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Pamphlet

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF GREAT BRITAIN.

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THE NEED FOR MORE WOMEN MAGISTRATES.

It is now ten years since the first Women Magistrates were appointed in Great Britain, and during that period it has come to be generally accepted that women are required to take part in the work of the Courts of Summary Jurisdiction.

Number of Women Magistrates.

It is to be regretted that many Courts are still without a woman, and that progress in filling the gaps is slow. For the last four years the average number of appointments has been 125 per annum, the best year being 1929, when the number was 150. There are, however, a thousand Courts, and only 2,100 women Justices of the Peace, out of a total of about 23,000.

An immense amount of work is performed by this large body of unpaid Magistrates, although a considerable proportion of the twenty-three thousand are unable to take any active part in the proceedings in the Courts for reasons of health, age, or change of residence, and there is great need in many Courts for younger Magistrates, both men and women.

Position in the Boroughs.

In March last, it was stated by the Attorney-General in the House of Commons that there were forty-nine Boroughs, out of a total of 251 with a separate Commission of the Peace, to which no women had been appointed. We regard this as a disturbing fact, and the explanation that the great majority of these Boroughs have a small population does little in our opinion to decrease its seriousness. There are, in addition, almost as many Boroughs with only one woman on the Bench; that is to say, 38 per cent. of the Boroughs, with a Commission of the Peace distinct from the County, have either only one woman Magistrate or none.

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Position in the Counties.

The Attorney-General further stated that women had been appointed to every County Commission in England and Wales, but did not say how many of the 733 Petty Sessional Divisions in the Counties were without a woman. The number must still be very large, and some of the County Divisions include urban areas with a rapidly increasing industrial population.

So far as our information goes, the situation is particularly unsatisfactory in Berkshire, Derbyshire, Durham, Herefordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, and Warwickshire. In these Counties, although some of the Boroughs are fairly well supplied, only 50 women appear to have been appointed to the 117 Petty Sessional Divisions of the Counties.

Juvenile Courts.

The suggestion that a special rota should be formed for the service of the Juvenile Court consisting of men *and women* Justices with special qualifications for the work, was made in a Home Office Circular of April, 1921, but in response to a questionnaire sent out by the Home Secretary in 1925, it was reported that 236 Courts were then *without women magistrates*. In 1927, the Departmental Committee on Young Offenders recommended that each petty sessional division should elect each year a small panel of men *and women* Justices to sit in the Juvenile Court, and added that "the qualities which are needed in every Magistrate who sits in a Juvenile Court are a love of young people, sympathy with their interests, and an imaginative insight into their difficulties." This recommendation of the Committee was subsequently endorsed in a Home Office Circular in September, 1927.

It is not yet possible to comply with these repeated recommendations, since, as we have shown above, women Justices are still not available in a large number of Courts.

It is, however, encouraging to know that the Lord Chancellor has recently sent a circular to all Advisory Committees asking that special consideration shall be given to the needs of Juvenile Courts, with a view to the appointment of Magistrates with special qualifications for dealing with children.

Advisory Committees.

Many of the Advisory Committees which submit names to the Lord Chancellor for appointment, are themselves in need of the infusion of a new and more progressive spirit. They are, we understand, in process of revision and reconstitution, but here, again, we can only regret that progress is not more rapid. The recommendation of additional women for appointment as

Magistrates, or even the maintenance of existing numbers, is seriously prejudiced by the lack of women on Advisory Committees. We are strongly of opinion that it is necessary to have at least one woman on every such Committee.

Alleged difficulty in finding suitable women for appointment.

We believe that this difficulty, where it exists, could be met in the following ways:—

- (a) Revision of personnel of Advisory Committees.
- (b) Less regard to political considerations. It frequently happens that women are not attached to any political party, and their names are therefore not put forward.
- (c) Acceptance of nominations (from which recommendations could be made) from organised bodies of women.
- (d) Withdrawal of the Circular of 1922 recommending that the names of both husband and wife should not be inserted in the same Commission of the Peace. We agree that it may be undesirable that they should sit on the same Bench, but on County Commissions where the difficulty of finding suitable women is more likely to occur than in urban areas, it might be an instruction that where both husband and wife are appointed, they should be allocated to different Petty Sessional Divisions.

September, 1930.

Published by the Public Service and Women Magistrates Committee of the National Council of Women, Murray House, Vandon Street, S.W.1. Price 1d. Special terms for a large number of copies.

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Majority of the members of the committee are
appointed by the President and the Senate
and are subject to removal by the President
at any time.

The committee is authorized to investigate
and report to the President and the Senate
on the administration of the Government
and on any other matter which may be
referred to it by the President.

(b) The committee shall have the right to
hold public hearings and to examine
and take sworn testimony from such
persons as it may have cause to believe
have knowledge of any matter which
may be pertinent to its inquiry.

(c) The committee shall have the right to
require the production of any books,
papers, documents, or other records
which it may determine to be necessary
for its investigation.

(d) The committee shall have the right to
administer oaths and to hold such
public hearings as it may deem
advisable.

(e) The committee shall have the right to
employ such personnel as it may deem
advisable and to fix the compensation
of such personnel.

Approved: _____
Secretary of the Senate