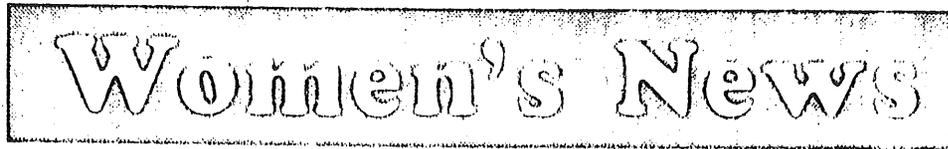


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Equal rights foes amuse first state woman legislator

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19TH AMENDMENT OPPOSITION RECALLED BY CITY RESIDENT



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THE MINNEAPOLIS STAR

Wed., Aug. 26, 1970

At least one woman in the Twin Cities has heard nothing really new yet in speculation on the consequences of the equal rights law for women passed by one house of Congress.

"It's just the same as the opposition they gave the suffrage amendment," sighed 68-year-old Myrtle Cain. And she should know.

Miss Cain, 650 Jackson St. NE., became a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives three years after the 1920 ratification of the suffrage amendment.

And near the end of her two-year term, she introduced the first equal-rights law for women to be introduced into any state legislature.

"Of course, we got nowhere then," Miss Cain recalled. "All kinds of terrible things were predicted."

Her bill was opposed by many men and by "most of the national women's organizations," she said, because of fear that its passage would remove protective legislation used by many states to "safeguard" its women workers.

Actually, according to the vigorous politician, removal of protective legislation will help the female laborer, a viewpoint with which many women's liberationists concur.

"Some of this protective legislation

talk has been a real bugaboo," she said. "It really isn't so protective. Often it protects women from getting some of the good jobs."

She often wonders whether protective legislation "wasn't designed to be a detriment to a woman's advancement."

Miss Cain's ill-fated bill in the Legislature was similar in content to the proposed constitutional amendment passed Aug. 10 by the House. If this bill is passed by the Senate and ratified by the legislatures of two-thirds of the states, it will guarantee equal rights under the constitution to members of both sexes.

That, Miss Cain said, would be real progress. She said the bill has "a good chance" for passage in Minnesota.

Women's entrance into many professions previously reserved for men has

created a view of female capabilities which makes passage in other states more likely, too, she said.

"Women have done a great deal. They've gone into the professions — they've worked in the war plants when the men were scarce and they've done an excellent job."

Ramifications of passage and ratification have been debated among women's liberationists and legislators for months. One sure consequence — perhaps the only one — will be its provision of a source of appeal for alleged cases of discrimination, Miss Cain said.

"It's most important to eliminate discrimination in the law," she said. "So many states discriminate against women on the basis of common law that it would take several lifetimes to take the cases on one at a time."

The basic question deals more with discrimination in general than with discrimination against women, she said.

"These discriminations by race and sex, all along the line, should be done away with once and for all," she said. "It's ridiculous that here in the year 1970 we have to eliminate discrimination."

Her current service on the staff of Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.), chief Senate sponsor of the women's rights amendment, is just another chapter in a long list of projects to end discrimination against her sex.

Much of her work was done with the National Women's Party.

During World War II, she served as labor relations director at the Twin Cities arsenal and participated in a wage dispute which developed when the plants were unionized.

The Twin Cities plant, which employed "large numbers" of women, once received instructions from the War Department that women could be paid 2 percent less than men for the same work Miss Cain said.

With the help of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, the women protested to President Franklin Roosevelt who responded by ordering equal pay for employees regardless of sex.

Miss Cain was the only woman labor relations director at that time.