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## THE GENERAL ELECTION, 1929

# HOW TO CONDUCT A NON-PARTY ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The object of the non-party campaign with which we are concerned is the promotion of the reforms on the immediate programme of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (see below). An election, the first since the full enfranchisement of women, presents a great opportunity of approaching candidates for Parliament with questions and information regarding the reforms on which women of all parties are practically unanimous. It is at the same time a unique occasion for propaganda among the voters in the constituencies and for the return of more women to Parliament.

### Public Meetings

The most striking results are secured by a public meeting of women citizens to which men may or may not be admitted (according to local circumstances) addressed by all the candidates for Parliament, standing in the constituency. A strong chairman, preferably with no pronounced party bias, should be chosen; candidates should speak in alphabetical order (this is important as there is usually competition for the last place), at a stated time, which should be strictly adhered to in order to avoid wasting their time unnecessarily. Each should speak for 10, 15 or 20 minutes, according to time available, and answer questions for at least 10 minutes. So far as possible definitely party issues should be avoided both in speeches and questions, though some latitude with regard to this is advisable. The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship has prepared a questionnaire to all candidates on the reforms for which it stands, and can supply appropriate literature giving detailed information with regard to these reforms. The questionnaire is very useful in giving a clue as to the topics which are likely to be of special interest to women constituents, and it can, of course, be added to as desired by societies organising meetings. The organisation of such a meeting is of the greatest importance, and every effort should be made to rise to the exhilarating standards of bygone Suffrage days. Women's non-party organisations of all kinds, in addition to employees of public authorities, social workers, teachers, clerks, secretaries, etc., should be invited to co-operate in making the meeting a success. Special arrangements should be made to enlist the interest of the Press in order to secure as wide a publicity as possible. The hall should be attractively decorated in the colours of the Union; stewards should be in attendance to take the names of questioners and to hand written questions to the platform; inexpensive pamphlets on questions likely to be discussed should be on sale in different parts of the hall; and efforts should be

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made to sell the *Woman's Leader*, copies of which may be obtained on sale or return from the Manager at 4, Tufton Street, S.W.1. The chairman should insist that every candidate receives a courteous hearing and is warmly thanked for his or her presence without regard to political views. In brief, every effort should be made to make the meeting as easy and pleasant and helpful as possible for all concerned. It is, as a rule, only the unsatisfactory candidate who has anything to fear from such a meeting, which, by supplying him with an audience at no cost to himself, should prove a real asset to the chances of the best man in the field.

### Questions at Party Meetings

Now that all adult women have votes they should be encouraged to attend all meetings organised by the respective parties on behalf of candidates. They must not be afraid to ask questions. They add to the interest of the meeting and are a valuable means of finding out the views of candidates, especially those who refuse to reply to printed questionnaires. They also provide a valuable method of gaining publicity for the reforms for which we stand. It must not be forgotten that questions may be sent in in writing. Only voters in the constituency should take part in this way; they only have the right to enquire into the views of those who offer themselves for election.

### Deputations to Candidates

If a public meeting be regarded as impossible, representative deputations to candidates should be organised in conjunction with as many women's organisations in the constituency as possible. Such a deputation should meet beforehand in order to appoint as leader the most experienced person available and to consider carefully the questions to be asked and the points to be raised. Whenever possible different points should be introduced by different speakers. It is needless to say that such deputations should in the case of all candidates be composed of representative women of all parties as well as those known to be neutral in their political sympathies. Care should be taken to include on such deputations representatives of large women's organisations, such as the Women's Co-Operative Guild, the British Women's Total Abstinence Union and similar bodies.

As in the case of meetings, it is only fair to candidates to give them the opportunity of seeing beforehand the questions which they are likely to be asked, with necessary information regarding them, in order that they may have time to consider any subjects which may be new to them. The Press should in every case be invited to be present at the deputation in order to avoid possible future evasion of answers to questions, and also to ensure fairness to the candidate. It is important to note, however, that whether meetings or deputations be organised, if definite answers be desired to definite questions, **these should always be secured in writing from the Candidates.** It is also important to secure a verbatim report of the questions and answers made during the deputation; this should be shown to the candidate before being circulated to the Press.

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### Work for Women Candidates

So long as there are so few women in the House of Commons many women will place the need for more women in Parliament before party considerations and will wish to work for the return of women at the General Election. In many cases societies affiliated to the N.U.S.E.C., although consisting of women of all parties, are supporting women party candidates in view of the extreme urgency of the need for more women in Parliament, and in others where women are standing as party candidates the difficulty has been got over by the formation of special Equal Citizenship Committees working on strictly non-party lines for this particular purpose.

The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, 15, Dean's Yard, S.W.1, has, since 1919, carried on active work for women candidates for Parliament, both at by-elections and at the General Elections.

A body of voluntary workers willing to help during the actual campaign has already been organised; additional offers of help for speaking or canvassing should be sent at once, when full particulars of candidates of all parties desiring help will be forwarded. There is no time to be lost. Every woman who cares for the causes for which women, as women, are primarily responsible, should strain every nerve to secure the return of as many suitable women as possible in the coming Election. She should do all within her power to influence public opinion in her own particular circle, be it large or small, and if possible, offer personal service in connection with the contest of some selected woman candidate.

### Centres for Information

In past days of Suffrage agitation, shops were opened as centres of information. This is not so easy now, but it is very desirable to have at least one office, or room adapted as an office, where literature may be displayed on all subjects of interest to women, and information relating to voting qualifications and other matters freely given. Stalls where free leaflets can be distributed and cheap pamphlets and copies of the *Woman's Leader* sold can be set up in conspicuous places at very little cost. An election is a great opportunity for educating the electorate as well as the candidates, and every effort should be made to utilise it fully.

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*Further information on the above subject, lists of election literature and pamphlets suitable for the information of Parliamentary candidates and voters, leaflets for distribution at meetings, a pamphlet containing particulars of women candidates, and the records of the members of the last Parliament on reforms of the N.U.S.E.C., may be had by return of post on application to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, 15, Dean's Yard, Westminster, London, S.W.1.*

## OBJECT

To enable women as citizens to make their best contribution towards the common good, and to obtain all such reforms as are necessary to secure a real equality of liberties, status and opportunities between men and women.

The National Union is working for the following programme of reforms :—

1. To encourage self education, independent thinking and effective action among women voters on all questions concerning their citizenship.
2. To secure more women in Parliament and on Local Authorities and other governing bodies.
3. To work for an equal moral standard between men and women, and to oppose all restrictions or regulations which, under pretext of public health or public order, are directed—whether formally or in effect—solely against women or any group of women.
4. To secure improvements in the status of wives and mothers, including : —
  - a. An adequate maternity service throughout the country.
  - b. The provision of family allowances for any or all sections of the community.
  - c. The freedom of married women who desire it, to obtain information on birth control at welfare centres in receipt of Government grants.
  - d. Equal rights of married women with men to retain or change their nationality.
5. To secure equal opportunity and pay in the Public Services, the Professions and Industry, as between men and women, including :—
  - a. Equal opportunity for service in the Ministry of Religion.
  - b. Abolition of restrictions on the right of married women to engage in paid work.
  - c. Application of the principle that protective legislation should be based upon the nature of the work and not upon the sex of the worker.
6. To support the League of Nations and the practical application of the principle of equal opportunities for men and women within it.