

MONTHLY NEWS of the Conservative Women's Reform ASSOCIATION. NEW ISSUE.

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OUR WORK.

Lectures. Two very successful afternoon meetings have been held. By kind permission of Dame Louise Gilbert Samuel, Sir Robert Newman spoke at 32 Sloane Gardens on February 23rd, on the subject of the "Separation and Maintenance Orders" Bill introduced by him into the House of Commons.

On March 7th, Sir Valentine Chirol addressed a crowded and enthusiastic meeting at 68 Great Cumberland Place on Egypt, a subject which he has made peculiarly his own. Our thanks are due to Mr. and Miss Edmonds for so kindly lending their house, and to Mr. John Bailey for taking the chair.

Drawing-room Meetings. Surprise has sometimes been expressed that speakers holding very different political views from our own have been invited to address our meetings. This is the explanation:—

Women have only lately come completely into public life, and now they can make their influence felt not only on public opinion, but in Parliament. But now that we have this new-found power as voters we must educate ourselves to understand thoroughly the problems of the day.

We are an association of Conservative women, but we are reformers also, and one of our chief aims is to urge the passing of reforms which are in accordance with conservative principles.

A great many of these reforms which are so urgently needed, such as the Guardianship of Infants Bill, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, the Separation and Maintenance Orders Bill, are all subjects in which women are naturally interested, and they are politically non-contentious. But before we press for such measures we want to know all that there is to be said on both sides of the question. For this purpose, our Education Committee arranges drawing-room meetings and invites on to our platform speakers who are experts and specialists on these subjects, but whose views politically may be quite in opposition to our own. We ask them to speak to us, not as politicians, but as the finest exponents of the particular subject on which we are seeking information; and we find that we gain a great deal

by hearing the point of view of the expert. Then before making up our minds we have to consider very fully whether it is possible for us to urge such a measure in the sane and constitutional way which is typical of the best conservative spirit.

Resolutions on some of these subjects are proposed after the debates which follow the Lectures, and if carried can be sent up to the member or minister standing for the policy in question.

Council. A meeting of the Council will be held on Wednesday, March 22nd, when the Hon. Ethel Akers Douglas will speak on her experience of propaganda work among working women.

L.C.C. Elections. The Executive Committee of this Association were greatly disappointed by the small response to their appeal for workers. In view of the fact that our Chairman, Lady Trustram Eve, was standing for North Hackney, it had been hoped that there would be a large number of associates to volunteer their help: and this has not been the case.

It is probable that many were already pledged to work in their constituencies; but even so, it would have been an encouragement to the Committee, who are devoting their efforts to making the C.W.R.A. an energetic body which can be relied upon for more than a passive support of its principles, if members would have written to this effect to the office.

THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS.

The result of the elections is extraordinarily satisfactory, and we may justly claim that it is largely due to the naturally conservative instincts of Women. The women's vote was a very important element in all the constituencies, and their steadying, practical influence was cast emphatically against the policy of socialist experiment and extravagance.

The results are well known to everybody, but they may be briefly summarised here. The Municipal Reformers hold 82 out of 124 seats, the Progressives 26, and Labour 16. The M.R.'s

gained 14 seats; Labour neither gained nor lost on balance; the Progressives lost 16 seats, including their leader, Dr. Scott Lidgett. This would seem to show that the Centre parties are being crowded out, and that the issues are more and more narrowing down into a straight fight between Conservatism and Socialism. But it would, perhaps, be rash to claim the election as a great rally of public opinion to Conservative policy. The London Labour Party helped us by putting forward a programme of such extreme idealism and delirious costliness, that it united against it the mass of commonplace common sense working class opinion.

Of the eleven women put forward by our party nine were elected, an astonishing result. Mrs. Dunn Gardner, at West Norwood, secured over 12,000 votes, and a majority of over 8,000, the largest figures ever known in a Local Government election. Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan was defeated in North Camberwell, and Dr. Barrie Lambert in Bow and Bromley. She made a splendid fight, and it is hoped that she will be co-opted Alderman. The names of the successful candidates are:—Lady Trustram Eve (no contest), Mrs. Elliott, Mrs. Dunn Gardner, Mrs. Hopkins, Mrs. Lankester, Mrs. Hudson Lyall, Dr. Adeline Roberts, Miss Rachel Parsons, Miss Rosamond Smith.

Two Labour women out of 12 were elected:—Miss Susan Lawrence and Mrs. E. M. Lowe. Miss Margaret McMillan, a sitting member, was defeated at Deptford.

Miss Adler (Progressive) was elected without a contest, and Miss I. Samuel was defeated.

The Independent women both failed. Commandant Allen, the special candidate of the National Union of Women Teachers only polled a few hundred votes out of an electorate of many thousands.

In 1919, nearly 17 per cent. of the electorate voted—in 1922 about 40 per cent. There is still very much work for us to do.

THE WORK DONE BY POOR LAW GUARDIANS.

The date for the election of Poor Law Guardians has now been fixed for April 5th. Afterwards we shall once more have in every Parish or Union of Parishes in London a body of persons entrusted with the administration of an ancient and very complicated legal system whose object is the relief of destitution in all its forms. The Destitute are a large class comprising not only those who are without *all* the means of subsistence, but also those who are in need of something necessary for the preservation of life and health and are unable to procure it except by applying to the Poor Law.

We all know that the expenses are met by means of the Poor-rate, levied on all householders, rich and poor, and indirectly in the form of an addition to the rent, upon all the inhabitants, some of them the very poorest of all. The Guardians are of course responsible not only for the assistance of the destitute in a suitable man-

ner, but also for the economical and efficient administration of the funds committed to them.

It has often been said, and with some truth that a country has the Government it deserves, and in the same way a Parish or Union has the Guardians it deserves. It is a lamentable fact that an election of Guardians rouses very little interest, and only a small percentage of the electors take the trouble to find out who are the best candidates and then to record their votes. They must not be surprised if persons are elected who talk loudly, waste time and money and never really understand the principles and practice embodied in the Poor Law, as amended in 1834. This work of Poor Law Administration is complicated and interesting, touching as it does the lives of persons of many different types of character, and dealing with many tragedies and (fortunately) some comedies. It calls for the help of all kinds of persons of good-will—doctors, lawyers and clergymen are very valuable—men and women in business, men and women of leisure and representatives of Labour who have a first-hand knowledge of many details; and they should combine with sympathy, knowledge and conscientiousness. Politics and party-spirit are decidedly not wanted on a Board of Guardians; they waste time and divert attention from the business in hand, which is the Administration of the Law.

One reason why the Poor Law and its Guardians are despised is, I believe, that they are commonly supposed to be under sentence of death and awaiting the executioner at an early date. But the date is not yet fixed, and meanwhile there is work to be done.

This work may be divided into two main parts:

1. **Indoor Relief:** the Workhouse, the Infirmary, the Schools.
2. **Outdoor Relief:** Allowances in money and kind, Medical attendance.

No. 2 is of course the most popular form of Relief, but the most difficult to administer well. Dependence on State Help, i.e. upon the whole community, is a demoralising manner of life and may easily be carried to a very dangerous extent, as was the case in England before 1834. When State Help becomes attractive, thrift, industry and independence of spirit are discouraged, and it is therefore the duty of Guardians to weigh very carefully the circumstances of all applicants for Out-door Relief. Where granted, it should not be lavish in amount but sufficient to provide for all necessities. It should not be given to friendless old persons, living in dirt and discomfort and unable to look after themselves, or to those who have a bad past record for drink, dishonesty or immorality. The cases of widows with children on Out Relief need special care to ensure that a proper use is made of their income and that the amount given is varied as circumstances change.

The good old rule that Out-door Relief should not be given to able-bodied men and single women, is for the present in abeyance in consideration of the abnormal amount of Unemployment which has made special legislation necessary. A scale of Relief has been put forward by

the Ministry of Health, and Guardians are directed to enquire into the circumstances of each case, and to deduct from the Guardians' allowance the amount of money already coming into the family. This needs care and judgment on the part of the Guardians and their officers, not to speak of the difficulties of the "exceptional cases" which constantly arise and the puzzles as to how to deal with the costermonger, the small tradesman "on his own," the man who has left his job of his own accord, or been dismissed for no grave reason, and the inefficient person who is always the first to fall out of work and the last to be taken on.

What is known as the "Mond Scale of Relief" is certainly sufficient to procure the necessities of life in all ordinary circumstances and it should not be exceeded without extremely good reason. It is difficult to see how the Government could have dealt with the multitudes of the Unemployed, many of them Ex-service men, if the Poor Law and all its machinery had not been in existence.

All difficulty as to the adequacy of the help given is of course absent from the grant of Indoor Relief, i.e. a Workhouse Order. In a well-managed Workhouse there is food, clothing, warmth, cleanliness, shelter for all the inmates, with moderate tasks of work for the able-bodied—all these advantages being neutralised in the opinion of many persons by the loss of liberty and the irksomeness of discipline in the "House." It is of course an unpopular form of relief; but when Guardians are in the habit of "offering the House" in all cases where the home is dirty and neglected and the applicant's character is bad, and only give out-relief after careful enquiry as to character and respectability, and whether relatives are doing their duty—then it has always been found that neither the Workhouse nor the Out-relief lists are over-crowded—the people learn to help themselves and each other and their whole character and outlook on life is raised.

Help given in sickness is on a different footing altogether and it behoves the Guardians to see that their Infirmary with its doctors and nursing staff are as efficient as possible so that the sick may be cured quickly and thoroughly, and also that the outdoor medical service may be carried on by capable men.

A few words must be given to the work done by the Guardians for children—really the most important business they have in hand, for they are dealing with the precious raw material which is to build up the new England of our dreams.

Children come under the Poor Law for various reasons besides mental and physical infirmity:—

- (a) They are complete orphans and destitute.
- (b) Their father is dead and the widowed mother cannot manage to support her whole family.
- (c) Their parents have deserted them.
- (d) The home and parents are for moral reasons unfit for children.

The Guardians can deal with them in various ways. There are the large so-called "Barrack" schools, where both boys and girls are educated and trained for their future life and are given a good start in the world; and for suitable boys

there is a first-rate Training Ship. Special cases of delicate children or of those who are rather too old to settle down happily in a large school, can be paid for in suitable small institutions. Orphan and deserted children can be boarded out in country villages, where these poor waifs soon become the real members of a real family.

The Guardians hear with the greatest interest of the progress of these children in after life and from time to time they are called upon to help them through minor troubles and partial failures but they are thankful to say that only a small proportion fail to "make good" or become a permanent charge on the rates, and then usually through mental deficiency.

It will be realised that the superintendence of all these various forms of relief and of the large body of Officials who *do* the actual work of carrying out the decisions of Committees, means the expenditure of time and attention, and it also indicates that it is scarcely work for the very old or the very young, but for persons with some knowledge of human nature and of the problems of life, and with energy to face their difficulties.

Guardians have often made mistakes or failed in their duty, and their work has been criticised. For these and other reasons it seems to be taken for granted that their day is over and that they must be superseded.

The suggested plan is that in London all Institutions should be managed by a Committee of the County Council and all out-relief by Committees of the Borough Councils.

Whether these Bodies, already well-supplied with work, will act more expeditiously, efficiently and economically than the despised Guardians, who at any rate have a great deal of past experience at their backs, remains to be seen. One foresees complications and delays when, as often happens, emergencies arise. In the meantime the Guardians have to be re-elected and it is for the electors to do their part on April 5th, 1922.

A. M. HUMPHRY,

Poor Law Guardian (Paddington).

POOR LAW FINANCE.

When Local Government electors go to the poll on April 5th to elect the Poor Law Guardians who are to hold office for the following three years, they should disabuse their minds of the belief that this is a trivial affair, and that it does not much matter whether they vote or not. Very large questions of social welfare are dealt with by the Guardians, and their expenditure of the rate-payers' money will very largely determine the amounts raised in local taxation.

This incentive to economy is, however, tending to diminish as the poor rate becomes increasingly chargeable on a Central Fund, contributed to by all the boroughs in proportion to their rateable value, and divided back amongst them in proportion to the number of their inhabitants in receipt of relief.

It is evident that the East End Boroughs with their large poor populations and low rateable values, cannot fairly be expected to meet the

full burden of the destitution within their areas. And it is quite just that the burden should be shared by the richer boroughs with higher rateable values and more prosperous inhabitants. But it becomes a matter of the highest importance that a powerful and vigilant central control should operate to counteract the almost overwhelming temptation to Guardians in poor districts to spend extravagantly money taken from the pockets of other people.

Until quite recently each borough was responsible for its own out-relief, and the Equalisation Fund was only chargeable for the support of persons in Institutions. A 6d. rate was levied for this purpose by the L.C.C.

Under the new system, however, which has only just come into force, the Equalisation Fund can be drawn upon up to the amount of 10d. per head per day for every individual in receipt of relief throughout the whole of the London area. And a very unsatisfactory feature is that no rating authority can possibly estimate what its share of the expenditure is likely to be.

The Ministry of Health is the controlling authority, and the Guardians are required to administer a scale of relief laid down by the Minister. The scale now in force must not exceed:—

Man and wife 25s., 1st child 6s., 2nd or 3rd child 5s., 4th or any subsequent child 4s.; and a cwt. of coal in winter, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. in summer. This would give a weekly income of 48s. for a husband and wife and four children. This is a maximum scale, and there are probably many Boards of Guardians who give less.

It will be remembered that the famous "Poplar" scale amounted to 82s. for the same family.

In the event of non-compliance the Ministry of Health can forbid the banks to allow overdrafts, and the extravagant Guardians are brought into line by their inability to obtain credits.

It remains, however, difficult to see how they can be prevented from giving relief to large numbers of people who would not be considered eligible by more provident Boards. It cannot be fortuitous that in Poplar nearly one person in every seven—23,320 out of a population of 162,618—is in receipt of relief, while in Wandsworth, the next highest, the number is less than one in 28.

The present very unsatisfactory system is in force, for one year only, and it would appear probable that some permanent scheme must be set up in its place, perhaps on the lines of the recommendations of Sir Donald MacLean's Committee, which reported in 1918. They recommended that one committee in each area should be responsible for *all* the relief given to necessitous families, and that this committee should be a Borough (or County) Council Committee.

Under the present system the Guardians serve precepts upon the Borough Councils for whatever sums they require. It would certainly seem to be a sounder principle to concentrate the spending and levying of the rate in the same body.

FLORA L. C. WALTER.

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WEEKLY LECTURES.

Wed., 22nd March. "The Basis of Sex-Equality" ... Mr. EDWARD CECIL
8.15 p.m. (Co-Education)
Chairman ... Mrs. T. DEXTER.

Wed., 29th March. Subject announced later ... Mrs. WINTRINGHAM, M.P.
8.15 p.m.

Wed., 5th April. "Is England on the Decline?" ... Mr. JOHN MURRAY, M.P.
8.15 p.m. Chairman ... Mr. NORMAN MORRISON.

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