

From the editor ...

*If I only had an hour I'd spend
it with the women
Who live the lives, the
fighting lives
The lives that inspire the
songs of women working
Fighting for our senses courageously
Preparing me for battles that
are yet to be won.*

*Linger on the details
The part that reflects the change
There lies revolution
Our everyday lives, the
changes inside
Become our political songs.*

Holly Near from "You Bet" on
Imagine My Surprise (Redwood Records)

Politics and the major societal structures that grow out of political processes are considered vital to our American way of life. Our system is based on the premise that each individual in society has a right and responsibility to contribute to the political process in some way. Yet we find ourselves overwhelmed by the enormity of our society, the power of government bureaucracies and the social inequities that persist despite the rhetoric and promises of political leaders. Many people in society view politics, government, the judicial system and public affairs

in general as being basically evil and subject to manipulation by the powerful few in society who serve selfish ends. Because of this sense of helplessness and hopelessness, and the connotation of evil that enshrouds the political system, many individuals are indifferent to the political process and lack any real knowledge of what it involves.

The articles in this issue of ANS reflect a growing concern among nurses and women that is directed toward understanding the political process in ways that have not been typically acknowledged by the male-dominated political world. It is critical to recognize the inherent relationship between the political problems of women and of nurses in today's culture. Although fewer than 20% of nurses are not women, well over 1.4 million nurses *are* women with political problems and challenges that are painful for any human to face, regardless of sex. As the authors of the articles in this issue have recognized and demonstrated, the politics of care are intimately tied to the public and personal politics of men and women in our society.

Great women of the 19th century, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, called for women to become informed, knowledgeable and involved in the political struggle to improve society. Without this inherent sense of the political process and recognition of its importance in reaching societal goals, these women could not have achieved the gains for which they are recognized today. In the quotation that precedes Ashley's article in this issue, Anthony emphasized that men cannot speak or act for women. This is even more true today than it was in Anthony's time. The political goals of women and of nurses have now been more completely conceptualized. It is also more clear now that the only gains that have been made toward reaching these goals while working through the male-dominated system are only token gains designed to give women a false sense of accomplishment. The political inactiv-

ism of nurses has had its own political impact, passively allowing the rise of a system that contributes to the blatant destruction of human health and the environment. For the remainder of this century the most worthy goal that nurses can select is that of arousing their passion for a kind of political activism that will make a difference in their own lives and in the life of our society.

Our own foresister and the founder of professional nursing, Florence Nightingale, wrote of the evils of a society that denies women the ability to develop their full potential and to make a significant contribution to society. In 1852 she wrote:

Why have women passion, intellect, moral activity—these three—and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?^{1(p23)}

* * *

And women, who are afraid, while in words they acknowledge that God's work is good, to say, Thy will *not* be done . . . go about maudling to each other and teaching to their daughters that "women have no passions." In the conventional society, which men have made for women, and women have accepted, they *must* have none, they *must* act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion—and therefore what else can they say to their daughters, without giving the lie to themselves?^{1(p26)}

* * *

We [women] fast mentally, scourge ourselves morally, use the intellectual hair-shirt, in order to subdue the perpetual day-dreaming, which is so dangerous! We resolve "this day month I will be free from it"; twice a day with prayer and written record of the times when we have indulged in it, we endeavor to combat it. Never, with the slightest success. By mortifying vanity we do ourselves no good. It is the want of interest in our life which produce it; by filling up that want of interest in our life we can alone remedy it. And, did we even see this, how can we make the difference? How obtain the interest which society declares *she* does not want, and *we* cannot want?^{1(p27-28)}

Nightingale *did* make a difference. After writing the essay in which these quotations appear, she worked in the Crimean war and then devoted the 54 years remaining in her life to founding nursing as a profession, writing and to productive living that led to widespread reform and improvement of health conditions not only in England but in other countries as well.

It is interesting to note that Nightingale rejected for herself personal involvement in what we think of as typical political activities. She was deeply concerned about the social and political inequities for women in society, but felt strongly that her own life should be spent in acting directly to establish nursing—a profession of value to society in which women could engage—and to improve the health of society. Her work had staggering political impact that was recognized more fully in her own time than it is today.

We are just beginning to see the political significance of everything that we do or do not do in life. How we structure and conduct our daily lives, who we spend our time with and what we produce are all politically significant. It is time for nurses to shed their apathy and become aware of all the avenues that lead to political influence, and to use these avenues to obtain the interest that society now wants—*health*.

At the time that Nightingale wrote the essay from which I have quoted, she did not see fully the remedy for the problems that aroused her passion and drove her to direct the course of her own life. Yet she has left a legacy that can enlighten us today as to how we might become politically effective as individuals and as groups.

REFERENCE

1. Nightingale, F. *Cassandra*, with an introduction by Myra Stark and an epilogue by Cynthia Macdonald, The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, NY, 1980.

—Peggy L. Chinn, R.N., Ph.D.
Editor