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Bermuda Woman Suffrage Society

Sixteenth Annual Report

OFFICERS FOR 1938-1939

President: Mrs. John Morrell, B.A.

Vice-Presidents: Miss Rose Gosling, M.B.E., Mrs. Gilbert Gosling (former President Newfoundland W.S.S.), Miss H. M. Rees.

Chairman: Mrs. St. George Butterfield.

Secretary: Mrs. K. C. Arnell, B.A.

Treasurer: Mrs. W. E. Spurling.

MEMBERSHIP

Interest in the Society grows steadily as evidenced by the twenty-five new members we have elected this year. Our membership now stands at 178.

OBITUARY

We deeply regret to chronicle the loss of four valued members: Mrs. W. T. James, Miss Helen Gosling, Mr. O. W. Kealy and Mrs. Hammond Lightbourn.

MEETINGS

We have held five general meetings during the year, at four of which we had special speakers.

At the pre-election meetings we were glad to have the opportunity to hear three of our supporters in the House of Assembly.

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PAMPHLET

At our April meeting Mr. W. E. S. Zuill, M.C.P., gave an interesting and thoughtful speech. He emphasized the value to women of the degree of individual liberty which we enjoy under our present government. He also indicated that some progress had been made even though no political franchise had yet been won. On the same evening Mr. F. O. Misick, M.C.P., also spoke, giving a comprehensive survey of present day conditions in Bermuda. In the course of his remarks he paid the Suffrage Society a high compliment which we hope and believe is fully earned. He said: "The Woman Suffrage Society has been a fountain of inspiration in public service, because many organizations had sprung up as a direct result of the Society's pioneering."

At an afternoon meeting in May Mr. S. S. Toddings, M.C.P., spoke for the first time at one of our meetings on the topic "Glimpses into the History of local Woman Suffrage." Mr. Toddings had had access to material of special interest and traced the movement from 1895 to the present day, and suggested that the outlook for parochial franchise was hopeful.

At an afternoon meeting in December, our good friend the editor of The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily, Mr. A. M. Purcell, spoke on "The Future of the Feminist Cause." He gave us a diverting account of the reasons put forward by the opposition and the shifting of their ground. The chairman, in thanking the speaker, emphasized the value to our Society of the friendly co-operation always accorded us by the press in Bermuda.

On February 7, an evening meeting was held, the guest speaker being the Rev. James W. Purves. He expressed his sympathies with any peoples who suffer from the stigma of compulsory inferiority. He believed that this was the cause of much discontent and unrest all over the world. He spoke of the part which women would be required to play in any national emergency.

From this meeting a resolution was sent forward to the Colonial Secretary: "That this meeting re-affirms its belief that there should be a woman on the Board of Immigration, and regrets that the Executive has not yet seen fit to make an appointment." This meeting being held on the eve of the introduction to the House of Assembly of the Parish Vestries Act, 1929, Amendment Act, 1939, the president urged members to make a point of being present for the debate.

Our experience of this year would seem to indicate that evening meetings secure the best attendance, as the two evening meetings were crowded and enthusiastic ones.

TAX RESISTANCE

Five members of the Society again pursued the policy of Tax resistance and suffered enforced sales of goods.

DEPUTATION

A deputation consisting of your President, Chairman and Secretary waited on Mr. Harold Beckett, of the Colonial Office, during his visit to Bermuda.

His Excellency the Governor expressed a wish to be present at the conversation which ensued and his presence was welcomed.

Mrs. Morrell, who led the deputation, desired to impress on Mr. Beckett that the women asking for the vote in Bermuda were not irresponsible theorists but Bermudians experienced in practical social work. An immense amount of voluntary public work was done by women in Bermuda. The Suffrage Society was proud to think that a considerable proportion of this had been inspired and initiated by their members.

The race question was frequently invoked as an argument against Woman Suffrage. To suffragists it seemed the strongest argument for it: That the franchise should have been freely granted to newly liberated slaves in 1834, made it all the more outrageous that it should be denied to the Bermuda women of today. Moreover, it seemed likely that women could play a helpful part in the adjustment and solution of such problems as were bound to arise in any country where two or more different races live side by side.

Mrs. Butterfield referred to the part played by the Suffrage Society in pressing for University Scholarships for girls. She also spoke of the need for more women on Boards, and of the representations made by the Society in regard to the need for a woman on the Board of Immigration.

"MY PART IN A CHANGING WORLD"

A letter from Mrs. Pethick Lawrence broke the sad news that she could not hope to pay us a visit. In response to our regrets, she suggested that some of the money which a speaking campaign by her would have cost, should be spent in bringing her book before the Bermuda public. Your Committee readily assented, as it seemed this was the next best way of introducing her stimulating and delightful personality to a circle of Bermuda readers. Copies of the book have accordingly been placed in six circulating libraries and in the libraires of the Bermuda High School for Girls and the Saltus Grammar School. We strongly urge all our members to read this book and recommend it to their friends.

PARLIAMENTARY

The General Election took place in May, 1938, and during the previous weeks members of the Society sought interviews with the candidates. Where the candidates interviewed were willing, the interviews were subsequently published and proved very popular reading. As regards publicity during the election period there was general agreement that Woman Suffrage "stole the show." An encouraging number of candidates promised us to support at least a Parochial Franchise Bill, and in no case did we observe that candidates suffered by making uncompromising pronouncements in our favour.

In the election results we deeply regretted the defeat of one outstanding supporter, Mr. W. E. S. Zuill, but rejoiced that the great majority of our friends were returned.

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Ever since its inception this Society has urged that the Government should grant University Scholarships for girls to correspond with the educational facilities provided for boys by the Bermuda and Rhodes Scholarships. It is, therefore, with profound satisfaction that we chronicle the passing of an Act to grant two such scholarships annually in value £200. 0. 0. a year for three years. We trust that these will prove a benefit to generations of Bermuda girls and through them to the whole community.

On February 8, 1939, our long-expected Parochial Franchise Bill was introduced by Sir Stanley Spurling. It took the form of a simple amendment to the Parish Vestries Act, 1929, the Act which introduced for the first time the hateful and ridiculous proviso "No person shall vote—unless he be a male." Some debate followed in which seven members spoke in favour of the amendment and three against, one of whom, Mr. J. E. P. Vesey, moved that the committee rise. Mr. J. C. Cox spoke to a motion that they report progress and the House divided 16-16. Mr. B. C. C. Outerbridge then gave the casting vote in favour of Mr. Cox's motion and for the first time in our history we survived one day's debate.

On February 15, the Bill was again down for consideration and a number of women were present in the gallery. Sir Stanley Spurling, however, asked if consideration of the order could be deferred as he had just received some information bearing on the subject which he would like more time to digest. To our disappointment he has not yet proceeded with the measure, though we daily expect it to be taken up again.

GLADYS C de C. MORRELL, President.

HELEN D. ARNELL, Hon. Secretary.

March 7th, 1939.

P.S.—On Monday, March 13, Sir Stanley Spurling moved the resumption of consideration of the amendment to The Parish Vestries Act, 1929. Mr. J. E. P. Vesey again moved that the committee rise, and his motion was carried by 20 to 13. Once again we taste the bitterness of hope deferred.