

Open Session  
Fairgrounds  
MAY 9, 1974

WOMAN'S LIB.  
Tom Soyak

The open session of the Athenaeum is a perilous time for the Society. Notice I said perilous for the Society, not for the speakers. They are usually treated with considerably more courtesy than they are at a regular meeting. It is the Society <sup>itself</sup> which is in danger. The President and his officers who must assign the papers for the current <sup>for open</sup> session always use great care in the selection of the speakers for the open session. The task is not, I modestly add with apologies to Curtis, to get the two best speakers for the open session. It is rather to make sure that the persons picked will not embarrass the Society by giving a paper on something controversial. Our ladies are here with us tonight. Friends and guests are also present. The Society must not disgrace itself <sup>in</sup> public. Some of our best members are, therefore, automatically disqualified. Norman Lazare cannot appear since his papers, although <sup>always</sup> beautifully ~~disguised~~ <sup>stuffed with</sup> by poetry, <sup>garnished with</sup> Norman's mellifluous voice and <sup>crammed with</sup> lots of big words, are always really about sex. Dr. Bill Rowlett might

~~give~~ <sup>deliver</sup> another paper on venereal disease. George Boone might give political offense to some of our audience with some ultra-radical proposal like abolishing the oil depletion allowance. In fact, nearly all of our attorney members are ineligible since every one knows that attorneys are always querulous and argumentative. Many of our other members are similarly <sup>tabu</sup> disqualified as open session speakers. Only a few of us are considered safe. Last year the Program Committee made two fine choices. Robert Sivley -- after all he is a psychologist and it is his job to make people happy with themselves -- capably responded to the question on Western movies he had seen during his boyhood. <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ Committee's other selection, came through with a paper on Hopkinsville's first railroad. <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ is was bound

to be non-controversial since WFIW folded up almost a half a century ago and ~~so~~ therefore, <sup>none of our members,</sup> ~~no one~~ except Wallace Henderson, Sr., could remember anything about it. Some of the women might <sup>possibly</sup> have ~~remembered~~ <sup>had some recollection of</sup> something about it, but William knew that none of them would dare admit being that old.

This year, however, the Committee had a hard job. They did the best they could to find a non-controversial speaker. While Curtis Brasher is a long way from being the most conservative of bankers, he is after all, a banker. I, of course, am an attorney and as mentioned earlier this group is ordinarily disqualified. ~~The Committee~~ <sup>the Committee</sup> Over the years, however, has learned that some attorneys are fairly safe, mainly those who hold some elective office. These men will not offend their constituents. In fact, George Boone, mentioned above as an inappropriate open session speaker, was given a chance at an open session a couple of years ago and came through admirably, giving <sup>a typical open session</sup> a non-controversial <sup>boring affair -- a travelogue</sup> paper on his trip to Ireland. It was, however, no coincidence that this was the year George was running for State Representative! And so the Committee decided to take a chance on me. I stand here tonight, however, to tell them that this time they failed. Not only is my paper on the subject of Woman's Lib, but I am delivering it at the one meeting a year when the ladies can be present. If this be the end of the Grand Old Athenaeum Society at ~~last~~ <sup>least</sup> let it be said that we went down with all guns blazing and all flags flying, defiantly engaging the enemy on his own (or I guess I should say her own) home turf.

Woman's Lib is obviously a contraction or corruption

composed of women, who believe that women should be liberated or freed. They contend that women are discriminated against on all sides. To many men it seems that women are more free than men. The man of the house is usually tied down to a fixed number of hours per day <sup>and days per week</sup> at the office or the factory while the woman remains in the

home and performs services pertaining to the house and the family. In exchange for these services the husband provides for her. The woman liberator at this point poses a good argument. A wife performs menial personal services for another and receives in exchange food, clothing, shelter and protection. So does a slave! The feeling of powerlessness, of being out of the main stream of events, of being confined to a never ending regimen of cleaning, cooking, diapering, dishwashing and all the other tasks that are euphemistically <sup>labeled</sup> ~~listed~~ "homemaking", drive some women into the arms of <sup>the</sup> Women's Libbers.

The housewife is not the only prospect for Woman's Lib. Exceptionally capable women, particularly those in business or the professions, feel that they are held back and not permitted to ~~reach~~ <sup>denied</sup> the high levels that men of comparable ability can achieve. And statistics seem to bear them out. The percentage of women in the top echelons of almost any organization is much lower than their percentage in the lower ranks. Even women who make the top rung often feel discriminated <sup>to</sup> ~~against~~. They are there, but they regard their victory as "tokenism". They are like the token black <sup>the college faculty or on the corporation</sup> on the board of directors, not really wanted or accented but put there simply to keep down criticism.

Another group that feels prejudice is composed

... prejudice is composed of the typical working woman. Not too long ago working women were pretty well confined to what has been called the "soothing" <sup>three</sup> professions, nursing, social work and teaching. Then the invention and development of the typewriter in the last century brought more women into the working world as secretaries. Even today, however, these four professions furnish <sup>proportionately</sup> fewer of the woman's libbers than one might think. Perhaps it is because these professions have been traditionally, and until recent years almost completely, dominated by women. In fact, society sometimes makes subtle discriminations or snide remarks about men who are in these professions.

And the Nineteenth Century also brought the factory and the assembly line. Mechanization meant that raw strength was no longer a pre-requisite for <sup>a laborer</sup> ~~the manufacture of goods~~. Employers were quick to discover that women (and yes, even children, but that's another story) were equally as good as men on a production line and furthermore, they worked for less, doubtless because when compared to men, they had fewer ~~other~~ competing employment opportunities. Not only were women paid less than men for doing the same work but promotions to foreman or manager were almost totally closed to them.

Many of these women came to resent even the laws that were passed for them by humanitarian legislators, almost all men, of course. Laws limiting working hours for women and laws calling for compulsory breaks <sup>or rest periods</sup> had been passed to help women but many women felt that employers used these inconveniences as excuses not to hire them or to keep them in the lowest paid and least important jobs. Maximum hour legislation often prevented

And the Nineteenth Century also brought the factory and the assembly line. Mechanization meant that raw strength was no longer a pre-requisite for <sup>a laborer.</sup> ~~the manufacture of goods~~. Employers were quick to discover that women (and yes, even children, but that's another story) were equally as good as men on a production line and furthermore, they worked for less, doubtless because when compared to men, they had fewer ~~other~~ competing employment opportunities. Not only were women paid less than men for doing the same work but promotions to foreman or manager were almost totally closed to them.

Many of these women came to resent even the laws that were passed for them by humanitarian legislators, almost all men, of course. Laws limiting working hours for women and laws calling for compulsory breaks <sup>or rest periods</sup> had been passed to help women but many women felt that employers used these inconveniences as excuses not to hire them or to keep them in the lowest paid and least important jobs. Maximum hour legislation often prevented

facility in which to have it done. For most practical purposes, therefore, the abortion battle was won by the Woman's Libbers. Although as a result <sup>of the decision - death of</sup> there was a great beating of breasts and gnashing of teeth by many state legislators, it has been suggested ~~that~~ most of them were actually quite relieved to have the Supreme Court take them off the hook. They were dead tired of being continuously assailed by the Woman's Libbers on the one hand and <sup>by</sup> the equally shrill "Right to Life" advocates on the other. It might be mentioned in passing that the legislative respite was short lived. The "right to life" crowd turned its attention to overturning the Supreme Court's decision by amending the Constitution. The <sup>pressure</sup> ~~heat~~ was back on the legislators. I believe that Eddie Whitfield, or any other <sup>member of the last General Assembly</sup> ~~state legislator~~ would verify that there was more heat and rhetoric ~~in the last legislature~~ on this ~~one~~ issue than on any other, with the possible exception of school busing.

The women have won other less spectacular but equally satisfying victories in the Supreme Court. <sup>In 1971</sup> The Court in Reed vs Reed, 404 U.S. 71, 30 L Ed 2d 245 declared unconstitutional an Idaho statute that gave <sup>preference</sup> ~~precedence~~ to men over women in being appointed by the probate courts as the administrators of ~~an~~ estates.

In another case an army WAC named Sharron Frontiero applied for an army allotment, or quarters allowance, for her husband, but was turned down by the army since she couldn't prove that she furnished more than one-half his support. She argued that she should not have to show this, since a male soldier can draw an allotment for his wife regardless of how much support he provides. Mrs. Frontiero argued that the army policy was <sup>un</sup> ~~un~~ constitutional discrimination because of ~~her~~ sex and in the case of <sup>1973</sup> ~~the~~ case of

She and her husband got the allotment.

The Kentucky Court of Appeals got in the act. For years Kentucky has had a statute (KRS 244.320) which prohibits serving a woman wine or liquor at the bar; she could only be served at a table. But in 1972 in the case of Alcoholic Beverage Control Board vs. Burke, 481 S W 2nd 52, the Statute was declared unconstitutional. Also declared unconstitutional in this same case was another Kentucky Statute (KRS 244.100) which prohibits the employment of women as bar-tenders.

The equal rights sword, however, cuts both ways. For years in divorce cases the custody of small children has almost always been awarded to the mother on the presumption that a woman was better qualified to take care of children of "tender years". But in the case of Watts vs. Watts, 350 NYS 2nd 285, a 1974 case from the New York Family Court in an opinion by Justice Kooper, this principal was declared to be an unconstitutional discrimination against men. Justice Kooper's full name, for those interested, is Sybil Hart Kooper. The judge was a woman!

The main political thrust of the Womans Libbers today is the adoption of an amendment to the United States Constitution prohibiting discrimination because of sex. The pertinent part of the proposed amendment is short and sweet: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex". The amendment sounds innocuous and in view of recent court decisions, some of which were mentioned earlier, almost unnecessary. The proposed amendment zipped through state after state until finally thirty-three states, at my last count, had adopted it, Kentucky among them in 1972. But with only five more states needed to obtain the three-fourths majority required to amend the Constitution, the



amendment began to run into trouble. Several states refused ratification. Others started repealing their earlier ratification even though there is considerable doubt <sup>as to whether</sup> ~~under~~ <sup>principles</sup> of constitution<sup>a</sup> ~~law as to whether~~ this can be done. The most publicized illustration of this phenomenon (at least in our area) was in Tennessee, whose legislature last month repealed its earlier ratification of the amendment. I am sure that many of you, like I, saw the hoopla on Nashville TV or read about it in the Nashville newspapers. I personally was never quite able to see <sup>what all the fuss was about.</sup> ~~the points raised both for and against the amendment.~~ It seemed to me, that from what I saw, only two questions were ever debated. First, would the adopting of the amendment require that women be drafted into the army as front-line combat troops and, second, would men and women be required to use each others public restrooms.

I cannot leave the subject of the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment without a short <sup>semi-</sup> personal note. A friend of mine is married to a woman who is the Treasurer of the local chapter of one of the organizations that are working hard nationwide for the adoption of the amendment. The other night his wife was watching a TV talk show on which an ERA advocate was orating eloquently. His wife urged him to stop what he was doing and watch the program. "I can't now," he said. "I'm busy. Don't you remember what you asked me to do. I am trying to balance your club's checkbook for you!"

Woman's Libbers are somewhat divided in explaining just how women came to be regarded as inferior to men. Man has been the dominant sex for as far back as historical or even anthropological evidence can be found. But how did it begin? Many males would attribute it to the overall superiority of man from every viewpoint. He is stronger, smarter, <sup>better organized</sup> more level headed, etc., etc., etc. Obviously, the women will <sup>not accept</sup> ~~have nothing to do with~~ this type of explanation.

back to the fact that originally in the distant past women were the ~~community~~<sup>tribe's</sup> gardeners and men its herdsmen. The two separate jobs probably evolved from the still earlier role of women as the ones who stayed about the campsite minding the children, while men went out to hunt. But according to Ms. Webb there was still equality between the sexes. The development that upset the applecart was economic -- trade developed between neighboring tribes and the principal item to trade was cattle and cattle were the men's. From that same fact evolved not only the inferiority of women, but also the institutions of private property, monogamous marriage, organized <sup>communities and</sup> states, and practically everything else that we now have in a modern capitalistic society. Ms. Webb cites as an authority for this ~~proposition~~<sup>theory</sup> none other than Frederick Engels, the collaborator and financial angel of Karl Marx himself. Just think! Everything is as it now is, because thousands of years ago men, not women, took care of the cattle!

A more obvious explanation for the dominant role of man would seem to be that man is simply the stronger of the two sexes and, therefore, able to get his way by physical force if necessary. One Woman's Libber, Elizabeth Hardwick, recognized the point and stated, "No legislation in woman's behalf could accomplish a millionth of what a bit more muscle tissue, gratuitously offered by nature might do". Since it appears unlikely that at this late stage in the game of evolution nature is likely to "gratuitously offer" the female more muscle, more subtle methods might have to be used. If women cannot be developed up to equality with men in physical strength, perhaps men could be brought down to the level of women. A Virginia Woman's Libber, Carol Forbes, has suggested just that. "We can breed back down the line. No breeding anymore with the Andy Robustellis. Just the Nureyevs". (Perhaps this last sentence will require a little explaining for some of our members. Dr. Lowry, George Boone,

Prewitt Owen, Nureyev is a Russian ballet dancer. I am sure of this point. I <sup>had to</sup> looked it up myself.)

This may sound farfetched but don't sell Ms. Forbes short. It was she who agitated until girls were allowed to enter the Soap Box Derby. She is currently hard at work in asking Congress to amend the charter it granted to Little League Baseball so that girls can play. This project, however, might not be necessary since several state courts have already ordered the Little League to admit girls, usually relying on the state's public accommodations law. It may be that girls will eventually get into Little League, but I for one hope that it is not until after my two nine-year old sons are out. It is bad enough to be the lad who struck out with the score tied and the bases loaded. Add in, however, that the pitcher was a girl and I think the trauma would be too much to bear.

Woman's Libbers might almost be willing to call off the whole thing if only they could get men to take them more seriously. There must be hundreds of stories of jibes that men have thrown at women throughout the centuries but time doesn't permit the mention of many of them. There are a couple, however, that I think bear retelling. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth century British wit, once heard a sermon by a woman preacher. She reminded him, he said, of a dog dancing on its hind legs; one marvels not at how well it is done, but that it is done at all.

Over two hundred years later a young black woman was addressing the national convention of SNCC, the Student's Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. (Incidentally this is surely the <sup>world's</sup> most inaptly named organization, ~~at least since the Popular Front Days of the Russian Comintern just prior to World War II.~~ SNCC is not composed of students, not any more at least; it most certainly does not practice non-violence; it does not coordinate anything, but on the contrary is usually opposed to anything

rather a complete organization in itself.) <sup>But back to our story</sup> The ~~young black~~ woman <sup>SP</sup> was bemoaning the lack of women in the higher leadership of SNCC and passionately argued that more women were needed. But all her pleas were to no avail. Stokely Carmichael, the leader of SNCC, followed her to the microphone and completely routed the young woman and sent his audience into gales of laughter with only one sentence, "The only position for women in SNCC is prone".

Another thing that the Woman's Libbers don't like (and this was mentioned in last Saturday's NEW ERA) is the practice of a woman taking her husband's last name after marriage. There <sup>have always been</sup> ~~are, of course,~~ a few <sup>for years</sup> ordinary exceptions. Women <sup>have</sup> often retained stage names or professional names after marriage. (Most of the stage names <sup>however,</sup> were probably made-up names to begin with). Many woman's Libbers now advocate keeping their maiden names upon marriage. But even this does not suit the real hard core woman's libber. After all a woman's maiden name is simply the name of her father, another male chauvinist. The real woman's libber uses as her last name a name formed by using her mother's first name and adding the <sup>suffix</sup> ~~word~~ "child". Thus Mary Doe, the daughter of Helen Doe, will start calling herself Mary Helen Child. But even this is not a complete victory for the Woman's Libbers for this method of forming names is exactly what men have been doing at least since the Middle Ages. Witness many of our most common surnames. Jackson (the son of Jack) Johnson (the son of John) Wilson (<sup>W</sup>son of Will) and so on. Ok, Graham Duncan, I will name some that weren't Democratic Presidents. There's the son of Harry, Harrison, and even the son of Nick, Nixon.

There are many organizations that are connected more or less with the ~~Women's~~ Libbers. The League of Women Voters, the Business and Professional Women's Club, the National Organization of Women and others can be called to mind. But my favorite Woman's Lib group which I first learned of in doing the research for this

The initials of the organization, by what I am sure is the most remote coincidence, form the acronym W I T C H. ~~And~~ the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell does not take its name in vain. It fights its arch enemy, man, with that ultimate of feminine weapons, witchcraft. WITCH reported that in the fall of 1967 a group of its members (I suppose we should say a coven of them) descended on Wall Street and put a hex on the Stock Exchange! ~~And~~ according to the report the Dow Jones average for that day fell 20 points!

And so we come to the ~~conclusion~~<sup>end</sup> of this paper. In it I have tried to give you some of the high lights,<sup>the</sup> low lights and <sup>the</sup> in-between lights of the Woman's Liberation Movement. I ~~suppose~~<sup>hope</sup> that some of you have been entertained by ~~but~~<sup>+</sup> even more important, I hope I have alerted the men in the audience to the danger that is about us, yea verily in our own homes. Men of the world, let us unite for the honor of ourselves, our sons, our grandsons, and our male progeny as yet unborn. We must save them from a fate worse than death itself, the world of Woman's Lib!

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The New Woman, An Anthology of Women's Liberation  
1970 Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

The First Ms. Reader, An Anthology  
1973, Ms. Magazine Corp.

Sports Illustrated, April 24, 1974 Issue  
"Georgie Porgie Runs Away"