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"What the Women of Europe are Doing towards Forming National Councils."

3 A PAPER READ BEFORE THE OTTAWA LOCAL
COUNCIL OF WOMEN

— BY —

MISS TERESA WILSON,

Delegate authorized to visit the Councils by the Countess of Aberdeen,
President of the International Council of Women of the World.



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PAPER ON A VISIT TO THE NATIONAL COUNCILS OF
EUROPE AS DELEGATE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

MEMBERS OF THE OTTAWA LOCAL COUNCIL,

It is with great diffidence that I obey your behest to give you some account of the National Councils of Europe, either formed or about to be formed, which I visited last autumn at the request of Her Excellency the President of the International Council of Women, which is to hold its quintennial meeting in London in 1898.

The tour has been one of great interest throughout in very many directions, but to-day I shall attempt no description of the places visited, give no account of incidents en route, or of what I may have discovered about the industries of the different countries, of the progress of education, or of the status of the women, but shall plunge straight into my subject matter, trusting that you will be able to deduce from it some satisfaction from these facts :—That the Council idea is taking root elsewhere, that other countries are feeling the need of united national action and expression of thought on the part of their women, and that they are working their way through difficulties and—may I say it?—with the same enthusiasm which you are showing—towards that end.

FINLAND.

I will take first the farthest off country I visited, and tell you about the work that is being done there. Finland has been a Russian province since 1812, with its own constitution and customs, a mixed population of over two millions of Finns and Swedes, and a dual language. Out of these elements it has long struggled to evolve itself into a united nation. The result of this struggle has been to call forth, besides a deep national sentiment, a spirit of self-sacrificing patriotism and an intense keenness about all the questions of the day, and especially those which concern women.

There is no National Council formed in Finland, and yet I might easily say that a Council has been doing good work for the past twelve years, so nearly do the aims and objects of the Finsk Kvinnoforening resemble those of the National Council. Their constitution informs us that : “The aim of this Association is to work for the raising of woman intellectually and morally and for the improvement of her economical position and her position as a citizen.” This aim the Association for wards by means of lectures, discussions, pamphlets and practical undertakings ; it has nine branch Unions throughout the country in affiliation with the central body.

its great work has been the bringing out of a calendar containing a complete register of all the different woman's industries of the country,

their history, their present position with all information as to their capacity for giving remunerative employment, and so on.

The Association has also a general registry office; they have started schools for industrial training and for cooking; they have encouraged the training of women gardeners, and they carry on lectures and classes of instruction for the women of the working classes, who have a keen thirst for knowledge, and who belong to the Union as individual members paying a small yearly fee. This is their difficulty in forming themselves into a National Council because they are not a union of societies. This difficulty will doubtless be easily got over, as the Association is exceedingly anxious to put itself in touch with the movement which is taking root all over the civilized world, and to form an integral part of the great International Council of Women.

The President and moving spirit of all this work has been the Baroness Alexandria Gripenberg, a Swede by descent, who has thrown herself into the national movement, who has taught herself Finnish in order to edit a most successful Finnish woman's paper, and whose noble efforts are unwearingly to promote the welfare of her country.

Miss Gripenberg (for the title is not used in ordinary conversation) was at the meeting of the United States Council at Washington some years ago, and from there brought away ideas which resulted in the formation of the Association just described to you. She is one of those characters which combine sweetness and strength—a great power of affection along with force of will and commanding intellect. I am looking forward to the time when she will meet with other members of other National Councils, for there is little doubt but that all will be as greatly attracted to her as I was during my two days stay in Helsingfors, where I received such a splendid and hearty welcome.

Miss Gripenberg has a thorough command of English, and there were but few of the many charming ladies who accorded me such a gracious reception with whom I could not interchange some ideas.

SWEDEN.

In Sweden also there is not as yet a Council formed, but great anxiety was evinced that there should be one.

We had many consultations on the best ways and means of accomplishing this, for here also there is a large and flourishing woman's society doing "Council" work and carrying out the "Council" idea, without the direct constitutional basis. This Society is called the Fredrika Bremer Forbundet, so named after the great Swedish pioneer of the woman's movement there. It was formed by two ladies, who had given themselves up to the work—the Baroness Aldersparre Leijonhufvud and Madame Olivecrona. It has for objects: To make known the rights and duties of women socially and legally, to work for educational reforms, to induce the principle of self-help, to enlarge the labor market for women, and to take up moral and social questions concerning them.

The work of the Association is divided among a number of sub-committees. There is a sick relief fund, a scholarship fund (for although education is free throughout the whole range of the educational course in Sweden, yet there is one exception, and that is that there are no free high schools for girls). There is a Committee for the protection of young girls, another for providing trained nurses for country districts, another to make a selection of wholesome books to be recommended to parents and teachers. There is an Editorial Committee for the publishing of a Review and there is also an employment bureau, which not only finds employment but gives advice as to the most suitable employment and training in individual cases. Such is one of the largest societies in Sweden, which has branches started in various places, and which tries to keep before the women of the country the standard of Fredrika Bremer herself, that "It is only the true emancipation which saves from the false one."

There was a very general feeling that this Society should form itself into the National Council, but the able and energetic Secretary, Miss Gertrud Adelborg, voiced the wishes of the Society by declaring their perfect willingness to join a National Council on the same terms as any other association.

Mme. Retzius, President of the Society for Married Women's Property Rights, a leading Stockholm lady, both in social and philanthropic circles, who gave me the opportunity of meeting many interesting ladies at luncheon, is very keen to see a National Council formed. Two other societies have agreed to affiliate, what they call the "Animals Society" (S.P.C.A.) and an Upsala University Woman's Club. Miss Ellen Fries, whose simplicity and modesty scarcely allow you at first sight to grasp the fact that she is not only the first doctor of philosophy in the country, but an able historian as well, acts as Provincial Secretary during the formation of the Council, and she and some other ladies are so interested that they would like to join the International Council, whether their Country does or not, so as to be present at the Congress in '98. I am sorry that more definite news of the results of our Conference is not yet to hand, but I think they will work things out all right, for Stockholm at any rate, as they are intensely in earnest about it.

I cannot pass on from Sweden without mentioning its home industries, which are so great a feature of the woman's work of the country, and which is truly a national work. In every country there is a depot where the peasants can send their work for sale, and the depots of the different Home Industries and Art Associations in Stockholm contain objects of very great beauty—such as wood carving, burnt wood work, embroidery, tapestries and hand-woven fabrics. Much of the management of this work seemed to me to be on a national basis.

DENMARK.

Things here are in pretty much the same condition as in Sweden.

There is a large Woman's Society in Copenhagen, the Dansk Kvindesamfund, which has been at work since '71, and has done very much towards the establishment of technical schools, cooking schools and the development of manual training, weaving and other home industries.

There has been considerable interest taken here in the Council idea, perhaps not such a buoyant interest as in Sweden, but that may be accounted for by the removal or illness of the leaders of the women workers there. The Baroness Stampe Feddersen, who kindly took me all over the Danish Woman's Exhibition, is going to a distant part of the country, while their beloved chief, Miss Frederiksen, is entirely laid aside on account of ill health. Everything seems to revolve around her, and I was extremely sorry to miss seeing her. Two ladies interested in the movement, Miss Falbe Hansen and Miss Gruntvig, are endeavoring to take steps towards the formation of a Council.

This Danish Exhibition was the first of the kind ever held in Scandinavia. It was very successful, and would have been even more so, had the ladies managing it had more faith in their enterprise. They were delighted to find that by this means women holding very different opinions on all subjects could work harmoniously together with one common object, and this has given a great impetus towards the desire for the formation of a Council.

HOLLAND.

In Holland things are in an even more embryo state than in any country I had yet visited. No one understood the Council in the least degree. Here, as everywhere else I had been, I came across traces of a Mrs. Warner Snoad, in England, who had started some sort of International Union on her own account, and had confused the minds of all those appointed at the Chicago Congress to form National Councils in their own countries as to what the International Council was or was not.

Unfortunately both Norway and Belgium have gone after this will o' the wisp, and have refused affiliation with the real International Council in consequence, and it was very hard work, I assure you, to explain this.

I had the privilege in Amsterdam of making acquaintance of a most able and fascinating woman, Mme. Meuleman Van Ginkel, who however was not only too busy, but had identified herself too completely with the suffrage movement to be a possible leader of the Council movement. I hoped at the Hague to find the Countess Dowager van Klerck, a devoted worker for social purity, who had taken an interest in the Chicago Congress. She was unfortunately from home, but I saw her sister, Miss van Hoogendorp, and her sister-in-law, the Countess van Hoogendorp, and they both seemed to think that a Committee might at any rate be formed to report to the London Congress of '98.

They think they are too poor to form a National Council, and yet Holland is the country where there is more work to be done than elsewhere, for from what I have heard, the position of women, according to law, is worse than in almost any other European country.

GERMANY.

So far, I have only been able to report on the projected formation of National Councils. Now I have the joy of describing a National Council in full working order, viz., the National Council of Germany.

It is already almost two years old and is busy preparing for its second annual meeting. After seeing some of the office-bearers in Berlin and Leipzig, and after a short visit of devotion to the shrine of Germany's two greatest poets at Weimar, I had the privilege of attending a three days' meeting of an affiliated society to the National Council—the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein, at Frankfurt am Main. This Union is really the parent society of the National Council, or Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, and was then celebrating its 18th biennial meeting. It has long been working in all possible directions for the welfare of women, and has branches in all the principal towns of the German Empire; but with unusual and never to be too highly commended generosity, this Society has stepped down from its unique position, and has not only joined the National Council, on the same footing as any small and insignificant union, but has handed over its chief work of many years to be carried out, as a national work, by the National Bund. When I was explaining to the President the difficulty which the ladies of Sweden felt about sinking their outstanding society to a level with other smaller ones, "Tell them" she said "tell them that we, with our large membership and year long experience have subordinated ourselves to a newly started society because we believe so thoroughly in the Council idea, and because we desire to make our work of many years on the laws of Germany affecting women and children into a truly national movement." This disinterestedness is, I fear, as rare as it is beautiful.

I ought to say a few words about this new code of laws, which is to serve for all the German Empire. The laws regarding women are in a very backward state in Germany, in such matters as the guardianship of children, married women's property, the want of power to will, and so on. These women have taken the laws which press most heavily on their sex, and are offering suggestive amendments to government, the mildest possible amendments, in the earnest hope that they will not be rejected without consideration.

Hitherto I have tried very hard to stick to my subject, and have consequently omitted many interesting incidents which might have lightened this discourse, but if I now digress and give an account of the meeting at Frankfurt. it is only because you will thereby get some idea of the noble women who are not only leaders of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein, but also of the Bund to which it is affiliated.

I stayed at the Hotel Zum Weissen Schwan, where most of the delegates were quartered, so had an opportunity of being in the thick of everything and I received the utmost kindness from everybody. On the first evening, just as in our annual gatherings, there was a reception given by the Frankfurt ladies. On this occasion there were short addresses of wel-

come and a response by the worthy and well beloved president, Fraulein Augusta Schmidt, a veteran leader, who is ably taking up the work cast on her by their noble pioneer, Louisa Otto, who died last year, and whose work was touchingly referred to on many occasions. Fraulein Schmidt is a large-minded and large-hearted woman, capable of guiding the destinies of the Council alike by intellect and by affection. Round her were gathered many earnest women—Frau Anna Simson, a staunch believer in the Council idea; Frau Hanna Bieber Boehm, the champion of social purity; Fraulein Ottilie Hoffman, the advocate of temperance; Frau V. Foster, a dainty personage, who proves to everybody's satisfaction that she can not only professionally assist her husband as oculist, but also adequately perform her duties as wife, mother and member of society. Last but not least I must mention the fair and stately Fraulein Helene Lange, the ideal "Germania," whose intellectual force, business capacity, large-mindedness and common sense are already bringing her into a leading position amongst German women. I am looking forward with especial pleasure to note the place she will take at the International Congress of '98. These and many others were present at the reception which merged into a most genial supper, when toasts were given and healths were drunk, and "Hoch soll sie leben" was sung with all possible German Gemüthlichkeit, amidst the clinking of glasses and other signs of friendliness. Serious business was begun the next morning at 9 o'clock, and in the course of the next few days such subjects as the following were discussed: The legal position of women in the family, the work of Women's Unions in the future, the effect of the woman's movement on family life, and several educational subjects. This latter is the only direction in which these German women have as yet ventured to act practically; as the discussion of political and social questions might bring them into collision with the police! They are working hard for the higher education of women, and both kindergarten and gymnasien or girls' high schools were subjects of papers. In like manner does the Council fight shy, on the one hand, of all labor topics and of trade organizations which might smack of socialism, and, on the other hand, of religious societies, which might bring them into conflict with the all-dominant Lutheran pastor, who does not permit much independence of action on the part of the women of his congregation, I assure you. This German National Council of Women has many a difficult problem to face before their members may be said to have gained even the standing ground from which we here look forth upon the world around us. Our Teutonic sisters are, however, second to none in their earnestness and enthusiasm, their eloquence and their business capacity.

The Empress Frederick takes a deep interest in the Council work and was present when Helene Lange gave her able address on "Some new points of view on the woman's movement."

I give you a few sentences from her address which may help you to seize her standpoint.

"Shall woman be allowed to fulfil her duty to humanity? That is the highest meaning of the woman question of the day The right to her own personal existence, proclaimed by Christianity, must be extended from the religious to the different provinces of social life. Our century is ready to lead the way in this respect The question is to assure to women—equality in the eyes of the law, possibility of complete intellectual development, a share in professional activities and in the fight against excess and crime It is however above all the question of making woman fit for her duties. The way is over thorns and briars, it is no path of comfort and ease, no dilettantes can walk along it. The recognition of the greater responsibilities of higher culture will alone give the key to the solving of this problem."

She finished by hoping that these meetings might give to all—"Muht des reinen Lebens"—"greater courage to lead a pure life."

The gathering was finished off with a concert consisting of music of women composers only and by a festive banquet, from which I had difficulty in tearing myself away to catch the midnight train to Zurich.

SWITZERLAND.

In Switzerland, if unselfish resolve and noble endeavor can bring about a union of differing nationalities, languages and religions, a successful Council will be formed, but there are many difficulties in the way. Meantime a committee of very enthusiastic men and women is working hard to have a really successful National Congress of Women at the Geneva Exhibition next summer.

I met a number of ladies belonging to this Committee at the house of Professor Louis Bridel in Geneva, who has done much to help forward the passing of a Married Woman's Property Act, and had a most interesting talk with them about their intentions and their difficulties. They are very hopeful that a National Council will be the natural outcome of this Congress, the more so as one piece of successful national work has just been accomplished.

A committee of representative women was formed at Berne to report to the Chicago Congress, but being unable to carry out their intention, they started to compile a complete statistical account of all the charities of Switzerland in which women are concerned, and have done throughly good united national work. The solidarit  shown by the ladies has very much encouraged those who are working for greater unity between the different cantons. I was much impressed with the ladies whom I met in Geneva, Melle. Lasserre, president of the Union des Femmes; Mme. Chaponni re, Mlle. Camille Vidard, also Mr. and Mme. Bridel and others seemed to me most high-minded, generous souls, undertaking really serious work.

After our meeting we were sitting waiting for the 'Pak' to ferry us across to the other side of the river and watching the glorious outlines

of Mont Blanc as she proudly lifted her snowy head in the mellow light of that October afternoon, and I told them how I had been led to believe that nowhere should I find a thorough grasp of the Council idea, but everywhere small aims and petty jealousies, and desires for self-advancement. I told them how very different my experience had been, how everywhere I had found an eagerness to make their work truly national work even at the expense of subordinating what had been already accomplished to that aim, and how that spirit was especially remarkable in Geneva. And one of the party said to me: "Yes, think of us only in connection with Mont Blanc, which is rearing its noble crest up into the very heavens, and believe that we are together all striving upwards to reach even such a noble summit as that." And so I carried away with me the impression of a band of earnest Swiss ladies—"an equal fellowship of noble hearts, made weak by time and fate, but strong in will, to do, to dare, to suffer, not to yield."

ITALY.

Of Italy I have little to report. There are many things which make the formation of a National Council there a hopeful matter. There is a great deal of philanthropic energy now-a-days outside the walls of convents and of nunneries, and their beloved Queen Margharita occupies herself in the furtherance of woman's work and is said to be interested in the formation of a National Council, but so far, unfortunately, the management of this undertaking does not seem to have got into the right hands, and no progress has been made.

FRANCE.

Last in order of narration comes the story of the National Council of France, and in a few words I must tell you what I have learnt about it.

Here they have evolved a line for themselves, and the Council or *Fédération des Groupes Feministes* is composed of a series of groups:—

La Solidarité des Femmes, *La Ligue du Droit des Femmes*, *L'Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs*, *L'Avant Courrière*, *La Grande Loge Symbolique* of men and women Free-masons, about which they seem very enthusiastic, and so on.

So far as I could make out, the ladies concerned in the Council were more interested in the groups themselves than in the central body; neither have they as yet approached the more philanthropic and religious societies with a view to affiliation. They are, however, alive to the importance of having a really vigorous and representative Council before the International Congress takes place in '98. I had the honor of spending a delightful afternoon with Mme. Bogelot, the brave old lady who crossed the Atlantic to be present at the Chicago Congress, and who has been decorated with the Cross of the Legion of Honour for her

services there. She shows a disinterested love for her countrywomen, and will, I hope, be able to rally them together for national work, in conjunction with Mme. Maria Martin, who is an official of the International Council and a very keen and zealous worker. Circumstances were against my meeting many of the ladies interested in these groups, but I saw and heard enough to assure me that there is a good deal of work for women which needs doing in France and that there are strong, energetic and earnest women there, who are struggling against somewhat heavy odds to try and get it done, each in their own way and on their own lines, to whom an efficient Council would be a real help and blessing.

Such, ladies, are a few of the facts and results which I have been able to bring before you in a very imperfect way, of the Council idea, as it is being worked out in Europe. (I have made no mention of the British one, which has only just been formed), but before closing I should like to say what an encouragement and help and pleasure it has been to one and all of the ladies whom I met to hear of the work which you are doing in Canada, to learn how it is truly representative of *all* kinds of woman's work, of *all* sections of the community; how women speaking different tongues and professing different religious beliefs are learning to work together for the common good of all; how the needs of women and children in the community are brought under the notice of parliament through your agency and are received with the utmost deference.

These thoughts and the fact too that the President of the International Council considered it worth while to send some one with her greetings and her request for information, have made the Council idea a living reality to them and have urged them forward and will help them to make a worthy representation at the great Congress in London when sisters from all the world over will meet and form a strong bond of fellowship and of love which will strengthen each other's hands for the work that lies before us all.

TERESA F. WILSON.

