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Women and the General Election



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WOMEN and the GENERAL ELECTION

REPORT PREPARED BY STANDING JOINT COMMITTEE
OF INDUSTRIAL WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS TO BE
PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
LABOUR WOMEN, 1929.

I

THE General Election of 1929 ushers in a new epoch. For the first time in our history, women will exercise a franchise based on full equality with men, and nearly fourteen million women will be upon the electoral register. More than a hundred years ago the demand for sex equality in citizenship was first made. Sixty years ago the first Women's Suffrage amendment was moved in the House of Commons to the Reform Act of 1867. From 1906 until 1914 the struggle for enfranchisement made a battle ground of bitter and tempestuous fighting. In 1914 the plunge into an international conflict stilled political antagonisms, promises were given, and partial enfranchisement achieved in 1918.

Now, after sixty years of definite political agitation, the Representation of the People Act of 1928 establishes Equal Franchise at 21 years of age. Women hold in their hands the destinies of their sex and of their country. They find themselves in a majority over men of more than two millions. In such a position, they must realise that their responsibility is as great as their power.

II

Fifty Years of Agitation

Women may well ask why the struggle for elementary justice to women has been so long. If the reply is that it has taken all this time, two generations, to convince men, let them remember that Labour and Trade Union men, and those of the Co-operative Movement, have needed no such period of time. The Trades Union Congress declared in favour of Adult Suffrage in 1901. The Co-operative Union adopted a similar proposal in 1908. The Labour Party, founded in 1900, at its first Conference held in 1901 placed Adult Suffrage at 21 on a short residential qualification on its programme.

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Working men, whether organised industrially in the Trade Unions, politically in the Labour Party, or as consumers in the Co-operative Movement, were the first to realise that men and women should stand together, with political freedom guaranteed by adult suffrage.

The Conservative and Liberal Parties thought otherwise. The Liberal Party included many suffragists, but did not accept Women's Suffrage as part of their policy. The Conservative Party contained fewer suffragists and were not only non-committal but hostile. Let women refresh their memories as to the history of this question since 1906.

Under a Liberal Government from 1906-14, we have the following efforts :—

| | |
|--|--|
| 1908. Women's Suffrage Bill. | Blocked by Tories and Liberals. |
| 1910. Women's Suffrage Bill. | Obtained Second Reading but Liberal Government blocked it. |
| 1912. Electoral Reform Bill by Liberal Government. | Government refused to include Women's Suffrage. |
| 1912. Women's Suffrage Bill. | Defeated by Tories and Liberals. |
| 1913. Women's Suffrage Bill. | Defeated by Tories and Liberals. |

After the war, first under a coalition of Liberals and Tories from 1918-1922, and Tory Governments from then to 1923, this is the history of suffrage measures :—

| | |
|--|---|
| 1919. Labour Bill giving votes to women at 21. | Liberal-Tory Coalition was defeated but House of Lords rejected Bill. |
| 1920. Labour Bill giving votes to women at 21. | Blocked by Liberal-Tory Coalition Government. |

Another Labour Bill was supported by the Labour Government in 1924, but the Government was defeated before the Bill could be passed.

Do not forget that it was not until the General Election of 1924 that a Tory Government was pledged to "Equal Political Rights for Men and Women." Why this tardy conversion? The reason is that Toryism could no longer face Labour at the polls without following Labour's lead in regard to justice to women. Yet when returned to power they delayed and postponed action, defeating one Bill in 1925 and blocking another in 1927 which the Labour Party put forward. At last in 1928, with time pressing on, the General Election in sight, Toryism capitulated to justice and the Equal Franchise Act was passed.

After the Act had received the Royal Assent in June, 1928, the veteran suffrage leader, Dame Millicent Fawcett, addressed a letter to Mr. Ramsay MacDonald as leader of the Labour Party, in which, on behalf of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and the London

and National Society for Women's Service, she expressed their gratitude to him and his Party for the great help and support "they have given all along to our cause." She also said "It was a great point gained for us when one of the Parties definitely adopted our cause and made it their own."

This Party was, of course, the Labour Party.

In view of this history, how can women read unmoved the astounding falsification of facts which appears in a Tory pamphlet :—

"Conservatives have worked for, and welcome, the full co-operation of women in public life."*

III

Who Will Vote in 1929 ?

The electoral register on which the General Election of 1929 will be fought should contain the names of over twenty-five million men and women. The women will number nearly fourteen million, the men about eleven and a quarter. Of the women, over 5,000,000 will be enfranchised under the 1928 Act, about half of whom are women over 30 who are unmarried, or whose husbands were not Local Government electors under the old Act. These include women workers of many kinds, both those living at home and in lodgings, in hostels, colleges, shops, hospitals, and as domestic servants in their employers' homes.

Of well over 2,500,000 women under thirty, some 1,500,000 are between 21 and 25 years of age. These are the youthful voters, the so-called "flapper" vote, at one moment declared by the Tories to be irresponsibly frivolous and at another to be ardent Socialists. They are not the only young people to vote for the first time. It must be remembered that about 1,500,000 young men from 21 to 25 will also go to the polls fresh to their political responsibilities. For these young men were not old enough to be upon the register for the last General Election at the end of 1924. So youth, male and female, will together shoulder its citizen duties for the first time, remembering that, though young in years, the responsibility of earning a living for themselves and often for others has been placed upon them for perhaps ten years past.

There are also other women who will vote for the first time. There are nearly a million married women from 30 to 34 who were below the age of women voters at the last General Election. They will have their first chance now.

* *What the Conservative Government has done for Women and Children, 1925-28. Page 16.*

What high hopes for Labour are to be read in these cheery facts! Youth has always been with us, and now its ranks are recruited by over 2,500,000 women under 30, nearly a further 1,500,000, married and unmarried, from 30 to 35, and 1,500,000 young men up to 25—5,000,000 young men and women with hope still living and eager to claim their right to happiness.

Labour may well look to doubling its last General Election vote of five and a half million.

IV

Responsibility for To-day

The history of our country, and therefore to a large extent the history of the world for the next generation, will be decided by the way in which women use or misuse or fail to use their political power at this General Election. Their first duty is to consider the claims of the three political parties—Tory, Liberal, and Labour. Let them first weigh the responsibility of each for the world in which we are living. Deeds and their consequences speak louder than promises.

Since the beginning of the present century, Tory Governments have held power from 1900 to 1906, 1922-24, 1924-29—or in all for twelve years. Liberal Governments have been in power from 1906-15—for nine years—and a Liberal-Tory Coalition ruled with a Liberal Prime Minister from 1915-22—for seven years.

For just ten months, from January to November, 1924, a Labour Government was in office. Not only was its period of office short, but alone amongst them all, it had no majority in Parliament to support it.

Who must bear the responsibility for what we suffer to-day, the Liberal and Tory Parties which have, one or the other or both together, ruled us for over twenty-seven years, or the Labour Party which formed a minority Government for less than one year?

V

The Appeal to the Woman Voter

With so large an electorate of women, each political party must necessarily direct its appeal to them. Its propaganda must concern itself with policy which it believes will satisfy the needs and aspirations of the woman voter.

For Labour this has meant no change in outlook, but only a further development of some sections of its programme, especially in regard to maternity and child welfare, under the stimulus of its women members. For Toryism, it has meant a complete change, a rightabout

turn which is clearly shown in its recently issued pamphlet, "*What the Conservative Government has done for Women and Children, 1925-28.*"* This has already been distributed free over a very wide area and re-issued with some enlargement. It may therefore be taken as the Government testimony to women, their apologia or their pride of achievement, as the case may be, and the basis of their promises for the future.

We call it a rightabout turn because in these pages the claim to women's support is based on three main premises:

- (1) Its pacifism.
- (2) Its extension of the social services, such as Housing, Education, and Health.
- (3) Its improvement of the standard of living of the people and in family law.

Here we see with surprise Toryism, the apostle of economy in the social services, the wielder of the axe of retrenchment, the scourge of progressive Boards and Councils, claiming credit for doing all those things for which Labour has hitherto been so vigorously abused by Toryism in authority.

In this pamphlet we have the Tory claims to the support of women. We are prepared to challenge them on the ground chosen by themselves. In the following pages we analyse their claims and ask women voters to decide the issue for themselves.

VI

Problems of Peace and War

The first paragraphs of the Tory Appeal to Women, second edition (Peace did not appear in the first edition!) are devoted to the subject of World Peace.

No question can be of deeper concern to women.

The present Government takes credit for five things:—

- (1) It has whole-heartedly supported the League of Nations.
- (2) It promoted the Locarno Treaties.
- (3) It signed the treaty for the renunciation of war known as the Kellogg Pact.
- (4) It has earnestly worked for universal reduction of armaments.
- (5) It has reduced expenditure on defence forces by 5½ millions since 1924.

But when we examine these claims we find the following facts:—

* Published by the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. 16 pages. Price ½d.

(1) The British Government has a war or armaments budget of some £114 millions a year. Yet in 1928 it moved a reduction of £40,000 in the budget of the League of Nations.

(2) It threw over the Geneva Protocol promoted by the Labour Government at the League of Nations Assembly in 1924 and accepted by fourteen nations. It then promoted, without consulting the League, the much less comprehensive arrangements of Locarno, which concerned a number of European States but was not a world-wide scheme like the Protocol. Nor has it resulted in any reduction of armaments nor in the long hoped for withdrawal of troops from the Rhineland—both of them vital questions for peace.

(3) Though signing the Kellogg Pact, it made a statement of exceptions which left the treaty almost meaningless and which greatly increased the difficulties of ratification by the Senate of the U.S.A. The treaty specifically declares that Great Britain retains freedom of action in "certain regions of the world, the welfare and integrity of which constitute a special and vital interest."

(4) How can we reconcile this pretence of earnest desire for universal disarmament with the tactics of postponement of the International Disarmament Conference? Or with the Anglo-French Pact on naval disarmament which was virtually an agreement for unlimited naval forces and an understanding that conscript countries might have unlimited military reserves? While it is true that, following its premature disclosure, this agreement came to naught, we must remember that it had been negotiated by the Government. How also can we reconcile it with the refusal to accept the principle of arbitration in the Optional Clause or to make arbitration treaties with any other countries?

(5) The estimates of 1928-9 for the armed forces are over £114 millions. This is a reduction when compared with the actual expenditure of 1925-6, but not for 1924-5 when Labour was in office. Yet there have been many reasons for reductions. In addition to a fall in wholesale prices there have been Imperial rearrangements of the forces in India and elsewhere, of the mechanisation of warfare which has led to a smaller personnel being needed, and to the reduction of the Civil Service bonus for the administrative staffs. We have a stronger Air Force, new capital ships in the Navy, further developments of chemical warfare. Our war strength is not lessened—the guns, the bombs, and the poison gas are ready to be released. War is a far more present danger than when Labour was promoting the Protocol in 1924.

This danger has been definitely increased by the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Russia in 1927. This brought to an end the efforts to develop trade with that country

which might so materially have relieved our problem of unemployment. Many Tory M.P.'s have now realised the mistake and would gladly reopen the channels of profit-making.

VII

Food Supplies, the Housewife, and the Tory Government

Toryism claims credit for a reduction in food prices. Mr. Baldwin, speaking on high food prices to a meeting of women at the General Election of 1924, declared:—

"There is no subject I am more eager to attack than this and, if returned to power, the Unionist Party will cause an expert investigation to be made at once into the causes of the rises of prices in all foodstuffs of common use among the people of this country. I don't pretend myself to know what those causes are; I am only determined that the causes shall be discovered, and, if it be possible to deal with those causes, they shall be dealt with."*

He appointed a Royal Commission, who had the causes put plainly before them, but all the Government did was to establish a permanent commission in the form of a Food Council, as though an institution with power to talk and to invite witnesses who might refuse to come, or if they came refuse to give information, would abolish profiteering and bring low prices!

After three years this Council, with its powers to talk but not to act, declared to the President of the Board of Trade that it could not get the information it asked for, though it had sent repeated requests. This was especially the case with regard to meat and milk traders. The Government threatened action to give powers, but have not yet taken it. The Food Council is as powerless to-day as three years ago—more powerless, because the traders have now proved its ineffectiveness.

The Government takes credit for an Act dealing with full weight and purity of food. Such legislation covering rather more ground was urged upon the Coalition Government by the Consumers' Council of the Ministry of Food in November, 1918. That Council consisted almost entirely of Labour and Co-operative representatives. In their anxiety to do away with all control of the food traders the Liberal and Tory Coalition rejected this advice. But housewives should remember that the pioneers in this matter, the big traders, *e.g.*, who first gave the full weight for tea, exclusive of heavy wrappings, and sought to provide honestly what the housewives paid for, were the Co-operative Societies, who have gradually by their good example forced other traders to accept and Governments to adopt such legislation.

The Co-operative Movement, to which Toryism is no

* October 15, 1924.

friend, is to-day the chief bulwark of the housewife against high prices. The members of the Co-operative Societies now number nearly 6,000,000, and each year shows an increase; time and time again honest trading in bread, milk, meat, tea and other commodities in the Co-operative organisation has forced private traders to follow their lead.

VIII

Is the Cost of Living Less ?

Let us see how the Tory apologia, which claims a reduction of 2s. in the £1 in the cost of living, manipulates the cost-of-living figures of the Ministry of Labour.

First we note that they compare November cost-of-living figures, 1924, when Labour left office, with April figures in 1928. Secondly they do not compare the figures for the group of household commodities but only for food.

Why is this ?

Because spring prices are always lower than autumn, *i.e.*, April prices than November. Moreover, the fall in prices since 1921, when the cost of living was at its highest, is more marked for food than for the group of general commodities including food. Yet the other commodities are equally necessary, as the housewife must also pay for fuel, light, clothing, rent, soap, household utensils, etc.

Here is the value of £1, judged by what it could buy in July, 1914, compared with what it could buy in general commodities, including food, each quarter in 1921, 1924, and in 1928 :—

| | General Commodities | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|
| | 1921 | 1924 | 1928 |
| March | 8/3 | 11/3 | 12/2 |
| June | 9/1 | 11/10 | 12/1½ |
| September | 9/- | 11/8 | 12/1½ |
| December | 9/1 | 11/0½ | 11/11 |

It will be noted that the reduction of prices was much greater in the years between 1921-24 than in the last four years of Tory rule, a result of Tory finance and industrial policy. If we also pick out special months and compare June, 1924, with December, 1928, the drop is only 1d. in the £.

But still more important to the housewife is the question whether prices ought not to be lower. We can judge this when we note the huge profits made by the following firms which deal in food and other essential commodities :—

| Firm | Latest Ordinary Dividend |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Tate & Lyle (sugar) | 12 per cent. |
| J. & P. Coats Ltd. (sewing cotton) | 17½ " |
| Union Cold Storage (meat) | 10 " |
| United Dairies (milk) | 10 " |
| Maypole (groceries and provisions) .. | 17½ " |
| Meadow Dairy | 30 " |
| Freeman, Hardy & Willis (boots) .. | 20 " |
| J. Hepworth & Co. (clothiers) .. | 10 " |
| Boots (chemists) | 27¼ " |

In addition to dividends, many firms have placed large sums from profits to reserves and to capital expenditure. United Dairies, for example, has undertaken great developments both in this country and abroad, which it has paid for out of profits, though still able to declare a dividend of 10 per cent.

Courtaulds, Ltd. (artificial silk), which paid an ordinary dividend of 25 per cent. tax free in 1927, made a profit of no less than £4,835,921 in that year. In 1920 it distributed share bonuses of 100 per cent. in January, and 200 per cent. in December, and in 1924 made a further share bonus distribution of 66½ per cent., and another 100 per cent. in 1928. The rate of dividend in this case is therefore not a true indication of the real yield of capital invested, and those who have held shares since 1920 have made colossal increases in fortune.

The profits in the tea trade are very striking. For example the 1927 balance sheets, of eighty-eight tea firms, show that the total profits made were close on £5,000,000, and the average ordinary dividend was 31.8 per cent.

Here are fine margins of profit! But the Government has made no effort to stop this profiteering and give the advantage of lower prices to the housewives.

IX

Sins of Taxation—Omission and Commission

They have even helped the profiteers to higher profits still by lowering taxation. There are indeed lower taxes—for income taxpayers! While we accept as good the extra allowances for children where income is low, we have to remember that even the super-tax payer has been helped by Mr. Churchill, as Chancellor, to the tune of £6,700,000 a year.

No mention is made of all those commodities on which Tories have placed duties, thus raising the price of both imported and home-produced supplies, a form of taxation which hits the poorer folk very hard.

These taxes are not all new. Some had lapsed and now have been reimposed, and a smaller number were in operation and have been retained.

THE HOUSEHOLD NECESSITIES NEWLY TAXED OR RETAXED DURING TORY RULE

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Crockery, kettles, pans, etc. | Gas mantles |
| Cutlery, razors, scissors, etc. | Mechanical lighters |
| Gloves | Clocks and watches |
| Silk and artificial silk | Musical instruments |
| Lace and embroidery | Buttons |
| Wrapping paper | |

These taxes amount to over £8½ millions per year. The housewife, of course, pays a great deal more in extra prices.

THE ARTICLES NEWLY TAXED OR RETAXED DURING TORY RULE WHICH INDIRECTLY AFFECT THE WORKERS' COST OF LIVING:—

Motor cars (including 'buses and commercial vehicles)
 Scientific instruments (including spectacles, etc.)
 Cinema films
 Oil (including petrol, thus affecting fares)

The taxes on these amount to £19½ millions a year.

TAXES WHICH THE TORY GOVERNMENT HAS RETAINED:—

| | | |
|--------|----------------|------------------------|
| Tea | Dried fruits | Patent Medicines |
| Sugar | Tobacco | Beer, wine and spirits |
| Coffee | Matches | Aerated waters |
| Cocoa | Entertainments | |

These taxes amount to £231 millions per annum.

The total amount of this taxation is £259,000,000.

Labour reduced food taxation by £30,000,000 and removed several other taxes. On sugar, alone, Labour made a reduction of £18,000,000.

The Tory pamphlet claims credit for reducing the taxation on sugar by £4 millions annually, of which £2,800,000 was due to the reduction in 1928, three years after they had been in office.

Nor does this finish the Tory tale of taxation omitted from the pamphlet under review. Their last year has been notable for a special measure of de-rating, under which all producing industries, whether they are making large profits or not, will have their rates reduced by three-quarters—a measure which will, to quote only one example, give to the brewers and distillers alone an annual gift of £400,000 without a penny of benefit to anyone but the shareholders.

X

Toryism and Our Children

What has Toryism done for education? According to the pamphleteer, it has increased expenditure in England and Wales by £4½ millions since 1924—and the Tory Party are pretending to be pleased about it.

In 1924 the Labour Government saved the schools from the Geddes economy axe, which had been polished and made ready by the Tory-Liberal Coalition. They sent forth to the Education Authorities a call to advance, to plan new school buildings where needed, to reduce the number of classes of 50 and over, to abolish those over 60, to develop free secondary education and to provide more secondary schools. It told them to send forward their plans and that in the Board of Education they would find encouraging friends, not parsimonious critics.

Lord Eustace Percy became Tory President of the Board at the end of 1924. Within two years he was holding up his hands in horror because, as a *result of Labour's work*, the Education Estimates were up by £2½ millions in 1926!

The Tory Government made four definite attacks on education.

- (1) Circular No. 1371 (November, 1925) urged, under threats of cutting down the grant from national funds, reduction in scholarships and other facilities, and exclusion of all children under five years old.
- (2) Memorandum No. 44 (December, 1925) contained further demands for reductions in educational facilities, and especially menaced evening and technical classes.
- (3) Economy Act, 1926, gave unlimited power to the President of the Board of Education to reduce grants.
- (4) Circular No. 1388 (1926) suggested further limitations.

The cutting down of large classes was practically brought to a standstill. Everywhere economy was the chief word. Local Education Authorities were badgered unceasingly, and epic fights took place whenever they sought permission to build new schools or special schools. The policy of Nursery Schools was indefinitely held up. Once the impetus given by Labour was overtaken, education passed into a series of lean years.

Yet this Tory pamphlet makes the audacious claim to credit for increasing expenditure, reduction in the numbers in classes, and other improvements.

Let us investigate the most important of these, the reduction of numbers in classes.

| | Over 50, but under 60 | Over 60 | Total over 50 |
|-------------------|--------------------------|---------|------------------|
| March 31, 1923 .. | 27,166 | 4,022 | 31,188 |
| „ 1924 .. | 24,478 | 494 | 24,972 |
| „ 1925 .. | 20,708 | 637 | 21,345 |
| „ 1926 .. | 19,740 | 242 | 19,982 |
| „ 1927 .. | 19,934 | 278 | 20,212 |

Note the reduction under the stimulus of Labour Government, and the slowing down, and finally the increasing numbers of large classes in 1927!

XI

The Widowed and the Fatherless

“Women,” says Toryism, “we stand before you proud in our boast that we have given widows' and orphans' pensions and old-age pensions at sixty-five to 1,500,000 men, women and children.”

“Not so fast,” says the wise woman, who thinks before she votes. “Pensions for widows and their children were the subject of Labour agitation from 1911 until 1924. Toryism adopted the principle in that year, and placed it on its election manifesto for the first time. Labour had had this on its election manifesto in 1918, 1922, and 1923.”

Labour had fought for it in the House of Commons every year from 1918; not until 1924 did the Labour resolution in its favour gain acceptance. Defeat of the Labour Government came too soon to bring the principle into operation.

Labour stood for a national non-contributory scheme with a pension at least equal to that given to war widows and orphans. For the aged it made some improvement in 1924, and more was to come.

Toryism introduced and, against all Labour's efforts to bring it into line with these principles, carried, a compulsory contributory scheme with amounts of payment so small as to justify the term "bread and margarine" pensions.

Moreover, the scheme, coupled with old-age pensions at sixty-five, is full of anomalies and injustices which leave over 52,000 widows outside it altogether, and make at least 30,000 men of sixty-five rue the day when Parliament adopted it.

The workers' weekly contribution deducted from wages is 4d. for men and 2d. for women. A widow who is declared ineligible and is at work, must still lose her 2d. The pension rates of 10s. a week for the woman, 5s. and 3s. for the first and other children respectively, are so low that the mother must work, starve, or receive Poor Law relief. She goes into an already crowded labour market, and with the subsidy of the pension endangers the whole wage rate of pensionless women.

But 52,000 widows have failed to qualify either because their husbands died too early or at too advanced an age, or because they did not have the requisite 104 stamps on their insurance cards for the two years preceding death.

The widows of earlier date than 1926 with children under fourteen received a pension if their husbands were insurable persons. But so soon as their youngest child reaches fourteen and a half the mother ceases to draw anything. She is thrown penniless upon the world again.

Moreover, workmen's compensation awards are taken into consideration in reckoning the pensions. The children may not receive a full award and full pension.

XII

Injustices to the Old Workers

With the aged the anomalies are still more marked, though they may have fewer years of privation before them.

1st. Old-age pensions were not previously contributory but gifts of the nation to those who had served it. Now those of 65 must have qualified by deductions from wages.

2nd. The insured person gets a pension of 10s. when he reaches sixty-five. His wife does not get it until she

is also sixty-five. If she is sixty-five before he is, she must wait until he reaches that age. But if he was seventy before the Act came into force, she will not get a pension until she is also seventy!

3rd. Women widowed before 1926 with no children under fourteen must wait until they are seventy.

4th. An unemployed man or woman of sixty-four drawing unemployment benefit loses it when he or she reaches the age of sixty-five, *whether qualified to draw a pension or not.* There are 30,000 such cases to-day, and there are 300,000 men and 24,000 women of sixty-five and over who are in work now but who, if unemployed, would not be able to draw benefit.

If a man was drawing benefit he got 17s. and 7s. for his wife—24s. He drops suddenly to 10s., and if his wife is under sixty-five, she gets no pension. Their income therefore falls from 24s. to 10s. If he cannot establish his claim to pension, the income disappears altogether.

5th. A man drawing sickness benefit suffers in the same way, falling from 15s. or more to 10s. a week. The saving to National Health Insurance on sickness and disablement benefit is reckoned at £1,800,000 a year. Much of that saving is loss for the old folk.

6th. "Need" pensions are being reduced and blind pensions taken away from those who draw the Tory "gift."

7th. The pension is too small to enable an aged worker to retire altogether, yet employers may reduce his wages, and have many times done so. The aged are thus being used to depress wages rates for other adults.

8th. Other employers take the step of dismissing old workers so soon as they begin to draw pensions.

XIII

Exchequer Gains on Pensions

The pension scheme is so planned that gradually the cost will be moved from national taxation to the funds contributed, one part by the workers, one by the employers, one by the State. Already in two and a quarter years £51,219,000 has been collected. The cost of pensions and administration is only £18,626,000, so that there is a surplus of £32,593,000. The Government, in answer to a Labour question, refused to consider an increase of the pension at sixty-five. This would have markedly reduced unemployment by allowing large numbers of older workers to retire.

Labour has already tried by all means open to an Opposition to get the Government to deal with these questions, but absolutely without effect. The anomalies and injustices are admitted, but they refuse the remedies.

XIV

Motherhood

The care of mother and baby is one of the bases of a healthy community, and yet it is only of recent years that the State has taken powers to improve it. Since the passing of the Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918, a slow and painful advance has been made in the development of these services.

While Labour was in office, a Circular was dispatched by the Minister of Health to all Local Authorities urging them on, and especially drawing attention to the high maternal death-rate and their power to establish services to combat it. Of these, three powers are most important:—

- (1) Provision of advice during pregnancy.
- (2) Provision of food or milk for the expectant or nursing mother.
- (3) Provision of medical and nursing care at childbirth, together with provision of maternity homes, hospital wards, and services of the best consultants.

The Labour Government referred this question of medical and nursing care, amongst others, to a Royal Commission on the National Health Insurance Acts.

The first comprehensive report on Maternal Mortality was published by the Labour Minister of Health during 1924, and mothers might have confidently anticipated rapid developments.

Alas, Toryism took the place of Labour. The clock could not be stopped, but progress could be delayed. Expenditure necessarily increased, for the services, once started, could not be altogether abandoned.

XV

Milk for Mothers

Two things, however, stand out.

The Royal Commission has reported, and its recommendations on this subject are still unfulfilled.

The other is more clearly retrograde. The Minister of Health in April, 1928, decided to cut down the grants to a large number of Local Authorities for the supply of milk to expectant and nursing mothers. On July 24 he thus explained his action to a deputation of twelve Metropolitan Borough Councils:—

“The reduction complained of had been made in view of the general need for economy. It has been impossible for him, as a member of the Government, to resist some economy being effected even in the estimates of the Ministry of Health. After a careful review of all the facts, he had come to the conclusion that there were only two possible

ways in which the necessary saving could be effected. One was to stop for the time being any further development of maternity and child welfare services, and the other was to make some reduction in the grants paid for the supply of milk.”

On October 30, 1928, dealing with the question at a Conference on Maternal Mortality at the Central Hall, Westminster, he said:—

“Some give nothing at all, others give as much as £20 per 1,000 of the population. They can't all be right. The fact is there is no definite standard that you can lay down. It is a matter on which there is a difference of opinion among different localities, and, that being so, what I had to do was this: First of all, I excluded from the operation of the cut certain distressed mining areas in Lancashire, in Durham, and in South Wales. Secondly, I cut out all the Authorities that were spending less than £100 on this particular service. There was nothing cut off those. To the rest I was obliged to say: ‘You must supply what milk you choose, but this is all I can give you from national resources,’ and, ladies and gentlemen, it is up to those Local Authorities, according to the importance that they attach to this particular service, to go on as they have been doing and pay the difference out of the rates—and it is not a very large sum—or to cut down the milk.”

The total saving to be effected on these mothers who are certified to be in need of nourishment (and unable to get it) by the Officers of Local Authorities is £12,000. This reduction of grant is not mentioned in the Tory pamphlet.

The Tory Minister has appointed two Committees of inquiry into: (1) The causes of each maternal death; and (2) the organisation of the midwifery services. These inquiries are admittedly needed.

Great public interest having been aroused since 1924 in this subject, and Committees after all being cheap, we need not be surprised that the Tory Minister granted the demand for them.

But mothers will do well to see that these Committees report to a Labour and not a Tory Minister. We do not want the recommendations pigeon-holed with those of the Royal Commission or treated in the same spirit as dictated the milk policy.

XVI

Where Shall We Live?

Houses for heroes, for heroines, for ordinary decent people—where are we to find them?

“Nearly 800,000 of the 1,100,000 of the houses built since the Armistice have been erected since the present Government was in office.” Thus runs the boast in this Tory pamphlet.

This shows two things. The first is that the Liberal and Tory Coalition and the Tory Governments up to the end of 1923, as well as since, have basely neglected their duties. More than 2,000,000 additional *working-class* houses to let have been urgently needed during that period to make up for pre-war shortage, increase of population, and ordinary wear and tear in the fourteen years since 1914. Not one-half have been supplied, for of the total about one-third are not for working-class occupation.

The second is that not until Labour had passed its Housing Act of 1924 and made a treaty with the building trades was any real advance made in building. The output steadily and substantially increased from 1924 up to the reduction of the subsidy in October, 1927.

The total number of “Wheatley” (*i.e.*, Labour Act) Houses completed up to the end of 1928 is 222,643 and its popularity has grown greater each year.

But there is a very serious omission from the statement on housing. In 1927 the Tory Government made reductions in the rate of subsidies for house building both to Local Authorities and others. The result of this was that the number of houses built in the year after the reduction fell by over 50 per cent., *i.e.*, from 212,389 in year ending September, 1927, to 101,761 in year ending September, 1928. Moreover, the increase of unemployment amongst the building trade workers rose from 8.9 per cent. in September, 1927, to 11.4 per cent. in 1928. A further cut was made at the end of 1928, which reduced still more the subsidy on Wheatley houses and abolished it on the others.

What, again, is to be said of slum clearances? Of over-crowding?

The number of *families* inhabiting one room only at the last census (1921) was 317,417 for England and Wales and 99,302 for Scotland. The numbers occupying only two rooms were respectively 917,958 and 400,353. That is over 1,335,000 families in two rooms or less. Yet the Tory pamphlet boasts of slum clearance schemes in hand which will rehouse 67,000 *people* not *families*.

Houses are still urgently needed. In 1928, over 137,000 people applied for houses to the London County Council, 34,000 are still on Glasgow's waiting list, and as late as 1925 the Scottish estimate of need was 118,327 houses.

Still more of a failure is the Rural Housing policy, which indiscriminately subsidises private landlords who may im-

prove their private property at the expense of public funds. The pamphlet gives no figures of its success—and for a good reason. They are not to be found!

XVII

Law and Family Relations

The Government claim credit for securing certain Acts of Parliament in the years 1925-28, which have improved the position of women and children in regard to what is most conveniently called Family Law.

In the first column we give the claim, in the second appears a short summary of the facts omitted from the pamphlet:—

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) <i>Guardianship of Infants Act</i> , 1925. Secures equality in the matter of guardianship by mothers and fathers. | A non-party measure originally introduced by a private member. The Labour Government held conferences of interested parties and introduced a Bill which failed through lack of time. Re-introduced in 1925. |
| (2) <i>Adoption of Children Act</i> , 1926. Legalises and provides safeguards for adoption. | Introduced by a private member as a result of a Committee of Inquiry set up by the Labour Government after many attempts to get an agreed measure. Second Reading carried without a division. |
| (3) <i>Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Act</i> , 1925. Makes better provision for married women obliged to apply to the Courts for Separation Orders. | Introduced on several occasions by private members. Labour adopted the Bill introduced in 1924, and it passed from the Commons to the Lords, but did not get further owing to lack of time. Reintroduced in 1925. |
| (4) <i>Legitimacy Act</i> , 1926. Legitimises children born out of wedlock by subsequent marriage of parents. | Measure agreed to by all parties as result of long consideration. Second Reading unopposed. |

These Acts leave Family Law still incomplete, but every one of them would have been passed, whatever Government had been in power. Not one was a Party measure and all had Labour support.

XVIII

Gambling and Moneylending

Toryism claims women's support on the basis of the Racecourse Betting Act, 1928, which established the Totalisator. They do so on the ground that one clause makes bets on a racecourse illegal by young persons who appear to be under 17!

But the whole Act was opposed by every anti-gambling association in the country, fought strenuously by Labour M.P.'s, and an amendment to exclude altogether young persons under 17 from enclosed places on racecourses for the purposes of betting was moved by Labour and defeated by the Tories.

As to the Moneylending Act, again we have a private member's Bill, supported by all parties, but touching a small corner of the evils of usury, and again Labour's attempts to strengthen the Bill were defeated by Toryism.

XIX

A Miscellaneous Group

The Mental Deficiency Act, 1927, designed to protect persons suffering from mental effects of "sleepy sickness" was once more a private member's Bill, supported by all parties. So was the Nursing Homes Registration Act, 1927—a measure long overdue, and especially keenly fought for by Labour M.P.'s.

On the Shops (Hours of Closing) Act, 1928, Labour fought strongly to get stricter enforcement of closing hours legislation, and to prevent the wide extension of long hours for the sale of certain commodities and the power to abolish the half-day in holiday resorts. One Labour amendment was secured, that which gives to shop assistants in these cases extra holidays in lieu of extra time worked.

Finally there is the claim in regard to that big measure, the Criminal Justice Amendment Act, 1925, women should be grateful because it developed and improved the probation system for offenders. This Act was already being considered when the Labour Government was in office. The Tory Home Secretary altered many features, and one of the biggest changes, strenuously fought by Labour, provided less control and less advantageous conditions for the appointment, conditions of employment, and qualifications of probation officers!

XX

Frustrated Efforts of Labour, 1924-28

While dealing with these private Bills it is worth while to note some of Labour's attempts by means of private Bills to improve the social services and the general welfare of the people. The following is a small selection of Bills introduced by Labour M.P.'s, to which further progress was denied by the Tory Government:—

Hours of Industrial Employment Bill, 1925, 1926, and 1928.

Coal Mines Minimum Wage Bill, 1925.

Blind Persons Bill, 1925, 1926, and 1928.

Prevention of Unemployment Bill, 1926, 1927, and 1928.

Factories Bill, 1926, 1927, and 1928.

Coal Supplies Bill (To enable municipalities to retail coal), 1925.

Offices Regulation Bill (To improve conditions in offices as to ventilation, light, warmth, etc.), 1925, 1926, 1927, and 1928.

Unoccupied Houses Bill (For reconditioning large empty houses for working-class occupation), 1925.

Widows', Orphans' and Old Age Pensions Amendment Bill, 1927.

Agencies and Registries Bill, 1928.

Children and Young Persons (Employment and Protection) Bill, 1928.

Children (Provision of Footwear Bill), 1928.

Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Bill, 1927.

XXI

Black Record on Unemployment

No woman voter in this country will go to the Poll without some thoughts on the tragic problem of unemployment. Upon whom does its burden fall more heavily than on women, whether as workers or as wives and mothers, and on children, the most helpless victims and the most frequent of its casualties?

Yet in the whole of this record of what the present Government has done for women and children, there is only one reference to unemployment.

This seeks approval for the arrangement of "courses of instruction in useful trades for young persons of sixteen to eighteen years of age," under the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1927.

But women should note that there was no such provision in the Tory Bill when it was introduced. It was a Labour amendment which secured this concession from the Tory Government, so that boys and girls might not be left to eat their bitter bread of unemployment in wretched idleness.

Against the provision of a number, still very insufficient, of training centres for juveniles, must be placed the fact that Toryism has reduced the amount of benefit of all young people up to twenty-one. Labour proposed increases, but failed to do more than modify the Government's original proposals.

The present scales under the Tory Act of 1927 are as follows:—

| | Age | Government's original proposals Amount | Benefits finally fixed | Reduction on existing scales |
|--------------|-------|---|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Adult males, | 20 | 10s. | 14s. | 4s. |
| " " | 19 | 10s. | 12s. | 6s. |
| " " | 18 | 10s. | 10s. | 8s. |
| „ females, | 20 | 8s. | 12s. | 3s. |
| " " | 19 | 8s. | 10s. | 5s. |
| " " | 18 | 8s. | 8s. | 7s. |
| Juveniles, | | | | |
| males | 16-18 | 6s. | 6s. | 1s. 6d. |
| females | 16-18 | 5s. | 5s. | 1s. |

For women, however, the whole conditions of unemployment insurance are infinitely important. The Tory Act of 1927, if fully brought into operation in April, 1929, means on their own admission, that 30,000 men, women and young people will be thrown off benefit because they cannot produce thirty stamps on their cards in the last two years. Even before that provision has been enforced, constant refusal of benefit through harsh administration of the words "not genuinely seeking work" is throwing thousands of men and women into the limbo of despair. The recent disclosures of the existence of private instructions and private reports never seen by the applicants appealing against decisions has sent a shiver of fear through the hearts of many a wife and mother. They are feeling their helplessness in the hands of a Government to whom they are not human beings but expensive burdens.

Little wonder that unemployment is omitted. But for the Government it is the inescapable battleground.*

What have they done to keep their pledge to cure it? The figures speak for themselves:—

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----|----|----|-----------|
| October 27, 1924 | .. | .. | .. | 1,203,229 |
| December 29, 1924 | .. | .. | .. | 1,273,885 |
| October 29, 1928 | .. | .. | .. | 1,374,741 |
| December 31, 1928 | .. | .. | .. | 1,520,700 |

This is an increase of almost a quarter of a million for the later date, or of over 300,000 since Labour went out of office.

These are the known and registered unemployed. We must add very many to them who no longer register because it is of no avail. Many of these are to be found in the Poor Law returns, which for England and Wales alone in September, 1928, showed 385,000 able-bodied unemployed and their dependants in receipt of relief.

They are also to be found in the casual wards and tramping the roads—single men, young and old, out of benefit, refused outdoor relief, for whom vagrancy or the prison of the workhouse are the only alternatives. Even enlistment is closed to more than two-thirds of them as physically unfit. In still worse plight, perhaps, are the unemployed single women, of whom even a larger proportion are denied benefit than amongst men. We know little of what happens to those who have no homes, though we may imagine a tragedy of horror for many.

* Mr. Baldwin in his Election Address, 1924, said:

"The Unionist Party would be unfaithful to its principles and to its duty if it did not treat the task of grappling with the unemployment of our people as a primary obligation."

A Tory Headquarters official leaflet (No. 2415) said:—

"The Unionist Party has a positive remedy for unemployment. . . . Constant work at good wages will be secured for all who desire and seek it."

There are omitted also the greater numbers of young boys and girls under sixteen, who leave school and find no work, learning the ills of idleness before they have known the responsibility of earning—the youngsters so full of hope and so soon to know the empty despair of unemployment.

XXII

Treacherous Desertion on Industrial Questions

The Tory Government came into office pledged to introduce a new Factory Act which would codify and extend the present one. The promise was definite in the King's Speech of 1924 and repeated each year until 1928, when it was omitted. A Bill was introduced in 1926, printed—and dropped. The opposition of Tory employers did its deadly work, and the prevention of accidents and improvements in factory and workshop conditions so eagerly awaited by workers—and especially women workers—in textile and other employments is now postponed until Labour is in power.*

So also with the establishment of a maximum forty-eight hour week for workers in all forms of industrial employment. The British Government representatives were pledged to this at the International Labour Conference held under the League of Nations auspices at Washington in 1919. But Liberal and Tory administrations refused to turn it into law. Labour had prepared its Bill when it was defeated. After four years of hesitation the Tory Government has now completed its betrayal by asking that the whole Convention on hours be referred by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office of the League of Nations at Geneva to the International Labour Conference in 1929.

Equally bad is the record on Trade Boards, which are established to fix minimum rates in trades paying low wages. The Labour Government had instituted inquiries into the catering, drapery, and meat distributing trades as a first step towards the establishment of a Trade Board for each. The reports were presented after a Tory Ministry had replaced Labour. The Government's decision to take no action was announced before the reports were published,

* On October 28, 1927, Sir William Joynson-Hicks, speaking on his Factories Bill, said:

"The Bill will make balustrades on staircases in factories compulsory. Fancy balustrades being rank Socialism! It will make mechanical shuttles take the place of present methods and conserve women's health. Every week one man is killed in mills through being caught in overhead shafting. Is it rank Socialism to try to prevent that? If so, I would be ashamed of the Conservative Party if it failed to prevent it."

But he let the Bill drop and the pledge go unfulfilled.

though these showed conditions which amply justified the Labour demand. They dissolved the Grocery Trade Board affecting thousands of workers—and established one for Drift Net Menders—who number a mere handful.

Their administration of the Boards has been similar in spirit—a restrictive and unsympathetic supervision, doing much to cripple their usefulness to the workers concerned.

XXIII

Tragedy of the Coalfields

But beyond all other deeds and omissions, working women must always remember these years of Tory rule for the great agony of the Miners' lock-out of 1926 and the devastation of the coalfields, which has culminated in the black poverty of the winter of 1928-29. The bitter anger of Toryism when the workers made their magnificent stand by means of the General Strike in the efforts to prevent the miners from being forced down to lower wages and longer hours has not been mitigated. They took their first revenge in standing by the mineowners, helping them by passing the Eight Hour law to lengthen hours, and after eight months of struggle leaving them unrestrained to inflict upon the men the abominable rate of wages now being paid. In the next year they took further revenge by the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Act, intended to cripple the unions, and at least for a few years to injure the political opponents of Toryism, the Labour Party, by an attack upon their funds.

The women of the workers' movement can never forget the eight months of 1926 when they collected money and clothes for the miners' wives and children, and the babies who came into the world in those dark days. They will never forget that the Government stood beside the mineowners while a million men, their wives and their children, were beaten by cold and hunger, and their standard of life destroyed.

The two years since have seen the struggle intensified until the greater part of the mining areas have become devastated territory, creating a national crisis with which the Government has at last been forced to deal. Yet even now, when the privation constitutes a national shame, the Government has confined itself to making a bargain with charity instead of meeting the national need.

In the beginning of December, 1928, at the instance of organised working women, a private member's Bill was introduced by Margaret Bondfield, M.P., backed by women M.P.'s of all parties, to provide footwear for children in any distressed areas, whether mining or not. It passed its Second Reading, but the Government refused to accept

even this small effort to deal with a crying need, and fell back instead on voluntary effort and charity.

Meanwhile we know well that it is not only in the coal-fields and amongst the miners that distress exists in this bitter winter. Steelworkers, engineers, shipwrights, textile operatives, dockers, and factory workers—all have their hard problem of unemployment.

Toryism has utterly failed to find a solution of the problem. Forced at last by an agitation, in which organised working women played a large part, to face the facts of distress, they can do no more than appeal to charity. The war of poverty has become a true war of attrition, creating fresh casualties for which they have provided no more than temporary dressing stations.

And this is the Government which went into office calling for "peace in our time"!

XXIV

Poor Law and Local Government

Nothing in the Government record is more damaging than their dealings with the unemployed who have no means of support. They have pursued a steady policy of "tightening up administration." This means the harassing, hampering, and finally the supersession of any Board of Guardians which endeavours to provide humane conditions for its unemployed and those dependent upon them.

To Labour's continual demands that unemployment is a national problem and not a local one, that the distressed areas cannot support the burden on their rates, the Government has been deaf.

Reduce the rates of relief, give none to single able-bodied unemployed whether men or women, give test work or offer the workhouse—these have been the commands of the Minister. When they were not obeyed, he took power in 1926 to effect his will by the Guardians Default Act, which permits him to turn out the elected Boards and place Commissioners appointed by himself in their place. This has been done in three unions: Bedwelty, Chester-le-Street, and West Ham, with immediate effect in creating more privation and misery than was known before. Next, the Audit Act of 1928 enormously increased the powers of the auditor to surcharge Guardians or Councillors of Municipal bodies, not merely for corrupt or negligent or illegal expenditure, but even for the payment of wages or relief or carrying out any considered policy of which the auditor disapproves.

Moreover the penalties of surcharge were made such as to drive out of public life those to whom they might be applied.

Thus have the elected of the people in Local Government

been cramped and confined. For the influence of the two Acts is very great, going far beyond the areas in which their powers have been most fully exercised.

XXV

The Last Work of Toryism

The Local Government Bill carries this work further. It purports to reform the Poor Law, but in fact it transfers it practically unaltered to County Councils and County Boroughs, creating a confusing chaos of Public Health, Education, and Poor Law functions. It abolishes the Boards of Guardians, but not the Poor Law. In some areas the Poor Law will be in large measure broken up, in others it will remain intact. Relief will be administered by committees of the County and County Borough Councils, on which co-opted members may serve and which will work through local committees, on which, again, co-option will be an important feature.

But the destitute unemployed will remain, as before, a local burden dealt with under the harassing and callous regulations of the Poor Law, administered, when Toryism is in power, with all possible rigour.

The finance of the scheme has two main features. Under the de-rating proposals productive industry is released from three-fourths of its rates, and agricultural land and buildings from the whole. Prosperous or not, every enterprise shares the advantage of this release from rates, which is to be paid for out of the proceeds of the petrol tax (to which of course many of them have contributed). In most cases de-rating will make no material difference to costs. For agricultural land it will often be passed on in the form of increased rent to the landlord. For many business firms it will be a welcome present to the shareholder. Meanwhile the loss to the rates will be compensated in an unscientific way by a special block grant from national funds, which will be reconsidered in three years. This amount is regulated by an extraordinary and unintelligible mathematical formula with the object of giving more to distressed areas—a vague and undefined term—and in practice leads to fantastic results.

Finally the percentage grant system, which has been so effective in developing the social services, is to be swept away, so far as public health is concerned, though maintained for education.

The establishment of the block grant system in place of the 50 per cent. from national funds and 50 per cent. from local funds is a heavy blow to maternity and child welfare—new services which need for their development all the financial encouragement which can be given.

The whole scheme is a proof of the Government's ill-will towards the extension of the services for which Labour has so constantly pressed. The Bill, which is being rapidly forced through the House of Commons, with scarcely a chance for discussion, is a serious attack on Local Government, and its democratic development, which has been one of the proudest passages in the history of our country.

XXVI

What of the Liberal Party?

What are we to say of the claim of Liberalism to women's votes? A vote for the Liberal Party is a vote given to the past. The Liberal Party is small—but not indivisible. It is notable for the frequency with which its few M.P.'s are to be found in three different places during a vote: one group voting Aye; one group voting No; and the third often the largest, not voting at all. During the discussions on the Unemployment Insurance Bill in 1927—a Bill of primary importance to workers—the Liberal Front Bench was conspicuous for its emptiness.

But if the Liberal Party were solidly one, it would make little difference. Its history since the war has been one of growing enfeeblement and indecision. The Liberal Left has lost its most brilliant members to Labour, and the most important figure of the Liberal Right has gone over to the Tories. Its policy balances between Toryism and Labour in the same way.

When we turn to judge it by deeds, we find that the failure of the Liberal-Tory Coalition, with the present leader of the Liberal Party as Prime Minister, was due to the betrayal of every Liberal element which stood for democratic government to the Tory capitalism. Judged by the past, Liberalism has always capitulated to capitalist demands, its pretensions have even been fairer than its practice, and its decay is the retribution which follows the public recognition of its incapacity to provide any genuine alternative to Toryism.

It has always been in the main the party of the wealthy middle classes. Such is the outlook, *e.g.*, in the leaflet issued from Liberal headquarters in an industrial constituency, where the women textile workers were largely unemployed or on part time, at a recent bye-election. We quote the following words:—

“Suppose you have a free half-day, and you decide to do a little shopping. You buy a piece of real silk and some artificial silk to make a frock and some under-garments, a couple of pairs of artificial silk stockings, and one pair of real silk, a pair each of kid and fabric gloves . . .”

This is the utterance of a party which knows very little of the life of the average woman voter.

We have already described the Liberal weakness in regard to Women's Suffrage. It is typical of the general attitude of the party—a mixed group but not a possible Government, and therefore of little importance to the practical minds of working women who want to use their votes to get things done.

XXVII

LABOUR'S PROGRAMME

Happy Childhood

The shortest and truest expression of the Labour Party's aim is the achievement within the nation of the conditions which are necessary for happy childhood. This may at first thought seem too simple an object for the statesmanship of a great political party, which we confidently expect will in 1929 prove itself the first party in the State.

The trend of political development quickened by the admission of women to political power has been to make the child—humanity's pledge to the future—its central figure. Our hopes of the perfectibility of human life, of the struggle upwards from the harsh miseries of many lives to-day, lead us towards the creation of that finer environment which should form the setting of the men and women of the future; and at the same time, the most pressing practical concern of men and women to-day is to take from the lives of their own children the ills of preventable sickness, ignorance and failure, and to make of family life a harmony of well-being, material and spiritual.

We seek in political activity, as well as in other phases of life, to abolish cruelty and fear, the diseases of the spirit; ignorance, the disease of the mind; and sickness, the disease of the body.

But when we speak of this central aim we do not mean that the programme of Labour is all directly concerned with children's needs. What we mean is that the effect of any measure on the nation's children is the test, the touchstone of its value. To that test we ask women to submit Labour's policy; and that same test they should apply to the programmes of all other parties. Nor do we claim that Labour's programme will complete this task. But we do submit that it takes us along the right road, it puts us on our journey which growing power and wisdom will carry to stages far beyond those we contemplate at this General Election.

XXVIII

Why Not Be Socialists?

The Labour Party works for the establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth based on the co-operative activities

of the people. Its measures are Socialist and will in their development carry us to this end. We ask women not to be frightened about words. Socialism is the alternative to capitalism; capitalism we have to-day, though mitigated in its worst aspects by partially Socialist measures, such as Unemployment Insurance, Old Age Pensions, Trade Boards, Feeding of School Children, Maternity and Child Welfare Services, Housing and Health Acts. Do we not know well how much these would help us if they had been planned and administered by Socialists who thoroughly believed in them? Then why not frankly accept the principles of Socialism from which spring all these methods of helping one another, of joining together to seek our common welfare?

XXIX

Labour and the Nation

Labour's programme has been set forth in a great call to the nation which was endorsed by the Party Conference at Birmingham in October, 1928. In this document, the aims of the Party and the objects which it would serve on attaining power are fully described.* The present report only deals with some parts of Labour's policy and deals with those very shortly. We urge all women keenly interested to refer for fuller treatment to the many pamphlets issued by the Labour Party, of which a selection is given in the footnote below. We ask women to judge Labour—as we have judged the Tory Party—on its own record and publications.†

The policy of Labour, which would be carried out when a Labour Government came into office, would deal primarily with the worker's need for security against poverty at home and war abroad, for a high standard of life, including decent housing conditions and cheap and plentiful food and other necessary supplies, for a high level of health, which includes

* *Labour and the Nation*. Price 3d.

| | Price | Post free |
|---|-------|-----------|
| † Maternal Mortality (together with Report of National Conference of Labour Women) .. | 3d. | 4½d. |
| Children First | 1d. | 1½d. |
| How the Tory Government has Disappointed the Old Folks and the Widows | 1d. | 1½d. |
| Why Food is Dear | 2d. | 2½d. |
| Health and Welfare of Mothers and Babies .. | 1d. | 1½d. |
| The Labour Party and the Nursing Profession | 3d. | 3½d. |
| Education when Labour Rules Again | 1d. | 1½d. |
| What the Open-Air Nursery School Is | 1d. | 1½d. |
| Boys and Girls: Their Education, Employment and Environment | 1d. | 1½d. |
| "On the Dole" or Off! What to do with Britain's Workless | 2d. | 2½d. |
| Labour's Policy in Agriculture | 2d. | 2½d. |

the special care of maternity, and for a high level of education, which would open the way to the worker's child from nursery school to university.

XXX

Security Against Poverty

This security means three things :—

(1) Industrial and agricultural development, which will make the worker, man or woman, sure of a job. The supersession of the incapable mineowners by establishing public ownership of the mines (*i.e.*, nationalisation of the mines) will give us an opportunity to restore prosperity to this most important industry.

The nationalisation of agricultural land will enable us to develop our own powers of growing foodstuffs and thus cheapen and improve food supplies while providing new avenues of useful employment.

The development of friendly relations with other countries, such as Russia and China, and the establishment of better relations with India, will widen our markets and help create prosperity for our industries.

(2) Better wages and conditions of employment will be secured by freeing the trade unions from the shackles of the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Act of 1927, and by taking the workers through their unions into partnership in controlling the industries in which they are employed. The Labour Party will secure a new Factory Act on the same lines as that introduced by Mr. Henderson in 1924. It will develop Trade Boards, establish the maximum 48-hour week, improve Workmen's Compensation, make better provision against accidents, repeal the Miners' Eight Hours Act, and pass legislation for better regulation of offices and better conditions for young workers.

The Labour Party is also pledged to forward the policy of equal pay for the same job for men and women.

Children's Allowances

But there is a further problem of special interest to women—namely, the question of Children's Allowances. On this the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress have a Joint Committee still sitting, and a final decision has not yet been reached. It is, however, to be noted that at the Labour Party Conference in 1928 it was stated that, while no final decision could yet be given, a majority of that Joint Committee had accepted the view that the principle of Family Allowances, *i.e.*, an allowance in cash for each child, paid by the State, should be adopted, such allowances to begin at birth and continue through school life, such principle to be applied as circumstances might permit.

Unemployment

(3) Unemployment must be dealt with drastically. It is the running sore of capitalist society, worse now than we have ever known it, but never absent save in the abnormal and hideous conditions of war time. Let women remember that only when there was a vast demand for instruments of destruction was the fear of unemployment absent from their minds—a condemnation alike of capitalism and its offspring, international war.

Labour's policy on unemployment is threefold :

1st. The development of schemes for improving our national resources by land drainage, roads, prevention of coast erosion, afforestation, etc.

2nd. The cutting off supplies to the labour market at both ends by raising the school-leaving age and providing maintenance allowances and by giving more ample old-age pensions to men and women of sixty-five, or if necessary sixty, thus enabling them to rest in comfort instead of forcing them to compete for jobs.

Further by wise schemes of emigration in groups with proper provision for settlement and development in newer countries pressure would be relieved to some small extent.

3rd. Provision of decent maintenance for those out of work and their dependants. Labour would not tolerate the present low rates, especially for young people, nor the harrying of single men and women now taking place. Women should not be forced unwillingly into domestic service because they are out of work, and efforts should be made to extend more varied training schemes to both men and women.

XXXI

Security Against War

Labour stands for peace between the peoples. We must turn our minds from thinking of what to do if war breaks out to the problem of building a world at peace. One of the first objects of Labour would therefore be to reopen relations with Russia, without which world peace must always be menaced.

A Labour Government would work to make arbitration and conciliation the method of settling disputes between nations, and strive to reach agreements in this direction by frank and open diplomacy. On such a basis of security the total disarmament at which Labour aims can best be gained. But it would also try to make peaceful relations worth while to everybody. It would endeavour to make the League of Nations all inclusive and democratic, giving to every nation the right to live and develop on its own lines. It would stand firmly for the establishment of

international agreements, setting up good standards in industry, commerce, and agriculture.

In the British Empire it would seek the establishment of a Commonwealth of Free Nations, and would look to the inclusion of India amongst the self-governing Dominions. In those areas in which native races cannot yet develop the necessary democratic institutions, it would aim at a policy which would lead as quickly as possible to this end, always recognising the paramount right of those races to be protected against economic exploitation, political and moral injustice.

When Labour took office in 1924, it was greeted throughout the world as the hope of peace. In eight months of office its greatest accomplishment was in this direction. It reinforced and led every peace-seeking element in the League of Nations. It prepared the way for a wider development of world peace by opening friendly relations with Russia. Its promotion of the Protocol and the International Conference on Disarmament which was to follow on its acceptance was the biggest step forward since the war.

When Labour fell in the General Election of 1924, fear of war came again upon the world. When Labour triumphs in 1929, as it will if the women are awake to their responsibilities, hope of peace will once more revive in the oppressed hearts of men and women throughout the world.

XXXII

Standards of Life

Labour stands for the building of houses to let at a reasonable rent. To achieve this, the Wheatley scheme must be fully carried out, the prices and supplies of building materials controlled, and Local Authorities encouraged to work by direct labour, which has proved so much less costly.

It is women's special task to keep a watchful eye upon housing plans to ensure that full use is made of labour-saving appliances, electricity, and that the needs of the housewife are well provided for.

Labour advocates special provisions of a more liberal character in rural areas, so that there may be sufficient comfortable and cheap cottages and the tyranny of the "tied cottage" be completely broken.

By encouraging agriculture, cutting out profiteering and useless middlemen, by helping the growth of the co-operative movement, by organising public control of important foodstuffs, such as wheat, meat, and milk, together with municipal and co-operative distribution, Labour aims at helping the housewife in her marketing.

By freeing food and necessary commodities from the

heavy taxation with which the workers are now burdened prices will be further lessened.

Taxation will be raised by direct taxes rather than indirect, and will be graduated so as to fall most heavily on the richest.

The business girl as well as the housewife will find that her food, her fares, and her clothes will all be cheaper because Labour rules. Her hours may be shorter, her office better ventilated and warmed, and her wages worth more.

We cannot deal with this question without referring to social amenities and recreations.

The provision of ample open spaces and safe playgrounds, more than ever necessary in days of motor traffic, is also part of Labour's plan.

Moreover, Labour desires to develop all possible forms of healthful recreation, to give the best that is possible in art, literature, music, and drama to the whole of the people, and thus to raise the general level of happiness in life. In this connection the problem of the drink traffic and the public-house must be considered. It is a question which has been the subject of bitter controversy. There have also been during the years since legislation was last carried out many experiments both at home and abroad. Labour realises that better standards as to health, housing, and education materially lessen the evils of intemperance, but cannot regard the enormous profits of the "Trade" and the present conditions of the public-house as satisfactory. A Labour Government would therefore appoint a Royal Commission to study the whole question and present a report upon which action could be taken.

XXXIII

The Highway of Education

Labour would give to every child irrespective of the wealth or poverty of its parents, the best education the nation can devise.

Such an education should be free from all class prejudice; schools paid for by the nation should be of such a kind that all children can mingle together within their walls.

Beginning with the open-air nursery school, the child should follow the high road of education, through the primary school to the secondary, technical, trade, or agricultural school. Then would come the University for those who would profit by it. Not the income of the parents, but the ability and character of the child should be the deciding factor. To save money on the children is to impoverish the whole nation.

We want the nursery school, so that the toddler of the working-class mother shall have the same good chance of

healthy nurture as the child with the nursery, the garden, and the care of a nurse. But the nursery school is still better, for the mother will find there in a garden school the trained teacher, who will from her experience be able to add to the mother's love a wider knowledge of child life; while the little one will learn to play with others and acquire the physical and mental habits which mean a good start in life. Such schools would be under the care of the school medical service, so that any physical defect would be at once seen and corrected. Attendance at such schools would not be compulsory, but it would be free.

Labour would, as we have said above, raise the school age to fifteen, with maintenance allowances. The costs at the secondary school and university would also be met whenever necessary by adequate maintenance allowances and scholarships.

Labour would encourage the immediate building of good schools to replace the 544 schools for 140,000 children which have been condemned but are still being used. In new buildings attention would be given to hygienic conditions, ample air space, full use of new plans for open-air classrooms and suitable playgrounds.

The Labour Party would also insist on good conditions and thorough training for the teachers, whose part in building the nation is of primary importance.

The children of the working class are born the equals of any children. Labour seeks to give them every opportunity to "make good" and to develop all their capacities for good citizenship and high service to the community.

XXXIV

Raising the Flag of Good Health

Labour seeks a wide extension, without increase of contributions from the workers, of National Health Insurance. It proposes to include for medical benefit, the wives and children and any other dependents of insured persons, and to fill the gap for juveniles by bringing them in so soon as the law allows them to work. The medical benefit would include the services of a doctor from the panel, and all specialist services necessary to health. It believes in the fullest development of Public Health services, and that all hospitals, voluntary and poor law, should be brought under the public control of the Ministry of Health and the Local Authorities. It has given special study to the hospital problem and also of nurses, who are now amongst the most overworked and underpaid of all who give us essential services. It has drawn up reports dealing with both these problems and will endeavour to carry these out as circumstances permit.

For the children under school age, Labour proposes to develop a system of medical supervision and care from babyhood to schooldays, with the doctor in the home and in the public health clinic, hospitals, &c., co-operating.

The school child should have the full benefit of the home doctor and the school service, coupled with individual attention and treatment, should go to the open-air school, country convalescent homes, and have all needed meals and special nutriment.

Health can never be fully safeguarded so long as our children are ill-clad and ill-shod because of poverty. Labour recognises that all the evils of privation in the home cannot be cured in a moment, and therefore it has supported the proposal for provision for boots and clothing through infant welfare and school authorities in England and Wales such as now exists for schoolchildren in Scotland.

XXXV

Care of Motherhood

The maternal death-rate, which is 4.12 for every 1,000 children born for England and Wales and over 6 per 1,000 for Scotland, is a disgrace to our civilisation. These 3,000 mothers die every year of causes which are mainly preventable, and Labour is eager to set about the task of organising maternity services which shall give women the opportunity of safe and healthy motherhood.

Their scheme, which has been initiated by organised working women, may be shortly set forth. These are not revolutionary proposals. Those relating to National Health Insurance received favourable consideration by the Royal Commission. The remainder cover powers enjoyed by Local Health Authorities under the Maternity and Child Welfare Act, 1918. It is necessary to extend the grants from national funds to enable them to do the work effectually and it would greatly quicken progress if the exercise of these powers were made compulsory:—

- (1) Extension of National Health Insurance to provide medical and nursing care free of extra cost to every insured woman and wife of an insured man; those below Insurance level in income, but not insurable, to be provided for by the Public Health Authority.
- (2) For employed women, special maintenance allowances so that they may leave their work six weeks before the birth of the child, such allowances to continue for six weeks after, during which they shall not return to work. Through the whole of this time their places to be kept open for them.
- (3) A Cash Allowance Maternity Benefit to be paid in addition to free treatment.

- (4) Provision of Welfare Centres by the Local Health Authorities for giving advice, milk, or food, if needed free or at cost price, and educational services for mothers before and after childbirth.
- (5) Provision of Home Helps to look after the home while the mother is laid up.
- (6) Provision by the Local Authority of Maternity Homes, beds in hospitals, and services of the best consultants for difficult cases, as well as those whose housing conditions make confinement at home unsuitable.
- (7) Better conditions of employment for midwives and development of municipal and county services of midwifery.
- (8) Convalescent homes so that mothers and babies requiring this extra care may have it.

Such services would not be costly in comparison with our huge expenditure on many destructive services. Two capital ships for the Navy make as large a demand on the Budget as the services we propose. Yet maternal welfare is far more important than warships.

Women must also remember that the dangers of maternity to-day are far higher than the risk of accident even in the mines. The miner's mother brought her son into the world at greater risk to life than he experiences when he goes to his work underground.

XXXVI

Women in the Labour Programme

Labour believes that the equality of women in the State is a fundamental principle. It stands against sex privilege as well as the privilege of wealth and birth. In fighting the war against poverty, it is fighting the battle of both men and women. It is not a struggle only for material gains. Labour is endeavouring to free mankind from the life which is narrow and stunted, morally and mentally as well as physically, when material poverty has so many victims.

This is a woman's battle, whether or no she be wife and mother as well as woman. Mankind cannot advance, the nations cannot rise to the ideals of peace and the happiness of co-operation, unless women take their full share of responsibility and opportunity. We appeal to them to realise the magnificence of the task before them, and the immensity of the power which their vote at this General Election places in their hands. Their homes, their children, their present and their future—all depend upon their action now.