

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

The members of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland owe a debt of gratitude to the fifty-eight of their number who requisitioned the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held in the new Central Hall, Westminster, on Wednesday, November 20th, "to consider the Franchise and Registration Bill now before Parliament, and the necessity for the inclusion of women in any scheme of Franchise Reform, and the safeguarding of the powers they already possess in Local Government, and to pass such resolutions on the above subject as the Council may determine."

It was evident, as the room quickly filled with a crowd of earnest women, that the issues at stake were appreciated, and probably so large a number of past Presidents have never been on a platform at one time. The Presidential Address of Mrs. Allan Bright was listened to with intense silence, broken only for a moment when Mrs. Creighton, who arrived after the meeting had opened, was greeted with round after round of applause. Mrs. Bright stated that fifteen resolutions had been sent in for the consideration of the meeting, which fell under three heads.

1. In favour of re-affirming the resolution passed in 1902, and re-affirmed in 1909, in support of women's franchise.

2. Those against such affirmation.

3. Those urging the Government to amend the Franchise and Registration Bill so as to remove the present anomalies and disabilities in regard to Women's Local Government Franchise, concerning which she hoped the meeting would be unanimous.

RESOLUTION I.

The first Resolution was moved by Mrs. Creighton, and seconded by Mrs. Henry Fawcett, LL.D. It was:—

"That, in view of the fact that the questions of Parliamentary and local government franchises for women are to be discussed in connection with the Franchise and Registration Bill now before the House of Commons, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland re-affirms the following resolution, passed on October 30th, 1902, and again on October 20th, 1909,

'That without the firm foundation of the Parliamentary franchise for women, there is no permanence for any advance gained by them';

and, while not expressing any opinion on the Bill, urges all Members of Parliament to vote so as to ensure that no Bill shall be passed which does not include some measure of Parliamentary Suffrage for Women."

Mrs. Creighton, in a clear and logical speech, asked her audience to consider first what the National Union of Women Workers stood for. It was, she said, working for the good of women and

children. In relation to the resolution which she had proposed, she thought it was asking too much of the supporters of women's suffrage in the National Council of Great Britain and Ireland, the Governing Body of the National Union of Women Workers, that the moment the Franchise Bill was before the country, their Council should refrain from expressing an opinion upon it. To adopt such a course would be to lend a weighty support to the opposition.

They were accused of going back on the "Compromise of 1910," but nothing was said at that time for or against the resolution on women's suffrage. What was done was that the Executive were prevented from taking hasty action on points which had not been sufficiently discussed. They were therefore at liberty to take action in regard to the Franchise Bill. On the other hand, the anti-suffragists had no occasion to ask the Prime Minister to exclude them from its benefits.

The Government had left it to Parliament to accept an amendment as to the inclusion of women if it thought fit. As women were challenged to show that they cared, let them do it in the strong, calm way that came from deep conviction, by steady patient work, and by devotion and zeal combined with toleration.

Mrs. Creighton then moved that the meeting re-affirm what, ever since it had begun to pass resolutions, had been the opinion of the Council, and concluded by saying that women workers knew so well how much the State needed the help of women that she could not doubt the result.

Mrs. Fawcett, who seconded the Resolution, said that it was no new departure. The members of the National Council had done much more than re-affirm the Resolution of 1902, for they had expressed in their actions their belief that "faith without works is dead," and in 1910 had memorialised the Prime Minister in favour of Mr. Shackleton's Bill. There was no compromise in 1910, but Mrs. Humphrey Ward was handsomely beaten by four votes to one.

What was decided was that the Executive should not take action on debatable questions without reference to the Council. Even supposing the carrying of this Resolution meant some loss of members, that must be faced. If we resolved to be content with what had been done in the past we should lose our vitality. There was no safety in remaining dormant.

The Resolution was supported by Mrs. Boulois.

The rejection of the Resolution was moved by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who challenged the statement that there is no permanence for advances gained by women without the firm foundation of the Parliamentary franchise. She declared that nothing won legislatively by women had been lost, and said that if the Resolution were passed it would be in defiance of the undertaking of 1910.

Miss Gladys Pott, who seconded, aroused much indignation by suggesting that a handsome sum of money given to the N.U.W.W. was given on the understanding of its neutrality.

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