

EDITORIAL

AN UNUSUAL BOOK.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL'S anti-suffrage book, entitled *The Ladies' Battle*, is advertised by its publisher, the Macmillan Company, as "an unusual book," containing "the most powerful argument against votes for women." Had the Macmillan Company not endeavored to substantiate its praises with citations from the book, the conclusion would have been justified that the praises bestowed were merely a seller's "puffs," who puffs all the louder the poorer his ware. There can be no "powerful argument" against votes for women. But the Macmillan Company makes several citations. These tend to confirm the view that the book is unusual. A perusal of the book itself leaves hardly any room for doubt.

Take this passage:

"There are two basic principles against woman suffrage: First, no electorate has ever existed or ever can exist which cannot execute its own laws; second, no voter has ever claimed or ever can claim maintenance from another voter."

This is an unusual passage, with two unusual features,—one pronouncedly sticking out—and one pronouncedly suggested.

The feature, that pronouncedly sticks out, is the startling assertiveness with which two facts, wholly false, one political and one economic, are sweepingly stated.

The statement is politically false that "no electorate has ever existed or ever can exist which cannot execute its own laws."—In order to execute the laws of capitalist society, long and special training is required. The requisite minimum of collegiate training is impossible of acquisition to the overwhelming majority of the citizens, male and female, of a bourgeois republic. The struggle for life that seizes the majority of our children and suctions them into its whirl almost from infancy



MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL
(1860–1916)

disqualifies them for the execution of the laws of the land. It is no accident that by far the larger number of our law executors are lawyers, and the bulk or the remaining ones men of affluence, hence, of considerable training in “executing the laws.” This notwithstanding, we find manhood suffrage in this country, that is, an “electorate,” the cast majority of which “cannot execute its own laws.” This state of things, true enough, has not always existed. Time was when the electorate was limited to those capable to execute “its own laws.” But the change

was not made in this generation. It was made before; it comes down to us from several generations back. What Molly Elliot Seawell asserts never was, or could be,—an electorate which cannot execute its own laws—not only IS but WAS. What was and is cannot be considered fundamentally a future impossibility.

The economic, and equally false assertion, sweepingly made, is that “no voter has ever claimed or ever can claim maintenance from another voter.”—The Working Class, male and female, though it is the wealth producer, hence, the maintainer of the Capitalist Class, cannot exercise its labor-function, and, consequently, has nothing “to bite,” unless the Capitalist Class sees, or thinks it sees, its way clear to knock off profits. Only then does the Capitalist Class allow the Working Class access to the necessaries for production, in other words, only then can the Working Class exercise its labor function, and only then can it obtain something “to bite.” The Working Class is, what sociologically it is called, a Wage-Slave Class. The practical effect of this fact is that the Wage-Slave is forced to “claim maintenance” from the Capitalist Class, and that the Capitalist Class maintains the Working Class—and loudly does the Capitalist Class proclaim the fact: To “give work to Labor” as the Capitalist claims it does, is to “maintain” Labor. Now, then, it so happens that, at whatever figure the Wage-Slave Class is estimated; at whatever figure the female portion thereof be fixed; and whatever the figure be of the non-voters; the voting male wage-slave constitutes a decided majority of our electorate. In other words, the economic state of things which Molly Elliot Seawell asserts

never was, or could be,—a voter who claimed maintenance from another voter—not only IS, but WAS, from the time when the capitalist system took full hold of the country.

Finally, the feature pronouncedly suggested by Molly Elliot Seawell's book hardly needs pointing out. It is amply indicated by the feature, just examined, which pronouncedly sticks out. If woman, who, from Molly Elliot Seawell's estimate of her, cannot execute laws, and, furthermore, must claim maintenance from others,—if, therefore, woman cannot with "logic" or "justice" demand votes for herself, then it follows that neither can, or should her fellow male wage-slave. The reasons advanced against women, hold equally good against male wage-slave electorates. The argument is a covert advocacy of the abolition of the present "illogical" and "unjust" laws that invest the male wage slave citizen with the ballot—laws, which, seeing they actually bring about a practice that, otherwise, "never was or ever could be," are simply social monstrosities.

No doubt about it—Molly Elliot Seawell's book is "unusual."

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