

Royal British Nurses' Association.

(Incorporated by



Royal Charter.)

THIS SUPPLEMENT BEING THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE CORPORATION.

CONFERENCE ON BURNING QUESTIONS.

(Continued from page 325.)

The discussion which took place in connection with the resolution on the Unemployment Insurance Act at the Conference convened by the Association, and held at 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, W., on December 3rd, to consider questions of burning interest to the nursing profession, was reported fully in THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING last week. This week we are utilising the space at our disposal in reporting the discussion on the Hours of Employment Bill.

RESOLUTION II.

THE HOURS OF EMPLOYMENT BILL.

Miss M. F. Rimmer, Hon. Organising Secretary of the National Union of Trained Nurses, proposed the following resolution:—

That the Hours of Employment Bill provides the means for compulsorily decreasing the long and unregulated hours of work of nurses in hospitals and kindred institutions.

This Meeting of Trained Nurses, therefore, desires to record its approval of the inclusion in the Bill of professional nurses working under uncontrolled employers, but considers that special regulations should be defined in the Bill to exempt classes of Trained Nurses who make their own contract for service with the patient.

Miss M. F. Rimmer said that she was glad to have the opportunity of proposing the resolution, as, from the first, the question had been of interest to the N.U.T.N., which took prompt action to represent its views to the Ministry of Labour on the subject. She congratulated trained nurses that they were at present included in the scope of the Bill. There had been a time when this was not certain. Sir David Shackleton had told a deputation to the Ministry of Labour that nurses would probably be classed with domestic workers and therefore not included. Then they were told that the College of Nursing, Ltd., had proposed the introduction of a special provision, under which nurses were to be required to work 56 hours a week.

It was sad if any profession began to think in terms of £ s. d., but, as she was fond of figures, and knew that nurses were always being exploited for the benefit of others, she had made a calcula-

tion as to the monetary effect of this extra day on the profession.

Fifty-six hours, in place of forty-eight, equalled one day a week extra, or seven weeks and three days a year. Assuming that this affected 60,000 nurses—a low estimate—they would work 3,120,000 hours, or 445,700 extra weeks in the year. Take the minimum cost at £2 per week—again a low estimate—and you had £890,000, which, if paid to extra nurses (because of the shorter hours under the 48-hours-a-week scheme) would be a great boon to nurses at present in practice, and result in the employment of 8,570 additional nurses. This would go far to solve the problem of unemployment for women, because, in the nursing profession, no one had yet suggested the turning out of women for men. If her estimate was considered too high it could be halved, and it would still be quite evident where the interest of the employer was, and why a minimum of 56 hours would suit him. She was glad to say that this proposal was now dead, but only the other day the matron of an important provincial hospital reported that the working hours of its nursing staff had now been brought down to 56 weekly, "which was equivalent to an eight hours' day," but she omitted to point out that this was for a seven, instead of a six, days' week.

If those present read their BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING carefully, and she hoped everyone did, they would have seen reported in the issue of November 20th that at the meeting of the General Nursing Council held on November 12th, Dr. Bedford Pierce proposed "That the Minister of Health be asked to introduce a Bill to regulate the hours of nurses employed in hospitals, or other institutions for the care of the sick," which was carried.

Thus a new danger threatened the profession, because, if acted upon, this proposal kept nurses indefinitely out of the benefits of the present Bill. She thought that with the best will in the world the Minister of Health had too much on his hands to bring in another controversial Nurses' Bill for some time, and, meanwhile, if excluded from the Minister of Labour's Bill, nurses would continue to work long hours, and, incidentally, to be economically exploited as at present. If he did introduce such a Bill, the Minister could, and might, make the hours longer; moreover, the Ministry of Health was a great Government department dealing with

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)