

Suffrage  
(97)

THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE.

AL/129

92, VICTORIA STREET,  
LONDON, S.W.

June 6th, 1906.

Dear Miss Somerville,

I was very sorry to read your postcard to Miss McCroben and I should like to answer it myself.

When Miss Kenney first came to London the officials of the Central Society for Women's Suffrage were I think unwise in the attitude they adopted towards her. Mrs. Fawcett's first letter to the Times in which she reviewed the whole question seemed to me to be far more representative of the real feelings of the many thousand women constituting the Central Society than the views which some of the officials expressed in newspaper interviews.

Personally I don't think that paid officials should ever be allowed to express definite opinions which might be mistaken by the public for the opinions of the Society as a whole. I took a great deal of care to ascertain from individual old suffragists what was their personal attitude towards Miss Kenney, and I came to the conclusion that the majority of them did not echo the feelings which had drifted into the public newspapers through the officials of the Society.

Having satisfied myself as to this I then set about finding out what Miss Kenney herself felt about the attitude of the old suffragists to her and her movement, and through the agency of Miss Alice Zimmern (a very moderate and temperate woman indeed) I made the personal acquaintance of Miss Kenney and found her a much nicer woman than I had any reason to suspect. I consider her an enthusiast and possibly rather hysterical but absolutely sincere and with a very definite well-reasoned plan of action. Like Mrs. Fawcett I feel that we have reached the end of our methods they are probably too quiet and too respectable.

I do not like Miss Kenney's methods and have no wish to join in them; but I am perfectly prepared to benefit by the suffrage if she and her party succeed where we have failed.

I feel also that because I am not greatly enamoured of Democracy it would be a pity to leave things too much in the hands of the Democrats and I was anxious to bring about a meeting between Miss Kenney and some of the old suffrage leaders of a quite private and informal nature. I invited her to tea in my private room and the Hon. Mrs. Arthur Lyttelton and Mrs. Russell Cooke came to meet

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her. We had a great deal of conversation and more than one good result came through it.

The next thing that happened was that the National Union of Women Workers having invited Miss Kenney to speak at the Tunbridge Wells Conference next October took fright after her public appearances and asked her to cancel the engagement. I as a member of the Executive Committee of the N.U.W.W. felt that although their action was wise under the circumstances, that it was only right and fair that Miss Kenney should be able to express her views and attitude to a body of sober educated women.

The Institute has always tried to maintain an attitude absolutely non-committal. My view of the Institute platform is that it should be a place from which all sides of a question might be heard. I therefore volunteered to ask Miss Kenney, with the permission of my Committee, to come on a Wednesday afternoon and tell us quietly what lay behind her movement and her action and what causes have led to her having a body of 94,000 working <sup>women</sup> behind her. We did not admit the press, and I believe but one tiny notice appeared in the papers. We had no shouting or flag-waving and no demonstration of any kind, no resolution and no expression even of belief in women's suffrage, we simply heard from Miss Kenney a perfectly reasonable account of the way in which the forward movement has grown up and the causes which have placed her at the head of it.

I wish you could have been here, for if so I do not think that you would have written that postcard to Miss McCroben.

With regard to Mrs. Montefiore I know nothing about her and I do not in the least know to what you allude when you speak of "other friends of Mrs. Montefiore".

Mrs. Montefiore was not mentioned on that afternoon and as far as I know she has no connection with the ~~question~~. *Institute*.

You will forgive this long explanation I hope and in time be as convinced as I am that we are doing good work and are quite sufficiently useful to others to deserve support. Perhaps some day you may come back to us again. I am always sorry to lose old members.

With kind regards,

Sincerely yours,

Signed by W. Pollard