

LABOUR REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE.

FELLOW MEMBERS,

With my colleagues, Messrs. Freak and Hornidge, I attended the Labour Representation Committee's Annual Meeting, held at the Sun Hall, Liverpool, on January 25th to 27th inclusive. I had also attended on the 24th a meeting of Labour Representation Committee's candidates and their agents, to prepare for the coming General Election—the business transacted was entirely electoral, the details of which would not interest our members; but the work of the Conference proper was of a most encouraging kind, the whole of the candidates exhibiting the utmost deep-seated sincerity in all that transpired. The attendance and keenness of the delegates during debates can best be illustrated by reminding those who have attended our own Biennial Conference when something has transpired which has placed some of the Branches and the Council in different positions, and each are doing their best to explain to the delegates, without any unnecessary heat, that they are both right. Such was the impression made on my mind, and of all the Conferences attended by me outside of our own industry, none were better attended than this at Liverpool.

For some reason or other we were unfortunately not requested by the Council to attend the Conference on the Unemployed and State Feeding of Children. Needless to say, being in Liverpool, I attended both, but only as a spectator not as a delegate. These conferences were conducted in a most invigorating and intellectual manner, the discussion doing one's heart good to listen to. Would that we had a Labour paper large enough to report the best points made by the speakers; this country would be the richer for such information obtained.

Mr. D. J. Shackleton, M.P., was unanimously elected Chairman of the Conference, and in his address very plainly placed the whole position before the delegates, giving them the lead, and in his very able address he said that their relation to the Conservative and Liberal parties in the House of Commons was one of neutrality; but they would be ready to co-operate with any party promoting direct Labour legislation. On the point as to what should be their action in constituencies where there was no Labour candidate, discretionary power should be left to the executive to take such action as was called for. As a national party they should not confine their action to those constituencies where they had a candidate only. He believed that in being independent they were on the right lines, and any change in the constitution would be a great mistake at a time like the present, immediately on the eve of a General Election.

Fraternity was represented by W. J. Davis, Parliamentary Committee of Trades Congress, and Messrs. Pete Curran and I. Mitchell, Federation of Trades.

A moral vote of sympathy was passed with our Russian fellow-workers, followed immediately by a collection amongst the delegates, which amounted to £12 odd. This in itself was a monument of sympathy raised to the credit of Labour representatives.

Our Union's old resolution, fathered by the Steel Smelters' Society, came up in the form of a Labour newspaper being established by the movement, by a levy upon all the members affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee of 1s. per member. It is a great pity, and most painful to witness at the Trade Union Congress and other places, how some of the men within the movement try to strangle this effort of establishing a Labour journal; but like all such movements the effort will ultimately survive its critics, and a Labour paper will become an accomplished fact—and long before the men whose aim is to wreck the movement by their sly attacks upon the man who above all others has made the Labour Representation Committee what it is to-day, and most of the capable men admit that the services of our able and accomplished Secretary, J. R. MacDonald, are beyond price. Speaking for the moment as a Leicester man, we here are thoroughly proud of him, and it is to be regretted that the green-eyed monster jealousy should find such homes of refuge as is found in the bosoms of some Trade Union leaders, who have not a tittle of MacDonald's ability; and the amendment to the constitution having for its object the exclusion of the brain of the movement, met with scant courtesy, only twelve voting for it.

The attempt to alter the constitution was lost by 594,000 to 244,000.

Another attempt to alter the constitution by depriving the Independent Labour Party and Fabian Society from direct representation, was also proven futile; and many of those who supported the change were men who, at the Trade Union Congress, spend time and money in bartering for votes for the Parliamentary Committee. The figures were as follows: For the change, 391,000; against, 510,000.

An attempt to double the subscriptions was also lost, the Conference thinking we must first walk, then run.

Our Labour newspaper was referred to the Executive Committee for consideration, and report next year.

The Compulsory Arbitration Resolution had my support for two reasons. We are bound by it nationally, and we are instructed by our Union to support it as part and parcel of our policy, and I am convinced that I have no right to represent myself, but our members, upon a matter decided upon by the Union, and an object of the Union; and until it ceases to be an object of the Union, its representatives have no right to vote against the members' declared opinion.

LABOUR REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE—Continued.

The Enfranchisement of Women. A resolution endorsing the placing of women on terms of equality with the men, was defeated; but not upon its merits. Unfortunately this resolution was down in the name of the Independent Labour Party. The Bill was backed by Will Crooks, Keir Hardie, and others; this in itself should have given pause to those who preferred adult suffrage at once.

Eighteen months ago, when asked at Wolverhampton did I believe in the Enfranchisement of Women, my answer was "Yes;" and more, I believe in Adult Suffrage—but when men like these trusted leaders bring forth a Bill, it reflects great want of confidence in the men to immediately start an agitation to upset what these men believe to be a measure, having for its object a reasonable chance of success; and the arguments of the opponents to the resolution, summed up in a sentence, means, "don't trust the women, they will vote Tory."

The action of the Conference on this question will supply sufficient evidence to show that at

least the Labour Representation Committee's Members of Parliament shall not have the confidence of the Labour Representation Conference on this subject; but upon this resolution the "disappointed only-Trade-Union-need-apply-men," and all those who refused to countenance the Labour Representation Committee at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, five years ago; and all those to whom the letters I.L.P. were a political red rag; these sections found common cause for agreement upon this question, hence the result.

This Conference was attended by not less than 350 delegates, representing some 900,000 members or politicians who are paying for their politics, and which depends so very large upon such. My own opinion is that we shall get from the political parties just as much as we are prepared to pay for and demand.

Yours fraternally,

T. F. RICHARDS.

The Women's Suffrage Controversy.

BY MARGARET G. BONDFIELD.

The Woman's Enfranchisement Bill, introduced by Mr. Will Crooks, at the end of last session is, no doubt, an admirable measure from the point of view of the ratepaying spinster, and to it—as such—I offer no opposition.

Working men and women who, like myself, believe in Adult Suffrage, could not consistently object to the efforts of any section of the community to secure its enfranchisement.

Unfortunately, the middle class advocates of this limited bill are not content with devoting their time and money to legitimate propaganda, but they have made a determined attempt to capture the Labour forces, and it is against this that I, as a woman Trade Unionist, enter my protest.

Those advocates of the limited bill who claim the support of Labour base their claim mainly on two grounds:—

1. That the majority of those enfranchised by the bill would be working women.
2. That it would remove sex disability.

They further argue in support of their policy:—

1. That in order to secure sex equality in future franchise reforms, it is essential to remove sex disability on the present property franchise.

2. That the root cause of all the economic disabilities under which women suffer is the political disqualification of their sex.

In the first place the limited suffragists have entirely failed to prove their claim that the majority of those enfranchised under the Bill would be working women.

The present electoral qualifications can be roughly summarised under the following heads:—

1. The owners of property.
2. Householders or occupiers of business premises rented from £10 up.
3. Lodgers who are sole occupiers of a room valued at not less than 4s. per week unfurnished.
4. Service voters, *i.e.*, persons separately occupying a house by virtue of their employment though not actually paying rent.
5. Graduates of universities possessing Parliamentary representation.

Working women are not property owners, nor are they university graduates, and only a very small proportion would be enfranchised under qualifications 2 and 4. It is upon the third qualification mainly that the limited suffragists base their claim.

Those of us, however, who belong to the workers know that proportionately very few women wage earners are sole occupants of rooms valued at a rental of 4s. per week unfurnished. For instance, the skilled women workers of Lancashire who are in the most favourable position economically, usually share a room with a sister or

THE WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE CONTROVERSY—Continued.

friend if they are unmarried. Recent investigations made in London among educated women workers bordering on the professional class, such as Civil Service employees, telephone operators, clerks, etc., has proved that very few indeed of these could qualify—mainly owing to the fact that they live at home or share rooms; factory workers, as jam makers, tea packers, etc., and dressmakers, show a still smaller proportion, while domestic servants and shop assistants are entirely outside the pale. In the latter case, owing to the living-in system and the migratory nature of their employment, even the men are unable to qualify as citizens.

It would be amusing if it were not rather pathetic to think of our enthusiastic young friend, Miss Christabel Pankhurst, quoting the wrongs of the voteless chainmakers of Cradley Heath as an argument in favour of the limited bill, and at the same time explaining that the majority of those women earn from 5s. to 8s. per week.

It is therefore obvious that this bill will increase class disabilities without fulfilling its second claim; for there can be no doubt that the bill as at present drafted will not remove the judge-made law of coverture—i.e., the disability of married women. Even if the bill were amended on the lines of the Scotch Municipal Franchise Acts, it would only abolish sex disability for elective purposes, and women would still have no part in the administrative work of the nation, while married working women, whether wage earners or not (such as the members of the Women's Co-operative Guild and similar organisations), having no property apart from their husbands, would still be voteless.

With regard to the contention that the limited bill is a stepping-stone to sex equality in future electoral reforms, my convinced opinion is that any further strengthening of the propertied base of our electoral system indefinitely postpones the realisation of the democratic ideal of adult suffrage.

Lady Knightley demonstrated this in her speech at York when she said that "extending the franchise to women who paid rates and taxes would remove the need for universal suffrage, which was a real danger"; and Dr. Stanton Coit evidently agreed with her when he said at the recent Queen's Hall meeting that the limited bill "would remove the danger that would result from giving illiterate persons the vote."

Those who say that only the people who pay rates and taxes (meaning direct taxation) should be allowed a voice in the government of the country seem to ignore the fact that the burden of indirect taxation presses more heavily, in proportion, on the working classes.

It is, of course, only just that those who pay rates and taxes should have a voice in fixing them, but surely the injustice of compelling those to obey the laws who have no voice in making them is equally apparent.

By an equal expenditure of energy the Labour party could secure Adult Suffrage, as well as a host of other reforms which are legitimately its business.

If a parallel is needed, one has only to consider the Shop Hours Act, 1904. Its promoters argued that it was the only bill which had any chance of passing through Parliament, etc.; it most ardent and honest supporters are now finding out that the

act will not secure the reform promised by its promoters, and it has blocked practical legislation indefinitely.

As to the economic disabilities of women in industry, the limited suffragists are surely strangely confusing cause and effect.

They argue "working women are poor because they are disfranchised." But supposing the limited bill is passed then they would be disfranchised because they are poor.

We would point out to our Manchester friends, who seem to think the vote is the panacea for all industrial ills, that women will have to improve their conditions of employment by trade organisation as men have done in the past. Industrial legislation is apt to be inoperative unless backed by a strong organisation of the workers affected.

Miss Eva Gore Booth's now famous pamphlet, "To the Working Women of England," in which she demonstrates (to her own satisfaction at least) that because of their political power "working men eat beef steak and butter, whilst working women live on bread and margarine," has undoubtedly afforded considerable amusement, but it has also its serious aspect. Labour leaders may laugh at its absurdities, but it is difficult to overestimate the mischievous effect of the distribution of such pernicious literature among the rank and file of women workers at this time when so much depends upon their economic education. It is distressing to find an attempt being made to foster distrust of men of their own class, to create a sex war in industry, and so play into the hands of the employing classes.

The members of the Freedom of Labour Defence, and opponents of special industrial legislation for women, are at least consistent in the arguments they advance in favour of the limited bill, but it is difficult to understand the position of Mr. Keir Hardie when he states that "there must be many thousands of working women in every big city, as well as in the textile districts of England and Scotland who would be qualified under such a measure, but even if this were not the case it appears to me that every woman, because she is a woman, should fight tenaciously for her own sex in this matter."

Although Mr. Keir Hardie does not believe in a class war, he here distinctly avows his belief in a sex war. It is amazing to find a Socialist with such a record for logic and consistency, using his great influence to distract the attention of working women from the disabilities of class to the minor disabilities of sex.

We have had the curious spectacle of Labour members fighting the battle of propertied women who have enough leisure and money and influence to do their own work.

We shall have at Liverpool the absurd anomaly of a Socialist party asking the Labour party to support a bill based on property and privilege.

I trust that by voting for the amendment in favour of Adult Suffrage the delegates to the Labour Representation Conference at Liverpool will demonstrate their recognition of the fact that the only reform of our complicated electoral system worth one moment of Labour's political energy is the destruction of its propertied base, the sweeping away of all existing anomalies, the abolition not only of sex but of class disability, and the enfranchisement of all adult men and women.

Joined by Book Debts or Clearances.

Arbroath	Hinckley	Leeds—Con.
John Woodward ... 4631	H. Colver ... 21780	OMITTED FROM REGISTRY
Bristol	W. Wright ... 21340	W. Green ... 29671
Wm. Monk ... 19071	S. Chamberlain ... 21343	Leeds 2
Birmingham	Leicester	SCRATCHED BY ERROR
F. Hodgkiss ... 44075	SCRATCHED BY ERROR	J. Henstock ... 30705
REINSTATED	W. Allen ... 14835	London Metro.
W. Leek ... 2720	C. Herrick ... 15317	R. Benson ... 18495
Dundee	H. Wells ... 19651	OMITTED FROM REGISTRY
OMITTED FROM REGISTRY	OMITTED FROM REGISTRY	H. Day ... 31712
Wm. Smith ... 4699	A. C. Summers ... 22162	Manchester
Alex. Smart ... 4700	J. Wells ... 22163	S. Needham ... 19033
Glasgow 2	J. Jayes ... 22164	Maybole and Ayr
G. Craddock ... 25841	G. Robinson ... 22165	A. Miller s ... 34674
W. Bell ... 4134	W. Dakin ... 22166	Mansfield
W. Kinnear ... 7537	A. Chawner ... 22167	A. Ward ... 38298
W. Graham ... 4139	W. Grewcock ... 22168	Norwich
J. Phillips ... 6126	<i>Female</i>	E. Forster ... 27504
J. Wallace ... 6124	Carrie Jarvis ... 22169	Northampton
J. Murray s ... 7544	Leicester 2	OMITTED FROM REGISTRY
Higham & Rushden	E. J. Stephenson ... 21851	J. Smith ... 39423
E. Freeman ... 11431	J. Large ... 21853	Stafford
Wm. Randall s ... 8431	REINSTATED	Geo. Spriggs ... 19523
Geo. Ward t ... 8977	J. Squires ... 27645	Geo. Bradley ... 17405
R. Mayes t ... 9007	H. Warren ... 27646	Fred. King ... 1165
W. Beeby t ... 8965	H. Elliott ... 27647	
Geo. York ... 8976	H. Rolleston ... 27648	
<i>Now becomes a full member.</i>	Leeds	
E. Spencer ... 9040	W. Richmond H s ... 8077	
	H. Cullingworth ... 3763	

Joined by Travelling Books.

Barnsley	Leicester—Con.	Norwich
John Foreman ... 36100	S. Leader ... 29310	B. Anderson ... 42269
Derby	G. Stevens ... 22150	J. Farrell ... 6798
E. Cheney ... 29581	E. Herbert ... 18782	Northampton
Glasgow	Leicester 2	A. Battison ... 4131
E. Duthoit ... 29595	W. Weston ... 7380	J. Farrell ... 6798
G. Furland ... 4610	Leeds	H. Freer ... 16835
R. Closs ... 35042	J. H. Merritt ... 8062	Northampton 2
Leicester	London Metro.	F. W. Nind ... 30678
J. Priest ... 19535	W. Silk ... 4662	
S. Melbourne ... 19470		

New and Re-entered Members.

Arbroath	Bristol—Con.	Edinburgh
Geo. McLean ... 453	Albt. Emmett ... 1228	Geo. Fisher ... 5911
Bristol	Fred. Davies ... 1229	Glasgow
Chas. Doward ... 1226	[HALF MEMBER.]	R. Taylor ... 6825
John Tucker ... 1227	Henry Cox ... 1230	