

creating positive social attitude towards women's participation in politics.
h) Specific efforts should be undertaken to strengthen linkages between female politicians and women-specific organi-

zations.

"It is up to women to stop rocking the cradle and start rocking the boat." I feel these words discreetly bear an element of truth, which is, women have leader-

ship potential and it is a quality that is inherent in them but remains dormant until goaded. It is time we female political leaders went into action and promoted the status of women. ★

Though Much To Be Desired In Korea

Family Law, Equal Employment Act Were Revised

by Rep. Park Young-sook

The degree of democracy of a society can be evaluated by examining the way women are treated in that society and the social conditions surrounding women's work. A political structure in which the issues of women's lives are not seriously considered obviously contradicts the democratic philosophy. At the same time, the realization of democracy cannot be achieved without solving the problem of the lack of representation for women.

In this regard, the society as a whole should make efforts to secure a woman's right to life-long equal work and to the realization of a life with human dignity. Women, themselves, need to actively participate in the political structure to achieve such goals. These are women's rights as well as their historical obligations.

Women should participate in politics for a number of reasons. First, since women constitute more than half of the population, they should naturally be represented. Women should be able to share in creating their own living conditions.

Second, as policy making is a process for enhancing the quality of life, women's participation is needed because of their inclination towards respect for life and a human-centered way of thinking.

Third, with their higher level of morality, women may improve the current political environment in which greed and power prevail. By forming a new power group, women can contribute to changing the present undesirable trend in politics.

The challenge for Korea today is to discover how women can organize themselves into a political force despite their history of oppression from sexist institutions and cultural traditions.

Throughout the evolution of the women's movement in Korea, the political awareness and participatory capability

of Korean women have made remarkable progress. From the late 1970s through the 1980s and even up to the present, the experience of persistent participation in various social movements, such as the democratization movement, has provided a solid foundation for a women's political movement. Meanwhile, the legislative achievement of the last National Assembly session and the chance to participate in the local and provincial council/assembly elections — which were revived after 3



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decades — were good opportunities for practical experience in women's political participation.

Such experiences provoked arguments about participation in institutional politics within women's movement groups. Women came to perceive quite objectively their own political capabilities and limitations through such experiences. It is deplorable, however, that despite the increasing participation or will to participate on the part of women, these activities and perceptions do not systematically formulate a unified political force.

The fact is that only a minority of

women's movement forces have yet to take root at the of grassroots level in Korea.

When we look at the election campaigns, we are aware that women are indispensable; they are the majority not only of the audience but of the campaign activists. The problem is that such participation, however, fails to influence policy making for women. As a result, a handful of women political leaders are required to play multiple roles — not only as lawmakers or lobbyists in the National Assembly and the party, but also as political educators to the general public. These women serve as bridges between organizations and political institutions while they organize activists within the political party. The present situation in Korea, however, does not allow them to fulfil such roles effectively.

One major problem is that women who have long been excluded from the political arena are in a very unfavorable position to compete equally with their male partners. The second problem is money. Politics is a job requiring much money, and the current atmosphere makes it difficult for women to fund their activities.

Third, the political foundation is still weak. We can trace this problem back to the process of women politicians' advancement into the political arena where the claims of the women's movement are often neglected. As a result, no supports are formed for women political leaders. This makes women cynical about politics, as they see there is no chance to realize the changes politics might make in their lives. Consequently, there is no expectation among women that their rights could be extended through political participation.

The political situation in the initial stage of the last National Assembly, in which opposition parties together enjoyed a stronger influence with a majority over the ruling party, was a victory for the people after their persistent democratization movement. A turning point was marked for women to have a new perspective on political participation when women political leaders and women's organizations achieved landmark success in their legislative efforts. After 37 years of painstaking efforts, the Family Law which had long oppressed Korean women was amended, while the Equal Employment Act was also revised to become a more practical law rather than

a nominal regulation.

A legal foundation was provided for the support of day care centers funded from the government's budget. Separate recruitment of government officials was prohibited. A women minister was nominated to the 2nd minister for Public Affairs. The Home Welfare Section was upgraded to the Home Welfare Bureau. And, women's participation in the administration was expanded.

All these achievements became possible thanks to the joint efforts of women political leaders, women's organizations, women journalists and male legal experts who truly believed in democracy and some male politicians who were sensitive to women voters. Among these groups, the role of women's organizations was the most critical. However it was unfortunate that women politicians could not overcome the barriers of their respective parties even in the cause of women's issue.

One result of this was the failure to adopt a system for women in the local council elections law. Of course, it was quite encouraging for us to achieve advancement in women's politics through policy reforms in the assembly and to speed up the awareness and necessity of women's participations in politics.

However, it should be noted that the number of women lawmakers actually decreased in the present National Assembly. In the last general election, only 14 women candidates ran in their constituencies and 19 ran in the latest elections. In both cases no woman candidate was successful.

The Constitution defines the equality of men and women in many phrases, but such phrases are not implemented in various institutions and practices of the society. It is true that women are not yet fully capable of exerting their political awareness in the form of practical influence.

In this regard, women political leaders should give priority to women's issues, rather than partisan interests, while braving the possible criticisms that they are too focused on the women's cause.

Through my experiences in the National Assembly over the past four years, I have learned that male lawmakers are, without exception, conservative on women's issues regardless of whatever progressive political ideology they may have. They do not have a fundamental awareness of the issues facing women.

Therefore, women politicians who take part in party activities need to carry through the interests of women within the decision-making process of the party. Women need to demonstrate

interest steadily and incessantly. This is not an easy task. The double dilemma I have suffered is that I was not only in the minority as a woman, but I was a member of a minority party.

One advantage I had was that I belonged to the supreme decision-making body of my party. Because I was within that final decision-making core, I could easily link women's policies and legislation. Women political leaders in Korea need active support from women groups, who are the very root of their existence.

Not only women politicians but their male colleagues as well should realize that women politicians are not alone in their beliefs. When this is realized, a minority of women political leaders will be able to achieve the demands of

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half of the population within the political community.

That is, by then, male politicians will have come to regard the voice of women politicians as the voice of all women. When women political leaders have the firm confidence that they are the very representatives and the window of women, they will be able to better fulfil their role in promoting and advancing women's status.

As local autonomy takes further root in Korea, opportunities for political participation and experience for women are expected to increase, and in turn more women political leaders will advance. Expectations are high as the role of women politicians expand. This role will be not only in legislation on women-related issues, but in other areas such as that educational activities for women's leadership training and revising various institutions such as changing the election law to prevent election campaigns from spending too much money, thus enabling women's entry into the assembly and the organization of women into a political force.

Once achieved, the current practice of

trumpeting colorful women's policies only during the campaign period will change. A current attitude in leadership training programs for women is objectifying them as election campaigners rather than considering them as subjects in politics. To avoid such problems, the political participation of more capable women plus the active involvement by women's movement organizations are essential.

Women's movement organizations should stop their practice of launching one-time campaigns on women's participation during the elections. They should plan and carry out ongoing, regular strategies for the National Assembly. Recently, institutes such as the Center for Korean Women & Politics have been set up for the study and education of the way and means of women's participation in politics and women's policies.

It is also encouraging that means of political participation have become part of the routine programs of women's organizations, although they are not yet fully satisfactory. Highly careful and systematic preparation and planning is needed so that the general public is informed of the process of legislative efforts and are encouraged to participate actively.

There are a number of tasks concerning women which aim to improve their living conditions and which can be realized through making policies and creating institutions. One of these is the enactment of the Special Law on Sexual Violence, as a measure to cope with increasing sexual crimes. However, it is time that women political leaders go beyond the tasks which are identified as women's problems.

When we take into account the fact that no political issues are separate from the lives of women, women political leaders should contribute to the enhancement of all people's living by strengthening the human aspect of politics through their expertise and professionalism in various political fields.

The role of women political leaders in Korea, a country where the government's pursuit of quantitative development and growth-oriented policies over the past three decades has resulted in the anti-life phenomenon, should be expanded in the important environmental and welfare areas.

Education, economy and national unification — all these issues call for active participation by women politicians. Such participation will be a way to improve the political climate of the nation as well as to promote women's status. ★