

contained not a single woman member, but the Committee long led a shadowy existence and when eventually it began to function the duties assigned it were rather to assist in imposing discipline than to protect the interests of the workers.

The Conference of Women's Organisations called by Runciman at the Board of Trade on April 13th, was crowded with well-to-do people: barely half a dozen of those present had the least claim to represent the working women who formed the majority of those it was intended to recruit.<sup>1</sup> Mary Macarthur complained that neither the women of the Labour Party nor the registered Trade Unions of Women had been invited with the sole exception of the Federation of Women's Trade Unions she represented.

Runciman told us that 33,000 women had already registered for war service, 6,000 of them for munitions. He hurried nervously over the wage question; it had been decided, he said, that on Government contracts the same piece rates should be given to women as to men but in regard to time rates "no special conditions had been laid down." I saw that, as I had feared, there was to be no real safeguard for equal pay. As everyone knew, all the work was to be reorganised. Only if it were decided that all the men and women, once trained, must have the same pay, would the sweating of women be checked.

Having surmounted the thorny question of wages, Runciman grew more urbane. He urged that the ladies before him could assist the good work by finding lodgings for the new women workers, and by keeping an eye on them to see that they came to no moral harm. "We know that this can be better done by your organisations than by any Government department." Smiles greeted his words. He passed on to the question of training: the Board of Agriculture had arranged to give women a fortnight's instruction in farm work: if they were active and intelligent they could learn enough in that time to make themselves useful. He ceased abruptly.

"Can anyone speak? Can I speak?" A clear voice cut the air; Mrs. Charlotte Drake from the East End, with her humble black clothes and her anxious face, was the questioner. She urged in her blunt, brief way that the men's Trade Unions should be asked to take in women members and the women be paid just as if they were men, whether on piece rates or time rates. Then there would be no reason to talk of the undercutting of men by "women blacklegs." The phrase

<sup>1</sup> The increase in the number of women employed in industry during the War, though large, was not so great as Press propaganda might have led one to suppose, as is indicated by the following table taken from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Average Figures for men and women in industrial employment (Manufacturing):

	July, 1913	July 1918	July 1924
Men ...	6,301,000	5,058,000	6,016,000
Women ...	2,178,600	2,970,600	1,987,990

angered her hearers, women cast indignant looks at her. Runciman shifted uncomfortably. Following her, I insisted on the uselessness of the promise he and Lloyd George had given. When I reminded him that the women whose service the Government required were still disfranchised Runciman interrupted. He would not have that question mentioned, he said irascibly. I was surprised to observe that not one woman infringed his prohibition.

Lady Aberconway, the doyen of an old Liberal Women's Suffragist family, spoke as representative of the Women's Liberal Federation:

"It is our earnest desire to co-operate with the Government." But was the Government employing as many women clerks and typists as it might? Runciman said the substitution of women for men was proceeding rapidly; but the lady was not satisfied; she wanted the economic screw pressed harder to assist recruiting, and to prove, since she was a Suffragist and ardent for the War, that women could serve it well. Mrs. Rackham, of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, took up the tale, gruesome indeed to the few who could see in the War a gigantic slaughter. Margaret Llewellyn Davies, that notable builder of the Women's Co-operative Guild, tender in her broad humanity, protested against the cruelly long hours women and girls, the potential mothers of the race, were working in the munition factories. It was surprising that the Government should sanction this economic waste, she said, for it had long been proved that the greatest production was secured by shifts of workers employed for not more than seven hours a day. Mary Macarthur had just returned from Elswick, where women munitioners were working 84 hours a week, though crowds of other women were clamouring there for work. The employers preferred to occupy their machines on two shifts of twelve hours than on three shifts of eight hours, therefore this cruel absurdity continued. Mrs. Reed and Lady Samuels, representing Liberal and Conservative women, attempted to combat her protests, till Runciman interposed to check the wrangle. The anti-Suffragist representative declared: "We hope to co-operate with the Government without imposing any terms." The Girls' Friendly Society, the Y.W.C.A. and others pledged enthusiastic aid. Then Eleanor Rathbone of Liverpool (afterwards M.P.), plump, ruddy and complacent, intervened. She had been "disgusted," she said, by the poor response of women to the appeal for war service; but she thought it had not been sufficiently striking and direct. It was too refined; it should be more like the appeals for the Army. There should be recruiting posters and recruiting stations. To get middle-class women there should be "comrades brigades." The middle-class woman would not migrate for war work alone, or if she did, she would not stick to her job. To get her to persevere she must go with her own class and her own set. Women should be put through military drill and given a retaining fee "of even a shilling a week," and when they had "taken the King's shilling" they should be subject to penalties "if they backed out." If the Government wanted to get women to replace men on really skilled and hard work, she declared, they must get