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The National Council of Women of Great Britain

~~Parliament Mansions, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W. 1.~~

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PROGRESS OF THE MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN POLICE.

By MISS EDITH TANCRED.

Brutus says: "There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to fortune."

I believe—and I would wish the N.C.W., with all the women's organisations affiliated to it, to realise—that the tide in the affairs of Women Police is *now* at the flood and if the women of the country take intelligent advantage of the present position we shall achieve the establishment of women police.

Mr. Garvin ("Observer") in the last of two striking articles entitled "Police and Public," appearing on July 15th, 1928, gives "*Four plain needs*" to meet the criticisms brought against the police in connection with the Savidge Case. Three of these "plain needs" relate to women police, i.e., (1) a woman of high rank in Scotland Yard, (2) women police to be organised fully and boldly; they should take an absolutely equal part in matters peculiarly concerning their own sex, (3) Hyde Park fully patrolled and supervised by men police and women police in uniform.

The last thirteen years have been an eventful time of persistent propaganda and intensive experiment in women police. The movement has come through two Committees of enquiry, an attempted execution by the Geddes axe, agitation in practically every large town in Great Britain, petitions addressed to the Home Secretary and both Houses of Parliament, to Watch Committees and Town Councils, to Standing Joint Committees and County Councils by every class of the community.

In every political party we have strong supporters, also among Chief Constables both in Boroughs and Counties; in May of this year a Chief Constable wrote to me:—"There are so many persons enthusiastic about women police and so many definitely opposed to their appointment. *It is not a question of apathy so far as I can see.*" *Then what is it?*

To reply to this question it is necessary to consider the British Police System as expounded by Sir Edward Troup (Permanent Under Secretary of State in the Home Office, 1908-1922), in the first number of the "Police Journal," published in January, 1928. The strength and weakness of our Police System lies in DIVIDED RESPONSIBILITY as between the Home Secretary and Parliament and the Local Police Authorities.

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Until 100 years ago there were no organised police in Great Britain. In 1839 Sir Robert Peel secured the passing of the Metropolitan Police Act. The Metropolitan Police—one-third of the whole police in England and Wales—are under complete Government control; the Commissioner appointed by the King reports to the Home Secretary and he in his turn is responsible to the House of Commons. Sir Edward Troup says: "He (Home Secretary) must answer to the House of Commons for the use he makes of the force." Therefore now as then the Metropolitan Police set the standard for the country.

In the Provinces (i.e. all of Great Britain outside the Metropolitan Area) by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 Town Councils were empowered and required to provide police forces under the control of a Watch Committee, and in 1839 similar powers were given in the Counties—the Local Government Act of 1888 transferred those powers in Counties to Standing Joint Committees and County Councils.

So far Local Autonomy was complete—but it did not work, for some localities refused to have a police force at all—just as to-day the localities refuse to appoint women police. In 1856, police forces were made compulsory in all Counties, and, in order to secure a standard of efficiency, Inspectors of Constabulary were appointed to test efficiency, and upon certificates of efficiency granted by H.M. Inspectors depended the police grant from the Treasury. The Police Act of 1919 empowered the Home Secretary to make regulations with statutory force, standardised the conditions of service in all police forces, and established the Police Council. Sir Edward Troup writes: "The present position therefore (outside the Metropolis) is that the local authority is responsible for efficiency, while the responsibility for the action of the police is shared by the Chief Constables and the Magistrates; but this is subject :

- (1) To the Police Regulations of the Home Secretary which, based on a wide experience, secure a high degree of uniformity in conditions of service and in duties;
- (2) To a supervision of administration by the Home Office exercised through its Inspectors;
- (3) To constant advice and direction as to duties from the Home Office—not given on the personal views of the Home Secretary and his staff, but on the collected wisdom of police authorities, police officers, H.M. Inspectors and the administrative officers of the Department."

So you see the Women Police of to-day are being worked on the old system, discarded in 1856, of local autonomy. It is left to the "discretion of local police authorities" to decide (1) whether they will employ policewomen at all, (2) if they employ

them, whether they will give them good or bad conditions of service and suitable duties, and (3) whether they will train them for the duties they are to perform.

The Report of the Baird Committee of 1920 states that the women are *within the scope of the Police Acts for all purposes*, including pensions; we stand on solid ground when we demand—as the N.C.W. has done for the last ten years—that the Police Act of 1919 be applied to policewomen and that the Home Office give "advice and direction as to duties" to Police Authorities, and draw up those regulations—with statutory force—for the full organisation of women police.

The first step, therefore, is to secure STATUTORY DUTIES for policewomen.

Out of all the storm and stress of the last few years over the status and work of women police one or two burning questions have emerged, and women all over the country are asking ever more and more insistently: WHO QUESTIONS CHILDREN, YOUNG GIRLS and WOMEN who have been the victims or witnesses of sexual offences?

It does not take much imagination to realise what is the nature of such questions, and yet it has taken the Savidge Case to bring it home to the ordinary man and woman that such questions *must not* be put to women and girls by men police.

Again it is asked WHO TAKES CHARGE OF WOMEN IN POLICE CELLS, through the day and through the night, over the week-end, on remand or waiting for the Court?

What arrangements are made for young girls under arrest? Are they put into police cells?

Are the arrangements in police cells decent and humane? Can women in custody get food and sleep, and wash themselves before appearing in Court?

Have all our women magistrates personally visited the police cells in their area, and discussed their possible improvement with H.M. Inspector, the Chief Constable, policewomen and Police Court Missionaries—the only people who should have access to the women's cells?

We are told that the science of numbers is an exact science, and for a reply to both questions I would refer you to the 88 Boroughs and 40 Counties in England with *no policewomen at all*—in the whole of Wales there is no policewoman; only four police forces in Scotland employ them. The same test of numbers applied to police matrons gives the same result; only 33 towns out of the 122 in England and Wales can have a full-time service of police matrons. I would like to make it perfectly clear that police matrons cannot be substitutes for policewomen—the duties they perform for women must be done *under the orders of a policeman*.

The issue, then, is plain, and all of us are agreed on the performance of certain duties by women being essential. Moreover we have a successful precedent for the performance of many of these duties by policewomen.

From 1918-1922 the Metropolitan Police Women Patrols, under their Superintendent, Mrs. Stanley, worked out with Sir Nevil Macready an organisation that was of proved utility to the community—an organisation that revolutionised rescue work by dealing effectively with the young girl offender, the thief, the prostitute in the making, the adventurous youngster tired of home life, and they brought into our Courts an element of merciful justice. This organisation was scrapped with the deplorable result that our public parks are unsafe for children to play in, and our streets are haunted by young girls the male police are expressly forbidden to approach for any purpose other than to arrest them. Mrs. Stanley has put forward four classes of duties on which she considers it essential for policewomen to be employed. They are:

- (1) Taking statements from women and children, whether victims or witnesses, in all cases connected with sexual offences.
- (2) Escort or conveyance of women prisoners and women and children to Homes, Hospitals, etc.
- (3) Searching and attending female prisoners detained at Police Stations.
- (4) Watching female prisoners, suicides, etc., in hospitals.

She also adds:—"But in order to make it an economic possibility for every Police Force to employ policewomen for these duties, it is essential that the women shall receive the complete training of police officers, and shall be available for any and every class of police duty."

In conclusion, may I mention these points: Local autonomy in police government failed to establish the men police. We have had eight years of "local discretion" and it has equally failed to establish the women police. We therefore ask that the women police movement be advanced from the police system in force prior to 1856—70 years ago!—to that of the present day, and we ask in particular for the "constant advice and direction from the Home Office as to duties" spoken of by Sir Edward Troup.

The work of women police is now in the limelight; a Royal Commission on Police Powers and Duties is now sitting; next year 5,000,000 additional women will vote in the General Election; such an opportunity for making ourselves heard will not occur again for "we must take the current when it serves, or lose our venture." Let us all with *one* voice ask for: STATUTORY DUTIES FOR POLICEWOMEN.