

The Midwife.

The National Insurance Bill.

A very representative meeting, convened by the Legislation Sectional Committee of the National Union of Women Workers, met at Caxton Hall on Tuesday morning, "to consider the National Insurance Bill as it relates to women." The President of the Union, the Lady Laura Ridding, was in the chair, and interesting speeches were made by Miss Constance Smith (Industrial Law Committee), Miss Mary Macarthur (Women's Trade Union League), Miss Rosalind Paget (Midwives' Institute), and Mrs. Summerton (Women's Court, Ancient Order of Foresters). There seemed to be a general consensus of opinion that the Bill pressed hardly on women, indeed it was proposed that women should ask to be left out of its provisions altogether, but eventually it was decided to put the matter into the hands of a Committee of men and women, representative of important sections of women workers, and co-opted Members of Parliament, with full powers to thresh out the amendments which it considered necessary, and to take steps to get them carried, if possible.

It was further decided to supply local associations with copies of the proposed amendments, so that they might use their influence locally with their own Members of Parliament. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick pressed for the representation of the interests of trained nurses upon the Committee.

Mrs. Ramsay Macdonald moved a resolution urging that the administrative provisions of the Act should be in the hands of women as well as men, in the proportion of at least one third, on Committees administering compulsory levies.

Speaking on the proposal that women should ask to be left out of the Bill, she said that she had advocated the present meeting, as the Bill had not been considered from the point of view of women, but criticism of its provisions was quite different from saying that we would go on strike. If the Bill was bad for women it was probably bad for men too, but it was an honest attempt to do away with the uncertainty of the position of the poor in sickness. It would do away largely with chance charity, which was not an ideal method of assistance, and depended not so much on the needs of the individual as upon his capacity to tell a long tale. The Bill at least secured the minimum of help to the necessitous.

A just criticism was that it gave encouragement to the married woman to continue wage-earning. Women should be allowed to be voluntary contributors after marriage.

In regard to charitable workers, a speaker pointed out that the effect of national insurance in Germany had been to set free a large number to do constructive instead of relief work.

THE MIDWIVES' POSITION.

Miss Rosalind Paget said, in an excellent paper:

For the purpose of considering the question of insurance midwives fall into three classes—(1) Independent midwives, (2) Midwives receiving a salary, and (3) Midwives employed as private nurses or engaged in other work.

(1) *Independent Midwives.*—These can only come under casual employment, and therefore can only join as voluntary contributors.

(2) *Midwives receiving a salary.*—These would go under the category of employed contributors whether they are salaried district midwives or holding salaried appointments: they will come under the same category as nurses, and as far as I know they are not at present members of any approved Friendly Society. It will be necessary to form an approved Friendly Society for midwives and nurses or they will have to be insured in the most unsatisfactory position of deposit contributors. For the purposes of insurance nurses have unfortunately very long lives, but a high rate of sickness and accident; this would render them unsuitable for ordinary Friendly Societies.

(3) *Midwives employed as private nurses or engaged in other work.*—Most of these would come under the casual section, and could only join as voluntary contributors.

So much for the way in which this Act concerns the midwife personally, as an ordinary member of the community. How her profession will be affected under this Bill is another matter, and one very difficult as the Bill now stands to ascertain.

After describing the various classes of women entitled to the Maternity Benefit, Miss Paget pointed out that there is nothing in the Bill to insure that the lying-in woman belonging to any of these classes has any freedom of choice as to whether she employs a doctor or a midwife.

The Friendly Societies and the Health Committees will be able if they wish to lay down that the Maternity Benefit shall be used to pay the doctor's fee, and the midwife may, in the future, only be able to attend those persons who, owing to uncertain or no work are unable to be insured under this Act. These people will to a considerable extent belong to the pauper class, who come under the Poor Law. At present, as constituted, the Poor Law pays a considerable fee to a medical man to attend these cases, and only in one or two isolated instances pays a midwife.

Miss Paget urged the inclusion of the word "midwife" in the Act, or medical men, who are an immensely powerful body with large political and much personal influence, would be able to bring pressure to bear on Friendly Societies and Health Committees, and were, in fact, already beginning to rejoice over the very probable extinction of the trained midwife. She did not blame them, they had to live, but so had the 30,000 midwives on the Midwives' Roll. The midwife is now a person recognised by Government. She has been proved to be a necessity, and since her profession has been organised and supervised the rate

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