

Please return to Miss Neilans

National Council of Women of Great Britain

REPORT OF A CONFERENCE

ON

Official Policewomen

HELD AT

4 ST JAMES'S SQUARE, LONDON, S.W.1

(By kind invitation of THE VISCOUNTESS ASTOR, M.P.)

ON

TUESDAY, 21st JUNE 1927

PRICE THREEPENCE

Report of a Conference on Official Policewomen

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THE Morning Session was devoted to the consideration of the present position in the **Metropolitan Area**.

DAME HELEN GWYNNE-VAUGHAN in the Chair. In calling upon LADY ASTOR to open the Conference and propose the Resolution, Dame Helen said she had been interested in the question of Women Police for many years, and had been a member of both the Committees of Enquiry—in 1920 and 1924.

LADY ASTOR, M.P., welcomed the Conference to her house and referred to the need for the education of public opinion on the subject of Women Police, and said it was very necessary to allow them to prove their worth to the community by giving them suitable duties. Lady Astor moved the following Resolution:—

“That this Conference calls upon the Home Secretary to fulfil his promise given to the Deputation organised by the National Council of Women on 23rd March 1926, to increase the number of Women Police in the Metropolitan Area. It asks that such increase should be at least up to 100, and that the women should work under their own Superintendent as in 1921.”

Mrs WILSON POTTER said:—

In seconding this Resolution I have been asked to make a statement on the present position of the Women Police in the Metropolitan Area. Speaking in the name of many who for fifteen years have devoted time, work, and money to the establishment of this force, I say that the present position can only be described as deplorable. Deplorable from the point of view of numbers, deplorable from the quantity of work which the Women Police are evidently only allowed to perform.

In 1921 112 women under their own Superintendent were becoming an effective force, carrying out the work for women and children which we know to be so necessary. The Commissioner's Report for 1921 speaks highly of their work :—

“The Women Patrols have performed the difficult duties allotted to them with keenness and carefulness; they have proved themselves helpful in many ways, more particularly those employed in connection with the detection of indecency and those who have been selected to assist in the delicate work of taking statements in respect to criminal conduct in relation to children and young persons.”

And the Returns of this work show that Women Police cautioned 70,140 persons; assisted 50,844 persons; and attended 332 times at POLICE COURTS. A magnificent record for an organisation only three years old.

The Welfare Department turned hundreds of girls from prospective prisoners into self-respecting citizens. Had these girls—and there were 1131 in 1921—not been passed by the Women Patrols into Homes and Hospitals, they would probably have drifted eventually into prison, and cost the State some £99,582 per annum. (Our figures are based on a cost per female prisoner in those days of £88 per annum.)

The protest which followed the decision to abolish the Women Patrols was successful in retaining 20, but this number did not warrant a Superintendent in Scotland Yard, so the 20 were allotted to the various Metropolitan Police Divisions.

In December 1924 Sir William Joynson-Hicks increased their numbers to 50, and at that number they have remained for an area of 699 square miles—for two and a half years.

For their work we turn to the last published reports of the Commissioner; in that for 1925 we read :—

“The establishment of the Women Police is 2 Inspectors, 5 Sergeants, and 43 Constables.

“One of the Inspectors is still attached to the

Criminal Investigation Department in connection with offences against children and young girls. . . . The system of attaching the women to the various Divisions has continued to work satisfactorily.”

In the Report for 1926 we read :—

“WOMEN POLICE. All have performed their duties in a satisfactory manner and have proved particularly useful in cases where children and young persons are concerned. Four women Constables were promoted to be Sergeants during the year. This will ensure more effective supervision and relieve the Woman Inspector in general charge.”

THIS IS ALL WE ARE TOLD OF THEIR WORK. I wish we knew more, for many inquiries come constantly from the Dominions and foreign countries, which look to England as the pioneer in this branch of the Police Service. But a sidelight is thrown on it by the Chief Constable of Liverpool, who reported to his Watch Committee that “with a strength of 50, including 2 inspectors and 5 sergeants, their arrests and appearances in Court are almost negligible—TEN CASES OR SO IN THE THREE YEARS they have been in force, etc. etc.”

Now why this immense discrepancy between the work in 1921 and the work now? And why in 1921 are the Women Police praised for their help in the detection of Indecency, yet in 1927 the Chief Constable of Liverpool states—“Nor can it be said that their presence in uniform acts as a greater deterrent to the male pest, etc., than that of the male police officer.”

In the 1921 Report it is recorded that the Women Police attended 332 times at the Police Courts. The difference is amazing. Has our Metropolis become more moral? The 1926 Report tells us that the cases for which we consider Women Police indispensable were as numerous, even more so :

	1921	1926
Indecent Assaults on Females .	186	233
Defilement of Girls	25	35

*

These figures show that if 112 Women Police were needed in 1921 much more are they needed now, and MORE OF THEM. Sir Neville Macready said that in his opinion 200 would not be too many for the work London could provide.

"But," some will say, "there are 50—why are they not at any rate half as efficient as the original number?" The answer is evidently that with their own Superintendent they did more responsible work. We have always maintained that Women Police should *not* be a separate force; but for the greater part of their duties—the taking of statements, the cautioning of young girls, dealing with prostitutes, arresting for indecency, etc., the women should be allowed to work on their own responsibility, and as long as they are merely attached to the male police divisions this they can never do. The Chief Constable of Liverpool's further statement *re* their being no deterrent to male pests is in strange contradiction to Sir William Horwood's Report of 1921, and an official letter, dated 5th September 1923, from New Scotland Yard, which says:—

"The Metropolitan policewomen have performed the difficult duties allotted to them with keenness and carefulness and have proved themselves helpful in many directions, but especially in preventing girls and young persons from starting or continuing lives of immorality. The Women Police have also been employed on duties in connection with the detection of indecency or criminal conduct by males, particularly in relation to children and young persons (when the chances of detection by a male officer might probably have been less!)"

He adds: "And certain of them have been selected to assist in the delicate work of taking statements in respect of these offences."

I have left this question of TAKING OF STATEMENTS to the last, because it is by far the most important. After all, it was the primary reason for the agitation for Women Police. According to the Commissioner's

Report for 1925: "One of the Inspectors is still attached to the Criminal Investigation Department in connection with offences against children and young girls. In this connection he goes on to say, "Reference should also be made to the valuable work done for a number of years by Miss MacDougall, not only in the taking of statements from women, young girls, and children, but also in housing and caring for those who, pending a trial, are in need of care and shelter."

We are all deeply grateful to Miss MacDougall for her untiring and splendid work, but we cannot forget that in 1921 429 statements were taken by the Women Police Patrols and in 1922 up to 21st May 127. These statements were *exclusive* of those taken by Miss MacDougall and the male police. SEVEN WOMEN were employed entirely on this work of taking statements, following up the cases, and preparing them for Court.

The 1926 Report shows that our Metropolis was not a better place than in 1921. Then who did the necessary work? It was quite impossible for two women to cover it, and the only inference is that it was done by male constables, or was largely left undone.

Mrs CARDEN, O.B.E., in the course of her remarks, read some important letters addressed to her as the founder of the Voluntary Patrol Movement from successive Metropolitan Commissioners of Police, **appointing the first official policewomen for London**, and later asking her to serve on the **Selection Committee** at Scotland Yard, which Committee was responsible for the selection of the first 110 Metropolitan Police Women Patrols. Mrs Carden told the Conference that this Committee no longer functions.

Mr FRANK BRIANT, M.P., deplored the ignorance and prejudice still existing on the subject of Women Police and called upon the Conference to institute a campaign for more policewomen for London and for the country as a whole. Not only in his own con-

stituency—Deptford—but all over London he said the need for policewomen to take statements in cases of assaults on children was very great. These statements could be taken by a policewoman *alone* whereas it required two policemen. “A terrified child might tell its story to one fatherly policeman but not to two,” was Mr Briant’s comment.

He concluded by saying: “Either there is no need for policewomen at all, or the present numbers are ridiculously inadequate to serve the 699 square miles of the Metropolitan Area.”

Mrs TUPPER, of the Mortlake and East Sheen Branch, N.C.W., contributed some useful information on the difficulties they had experienced in asking the Urban District Council to apply to Scotland Yard for policewomen to patrol Barnes Common. She was advised to approach their M.P. with a view to a question in the House of Commons on the subject.

Miss ALISON NIELANS urged the Conference to make Women Police a test question in Municipal and Parliamentary Elections and to undertake local propaganda amongst men and women voters. Other suggestions were a sympathetic cartoon in *Punch*, short leaflets for theatre queues, etc.

DAME HELEN GWYNNE-VAUGHAN, in summing up the speeches and the discussion upon the points raised, stressed the importance of an **Autumn Campaign**. She also considered the appointment of a woman senior official at Scotland Yard, with direct access to the Metropolitan Commissioner, and having his authority behind her, was an essential step in the development of the movement in London.

The Resolution was carried unanimously.

The Afternoon Session was devoted to the consideration of the present position in **England, Wales, and Scotland**.

Mrs WILSON POTTER, in the Chair, called upon the Hon. Secretary (Miss Margesson) to read the apologies. These had been received from the Home Secretary, the Secretary for Scotland, and the Permanent Under-Secretaries, Sir John Anderson and Sir John Lamb. Sir John Anderson expressed “real regret” that he could not be present owing to the fact that the Conference was in the nature of a criticism of the policy of the Home Office as stated in recent Circulars and answers in the House of Commons. Sir Leonard Dunning and General Atcherley were both away on inspection tours.

The Chief Constables of BIRMINGHAM, GLOUCESTERSHIRE, GLASGOW, and AYR sent apologies, but wrote in the case of:—

BIRMINGHAM: “That the senior policewoman would be allowed to give information of the practices adopted in Birmingham.”

GLASGOW: “I think my views on this branch of the service are pretty well known.”

AYR: “You have information of my interest in and sympathy with the movement for Women Police. . . . I think it is only a question of time when women will be more fully represented in the police forces of the country than they are to-day.”

Miss TANCRED then proposed the Resolution, and reminded her hearers that no new demand was being made. The N.C.W. had given over 14 years of work to the establishment of official policewomen. The Baird Committee in 1920 had laid the foundations of the service and had indicated the official view of the necessary developments to define and stabilise that service. These views were expressed by:—

1. SIR LEONARD DUNNING, who estimated that between 80 and 90 of the large towns would employ policewomen.

2. THE CHAIRMAN (SIR JOHN BAIRD) expected that

the service would be standardised "in the same way as that of the men, viz. : by regulations made by the Secretary of State under Section 4 Police Act 1919" with pay and conditions of service uniform throughout Great Britain.

3. THE COMMITTEE considered it essential that the women employed should be "specially qualified, highly trained, and well paid, and that they should form an integral part of the police force."

4. In 1921 "Members of police forces who are women" were included in the Police Pensions Act.

The Committee on the Employment of Policewomen in 1924 re-endorsed these four recommendations, and (5) in the Circular of that year recommended that policewomen be employed to take the statements of women and children.

How have these expectations been fulfilled?

1. Instead of 80 or 90 towns employing policewomen, 32 out of the 122 Boroughs employ 63 policewomen: London employs 50: 6 out of the 60 Counties employ 34 policewomen, and these, with the 15 employed in Scotland, make a total of 162 for Great Britain.

2. Instead of standardised conditions of service the conditions can only be described as chaotic—half the women are not sworn-in, nor do they receive the Baird scales of pay and allowances—some are not under the Police Pensions Act, but *all* are paid from the Police Grant.

3. No steps have been taken by the Police Authorities in England to ensure a supply of specially qualified and highly trained women. As the Law stands the Police Authorities alone can select and train members of police forces.

Since the issue of the Report in 1920 the N.C.W. has asked year after year that these recommendations be embodied in draft STATUTORY REGULATIONS.

Miss Tancred reviewed the position of the policewomen in the towns where they are not sworn-in (Bristol 6, Birmingham 7, Manchester and Liverpool

3 each), and compared their status and conditions of service with those of Glasgow and Sheffield where the women concerned had—to their great satisfaction—been sworn-in after some years of service, and drew attention to the danger of substituting police matrons for policewomen. She described the struggle now proceeding to obtain the appointment of policewomen in 40 to 50 large towns, including Newport, Derby, Bath, Wolverhampton, Wallasey, Hull, Portsmouth, Bedford, Manchester, Burton-on-Trent, Dewsbury, etc., and in Counties such as Devonshire, Hertfordshire, and Somerset.

In spite of protestations from Home Secretaries, consistent support from Sir Leonard Dunning, recommendations in the Reports on Sexual Offences against Young Persons, and the strong backing of Educational Authorities, the following reasons are given for their non-employment:—

1. "No dictum from the Home Office" (Chairman of Watch Committee, Derby). "Home Office not really keen" (Chairman of Watch Committee, Bedford).

2. Supposed opposition of male police. Only 18 members of the Police Federation were present at the meeting which drew up the statement for the 1924 Committee.

3. Expense. The cost of four policewomen for a county force worked out at one-twentieth of a penny addition to the rates.

4. No accommodation in Police Offices for women. The sooner this is attended to the better in the interests of women on juries, women witnesses, as well as policewomen.

5. No women on Watch Committees in Boroughs or on Standing Joint Committees in Counties.

The failure of the last Circular caused keen disappointment. Wide publicity had been given in the press to the Home Secretary's promises to the Deputation on 23rd March 1926, and the belated appearance of the Circular on 31st December led to

twenty towns turning down policewomen without any consideration being given to the subject at all.

The N.C.W. are convinced that no serious consideration will be given to the subject of Women Police until some definite action such as submitting draft regulations is taken by the Home Office and Scottish Office. Regulations were found to be absolutely necessary for the male police (where no prejudice had to be overcome), and it was recognised by the Police Act of 1919 that leaving these matters to local discretion had failed—facts show that leaving the appointment of policewomen to “the discretion of local police authorities” has also failed—hence the request of the Resolution:—

“That, since the Circulars issued by the Home Office and by the Scottish Office on 31st December 1926 and 13th January 1927 respectively, have had an effect quite contrary to that which was anticipated, this Conference would now urge the Home Secretary and Secretary for Scotland to follow the matter up by drafting Statutory Regulations and submitting them to the Local Authorities without further delay.”

Mrs T. JOHNSTON, in seconding the Resolution, gave a statement on the present position in Scotland. Fifteen policewomen are employed in Scotland: in Glasgow 11, Edinburgh 2, Ayr 2.

She described the persistent efforts made from 1920 to 1927 to increase the number of policewomen in Edinburgh, and the entirely unsuccessful efforts of Aberdeen, Dundee, and Stirling to obtain any at all, in spite of the strong recommendations made by the Reports on Sexual Offences against Young Persons and the Educational Institute of Scotland asking that policewomen be appointed for the protection of children as well as for the prevention and detection of crime.

Mrs Johnston drew attention to the fact that the League of Nations Report on the Employment of Women in the Police quoted the **duties** performed

by the **Glasgow** policewomen in full. She considered those duties an absolutely unanswerable argument for the employment of policewomen to perform them; no civilised man or woman could contend that the duties there set out ought to be performed by male police. Mrs Johnston quoted from the Home Office Circular of 21st November 1924, “the Law Officers of the Crown advised that, in their opinion, regulations could properly be made defining the duties which women constables would be expected to perform.” Mrs Johnston recommended the Conference to concentrate on getting these duties made statutory for policewomen, and said that Scotland hoped England would agree to advance along that line; if **regulations on duties** were obtained she felt that all the other points for which we were contending would necessarily follow.

Mrs MILES, senior policewoman of **Birmingham**, gave an account of the work of the policewomen which proved the contention of the Chief Constable of that City when he said, “The work cannot be dealt with by male members of the police force and cannot be reached by philanthropists or social workers.” The Chief Constable’s letter contained the following words: “**The main object of any police establishment is the prevention of crime, and our policewomen do an immense work by preventing young women from sliding into a criminal course.**”

The opinion of the Chief Constable of Birmingham on this question of what is and what is not police work is in direct conflict with that of the Chief Constable of **Liverpool**, who considers that preventive work, undertaken in the interest of girls by policewomen, does not meet the “legal obligations of the police.” In the report submitted by LIVERPOOL the Chief Constable is reported as stating that the requirements of those advocating women police are met by twenty-nine “trained women”; on inquiry it was found that twenty-six of these women were police matrons, generally the wives of policemen,

and the remaining three women worked in plain clothes. None of these women are sworn-in, nor do they come within the Police Pensions Act. The citizens of Liverpool are now asking in what way police matrons meet the "legal obligations of the police" while the Women Police Patrols do not?

Councillor Mrs PETTY, of DERBY, told the Conference of the struggle for women police in that town. Following a majority vote in the Town Council recommending the appointment of two policewomen, the Watch Committee refused to comply, and it remains to be seen whether the Town Council of Derby will adopt the successful tactics of SHEFFIELD where, as a protest against the refusal to appoint policewomen, the Town Council rejected the whole of the Minutes of the Watch Committee, including the finance proposals.

Miss ABSOLOM, Patrol Leader from SOUTHEND, spoke of the services rendered by the Patrols to the thousands of excursionists visiting the town.

A letter was read from Miss HARTLAND, J.P., GLOUCESTERSHIRE, telling of the successful efforts made to obtain four more policewomen for that County; Mrs Phillips, J.P., spoke of successful propaganda but final defeat by one vote in DEVONSHIRE Standing Joint Committee.

The Conference, as a whole, gave no indication of discouragement but rather of a determination to use every effort to press for policewomen locally and nationally. All were agreed that definite action by the Home Office and Scots Office in the direction of issuing draft statutory regulations is imperatively called for if any real advance is to be made.

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