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# National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

## SESSIONAL NOTES.

February, 1899.

*Section 1. Change of Leadership in the House of Commons.*

*Section 2. Conference of Parliamentary Friends.*

*Section 3. The result of the Ballot.*

### I.—CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

In consequence of his acceptance of office as Under Secretary for War, Mr. Wyndham, M.P., retires from the leadership of the Women's Suffrage question in the House of Commons.

The letter in which Mr. Wyndham intimated his retirement to the Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society, contained also a strong recommendation that Mr. Faithfull Begg should be asked to take the position, as one who had already rendered the cause most efficient service. This letter was communicated to all the Committees forming the Union. All sent in replies unanimously desiring that Mr. Faithfull Begg should be approached.

The following resolutions were accordingly passed at the Executive of the Union at their meeting on January 19.

(1) *Moved by Mrs. Fawcett from the chair, seconded by Mrs. Russell Cooke and carried unanimously.*

“That the Executive Committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies desire to heartily congratulate Mr. Wyndham on his accession to office; at the same time they deeply regret on their own account that such accession involves for them

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the loss of his assistance as leader of their question in the House of Commons.

"The Committee beg Mr. Wyndham to accept the expression of sincere gratitude, which they offer on behalf of the Union, for the services he has rendered them by his leadership during the past four years, and trust that whatever political distinctions may await Mr. Wyndham in the future, they may still have his advice and support on critical occasions."

(2) *Moved by Mrs. Fawcett, seconded by Mrs. Russell Cooke and carried unanimously.*

"That in consequence of the retirement of Mr. Wyndham, on the occasion of his taking office, from the leadership of the Women's Suffrage Question, on the Conservative side of the House of Commons, the Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies hereby resolve to convey to Mr. Faithfull Begg their earnest request that he will take the position thus rendered vacant.

"That in doing this the Executive assure Mr. Faithfull Begg that they are expressing the unanimous feeling of the societies forming the Union. All are of one mind that the steady, practical help he has already given, inspires them with confidence in his leadership, and the earnest hope that he will accede to their united request."

A further resolution was then passed asking Mr. Faithfull Begg to receive a deputation from the National Union. This he appointed to do at his residence in Earl's Court Square, on January 31.

The Deputation consisted of Lady Frances Balfour, Miss Blackburn, Mrs. Russell Cooke, Mrs. Fawcett, Mrs. Arthur Francis, Miss S. E. Hall, and Mrs. Charles Baxter, Miss Edith Palliser, Miss E. G. Roper, Secretaries to the Union.

Mr. Faithfull Begg gave the Deputation a most cordial assurance of his willingness to do them the service they sought at his hands, and entered at once with them into consideration of arrangements for summoning a Conference of Parliamentary friends of the movement, on the first day of the Session, in conjunction with Sir Edward Grey.

This is the third occasion on which acceptance of office has necessitated a change of leadership in the

Women's Suffrage movement, the first occasion being when Mr. Courtney took office in 1881, and the second when Mr. Woodall took office in 1886, Mr. Wyndham himself taking the leadership in 1895 on Lord Wolmer's succeeding to the Earldom of Selborne.

## II.—CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDS.

Letters summoning a Conference of the supporters of the movement in the House of Commons were issued immediately, signed on the Unionist side by Mr. Faithfull Begg, and on the Liberal side by Mr. Charles McLaren, owing to Sir Edward Grey's inability to be present on the first day of the Session.

The Conference met in Committee Room 12, at 2.40, on Tuesday 7th, Mr. Faithfull Begg presiding. The following M.P.'s were present:—Col. Cotton-Jodrell, Mr. B. L. Cohen, Mr. H. S. Foster, Mr. Hazell, Mr. Wm. Johnston, Mr. Charles McLaren, Col. Mellor, Mr. E. P. Monckton, Mr. Morrell, Captain Norton, Mr. Skewes-Cox, Sir Wm. Wedderburn, Mr. J. Wilson (Govan), Sir James Woodhouse, Capt. Young.

Those attending on behalf of the National Union were:—Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Beddoe, Miss Blackburn, Mrs. Russell Cooke, Mrs. Fawcett, Mrs. Arthur Francis, Miss E. Gore-Booth, Mrs. Gray Heald, Miss Louisa Stevenson, and Mrs. Charles Baxter, Miss Edith Palliser, Miss E. G. Roper, Secretaries to the Union. Dr. Beddoe and Mrs. Charles McLaren were also present.

It was understood that twenty-five M.P.'s were prepared to ballot for the Bill. A general agreement was arrived at on various points of procedure.

## III.—THE RESULT OF THE BALLOT.

On the following day no less than 354 M.P.'s set down their names to ballot for days.

Only those members who are so fortunate as to come out in the ten or twelve first places have any



clear chance for their Bills. The chances for any particular Bill, under such a pressure of numbers, are, therefore, very small. Mr. Faithful Begg came out best amongst the Women's Suffrage friends and he stood thirty-sixth.

It is possible that, as the Session advances, other opportunities may be found to introduce the question in the House of Commons. Our Parliamentary leaders know best how to advise on this matter, and in their earnestness and their discretion the Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies have complete and well-grounded confidence.

A rumour is afloat that an attempt will be made to introduce the question in the House of Lords. It seems well, therefore, to state that the Executive of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies contemplate no such step. As Lord Salisbury pointed out repeatedly, on the occasions when the late Lord Denman pursued this policy some years ago, to introduce a question affecting the constitution of the Commons in the House of Lords is contrary to Parliamentary practice.

Day or no day it must not be forgotten that the Women's Suffrage question has now entered the stage when its supporters look to its becoming part of a Government measure, and much as a debate and division in the House of Commons should conduce to that end, work in the Constituencies has a not less important part to perform in bringing about the desired result.

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## ANNUAL REPORT.

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MUCH in accordance with the anticipations of your Committee, no further progress was made in Parliament this Session. On the opening day of the Session, a Conference of Members of Parliament favourable to Women's Suffrage was held in Committee Room 13 of the House of Commons, to decide on the policy of the Session. Mr. George Wyndham, M.P., presided. After some discussion, in which Mr. Faithfull Begg, Mr. William Johnston and Mr. Atherley Jones stated their views of the importance of some Parliamentary action being taken, it was decided to ballot for a day, and to proceed by Bill or Resolution according to the result.

The following ladies, representing the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, were present:—Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Fawcett, Miss Blackburn (Central and East of England Society for Women's Suffrage), Mrs. Russell Cooke, Mrs. Broadley-Reid (Central and Western Society), Miss Roper (North of England Society), Mrs. Arthur Francis (Bristol and West of England Society), Miss J. McLea (Cheltenham), Mrs. Enfield Dowson (Nottingham and District), Mrs. Gray Heald (Leeds), Miss Louisa Stevenson and Miss S. E. S. Mair (Edinburgh), Mrs. Charles Baxter and Miss Edith Palliser (Secretaries of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies).

Mr. Joseph T. Firbank (M.P. for Hull, East), was the most successful of those who balloted for a Women's Suffrage