

Canadian Suffrage Association

REPORT OF INTERVIEW
With The Right Honourable
R.L. Borden, Prime Minister
of Canada.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE HEADQUARTERS
22 Carlton Street, Toronto

RB31370

Report of the Proceedings

Of the Deputation of the Canadian Suffrage Association, which waited on the Right Honourable R. L. Borden, Prime Minister of Canada, on Monday, September 23rd, 1912, at the Residence of the Hon. A. E. Kemp.

There were present Dr. Augusta Stowe-Gullen, Honorary President of the Canadian Suffrage Association; Mrs. Flora McDonald Denison, President; Dr. Margaret Johnston, Recording Secretary; Dr. Margaret Gordon, representing the Toronto Suffrage Association; Mrs. Robt. Glasgow, of the Suffrage headquarters; Dr. McAlpine; Dr. Isabella Wood, Treasurer; Mrs. Harriett Prenter; Mrs. McIvor, and Mr. Wm. Munns, Secretary.

Mr. Munns:—Mr. Borden, I have pleasure in introducing the deputation of the Canadian Suffrage Association. Mrs. Denison, the President, will address you on its behalf.

Mrs. Denison:—In accordance with your request to write out what we had to say, we have done so in the shortest possible space, although

we would have liked to have said a great deal more to you.

Sir, the present day movement for woman's suffrage is neither local nor intermittent, but international in scope, well organized and possesses a clear understanding with a definite purpose.

It demands political rights for women because it recognizes the vote as the only dignified and honorable means of securing recognition of needs and aspirations.

There has never been a reform movement in the world's history that with fifty years of a record claims so many victories.

It is interesting to know that in 1850 Ontario was among the very first to recognize women by giving them the school franchise.

Victory after victory has followed, and today millions of women are free to express themselves at the polls. Now with an international suffrage alliance at work there can only be one result—political equality for men and women.

The International Council of Women, comprising twenty-seven National Councils, and representing the representative women of every civilized country, met in Toronto in 1909 and unanimously declared for woman's suffrage.

The policy of this international body of women has always been conservative, and it has

passed no resolution in favor of any reform unless the arguments have ceased to be controversial.

This means that sixteen million organized women have asked the Legislatures of the world to enfranchise women. Is it wisdom for statesmen to force women to fight for this reform with no other weapon than logic?

The terrible state of affairs in the Old Country tell the tragic tale of lack of judgment on the part of the statesmen in authority there, and to-day Great Britain is writing one of the blackest pages in her history. With the victories of the past half century, with this international army of eloquent, witty and logical women, with trained pens, there is only one finale for the common cause they represent.

What Canada Has Done.

Honorable sir, the statesmen of Canada have been leaders. Your illustrious predecessor, Sir John A. Macdonald, recognized the signs of the times in the framing of a franchise bill, and by the introduction of a clause to extend political equality to women.

In 1884 Ontario gave the municipal vote to widows and spinsters, and the other Provinces followed. This put Canada in the foreground, but since that time sixteen Legislatures have

given their women full suffrage on the same basis as men.

Dr. Emily Stowe, the pioneer woman suffragist in Canada, was instrumental in gaining the admission of women to Toronto University, in passing the Married Woman's Property Act, and factory laws regarding sanitation and protection of life. Dr. Stowe was the first woman to practice medicine in Canada, and because of her energy and organizing ability the women of Ontario have enjoyed superior legal and political rights. Since Dr. Stowe's death her daughter, Dr. Stowe-Gullen, now on the Senate of Toronto University, has largely carried on the work of the national suffrage.

You will see, sir, that Canada has been working in this great international movement for women's suffrage; the policy of this organization has been to carry on its propaganda by educational methods, which have so moulded public opinion in favor of its cause that the following organizations have passed resolutions endorsing women's suffrage:—The Dominion Alliance, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Trades and Labor Council, Toronto Teachers' Association, Women's Teachers' Association, W. C. T. U., Single Tax Association, Friend's Association, many temperance organizations of men, Women's Medical Society,

Medical Alumnae, Household Economic Association, University Women's Clubs, and the National Council of Women.

Their Hope for Future.

Our national organization believed in the reasonableness of Canadian men and had hoped that when the organized womanhood of the Dominion asked for the vote that right would be conceded and granted.

You, Mr. Premier, have affirmed your belief in the justice of our cause; we ask your assistance and co-operation.

You are aware that no less eminent a man than Theodore Roosevelt has deemed it expedient to put women's suffrage as a plank in his presidential platform. By this move the women of the United States are not hoodwinked into believing that Mr. Roosevelt was always an ardent women suffragist. It has however, proved him to be a greater politician than a statesman, as there are now a million and a quarter women voters in the United States, and Mr. Roosevelt thought it wise to bid for that vote.

Mr. Premier, the Canadian suffragists believe that the leader in this Great Dominion is more of a statesman than a politician. They would like to see their Premier lead along progressive lines, rather than accept progressive measures as an election policy.

Are the women of Canada less worthy than the women of Australia and New Zealand, who now have the privilege of voting not only on national but also Imperial questions.

Canadian women are humiliated that their nation has so long lagged behind the other overseas dominions.

On behalf of the Canadian Suffrage Association.

FLORA McD. DENISON, President.
MARGARET JOHNSTON, Secretary.

Mr. Borden :—Do any of the other ladies desire to say anything?

Dr. Gordon :—I would like to ask a question. Could women vote in the Dominion elections before they voted provincially? Could the Dominion Parliament grant votes to women before the Provincial Parliament does?

Mr. Borden :—Well, if there is not anything further to be said I will explain about how that is. Some ladies did come to see me in England. There were three delegations really. One was an association—I forget the exact name of it—which resorts in a more or less friendly way to what they call militant methods. Then there was another association which was equally earnest I think, in its belief that a franchise should be extended to women generally, but which does not believe in the militant tactics to which I

have alluded. Then there is the third association in England which is entirely opposed to the extension of a franchise to women, and which is conducting more or less of an active campaign in that direction. It was the one I mentioned first and the one I mentioned last that interviewed me. Both interviews were on the same day, and I explained to the ladies who came to see me at that time that under the Dominion Franchise Law, which we have had, I think, for about fifteen years, the Federal Parliament adopts for the purpose of Federal elections the electoral lists which are prepared in the several Provinces under and by the authority of the Provincial Legislatures, so that if any step were taken by any Provincial Legislature in the direction which you desire at the present time, as far as I remember, the law is those who became then entitled to vote at the Provincial elections would also in that Province become entitled to vote at the Federal elections. Therefore, so long as that law would remain in force, so long as the Dominion Parliament would continue to maintain that law, the question is in that respect and to that extent one for the Provincial Legislatures who, of course, in any event most absolutely control the extension of the franchise so far as the election of members for the Provincial Legislature is concerned.

Of course I do not want you to understand that the Dominion Parliament is unable to deal with the matter in another way. It could do so. The Dominion Parliament would be at liberty to-morrow, or at their next session, to repeal the Franchise Act passed, I think, in 1897 or 1898, and to enact a new franchise law. It could discontinue the policy of adopting the Provincial electoral lists and could establish Federal lists which would be used exclusively for Federal elections.

I could not give you any assurance on that question one way or the other this morning. As a matter of fact it has never yet been considered by the Government.

We have been in power a little less than a year, and the repealing of the present Franchise Act of the Dominion, and to make a new Act bringing into force machinery all over Canada for the establishment of Federal lists, is a matter of some importance, and naturally it would require consideration. I could only say at the moment that the whole subject with which your suggestions are necessarily closely concerned would come before the Government in the ordinary course if and when it should contemplate a change of principle in the law to which I have just alluded. That is to say, if we come to the

conclusion that we should establish a law such as was in force, I think, for about twelve or fifteen years before 1896, under which Federal officers were appointed for the purpose of preparing Federal lists; if we returned to that plan necessarily we would have to take up in connection with it the question you have submitted to me. Just how soon we will take that question up I really could not say to you this morning. It will require communication with and consideration by my colleagues and myself.

I am very happy for this means of information and suggestion, and when the question does come up I will have the document which you have been good enough to place in my hand, and if there is any further information or any further pamphlets which are being prepared and are being circulated by your society, I would take it as a great favor if you would send them and any communications with them, to me, as well as to my colleagues. Naturally it is a serious subject, and we would like to have all the information upon it which you would be in a position to collect.

I do not know that I could say anything more than that this morning. It would be obviously impossible for me to give you any assurance upon a question which the Government has not yet had an opportunity to take into consideration.

Mr. Munns:—I thank you on behalf of the deputation for the cordial way you have received the deputation and for your assurance that the matter will have your careful consideration.

Mr. Borden:—As it is at present you understand the question is one for the Provincial Legislatures and Governments, so long as we maintain the present law, and it is in the hands of the Provincial Governments in any case so far as the right to vote at Provincial elections is concerned. If we should conclude to repeal the law which was passed some fifteen years ago and take up the whole question of Federal franchise necessarily we will have to consider this, or possibly we may have to consider it before.