

Rathbone AL/842

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

LIVERPOOL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

CONSTITUTIONAL. NON-PARTY.

President:

Mrs. HENRY FAWCETT.

Chairman:

Mrs. E. STEWART BROWN.

Hon. Treasurer:

Miss OLIVE JAPP, 9, Alexandra Drive.

Hon. Secs.

Miss E. DEAKIN, 14, Ullet Road.

Miss ELEANOR RATHBONE, Greenbank.

23rd July 1910

Dear Mrs Ward,

I quite agree with you that a monster petition in reply to that of the A.S. is desirable. But it seems to me that the right moment for doing it was when I suggested it, six months ago. We could then have had our million-signature petition rolled into the House of Commons last Tuesday week, with excellent effect. The best time for petition work is the spring, when days are long and light and warm, when women do not mind standing on their doorsteps and when workers ~~are not~~ are not subjected to the discomforts and time-wasting ~~paraphernalia~~ ^{paraphernalia} of a winter campaign, frozen fingers, dripping umbrellas, flash lights, etc. The workers who were brought to the front for the first time by the Voters' Petition and whom one cannot use in organising work would have been kept interested and usefully and suitably employed. However it is no use crying over lost opportunities. The question is, whether it is too late to ~~at~~ attempt this or some other form of statistical reply to the Antis. Put as shortly as possible, the points I feel keenly about are:-

1. That we should have a special Council Meeting in the last week in September to decide what is to be done.

2. That no general Women's Petition should be attempted unless the Council is prepared to make a very big thing indeed of it and to

push it through as rapidly as possible. I don't a bit agree with Mrs Fawcett that it could or should be undertaken as a sort of "extra." That would mean that it would be done partially and half-heartedly. A small petition would be far worse than useless. Half-a-million should be the minimum, a million the aim.

3. I made some calculations as to how long the work would take, based on our small test petition here. We set twelve workers to collect signatures for four periods of three hours each in four districts selected so as to be as different as possible. They collected just over a thousand signatures, i.e., average rate $83\frac{1}{3}$ signatures per worker. This only comes to a little over seven signatures an hour, which certainly does not seem very much, but as some of them were excellent workers and some not so good, I think it may be taken as a fair sample.

I calculate that at this rate if **150** Societies gave on the workers average six ~~hours~~ each to the work, ~~thirteen~~ working twelve hours a week, they could collect the million signatures in about thirteen and a half weeks, or a little over three months. This of course allows nothing for the signatures which would be got at meetings, where the rate of collection would be much more than 7 per hour.

In the winter time it would probably take longer as the physical difficulties are much greater. Supposing that my figures are right, I don't think that it ought to be impossible to get this put through in a stated time, but it does mean a big amount of work, i.e., an army of about 900 workers giving up three half-days a week for this purpose. Of course if one raised funds and employed a lot of paid workers it could be put through much more quickly.

Mr/842 ~~cont~~

One alternative often suggested is of course to canvass the women occupiers who would get the vote under the Bill. This is far slower, as one may visit only two or three houses in a street and only one voter in each, instead of getting perhaps two or three signatures at every second house. Also, I doubt whether one ~~even~~ gets as high a proportion of signatures among those canvassed, as the women occupiers are so many of them elderly widows who are rather timid. The married and single women who won't get the vote ^{seen} ~~are~~ far keener about it, though of course one daren't say this publicly. I wonder what the people at headquarters are thinking about the favourite ^{'-'} ~~Anti~~ suggestion of a referendum either among women or among electors or both. It is a horribly specious proposal and I am very much afraid the result would be unfavourable, at any rate among women, thanks entirely to the militants. I have been rather thinking very privately and unostentatiously to ^{try} ~~try~~ a referendum of electors by the post, in say, a single polling district here, and one in two or three other towns. If one knew the result, it would be so much easier to know what line to take if the proposal was put forward very seriously. If the results were unfavourable of course one would ~~suppress~~ ^{suppress} them, as an unfavourable result is no real argument against the vote. If on the other hand the result is favourable, we could encourage the trial of the experiment on a bigger scale. The difficulty would be to prevent any one finding out that we were making the experiment and demanding to know the results.

Another suggestion for work that I should like to bring forward if there is a special Council Meeting, is that a movement should be

AL/842
cont

set on foot to get political workers to sign a pledge not to work at the next General Election, except for Candidates approved by the N.U.W.S.S. Hitherto, I think the efforts have generally been to get whole ~~individual~~ Associations to refrain. The worst of this plan is that even if under the influence of a good Suffrage speaker the Association agrees to make the Suffrage a test question, when the excitement and stress of the election comes on, the Association itself or the individual members are swept off their feet by the pressure of their male relatives and work as hard as ever for Anti-Suffragists. We had numerous examples of that here last election, ^{e.g. two} when Secretaries who had promised me faithfully not to work and not to let their members do so for anti-suffrage candidates, not only did this in their own constituencies but actually went several miles off to Bootle and worked there for an aggressive anti-suffragist. If the members had individually signed a solemn pledge beforehand, they would be ashamed to break it. Would you feel disposed to bring this suggestion before the London Society?

I did not mean to trouble you with so long a letter.

Yours truly,

G. F. Rathbone