

perspective-from-a-canadian-sister

The Premier of the day delivered his message, that he would vote against extending the franchise to women even though he had great respect for them. Two days later, on January 29, 1914, Mrs. McClung, several more women and a few men, opened the performance, "The Mock Parliament," at the Walker Theatre. This time the *women* were members of the Government of the day and a delegation of *men* were requesting Votes for Men. The men were rejected as not being qualified nor trustworthy with the responsibility. After all, "Men's place is on the farm."

This hilarious satire was overwhelmingly successful and two years later on January 27, 1916, the third and final reading of the amendment to the Manitoba Election Act passed giving women the right to vote. The provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta followed just days later.

The home and other communities of the "Famous Five" have plaques and memorials in their honor, as does the Canadian Senate. Of the Famous Five, Emily Murphy may be remembered more than the others as the City of Edmonton has a very large and popular riverside park named for her. Undoubtedly, the suffrage movement was overshadowed by the war. But these women continued battling for social reforms –the minimum wage, property rights, medical care,

pensions, etc. so the suffrage achievement was not viewed as one event, but as part of the ongoing package. The right to vote was granted in 1916 in three provinces, but even then the struggle continued until women's status as "persons" was fully resolved in 1929. The right to vote was not an end to the struggle but just one step.

As a young adult, I took voting for granted and viewed the past fight for the right to vote, and to hold seats in the Legislature and Parliament, as evidence that the older members of the family had lived in the Dark Ages and was somewhat dismissive. I would guess that is the same for others.

One critical aspect of the "new suffragists' struggle" is not just the right to vote, but the right to go to school and receive an education. At a personal level, that is where I am involved. Therefore I send financial support to I Am A Girl and Stones Into Schools. I realize that I have neglected even telling my own daughter about how these women's triumph has affected me. And Strike 2, the ball just thwacked the glove — I also need to tell my son.

To revive and spread the message of this struggle, we could use the same strategy: theatre, satire, story-telling. A play or movie of the original appearance and rejection, the strategy of the theatre performance and satire, and the outburst and pandemonium of the victory could be a blockbuster. The

impact may shatter a few glass ceilings and beyond.

Barbara Allisen