



Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association

HEADQUARTERS: 55-57 PRATT STREET, HARTFORD
TELEPHONE CHARTER 6317

SUFFRAGE NEWS AND NOTES.

By Annie G. Porritt.

It is going to be a little difficult for the various women's organizations that have taken up war service work to bring themselves into full cooperation with the new Women's Committee of the Council for National Defense at Washington. As loyal citizens, however, the Suffragists are preparing to sacrifice a little of their independence in obedience to the recommendation of the Government. The Women's Council is intended by the Government as the clearing house of all the work done by women in various volunteer organizations. It will not supplant the other organizations and it has sent a message to the women of the nation not to allow any work already undertaken to lapse. But it will direct their activity. It will formulate the plans for such work as the registration of women for service--work that has been peculiarly subject to wasteful methods. and through State Committees it will allot the work to the organizations that can best perform it.

The two organizations in Connecticut that so far have done most work are the National League for Women's Service and the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association. These are of course in addition to the Red Cross Society and its various units. The work of the Red Cross is thoroughly recognized and the Red Cross is nationally organized for its work. Its heads have government recognition and there is no intention on the part of the government to interfere with the Red Cross work in its appointment of the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense.

Both the Suffrage Organization and the National League for Women's



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vice League are expected to cooperate with the Women's Committee and to act under the orders from Washington which are to be passed on in every case by the Government Department most concerned. In this way agricultural work for women will be brought directly into line with the work of the Department of Agriculture, and work for women and children employed in factories with the Department of Labor. This new cooperation is of special importance in the case of the registering of the women. According to Dr Shaw, chairman of the Women's Committee, six systems of registration have been adopted by various women's organizations; and not one of these systems will be of any use to the government if there is a demand for women for special services. Instead of six systems, one uniform system will be adopted to be used by every organization that desires to take a registration of the women.

It will of course involve a certain loss of independence to take orders from the Women's Committee. But this loss will be compensated by the increase of efficiency of a more uniform system, and the Suffragists are willing loyally to put themselves at the command of the Government of the United States and to accept the plan which has been decided upon by the Council of National Defence--the council formed of six of President Wilson's cabinet ministers. The general plan of work for the Women's Committee has been outlined by Miss Ida Tarbell, one of the members. It includes (1) Registration of Women; (2) Food production and conservation; (3) Care and protection of women in industry; (4) Training of women for special services as needed; and (5) Preservation of the inner defences of our national life both material and spiritual.

The members of the Women's Committee are:--Dr Anna Shaw, chairman; Mrs Philip Moore, Secretary, Mrs Stanley McCormick, Treasurer, Miss Maude Wetmore, Josiah
Mrs Joseph Lamar, Mrs ~~Joseph~~ Cowles, Mrs Watt, Mrs Antoinette Funk, Miss Agnes Nestor and Miss Ida Tarbell. Most of the women have been chosen be-

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cause they were president or officer of some great organization of women.

The Connecticut committee to work under the Women's Committee has not yet been formed. The Washington Committee appointed as temporary chairman the President of the Connecticut Federation of Women's Clubs--Mrs E.H. Smiley of Hartford. Mrs Smiley's chief duty as temporary chairman will be to call a meeting of the presidents of women's organizations for the choice of a permanent committee, which will then work under the National Committee in Washington--thus removing the danger of duplication and confusion that has hitherto existed.

There is a constantly recurring confusion in the minds of many Anti-Suffragists concerning the meaning of democracy. One would think that any man or woman who has had even a grammar school education would know that democracy means the government of the people by themselves or by their chosen representatives. It was defined of old by President Lincoln in the historic words "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" and our present President has redefined it in words that will probably become equally historic "democracy, the right of those who submit to authority to take part in their government".

Instead of keeping clearly the meaning of democracy in mind some of the Anti-Suffragists confuse it with popularity. They assert that it would be "undemocratic" to grant the ballot to women, because a large number of men and women don't favor women suffrage. Whether people favor woman suffrage or not affects not at all its democratic character. If ninety-nine women out of every hundred strenuously objected to having the vote conferred on them, or even if every one of the women objected, it would still be undemocratic for men to govern women without the women themselves having any part in their own government.

In a letter printed in some of the newspapers of this state last week, Mrs Stephen S. Fitzgerald puts forward this false conception of democracy

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She writes of "thrusting the ballot upon women when they do not want it". "It would certainly", she writes, "not be democratic, since in a democracy the majority should rule, and the majority of women believe they can serve the state best outside politics." There are two utterly preposterous assumptions in this one sentence. The first is that Mrs FitzGerald can speak for the majority of the women--that she and she alone knows what the majority of women are feeling and thinking. The second and more important is that a majority in favor of a measure necessarily makes that measure democratic.

In the days of decadence of the Roman Empire we are told that the Emperors kept the people contented by distributing free food and providing free amusement for the populace by means of circuses and gladiatorial fights with occasionally the martyrdom of some Christians as a change. These measures were highly popular, and if the people had been offered their choice of this easy and pleasurable existence and a strenuous life of self-support with self government and responsibility, it is highly probable that the vast majority would have preferred to keep things as they were. Would the life of the Empire then be democratic, and the life of a self-supporting and responsible republic be undemocratic because the majority preferred pleasure to duty?

There is nothing more undemocratic than a referendum of the male voters on the question of women suffrage. Here we have a question affecting a great body of people. Not a single member of that great body is given a voice in its settlement. On the contrary the settlement is given into the hands of another quite different body of people who are asked to settle it according to their own ideas and not according to the ideas of the people concerned. So far as Mrs FitzGerald was concerned with the taking of a referendum on woman suffrage, she was right in calling it undemocratic. But that was not the aim of her letter. Her letter was opposed to woman

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suffrage altogether, and her objection to suffragists for their opposition to a vote to be taken among the women themselves was only incidental.

It is quite true that under present circumstances women always oppose schemes for taking a straw vote of the women on woman suffrage. They oppose it because such a vote would have no validity--it would be merely playing with the question. Such a vote would also imply that the women were capable of settling one great question of government for themselves; and if one question why not more? Woman suffrage is not a question to be settled by temporary majorities. It is more primal and more permanent than that. It is a question of the very foundation of government, and the very nature of women. If our government is to be a democracy it can only be so when all the people are willing to bear the responsibility of taking part in their government. Until people are willing the democracy will continue to be a failure or at best but a limping success.

If there are many women unwilling to take their proper share of this responsibility it is certainly much to be regretted. But the proper way to treat such delinquents from democracy is to stimulate their patriotism and to make them see that to take part in their government is the first duty of every citizen. Only by such patriotism and such recognition of duty can democracy ever become a full success. Some people will say that this is true as concerns men, but that it ceases to be true in regard to women. These are the people who are not sure that women are human beings. They would shut women out from being people. They would say that, like children, women must always be wards of the nation--not really grown up, nor responsible fully for their own actions and in no way responsible for their nation's conduct.

Women Suffrage is settled in principle and justice when two simple questions are answered in the affirmative and there are few people who nowadays can answer these questions in ~~xxxx~~ any other way. These questions are "Are Women People?" and "Is ours a democracy?"