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AL/847

NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES.

Hon. Secretaries:

MISS BERTHA MASON (Parliamentary).
MISS EDITH DIMOCK.

President:

MRS. HENRY FAWCETT, LL.D.

Secretary,

MISS T. G. WHITEHEAD, M.A.,

OFFICE HOURS 9.30—5.30.
SATURDAYS - 9.30—1.

Treasurer (pro tem.):
MISS BERTHA MASON.

PARLIAMENT CHAMBERS, GREAT SMITH STREET,
WESTMINSTER, LONDON, S.W.

August 5th, 1910

To the Secretary,

Dear Madam,

I enclose copies of correspondence which has taken place between Mr. Asquith and Lord Lytton. From the latter you will see that the Conciliation Committee do not regard Mr. Shackleton's Bill as dead, but intend before Parliament re-assembles to lay before the Prime Minister further evidence of the urgency of the demand for the passage into law of the Bill this year. The clear duty then of the National Union is to strengthen in every possible way the hands of the Conciliation Committee in their work, and they beg that your society will do its utmost to gain further support for the Bill in your district.

The following Resolution passed by my Committee at their meeting on July 28th, embodies their own views :-

"That until the promoters of Mr. Shackleton's Bill decide to drop it, the National Union shall not consider the Bill as destroyed."

I enclose a circular with suggestions for work in support of the Bill between now and November 15th when Parliament re-assembles.

In addition to the suggestions in the circular, I should like to specially commend to you the scheme of :-

- (1) Recruiting for the ranks of the Men's League, and the formation of new Branches of that League.

If each Women's Suffrage Society would arrange for the formation of a Men's League in its area, if none already exists, it would give a great impetus to the cause of Women's Suffrage.

This plan has already been tried with great success by the Tunbridge Wells Society, the Hon. Secretary of which, (Miss Mosely, c/o Mrs. Lelacheur, The Wilderness, Tunbridge Wells) will I know be glad to give information regarding the methods they employed to attain this object.

- (2) A further suggestion is the formation of a Social Study Circle, for the purpose of stimulating interest amongst women of your district.

If you wish for further information and will write to me I will gladly do all in my power to supply it.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) BERTHA MASON
Hon. Parliamentary Sec.

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10, Downing Street,
Whitehall, July 23, 1910.

Dear Lord Lytton,

I have received your letter of the 19th inst.

On June 23 last, in announcing in the House of Commons that, in the exceptional circumstances of the case, the Government were prepared to give time for a full debate and division on the second reading of Mr. Shackleton's Bill, I added, with the utmost explicitness that they could not afford any further facilities to the Bill this Session.

To that statement I need hardly say that the Government adhere. My further words to which you refer, that "the House ought to have opportunities, if that is their deliberate desire for effectively dealing with the whole question", clearly did not, and could not, refer to the present Session; nor (I may add) to any Bill the title of which was so framed as to preclude a free and adequate dealing with the "whole question"

Yours very truly
H. H. ASQUITH.

11, North Audley Street,
W. July 28, 1910.

Dear Mr. Asquith,

I read your letter of the 23rd to my committee this afternoon, and they asked me to reply to you as follows.

It is common ground between the Government and ourselves that in the Parliamentary handling of this question woman suffragists have laboured under what you have yourself described as a "great hardship". Bills for the enfranchisement of women have repeatedly passed their second reading in the House of Commons, yet no effect has been given to the opinions thus recorded by large majorities. Your letter indicates that you propose to make the debate of this Session - serious, comprehensive, and decisive though it was - one item the more in the long list of unfruitful and academic discussions. We can conceive no course more surely calculated to increase a discontent for which already there was much justification.

In drafting our Bill we had to remember that we were suitors for Parliamentary time. We believed that in putting before the House a definite proposal which required no prolonged debate we should meet the convenience of the Government. We note that, while you indicate your preference for a Bill drafted in such a manner as to necessitate protracted discussion, you give us no assurance that in making a bolder demand on the time of the House we should meet with a more favourable reply.

Our object was to provide by way of compromise a solution of a problem the urgency of which the Government recognises while it avows its inability to legislate itself. The significant vote by which our proposals were adopted entitles us to claim the rights of a majority. We propose before Parliament reassembles to lay before you further evidence of the extent and urgency of the demand for the passage into law of Mr.

Shackleton's Bill this year.

I am, Yours very truly,
LYTTON.