

SUPERINTENDENT'S LETTERS.

LEGAL AND PARLIAMENTARY.

12, Bealey St., St. Albans,
Aug. 31, 1915.

To the President, Officers, and Members of the W.C.T.U.

Dear Comrades,—

Will all Unions carefully watch for the Public Health Amendment Act. Get a copy as soon as possible from your member, carefully note its contents, and send in your protests against any compulsory measures which it may contain with regard to the treatment of venereal disease.

May I say to all Unions that, while in matters of religion or conscience, Convention has no right to bind us either individually or as Unions, yet it surely is our duty to stand loyally by the decision of Convention when it is a matter of national legislation regulating vice. We send to Convention our ablest women from all Unions (or should do), they elect to the National Executive the women whom they consider the best qualified for those important posts, for, should questions of national importance arise during the interval between Conventions, we look to the Executive to give special attention to such matters, and devise measures to promote or resist legislation, and we should be guided by their advice.

Convention's decisions have a still stronger claim upon us, because it is our representative voice, and gives special attention to matters of importance. Take, for instance, this matter of the Public Health Amendment Bill. After discussion on the medical proposals, submitted recently to your Unions, Convention set up a committee of women to go carefully through the whole subject. These women were conversant with the details of the operation of various laws, in various countries, dealing with prostitution and venereal disease, and had knowledge of the opinions of leading European experts on these matters, and included a woman doctor in their number. After long and careful consideration, this committee brought its recommendations, and reasons for them, to Convention, which again carefully considered them before adopting them as a resolution. It seems to me to be the plain duty of Unions to abide loyally by that decision of Convention. We could never have got our franchise or Local Option vote if we had gone to local doctors, press, or politicians for their opinions on these matters, and been guided by them, instead of following unitedly the lead of our Conventions, which took great principles for their guide, and were not swayed by subtle arguments on side issues. The C.D. Acts have been in operation in New Zealand, they were actively enforced in

Christchurch for several years, and no one who remembers them wants them again. They were a direct incentive to vice, and have never here, or anywhere else, been effective in reducing disease, but have always had a directly contrary effect (the story of regulation in the Army proves this up to the hilt), and it took years of incessant work to secure their repeal. If the medical proposals are embodied in legislation all that work is undone, and you will have all the horrors and dangers of the C.D. Acts in full blast again. All compulsory and penalising measures against venereal disease are being abandoned in the countries where they have been tried so long, as it is found that such measures prevent infected persons coming for medical treatment in the early and most infectious stages of these diseases. Compulsory notification cannot be enforced. No one but the doctor and patient know of the disease, the patient is, naturally, most anxious for concealment. Who is to prosecute if the doctor fails to notify. Where is the evidence to come from that will convict him. It is just at this point that men can, and will, evade this provision in the medical proposals. It will be a dead letter, as it has been in other countries where it was the law, and compulsory examination on suspicion immediately gives us state regulation of vice. I implore all Unions to stand fast, and unitedly, against all compulsory measures, and to advocate free treatment and education.

The condition of returning troopers does not affect this question. They are under military law, and the authorities have power to detain them until fit to be discharged. We are dealing with civil law, and with legislation that will affect us years after the war is over. I do urge unanimity against these compulsory measures, and I would suggest that Unions carefully consider the best means of **preventing and lessening the immorality** that leads to these diseases and submit their conclusions on this phase of the question for consideration by Convention.

I affectionately and earnestly urge all Union members to disassociate themselves from all gambling in connection with patriotic funds. We must not do evil that good may come. It is dishonouring to our brave soldiers to provide money for them by degrading methods. This country is rich enough, and ought to be willing and glad to make generous provision for all gallant fellows who return to us disabled in body, or wrecked in health.

I made the mistake, in my last circular to the Unions, of confusing the Crimes Amendment Bill with the Criminal Code Amendment Bill. Will all Unions carefully watch for the latter, the Criminal Code Amendment Bill, and strenuously protest against any provision which makes prosecution for crime against the person and purity of our young girls dependent on the leave of anyone.

I append a resolution re the medical proposals. It may be a help to some Unions as it touches in detail the objections to these proposals.

Yours in White Ribbon bonds,
J. ROBERTS,
Legal and Parliamentary Supt.

RESOLUTION RE VENEREAL DISEASE.

We the members of the Christchurch Branch of the W.C.T.U. beg to record our conviction that while in view of the inroads of venereal disease speedy and radical action is necessary, the Public Health Amendment Bill, as now drafted, will not fulfil its purpose. We note that while equality of treatment as regards men and women patients is apparently aimed at, the most objectionable features of the C.D. Acts are practically revived. These are:—

- 1st—Compulsory notification.
- 2nd—Compulsory examination on suspicion only.
- 3rd—Compulsory detention.

We regard the inclusion of those provisions as a revival of an ancient menace to innocent women, and a danger to the public health. We are of opinion that however framed to secure seeming equality of treatment, the provisions of this Bill would be mainly used against prostitutes in the vain endeavour to make vice safe, and we would remind you that for this purpose the most eminent European experts hold that compulsory notification, examination and detention have been not only utterly useless, but have been absolutely pernicious in their effects by creating a false sense of security, and thereby increasing vice and the diseases it engenders.

We believe that the fear of compulsory detention would have the effect of deterring many innocent victims of these diseases from seeking properly qualified medical treatment.

We would further point out that the provisions of this Bill would almost certainly be evaded by men who are the persons most responsible for the communication of these diseases to wives and children.

We desire:—

(1) That free treatment should be provided for all sufferers from venereal disease, who voluntarily present themselves for treatment.

(2) That the Education Department should provide for the older scholars instruction in sex hygiene by properly qualified and carefully selected instructors, preferably medical men and women.

(3) That the marriage law should be amended by making venereal disease a cause for legal separation.

(4) Seeing that it is not usual for medical practitioners to inform married women affected by venereal disease of the nature of their complaint, and in consequence disease is being widely transmitted to children, we hold that medical practitioners should be compelled under penalty to disclose the truth to married women when so affected.