

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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MAKING HISTORY.

A very large and influential deputation assembled in the old chamber of the House of Representatives to present to the Premier and the Finance Minister the large petition asking for a Referendum upon the Efficiency Board's proposal for ending the Liquor Trade.

The deputation was introduced by Mr L. M. Isitt, and the speakers were Rev. R. S. Gray, President of the N.Z. Alliance; Mrs Don, President of the W.C.T.U.; and Rev. F. A. Bennett, Superintendent of Maori Missions.

Rev. R. S. Gray spoke clearly, concisely, and temperately, and with masterly skill framed his indictment against "The Trade." He spoke of the size of the petition, the largest ever presented to Parliament. The deputation came to them as patriots, not as Prohibitionists. But there was now a consensus of opinion amongst statesmen that the question of Prohibition must be dealt with in the interests of national efficiency. The time had gone past when they had to convince members that the liquor trade was an enemy, not only to the individual, but to the nation. They held that the war had amply demonstrated that the liquor trade was the enemy of the nation, and they now asked them to introduce legislation to banish the liquor trade in the interests of economic, physical, and moral efficiency. They, together with the business men, urged the Government to carry into effect the recommendation of the Efficiency Board. The N.Z. Alliance, after grave deliberation, had abandoned its opposition to compensation, and had agreed to the

recommendation of the Efficiency Board for reasonable compensation to the liquor trade. The Alliance did not believe that the liquor trade had either legal or moral right to compensation, but had accepted it because they believed it was the only way to get legislation to deal speedily with the traffic. They understood that on the lines of the Efficiency Board's report they would have immediate prohibition by a bare majority.

He characterised the Liquor Petition as dishonest, because while professing to try to discover the will of the people, it took special precautions to defeat that end. It was a case of "Heads they win, and tails we lose." They asked for a vote on three issues: Continuance, National Ownership, and National Prohibition. No person to vote on more than one issue, and no issue carried except by an absolute majority of the votes cast. If 100 votes were cast, 50 for prohibition, 49 for State ownership, and 1 for continuance, continuance would win because neither of the other issues secured a majority (51) of the votes cast.

The speaker pointed out that large as the petition was, a much larger one could have been secured for Prohibition without compensation, and if the Government did not grant this petition, we should come next year with a petition for Prohibition without compensation, which would be overwhelming.

The Labour Party were also presenting a petition asking for four issues on a preferential vote. The Labour Party were the custodians of democracy. If more than two issues were put upon the ballot paper, there was no way of ascertaining the will of

the people save by preferential voting or a second ballot.

Before State Ownership was put upon a ballot paper, we wanted to know how much the trade wanted to buy them out; whether the national liquor trade was to be run for profit or to promote temperance; what type of civil servant was to sell the liquor, whether they were to be the present licensed victuallers, barmen, and barmaids?

In conclusion, all they asked was that the public should have a fair chance of expressing their will at the ballot box.

Mrs Don feelingly and eloquently presented the woman's point of view. The long tragedy of the war had led all people to see the harm of alcohol. It was evil only, and science showed that it disqualified humanity from the cradle to the grave, and no class knew this better than the women did. She had met mothers who had given their sons to the Empire, and these sons were now sleeping on the slopes of Gallipoli or in the cemeteries of France, women whose sons were in the danger zone, women whose sons had been returned mutilated, and they had made no moan. All they complained of was that sons who had left total abstainers had returned with a craving for alcohol. She urged the Ministers now, when war had so sadly depleted our man-power, to do all possible to conserve what was left.

Compensation had been a bitter pill for the women to swallow; they did not see that a trade which had always brought ruin in its train should be compensated. They emphatically objected to compensation, but so strongly did they feel the menace of