, he was. Why shouldn’t he? He never spent anything. I drove out tonight with Will Cummings, who says that his property in the copper company simply wasn’t known. He was a great income-tax dodger, you know. . . .

“Go on,” said Lily. “Read the part about Carol.”

“Well, I can’t read the whole thing. It was something about a divorce. . . .

“I’m coming to it. Here it is: ‘My niece, Caroline Ranger, the rest of my estate, on the condition that she shall retain control of her own property and not give it in whole or in part to her spouse, whoever he may be. . . . This must have been written before Carol was married.’”

“I told you it wasn’t because he had anything against Philip Helm.”

“Well, he must have guessed at him. Here’s the heavy part. ‘To do this in the belief that every man should earn his own living, regardless of the property of his wife, and that no man should depend on a woman for his livelihood. I believe that marital happiness and welfare is dependent on this—So, I decide quite a lot of horses, didn’t he, the old man?’

“What’s the date of the will?” asked Lily, astir.

“Amazingly intelligent.”

“About fourteen months ago.”

“You and Carol was married!” cried Lily. “My mother said tonight that she remembered that Mr. Ranger had just married a man and gave him what money she had—they had a lot of trouble about it.”

“Some time between Ranger’s death, don’t you want to know? They’re getting that, and some Chinese pleasant too—keeping this month.”

“All right. I don’t see that the whole