

1896.

NEW ZEALAND.

# REPEAL OF THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACT, AND THE RAISING OF THE AGE OF CONSENT

(LETTERS RECEIVED BY THE PREMIER FROM ENGLAND RELATIVE TO THE).

*Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. Seddon, with the Leave of the House.*

Grasmere, Bristol Road, Edgbaston, 7th January, 1896.

Mrs. F. H. Fox, on behalf of the Birmingham Branch of the Ladies' National Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation Office, desires to convey their strong and deep sense of the importance of this subject to the Hon. R. Seddon, Premier, and to express, also, their thankfulness for his clear and unequivocal statement, to the effect that the raising of the age of consent would be insisted on in the coming session, and also "a shameful and objectionable statute" removed. The honorary secretary, therefore, on behalf of the ladies united with her in this branch of the Ladies' National Association, desires to offer her Christian congratulations to the Hon. R. Seddon on the noble stand he is thus taking on the side of purity and righteousness, and to encourage him as far as she may be permitted to do so to withstand unswervingly any attempts on the part of those less high principled and less enlightened to press measures of an opposite character, assured that the Divine blessing can only rest upon the faithful carrying out of just and pure statutes, founded upon Christian ethics and upon the equality of the sexes in all that relates to their moral and spiritual well-being. The action of some ladies in New Zealand during the past year, evidently arising from ignorance of the subject, grieved the members of the Ladies' National Association in England, but they are glad to know that they have been convinced of their grave mistake. Mrs. Fox desires to add best wishes for Divine guidance and help to the Premier in his responsible position.

DEAR SIR,—

Free Church Manse, Kemway, Aberdeenshire, 22nd April, 1896.

Yesterday, at a meeting in Edinburgh of the Free Church of Scotland's Committee on State Regulation of Vice, I had the pleasure of making known that a few months ago you had said that next session the raising of the age of consent would be insisted on, and also the removal of a "shameful and objectionable statute." We understand you to refer to the C.D. Act, and I was instructed to express to you the great gratification of the Committee at your utterance. This I am most happy now to do. What you said is inserted in the Committee's Annual Report to the General Assembly at its forthcoming meeting in May, and it will be listened to with lively satisfaction by the Church generally. We rejoice that you are at one with us on this important matter, and that you have such a purpose and hope in connection with it. Some months ago, in the Committee's name, I sent a letter to all Presbyterian ministers in New Zealand (as also in the Cape Colony and in Victoria) earnestly urging them to action in the matter. Perhaps you have seen it. I should like to have enclosed a copy, but unhappily I have only one left, and it is needed. We are thankful to see that the Dunedin Presbytery have been moved to pass a very decided resolution.

I will (D.V.) send you a copy of my report when it is in print.

Yours, &amp;c.,

(Rev.) JOHN DYMCK.

SIR,—

Halifax, Yorkshire, 27th April, 1896.

We, the undersigned, on behalf of ourselves and others who formerly composed the Halifax Ladies' Committee for the Repeal of the (English) Contagious Diseases Acts, desire to express to you our extreme gratification at your announcement that in the next session of the Legislative Council of New Zealand your Ministry will insist on the "raising of the age of consent" and "the removal of a shameful and objectionable statute."

As regards the latter, we sincerely hope that your colonial Contagious Diseases Act (to which your words doubtless referred) may be totally repealed, and that no measure may be enacted conferring powers for the apparent purpose of suppressing social vice, but capable of being used for its regulation and supervision. We would remind you of the fact that over the Continent of Europe the debasing system of the sanitary regulation of prostitution is carried on by officials entitled "The Police of Morals," in whose hands measures ostensibly directed against open vice are the principal means of enforcing their shameful sanitary rules.

That you and your colleagues may have the Divine guidance and blessing in your efforts to abolish unrighteous, and to enact righteous, laws, is the earnest prayer of

Yours, &amp;c.,

JANE ELEANOR CROSSLEY, President.

ELLEN E. WAITE, Hon. Sec.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Prime Minister of New Zealand.

SIR,—

Cherry Hill House, York, 27th April, 1896.

It is with much satisfaction that we hear that in a recent speech you expressed the opinion that a certain objectionable statute now existing in your country will in all probability be removed; and also that it is your hope that your Legislative Council will not again refuse to raise the age of consent for young girls.

In England we know by past sorrowful experience the moral harm done by the C.D. Acts, and the hard and protracted struggle to obtain their repeal; and we shall indeed rejoice when we hear that your Government has freed itself from any part in the odious system of State regulation of vice.

Trusting that your anticipations regarding these matters may be speedily realised, we beg to subscribe ourselves, with much respect,

Yours, &amp;c.,

THE COMMITTEE OF THE YORK BRANCH OF THE LADIES' NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR THE ABOLITION OF STATE REGULATION OF VICE.

Signed in and by direction of a meeting of the Committee, held in York this day, the 27th of April, 1896.

MARIA (Mrs.) RICHARDSON, Hon. Sec.

The Hon. R. J. Seddon, Wellington, New Zealand.

SIR,—

Glasgow, 29th April, 1896.

The Glasgow Ladies' Committee of the British Continental and General Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice beg to express to you their gratification in hearing that you have publicly stated that, in the coming session of your Legislative Assembly, the removal from the statute-book of the C.D. Act will be insisted on, as also the raising of the age of consent. We, who have passed through a conflict with the powers of evil similar to that in which you are engaged, can testify that victory is accompanied by an enlightenment of the public conscience and a demand for a higher standard of morality in all classes of society. We cannot be satisfied till all the colonies of our race purge themselves from the stain of State-regulated vice. We therefore earnestly desire that your efforts be crowned with success, and

We are, &amp;c.,

JESSIE T. GREIG,  
18, Lynedoch Crest., Convener.

W. A. C. GREENLEES,  
Langdale, Glasgow, Treasurer.

ELIZA MACLAREN,  
Secretary.

The Hon. R. Seddon.

Ladies' National Association for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice,  
London Branch, 1, King Street, Westminster,

30th April, 1896.

DEAR SIR,—

The Council of the London Branch of the Ladies' National Association have noticed with extreme satisfaction the statement which occurred in your speech delivered at Christchurch on the 6th February, to the effect that the Government would insist next session upon "the removal of an objectionable and shameful statute"—the Contagious Diseases Act; and it was unanimously resolved at the last meeting of the Council, held 28th April, that the hearty thanks of the members be conveyed to you. Having been compelled, in the course of the long struggle for the repeal of the English Contagious Diseases Acts, to investigate this painful question in its varied aspects, we are profoundly convinced that the regulation of prostitution, with its central and most revolting feature, the personal medical examination, is an intolerable injustice to women, a powerful incentive to vice in men, a grave hygienic mistake, and a great moral wrong.

We await with keenest interest the time, now we trust so near at hand, when your vigorous and progressive country shall blot for ever from its statute-book a law which you so truly characterize as "shameful and objectionable."

We are, &amp;c.,

SARAH M. AMOS, Chairwoman.

CATHARINE M. WHITEHEAD, Hon. Sec.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand.

DEAR SIR,—

1, King Street, Westminster, London, 30th April, 1896.

On behalf of the Federation for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice we beg to tender to you an expression of our gratitude and admiration for the fearless and outspoken declaration which you, as Prime Minister of New Zealand, made at Christchurch on the 7th of February, that the Government would insist next session on "the removal of an objectionable and shameful statute"—the Contagious Diseases Act. We congratulate the Government and our fellow-citizens in New Zealand upon this declaration. During the many years that it has been our painful duty to study the effects of similar Acts and regulations we have become more and more convinced that they are an absolute failure from a sanitary point of view, and are actually an incentive to vice, and therefore ultimately lead to an increase of disease. In addition, they violate the highest constitutional principles, and are an outrage on the moral law.

It is therefore with no small satisfaction that we learn that, under your enlightened leadership, New Zealand will emancipate herself from the shame of such legislation, and will take her stand beside Great Britain on this great subject.

We rejoice, also, to know that your Government will insist on raising the age of consent, as we are well aware that by such an amendment of the law many young girls may be saved from ruin.

Our Federation represents a large number of societies and individuals all working for the same object, and in their name we again offer you our cordial congratulations and our good wishes for the success of your noble work.

We have, &amp;c.,

WALTER S. B. MACLAREN, Chairman.

JAMES STANSFELD.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Moral Reform Union, 44, Porchester Road, Paddington, W., 1st May, 1896.

THE Moral Reform Union, a society of men and women—founded, 1881, in the interests of pure family life—has been much encouraged in its efforts to promote moral reform throughout the world by the welcome declaration of the Premier of New Zealand, in his address given in the Opera House, at Christchurch, on the 4th February, as to prospective legislation affecting women in the colony, especially as regards the removal of “an objectionable and shameful statute,” and the raising of age of consent.

By order. F. E. ALBERT, Secretary.

The Brackens, 11, Bolingbroke Grove, Wandsworth Common, S.W.,

SIR,—

6th May, 1896.

I have the honour to enclose you a copy of resolutions passed by the Bond of Union amongst Workers for the Common Good, among whom are some veteran fellow-workers of the Right Hon. Sir James Stansfeld, to whom England owes her freedom from the evil legislation to which you also are opposed, as we rejoice to hear.

I am, &c.,

FRANCES LORD, Hon. Sec., Gen.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand.

The Bond of Union amongst Workers for the Common Good passed the following resolutions on 1st May, 1896. Meeting at the Pioneer Club, 22, Bruton Street, Bond Street, W. (London):—

“That the Bond of Union amongst Workers for the Common Good hails with satisfaction the statement of the Premier of New Zealand, in his address at Christchurch on 6th February last, that the raising of the age of consent, and ‘the removal of an objectionable and shameful statute’ (which had been carried by the House of Representatives, but rejected by the Legislative Council), would be insisted upon next session.”

“That the Bond begs to assure the Hon. Mr. Seddon of its hearty appreciation of his determined attitude on the side of morality, and trusts that the session will not close without both these vital reforms being carried.”

“That a copy of these be sent to the Premier and to the President of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Auckland, New Zealand.”

6th May, 1896.

FRANCES LORD, Hon. Sec., Gen.

Social Purity Alliance (founded 1873), 1, King Street, Westminster, S.W.,

SIR,—

7th May, 1896.

The Executive Committee of the Social Purity Alliance, meeting on the 6th May, 1896, desire to convey to you their keen appreciation of your intention of doing your utmost not only to raise the age of consent, but to remove a statute which is correctly described as “shameful and objectionable.” They earnestly trust that this intention, for which they are most grateful, will be realised in the coming session.

A. GOFF, Chairman.

ERIC HAMMOND, Secretary.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand.

DEAR SIR,—

Heath Avenue, Halifax, Yorkshire, 9th May, 1896.

Prompted by your speech at Christchurch on 7th February, in reference to “the removal of an objectionable and shameful statute,” I take the liberty of sending you (per book-post) a pamphlet which I have been recently impelled to compile, from which you may, perhaps, glean something useful in your advocacy of the repeal of immoral regulations.

Your speech has given immense satisfaction to repealers in this country, who will not cease to pray that your hands may be strengthened in this good work that the next session may sweep away this blot on the legislative escutcheon of your country.

I cannot forget that your Act for the regulation of prostitution was, in the first instance, the outcome of pressure from the Home Government, and that responsibility therefore rests primarily upon this country. I am therefore the more anxious that we on this side should do whatever lies in our power to assist in undoing the evil, for originating which we are compelled to confess ourselves guilty.

I am, &c.,

JOS. EDMONDSON.

National Vigilance Association and Central Vigilance Society,  
267, Strand, W.C. (near the Law-Courts),

DEAR SIR,—

12th May, 1896.

The attention of the Committee of this association has been called to a speech which you recently delivered, in which you are reported to have said, “The Legislative Council had last year refused to raise the age of consent, but next session this would be insisted on, as would also the removal of a shameful and objectionable statute.”

Feeling the importance and value of such legislation in the interest of the well-being of all nations and of our common humanity, they have instructed me to write and express their gratitude for the principle of true righteousness which characterized your remarks, and they venture to express a hope that your determination to raise the age of consent, and to remove “a shameful and objectionable statute,” may be crowned with abundant success.

On behalf of the Executive Committee,

We are, &c.,

PERCY WILLIAM BUNTING, Chairman.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER COOTE, Secretary.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Wellington, New Zealand.

Women's Liberal Federation, 23, Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster, S.W.,  
13th May, 1896.

SIR,—

I have been desired by the Executive Committee of the Women's Liberal Federation of England to inform you that, having heard with great pleasure that you have declared that the removal of the Contagious Diseases Act from the statute-book will be insisted upon during the next session of the Legislative Council of New Zealand, the Committee resolved to convey to you their great appreciation of your zeal in this just cause, and the assurance of their earnest desire that your proposals may be crowned with success.

I am, &c.,

MARGARET BENMER,  
Secretary.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand.

SIR,—

Attercliffe (Sheffield) Women's Liberal Association, 15th May, 1896.

The above association, of which I am president, desires me to express to you the satisfaction with which they have heard that you have said that "the Legislative Council of New Zealand had last year refused to raise the age of consent" (at which a girl may agree to her own ruin), "but that next session this would be insisted on, as would also the removal of a shameful and objectionable statute."

Some of us are old workers in seeking to promote the universal abolition of the State regulation of vice, and we are all profoundly convinced that what is morally wrong can never be physically right—a conviction which is only confirmed by the experience of all those who have inquired into this matter with unprejudiced minds. We trust that the coming session of the Legislature will witness the repeal of the Act and the passing of the other measure designed for the protection of young girls. On behalf of my committee,

I am, &c.,

The Hon. R. Seddon, Wellington, New Zealand.

S. R. WILSON, President.

SIR,—

Tamar Vale, 75, Gordon Road, Ealing, London, W., May, 1896.

The Social Purity Committee of the English Wesleyan Methodist Conference have heard with great satisfaction that you have declared your desire that the law for the regulation of sexual vice shall be removed from the statute-book of New Zealand. We are deeply anxious for the abolition of these obnoxious laws wherever they exist. You will doubtless be aware of the tremendous struggle which preceded the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in this country. We fear that there are those in Great Britain who would like to see these shameful Acts revived. A victory for the cause of repeal in New Zealand would strengthen the hands of the friends of abolition throughout the world. We desire to express our gratitude to you for the stand you have taken, and our earnest hope that your desire will be accomplished.

On behalf of the above-named Committee,

We are, &c.,

D. J. WALKER, D.D.,  
President of the Conference.  
G. ARMSTRONG BENNETTS, B.A.,  
Secretary of the Committee.

The Hon. R. J. Seddon, Premier of New Zealand.

DEAR SIR,—

18, Rawlinson Road, Oxford, 5th June, 1896.

I am desired by the executive of the Mid-Oxon Women's Liberal Association to express to you our grateful appreciation of your statement, at a recent by-election, that the raising of the age of consent would be insisted on during the next session of the Legislative Council of New Zealand, as would also the removal of a "shameful and objectionable statute."

It is most encouraging to hear of such words spoken by the Prime Minister of a great colony; and our earnest hope is that these two measures of justice may be carried in your Legislative Council by a large majority.

I have, &c.,

CATHERINE B. DRUMMOND,  
Hon. Sec. Mid-Oxon W.L.A.

The Hon. R. Seddon.

*A Greeting from Old Ireland.*

Dublin Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts,  
91, Rathmines Road, Dublin, 10th June, 1896.

DEAR SIR,—

We are much rejoiced to learn, through Mrs. Butler, that you intend at your next session of Parliament to propose that the age of consent be raised, and also that the C.D. Acts in your colony be repealed. If there were anything in our power that we could do to strengthen your hands, you have our very best desires and deep sympathy. Our Committee here has long ago been dissolved, but I continue to act as a member of dear Mrs. Butler's Committee, and now, being an old woman (one of the original workers and secretaries in 1870), can do but little. I have always helped at women's questions, am still honorary secretary of the Women's Suffrage and Poor-Law Guardian Association. The latter we are vigorously working up now, having got the Act enabling women to be Guardians passed this year. Any appeal as regards combating the C.D. Acts has my warmest sympathy, and I earnestly trust that your hands may be strengthened to fight the battle before you vigorously; and that a blessing may rest on your efforts and those of the good men and women who may assist you is the heartfelt desire of your sympathizing friend in the good cause of morality, purity, &c.

ANNA (Mrs.) M. HASLAM,  
An old Hon. Sec.

The Hon. R. Seddon, Wellington.

P.S.—I send you one of the old pamphlets I had compiled here long ago.—A.M.H.

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