

## Nurses' Employment Agencies.

We have always believed that there are more mistakes made through ignorance than malice, and this specially relates to legislation for women, put into motion by men who are not qualified, through lack of knowledge, to legislate for them.

Last week we referred to the new London County Council (General Powers) Act, 1910, which has a clause dove-tailed in, dealing with Agencies and Registries for the employment of persons, between clauses dealing with the executing of street works, the smoke nuisance, and acquiring of lands in Kensington, Lambeth, and Camberwell!

In a matter of so much importance as that of dealing with *the liberty to work* it is to be regretted that the London County Council did not attack the question of Agencies in a Bill for the purpose, when proper publicity would have been given to this very important question, sound advice offered, and just legislation enacted.

We can quite believe that the promoters of the Agency clauses in the new Bill were anxious to prevent "fraud and immorality" in relation to the white slave traffic, swindling, and other evils, but—in so far as the Nursing Profession is concerned—the legal interpretation of the Act as it relates to Nursing Associations will have the directly opposite effect, and will protect the employer, and penalise the worker.

We are strongly in favour of registration and inspection of all public institutions where one human being is manipulated for gain by another; hence, had the Bill brought all institutions supplying private nurses to the public—either for gain, or for the financial benefit of the worker—under its provisions, and these institutions had been compelled to take out a licence, many nefarious practices might have been stopped.

But what does this Bill do, so far as nurses are concerned?

First of all, it slashes at the root of professional co-operation between highly qualified nurses for mutual financial benefit, by prohibiting them from associating together as a Private Nurses' Co-operation unless their Society takes out a licence which places it on the same level as Agencies kept by unprofessional persons who supply semi-trained nurses, domestics, and other workers, indiscriminately, to the public.

And at the same time this extraordinarily unjust Act protects the interests of the employer. All employers, however reprehensible their system, are exempt from licensing and inspection.

For instance—

1. The buck negro, the proprietor—or shall we say the procurer?—of a Nursing Home in Marylebone, who dressed his victims in nurses' uniform, and who came under the penalty of the law for brutally assaulting one of them, would not be required to take out a Licence; he was an employer!

2. The proprietress of a so-called Home—principally used for abortion purposes—but who supplies semi-trained and criminal women, on salary, to the public as private nurses, is not required to take out a Licence; *she* is an employer!

The hospital which supplies probationers to the public as private nurses—no matter how insufficiently trained—or how inadequately paid—is not required to take out a Licence; the institution Committee is an employer!

The hospital which undersells the three years' certificated private nurse, working on the co-operative system, by granting short term certificates of training, or by supplying these nurses to the public at a cent. per cent. profit, is not required to take out a Licence; the Committee is an employer.

We need enumerate no further instances in connection with the provisions of the Act to prove that it practically protects every abuse in the private nursing world and deprives highly trained reputable Nurses' Co-operations of the prestige which they have earned through many years of upright, honourable dealing with the public. Moreover, it goes deeper, and deprives the professional woman worker of the *right to co-operate* unless licensed along with the unprofessional agencies, association with which, in the mind of the public, would be most disastrous to their professional prestige.

The apathy of the nurses, and the keen business acumen of the hospital employer, has been amply apparent during the struggle for State Registration of Nurses, and behind the new General Powers Act of the London County Council, every employer—good, bad, and indifferent—is securely entrenched.

And where are the rights of the co-operative workers? They have been deprived of the independent right to co-operate.

Is it presumable that if women were citizens and had the Vote, and qualified nurses were Registered and had legal status, that man-made laws would be slipped through Parliament treating them with no more consideration than machines? This is but one more proof of the demoralising lack of status of women in the community, and must be used not only in support of the professional nurse's demand for

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