

Soc. Pam.

331.88:354.08(09)

add def

History of the
National Association of
Women Civil Servants



Pamphlet

331.
478
113
514
1
NAT

WOMEN'S SERVICE LIBRARY
FAWCETT HOUSE,
27, WILFRED STREET,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

331.4781135141 NIAT

History of the National Association of Women Civil Servants

EARLY ORGANIZATION.

FIRST INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN INTO CLERICAL WORK IN THE CIVIL SERVICE.

A brief account of the employment of women on clerical work in the Civil Service is a necessary preliminary to the history of this, the largest women's organization in the Service.

Women were first introduced on clerical work in 1871 when a few women were appointed to the Clearing House Branch of the General Post Office. They were recruited by nomination for a six-hour day and employed on duties similar to those of the Second Division Clerks (men). Their employment was shortly afterwards extended to the Savings Bank Department and by degrees to the other headquarter offices of the Post Office. The extension of the hours to seven with an increase in pay, and recruitment by open competitive examination at the age of 18-20, followed. In 1897, however, a new class (Girl Clerks), recruited with a view to reducing costs, was instituted. These officers entered at 16-18 by the same examination as women clerks, but the marking was on a different basis. At first they worked a six-hour day, which was later extended to seven hours with a small increase in pay, and they automatically passed into the higher class after two years' efficient service.

FORMATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF POST OFFICE WOMEN CLERKS.

In 1897 the Postmaster-General announced a reduction in the minimum pay of women clerks, viz. from £65 per annum to £55 per annum, together with reduced increments, and it was this reduction which eventually brought about the institution of a women's organization. Women are fortunate in that one of the early appointees under these new conditions had vision and organizing ability, and with

3800137837

the aid of her colleagues in the Postal Order Branch of the Accountant-General's Department of the Post Office set about recovering the former position. Women throughout the Service owe a debt to Miss Cale, this early pioneer of the rights of women Civil Servants. The first efforts were made by signed petitions of quaint phraseology to the Postmaster-General and by personal interview with friendly Members of Parliament—almost unheard of activities in those days, and looked on with awe by some of the older women in the Service who were not sure that this new vigorous element was quite wise in its methods.

The pioneers soon found, however, that this business of obtaining individual signatures to petitions was too cumbersome, and they set about forming an Association and uniting the efforts of the women in the various Departments of the Post Office. The first object was the restoration of the old minimum rate of pay, and membership was confined to those who were suffering the reduction. The first efforts to organize met with great success, though recourse had to be had to questions in the House before the opposition and obstruction of the Savings Bank authorities were removed! The Association was actually formed in 1901 under the name of the Association of Post Office Women Clerks. Before long a number of sympathizers amongst the £65 minimum entrants were found, and the membership was extended to include all women clerks (First and Second Classes) and girl clerks, and "EQUAL PAY" and "EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES" were added to the objects.

FIRST SUCCESSES.

It was not until 1908 that the Association succeeded in obtaining the restoration of the old minimum as a result of evidence given in 1906 before the Select Committee on the Post Office Staff under the Chairmanship of Mr. C. E. Hobhouse, M.P.

In addition to the restoration of the old minimum, the Association was successful in obtaining increases in the maxima of the scales of the women clerks' grades. Having achieved this measure of success, the Association was then able to devote itself to the wider question of equality with men in matters of pay and opportunity. It was, however, not long before the Post Office began to look for further economy at the expense of women, and in 1911 announced the setting-up of a new class, Female Assistant Clerks, at a weekly rate of 18s. to 34s., with an EIGHT-HOUR DAY, to take the place of the Girl Clerk Class with a seven-hour day. The notification was made to the Association simultaneously with the promotion of some women sorting assistants to fill the first posts.

THE WRITING ASSISTANT AGITATION.

The Association fought the institution of this class by interview, by Parliamentary action, and by evidence before the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, appointed in 1911, and before the Holt Committee on Post Office Staff 1912-13. They succeeded in obtaining a promise from the Postmaster-General in the House that he would refrain from increasing the numbers until such time as the Committee reported, and what was perhaps more valuable in the long run, *an undertaking from the Secretary of the G.P.O. that whatever hours were finally agreed for the women clerks would be given to the female assistant clerks.* In the meantime these hours were reduced to seven and a half per day. Pressure in the war time gave the authorities an opportunity of extending the class. It was unfortunate that the other Service organizations had not realized the danger of the introduction of a cheaper class with longer hours, and, when grading came to be discussed in 1920, in many cases accepted without demur the introduction into their Departments of what had by then become known as the Writing Assistant Class.

EVIDENCE TO THE 1911 ROYAL COMMISSION.

Evidence was given before the Royal Commission of 1911-12 on the question of equality of pay and opportunity both by the Post Office Association and by the newly-formed Association of Board of Education Women Clerks. The Commission reported with regard to pay: "The majority of us recommend that in so far as the character and conditions of the work performed by women in the Civil Service approximate to identity with the character and conditions of the work performed by men, the pay of women should approximate to equality with that of men." The Commission further recommended that the Treasury should institute a general inquiry with the object of removing inequalities of salary not based on differences in the efficiency of service.

With regard to opportunity the Commissioners recommended that the State should secure the services of women whenever those services would best promote its interests. They were unable to understand why 3,000 women clerks were employed in the General Post Office and only about 500 in the rest of the Service. They considered that specially qualified women should be eligible for appointment to administrative posts in certain Departments and should be selected by Selection Board methods rather than by admission to the class by examination. Women clerks should be accommodated separately from men clerks, and recruited by a separate examination, and their overtime should be strictly limited.

There was a strong minority report favouring a more general equality in the employment of women throughout the Service, and also an important minority recommendation against the equal payment proposals.

Strong resistance was organized by the Association to the "patronage" recommendations of the Commission. The women in the Service were insistent that those to be admitted to the higher ranks should enter on the same terms as men, i.e. by the examination method or by promotion, rather than by special "selection board" procedure.

The most important recommendation of the Commission from the women's point of view, viz. that the Treasury should inquire into the possibilities of removing inequalities of salary, was never put into effect. Almost immediately after the publication of the Report the country was convulsed with the war emergency and no consideration of Royal Commission recommendations was practicable.

THE FEDERATION IS FORMED.

INSTITUTION OF FEDERATION OF WOMEN CIVIL SERVANTS.

Whilst the Commission was sitting in 1912 the Insurance Commissions (Health and Employment) recruited staff by transfer from the women clerks. A number of members of the existing Associations, amongst them being a former President, the Secretary and the Treasurer of the Post Office Association, were transferred to the new Departments. It followed that new Associations were set up, and in 1913 the Federation of Women Clerks in the Civil Service was formed. This was extended in 1916 to include women other than clerks and then became the Federation of Women Civil Servants. With the extended employment of women in other Departments new groups were formed which affiliated with the Federation.

WARTIME ACTIVITIES.

During the war Association activities were naturally limited in character, the principal work being on the question of transfer of experienced women to Departments where untrained staff was being appointed, safeguarding the seven-hour day (which the Government proposed to extend to eight hours), resisting the inequalities in the payment of war bonus and improving the basic salaries.

The question of extended hours in 1916 brought into being the Civil Service Clerical Alliance of which the Federation was the largest women's body. The Alliance subscribed to the policy of Equal Pay and Equal Opportunity.

RELATION WITH THE NATIONAL WHITLEY COUNCIL.

Immediately after the war the National Whitley Council for the Civil Service was set up and was given amongst other tasks the work of reorganizing the clerical and higher grades in the Service. Both on the National Council itself and on the Reorganization Committee Federation members were appointed as Alliance representatives.

WAR BONUS.

During the period of the Federation connexion with the National Whitley Council through the Civil Service Alliance, the Cost-of-Living Committee was working on the settlement of the rates of bonus.

Bonus had been paid on a flat rate for several years, always with a differentiation between men and women, and the "percentage" scheme put forward by the Official Side proposed a continuation of this differentiation. These terms were discussed by the Staff Side, and when the offer was reported to the Federation by the Alliance representatives it was rejected as being wholly unacceptable. The Federation had strenuously fought the "half-rate" war bonus awards of the war period as the increased cost of living was felt just as severely by women as by men. Further, it was felt that the proposal would remove the small measure of equality of pay which had been secured by the Reorganization Committee, and would actually increase the existing inequalities throughout the scales. The final settlement gave the percentage increases on actual pay regardless of sex.

THE REORGANIZATION COMMITTEE.

On the Reorganization Committee the Federation member endeavoured to secure that the many reforms for which the Federation had been working were incorporated in the Report, but this was not possible. The Report of the Committee was, in fact, considered very unsatisfactory from the women's point of view. Although the main Reorganization Classes had been opened to women there was still no definite lead given on the question of aggregation, and examinations to the various grades were not open to both sexes. The Committee also gave way on the vital question of equal pay, and although there was a common starting point for men and women in the various grades there was a wide divergence in the actual scales. In spite of the fact that women had in all Departments demonstrated during the period of the war their ability to work equally with men, the Reorganization Committee still refused to concede complete equality as between the two sexes. The Committee also weakly agreed to the setting-up as a National Class of the routine grade confined to women, viz., the Writing Assistant Class, the institution of which had been so strenuously fought

by the Post Office Association in pre-war days. So strongly, in fact, did the Federation view the shortcomings of the Committee that they felt it was unwise to remain in an Alliance where they were always in a minority and where their activities could be limited by a majority vote of their male colleagues, and accordingly they gave warning of withdrawal. Their misgivings were strengthened by the difficulties which arose in connexion with the assimilation of members of the existing grades to the new Treasury Classes. The Assimilation Report proposed, as regards men, that Second Division Clerks should be assimilated to the Executive Class and the Assistant Clerks—a lower grade—to the Clerical Class. All the women clerks, including those already promoted to the rank of First Class Clerk, were provisionally assigned to the Clerical Class with a meagre promise that some of them might afterwards be selected for Executive posts. When this unsatisfactory Report was accepted by the Alliance the Federation finally withdrew from membership.

THE TEMPORARY WOMEN AND THEIR ORGANIZATION.

EARLY ACTIVITIES OF THE ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN CLERKS AND SECRETARIES.

Although the Federation was the body most vitally concerned with Reorganization from the women's standpoint there was another organization which was concerned in the Reorganization recommendations. This organization was the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, a body whose membership had at the latter end of the war been very considerably increased by the admission of temporary women Clerks and Typists in the Civil Service. The A.W.C.S. had been formed, like the Federation, many years earlier, and its original membership was confined to women working in City and kindred offices. It had always had friendly connexions with the Federation. The A.W.C.S. through the Temporary Staffs' Federation, to which it was affiliated, had at one time a seat on the National Whitley Council, and its Secretary was a member of the Temporary Staffs' Committee, which endeavoured to settle the problem of the assimilation of temporary staffs to the permanent Civil Service. The A.W.C.S. took part with the Federation in denouncing the Reorganization Report as falling very far short of women's aspirations.

PAY, RETENTION AND ESTABLISHMENT.

The main work of the A.W.C.S. during the post-war period on behalf of the temporary women was to secure their retention. Following the Temporary Staffs Report

which gave establishment after special examination to some 2,000 women Clerks and to a smaller number of Typists and Shorthand Typists, dismissals owing to redundancy and substitution by ex-Service men were the order of the day. The Association had instituted an Unemployment Fund to assist members who were thrown out of work at short notice, and was instrumental in securing from the Government an undertaking that at least a month's notice and a month's warning where possible should be given to all the temporary women.

At the same time the Association prosecuted wage claims on behalf of the members, as the temporary staffs had never been covered by the cost-of-living report. As far as wage claims were concerned the Association worked with other organizations representing the men and in some cases a number of temporary women.

The period from 1921 to 1924 was occupied mainly in resisting the excessive claims of the incoming ex-Service men. Evidence was given by the Association both to the Lytton and Southborough Committees, and the final decision of the Southborough Committee to exempt from substitution women employed on women's work definitely set a limit to substitution. One of the fiercest fights waged by the Association was in the Ministry of Pensions where the majority of the women had joined the Association and where substitution was a daily menace. The Department had been almost entirely staffed by women during the war, and during post-war years the Association used every endeavour to ensure that a share of the work throughout the Ministry was still allotted to women. As a result of the strong action taken by the Association the Minister agreed to allow the women to retain most of the work at the Issue Office, and a few of the higher posts in the Department were reserved for women.

THE 1924 EXAMINATION.

The examinations of 1921 had by no means solved the problem of the temporary staffs, and in 1924 the Association made a further effort to secure establishment by examination for a number of its members. Representations to the Government of the day were made, and on July 29th the Treasury indicated to the Association that they had agreed to allow the temporary women Clerks to have a further opportunity of establishment. The Treasury at the same time endeavoured to strike a bargain with the Association by indicating that the granting of this examination was conditional on the understanding that remaining women who did not succeed in the examination must be liable to substitution by new entrants. This latter understanding was not accepted by the Association in full, and, as it became increasingly evident that the Treasury intended after

substitution by ex-Service men had abated to replace temporary women by open recruits from the examinations, the Association was forced to take action to safeguard the position of its members from this new form of substitution.

THE 1926 PLEDGE.

In December of 1925 a deputation to the then Financial Secretary was taken by the Association, and in January of 1926 a pledge was given by Mr. Ronald McNeil (now Lord Cushendun) that no efficient temporary woman Clerk should be substituted by an open recruit. This pledge was the means of safeguarding the remaining temporary women and meant that women in future were dismissed only owing to redundancy. The pledge was given for a period of two years only, and at the end of each two years it was renewed on representations from the organization until the whole question of the remaining temporary women was remitted to the Tomlin Commission for final settlement. The pledge given to the women in January of 1926 was quickly taken up by the men and similar pledges to the ex-Service men were given in the House of Commons. The pledge given to the Association was given in respect of women Clerks only, as at that time the Association represented more women Clerks than Typists.

THE POSITION OF THE TYPISTS.

From 1926 onwards temporary Typists began to realize that their position was becoming precarious. Dismissals owing to redundancy and the substitution by examination entrants were becoming more usual. For the first time, therefore, it was possible for the Association to organize the Typists in sufficient numbers to ensure representative capacity. Efforts were speedily made to secure the extension to the Typists of the pledge given to the Clerks, and early in 1928 a deputation was taken to Mr. (now Sir) Arthur Michael Samuel, the then Financial Secretary, with a view to improving the position of the Typists. The Financial Secretary was not able to agree to all the proposals put forward by the Association, but with a view to meeting some of the worst evils he agreed to establish a Typists' Pool to ensure the transfer of redundant Typists to vacancies in other Departments. It was a condition of the arrangements that there should be in general no loss in pay on transfer. At the Deputation the Financial Secretary conceded to the Association also their request that the staff dismissed should be made eligible for leaving gratuities. Hitherto no member of the temporary staff, man or woman, had been entitled to the benefits of the Superannuation Acts in this respect. It is interesting to note that following the letter received by the Association it was possible to have the concession extended to women Clerks, and other Associations took the case up in the interests of the men Clerks.

PAY INCREASES FOR THE TEMPORARIES.

The influx of Typists to the Association membership made it possible in 1927 for a pay claim to be taken forward on behalf of the Typing grade. The Association maintained that there was not sufficient regard paid in the Service to the technical qualifications of the Typists, and pointed out that outside rates for Typists and Shorthand-Typists were in many cases higher than those paid in the Service. The Court made a substantial award on the claim.

At the same time the Association had in conjunction with the men's organizations been instrumental in securing improvements in the incremental scale for the women Clerks and was able to effect improvements in the overtime rates and provincial differentiation arrangements. The Association was successful also in negotiating salary increases in the Ministry of Pensions and the Stationery Office for Departmental groups of women.

FURTHER EQUALITY CAMPAIGN.

EXTENSION OF OPPORTUNITY.

Following the withdrawal from the Civil Service Alliance the Federation joined various women's organizations outside the Service with a view to prosecuting a vigorous campaign for equality. In particular it took a very active part in a newly formed Committee for women in the Civil Service; a Committee partly composed of women inside the Service and partly of women of other professions and organizations, some of whom had been active in prosecuting the suffrage cause outside the Service. The A.W.C.S. was also represented on this joint Committee. Both the Federation and the A.W.C.S. strove their utmost following the publication of the Reorganization Report to ensure that Departments which had been open to women during the war-time should still make use of their services, and that posts of an administrative and semi-administrative character should be generally open to women. As a result of the pressure exercised by the women's organizations one of the examinations under the Reconstruction Scheme was earmarked for the women and in 1922-3 a few established and temporary women passed on to the permanent establishment in the higher Reorganization Classes.

At the same time the Federation was active in endeavouring to obtain fair treatment for women under the Assimilation Agreement. The fact that the whole of the woman Clerk Grade had been provisionally assimilated to the Clerical class caused great dissatisfaction in the minds of the women and the activities of the organization in the various Departments were concentrated on an endeavour to secure some better terms in the final settlement of posts.

Meanwhile the organization centrally pursued its activities to ensure equality of treatment and equality of status in the various grades. A number of Members of Parliament interested themselves in the fight for equality inside the Service and finally at the end of 1921 temporary regulations were approved in the House which had the effect of opening all the Reorganization Classes to women on the same terms as men. Effect was given to these regulations in 1924 when women were declared to be eligible for admission to the open competitive examinations.

During the long period from 1921 to 1929 the Federation was occupied largely in the work of reorganization in Departments, and in the furtherance of its policy of equality. The organizations affiliated to the Federation played their part on the local Whitley Councils in protecting women's interests in the matter of reconstruction according to the new grades, and in securing new appointments and promotions. The Federation unceasingly pursued the women's cause by Parliamentary and Press work. The aim of its central body was to secure complete equality in the Service, both in opportunity and in remuneration.

PAY ACTIVITY.

By co-operation with outside bodies, it was possible in 1920 to secure the passage of a Resolution by the House of Commons which amongst other matters provided that women "should also receive equal pay."

The organization used every endeavour to follow up the Resolution, but in 1921 when a reply to a friendly Member of Parliament was given, it was made clear that the Government was not prepared to go further with the equal pay question for some years.

Beyond pressing forward the demand for equal pay it was not possible to do much with regard to improving the basic pay scales. The organizations affiliated to the Federation did useful work in connexion with the various all-Service "bonus" agitations designed to arrest the continued downward trend in "cost of living" additions.

A useful piece of work was undertaken in 1928 on behalf of members employed as language assistants, when a claim heard by the Industrial Court resulted in the allowances being increased in the case of officers using more than two languages from £25 per annum to a possible maximum of £45 per annum.

COMMON SENIORITY.

Of interest also is the part played by Federation representatives on a Common Seniority Committee appointed in 1923 to examine the possibility of common seniority lists throughout the Service. The Committee was set up by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and with a view to ensuring

that the women's views were properly represented the Federation was asked to appoint two members. The Report of the Committee was not as conclusive as the women would have wished, as the main issue was left to the Departmental Councils to thrash out.

EQUAL PAY AGITATION.

Although not represented on the National Whitley Council, during this time the Federation played an important part in having the equal pay issue widely supported throughout the whole of the Service. A special equal pay committee composed of representatives of the principal Service Associations was set up to prosecute the campaign. As a result of the pressure of the Federation, assisted by other women's associations, the Government decided in 1929 when viewing the many outstanding questions in the Civil Service to submit the sex equality issue for the consideration of a Royal Commission. This Commission began its labours in 1929 under the Chairmanship of Lord Tomlin, one of the Lords of Appeal. The Commission consisted of sixteen persons, including Members of Parliament. Five members of the Commission were women. One of its terms of reference was "to inquire into and report on existing differentiation between the rates payable to men and women Civil Servants, and the conditions of retirement from the Civil Service, including the retirement of women Civil Servants on marriage."

THE TOMLIN COMMISSION.

The Federation took full advantage of the opportunity afforded to it by the setting-up of this Commission and gave valuable evidence regarding the continued inequalities and the lack of opportunity afforded to women in the Civil Service.

Amongst other questions remitted to the Tomlin Commission was that of the settlement of the temporary staffs problem. The Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries concentrated its efforts mainly on the need for finally establishing the remaining temporary women staffs in the Service. The Association urged that all temporary women Clerks and Typists with long service should be placed on the permanent establishment without examination.

Both the Federation and the A.W.C.S. were called to give oral evidence before the Commission. The findings of the Commission met to some degree the evidence put forward by both Associations. The Tomlin Commission found that there were still many inequalities in the Service and recommended a policy of a "fair field and no favour." The Commission definitely stated that so far as possible all posts

in the Service should be open to men and women alike, a policy of aggregation was to be pursued, and in the main the reservation of posts to either sex was to be discontinued. The Commission also recommended what the A.W.C.S. had urged, viz. the assimilation of long service temporary women Clerks and Typists to the established ranks.

FORMATION OF N.A.W.C.S.

The recommendations of the Tomlin Commission were of outstanding importance to both organizations. A further measure of equality appeared in sight, and for the temporary women, establishment meant that their membership of an organization composed partly of women in private employment could no longer continue.

THE POSITION OF THE A.W.C.S.

The Executive of the A.W.C.S. was forced to review the position at an early date. In earlier years when considerable sections of the membership were transferred to the established force as a result of Association recommendations in connexion with the examination method of establishment, the members so transferred were urged to join the Civil Service Clerical Association. The A.W.C.S. had taken this stand in 1921 when it was assured that this Association, which already represented the established Typists and Writing Assistants, was pledged to equality. An agreement had been drawn up by the two organizations in the summer of that year which provided amongst other things that the C.S.C.A. would strive to secure:

"equality of recruitment, pay, opportunity and status irrespective of sex, and the abolition of all Clerical and semi-Clerical grades worse off in regard to pay or conditions than the Lower Clerical Class."

It was on condition that the C.S.C.A. observed this clause that the A.W.C.S. agreed to arrange for the transfer of members and two of its own officers to that Association. Throughout the period during which transfers were being arranged from the A.W.C.S. to the C.S.C.A. the agreement was in the main adhered to. At this time the C.S.C.A. took a prominent part on the National Whitley Council in resisting the increase in the size of the Writing Assistant Class. It further subscribed to the policy of equality of pay and opportunity being waged by the women's associations. When giving evidence to the Tomlin Commission, however, the C.S.C.A. paid no further thought to its understanding with the A.W.C.S. It urged before the Tomlin Commission the extension of the Writing Assistant Class and its con-

tinued recruitment on an all-women basis. The C.S.C.A. representatives further denied before the Tomlin Commission that there was any unfair sex discrimination in the Service.

AMALGAMATION.

When the time for decision arrived the Civil Service Section Committee of the A.W.C.S. was unanimous in recommending to the Executive Committee that there should be no further approaches to the C.S.C.A. The members considered that every effort should be made to assist the women's organization in the Service and that the same form of organization which had assisted them in their temporary status should continue after establishment.

The Executive Committee of the Federation had from time to time discussed the possibility of enlarging its sphere of membership, and preliminary conversations were taking place between the secretaries of the A.W.C.S. and the Federation before the Royal Commission's Report was published. These conversations were quickly followed by the formation of a small but very efficient sub-committee of officers of both organizations which discussed details of amalgamation. The sub-committee's work was soon accomplished and the Women Civil Servants' Joint Committee was set up on October 1st, 1931. The two organizations worked under one Executive Committee until April, 1932, when the permanent constitution of the National Association of Women Civil Servants was framed.

It is the aim of the National Association to build up an organization which shall be fully representative of the women in the Treasury Classes. Only in this way can the view point of women be adequately represented. In order to secure equality of pay and equal recognition in the matter of promotions and the removal of the worst features attaching to the Typists' and Writing Assistants' grades it is necessary for women still to have their own Association.

Further than this it is not proposed to go at this stage. The achievements of the National Association since its formation are still fresh in the minds of members. Their correlation in order of importance will be the work of posterity to undertake. Meanwhile in commending this brief survey of the activities of the parent organizations to present members, it is felt that all will agree that women in the past have left a very marked imprint on the design of the Civil Service, and that the present generation can do no less than go forward with the work which the pioneers have begun.

Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is mirrored and difficult to decipher.

