

Scott Papers
MS 38/37
item 3.

THE STATE AND ITS WOMAN
EMPLOYEES. [19 Dec. 1901]

Yesterday a deputation from the Womanhood Suffrage League waited upon the Public Service Board with the object of setting forth some of the grievances of which woman employees of the State complain. Of these the most important would seem to be that offences which would be regarded as justifying the expulsion from the Public Service of woman offenders are regarded as mere peccadilloes when the offender is a man. If this statement were true, the Public Service Board has been guilty of a grave dereliction of duty; not so much because it favoured men as against women in the service of the State, but because it winked at the neglect of duty by public servants. The difference of sex does not properly enter into the discussion at all, and the question really resolves itself into a purely business consideration. There are so many servants of the State employed to do certain work. Is it a fact that these servants, or any of them, are allowed to shirk their work and to enjoy themselves in business hours? What they do after business hours is no concern of the State as employer, but it is to the interest of the State to insist upon the due performance of their work by the servants who have been selected to do it. As a matter of fact the statement that offences committed by men were overlooked which would ensure dismissal in the case of women was withdrawn by the lady who made it. It was unsupported by evidence and was plainly untenable. Still the accusation was made, and it is matter for regret that people should make charges of the kind. They can do no good to the persons who advance them or to their cause, whilst they may do a deal of harm. The State has recognised the advisability of employing women in the Public Service, but that does not mean that places shall be found straightway for all the woman candidates who pass the entrance examination. Appointments can only be given when vacancies occur, and, with the transference of the Postal Department to the Federal Government, such appointments are only rarely at the disposal of the State authorities, comparatively speaking. But, so far as can be seen, there is no difference in the treatment of public servants once they are appointed. The Board rightly makes no distinction so far as regards the sex of public servants. To the Board public servants are public servants, and nothing more or less.

WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE
TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir,—With reference to our deputation to the Public Service Board, will you allow me to state, as the originator and organiser of that deputation, that its chief object was the employment of women in the Public Service; and the fact that since December, 1899, two years ago, girls have not been allowed to compete at the junior clerical examinations—and this in spite of section 35 of the Act and the board's most encouraging report. Also, that out of four girls who so successfully passed in December, 1899, one girl has not yet been placed. The reasons given by the board are obvious, and speak well, not only for their sense of justice but also for their kindness of heart, since it can be of no use allowing girls to pass examinations and then disappointing them, and all by reason of the lack of necessary accommodation.

We now appeal to the Minister for Works. It is certain that nowadays women must work to support themselves, and often others; it is surely also certain that no chivalrous man will willingly block the sex they are supposed to protect from earning an honest living. The question of equal pay for equal work is so just that it is strange it should need our pleading. The question of equal punishment was not the object of the deputation; it was an afterthought, hastily arranged a moment before we entered the room. The kind heart of the lady who brought it before us, and then the board, had been much distressed over a case she knew of; but names could not be mentioned publicly. We were, at any rate, quite satisfied that the board felt on that subject generally just as we did ourselves. Women have often had reason to thank the "Herald" for justice and courtesy, and so, hoping you will in justice to our deputation publish this letter, I am, &c.,

ROSE SCOTT, Hon. General Secretary W.S.L.

FEMALES AT THE PUBLIC SERVICE
EXAMINATION. 117

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir,—Great disappointment has been caused to many persons by the vacillancy of the Public Service Board with regard to the admission of females to the forthcoming public service examination. On inquiry at the office last week, applicants were informed that both sexes would be allowed to compete, but, to the disappointment of many who had made arrangements and secured the services of a coach, Saturday's newspaper informed the public that the Public Service Board have changed their minds, and only males will be admitted. The only excuse that can be offered is that no accommodation has been provided in offices for females, but the real truth is that the conservatism of certain under-secretaries bars the way, and the Public Service Board, who are in and out of office every few months, have not the courage to carry out the provisions of the Public Service Act, which provides for the admission of women to the public service. Injustices like these strongly illustrate the necessity for the immediate enfranchisement of women. If they had votes they would then be of some political importance, and would find champions galore; but now being political nonentities, they are brushed aside and common justice denied them.

I have been informed that the ladies now in the public service are a decided success, so that no fault can be found with them on the score of fitness.—Yours, etc.,
PATER.
October 29.