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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF  
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WOMEN POLICE IN WAR TIME.

WHAT IS THE W.A.P.C.?

The Great War of 1914 was marked by the fact that men and women of every class were personally involved and called upon to play their part. We saw then the Services inviting the aid of women as Auxiliaries and the enlistment of W.A.A.C.S., W.R.N.S. and W.R.A.F.S. One service that came into being less spectacularly, but none the less of far reaching value, was that of Women Police as regular members of the Police Service.

The value of the work of Women Police was proved by the Voluntary Women Patrols organized by the National Council of Women throughout the country, especially in the areas where camps were situated and in cities where large numbers of soldiers and girls congregated. Miss D. Peto, O.B.E., Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women in October, 1939, said, "What conditions were facing voluntary patrols twenty-five years ago? Bad conditions round camps, difficulties of billeting of troops in large numbers in unaccustomed places, lack of recreation, the darkness and the shortage of men police and the total lack of women police. How were these conditions met by the voluntary patrol movement?"

The patrols put up a magnificent piece of work, without powers, without pay, without professional training in their work for

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the promotion of decency and order in streets and parks, the protection of young people and the provision of healthy recreation. When the voluntary patrol organization dissolved in 1919 it left behind a large body of instructed public opinion to which, in a great measure, we owe the policewoman of to-day."

The work of the patrols was primarily that of patrolling in the interests of public order and safe behaviour. The influence of recognized women, with the training soon found essential for their work, met with remarkable success. The presence of these women acted as a deterrent when boisterous conduct or undue excitement were becoming dangerous for young people; moreover the patrols were rightly feared by many men and women who were out to make a prey of men and girls alike. The Women Patrols were not content to do merely deterrent work but they urged and secured for the young people Comrades' Clubs and recreational facilities in many of the places in which they worked. They found themselves inevitably doing a form of police work which was needed not only in time of war but in times of peace. Often they were involved in Police Court cases, and here they realized that their true sphere of work was in the Police Service as fully attested members working in the interests of women and young people. The Metropolitan Commissioner of Police recognized this and accepted the voluntary patrols of the National Council of Women in London as the nucleus of a body of women police. This body is working in the Metropolis under the able leadership of Miss Peto, O.B.E. The work of these women has earned the unstinted praise of Sir Philip Game, the present Metropolitan Commissioner, who recently authorized plans to attract more women into the Force. In the Metropolitan area they are valued more than ever before and recruiting is continuing steadily.

The National Council of Women has worked unceasingly since the movement was started to secure good conditions of work for women serving in Forces and also to promote an informed public opinion in order that an adequate number of policewomen may be appointed to work in every Force on behalf of women and children. Unfortunately Chief Constables, only accustomed to work with men, are reluctant to recommend the appointment of women police in their Forces as they are sceptical of their ability to deal with the difficulties that work among women and children present; whereas it is because we know that this work should be, and would best be, handled by trained and well chosen policewomen that we consider the matter urgent.

Meanwhile, for more than a year we have been living under the shadow of another war. The National Council of Women realized that similar conditions would no doubt arise which led to the demand for Women Patrols in 1914 and that the number of Women Police now appointed would be inadequate. This has happened and demands are coming from all parts of the country for women to patrol not only in camps and populous areas, but also in reception areas where large numbers of evacuees present unusual difficulties.

The National Council of Women felt that as such strong police backing was needed for difficult patrol work it would be better for the volunteers to be recruited by the Police Authorities as Special Constables: they would then be working with full police powers and would easily be accepted by the public as colleagues of the Men Specials whose terms of reference—that they should work for the preservation of the public peace, the protection of the inhabitants and the security of property—cover the special emergency duties required of women and imply that they would receive a similar intensive training needed for this special temporary work. Accordingly the National Council of Women asked the Home Secretary for the recognition of Women Special Constables. The Home Secretary, in a Circular sent to the Police Authorities in August, 1939, authorized the recruiting of a Women Police Auxiliary Corps (W.A.P.C.); but to our profound disappointment their duties were to be those of police orderlies, *viz*: motor driving, maintenance and repair of vehicles and police equipment, clerical and canteen work. They were not to be ranked as Special Constables nor to be given police powers. No reference whatever was made to their undertaking the duties so urgently needed and which the Women Patrols proved in the Great War could be of such value.

The duties specified for the W.A.P.C. certainly did not justify the giving of police powers as such duties required no special qualification at all for skilled police work. The recruits would no doubt prove useful in Forces where the men were needed for extra entirely police duties.

Repeated appeals were made to Police Authorities for women to patrol round camps and in places where abnormal conditions obtained. As a result the Home Secretary sent another Circular to Police Authorities on October 9th. This Circular recommended:—

- (a) The appointment of policewomen as a part of the regular establishment;
- (b) The re-appointment of ex-policewomen where available as a First Reserve;
- (c) If the above proved insufficient, women should be selected for this special temporary duty and be given police powers. They should be considered members of the W.A.P.C.

The conditions of service of all members of the W.A.P.C. are that they shall be part time, unpaid workers, uniform and out-of-pocket expenses provided. If whole time duty is found necessary, the pay is £2 a week.

The recognition of the fact that women with police powers are needed for camp and other police duties is all to the good. Nevertheless the position is fraught with difficulties. We shall now have a new uniformed body of women doing duties as orderlies and

without police powers, and some women in similar uniform but with police powers and requiring special qualifications of character and experience. This confusion of terms of reference is misleading and can hardly be considered in the best interests of the Police Service as a whole. Moreover the women with police powers need to be most carefully selected, trained and supervised. At a time like this the ordinary members of the Force are fully engaged in their own work and not really available to give the required training for this special work.

The National Council of Women hopes that Forces recruiting women for service in the W.A.P.C., either as orderlies or as special workers, will appoint a small Selection Committee of men and women with experience of social work to choose the women, and that a scheme of training for those told off for patrol duties will be recognized by the Home Office.

Further, it is urgent that a Commandant or Controller of the W.A.P.C. be at once appointed to discuss with Chief Constables the standardization of the work of the new recruits. Commandants have been appointed for other Services, why not for this? There are very few women with specialized experience of this work, but no doubt much valuable help could be given in consultation with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police whose women officers have already gained a wide experience of the problems to be met at this abnormal time.

M. H. COWLIN.

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