

Suffragists Arrested and Imprisoned, Letter to the Editor, 1917

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VIRGINIA WOMAN ASKS FOR JUSTICE

I HAVE read with great concern about the arrest and treatment of our women of the National Woman's party. In each case it seems clear that they were arrested because certain people disliked the wording on banners borne by them. The pickets were assaulted, arrested, imprisoned in the jail, sent to the workhouse at Occoquan, apparently not for what they had done, but because of the obstruction to traffic caused by interference of thoughtless people who had no right to interfere. The police, from reports, seem to have made little effort to protect the women. In one instance, according to the papers, when reproved for not doing his duty, a policeman replied: "You will not let us arrest the women, and we will not arrest the men."

Questions naturally arise, among them:

(1) Whose duty is it to see that the police do their duty? Are they to arrest simply the people they want to arrest? Does not the question of law and order enter into the proposition?

(2) The women rent the Cameron house and pay for it. Whose duty was it to prevent a mob from entering that house and taking therefrom banners which were the property of the women who rent that house? Whose duty was it to prevent the throwing of eggs and vegetables and stones at the house? Who fired that pistol? What was done with that person?

(3) One account said the cells in the jail were prepared the day before the trial. Why?

(4) Mrs. Matilda Hall Gardner says they had to sleep in a dormitory where colored women also slept. Miss Doris Stevens says they had to undress one by one before the entire company, including two negress attendants and a "harsh-voiced" wardress. There were sixteen of the pickets. After undressing, "each woman nakedly walked across the great vacant space to the doorless shower." After this humiliation, they had to dress in clothes which they learned had been taken from the backs of negroes the day before the trial and washed for the suffragists. If cells are prepared and clothes made ready before trial, why the trial? Next, Superintendent Whittaker appeared with a reporter.

(5) Mr. J. A. H. Hopkins, of New Jersey, President Wilson's "home state," and, I believe, chairman of his Democratic committee there, called on Mr. Wilson and pointed out to him things he had noticed, of which I will quote two:

(a) That, while calling upon women for every kind of service and sacrifice in connection with the war, the administration had steadfastly refused to pass the suffrage amendment.

(b) That men and women all over the country who were anxious to give their entire time and energy to the successful prosecution of the war had, by reason of these facts, and especially by the failure to pass the suffrage amendment, been compelled to devote a good portion of their time to establishing democracy at home.

Mr. Hopkins told Mr. Wilson about the "totally unwarranted" arrest of the sixteen suffrage pickets, their conviction and sentence of sixty days in the workhouse, after "a trial which was one of the most outrageous and farcical procedures." Mr. Wilson said he had never at any time objected to the pickets, nor had they annoyed him. He volunteered the information that he did not consider the Russian banner either treasonable or seditious. These gentlemen arranged the pardon for the women. "Mr. Wilson," says Mr. Hopkins, "called my attention to the fact that this would only be a temporary measure of relief and did not at all solve the real problem, which he agreed could only be solved by the passage of the Susan B. Anthony amendment." Mr. Hopkins then informed Mr. Wilson that Chairman Webb, of the judiciary committee, and Senator Jones, of the senate committee, had stated that they were ready to report the amendment whenever the President said the word.

(6) December 6, 1915, Mr. Wilson received three hundred women of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage and promised us that he would consult his colleagues at the other end of Pennsylvania avenue and that he would consider our request. Most of his colleagues have, from time to time, promised us their earnest consideration.

(7) Next came the "Kaiser Wilson" banners. This banner simply addressed him as "Kaiser Wilson" and asked if he did not remember his sympathy with the Germans because they did not have liberty.

(8) August 23, seven more women were arrested, among them Mrs. Pauline Adams, of Norfolk, and Mrs. Lockwood, of Clarendon, Va. The banners held this time were simply quotations from the President's book, the "New Freedom." One reads: "I tell you solemnly, ladies and gentlemen, we cannot postpone justice any longer in the United States."

August 9, Secretary of the Treasury William G. McAdoo, in a speech at Monterey, Pa., declared: "We intend to vindicate and make triumphant the principles of human liberty, if it takes every drop of blood in the veins of every American freeman." It is stated that this speech was submitted to Mr. Wilson before it was delivered.

Naturally, women ask who are "American free-men," and claim that there are twenty million women in the United States who have no voice in their own government. Let it be remembered that one woman risked her life for every individual soldier in the army; that one woman has devoted years of work and patience to rearing that soldier. Yet, when these men are sent to the front, a large number of women stand voiceless. Is not the national suffrage amendment a war measure? Why should it not be treated as such and passed at once?

Putting women in jail and in the workhouse will never solve or even help the problem. It is simply one that has to be met squarely, fairly and justly. Women love their country and are naturally patriotic. They give their all. Under God, I believe the right to vote is hers and that it should not be withheld from her a day longer. I send out the S.-O. S. call and ask that every man who believes in justice rally to the cause and help women, even as women have always helped men.

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