

mies". In Timothy Anglin's case at least, Sir John A. remained faithful to his principles.

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VERONICA STRONG-BOAG. — *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada*. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1976.

With its many initiatives over the past few years the History Division of the National Museum of Man has been both servicing and prodding the scholarly community in Canada. The *Mercury Series*, of which this book is the latest publication, produces research hot off the conference circuit or straight out of the oral defence. The format is cheap and the publication is quick. The benefits are obvious. Research results are into the hands of users almost before the words have ceased or the ink has dried. Even the drawbacks may have some long-term beneficial effect. In this case the publication is a Ph. D. thesis and few theses are ready for public consumption the minute they have passed the university tests required of them. Invariably they are too long, too detailed and too tedious; invariably they evoke from a reader both the picayune and the grandiose questions that probably only belong in the office of the supervisor, on the report to the Graduate Dean or at the oral defence. Enough of such publications and graduate schools will start demanding more polished productions from their students; when that happens the Museum can add another feather to its cap.

There were of course pressing reasons for the publication of this thesis. It is in the new field of women's history where, until recently, the dearth of Canadian materials was truly scandalous. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, this is the first doctoral thesis in the field in Canada, if one excepts Catherine Cleverdon's *Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* completed for an American university in the late 1940s. If rumour is correct, it had to sustain a fair fight even to get started. That, in the end, it should be just what one expects of a very good doctoral thesis — scrupulously researched, carefully constructed and contributing greatly to our knowledge of Canada's social history — was probably a surprise to the skeptical. That the author, skilful pioneer that she is, should want to go on immediately to other untouched territory is both understandable and necessary. For even in the time she spent on this thesis, women's history moved quickly away from elite women making public contributions (just like men) to ordinary women experiencing the vicissitudes of everyday life. In social history in general, and in women's history in particular, one has to move quickly. While the author moves swiftly into a broad study of women in the 1920s, we consumers can profit, thanks to the National Museum, from what must be the biggest, most detailed and cheapest book on the market today.

The National Council of Women, a federation of women's organizations, had pretensions to being a national voice, a "parliament" for the women of Canada. It emerged at the very time that other organizations — political, social, economic, intellectual — were flexing their pan-Canadian muscles, stretching themselves out from local and regional and sectarian concerns. This book documents the rise, the prominence and the gradual decline of the NCW from its origins in 1893 (with antecedents in numerous clubs and associations in the 1870s and 1880s) to its lethargy of the late 1920s when affiliated groups broke away and unkind

voices despaired of any true social change coming from conservative upper middle class ladies.

In fact those very women had both reflected and brought about much of the social change that occurred in Canada around the turn of the century. Conservative they certainly were: they feared for the home and the family in a time of rapid urbanization and industrialization. But their reaction was to encourage women to step out boldly into the public arena and defend the home and the family. Middle class they certainly were: at times their own despair over the lack of domestic servants seemed their major concern (and, from their point of view, rightly so: they actually believed the home life of the nation would suffer from the lack. How middle class motherhood has changed!) But it was the very leisure afforded them by servants and by prosperous husbands that permitted them to demand of politicians and public administrators improved factory legislation, better housing and health care, playgrounds, technical and domestic science education, minimum ages and wages, mothers' allowances, equal pay and, by 1910, woman suffrage. These women took their self-imposed role of public mother seriously and they were largely successful in it. Only when society in the 1920s began to question all kinds of controls, including maternal ones, and when women no longer accepted mothering as the distinctive and unifying force for them did the NCW begin to flounder. Thanks to this study, we can no longer speak of any of the social reforms or social reform movements of the early decades of the twentieth century without considering the role of women. Indeed, there is a lesson for Canadian social history clearly delineated but never explicitly stated in this book: the coming of the welfare state in Canada probably owes more to activist women than to ideological change.

What of the lessons for Canadian women's history? There is a certain irony in the fact that the NCW based its public activities on the argument of separate spheres: women were quite decidedly different from men. And yet the NCW began to lose its effectiveness just after the First World War, at the same time and for the same reasons that other reform groups and national organizations began to fall apart. The women, it seems, were no different from the social gossipers, the trade unionists and the politicians: all were subject to regional and class divisions. Just how the women reacted to those regional and class divisions we do not know. One of the surprising omissions of this study is just how these women organized themselves and their activities. An authoritarian executive is posited but its authoritarianism is never examined. Perhaps the sources do not permit such an examination; annual reports, the major source used here, are generally long on accomplishments and short on means. Yet it is the means that will tell us something about women in groups. We are familiar with statements that are now virtually truisms and are repeated in this study: that women have extraordinary organizing skills and that the early women's organizations served as political education for women. But one would dearly like to know the hows and the whats of those skills and that education.

So while the focus shifts in women's history from elite to ordinary women, there is still much to be gleaned from studies of the organizations elite women built.

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