

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

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**OUR WORK.**

1923. The New Year has opened for our Association in new quarters, and we hope many of our members will have occasion to seek out Miss Raiker in Room 191, Windsor House, Victoria Street. They will enjoy a wonderful view, and almost mountain air, from the top floor of that lofty building; and they will find it most conveniently situated close to St. James's Underground Station, and nearly opposite the Army and Navy Stores.

It was sad leaving 48, Dover Street, with its pleasant associations of many years of good work accomplished there, but we look confidently to the future in our new home, feeling certain that the critical time which lies before us has calls and opportunities for organised Conservative women as important as any that lie in the past.

**Last Session Meetings.** In spite of the agitations and interruptions caused by the General Election a programme of four drawing-room meetings was carried through. They were all entirely successful, and our Association owes and pays, its very sincerest tribute of thanks to the distinguished speakers who have made them so. The C.W.R.A. lectures have earned and deserve, the high reputation which they enjoy. It may interest our readers to recapitulate the speakers and subjects:—Lord Eustace Percy on the Versailles Treaty; Mr. Harold Williams on Reparations; Signor Pellizzi on Fascism; Mr. Christopher Turnor on Agriculture.

**Debates.** The debates, followed by tea, have proved themselves a successful experiment, and will be continued this session. It is found that people are glad of the opportunity of speaking before a small audience, and so acquiring the experience and self-confidence which are essential to the public speaker. Quite a number of new associates have joined the C.W.R.A. through these gatherings.

**Next Session Meetings.** In view of the large numbers of people who were turned away from

the meeting on Fascism, addressed by Signor Pellizzi on November 30th, the Committee asked him if he would be good enough to repeat his address on January 27th, and he has most kindly consented to do so. A large drawing-room was promised, and it was decided to ask members to apply in advance for the tickets they required. Even so the supply was exhausted a fortnight before the meeting was due and many applications have been most regretfully refused. Signor Pellizzi likes to answer questions, and it is hoped a very interesting discussion will follow the lecture.

On Friday, February 9th, Earl Grey has promised to speak on the various alternative schemes which have been suggested to make our electoral system more representative of public opinion. The existing arrangements, which frequently allow of the return of a candidate to Parliament on a minority vote is a source of serious political weakness to any government, and it is thought that information about the various alternatives will be of great interest. We publish a short note on the subject.

**Debates.** On Jan. 24th a debate will be held on the question "Whether Dry America has been a failure." Miss Grant will take the chair; Mrs. Cochrane will open, and Miss Catharine Margesson will oppose.

On February 7th the subject will be "Whether there is one law for the rich and another for the poor." Miss Sandars will take the chair; the Countess of Hardwicke will open, and Mrs. Pell will oppose.

**Canvasser's Classes.** There is undoubtedly a large body of people who are anxious to render political service at election times, but who feel themselves not qualified to undertake anything except clerical work. Undoubtedly also it is the trained and experienced canvasser who can render the most vital assistance to the candidates—and many people who now restrict themselves to clerical work could undertake the canvassing with a very little encouragement and



training. It has been suggested that our Association could render no more valuable assistance to the Conservative party than by establishing Canvassers' Classes, and so to provide a band of competent workers against the day of battle when maybe the need will be very great. We should be very glad to hear the views of our members on this point, and we earnestly invite you to communicate with this office. The Editor would be very glad to publish any letters on the subject in *Monthly News* should any be sent for that purpose. It would be especially desirable to interest young and active women. Climbing endless stairs, and standing on wet doorsteps in a gale of wind, is not possible for the elderly—and if you are young enough you positively enjoy it.

**Monthly News.** We publish to-day the first instalment of an extremely interesting article on "Housing," one of the most difficult and contentious of all our social problems, and probably the one on which the ultimate peace and stability of our nation will depend. It is impossible for people to grow up healthy and to live contented under existing housing conditions. At the same time unsound finance spells bankruptcy and ruin. The first article deals with the past—the second article will discuss the various alternatives put forward to provide for the present and the future. The writer, Mr. H. Percy Boulnois, M. Inst. C.E., F.R.S.I., F.S.E., late Deputy Chief Engineering Inspector L.G.B.; author of "*Housing of the Working Classes*," "*Municipal Engineer's Handbook*," "*Hints on taking a House*," "*Housing of the Labouring Classes and Back to Back Houses*," "*Modern Roads*," etc. is admittedly one of the greatest authorities on this thorny subject.

#### P.R. and the Alternative Vote.

In view of the proposed lecture on Electoral Systems it may be interesting to mention very briefly, the broad outline of the two principal schemes which are most prominently put forward at the present moment.

One is, of course, our old friend Proportional Representation, partially disguised under the title *Single Transferable Vote*. P.R. involves large constituencies, and the right of the voter to mark the names of the candidates in the order of his preference. The number of votes required to secure election having been calculated a series of counts takes place until the full number of candidates has been elected through the scrutiny of the various orders of preferences.

There are many points which are urged both for and against P.R., but it is common fairness to say that the system is workable, and does work, and that elections by its means are at the present moment carried out in many parts of the world, including the Municipal elections in Ireland and the Parliamentary elections in Belgium. The real objections to P.R. are quite other than the superficial ex-cathedra dictum that it is too difficult, and the voters couldn't understand it—nor, for that matter, the returning officers.

The system called the *Alternative Vote* would not involve an alteration in the size of constituencies, it would only operate in cases where more than two candidates were contesting one seat. By allowing the voter to declare his second choice in a three-cornered fight it is claimed that the feeling of a constituency would be made clear, and the highly unsatisfactory nature of our present system, under which a minority party frequently holds the seat, would become impossible.

If the tendency of the future is to be towards a fight between Constitutionalist and Socialist principles it is of urgent importance that the Conservative party should take thought to-day how best to secure that no accidental snap majority, such as might easily be secured in a General Election under the present system, should be in a position to alter our institutions while only representing a minority of the people.

### HOUSING.

#### PART I.—THE PAST—1890-1922.

It was not till the year 1842 that the legislators of this Country gave a thought to the needs of our working population when a "Poor Law Commission" under the Chairmanship of that great Sanitarian, the late Sir Edwin Chadwick, issued a Report of such an appalling character as to the then condition of things that Parliament proceeded to pass certain Acts dealing with the question. Between the years 1845 and 1890 about a dozen Acts were passed, all of which were of a more or less confusing and contradictory character, and it was not till the "Housing of the Working Classes Act 1890" came into force that much was effected. This Act amended and consolidated all the preceding Acts, but dealt chiefly with the demolition of "unhealthy areas," and the compulsory rehousing of the population displaced thereby. Notwithstanding the benefit of the powers thus conferred on Local Authorities, considerable difficulties arose in complying with the Act, too numerous and complicated to deal with in a short article; suffice it to say that considerable strides were made in grappling with the problem

up to the beginning of the great war which naturally put a stop to all activities in this direction. Not only did the war cause a stoppage of this useful movement but also to the building of houses by private enterprise. Consequently it was found, soon after the Armistice, that an alarming shortage of housing accommodation existed. The People and the Press implored Parliament to do "something" at once to relieve the distress by building houses.

As a consequence of this outcry, "The Housing and Town Planning Act, 1918" was passed and came into force in July of that year.

#### THE HOUSING AND TOWN-PLANNING ACT, 1918.

The financial clauses of this Act provided the necessary powers for the State to give grants to Local Authorities to aid them in meeting any losses they might incur in carrying out the provisions of the Act, which in substance, compelled Local Authorities to build houses for the accommodation of the Working Classes.

It would not be possible in a short article to give even an epitome of this Act, but the actual working of the details was left in the hands of the Ministry of Health which proceeded to issue Regulations and Instructions to the Local Authorities as to the methods to be adopted in order to secure the grants in aid. Naturally the Ministry had "to feel their way" very cautiously where so many millions of pounds of the taxpayers money was involved in such a novel scheme, so that these Regulations, etc. had frequently to be altered, amended, revised or extended, from time to time. Many questions had to be considered of which a few may be given, such as:

- (1) The cost of the land on which the houses were to be built.
- (2) The style of the houses and number of rooms, etc.
- (3) The estimated cost of building each house.
- (4) What weekly rent was proposed to be charged.
- (5) Was there a real and crying need for houses.
- (6) How many houses was it proposed to build

These and many other points had to be considered before a scheme could be sanctioned or commenced. In addition to this there were many towns where slum areas existed which required demolishing, and the population thus displaced had to have accommodation provided for them. It will thus be seen that the mere passing of an Act of Parliament could not, like a magician's wand, provide the necessary houses at once.

Before passing on to deal with the effects and results of this legislation a few words on the meaning of "State Aided Houses" might be useful.

#### STATE-AIDED HOUSES.

Under certain Acts Local Authorities are empowered to levy a rate not exceeding a penny in the pound towards the cost of Housing. This Act of 1918 provided that if the penny rate was insufficient to meet the cost of the housing scheme the State would provide the rest. This practically meant that if the interest and sinking fund on the money borrowed for the purchase of the land, erection of the houses, and their subsequent upkeep, etc. was not met by the penny rate, plus the rents obtained the State would pay the difference. In other words the Ratepayers and the Taxpayers became partners in the venture.

Unfortunately, partly owing to the war, and partly to labour demands, the cost of building had enormously increased in 1919, and consequently houses could not be built

at anything approaching economic rents, so that the financial burden on the Taxpayer and Ratepayer thus automatically became much increased.

#### INCREASE OF BUILDING COSTS.

It would not be possible in the space at my disposal to enter into much detail as to this increase of cost, but I have selected a few items from official and reliable sources which will give some idea of these inflated prices since the year 1914.

Common Bricks per 1,000	...	27/-	82/6
Timber per cubic foot	...	1/6	10/6
Slates per ton	...	57/6	140/-
Tiles per 1,000	...	60/-	137/6
Sash Weights per cwt.	...	5/6	23/-

Drain pipes, cement, lime, paint, glass, iron and lead goods, in fact everything in connection with building, had enormously expanded in price, and in addition to this, as well as being the principal cause of it, was the increase in wages. Unfortunately also, certain restrictions appear to have been put on the output of labour and the hours to be worked.

In connection with this it is interesting to note that Dr. Addison, the then Minister of Health, in reply to a question in the House, said that if there was a restriction under which a bricklayer could only lay 300 bricks a day the erection of a house would be increased in cost by about £60 as compared with a man who could lay 600 bricks a day, and further, that the 300 bricks a day man would only build 3½ houses a year whereas the man who laid 600 would build 6 houses a year. Incidentally the writer of this article remembers that not a very great number of years ago, when such restrictions on individual effort were not imposed, a skilful bricklayer could easily lay from 1,000 to 1,200 bricks a day without undue distress.

Before the war houses suitable for the working classes could be built by private enterprise for about £350 a piece, but in 1920, under these new Government conditions, they could not be built for less than from £900 to £1,200 a piece, with the result that even if these houses were let at the high rent of ten shillings a week they could not "pay their way," and have become a burden on the Taxpayers and Ratepayers. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to state even approximately how much a year this burden reaches, or what it will become as time goes on.

#### STATE SOCIALISM.

It is true that at the time when the Government interfered there was a great need for "something" to be done immediately, but the system of State-aided houses is unsound, and contrary to the first principles of Political Economy. What does a State-aided house mean? Shortly it means that some lucky man is able to secure one of these houses at a rental far below the rent that would recoup the owners, who are actually his less fortunate contemporaries who pay the difference. In other words Smith lives in a house for which Brown, Jones, and Robinson pay part of the rent.

How long these gentlemen will consent to do this remains to be seen. The argument that was raised by those who committed us to this burden on our already overtaxed pockets was that the question was of National importance. This is perfectly true, but so also is the supply of bread, milk, meat and clothing. But the State has not yet suggested the taking over the work of the Farmer, the Dairyman, the Butcher, or the Tailor. Such a step would indeed



be of a very drastic Socialistic character, but is there not some danger in the recent legislation to provide house accommodation that the State may go further in this direction if and when there is another clamour for State aid in connection with other commodities? It has been said that "Subsidies of all kinds are bad in principle both in private and in national life and can only lead to inevitable disaster." This is rather a sweeping statement, as temporary subsidies (to be repaid in process of time) have occasionally been helpful, but the effect of the Act of 1918, if continued, must be to lessen that individual effort and self-reliance which are the characteristics of a vigorous nation. These deficiencies are unfortunately only too well marked in the shortage of output by labour. The question of higher wages is not of nearly so much importance as a high standard of production which is the real and only wealth of a Nation. It was stated by a speaker not many months ago at a conference on the Housing question with reference to the abnormal cost of building, "that a feeling had insidiously crept in of lethargy, a sort of "don't care spirit," about the workmen of today which did not exist before the war, and which was unsatisfactory in the highest degree." It is not suggested that the Act of 1918 is responsible for this, but that the principle of State aid tends to foster and encourage this feeling. It is difficult to see however what course the Legislature could have pursued at the time when the need for more houses was so evident and the outcry was so persistent, and although the Act of 1918 may be looked upon as more or less "panic legislation" it certainly had the effect of alleviating the Louse famine, and building operations by Local Authorities, proceeded all over the country, notwithstanding the enormous cost.

In connection with this it is interesting to note the following remark made by Sir Alfred Mond, the Minister of Health at the time, in reply to a deputation from "The National Housing and Town Planning Council." to the effect "that a proposal had been submitted to the Cabinet by his colleague and himself relative to the building of a further number of houses by Local Authorities when the 176,000 included in the present limited programme had been completed." This was in July 1922, so that we may conclude that this "limited" programme of 176,000 houses must have very nearly reached completion. Not a bad result, though at the time when the Act was passed the total "programme" was to be 500,000 houses!

As it has been estimated by capable and reliable men that the nett loss on each house is about £30 a year, the cost to the Taxpayers and Ratepayers of these 176,000 houses works out at £5,280,000 a year. If the total "programme" of 500,000 houses is carried out on the same terms you can judge of the colossal sum it represents.

At the same meeting Sir Alfred Mond further stated: "There is a considerable feeling throughout the country that the penny-rate scheme is by no means the best scheme that can be devised. That is shared by a good many Local Authorities, who prefer greater freedom. I personally feel that they would have done better if they had been allowed greater freedom. I do not think public opinion would tolerate the continuance of the present scheme as it stands." What this greater "freedom" would mean did not transpire but it is evident that if the principle of subsidised houses is to be continued, and the cost of building does not substantially decrease, the difference between this cost and the rents received will have to come out of the pockets of the people, and the evils arising out of the principle of subsidised rents would still remain.

H. PERCY BOULNOIS.

(To be continued.)

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### WEEKLY LECTURES.

Wed., 31st Jan., 8.15 p.m.	"An Adventure in Social Service" Miss WINIFRED N. STARK. Chairman ... Mr. CLARKE HALL.
Wed., 7th Feb., 8.15 p.m.	"The Rome Congress" Mrs. CORBETT ASHBY. (By kind arrangement of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance) Miss FRANCES STERLING. Chairman ... Mrs. FAWCETT, J.P., LL.D.
Sat., 10th Feb., 5.30 p.m.	Reading-Recital: "Paolo and Francesca" Miss CLARA REED.
Wed., 14th Feb.,	No Lecture.
Wed., 21st Feb., 8.15 p.m.	"If I were Prime Minister" Announced later. "If I were Chancellor of the Exchequer" (By kind arrangement of the Women's Freedom League) Mrs. AYRES PURDIE. Chairman ...
Wed., 28th Feb., 8.15 p.m.	"If I were Home Secretary" Miss NINA BOYLE "If I were Secretary for Foreign Affairs" Miss V. V. J. ACHESON. Chairman ... (By kind arrangement of the Women's Freedom League)
Sat., 3rd Mar., 5.30 p.m.	Concert ... Harpist: Mrs. GEORGE MORLEY. Singer: Mrs. PETER SMAIL.

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