

## THE WOMEN'S BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL RESERVE.

### ITS PURPOSE AND WORK.

The Women's Branch of the National Reserve has been established in response to requests from all centres to provide for the enrolment of women desirous of supporting the loyal movement of the citizens during the present war crisis. In its Memorandum of Constitution, its purposes are stated to be:

(a) To compile an accurate register of women prepared to undertake some branch of work whereby they may set free for active service the men at present employed.

(b) To raise funds, without which no organisation can exist.

Branches and local sub-committees have been, or may be, formed, to be administered by an Executive Committee, having its headquarters in Wellington, under the presidency of Dr. Platts-Mills.

Annual subscriptions are, for honorary members 5s per annum, active members 2s, dating from August 4th, and payable, if preferred, half-yearly. Badges may be obtained at 2s 6d each. For registration, as explained by the Hon. G. W. Russell (see below), no fee is asked.

Cards for registration, and any information, can be obtained from the National Reserve Office, 157, Featherston Street, Wellington.

### WOMEN'S MEETING ADDRESSED BY HON. G. W. RUSSELL.

On Wednesday afternoon, May 31st, a women's meeting was held in the Newtown Public Library under the auspices of the Women's National Reserve. The purpose of the meeting was to give the Hon. G. W. Russell an opportunity to explain the Government scheme for the registration of women.

He began by briefly summing up the present position, the Empire engaged in a colossal war, not of Britain's seeking, for it found her unprepared—a war engaged in not for lust of territory, but to protect the liberties of the Belgians. We in New Zealand were as deeply interested in it as if we were in London, perhaps more so, for had not the German Navy been compelled by our navy to take refuge in Kiel, the first land to be attacked would have been our own islands, so bountifully blessed with supplies of coal for shipping, fro-

zen mutton for feeding soldiers, gold and silver, and everything desirable for an Empire like Germany, and the sufferings of the Belgian women would have been ours. Had any one predicted two years ago that by this time 50,000 soldiers would have been sent from New Zealand and another 10,000 training to go, he would have been judged a lunatic; but if it were necessary for New Zealand to send another 60,000, we were going to do it. That very afternoon the Military Service Bill was being discussed, which, without superseding the voluntary system, was intended to lie behind it, so that in districts where it was necessary, names might be drawn by lot for service at the Front. The power of compulsion would not come in, he could assure them, until it was absolutely necessary. Some were quite prepared to see their neighbours and comrades go and fight, but would not go themselves. He could tell of one part, occupied by wealthy sheepowners, where were whole families of grown-up sons, not one of whom had gone to the Front, and to meet such cases a special clause had been put in, enabling Ministers to conscript all such shirkers, without any ballot, for the Government was prepared to do its duty to the country.

As the manhood was being drained, it was necessary to organise a plan for using the womanhood. He was grateful for the magnificent work that the women had already done in the war, and for the gifts they had already sent away for the soldiers in connection with the Red Cross and other organisations—gifts to the value of not less than £150,000. In the present Bill, no member of Parliament was exempted, nor Government employees. But it was evident that some men must remain; some departments, the Railways, for example, must employ some men; the work of production must be carried on, but the Government were going to try and carry on without the single men, and proposed that married men should not be called on till the single men were exhausted, with one exception, namely, men married since the war began. These were not to escape their responsibilities to the women of the country by sheltering behind their wives.

How, then, can the womanhood of the country be more fully organised? The Women's Branch of the National Reserve had been entrusted with this

business, and he was there that afternoon to help them. By the original scheme, it was proposed to enrol women for the following classes of work: Professional, farming, general (tram conductors, etc.), shop work, domestic, and clerical; but the last-named was the first to be taken up; others might follow later. In all Government departments a census was to be taken of men serving as clerks who were fit for service at the Front, and women would be put in their places. Similarly with banking institutions, shipping offices, wholesale warehouses, etc., women would do most of the work as well as men. Many women had been through the technical and high school, some through the universities; he appealed to all such who had any time to give to enrol at once. They would have to submit to some simple test, on passing which they would be employed for clerical work. Those who had not had such educational advantages, should hand in their names, and for them classes would be opened, in afternoon, morning, and evening, at which they could qualify. The Minister for Education would be asked to apply to the school teachers to assist with these classes, as their contribution to the country, and also to appoint one of the Inspectors to examine candidates and grant certificates of proficiency for general clerical work, typistes, and shorthand writers. When the women were trained ready, the National Reserve would advertise and offer them for service.

Such was the general outline of the scheme. As to payment for services thus rendered, he did not intend to ask the women to provide cheap labour. If a woman did the work of a man, she should receive the same wage.

The end of the war was not yet in sight, but as Britishers, we could have no doubt as to the end, for wherever the flag of Britain had gone, there had been progress, and the peoples had been uplifted. One had but to look at India, Egypt, own own New Zealand, to recognise this. The principles for which we were fighting, for which so much had been sacrificed, would be victorious; and the women of New Zealand would be able to feel that they had done their part.

A hearty vote of thanks was passed to the Minister for his clear and interesting address.