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ORGANISATION OF WOMEN

WITHIN

THE LABOUR PARTY

The Work of the Women's Sections

I.—CONSTITUTION OF WOMEN'S SECTIONS.

THE Constitution of the Labour Party provides for the establishment of a Local Labour Party in each borough constituency and in each urban district of a county constituency. The Women's Section in each consists of the individual women members of the Local Labour Party. Any woman accepting the principles and agreeing to abide by the rules of the Labour Party may join a Local Labour Party as an individual member on payment of the subscription fixed by the rules of the Party, which must not be less than 6d. a year. Members of associations such as trade unions which are already affiliated to the Local Labour Party are also eligible to become individual members on payment of the subscription.

In County Divisions there must be a Divisional Labour Party covering the whole constituency, and in each Urban District a Local Labour Party which will be represented on the General Council of the Divisional Labour Party. In the Rural Districts of County Divisions there are Polling District Committees which men and women join, and it is advisable to form a Women's Group in each Rural District in order to promote organisation amongst them. In Divided Boroughs (i.e., Boroughs consisting of more than one constituency) the Constitution provides for the establishment of a Central Labour Party, on which the Local Labour Party in each constituency will be represented. In a Central Labour Party it may be well to form a Women's Association consisting of all the individual women members of all the Local Labour Parties, which will help to carry out in all parts of the Borough the work of political organisation amongst women. By thus joining all the forces of the women greater stimulus will be given to educational political work amongst them. In a similar way the County Divisions might arrange for the formation of such an Association linking up the women of the Local Labour Parties and the rural Polling District Committees.

II.—FINANCE.

The Women's Section forms part of the Local Labour Party, and the method of financing it must be a matter for decision by the Local Labour Party itself, which will, of course, discuss the matter with the Section. It may be decided to pay all contributions from individual members into the Local Labour Party funds and to have the expenses of the Section met from those funds as need arises. Another method would be to give the Women's Section a certain proportion of each contribution. In either case it may be found advisable to allow the Women's Section to raise special funds for its own purposes. The Local Labour Party should, however, provide for a meeting place out of its funds and also for the ordinary expenses of stationery and postage. It must, however, in any case be remembered that the Section must abide by the decision made by the governing body, that is, the General Committee of the Local Labour Party, upon which it is represented.

The financing of the Associations is a matter entirely for local arrangement, and their needs must be met by contributions (1) from the Central Labour Party or the Divisional Labour Party, or (2) from the Local Labour Parties and Polling District Committees, or (3) by a special contribution paid to the Association by each member.

III.—ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SECTION.

Where there is a Women's Labour League branch the Local Labour Party Executive should invite the committee of the Women's Labour League branch, together with representatives of other industrial women's organisations both affiliated and not affiliated, to act as a provisional committee for forming a Women's Section. It is of great importance that representatives of other women's organisations should be included in order that the full support of bodies such as the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Railway Women's Guild and the women's trade unions may be gained. In districts where there are mixed unions or other bodies eligible for affiliation which contain a number of women, representatives of these should also be included. Such a provisional committee should at once set about the work of getting new recruits and arrange with the Local Labour Party to hold a special meeting to form the Women's Section.

When the Section has been established its members should without delay select representatives up to the number agreed upon by the Local Labour Party in accordance with its rules for the General Committee. The Secretary of the Section should send to each meeting of the General Committee a short report of the work of the Section, together with any proposals made by the Section as to action which should be taken by the Local Labour Party.

IV.—OFFICERS OF THE SECTION.

The Women's Section should elect its own Secretary, Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Literature Secretary and Committee and any other officers which it thinks necessary to carry on its work. It may be advisable in the first place to elect all the officers and representatives on the General Committee for a short period only, say three months. By that time the Section may have grown a great deal, and it would then be possible to bring into office some of the new members.

The Section must hold an Annual Meeting for the election of its representatives on the General Committee of the Local Labour Party. At this meeting it would be advisable to elect its other officers also.

V.—MEETINGS.

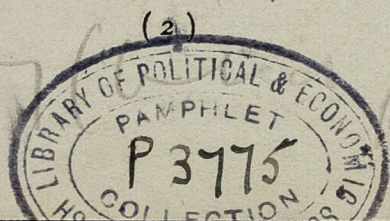
The Section should meet once a week or once a fortnight. In some districts it is found convenient to have meetings alternately afternoon and evening, as many women cannot get away easily in the evening. At these meetings the Section's business should be discussed and a point made of always having some matter of general interest discussed also. Whenever possible, lectures should be arranged and visitors invited to hear them. Social functions, too, should not be despised and sewing parties, besides helping to raise funds, are useful in drawing members together and in bringing in new ones. It must always be remembered that politics are new to many women, and to come into them by means of social intercourse is an easy way. A section, therefore, should have:—

- (1) Business Meetings.
- (2) Educational Meetings, either combined with business meetings or as separate meetings to which outsiders may be invited.
- (3) Propaganda Meetings. Wherever possible these should be held in conjunction with the Local Labour Party.
- (4) Tea Parties, Dramatic Entertainments, and Socials, with short speeches explaining what the Labour Party is.
- (5) Sewing Meetings for those who like to meet and chat over the affairs of the Party.

At all meetings, membership forms should be available for new members.

In choosing the subjects for the meetings it must be remembered that women join the Party who have very varied interests, and it is best to choose matters which give all a full opportunity. Sometimes a trade union question should be discussed, sometimes a question dealing more especially with the home. "The Labour Woman" has from month to month suggestions for lectures in citizenship which would make subjects for an evening's discussion.

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VI.—BUSINESS MEETINGS.

At these meetings representatives on the General Committee should report and delegates who may have been sent to any Conference should give their account of the proceedings. Representatives on other committees, to which reference is made later, should also give their regular reports.

VII.—REPRESENTATIVES OF THE WOMEN'S SECTIONS ON OTHER BODIES.

As the Women's Section forms part of the Local Labour Party it will not be able to send direct representatives to serve on Committees, etc., unless specially asked to do so by the Local Labour Party. It will, however, be found an advantage if women representatives on Maternity and Child Welfare Committees, National Kitchens Committees, Local Pensions Committees, Local Food Control Committees, and women Councillors or Guardians keep in very close touch with the Women's Section and report to it on the proceedings of the body with which they are connected. It is always in the power of the Local Labour Party to ask the Women's Section to make nominations for such appointments, or for the Women's Section to put forward their nominations through their representatives on the General Committee. The closer the touch that is kept between such representatives and the Section the greater will be the interest felt by women in the work of Labour.

The same applies to representatives sent to attend Conferences; where women representatives are sent it will be useful if they give a report to the Women's Section as well as to the Local Labour Party.

VIII.—ELECTION WORK.

A very important part of the work of the Section is to help in organising for Local and Parliamentary elections. They have not only to prepare themselves to become candidates but also to help in getting support for Labour candidates in the constituency. Most of their work will be done on the Ward Committees and Polling District Committees where they will work with the other members of the Party in organising the constituency. Women's Visiting Committees should undertake the special task of visiting women electors and distributing literature explaining the work of the Party and also the registration of electors and the qualifications needed by women. In addition to these Visiting Committees, Cottage Meetings will be found useful—five or six women meeting together to discuss what the Labour Party stands for and how to work for it. In this way a large number of women will be reached who will be willing to go to their neighbour's parlour to a small gathering, but would not like to go far off to a bigger meeting. New members will be gained in this way and public opinion amongst women will be influenced. In all election work the help of the women will be greatly needed and cordially welcomed by the election agent.

IX.—LITERATURE.

The Labour Party publishes every month a journal called "The Labour Woman," dealing especially with questions in which women are most interested. This paper costs rd., and is supplied to Sections at 9d. per dozen, post free. The Literature Secretary should make it her duty to get as many subscribers as possible and arrange for members of the Section to deliver the paper to subscribers as soon as it reaches the Secretary. She should also try to get volunteers who would sell the paper at meetings and take it round from house to house seeking new subscribers. Other literature is published by the Labour Party and lists of new publications appear from time to time in "The Labour Woman." Whenever a new leaflet comes out it is well to get some copies and ask one member to make a special study of it and discuss it at a Section meeting.

X.—TRADE UNION ORGANISATION.

The Women's Section should maintain especially close relations with all trade unions having women members and assist them in the work of getting new members and in any industrial crisis that may arise.

XI.—OTHER ORGANISATIONS OF WOMEN.

The Women's Section should exercise great care when asked to affiliate to any organisation outside the Labour Party. If they should decide to affiliate their decision must be endorsed by the Local Labour Party before it can be carried out. It is specially necessary to be careful now about joining any non-party political organisation, for this may serve to turn the interests and energies of the members into other channels and draw them away from the more important work of organising within the Party. It is, however, often advisable to join with other organisations of either a party or non-party character for some special object such as the organisation of National Kitchens, the extension of open spaces, or some such specific purpose.

XII.—CONFERENCES WITH OTHER WOMEN'S SECTIONS.

It will be found valuable in stimulating organisation amongst women to hold from time to time District or County Conferences at which all the Women's Sections are represented and questions of organisation amongst women and other matters of special interest such as Housing, Education, Night Work for Women, Equal Pay for Equal Work, Woman as Domestic Worker, etc., etc., may be discussed. The best method of establishing such Conferences would be for a Women's Section, or a Women's Association, with the consent of the Local Labour Party, to take the initiative in calling a Conference of all the Sections within an area which is conveniently arranged for railway communication. At such a Conference a District Committee could be

elected to take in hand the arrangement for future gatherings, either half-yearly or quarterly. The expenses of the Conference could be met either by a contribution made by each Women's Section or Local Labour Party, or by a fund raised by some special effort amongst the Sections concerned. These Conferences might be arranged on a county basis, or by one or two counties joining one another. Where there is a federation of Local Labour Parties the area of the federation would probably be the most convenient one to take, and in that case the expenses of such a conference might be met by the federation. A delegate's fee of 1s. would probably cover the greater part of the expense other than fares.

XIII.—VISITS OF NATIONAL ORGANISERS.

The National Executive has appointed women organisers to assist in establishing the Sections and in helping in their development. These organisers make short visits to the constituencies and it is intended that they should give a stimulus to organisation and not do the spade work necessary in the constituency itself. The chief burden of such work must necessarily fall upon the people resident in the locality. It may be advisable for a constituency to appoint a resident woman organiser to help and direct such work as this. The visit of the national organiser can do no more than set things going, or give special encouragement when once they have been started. In arranging for the visit it is desirable that on the first day in the constituency she should meet the Executive of the Local Labour Party and discuss with them the conditions of the district. Arrangements for her to meet the women either for the establishment of the Section, or who have already formed the section, should be made beforehand.

Where the Women's Section has not yet been established it would be well to arrange for a social gathering with a speech from the organiser. This would be followed by a meeting to inaugurate the Section and to appoint a committee. The organiser would discuss with the Committee the work which lay before them, and if possible, arrangements would be made for her to return at a later date. If this was done, a Conference for women might be arranged for her return visit on a subject such as Housing, which is of general interest, and another meeting at which she would discuss with the Section the business side of their organisation. If before her visit the Women's Section is already in being, a Conference on the organisation of women would be most valuable. It is important to impress upon all Local Labour Parties whose constituencies are being visited that meetings of the organiser should be well advertised amongst women beforehand, in order that the short time at her disposal should be used to the best advantage. Part of her time might be occupied in visiting trade union branches which contain women members, or important organisations of women, such as the National Union of Railway Women's Guilds and the Women's Co-operative Guild.

As soon as the Section is formed the Secretary is invited to communicate with Dr. Marion Phillips, The Labour Party, 33 Eccleston Square, S.W.1, who will at all times be glad to give advice and help in the conduct of the work, to suggest subjects for discussion, to tell her of suitable literature, and to send information on the work of various Local Government bodies in which the Section may be interested.

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THE LABOUR PARTY, 33 ECCLESTON SQUARE, LONDON,
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Price 1d. each, or 9d. a dozen.

PUBLICATIONS of the LABOUR PARTY

THE following publications will be found useful by women interested in the work of the Party:—

Women and the Labour Party.—By various women writers, including Mrs. Sidney Webb, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Mary Macarthur, Margaret McMillan and Rebecca West, edited with an Introduction by Dr. Marion Phillips, and a Foreword by the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P. 1s., post free 1s. 2d.

Labour and the New Social Order.—A Report on Reconstruction after the War. 2d., post free 3d.; 1s. 6d. per 13, carriage paid.

Memorandum on War Aims, agreed upon by the Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, February, 1918. 1d., post free 2d.; 1s. per dozen, carriage paid.

New Party Constitution.—1d., post free 2d.; 9d. per dozen, carriage paid.

Labour Year Book, 1918.—Cloth edition, 2s. 6d., 3s. post free. Ready shortly.

The Labour Woman.—The Labour Woman's Monthly. 1d., post free 2d.; 2s. per year.

The Aims of Labour.—By the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P. 1s., post free 1s. 2d.

The Outlook for Labour.—By the Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, M.P. 1d., post free 2d.; 1s. per dozen.

The Position of Women after the War.—Report of the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, presented to the Joint Committee on Labour Problems after the War. 2d., post free 3d.; 5s. for 50, carriage paid.

LEAFLETS

The Labour Party.—A statement of its objects, with application form for membership attached. 6 page folder, 30s. per 1,000, with particulars of Local Party.

Why Women should Join the Labour Party.—2 pages. 1s. per 100; 5s. per 1,000, post free.

Men and Women, Look after your Votes!—A Summary of Franchise qualifications. 2 pages. 2s. per 100; 10s. per 1,000, with particulars of Local Party, post free.

The Working Woman's House.—4 pages, with plans. 1d., post free 2d.; 9d. per dozen; 5s. 6d. per 100; £2 per 1,000, post free.

To be obtained from—

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