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LONDON GRADUATES' UNION FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE (May, 1918).

IN the autumn of 1914, the Union decided, by means of a post-card vote of its members, to suspend the activities of the Union for the period of the war at the discretion of the Committee. (Result of the voting was : for, 273 ; against, 14.)

In October, 1916, the Committee met to consider the situation arising from the appointment of the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Reform. It was decided that the Committee should meet from time to time, but that no action should be taken which would require reference to a general meeting. The following memorandum was drawn up and sent to every member of the Speaker's Conference.

MEMORANDUM TO THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE FROM THE COMMITTEE OF THE LONDON GRADUATES' UNION FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

ON the outbreak of war this Union suspended direct work for its object, which is the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women on the same terms as it is or may be given to men. The reasons for doing so were (i) to set all its members free to serve the nation, and (ii) to promote the truce in all matters of domestic politics. The question of alterations in the Franchise laws has however now been raised in Parliament, and our Committee therefore begs to submit this Memorandum to the Speaker's Conference on the subject.

The Memorandum is presented by members of a University in the Constitution of which there is no disability of sex, men and women having equal rights in the election of all the governing bodies and being equally eligible to all those bodies. Women graduates are, however, subject to the disability imposed by law in regard to voting for the University representative in Parliament. The enlightened policy of the University has been justified by its results, and the Convocation of graduates protested in 1911 against the exclusion from its parliamentary register of a considerable proportion of its members on the ground of sex.

We wish to draw attention particularly to one aspect of the subject, namely, the national gain which results from freedom being granted to individuals to exercise any abilities they may possess. Women have not that freedom so long as their status and their right to work are determined by laws made and maintained by Parliaments representing men alone. There is no test of capacity to do efficient work unless there be freedom to attempt it. The war has shown that women are ready to work in spheres from which they were before excluded and from which they may be excluded again if they are denied the protection of the vote. It has also demonstrated their capacity notwithstanding the deficiency of previous training owing to

artificial restrictions. In industrial life their acquirement of manual dexterity was hindered by Trades' Unions which derive much of their power from representation in Parliament. The exclusion of women from the more skilled forms of labour finds its parallel in the intellectual occupations which are controlled by legislation or by State administration. A legal decision debars them from the practice of Law. They are not admitted to competition for the higher Clerkships of the Civil Service. In these directions as in the ranks of Labour the more interesting and better paid work is closed to them. The loss to the nation occasioned by this policy is clear at a time when substitutes for men of military age are urgently required.

On the other hand, in those fields of service which were opened to women by the abolition of sex-disabilities in the University of London and some of the other Universities, the outbreak of war found women trained to the highest point of efficiency. In Medicine and Surgery their services were from the first eagerly accepted by our Allies and later by British Authorities. The Scottish Women's Hospital Units have taken sorely needed assistance to the Belgians, to France, Serbia, Russia and Rumania, and in so doing they have promoted goodwill to our country. In London the Endell Street Military Hospital, staffed entirely by women, has demonstrated their ability to perform this War Service. It must be recalled that the opposition to women entering the medical profession was at one time as great as that now offered to their qualifying in other departments of national work.

The whole standard of national efficiency will be raised by the free development of women's abilities; and their widened outlook will re-act on the rising generation and tend to improve the home-training of children. In the competition between nations, that nation may be expected to excel which does not waste its woman-power. Already women contribute to the profession of school teaching more than half its members, and an increasing number are being elected to posts in Universities. The Educational problems to be settled after the war require the co-operation of both sexes.

It is also essential that, in the work of reconstruction, economic, social, industrial and hygienic problems should be considered in relation to the experience of women as well as to that of men. This cannot be achieved whilst one sex only is represented in Parliament.

The need of women's influence as voting citizens extends beyond the limits of this country. Some of the most difficult problems of Empire demand the co-operation of women.

Great Britain is at war to maintain the principle that right is not determined by might. In this we see a new hope that the enfranchisement of the women of our nation will no longer be refused or delayed.

ALFRED CALDECOTT, D.Lit., D.D.,
President.

HELEN C. I. GWYNNE-VAUGHAN, D.Sc.,
Chairman of Committee.

MARIAN BUSK, B.Sc.,
Hon. Treasurer.

November 17th, 1916.

A representative of the Union has attended meetings of the Consultative Committee of Constitutional Women's Suffrage Societies, the co-operation of the Union being limited to matters within the discretion of its Committee. The policy of the Consultative Committee has been to keep in touch with advocates of women's suffrage in Parliament and to suggest improvements in the Reform Bill, but not to imperil its passing by opposition

to any of its provisions, or by any action which could be interpreted as showing a lack of unanimity among suffragists.

In February, 1917, the Chairman of the L.G.U. Committee (Dr. H. C. I. Gwynne Vaughan) was appointed Chief Controller of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in France, and later the Vice-Chairman (Dr. Adeline Roberts) was appointed Recruiting Medical Controller London District W.A.A.C. Other L.G.U. officials and members of Committee have also been engaged in war-work. The Committee, therefore, did not meet between February, 1917 and March, 1918, and the function of its representative on the Consultative Committee has been purely deliberative during that time.

The Representation of the People Act received the Royal Assent on 6th February, 1918, and the Committee sends a hearty message of congratulation to all members of the Union on the measure of Women's Suffrage included in that Act, although the object of the Union to obtain the franchise for women on the same terms as it is granted to men has not been attained.

The University of London continues as a separate constituency returning one member to Parliament. Graduates over 21 years of age if men, and over 30 years of age if women, are entitled to be registered as parliamentary electors in this constituency on complying with regulations for registration made by the University. A circular has been issued by the University concerning provisions for registration. The exercise of the franchise in a University does not preclude the elector from voting in *one* other constituency at the same general election.

Members of the Union entitled to be registered in a constituency other than the University should see that their names are included in the new register which will be posted on public buildings in the locality, and if they are not included, should apply to the Clerk of the Town or District Council for a form of claim. A pamphlet by Miss Chrystal Macmillan, giving all particulars of the Act as it affects women, is published (price 3d.) by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 52, Oxford Street, W. 1.

The question of the continuance of the London Graduates' Union and the renewal of its activities in any form after the war is now one for the members to consider. Many suffrage societies will continue in order to use their organisations for the promotion of good citizenship and just legislation; and some have as an additional object the removal of sex-disabilities within communities to which their membership is restricted. No specific disabilities are imposed upon women in the University of London. As regards the removal of the remaining

general disabilities or inequalities in the terms of the franchise, it may be thought that Parliament is not likely for some time to entertain proposals to alter provisions of an Act so recently passed. On the other hand there are important disabilities imposed on women in general life. Among subjects which must engage attention may be mentioned the admission of women to all grades of the Civil Service, imperial, national and municipal, and to certain professions from which they are at present excluded; the question of equal pay for equal work; problems of education; the laws of nationality; the laws of marriage and of the guardianship of children. In view of these there is plainly a clear call upon our University Constituency to take a definite share in the formation of opinion and in the exercise of influence in the arena where these issues are decided.

The L.G.U. however, has greater difficulty in maintaining activity than most societies. The professional occupations of its members, even in peace time, limit the time and energy they can give to organisation. It is hoped that letters on the duties or opportunities of the Union, and on the subject of its continuance or discontinuance may be sent for the information of the Committee (addressed to Lady Busk, 11, Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London, N.W. 1), pending the possibility of obtaining an authoritative decision by vote at a general meeting or otherwise.

The Accounts of the Union were audited to the 31st December, 1914, when there was a deficit of £13 8s. 10d. arising from the fact that no request was made for members' subscriptions after the outbreak of war. Since the audit subscriptions amounting to £3 7s. 6d. have been received, and the Committee has spent £4 3s. 7d. The Account has been kept open by guarantee donations.

Members are requested to send changes of address to Miss Foley, 51, Elm Park Mansions, Park Walk, Chelsea, London, S.W. 10, and also their subscriptions for 1918 to meet the deficit and for the expenditure for the Union which will still be requisite.

Signed on behalf of the Committee,

ALFRED CALDECOTT, *President.*

MARIAN BUSK, *Hon. Treasurer.*

HARRIETTE CHICK, *Hon. Secretary.*