

THE FEDERATION OF WOMEN CIVIL SERVANTS.

THE attention of the Federation of Women Civil Servants has been directed to certain statements made in a PAMPHLET ISSUED TO FEDERATION MEMBERS in the Ministry of Pensions, and it is considered that three of the questions dealt with are of such importance that our members should be in possession of the full facts.

It has been the recent policy of the Federation to ignore the NUMEROUS AND VAGUE accusations levelled by the C.S.C.A. against its past policy, because the statements circulated are so ambiguous that it would be impossible to refute them except at extreme and wearisome length, and also because the statements are in themselves frequently so contradictory that to any intelligent reader they are obviously incorrect.

On several occasions the foundations for accusations similar to those made in the Ministry of Pensions pamphlet have been PUBLICLY CHALLENGED IN *Red Tape*. The challenge has not been met, but the statements have reappeared elsewhere.

It is therefore proposed to show what has been the Federation policy on the MOST IMPORTANT POINTS dealt

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with in the pamphlet, viz., THE PROMOTION OF WRITING ASSISTANTS, EQUAL PAY, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TEMPORARY STAFFS, and then to leave our members to judge for themselves of the reliance to be placed on other statements in the pamphlet.

As regards the PROMOTION OF WRITING ASSISTANTS the F.W.C.S. has always endeavoured to INCREASE the openings for the promotion of this grade.

In 1923 the Federation submitted to the Treasury Committee on Common Seniority, as one of the main reasons for the aggregation of men's and women's posts throughout the Service, the fact that such aggregation would NEARLY DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF POSTS AVAILABLE FOR THE MUCH-NEEDED PROMOTION OF WRITING ASSISTANTS. This policy of the Federation was OPPOSED BY THE C.S.C.A.

In the December, 1923, issue of *Red Tape* a letter from the Federation gave full publicity to the same policy, and showed that it would have nearly DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF VACANCIES AVAILABLE FOR THE PROMOTION OF WRITING ASSISTANTS without differentiating the recruitment of men and women clerical officers. This policy has been desperately fought by the C.S.C.A. because their male members fear that aggregation would reduce their percentage of Higher to Lower clerical posts which is much greater than the women's. A copy of this letter is appended.

The Federation of Women Civil Servants always OPPOSED THE CREATION OF A GRADE OF WRITING ASSISTANTS CONFINED TO WOMEN. It was feared that the tendency would be to hand over to Writing Assistants in the Women's Branches all the simpler work which, in a Man's Branch, would be performed

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by Junior Clerical Officers, THUS DEGRADING THE WORK IN THE WOMEN'S BRANCHES.

This is exactly what has now occurred in many Departments, including the Ministry of Pensions, and the Woman Clerical Officer's prospect of promotion has been thereby appreciably lessened. The proportion of Higher Clerical posts to a combined staff of Clerical Officers and Writing Assistants is considerably lower than the proportion of Higher Clerical posts to clerical posts.

As regards EQUAL PAY this has been one of the main planks of the Federation platform for over twenty years, and its experience was considered so valuable that when the Civil Service Equal Pay Committee was set up the Federation was asked to appoint a representative, although it has no seat on the National Whitley Council which initiated the Committee.

The Federation has always been represented on the Parliamentary Committee on Women in the Civil Service which was responsible for the two Equal Pay Resolutions agreed to by the House.

In 1920 the principle of Equal Pay was affirmed in the resolution of May 19th. The following year it was considered desirable to press for equal entrance for men and women to the Executive and Administrative Grades as it was felt that the difference in the recruitment of the sexes to these grades was largely responsible for the small number of higher posts available for women in the Service, with a consequent stagnation of promotion right down to the lowest grades.

The Parliamentary Committee, finding that no action had been taken by the Treasury on the 1920 Resolution, decided to reaffirm the principle of Equal Pay in the 1921 Equality Resolution. A great deal of encouragement was received from all parties in the

House, but it was obvious that no support would be given to the women's demand for equality UNLESS THE POSITION OF THE EX-SERVICE MAN WAS SAFEGUARDED, and a clause to that effect was inserted in the Resolution. The F.W.C.S. agreed to this. IT HAS ALWAYS CONCEDED THE CLAIM OF THE EX-SERVICE MAN TO PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT, AND IT IS NOT ASHAMED OF HAVING DONE SO.

As the date of the Resolution approached it was unanimously AGREED BY THE WHOLE COMMITTEE that, in view of the acute financial position of the country, it might not be wise to press the question of Equal Pay to a division, with a very possible prospect of defeat and a consequent definite record that the House was against Equal Pay. The Members of Parliament concerned with the conduct of the Debate were given full authority to modify the Resolution, if necessary, so as to ensure the equal recruitment clause getting through with an agreement to the PRINCIPLE of Equal Pay.

The A.W.C.S. representative on the Committee had raised no objection to any of the proposals, but at the final meeting before the Debate she presented a letter resigning from the Committee on the grounds that she was not in agreement with its policy. This occasioned some surprise as no objections had been raised during the discussions. On the day of the Debate, however, the reason for the resignation was realised. THE A.W.C.S. HAD CIRCULARISED MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT POINTING OUT THAT THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN WAS CHEAPER THAN THE EMPLOYMENT OF MEN. The Federation has not seen the circular, but the following extract from the speech of Sir F. Banbury will show how its issue provided our opponents with ammunition : *Hansard*, 5th Aug., 1921.

“ . . . It is the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries, ‘affiliated to the Trade Union Congress.’

In their communication yesterday they said that they were concerned about the dismissals of women from the Civil Service in order to make room for ex-service men. They said they had no objection to the dismissal of women in order to make room for disabled ex-service men, but they did object to the dismissal of women in order to make room for Grade 1 men, and the reason they gave was that the women were doing the work much more cheaply than the men, and in view of the economies which ought to be practised it was, in their opinion, wrong to dismiss the women. In the document which I have before me, they say that the saving would be £1,560,000 a year. . . .

. . . The point I raise now is that the women seem divided amongst themselves. Here is an association which, I presume, commends itself to hon. Gentlemen opposite, because it is affiliated to the Trade Union Congress. The association's point is not that the women are not getting enough wages, but that they should be kept on because they are cheaper. The Motion now before the House says that women are to be paid the same wages as men. The two things do not agree. This is only further proof of the complete inconsistency of women.”

Our supporters were bound to accept the compromise, and the resolution was carried, as follows :

Resolved,—

“ 1. That this House approves of the temporary Regulations for competitions governing the appointment of women to situations in the new reorganisation classes in the Home Civil Service.

Provided that after a provisional period of three years women shall be admitted to the Civil Service of His Majesty within the United Kingdom under the same Regulations, present or future, as provide for and prescribe the mode of admission for men.

Provided, further, that the allocation by the Civil Service Commissioners of such candidates as qualify at the examination shall be made with due regard to the requirements of the situation to be filled.

2. That women shall be appointed to and continue to hold posts in the Civil Service within the United Kingdom under the same Regulations, present or future, as govern the classification and (in so far as regards status and authority) other conditions of service for men.

3. That, having regard to the present financial position of the country, this House cannot commit itself to the increase in Civil Service salaries involved in the payment of women in all cases at the same rate as men; but that the question of the remuneration of women as compared with men shall be reviewed within a period not exceeding three years.

Provided that arrangements in hand for the inclusion of ex-service men on special terms be not by these Resolutions prevented or delayed."

Though not what we hoped, the result is that we are no longer concerned to argue on whether Equal Pay is an equitable principle, but only on how soon it is politic to introduce it. We have further ensured that, in future, the number of women in higher posts in the Civil Service shall depend, not on the number of vacancies wrested from the men, but on the number of women who can prove their ability to compete successfully at the entrance examinations.

The C.S.C.A., in their pamphlet, is constantly at pains to prove that we are not fighting for certain individual classes of Civil Servants. It is quite true we are not. We are fighting primarily to secure the best conditions for all women in the Civil Service, from Writing Assistants to Administrative Officers, and we

try to consider each problem, not as it affects a particular grade, but as it affects the whole position of women throughout the Civil Service.

With regard to the statement headed "The 1919 Examination," in which the charge is made "that when the Joint Committee (representing permanent and temporary Civil Servants) secured a promise from Mr. Baldwin—then Financial Secretary to the Treasury—that he would receive a deputation in June, 1919, the F.W.C.S. wrote to the Treasury in an endeavour to secure a separate hearing," the truth is that the Federation had applied on April 11th, 1919, for an interview with the Treasury Director of Establishments on the question of the distribution of the permanent women in Headquarters' Departments. This interview was granted in a letter, dated April 16th, 1919, but it was postponed on account of pressure of work at the Treasury. The Joint Committee did not make their application for an interview till May 24th, and on receipt of this request the Treasury assumed that the joint representation would take the place of the interview which had been promised the Federation. With the consent of the Joint Committee the Federation was therefore given an early opportunity in the proceedings of putting forward their case as stated in their original application of April 11th, 1919.

The fact that the 1920 examination was held as a result of the recommendation of the Sub-Committee on Temporary Staffs of the National Whitley Council Reorganisation Committee, which was signed by the Federation representative, is sufficient evidence that we did not oppose the establishment of temporary officers.

APPENDIX.

TO THE EDITOR, "RED TAPE":

SIR,—I notice in your November issue a criticism of the policy of the Federation of Women Civil Servants in objecting to the complete differentiation of the recruitment of the clerical class as between men and women, and I should be glad if you would publish the following statement in your next issue:

Anyone with experience of the Service is aware that the status of a class with open recruitment (that is, from outside the Service) is higher than that of a class recruited by promotion from a grade below, and, as the Federation has been fighting for over twenty years to obtain equality of status between men and women of the same grade, it is obvious that we cannot throw over the main principles of our policy because the National Whitley Council, with a majority of men, chose to abolish the trouble that had arisen in providing an outlet for the Boy Clerk by shifting the problem on to the shoulders of the women.

As things are at present we realise that a promotion outlet for Writing Assistants is essential, and we are quite prepared to consent to an agreed proportion of vacancies being reserved for this purpose, provided there is also an agreed proportion reserved for open recruitment, though even then we are altering the status of the Women's Clerical Grade in comparison with the Men's.

At the same time we have a constructive proposal which would improve the prospects of the Writing Assistants to an infinitely greater degree than if all the women's vacancies in the Clerical Class were reserved for them, and that is that there should be a common seniority list for men and

women Clerical Officers—in fact, that the men and women should be interchangeable on one establishment. There are, roughly, 11,000 male Clerical Officers in the Service and about 5,000 women. The percentage of wastage in round figures, as given in the Gladstone Report, is 2 per cent. for men and 5 per cent. for women. This would mean that only 250 vacancies per annum would be available for the promotion of Writing Assistants and Typists, even were all women's clerical vacancies filled by promotion; whereas with a single establishment list there would be 470 vacancies per annum, and 50 per cent. of the total vacancies would provide a greater outlet for promotion than the 75 per cent. of the women's vacancies demanded by the C.S.C.A. It is true that, later on, unless the number of men successful at the mixed examination exceeded the number of women by the number of those promoted, the Clerical Class would ultimately be mainly women, and this is one of the reasons why the proposal is received with so much antagonism in some quarters; but surely a Writing Assistant who has been successful in a trial on clerical work should not be excluded from consideration for half the clerical vacancies in the Service; and, if the number of women in the Clerical Grade became excessive, the introduction of Boy Writing Assistants would level things up.

Faithfully yours,

D. SMYTH,

Hon. Secretary, Federation of Women Civil Servants.

9TH NOVEMBER, 1923.

