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THE PRESIDENT AND THE SUFFRAGISTS

"I WAS DREADFULLY FRIGHTENED MYSELF, AND I DO BELIEVE HE WAS AS MUCH FRIGHTENED."

But Dr. Anna Howard Shaw says she is satisfied with her interview with President Wilson, tho she is sorry he failed to link his name with Lincoln's by official advocacy of the enfranchisement of women.

IT WAS SOMETHING of an achievement for President Wilson to refuse the requests of a delegation of woman suffragists without giving them the slightest inkling of his own attitude toward their cause, even his political foes acknowledge. Some of them, however, consider it a mere clever "dodge," and his stanch friend, the New York *Evening Post*, even calls it "absurd." According to another friendly paper, the New York *World*, the President's visitors were "properly rebuked." Yet their leader calls the interview "all that we could ask for." The fact is, declares the critical Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, that President Wilson's "meaning was so artfully concealed that some of the women were encouraged, some were disappointed, and some, like Mrs. McCormick, who said that she needed time 'to think' before making any comment, were so dazed that they were unable to form an opinion." The President's refusal to urge equal suffrage upon Congress, continues the Rochester daily, "was couched in such terms that it is impossible to say whether he is in personal sympathy with the suffrage movement or with the opposition, his refusal being based upon the ground that 'I am not at liberty to urge upon Congress, in messages, policies which have not had the organic consideration of those for whom I am spokesman." This statement of the President's has to Washington cor-

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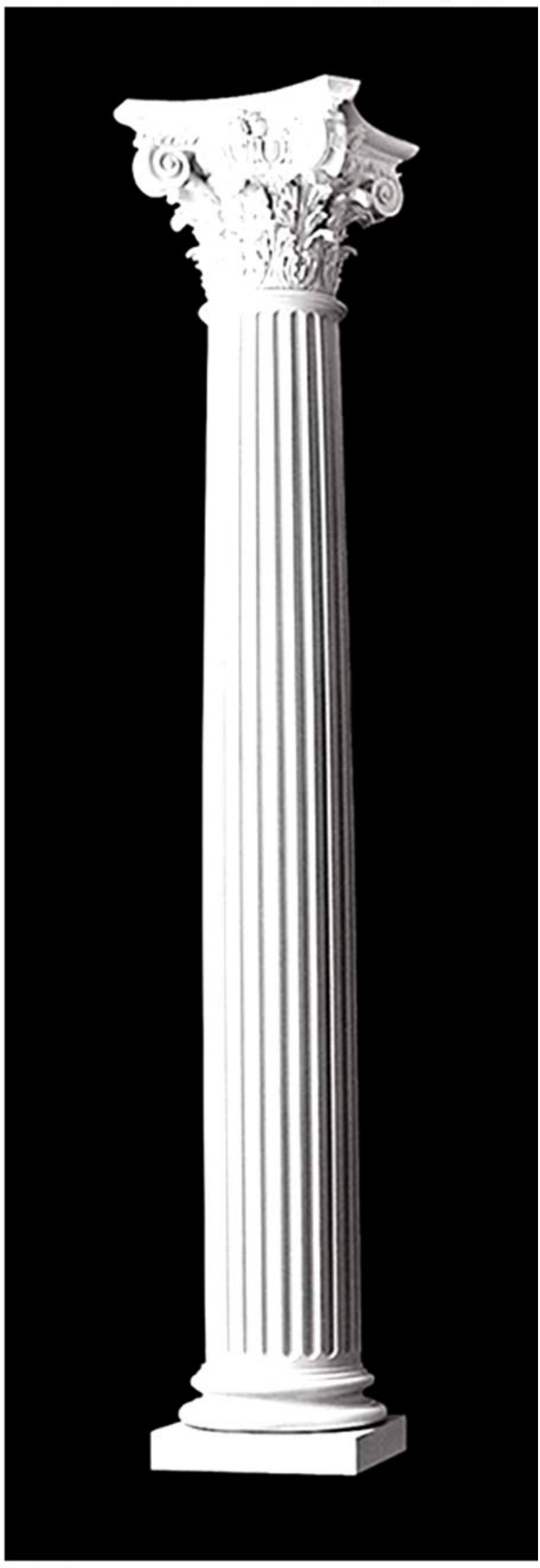
correspondents "a broader significance than its mere relation to the suffrage question." As the New York *Sun's* representative believes, "it commits Mr. Wilson to the policy of recommending to Congress in the next three years only such subjects as are included in the Baltimore platform." This "is a departure," we are reminded, from the custom of President Roosevelt and President Taft.



The fifty-five suffragists who called on President Wilson in the White House last week were a delegation from the recently adjourned Washington convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the association, was their head and spokesman. The President paid the strictest attention, say the dispatches, while she asked him, on behalf of the women citizens of the republic, to ask Congress for an equal-suffrage amendment to the Federal Constitution, or, failing in this, to "use the Administration's power" to secure the appointment in the House of Representatives of "a committee corresponding with the Suffrage Committee in the Upper House, before whom we may go, a committee which has leisure to examine our subject, a committee which can give it its time."

The President's brief speech in reply "is of wide application and interest," observes the New York *Evening Post's* Washington correspondent, "because it does not apply solely to woman suffrage, but to all of the various movements and propaganda which send delegations here, or have conventions here, and seek to induce the White House to take up their cause and make recommendations to Congress." To quote a portion of what Mr. Wilson said:

"I set myself this very strict rule when I was Governor of New Jersey and have followed it as President, and shall follow it as President—that I am not at liberty to urge upon Congress, in messages, policies which have not had the organic consideration of those for whom I am spokesman.

"In other words, I have not yet presented to any legislature my private views on any subject, and I never shall, because I conceive that to be part of the whole process of government that I shall be spokesman for somebody, not for myself. It would be an impertinence. When I speak for myself, I am an individual; when I am spokesman of an organic body, I am a representative.

"For that reason, you see, I am by my own principles shut out, in the language of the street, from 'starting anything.' I have to confine myself to those things which have been embodied as promises to the people at an election. That is the strict rule I set for myself.

"I want to say that with regard to all other matters, I am not only glad to be consulted by my colleagues in the two

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houses, but I hope they will often pay me the compliment of consulting me when they want to know my opinion on any subject.

"One member of the Rules Committee did come to me and asked me what I thought about this suggestion of yours of appointing a special committee of the House, as the Senate has already appointed a special committee, for the consideration of woman's suffrage, and I told him that I thought it was a proper thing to do. So that, so far as my personal advice has been asked by a single member of the Committee, it has been given to that effect. I want to tell you that to show that I am strictly living up to my principles."

"When he told us that," says Dr. Shaw, in a New York *Tribune* interview,

"I inquired if I might ask him a question. He said I might. I said: 'Mr. President, since you can not present our case to Congress, and since we have no committee in the House, who is to speak for us there?' He returned laughingly that he had found us well able to speak for ourselves, whereupon I said: 'But not authoritatively. Have we any one, Mr. President, to present our case with authority to Congress?' He hesitated a moment, the muscles of his face twitched; I was dreadfully frightened myself, and I do believe he was as much frightened; but he didn't evade the question; he answered squarely, 'No.'

"And to my mind that 'No' was the most important thing in the interview."

After leaving the White House, Dr. Shaw said optimistically of the visit:

"It was all that we could ask for. He is in favor of a committee of the House; that was our chief purpose in coming to see him."

Yet the leader of the suffragists is sorry—"more for Mr. Wilson's sake than for ours"—"that he has not had the courage to speak out for our enfranchisement, and I am the more sorry because I think that he believes in it. He could not have written the words he has written in 'The New Freedom' and not believe in it." The nearest thing to an official suffrage reply to President Wilson's speech is contained in this little argument, with which Dr. Shaw concluded her statement:

"I think he is mistaken in considering himself the spokesman of his party. He should be the spokesman of his country now. Moreover, would he not speak for his party in speaking for suffrage? His total vote in the last election was 6,292,718. Half of this is 3,146,359. Now, in the ten States where women vote the total Democratic vote is 1,577,254. In the campaign States, North Dakota, Montana, and Nevada, where the suffrage bill has passed the legislature stage and is before the people, the total Democratic vote is 65,112. In Iowa, New York, and New Jersey, where the bill has passed one legislature, the total Democratic vote is 1,010,938. A suffrage bill has also passed Democratic legislatures in Wisconsin and Missouri. Count these totals up and you will find that the Democratic vote in States where women have the ballot or where the legislature is Democratic and has shown itself for woman suffrage amounts to 3,148,660, or more than half the Democratic vote in the last Presidential election.

"Is Mr. Wilson representing the majority of his party, therefore, when he declines to speak for enfranchisement of women?"

So the suffragists are concealing any disappointment they may feel and speak of the President most kindly. The good feeling may not extend to his party, however, hints Miss Alice Paul, chairman of the suffragists' congressional committee —"we are going to turn the votes of millions of women and the influence of many more against the Democratic party in the next election, unless that party changes its mind on the question of suffrage."

But opposition editors are not willing to let Mr. Wilson off so easily. The incident brings from the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rep.) the admission that "if adroitness in dodging awkward questions is a proof of political ability, then Woodrow Wilson is one of the ablest politicians the country ever

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produced." In the Indianapolis *Star's* (Prog.) opinion, "the President 'wabbled,' not to say quibbled, in his talk to the women." The New York *Press* (Prog.) wonders at the "novel doctrine" expounded by the President, and inclines to the view that with "the suffragettes" he was perhaps "not so modest and retiring as politic and calculating." No less critical is the New York *Evening Post* (Ind.), friend of equal suffrage and strong supporter of the Administration. It does not want to call the President's courteous speech a "dodge," but—

"it does not square with what we believe to be the sound conception of the Presidency as an office in which initiative and leadership are essential. For that matter, it does not square with President Wilson's own practise. No Executive has been more insistent or more successful than he in impressing his personal views upon Congress; and we take it that he would not make a quibbling distinction between doing this in a public message and in earnest interviews with members. Mr. Underwood, for example, stated on the floor of Congress that free sugar and free wool were written into the Tariff Bill at the express request of Mr. Wilson. He might perhaps say that this was only his development of the 'organic consideration' given to the tariff in the Democratic platform. But take another case. Last week he urged Congress to enact a Federal law for Presidential primaries. What organic consideration, of which he is the obedient spokesman, had his party given to this subject? The Baltimore platform favored Presidential primaries, but only 'through legislation in each State.' The Federal scheme is off Wilson's own bat. It is entirely right that he should recommend to Congress whatever he thinks best for the country. The only question is whether it is right for him to say that he can not unless it has been previously considered by his party. To state that position is, in our opinion, enough to make it appear absurd."

In contrast with this is the attitude of the New York *World* (Dem.), which, not content with praising the President, undertakes to scold the suffragists who went to the White House "truculently with preliminary demands and menaces which were out of place and not much to their credit." They were "properly rebuked" by the President, who, adds *The World*, "gave his callers a primary lesson in party and popular government, and, as is customary with him, he imparted the instruction courteously as well as pointedly. The appeal of the suffragists must continue to be to the people." The opinion expressed in the last sentence from the *World* editorial is shared by other editors, who have no objection to the women's activity at Washington. The suffragists, explains the Springfield *Republican*, understand politics, "agitate methodically," and realize that "one way to agitate is to press along all possible avenues of approach." Yet *The Republican* concludes, as do the New York *Evening Sun* and Pittsburg *Dispatch*, that "the most fruitful field for the suffrage movement for some time to come

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