

Received Sept. 11/08

Women's Co-operative Guild.

Davies (Miss Llewellyn)

AL/429

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GENERAL SECRETARY:

Miss LLEWELYN DAVIES, Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmorland.

Assistant Secretary:

Miss LILIAN HARRIS, Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmorland.

August 28th, 1908.

Dear Madam,

It is proposed to forward the enclosed letter to the Prime Minister, signed by the officials of as many Suffrage and other important women's organisations as possible. The need is most urgent for a definite statement from the Government, and to obtain this, pressure from every quarter is wanted. Kindly let me know at your very earliest convenience whether *the London* *Society for Women's Suffrage* will join, as we much hope it will, in this course of action, and sign the enclosed letter.

Yours truly,

M. Llewellyn Davies

Miss Claver
To the Right Hon. the Prime Minister.

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Sir,

You have announced your intention to introduce, during the present Parliament, an Electoral Reform Bill, drawn in such a way as to include the principle of Women's Suffrage, and your willingness to accept an amendment giving the vote to women on democratic lines, if passed by the House of Commons. We welcome this proof that you recognise the justice of women's claim to the vote. At the same time we wish to point out that your announcement names no time for the introduction of the Bill and gives no indication that the Government would consider itself responsible for the carrying through of Women's Suffrage. For these reasons, we are unable to accept your announcement as satisfying our desire that the Government should enfranchise women. The introduction of your projected Bill will be subject to political accidents: and though the House of Commons has this year affirmed the principle of Women's Suffrage by a very large majority it is unlikely that the part of the Bill which would concern women could pass through all stages in both Houses, unless the Government were prepared to insist on its retention.

Since you are willing to introduce a Bill including Women's Suffrage in its scope, and to accept the decision of the House of Commons on a Women's Suffrage amendment, you will, we trust, recognise that this admission of the justice of our claim gives us the right to ask you to consider in our favour the points which we regard as essential to the success of the measure and to its obtaining the confidence of women. We do not think that the enfranchisement of women could be reasonably assured in the way so indicated, unless the Government were prepared (1) to introduce the Bill next session, and (2) to emphasize the sincerity of their intention of giving votes to women by letting it be known that they would refuse to pass the Bill without the women's clauses, if these should be rejected by the House of Lords. (3) We also wish to point out that in view of the attitude of the House of Commons to our claim, there can be no reason why the Government being themselves willing to accept women's suffrage, should not make it a part of their Bill as introduced. The unusual course proposed of offering the House of Commons the opportunity of inserting legislation on a subject of first-rate importance into a Government

Bill by way of amendment, has given rise in some quarters to a doubt of the genuineness of the proposal, which we should be glad to see dispelled. (4) With the view of securing the confidence of women, we regard it as important that some clear indication should shortly be given of the qualifications for women which would be compatible with your project of electoral reform.

We desire to ask you, with all the urgency in our power, to give your favourable attention to these points. The movement for political freedom among women is forty years old: it has grown to great dimensions, embracing all classes, and has acquired a new strength from the wave of popular feeling to which the Government owes its power. The higher educational and professional work of women, the increase of laws and of demand for laws affecting more especially working women's lives, the development of women's political consciousness, and their experience of public work, have given it solidity and force. There can now be no doubt of its strength and persistence, and as to its justice, we can appeal with confidence to Liberal principles.

The enfranchisement of women has not only been accepted as part of the programme of the National Liberal Federation, but has obtained the support of the organised labour vote, resolutions in favour of Women's Suffrage having been passed by the Trade Union, the Co-operative and Labour Party Congresses, and the Annual Conferences of the Independent Labour Party and Social Democratic Party.

Three great Suffrage Demonstrations will be held in October - two in London, by the Women's Liberal Federation and the Social and Political Union, and a third in Manchester by combined organisations. We most urgently desire to have some promise of definite action on the part of the Government, to submit at these Demonstrations.

Yours respectfully,

Miss S. thinks it probable that her Com. wd wish to make some alterations in the last paragraph & to refer to the great ^{Suffrage} demonstrations held since W. A's pronouncement.

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