

# MOTHERS' PENSIONS.

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357



JUDGE NEIL.

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*[Photo by Hartsook.]*

How Judge Neil became the Champion of Widows with dependent Children and won legislative endorsement for his scheme known as THE MOTHERS' PENSION SYSTEM in thirty of the United States of America.



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## MOTHERS' PENSIONS.

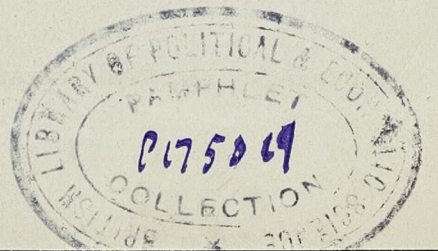
JUDGE NEIL of Chicago has braved the perils of a sea voyage in wartime and has arrived in this country, in response to the invitation of the State Children's Association. Who is Judge Neil? And what connexion has his name with the question of the welfare of State children in this country? He is a Judge in Illinois, who, in the course of his work has seen the tragic effects of a social system in which children are taken away from the care of those mothers who are too poor to provide for them. And he comes to suggest to the people of this country a way of dealing with the question of destitute children which has been tried with success in America.

The outstanding principle of his particular contribution to the great question of child welfare now engrossing the attention of all the civilized nations, is insistence upon the child's vital and supreme need of *the mother*, and the importance to the community of saving the mother from the scrapheap and giving her a secure position as an honourable and useful servant of the community at the same time as the State steps in to save the child from destitution. His special claim upon the interest of all people in our own country who are concerned to find a practical remedy for child poverty, is that he has been successful in securing legislation, not only in his own State but in twenty-nine other States of America—legislation which enables a widowed mother with no adequate means of support to be furnished with money to support her children out of the common county tax fund.

The story of his campaign in America is briefly described by himself.

“ Previous to 1911, in the several States it was the law that widowed or deserted mothers who were too poor to provide for their own children had their children taken away from them by the Juvenile Courts and sent to institutions, which institutions were supported by general taxation. Tens of thousands of

Mothers' pensions.





children were separated from their mothers in this way in the United States during the years from 1899 to 1911.

"Early in January 1911, I went into the Juvenile Court in Chicago, and saw the first case for the day tried under the Juvenile Court Law. It was that of a mother with five children: the mother was so weak physically that she could not stand, the children were clinging around her skirts. The testimony was that the father had died three years before; the mother, a good woman, had gone out washing for three years in an attempt to support her children; the excessive work had broken down her health; she was unable to earn more money; the landlord ordered her to move, and, having no place to go, she was ordered into court.

"The Judge on the Bench said: 'Officer, what is the testimony in this case?' The probation officer said: 'This woman has no place to go with her children: she is unable to support them, and I think the children should be taken away from her and given to someone who can support them.' The mother's head dropped in a stupor, and I said: 'Judge, wouldn't it be kinder and more humane if you took the mother out and shot her before you take the children away from her for ever?'

"That case woke me up. I went to the State Legislature of Illinois, told them the story of this woman, and asked them to enact a law by which a widowed mother, with no reasonable means of support, would be furnished with money to support her children out of the common county tax fund. The Legislature enacted that law without a dissenting vote, and since that time it has proven successful in the case of children and mothers in thirty States.

"The pensioned mother is put on the county pay roll, the same as the county Judge or the janitor. She gets her cheque every month, and, if she proves unable to handle the money properly, her pension may be revoked. But we have very few cases of any abuse of the pension.

"This is known as the Mothers' Pension System for abolishing child poverty. For six years I have been making, and am still continuing to make, a campaign to extend this Mothers' Pension System to every part of the world, and to expand its provisions so that it will abolish child poverty in the same way that free public schools have abolished illiteracy.

"Strictly speaking, this is an economic scheme. We pay poor mothers pensions to save the taxpayers' pockets. The authorities were empowered to take away children from mothers who could not find the money for rent and food, and place them together in large institutions. These institutions were very costly. In New York City three and a half millions of the ratepayers' money was expended in one year on the care of twenty thousand children. It occurred to me, when I discovered this state of things six years ago, that a saving might be effected by granting the poor mothers pensions and seeing they looked after the children themselves, and so it has proved.

"Practically three-quarters of such children are now looked after at home, and the cost is just about one-third what it was.

"The scheme has had wonderful effects in the checking of juvenile crime. There are districts in which this was virtually stamped out after six months' trial of the pensions system."

Such an experiment, so largely tried and so admittedly successful, cannot fail to be interesting to the members of the Women's International League. Reduction of juvenile crime, the actual economy secured to the ratepayer, are excellent arguments for the scheme. But the most significant fact from the International Women's standpoint is that, almost for the first time since the history of modern civilization, the service to the community of the mother, as the organizer of the home is publicly acknowledged and honourably recompensed. For it must be clearly understood that the Mothers' Pension System is not merely an expansion of the system of "out-relief" as administered by some of our more progressive Boards of Guardians. The distinguishing feature about the American scheme is that the adequate sum apportioned to the mother for the maintenance of her family carries with it no suggestion of charity and no stigma of pauperism. She is recognized as a servant of the State. She receives her monthly cheque from the same source and by the same method as that by which a Warden of a State Institution or a Judge of a State Court receives his stipend. She is responsible to the State in precisely the same way. Motherhood takes its due place as a social ministry to the whole community, and becomes by implication an honourable part of public life. And this reacts throughout the community in a readjustment on more true and more dignified lines of the position of women in the body politic.

Judge Neil believes in the mother. He is filled with reverence for



the miracle that the working-class mother so often achieves, in spite of overwork and poverty. He understands, when the mother fails, how much of the tragedy is due to the fact that the State has failed the mother. "The more you help the mother," he says, "the more the mother helps. We have proved it, and now confidently assert it."

Since he came to this country he has seen the various systems by which destitute children are provided for under the Poor Law in this country. He has nothing but appreciation for the devotion and enthusiasm of those who make the welfare of those children their personal care and concern, and who are justly proud of their successes. Institutions for children who are bereaved or deserted of both parents, or who are victims of cruelty or vice, must continue to exist, even though we in Great Britain and Ireland were to make motherhood secure and honourable in the way that the State of New York and other States in America have done. There is nothing destructive in Judge Neil's proposition. But he sees the mother and the home and family love as an immense asset to the State: so definite an asset that it can, if necessary, be expressed in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence. He realizes, as hardly one man in a million realizes, the intolerable burden that the modern community is daily heaping upon the mothers in a country like ours, with its ever-rising standard of child welfare and ever-increasing demand upon overworked, half-starved, and harassed women. "If you were to see a horse fall down in the shafts because it is too weak to pull its load, what would you do?" asks Judge Neil in his simple and practical way. "Lighten the load? Yes; if you meant business. Then why not treat the broken mother in the same way? Lighten the load, and you will find that she will pull. I only plead 'horses' rights' for mothers!"

Judge Neil comes to this country at an opportune moment. Owing to the terrible destruction of the best life of the nation, the problem of what is called "man-power" and "woman-power" has become of absorbing interest to all patriotic people. The importance of efficient motherhood and effective child nurture has become a very practical question. Furthermore, the inauguration of the Pension Scheme for soldiers' widows and children, and its dissociation from the stigma of pauperism, has opened the way to the further extension and application of this method of dealing with child poverty.

Many representative men and women, including members of both Houses of Parliament, are meeting Judge Neil. Public meetings are being arranged in many of the large centres of population for the dis-

cussion of this question, and it is greatly to be hoped that the utmost will be made of the opportunity presented by the visit of Judge Neil at this critical moment in the history of our country, when it is so essential that we shall discover the best methods of social reconstruction.

We do not think it necessary or advisable to wait till "after the War" to get going this great reform. Even if it were to cost more in money, we would still urge that the lives of the children are worth the extra cost. But it has actually been proved that it more economical in money to follow Nature's way and let the mother mind her own child.

Reforms of this kind are not, however, accomplished merely by enthusiastic meetings and resolutions. They need organization, so as to concentrate pressure and bring it to bear on the proper Government Departments. Everybody's business is nobody's business. The Women's International League hopes, therefore, that the response in this country to Judge Neil's selfless efforts for childhood and motherhood all the world over will be the formation of a working organization to press this reform at the earliest possible moment. Such an organization would be of infinite value for making effective the new voters, whom the Reform Bill will, it is hoped, shortly add to the electorate.

EMMELINE PETHICK LAWRENCE.

NOTE.—In order to gather up and concentrate public opinion on this matter, it is hoped that the following Resolution will be submitted at Conferences and Meetings:—

"This meeting warmly supports the principle underlying the scheme for Mothers' Pensions now in operation in thirty of the United States of North America, which recognizes the valued services rendered to the community by mothers who tend and cherish their children in the home.

"It urges that a scheme on similar lines be established in this country, so that no mother who worthily discharges this great service should be brought under the operation of the Poor Law or prevented by economic stress from discharging it adequately and well."



# Women's International League

(British Section of the Women's International Committee for  
Permanent Peace),

12 LITTLE COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER.

Tel.: Victoria 2254.

Chairman: Mrs. H. M. Swanwick. Hon. Secretary: Miss I. Cooper Willis.  
Hon. Treasurer: Mrs. Pethick Lawrence.

## Executive Committee:

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Mrs. Barton.  
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Miss M. Sheepshanks.  
Mrs. Philip Snowden.  
Mrs. Mason Thompson.  
Mrs. Charles Trevelyan.  
Miss A. Helen Ward.  
Miss Th. Wilson Wilson.

## OBJECT.

To establish the principles of right rather than might, and of co-operation rather than conflict, in national and international affairs, and for this purpose to work for:—

(1) The development of the ideals underlying modern democracy in the interests of constructive peace, by

(a) The strengthening of the democracies of the world by the inclusion of women in the ranks of equal citizenship.

(b) The education of the democracies in their responsibility towards international relations, and the creation or development of constitutional machinery by which they may exercise control over foreign policy through their legislative representatives.

(c) The protection of the rights and interests of children and young people, and their education in the ideals of co-operation, national and international.

(d) The acknowledgment of the right of men and women to determine the government of their country, and the denial of the right of annexation by conquest.

(e) The abandonment of the theory of the Balance of Power. The reference of international differences to arbitration or conciliation. The creation of the international machinery necessary for these purposes, including a stable body of international law.

(f) International agreement to unite in bringing moral, social, and economic pressure to bear upon any country that resorts to arms instead of referring its case to arbitration or conciliation.

(g) The abolition of private profit in the manufacture of, and traffic in, arms and munitions of war, as a step towards general disarmament.

(h) The promotion of liberty of commerce and opening of trade routes to all nations on equal terms.

(i) Insistence that investors who place their capital abroad shall do so at their own risk without recourse to the official protection of their property by their own Government.

(j) Opposition to conscription, whether military or industrial.

(2) The emancipation of women and the protection of their interests, including:—

(a) Their admission to the Parliamentary franchise.

(b) Their admission to national and international councils.

(c) The establishment of their economic independence and legal freedom.