INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1348 USA
800-521-0600

UMI
WOMEN'S FOREIGN POLICY ADVOCACY IN 1930s BRITAIN

by

Deborah E. Van Seters

A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of History
University of Toronto

©Deborah E. Van Seters, 1999
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-53910-5
This study of women’s participation in the public realm focuses on women’s activism in foreign affairs in a period in British history in which such issues increasingly dominated public life. From the generally optimistic outlook of the early 1930s to the divisive and anxious debates later in the decade, discussion of foreign policy in Britain at this time constituted a rich and varied dialogue which attracted concerned citizens of all political persuasions. This study examines the extent to which politically engaged women chose to involve themselves in what was clearly a heavily male-dominated realm and how such participation can be characterized.

In spite of the fact that international relations scholarship concerning British foreign policy in the 1930s is extensive and has acknowledged the insight to be gained from looking beyond a small circle of high-ranking policy makers, recognition of women’s activism has remained very limited. Considerably greater interest has been shown within the field of women’s history, but typically in relation to a select group of individuals or organizations. Looking at a wide range of relevant activity in non-party women’s organizations and mixed-membership organizations, in the world of journalism and independent published commentary, and in the explicitly political arenas of parties and parliament, this study offers a more complete sense of the full scope of options
pursued by interested women in penetrating the male world of foreign policy debate. It also suggests that this was an area of women's activism which saw feminists and non-feminists co-operating closely on some occasions, while in other situations women with like-minded views on the position and rights of women in society were sharply divided in their foreign policy opinions. Women's foreign policy advocacy in Britain in the 1930s is revealed as a complex world in which explicitly gendered and non-gendered rationales and arguments were present in many varied forms and were not exclusively associated with any particular foreign policy position - whether pacifist, internationalist, or militarist.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first of all like to express my appreciation to the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship fund, and the University of Toronto - all of which offered financial support which made this project possible. I would also like to thank the administrative staff in the History department at U of T for their kind and effective assistance over the years.

The research for this thesis involved the use of a number of libraries and archival collections both in Canada and in the U.K. Here at home, special thanks are due to the staffs in the Interlibrary loan service and the Microform collection at Robarts Library at the University of Toronto. Thanks also to the Vera Brittain Archive at McMaster University. Regarding sources consulted in the U.K., my biggest debt of gratitude (as is the case for so many scholars of British women's history) is to the Fawcett Library at the City of London Polytechnic and its staff, but especially to the wonderful David Doughan. Many thanks also to the British Library of Political and Economic Science archives (University of London), the British Library, the British Library Newspaper Library, the University of Reading archives, the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne archives, the University of Birmingham archives, the Brynmoor Jones Library of the University of Hull, the Sydney Jones Library of the University of Liverpool, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the Cumbria Record Office. Finally, special thanks to the Peace Pledge Union staff at Dick Sheppard House, London, for permission to view PPU papers and for the warm reception they offered me, to the Duchess of Atholl's niece and literary executor, Lady Warner, for permission to view the Duchess'
papers, and to Jane Anderson, the Atholl family archivist at Blair Castle, who graciously assisted me and welcomed me into her office to work.

In the process of making sense of all my research and in shaping the thesis, I was greatly helped by my advisor, Dr. Wesley Wark, whose enthusiasm and support were constant and whose questions and comments repeatedly cleared away the mists of confusion and uncertainty. I am also grateful to Dr. Sylvia Van Kirk for her considerable, valuable advice which reflected both an awareness of the larger issues and a fine eye for detail.

Finally, I have been tremendously lucky in the empathy, insight, and laughter of the friends I have made here in the History department and would especially like to thank Jeff McNairn, Jane Harrison, and Jane Thompson for their continued support and encouragement over the years and for the fun we've had together. My parents, John and Elizabeth Van Seters, have generously sustained me in more ways than I can express and I thank them and my brother, Peter, for their firm belief in my abilities. In the last few years I have also greatly valued the warm support of Dory and Tom Crerar. By far my greatest debt, however, is to my partner, Adam Crerar. His intellectual gifts informed the entire project from beginning to end, easing the process immeasurably, and he always adamantly insisted on the value of this enterprise. Beyond that, he simply made it possible. every day, to keep going - and to enjoy life at the same time.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 1

Abbreviations 4

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 - Women's Organizations I - Policy Formation 28

Chapter 2 - Women's Organizations II - Strategy and Rhetoric 77

Chapter 3 - Mixed-Membership Organizations 124

Chapter 4 - Foreign Affairs Writing and Publishing 180

Chapter 5 - The Politics of Foreign Policy I - Women's Party Structures 249

Chapter 6 - The Politics of Foreign Policy II - Women Members of Parliament 299

Conclusion 367

Bibliography 389
ABBREVIATIONS

BUF  British Union of Fascists
CPGB Communist Party of Great Britain
FoR  Fellowship of Reconciliation
FPC  Friends' Peace Committee
IAW  International Alliance of Women
ICW  International Council of Women
IPC  International Peace Campaign
IWCG International Women's Co-operative Guild
IWSA International Women's Suffrage Alliance (later became IAW)
LNU  League of Nations Union
NCEC National Council for Equal Citizenship (offshoot of NUSEC)
NCLW National Conference of Labour Women
NCS  New Commonwealth Society
NCW  National Council of Women
NMWM No More War Movement
NPC  National Peace Council
NUSEC National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NUWSS National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (later became NUSEC)
PPU  Peace Pledge Union
SJC  Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations
SPG  Six Point Group
UDC  Union of Democratic Control
WCAWF Women's Committee Against War and Fascism (later became
      Women's Committee for Peace and Democracy)
WCG  Women's Co-operative Guild
WFL  Women's Freedom League
WIL/WILPF Women's International League, Women's International League for
      Peace and Freedom
WNLF Women's National Liberal Federation (later became Women's Liberal
      Federation)
WPC  Women's Peace Crusade (two different movements by this name - 1st
      circa World War I, 2nd circa late 1920s, 1930s)
WSPU Women's Social and Political Union
INTRODUCTION

In February of 1932, an important conference began in Geneva with the expressed ambition of achieving international agreement on disarmament. Among the 1,200 official delegates were a handful of women from different countries. Their credentials as prominent public figures, their expertise in international affairs, and their "presentability" were apparently viewed as sufficiently valuable (at least as a public relations gesture) to warrant their entrance into the traditionally male world of diplomacy and international relations.

One of these five women, Margery Corbett Ashby, represented Great Britain. Appointed by her government as a substitute delegate to the conference, Corbett Ashby was one of the most prominent feminists of the interwar period. A relatively youthful veteran of the suffrage campaign and an active feminist on domestic issues in the 1920s, Corbett Ashby had been introduced to international politics through her involvement with the International Alliance of Women - an association of national feminist organizations from around the world of which she became president in 1926. Her experiences with this organization had convinced her of the importance of women's activism in the crucial task of working for peace and international understanding - for the benefit of feminist causes and of humanity in general. Her high profile in this role, combined with her "respectable" political background with the Liberal party and personal background as a university-educated, upper middle class, wife and mother,
made Corbett Ashby appear a relatively safe and happy choice as a "visible" woman for the delegation.

Margery Corbett Ashby's letters to family members written before leaving for Geneva and during her time there provide a vivid glimpse of her changing impressions of her experiences in this role. In them her tone and comments ranged from expressing amusement and excitement to frustration, anger, and even despair as she encountered the realities of international political machinations. Early letters to her mother not surprisingly sounded anticipatory and flattered as she spoke of initial meetings with Sir John Simon, the Foreign Secretary, and of being given large quantities of cabinet papers and other documents to read.¹ Once in Geneva, she was discouraged by early indications of the problems which would hinder the conference, but still charmed at the novelty of speaking with men of influence on issues of international affairs, as she wrote on February 12th:

I just slipped in a tired little letter to you last night because I was really half sick with sheer excitement at having got my views off my chest to my two cabinet ministers! [Simon and Lord Londonderry, Minister for Air] They listened awfully well! ...we were interrupted at the end...but Lord Londonderry followed me out and we had a tête à tête in my room. Goodness knows if my ideas will help but it has cured my depression because it gives me the feeling of doing something....²

However, as the days and weeks progressed, her spirits visibly declined. She was bolstered by contact with international women's organizations and committees in Geneva observing the conference, but among the male diplomats and officials of the conference itself she frequently felt powerless and frustrated with the larger atmosphere of growing stagnation


²MCA to MC, 2 February 1932. MCA Papers.
and distrust. Increasingly, Corbett Ashby wrote of the difficulties of getting people to listen to her. She was quickly disillusioned with Sir John Simon and made to feel like a "nag." If anything, the situation worsened when Simon was replaced at the conference by Anthony Eden - with whom she found it more difficult to establish relations. In a letter to her husband, she noted that she got very little help from the permanent officials within the delegation and suggested that they, in fact, wanted to "freeze [her] out" - which she attributed to economy "...plus a certain prejudice against women."  

Margery Corbett Ashby's personal trials would have inevitably seemed less significant to her if she had sensed that real progress in disarmament was being achieved at the conference, or at least that her own country's intentions were sincere. Unfortunately, international agreement remained out of reach and it appeared to Corbett Ashby that her government was merely presenting a facade of support to the conference while rejecting almost all proposals. She described her situation as that of "[having] the feeling of living in an unreal world or seeing only Plato's shadows." With the announcement of British rearmament plans in early 1935, she resigned her position, noting in her letter to the prime minister that she would feel "less useless to the cause of peace" if she left the delegation. In keeping with this sentiment, she remained committed in the latter half of the decade to activism in international affairs. While her own views on foreign policy evolved in light of

---


4MCA to Brian Ashby [husband]. 8 February 1933, MCA Papers.

5MCA to Brian Ashby. 22 February 1933. MCA Papers.

6MCA to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. 6 March 1935. MCA Papers.
new developments on the international stage, Corbett Ashby remained constant in her belief in the urgency of involving women in this realm and in the value of their contributions.

This story of one woman's experiences as a participant in the world of foreign policy and international diplomacy in the 1930s is compelling in its own right. However, it also raises further questions about the involvement of women generally in the very male-dominated world of international affairs in this period. What forces compelled Corbett Ashby and many other women, against the conventions of their times, to engage in foreign policy activism? How did they cope with the difficulties participation in this male-dominated world entailed and in what contexts did they pursue this activity? How did the various events and developments on the international stage in the 1930s effect their views and their engagement? Answers to these questions offer the possibility of a valuable contribution to our understanding both of the nature of foreign policy activism generally in this tumultuous decade and of women's political activism specifically in the post-suffrage period.

To date, scholarly treatment of women's foreign policy activism in Britain in the 1930s is rare, especially outside of the disciplines of women's history and feminist history. This circumstance coincides with a traditional lack of interest in women's activities on the part of historians of international relations - a disinterest which has only recently been questioned by a few scholars in this discipline, especially in the subject of the history of the United States and international relations.\(^7\) If one looks for evidence of women's participation

\(^7\)The past ten years has seen something of a flowering of interest in the incorporation of women and gender issues into the field of international relations. To date, however, the larger part of this effort has been undertaken by feminist political scientists working to bring together feminist theory and international relations theory. Among the relevant studies produced thus far are: Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: An*
within the substantial literature on the formation of British foreign policy in the 1930s and, specifically, on the evolution of policy towards the fascist dictatorships which became known generally as "appeasement." the findings are slight to non-existent, especially in many of the "classics" of the literature which focus largely on an elite circle of male policy-makers and contain only passing references to, or relatively brief discussions of, a broader circle of opinion. The situation is little different in more recent studies of similar scope. In all of these works, as well as in most biographies of these elite men, women are either invisible or are referred to only in passing - either in general terms as part of public background to debate, or in specific examples of individual women's active support of, or opposition to, government policy. At their best, such references come across as sincere, if brief,

Introduction, (1998); Christine Sylvester, Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era, (1994); Deborah Stienstra, Women's Movements and International Organizations, (1994); V. Spike Peterson, ed., Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory, (1992); Ann Tickner, Gender in International Relations, (1992); Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland, eds., Gender and International Relations, (1991); and Cynthia Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics, (1989). Work on women and gender in the history of international relations has been much more limited. Certainly the works of Stienstra and Enloe contain some historical reflection, and the Grant and Newland collection includes an article by Carol Miller which discusses public debate in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s over the entry of women into the diplomatic service and the civil service of the League of Nations. (Miller, "Women in international relations? The debate in inter-war Britain," in Gender and International Relations, Grant and Newland, eds., pp.64-82.) Beyond these works, however, interest in this subject has generally been shown by only a few scholars of American foreign policy, including Edward P. Crapol, editor of Women and American Foreign Policy: Lobbyists, Critics, and Insiders, (1987, 2nd edition - 1992), and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, author of Changing Differences: Women and the shaping of American foreign policy, 1917-1994, (1995). Further work is this field has been encouraged by prominent diplomatic historian Emily Rosenberg - in "Gender," The Journal of American History. (June 1990), pp.116-124.


recognitions of women's contributions to the debate. At their worst, they have the condescending quality of novelty items included simply to add "colour" to the narrative.

What all these studies share is a consensus that women were not central to the formation and evolution of foreign policy in this period and are therefore not important subjects for discussion or analysis.

Women are somewhat more visible in works which move outside the inner circles of policy formation to focus more heavily on the responses of other politicians and on extra-parliamentary activity regarding foreign policy. However, with a few exceptions, such works still tend to portray women's contributions as peripheral or not especially interesting, and detailed discussion of women's activities is again rare. For example, little attention is given to women's participation in foreign policy debate in discussions of party and parliament. General histories of the various political parties in the 1930s are often very limited in their acknowledgements of women's presence in the parties and say little of women's activities generally, let alone their foreign policy activism. In studies focusing on party and foreign

---

10See, for example, R.A.C. Parker's reference to the Duchess of Atholl, MP and author of "best-selling 'Penguin Special'" Searchlight on Spain, as "a highly effective advocate for the Spanish government" - in reference to her support for Republican Spain during the civil war. (Parker, Chamberlain and Appeasement, p.89)

11In discussing Neville Chamberlain's response to Hitler's invitation for him to come to Berchtesgarden in 1938, John Charmley notes Chamberlain's decision that his wife, Anne, would not accompany him - which then allows Charmley to include the following "witty" aside: "...the Prime Minister's rejection of this has deprived historians of the piquant scene of Annie Chamberlain sipping tea with Eva Braun in one room whilst their menfolk divided the cake of Europe between them in the next." (Charmley, Chamberlain and the Lost Peace, p.147.)

12Martin Pugh's The Making of Modern British Politics, 1867-1939, (1993) is a rare example of a general survey of modern British political history to contain a section, albeit brief, on women's involvement in the political parties. Studies of the Conservative and Labour parties which cover the 1930s also refer to women only briefly. (See John Ramsden's The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940, (1978); G.D.H. Cole's A History of the Labour Party From 1914, (1969); and Ben Pimlott's Labour and the Left in the 1930s, (1977).) Women are almost invisible in the thin literature on the Liberal party in the 1930s. (See Chris Cook's A Short
policy in this period, the quantity and quality of discussion of women is mixed. Neville Thompson's well-known monograph, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s*, (1971) does refer to the activity of some prominent individuals, such as MPs Eleanor Rathbone and the Duchess of Atholl, influential Liberal Violet Bonham Carter, and the eccentric, right-wing Lady Houston. Tom Buchanan's *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (1991), pays some attention to MP Ellen Wilkinson, as well as a few other prominent women on the left. However, in other works dealing with political factions and foreign policy, women are again invisible.\(^\text{13}\)

When one moves beyond an explicit focus on party and parliament, women begin to become more frequently and noticeably visible (with some definite exceptions) in both general discussions of British public opinion and foreign policy issues, and more specialized studies. By and large, however, there is still very little interest even in these works in analyzing the nature of women's activity and its significance.

For example, references to women do appear with greater frequency in studies of public opinion, including Daniel Waley's study of the Abyssinian conflict, Keith Watkin's examination of the Spanish Civil War, and Roger Eatwell's essay on the months surrounding

---

the Munich crisis in 1938. In the literature on foreign policy and the British press in the 1930s, women make only rare appearances (if at all) in the studies of Richard Cockett and Franklin R. Gannon, but Benny Morris' study of the weekly press and the policy of appeasement reveals women's presence in this realm.

In the literature examining foreign policy-related public campaigns and non-party organizations, one encounters the rather curious phenomenon of women's substantial participation being, paradoxically, both acknowledged and passed over at the same time.

Among the scholars writing in this area, Jim Fyrth, in his work on the organization of aid for Republican Spain during the Civil War, stands as a rare example of an author who both explicitly places women at the heart of the campaign and notes the need for further study of women's efforts in this area. However, those historians of, for example, the various pacifist and pro-League of Nations organizations in Britain in this period who do, either explicitly or implicitly, indicate both the large numbers of women involved and the presence of women at high levels of mixed-membership organizations, at the same time show little interest in discussing these women at any length. This is presumably due once again to the assumption that, in relation to men, women as a whole were insufficiently influential in this period, at least in a political sense, to merit serious attention. In some cases, significant women's

---


activity is curtly dismissed, treated as a curiosity, or ignored altogether.\(^{17}\)

In general, the interest shown in women in the literature addressing British foreign policy formation and debate discussed to this point is limited, with very few exceptions. Many of the authors mentioned thus far have clearly seen women as incidental or irrelevant to any discussion of this topic. Those who go further in their inclusion of women's contributions provide useful information but are generally not interested in analyzing such activity in any detail. At best, these works provide clues of specific individuals and groups to research and suggest, by implication, forums or contexts of foreign policy activism to explore for hitherto neglected women's contributions.

---

\(^{17}\) For example, regarding the largest and most significant of such organisations in the 1930s, the League of Nations Union, the most detailed discussion of this body and its policies is found in Donald Birn's *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* (1981), but Birn is not interested in examining women's contributions in any detail, even though he indicates their substantial presence in the LNU at both the grass roots and national levels. Similar brief references to women are also all that is found in the article literature on the LNU, including: Birn, "The League of Nations Union and Collective Security," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9.3 (1974), pp.131-159; Martin Ceadel. "A Pro-War Peace Movement?: The British Movement for Collective Security," in *Le Pacifisme En Europe*, Maurice Vaisse, ed. (1993), pp.167-192; J.A. Thompson, "The League of Nations Union and Promotion of the League Idea in Great Britain," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18 (1 April 1972), pp.52-61; and J.A. Thompson. "Lord Cecil and the Pacifists in the League of Nations Union," *The Historical Journal*, 20.4 (1977), pp.949-959.

Finally, mention should be made of an influential work on pacifism in Britain in this period, Martin Ceadel's *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith*. (1980). Ceadel dismisses one major women's organisation of the peace movement, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, as "doctrinally too confused ever to become important." (p.61) and fails to even mention the largest women's organisation engaged in pacifist activity in this period, the Women's Co-operative Guild. In reference to women's participation in the most famous mixed-membership pacifist organization on the 1930s, the Peace Pledge Union, Ceadel periodically mentions some of the most famous women members, but makes some comments concerning the motivations of some women in becoming pacifists and in joining an organization such as the PPU which are, at best, curious and/or unreflective, and generally inadequate. At one point he describes the affinity between feminism and pacifism identified by some pacifist women as "less logical" than the affinity between pacifism and vegetarianism, and, referring to the motivations of women Sponsors of the PPU, he notes that many of them "...led private lives that contained a large measure of unhappiness and frustration" - a comment which he clarifies as relating specifically to "problems" in their love lives. (pp.84,239) (Ceadel also cites personal problems of prominent male members but is generally more thoughtful about their other motivations and circumstances as well.)
Not surprisingly, the literature on British women in this period (as opposed to literature on politics and foreign policy) provides more substantial discussion, although even here there are noticeable gaps. Relevant works can be divided roughly into two groups: those examining women's activities in the public sphere in Britain in the interwar period which might include references to, or discussions of, women's activism in international affairs, and those which focus explicitly on particular aspects of women's foreign policy activism.

Within the first group one can include both specialized studies, of individuals and of particular groups of women, and broader works studying women's political activism generally in the interwar period. Among the specialized studies, there is a small body of biographical works on such figures as Eleanor Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson, the Duchess of Atholl, Viscountess Rhondda, and Vera Brittain, which discuss the foreign policy activism of their subjects. If one examines work on women's participation in the political parties in the period, attention to foreign policy debate and activism is rather limited, with a couple of important exceptions - most notably in the work of Pamela Graves and Sue Bruley. Some relevant commentary is also found in studies of women's experiences as members of parliament - with Brian Harrison's essay on this topic being the most significant in this

---

respect - while the topic of women's journalism on foreign affairs in this period enters into Anne Selba's broader study of the history of women's journalism in Britain.¹⁹

A number of the above-mentioned works address a central issue of British women's history in the interwar period - namely the state of the women's movement and of feminism in the aftermath of the partial extension of the franchise to women in 1918. While achieving the franchise on wholly equal terms with men was clearly an important goal for many women in the 1920s, it was not sufficient in itself to constitute a great campaign along the lines of the pre-war women's suffrage movement. The questions which many scholars have explored are: what happened to the women and groups involved in this earlier campaign, and in what direction or directions did feminism go in the interwar period?²⁰

In light of these questions, the knowledge that a number of feminists (Margery Corbett Ashby among them) and their organizations were deeply engaged in international affairs in the interwar period has sparked interest in analyzing the feminist nature of this activity - a process which ends up bringing into sharp relief the views of various scholars on what constitutes "feminism" and how women activists of the period should, or should not, be classified as feminists.

In the post-war period, two significant strands of thought shaped feminist discourse -


"equal rights" or egalitarian feminism and "new" feminism. The former continued to emphasize the need to work for equal rights for women alongside men and equal opportunities for women outside the home. The latter emphasized the need for the recognition and valuing of the realities most women faced in their daily lives as wives and mothers. It further suggested that the special qualities of nurturing which women possessed by virtue of these roles would, when brought into the public sphere, consequently re-shape society and politics. This line of thought was, in fact, not especially "new" at all but closely resembled 19th century "maternal" feminism. With the possible exception of Dale Spender, most scholars agree that these years saw the increasing dominance of "new" feminism over equal rights feminism. Both Martin Pugh and Susan Kingsley Kent see this shift as indicative of a compromise with contemporary conservative ideology which valued domesticity and, in Kent's words, "sexual peace." For Kent, this shift clearly suggests a decline in feminism in the interwar period - an assessment with which Pugh appears to largely agree, although allowing for the possibility that "...what looks like decline from one

---

21 This feminist impulse is also referred to in some of the literature of women's history as "individualist feminism" - see Karen Offen. "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach." Signs, 14 (Autumn 1988) pp.119-157.

22 This strand of feminism also sometimes goes by other names in women's history, including "relational feminism" (Offen) and "social feminism" (Naomi Black, Social Feminism, 1989).

23 Spender tends to stress the survival, and even flourishing, of equal rights feminism. Martin Pugh, in Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, Johanna Alberti, in Beyond Suffrage, Susan Kingsley Kent, in Making Peace, and Olive Banks, in The Politics of British Feminism all generally agree that equal rights feminism was under siege to some degree - especially by the 1930s.

24 Sheila Jeffreys has described this process more bluntly as a "betrayal" of feminism in her study, The Spinster and Her Enemies, (1985).
perspective appears as evolutionary development from another."^{25}

Pugh views women's involvement in international affairs as both a notable exception to the organized interwar women's movement's emphasis on domesticity and as something which attracted many feminists away from the domestic issues of the movement.^{26} Similar assessments are offered by Brian Harrison and Olive Banks. Harrison suggests that the movement of these women into international issues is part of an explanation for the "decline" of domestic feminism in this period, while Banks refers more generally to a loss of interest in the 1930s in specifically feminist concerns in favour of issues such as large-scale unemployment and the threat of war.^{27} Placing women's foreign policy activism largely outside of the parameters or interests of their works, which focus explicitly on domestic developments in the women's movement and feminism, these authors consequently have little reason to spend much time discussing it. Because of his more specific focus on the interwar period and on a select group of women, Harrison offers more comment than Pugh or Banks on this subject as it relates to some of the women he discusses. But, for the most part, this activity is also not the focus of his attention.

However, some scholars have in fact seen a connection between feminism and foreign policy activism as historically significant and worthy of more detailed study. In particular, they have been interested in pursuing the involvement of feminists in Britain in the peace movement - both as pacifists, who rejected war absolutely, and as what we might call


^{26}Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement*..., pp. 103, 236.

"internationalists," or those who ultimately accepted the necessity of war in particular, extreme circumstances but who focused their energies on the prevention of those circumstances by promoting international understanding and co-operation, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Of the importance of this project, Jill Liddington, the author of the only extensive study of the 19th and 20th century history of this involvement, has stated: "Any history of peace politics which ignores the issue of gender and ignores the powerful language and imagery of women and peace remains inadequate and misleading; so is any history of feminism in Britain which omits peace ideas and campaigns."

Besides Liddington's broader study, much of the attention in exploring this aspect of British women's history has focused on the decade and a half prior to the 1930s with the

---


emergence of major women's peace initiatives during the first World War - including the
Women's Peace Crusade and the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom - and
the development of a broadly-based women's peace campaign during the 1920s. These
years saw the women's peace movement at its most coherent and have left behind a rich body
of documentary evidence through which scholars can study women working toward a
common cause from a range of feminist perspectives.

There has been rather less interest in examining feminist engagement in international
affairs in the 1930s, when the increasingly problematic international situation in that decade
created tensions in the women's peace movement, causing it to fracture and weaken.
Liddington views this period as a reasonably active one for various women and groups, but
nonetheless clearly as a downturn in what she perceives to be the "highly cyclical history" of
the women's peace movement over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. The few works
besides hers which discuss this period in any detail tend to focus on particular groups or
individuals.  

30 Liddington herself spends considerable time talking about war-time developments in The Long Road to
Greenham. Other works specifically on this period include Anne Wiltsher's Most Dangerous Women:
Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War (1985), Jo Vellacott, "Feminist Consciousness and the First
World War." and Deborah Gorham, "Vera Brittain. Flora MacDonald Denison and the Great War" in Women
examine both the period of the war and after include Jo Vellacott's "Women, Peace and Internationalism, 1914-
1920: 'Finding New Words and Creating New Methods,'" in Peace Movements and Political Cultures. Charles
Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen. eds.. (1988) and Johanna Alberti's Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and
Peace, 1914-1928. (1989) which includes considerable discussion of feminists' international activity as part of
a general assessment of directions in feminism as illustrated by the careers of fourteen prominent feminists.

31 A subject of particular interest in recent years, Vera Brittain and the relationship between her feminism and
her conversion to pacifism and involvement in the Peace Pledge Union in the 1930s have been explored by
Deborah Gorham in Vera Brittain: A Feminist Life (1996) and Yvonne Aleksandra Bennett, "Vera Brittain and
Liddington's survey, there is very little on the WILPF in the 1930s besides the in-house history of the
organisation - Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, Women's International League of Peace and Freedom,
1915-1965: A Record of Fifty Years Work (1965). There is also an in-house history of the Women's Co-
Identifying this tendency of the literature specifically on the feminist peace movement in the 1930s to concentrate on certain individuals or groups in fact effectively summarizes the broader picture of the existing literature which refers to women's foreign policy activism generally in Britain in this period. The intention in all of this work has been to study either a particular woman or a group of women (albeit sometimes a large group). The individuals may be prominent feminists, politicians, or writers of the period (or sometimes all three); the groups can be narrowly defined as specific organizations of women, or broadly defined as feminists as a whole, or feminist anti-militarists. The important point here is that no one has shown an interest in presenting in a single study a view of the wider range of women's foreign policy activism at this time in which feminists and non-feminists appear alongside one another, as do pacifists and non-pacifists.

Providing this kind of "wide-angle" view is the intention of this project. It will naturally draw in part on the valuable work already done but will also fill in some important gaps and bring previously little-known or discussed activity to light. My goal is to present a picture of women's foreign policy activism in the 1930s in all its complexities by acknowledging the many variations in women's motivations and the way they were articulated, in their responses to the dramatically changing international scenario of the decade, and in their tactics and strategies in penetrating the traditionally "male" sphere of diplomacy and international politics. In so doing, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the Cooperative Guild which pays considerable attention to pacifist activity in the 1930s but places little emphasis on analysing it as feminist activity - Jean Gaffin and David Thorns, *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women's Guild* (1983). For a feminist analysis of the WCG's pacifism, however, one can fortunately examine the relevant chapter in Naomi Black's *Social Feminism*, (1989).
to the historiography of foreign policy in this period, by bringing the wealth of women's participation in the contemporary debate into the spotlight. It also makes a significant contribution to the literature of British women's history and feminist history, by closely scrutinizing a particular manifestation of women's political activism in the post-suffrage period - thus allowing us to see in some detail a case study of the interaction and confrontation of different feminist and non-feminist impulses.

In discussing the specific question of women's motivations and rationales for their participation in the contemporary foreign policy debate, I will be using a framework of analysis of women's public activism convincingly posited by feminist historian Nancy Cott. Cott argues that such activity can be seen to be motivated by three different "aspects of consciousness" which she identifies as feminism, "female consciousness," and "communal consciousness." In relation to the first of these aspects - the feminist consciousness - I, like Cott, agree with Linda Gordon's general definition of feminism as "...a critique of male supremacy. formed and offered in the light of a will to change it. which in turn assumes a conviction that it is changeable." Regarding the two main strands of feminism present in this period referred to above, I intend to identify them as "equal rights feminism" and "maternal feminism" because I believe these terms are most naturally descriptive of the rhetoric with which they are associated in these years.

---


33Ibid., p.827.

With reference to the latter term, the use of "maternal feminism" over the somewhat misleading "new feminism" or the more recent "relational" or "social" feminism also recalls the importance of examining both the common ground and the divergences between this type of feminism and a different kind of consciousness which might also be identified as "maternalist" but is, in fact, not inherently feminist. This phenomenon falls under what Temma Kaplan first described (and Cott endorses) as a "female consciousness" - in which women do not challenge a society's traditions of gender roles or sexual division of labour (in which women are defined as the nurturers and preservers of life in the home) but nevertheless act in the public realm precisely out of their sense of needs that should be met by society in order for women to properly fulfill those roles.

In contrast to these two women-identified motivations (the feminist and the female consciousness) there is the third possible motivating force suggested by Cott as a basis for women's public activism - "communal consciousness" - which she notes is based on "solidarity with men and women of the same group, local or global...." Cott notes that one's group may be defined in "class, ethnic, racial, geographical, religious, or national terms," but for my purposes, it is helpful to add the additional term "international" - thus allowing for the

---

35 In their introduction to the collection Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States (1993), editors Seth Koven and Sonya Michel use the term "maternalist" and "maternalism" to refer, not to a particular movement or to specific individuals, but to a discourse that "...exalted women's capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role: care, nurturance, and morality." (p.4) They stress, however, that maternalist discourse could be feminist but was not necessarily so - that it was a "protean" discourse which could also be harnessed to anti-feminist or paternalist agendas. (pp.5-6)

36 See Cott, p. 827 and Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." Signs, 7 (Spring 1982), pp. 545-566. Kaplan's article discussed the mobilization of working-class women in Barcelona in these years - in strikes and protests directed at the government - with the goal, not of changing a patriarchal society, but of obtaining what was in fact necessary for them to fulfill their proper role of ensuring the survival of their families.

37 Cott, p.827.
inclusion in this consciousness of an effort to see beyond various boundaries to express solidarity against such phenomena as militarism or fascism. As Cott points out, "communal consciousness" inevitably has a gender dimension "...because the women involved have a different relation to power than their male comrades." However, it can nevertheless be distinguished from both other aspects of consciousness which she describes because the terms of engagement in the public debate which express communal consciousness are theoretically (or superficially) gender-blind or gender-neutral.

It is important not to see these categories of motives as mutually exclusive. It is certainly likely that some individuals or groups of women can be linked more closely to one of these bases of motivation than the others. and it is important to examine the significance of such circumstances. However, as scholars of feminist history have, in recent years, moved away from the misleading tendency to divide feminists in the interwar period into clearly delineated camps. so too is it necessary to be open to the possibility that many women engaging in foreign policy activism could and did demonstrate an ideological flexibility which saw them moving back and forth between any two of these aspects of consciousness, or even among all three.

Each chapter in this thesis will deal with a particular context or forum in the public sphere in which women's foreign policy activism occurred in the 1930s. The end result is not intended to produce a definitive list of forums or of all of women's activities in each context.

38Ibid., p.828.

39Ibid.
For example, the focus will continually be on women's participation in male-dominated foreign policy debates and decisions, and therefore such activities as aid campaigns for victims of fascism - although clearly an important part of women's engagement with the wider world in this period - will not be discussed in detail but mentioned only where they relate to foreign policy positions. However, what is achieved with the choices made here is a true sense of the scope of women's participation and of the possibilities they saw and created to make themselves heard - both independently, as individuals, and as members or representatives of different groups in society. In each chapter, women's activities in a particular context will be examined for the 1930s as a whole. Thus we can gain a sense of trends in the activism in each context in light of developments on the international stage.

Finally, the different chapters in this study follow a progression in women's foreign policy activism from the furthest removes from the inner circles of foreign policy formation to the political context which provided women's closest access to these circles in the public realm.

Chapters 1 and 2 therefore focus on women's foreign policy activism within the context of women's non-party organizations. Here I will examine which groups chose to involve themselves in this activity and why, how they went about this activity, and, with a particular emphasis on two of the most important women's organizations in Britain involved in this activism - the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Women's Co-operative Guild - how the events of the decade shaped the nature of their engagement.

Chapter 3 stays in the realm of non-party organizations but turns to women's participation in those mixed-membership organizations of the 1930s which were explicitly concerned with foreign policy advocacy - two of the most significant being the League of
Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union. Participation in these organizations brought women into contact with some of the most prominent male foreign policy commentators of the period, and much of my interest here is in looking at how women functioned within these organizations and what kinds of roles they were allotted and/or made for themselves. I will also be examining the extent to which women did or did not form an identifiably unified faction in their views within these organizations over the course of the decade.

In Chapter 4, the study shifts its terrain somewhat to a context outside of the organizational settings referred to above but also still outside the explicitly political realm. In looking at women's foreign policy activism in the world of publishing, and especially the flourishing weekly press of the 1930s, my discussion becomes very much one of individual women striving to make themselves heard as independent voices. Here I will look at the obstacles that women faced in such efforts, the extent to which they were successful, the voices and views which consequently emerged, and the impact of international events in shaping their views and stimulating their writing.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the discussion covers both highly individualistic activity, such as that found in Chapter 4, and group-oriented activity similar in nature to that examined in earlier chapters. Here, my study of women's foreign policy activism moves into the explicitly political realms of party and parliament - in which women's official participation and equal membership was still only recently legitimated and in many respects only grudgingly recognized. In looking at such activity within the structures of the political parties of the period (especially the parties of the mainstream - Conservative, Liberal, and Labour). Chapter 5 focuses on the separate women's organizations and examines the extent to
which, although constrained in their power and influence within the parties as a group, they chose to engage in foreign policy issues. In those parties in which the women's organizations did take up these issues in the 1930s, the question to be answered is whether or not they expressed a unified position that was explicitly linked to issues of gender.

Finally, Chapter 6, in pursuing the issue of women's foreign policy activism in the political world alongside men, takes this study into the elite realm of parliament - in which women members represented a tiny fraction of the total throughout the interwar period. Again I will examine the extent to which women members of parliament participated in foreign policy debate in the House of Commons over the course of the decade and how they did so in this extremely male-dominated setting. Much attention will be focused on the considerable activity in this realm of three women in particular who would become among the most famous foreign policy critics of the 1930s - Eleanor Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson, and Katharine, Duchess of Atholl.

In the course of these chapters, vivid pictures of collective action and distinctive personalities emerge to breathe fresh life into the subjects of foreign policy debate and women's public activism in 1930s Britain. A period of tremendous upheaval, both at home and abroad, it was also a time in which memories of the horrific destruction and losses of the Great War were still, for many of these women, relatively fresh. The dilemma they faced, as politically and socially engaged citizens, was how to respond appropriately to an escalating international instability and an increasingly real threat of Britain's involvement in another major conflict.
Like their male colleagues struggling with the same conundrum, these women had to attempt to find their way through often conflicting impulses and sympathies which frequently made their task seem impossible or fruitless. In hindsight, their resulting contributions were often highly admirable; their circumstances, however, were generally unenviable. In addition to the difficulties presented by the evolving international situation, these women, in working in highly male-dominated terrain, faced the challenges created by the limitations contemporary society imposed on women's roles. It is the rich and varied response by women activists to both of these circumstances that this study will now explore.
CHAPTER 1 - WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS I - POLICY FORMATION

So many of our impressions and images of women's participation in the public realm in Britain in the 19th and early 20th centuries arise from the women's organizations established for the sake of various social and political campaigns. The greatest and most famous campaign, of course, was the struggle for women's suffrage - which alone sparked the creation of a number of different women's organizations devoted explicitly to that cause. In looking at the period between the two World Wars, in the aftermath of women's partial achievement of the franchise in 1918, one of the key interests of women's history has been the fate of the women's non-party organization - an entity which had been so central to women's public activism to that point.

It is thus both logical and satisfying to begin this study of women's public activism in international affairs in the 1930s with an examination of relevant activity in such organizations. Certainly there were, by this time, a number of other, non-segregated, forums available to women wishing to pursue such an interest - forums which this project will explore in later chapters. At the same time, however, there was also an established paradigm of organized women's participation in international affairs which involved protests against war and militarism and efforts to convince governments to pursue peaceful foreign policies.

The first task of this chapter is thus to summarize this historical background of peace work by women's groups from its beginnings in the 19th century to its flowering during World War I and the 1920s. One is then presented with a cast of key "players" - in terms of
the organizations involved and some of the important women in them - which one can then follow into the 1930s. The key issues to address here concern the state in which the organized non-party women's peace campaign began the decade and the subsequent impact on this campaign of the dramatic events in the international arena in the 1930s and the resulting rise in tensions between states.

The increasingly ominous international situation would force concerned women's organizations to confront the implications of their involvement in international affairs. In the face of the growing power and confidence of aggressive totalitarian regimes, consensus on the appropriate foreign policies to advocate became problematic - both between organizations and within the groups themselves. One possible solution to this problem was for a group that was unable to maintain a unified position on foreign policy to withdraw itself from the debate. The other option was for an organization to work to stay in the debate and maintain a rough consensus, perhaps at the expense of individual members leaving to find more congenial surroundings.

The rather easy unity that characterized the participation of women's groups in the peace movement in the 1920s would be fractured as the unique circumstances of the 1930s worked to create a much more complex environment for the involvement of these organizations in international affairs. In understanding this development, we are especially aided by the surviving records of the two most important women's organizations engaged in foreign policy issues in this period - the Women's International League and the Women's Co-operative Guild. They provide a vivid and fascinating picture of two organizations' ongoing struggles to maintain commitment and consensus in the face of events which divided women's loyalties among the often conflicting impulses of pacifism, internationalism, and
anti-fascism.

As Jill Liddington has effectively demonstrated, the roots of organized British women's peace efforts lie in the 19th century - in the religious activism of Quaker women in the first half of the century and in the subsequent gradual emergence of peace activism linked to feminism as British women participated in the international organization of women. The first major international organization - the International Council of Women - was established in 1888. The ICW represented a wide range of women's groups in many countries through National Councils of Women and stressed inclusivity as a guiding principle - even to the point of not taking a firm stance in these early years in support of women's suffrage. Those feminists dissatisfied with this approach went on to organize the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in 1904 which had an explicitly feminist orientation from the beginning and represented national women's suffrage organizations such as Britain's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). However, although tensions were clearly present over feminist issues such as suffrage, interest in establishing links between women and women's organizations of different countries was a broadly shared principle that entailed sympathy and support for peace work.

In the early years of the 20th century, from the Boer War to the outbreak of World War I, the peace campaign in Britain was small and weak because of the widespread national enthusiasm for militarism and the fact that anti-war feminists were wrapped up in the

---


The spirit of internationalism among women was certainly fostered by the IWSA, which grew from ten national suffrage organizations in 1904 to twenty-five organizations by 1914, and which attracted the involvement of young British suffragists such as Catherine Marshall, Mary Sheepshanks, and Margery Corbett. However, attention to antimiilitarism among women's groups in Britain in this period was limited; the involvement of Britain in the conflict which broke out in 1914 in fact stimulated a widespread patriotic, even warmongering, response among many women's groups and their leaders — including Millicent Garrett Fawcett, of the non-militant constitutional suffragist NUWSS, and Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, of the militant suffragettes' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

However, in 1915 a handful of feminists rose up in opposition to this display of patriotic fervour among their colleagues. A group of prominent suffragists from the executive of the NUWSS, including Helena Swanwick, Margaret Ashton, Catherine Marshall, Maude Royden, Kathleen Courtney, and Chrystal Macmillan, broke away from that organization and, in company with a few other British women from other organizations, were at the centre of efforts undertaken with like-minded European and American colleagues to arrange an international Women's Peace Congress in the Hague in 1915. Most of the British

---

3Rupp, p.1575; Liddington, p.63. Margery Corbett attended the first IWSA meeting in Berlin in 1904 at age 22 in the company of her mother, Marie Corbett, (who was an active suffragist) and her sister. She married Brian Ashby in 1910, thereafter going by Margery Corbett Ashby.

4The two other Pankhurst daughters, Sylvia and Adela, took opposing views on the war from their mother and sister and supported the pacifist cause during the war. Sylvia Pankhurst had left the WSPU shortly before the war began to start her own organisation - the East London Federation of Suffragettes. She was briefly involved in the WIL but found it too conservative and left, carrying out protests against the war and conscription within the ELFS. (Anne Wiltsher, Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War, (1985) pp.42. 133-134, 137, 142-143.)
women involved were prevented by the government from attending, but, in the aftermath of the Congress, they formed the British section of a new international women's organization dedicated to working for peace - the Women's International League. Within a few years, the WIL, chaired by Swanwick, had over 3,500 members in forty-two local branches. The WIL stayed at the centre of women's peace activism in Britain during the war even as this activism broadened its base from being a predominantly middle and upper middle class enterprise in 1915, to a movement which began to include women of the lower middle class and the working classes in 1916. Part of the explanation for this expansion of the movement lay in the introduction of conscription and the restrictions on personal liberty provided for by the Defence of the Realm Act. Starting in the north, in Glasgow, pre-war suffragettes and suffragists came together with anti-conscription and industrial militants to forge the Women's Peace Crusade - a movement with many links to the WIL but also (more so than the WIL) to the Labour movement. The Women's Peace Crusade was also less formally organized than the WIL and more popular in its appeal, spreading quickly during the summer of 1917 and into 1918, and manifesting itself in numerous rallies and marches around the country.

The Women's Peace Crusade did not survive the end of the war. The WIL, on the other hand, continued its work. In 1919, the international organization of the WIL was

---

5Liddington, p.106.
7Ibid., Chapter 6.
8The WPC name would be revived in another campaign late in the 1920s.
renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In Britain, membership stood at 4,200 and, although these numbers dropped in the next few years and the WIL had to explicitly define itself as a pressure group instead of a mass movement, it remained the central force of the women's peace movement in the 1920s.

In 1923, the WIL decided to allow interested local women's organizations to affiliate with it - a move which resulted in associations with Women's Sections of the Labour Party and with local branches of a rapidly growing women's organization - the Women's Co-operative Guild. The WCG had been established in 1883-4 as an auxiliary to the broader Co-operative movement which, as Naomi Black notes, had its roots in Christian and Owenite socialism and was originally based on the concept of "production for use" in which the means of production were communally owned and managed. By the late 19th century, the main focus of the movement was on its co-operative stores - which returned profits to the "owners/workers/consumers" through dividends on purchases. As the main purchasers for the household, women were inevitably central to the co-operative exercise - thus leading to the founding of the Guild. Comprised largely of married working class women, the WCG's membership stood at 44,500 by the end of the First World War: by 1930, the Guild had over 66,500 members. Although the Guild had been more supportive of the peace movement

---

9The British section's monthly publication was called the WIL News Sheet throughout the interwar period. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to use the acronym WIL when referring to the British section, and I will use the acronym WILPF or WILPF Geneva to refer to the international organisation based in Geneva after World War I.

10Liddington, pp. 133-139-141.


12Black, pp.112-113.

13Liddington. p.143.
than active in it during World War I. this situation changed dramatically in the interwar period - especially after the founding of the International Women's Co-operative Guild (IWCG) in 1921 and the resulting increased contact with women co-operators in other countries.\textsuperscript{14}

The late 1920s saw women's organized peace activism in Britain at an all-time high. With the WIL and its chair, Kathleen Courtney, at the centre, and a wide range of women's organizations onboard - including the WCG, the National Council of Women (NCW), and the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC - formerly the NUWSS) - a large-scale "Peace Pilgrimage" was organized in 1926 in which women marched from different parts of the country to converge in London. At its culmination on June 19th, 10,000 women came to Hyde Park to listen to prominent speakers from a broad range of women's groups.\textsuperscript{15} The committee which organized this impressive event remained in existence afterwards and eventually revived the name "Women's Peace Crusade" to describe its work in organizing the efforts of women's groups to lobby politicians on peace issues in the lead-up to the 1929 General Election.\textsuperscript{16}

Of course not all women's groups were equally engaged in this activism at the turn of the decade. Some were lukewarm participants while others rejected peace activism altogether. Among the less enthusiastic participants were the relatively small equal rights

\textsuperscript{14}Liddington. p.143.


\textsuperscript{16}Liddington. p.147.
feminist organizations known as the Women's Freedom League and the Six Point Group. Of the two, the former, a survivor of the pre-war militant suffrage movement, appears to have spent some time openly struggling with the dilemma of the degree to which it should involve itself in international affairs. What little evidence exists for the beginning of the 1930s indicates some support within the WFL for the peace movement and disarmament, but it does not appear that it spent a large amount of time or energy in the relevant campaigns. The high point of the WFL's active involvement in foreign policy during the decade appears to have coincided with the first year of Margery Corbett Ashby's tenure as president from 1935 to 1936. The Six Point Group, formed in 1921 by former WSPU member Lady Rhondda and a few of her close friends from suffragette days, appears to have devoted little to no time to international affairs, choosing instead to focus its attention on the domestic equal rights feminist issues that formed the backbone of its agenda, such as: the rights of women regarding their children, equal pay between men and women teachers, and equal opportunity for employment within the civil service. Although the Six Point Group was interested in the late 1920s and early '30s in developing an international equal rights feminist campaign through pressure on the League of Nations, there is little evidence to suggest that it actively sponsored or assisted in the campaigns and debates of the peace movement. The few group records from later in the decade that still survive make it clear that the members remained divided on the question of supporting any particular peace policy. The Six Point Group became deeply concerned with the rise of fascism and the threat it posed to feminists and feminism, but this concern manifested itself in speaking out on the impact of fascism on women and assisting in specific relief efforts - not in encouraging a particular foreign policy against the fascist powers.
In the case of both the WFL and the Six Point Group there were significant ideological issues involved in their reluctance to commit themselves to campaigns relating to international affairs; these will be addressed in the following chapter. However, it is also probable that, from a practical point of view, small groups like these had limited resources compared to the larger umbrella organizations like the National Council of Women, and, not surprisingly, wanted to focus their resources on the domestic issues which constituted their reason for being - especially if there was a noticeable lack of agreement among the membership over a foreign policy agenda to advocate.

Having said this, however, it is nonetheless clear that the picture of organized women's peace activism at the turn of the decade was one of a movement which was able to attract a wide range of women's organizations and which constituted a very large portion of general peace activism at this time. Bolstered by support from the international women's organizations, including the International Alliance of Women (formerly the IW SA), the ICW, the IWCG, and WILPF, the movement in Britain in the early 1930s continued to be represented by the WIL and the WCG and to draw support from many of the organizations affiliated with the NCW and the newly reorganized NUSEC. The rural Women's Institutes and their new urban equivalent, the Townswomen's Guilds, also participated in peace work in this period, as did a number of other women's social, religious, and professional organizations. Many of these organizations not only co-operated with one another in an organized women's effort but also associated themselves with broader pacifist and

17By 1932 the NUSEC had officially been divided into the National Council for Equal Citizenship (NCEC), which carried on responsibilities for policy formation and feminist activism, and the National Union of Guilds of Citizenship (later the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds) which took on the task of educating women as citizens and providing social networks for women who did not have access to the rurally-based Women's Institutes (first established in 1915) which performed a similar task.
internationalist efforts which mobilized both men and women, including the National Peace Council and the League of Nations Union. Within the latter organization, the largest of its kind in the interwar period, affiliated women's groups were represented on a Women's Advisory Council which worked to stimulate their pro-League efforts and which, in turn, represented the views of women's groups to the leadership of the LNU - a group of individuals which included some of the most prominent British foreign policy commentators of the period.18

That the organized women's peace movement in Britain was so substantial in the late 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s had much to do with the fact that events in the international arena - such as the establishment of the League of Nations, the mutual guarantees against aggression of the 1925 Locarno Treaty signed by Britain, Italy, France, Germany, and Belgium, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 which "outlawed war" - had given many people in Britain at least the impression of significant progress being achieved in the stabilization of international relations and the prevention of future wars. Progress in arms limitation seemed within reach given the plans for an international naval conference in London in 1930 and a large-scale international disarmament conference in Geneva to follow. The British public's general optimism concerning international relations was hardly surprising given that they had little sense that there was anything on the international stage which posed a serious threat to world peace.

In any event, to be pro-peace in the 1920s and early 1930s was not a controversial

18For further discussion of women's participation in the LNU, see Chapter 3.
stance to assume and, under the umbrella of this rather vague but broadly-shared sentiment, it was relatively easy for women of somewhat different views - whether pacifist or internationalist - to debate the issues in basically cordial terms and co-operate in efforts to build public and political support. It did seem possible, at this point, for a committed pacifist to give enthusiastic support to the League of Nations, and for someone who did not consider herself a pacifist to be an active participant in the peace movement. Differences, especially regarding short-term goals, revealed themselves on occasion both among and within those groups interested in international affairs, but there was general agreement on the fundamental goals of international disarmament and the peaceful arbitration of disputes between states.

Within this context, the WIL of the early 1930s appears as an effective example of a coalition of a range of pacifist and internationalist perspectives. The majority WIL view which determined the extent of the "pacifism" of its policies seemed to settle for a compromise position between prominent professed pacifists such as Helena Swanwick, Kathleen Innes, and Maude Royden and those who, like Kathleen Courtney, were simply generally committed to the peaceful resolution of international disputes. What separated the WIL from more extreme or absolute pacifist organizations was its desire to balance the desired long-term goal of total disarmament among nations with its sense of what was realistically achievable in the short-term - i.e. at the London Naval Conference of 1930, at the Preparatory Disarmament Commission, and at the Disarmament Conference which began in early 1932. One of the organizers of a WIL-sponsored Disarmament Campaign, Margery Chettle, responded to the criticisms of "the extreme and wonderfully hopeful pacifist" who wanted total unilateral disarmament, by saying that "...we are not only pacifists, we are citizens of the
world and we can only convince ourselves of what is reasonable and what is not by contact
with as many minds, like and unlike our own, as possible. The result of such contact
convinces us that what is practical politics at the moment is a measure of disarmament by
international agreement." 19

This compromise, which leaned in favour of a strong pacifist tendency without
advocating extreme measures, seems to have been characteristic of much of the pro-peace
sentiment in Britain within society as a whole around the turn of the decade. Certainly the
recommendations of many of the other concerned women's organizations echoed those of the
WIL in their support for the League of Nations and disarmament. In 1931, the President of
the NCW, Florence A. Keynes, wrote a strongly worded letter to the Times on behalf of the
"largest group of organized women's societies of Great Britain" protesting the "ill-judged and
ill-timed attack upon the League of Nations at present being carried on by a section of the
Press." She went on to state that women who studied international issues were not "blind
optimists." They understood the critical nature of talks then currently underway in prepa-
ration for the Disarmament Conference, but were also "firmly resolved that, in so far as
women possess moral and political influence, that influence shall be exerted in support of the
League of Nations, as the best hope for the peace of the world, and more especially of

19 Margery Chettle, "Answers to Criticisms in the Disarmament Campaign" in the WIL Monthly News Sheet,
[hereafter referred to as the WIL News Sheet] December 1930, p.1. The predominance of a compromise
perspective was obvious in the specific WIL proposals for British policy regarding a final Convention at the
Disarmament Conference: a 25% reduction of all expenditure on armaments; provision in the Convention for
the specific limitation of expenditure on air, land, and naval armaments; the abolition of warships over 10,000
tons; and the direct limitation (by enumeration) of the larger weapons of land warfare (e.g. tanks, big guns)
within the framework of the Convention. (See discussion of the annual Council Meetings in the WIL Executive
Committee minutes, vol.1/7, 10 March 1931, p.2 - British Library of Political and Economic Studies) While
such measures certainly would have been considered drastic and unachievable by most members of the British
Government, they did represent a noticeable qualification of a completely pacifist position.
distracted Europe. At its 1931 Annual Council meeting, NUSEC also showed a clear determination to "awaken" the general public to the need to press for significant measures at the Disarmament Conference.

As something of a contrast to the willingness to compromise shown by the WIL and the larger, predominantly middle class organizations, the WCG leadership took a harder line on disarmament at this time. They called more frequently for "drastic" measures and for total disarmament within a relatively short period of time. As General Secretary of the Guild, Eleanor Barton did not hesitate in indicating Guild disapproval of the disarmament platform of the Co-operative Party itself when its demands to the Government appeared inadequate. At the same time, the broader membership may have been less certain in its commitment to disarmament - possibly due to fears concerning the measures' impact on employment in certain areas of the country. The Guild's response to this concern was to emphasize the high costs of militarism and armaments to society and the potential benefits of being able to redirect money spent on arms production to education and welfare.

In spite of the WCG's unequivocal stance on disarmament, however, it was apparently not reluctant to associate itself with the efforts of the other, more moderate, women's groups

---


21 Like the WIL, the Council called for a general 25% reduction in the annual expenditure on armaments of the Powers concerned. (National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship - Annual Report, 1930, p.52 - Fawcett Library)

22 See article on the Co-operative Party Conference of 1931 at Blackpool, "Our Women's Pages." The Co-operative News, 11 April 1931, p.17. See also the WCG's 48th Annual Report, May 1930 - May 1931, DCW 2/11 - University of Hull. [All subsequent references to WCG records will be from the U. of Hull holdings, unless otherwise indicated to be part of the BLPE collection.]

23 In reporting on the 1931 North-East Lancashire District Conference of the WCG, the women's pages of the CN noted one delegate's view that "not even her own guild sisters were whole-heartedly for disarmament." (The Co-operative News, 22 August 1931, p.13.)
of the peace movement. At this point, with little of seeming significance on the world stage to trouble those pressing for international co-operation and disarmament, the women's peace campaign appeared to be in relatively good shape and capable of containing a range of views regarding the means of achieving a peaceful world. However, when confronted by the series of international crises in the decade ahead, both the WIL and the WCG, as well as the other women's groups, found it increasingly difficult to satisfy all their members and maintain consistent policies regarding international affairs at the same time. Indeed, conflicting views would be found not only among individuals but within them as well, as they struggled to reconcile loyalties to pacifism, internationalism, feminism, and simple humanitarianism that increasingly threatened to pull them in different directions.

The first test was provided by events in the Far East in 1931. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in that year did not have an immediately negative impact on the groups' unity of purpose. However, following the international community's failure to deal effectually with Japan's breach of the Covenant of the League of Nations in its aggression against a fellow League member, the beginnings of a divergence of opinion both among and within women's groups regarding the proper policy towards aggressor nations appeared. In hindsight, this divergence provides an early indication of the tensions between pacifist and internationalist perspectives that would become increasingly evident in the next few years.

The WIL's initial reaction to Japan's actions was, not surprisingly, one of a unified expression of horror. but it also expressed the firm beliefs that the Japanese Government and military were not acting in accordance with the wishes of the Japanese people, and that the
League would proceed to deal effectively with the situation. This optimism regarding the League, however, was relatively quick to dissipate, as Japan willfully flouted an indecisive League Council. In December of 1931, the WIL urged that body "to bring the fullest moral pressure of public opinion upon Japan" and to make it clear that if Japan continued military measures, the Council would sever diplomatic, financial and economic relations. At the same time, still true to its pacifistic priorities, it asked the British government to refuse licenses for the export of arms, ammunition, and "other material of war" from Britain to both Japan and China. In the organization's news sheet of that month, Kathleen Courtney condemned British traders for supplying arms to both China and Japan, and pressed for an embargo, in the expectation that it would be followed by other countries, including the United States. She went on to state. "We cannot sell armaments to countries which are fighting and stand with clean hands at the Council Table of the League to insist that hostilities shall cease."

In that same issue, however, editor Dr. Hilda Clark drew attention to an issue that would prove to be highly sensitive within the WIL and many other organizations - that of the application of sanctions against aggressor states as provided for in Article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant. The executive members of the WIL appear to have agreed that some form of implementation of economic and financial sanctions was appropriate and necessary

---

24In September, the WIL Executive sent a cable to the Women's Peace Society of Japan expressing their dismay and encouraging them in their work for peace. (WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/7, 29 September 1931, p.4.) In October, Freda White described the Manchurian situation at that point as a "League success" because of the Japanese withdrawal of troops. She went on to state that "League 'security' honestly applied is a real thing. And the difficulty of 'defining the aggressor' in this as in other cases, is a mere myth." (October 1931, WIL News Sheet, p.2.)

25WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/7. 8 December 1931, pp.3-4.


27ibid., p.2.
in the face of Japanese intransigence. but some of the wider implications of sanctions brought
the organization on to less solid ground. As a representative of the more deeply committed
pacifist sentiment of the WIL. Kathleen Innes noted the dilemma presented by the Sino-
Japanese conflict. which had "...brought pacifists up sharply against the problem of how the
evil doer is to be restrained." In the face of this dilemma. Innes justified to both herself and
her fellow pacifists in the WIL the practical need to "prevent evildoing" by demonstrating in
a concrete fashion international condemnation of aggressive actions: "...pacifists. who did not
face the fact that in an imperfect world the avoidance of war must. for a long period at any
rate. entail measures to restrain and constrain those breaking their international obligations,
had little to contribute in a crisis....The risks of failing to-day to stop aggression are far
greater then any risks likely to be taken in the effort to stop it."
Although recognizing the
need for sanctions. Innes clearly felt some regret at this necessity. Her concerns were shared
by some of the other members of the Executive Committee who feared the possibility that the
WIL might be endorsing economic actions that were too closely dependent on the ultimate
threat of military force.

In a related discussion the following month. Dr. Clark. angry at what she perceived to
be the blatant self-interest of British government policy regarding the Far East. supported a
proposal to the Executive that the WIL should promote a movement for individual voluntary

---

28See. for example. the resolution passed by the WIL Executive ctte in February. 1932. which was
subsequently distributed to. and passed by. hundreds of different organisations throughout Britain. (WIL
Executive Committee minutes of Urgency meeting. 1/8 1 Feb 1932)

29Kathleen Innes in the WIL News Sheet. April 1932. p.3.

30WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/8. 9 February 1932. p.2.
boycotts of Japanese goods. However, the Executive could not agree on the advisability of this approach, and Dr. Clark withdrew the proposal because of the difference of opinion. Some members were likely concerned about the punitive nature of boycotts and the negative impact they might have on the Japanese people. At this stage, all the Executive could agree on was the possibility that they would consider the matter further "should any further development in the Far East situation appear to call for it."\(^{32}\)

The WCG's initial reaction to the Manchurian crisis appears to have been very similar to that of the WIL. In keeping with its disarmament rhetoric, the Guild's early response noted that these events made it even more important to cultivate "the peace mind" and press harder for disarmament, while recognizing that Japan was clearly in violation of the League of Nations Covenant and the Pact of Paris.\(^{33}\) By early 1932, the Guild, like the WIL, was increasingly disillusioned with the League's response to the crisis. As the situation deteriorated during that spring, there is evidence of a mixed response by Guild members similar to that of the WIL. At the Guild Congress at York, a resolution was passed calling for an arms embargo for the region and an end to financial loans to Japan. However, it was also suggested that the Guild promote an economic boycott of Japan and that, under the circumstances, it was possibly more practical to call for partial rather than total

\(^{31}\)See Hilda Clark's signed article on the war in China in the March, 1932 issue of the news sheet, in which she states, "[i]t must be admitted that a heavy responsibility rests in Great Britain for the long inaction of the Council. By basing her policy on the protection of the British in Shanghai and the maintenance of this Open Door for trade. rather than on the defence of peace and the protection of the country which was attacked, Great Britain has surely broken her obligations under the Covenant." (WIL News Sheet, March 1932, p.3)

\(^{32}\)WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/8. 15 March 1932, p.3.

disarmament.\textsuperscript{34} Even though both latter suggestions were rejected by a Congress majority, they nonetheless reveal hints of tension over policy among at least a few Guild members when the organization was faced with the disturbing reality of armed conflict.

Those members of the WCG and the WIL who were leaning towards advocating a stronger, and perhaps riskier, message to Japan seem to have been in agreement with the policies suggested by the larger mainstream women's groups like NUSEC and the NCW. NUSEC's language was perhaps closest to that of the WIL - it called on League members to withdraw their ambassadors from Japan and vaguely supported appropriate "economic and financial pressure" if Japan's military action continued.\textsuperscript{35} The NCW, however, was more definite in supporting the sanctions measures supplied in the League Covenant, believing that "the possible risks involved in emphatic protest [were] infinitely less than the certain danger of inaction...."\textsuperscript{36}

By the beginning of 1933, disillusionment with the League's most powerful members was running high and the attitudes of His Majesty's Government appeared especially unsatisfactory. However, more striking than WIL criticism of Cabinet members' comments were the indications of a shift in WIL policy regarding the issue of an arms embargo. One year earlier, the WIL had been vocally adamant in calling for an embargo on the export of arms to both countries involved in the conflict. By the spring of 1933, however, this policy had been discarded in favour of an embargo that focused exclusively on Japan. In a letter to

\textsuperscript{34}Co-operative News. 4 June 1932, p.12.

\textsuperscript{35}NUSEC - 1931-32 Annual Report. p.55 - under listing of resolutions passed at the 1932 Annual Council meeting. (2/NSE NUSEC/C 14 (342) - Fawcett Library)

\textsuperscript{36}Notice of a resolution by the NCW Executive - Women In Council. March 1932, pp.68-69.
the press. Kathleen Courtney illustrated most clearly the Executive's change in position: "We have withdrawn the mistaken and unjust double embargo on arms export to China and Japan; but it appears uncertain whether we have consented to the proposition of a discriminatory embargo against the aggressor."37 In fact, on this issue, the WIL found itself in disagreement with WILPF Geneva which was still pushing for an embargo to both states; the British section was adamant by this point in wanting Japan singled out.38 Of course WIL leaders did not go so far as to encourage the supplying of the Chinese with arms. but the fact that they were no longer willing to actively discourage the shipment of war material to China nevertheless represented a considerable departure from their traditional position of rejecting out of hand the possibility that a state could be justified in taking up arms - a position to which the international organization clearly still adhered.

In this respect, we begin to see a clearer division between the policies of the WIL and the WCG. As the WIL shifted to favour an exclusive arms embargo on Japan, the WCG stood by its more inclusive embargo policy. If there were doubters within the Guild concerning the justice of including China in such an embargo, they were clearly outnumbered by those wanting to prevent the flow of arms to either country entirely. Both the Central Committee and numerous local branches endorsed this position: the Guild's pages in the Co-operative News stated that "Pacifists can only regard the move [to an inclusive embargo] as satisfactory. despite the argument that the withdrawal of arms will leave Japan master of the situation in the Far East."39

37WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/9. 13 April 1933.
38WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/9. 9 May 1933. p.4.
39"Our Women's Pages." Co-operative News. 4 March 1933. p.16.
All the women's groups would, in fact, continue to struggle to determine the appropriate response to events in the Far East throughout the decade, especially after the Japanese intensified their attacks in 1937. The main source of debate at that point revolved around the issue of economic boycott and the rights and wrongs of promoting it at either a state or individual level. In the meantime, however, they were confronted by other menacing militaristic regimes who were alarmingly closer to home. In the spring of 1933, of course, attention was focused on Germany and the new Nazi regime.

Since its early years, the WILPF had had a sympathetic view of Germany and its position in post-war Europe, and the British members proved no exception to this view.40 However, they could not remain blind to alarming trends in German politics after the turn of the decade: the rise of Nazism appeared to pose a particularly serious threat to both the gains of feminism and the peace of Europe. The WIL was thus faced with a painful dilemma - one which forced it to attempt to both voice its opposition to the nature of the Nazi regime and maintain an atmosphere of optimism and hope in which that government could be persuaded to alter its character, thus making it possible to include Germany in efforts of international co-operation and disarmament which would rectify some of that state's legitimate grievances. During 1932 and 1933, both the minutes of the Executive Committee and the news sheet reveal a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity in the WIL's response to Nazi Germany.

For example, in their first resolution concerning Germany in the aftermath of Hitler's triumph, the WIL Executive Committee attempted something of a balancing act in which it

40See Alberti, Beyond Suffrage., p.195: See also Bussey and Tims' reference to the WILPF condemnation of the Allied occupation of the Ruhr after the war and their upholding of the passive resistance campaign of German miners. (Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965, (1965) p.44.)
noted the "unjust" treatment of Germany after the war, condemned the current government's
cruelty and terrorism, and advocated a return to freedom of speech and action which would
allow for peaceful co-operation in Europe.\(^1\) The WIL was not trying to deny the news it was
receiving from inside Germany, especially from WILPF sisters who were being forced to flee
as feminist groups became subject to Nazi oppression. While maintaining its original role as
a pressure group and not a relief organization, the WIL did try to aid political prisoners inside
Germany, especially women, and to protest their ill-treatment to the German government. At
the same time, it remained determined to hope for the best and asserted that international
disarmament was still the means to bring Germany to a place in the international community.

In November of 1933, Kathleen Courtney pressed for the offering of a "square deal" on
disarmament to Germany, stating that "...it is difficult to believe that Hitler would wish to
incur the odium of making world disarmament impossible..."\(^2\) Not surprisingly, some of the
other national sections of WILPF on the continent were beginning to feel differently, and old
tensions flared up over control of organizational policy between the WIL and the WILPF in
Geneva.\(^3\)

In many respects, the reactions of the other women's groups to the rise of Nazi
Germany were similar to those of the WIL. They were all concerned about human rights

\(^1\)WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/9. 14 March 1933, p.2.


\(^3\)When the WILPF was formally established in 1919 and its headquarters located in Geneva, it was decided
that each national section could nominate two "consultative members" to the International Executive
Committee, but that the committee itself would consist of members elected on an individual, and not a national,
basis. The national sections would retain considerable autonomy but policy would ultimately be determined by
decisions of the International Congresses which would occur biennially. (Bussey and Tims, p.32) In the years
that followed, the British section would occasionally chafe at this arrangement and push for more control over
its own policy decisions.
violations within Germany, and were particularly alarmed at the impact of the Nazi regime on women. The WCG expressed its abhorrence of all aspects of fascism - including its treatment of women as chattel and its glorification of war - and pledged itself to "resist the menace of Fascism." In the spring of 1934, the Guild sent a number of delegates to the first Women's International Congress Against War and Fascism in Paris - at which the Women's Committee Against War and Fascism (WCAWF) was born. This new organization, dominated by Communist women but also determined to have a broader appeal, was not based on a mass membership of its own but rather relied on affiliations from other women's groups. Besides being engaged in peace work, it also subsequently took a leading role in organizing other British women's groups' involvement in campaigns concerning German women who were suffering under the Nazi regime - especially those who had been imprisoned for political reasons. Among all these groups there was considerable dismay at Nazi policies designed to push women back into the home. Such policies offended and disturbed feminists of all stripes, as can be seen in the fact that both the NCEC, which

---

44 "Our Women's Pages," Co-operative News, 5 May 1934, p.16.


47 During the 1930s, a number of British feminists wrote about the repressive aspects of the Nazi regime which concerning women - identifying that regime's celebration of "manliness" as one of the highest virtues and its placing of women in a lower position in society relative to men, discouraged from working outside the home and valued only for their child-bearing functions. Novelist and journalist Winifred Holtby was one of the most prominent of these feminist critics of fascism and Nazism; others included prominent Six Point Group member Monica Whately, author of the pamphlet "Women Behind Nazi Bars" (1935), and left-wing writers such as Hilda Browning, author of Women Under Fascism and Communism (1934), and Hilary Newitt, author of Women Must Choose: The Position of Women In Europe Today (1937). For further discussion of this body of writing, see Johanna Alberti, "British Feminists and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s" in This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain 1914-1945. Sybil Oldfield, ed. (1994) pp.111-122.
displayed both maternal feminist and equal rights feminist impulses, and the more exclusively equal rights feminist Six Point Group, protested the policies of the German government regarding women.\textsuperscript{48} The latter group even worked closely at times with the WCAWF on anti-fascist activism in spite of being leery of the WCAWF's peace work.\textsuperscript{49}

Those women's groups that had committed themselves to the cause of international agreement and disarmament redoubled their efforts along these lines in response to the rise of militarist regimes on the Continent. However, indications of a divergence of views among the groups also became more visible at this stage. Prominent NCW member Elizabeth Cadbury argued that the threat of economic sanctions should be firmly impressed on potential aggressors.\textsuperscript{50} The WCG remained opposed to sanctions, and while some members of the WIL were clearly more receptive to such a proposal than others, the majority view appears to have continued to view sanctions with reluctance and uncertainty.\textsuperscript{51}

In spite of these differences of opinion, the women's groups working for peace in Britain were, for the moment, still a relatively unified force. Guild and WIL concerns about a weakening commitment to disarmament did not prevent them, along with the NCW, the

\textsuperscript{48} NCEC Annual Report. 1933-34. p.8 (2/NSE 342 NUSEC/X1/2 - Fawcett Library); Six Point Group Annual Report - 1933-34. pp.8-9 (5/SPG/B 525 - Fawcett Library). The Six Point Group made a very rare venture into a specific issue of international affairs late in 1934 in going so far as to support an appeal to women in the Saar region prior to the plebiscite being held there early in the new year - urging them not to vote for the return of the Saar to Germany. (Six Point Group Annual Report. 1934-35, p.7.)

\textsuperscript{49} Although there is unfortunately only a limited amount of surviving Six Point Group records for the 1930s, evidence of their links with the WCAWF can be seen in the groups annual reports for the mid to late 1930s and in the group's Executive Committee minutes for 1936. Monica Whately and Dorothy Evans represented the Six Point Group at the world conference prior to the formation of the WCAWF. [Six Point Group Annual Report, 1933-34] References to the group's wariness of the WCAWF's peace work can be seen in the Executive Committee minutes for 18 May 1936 and 23 June 1936.


\textsuperscript{51} WIL News Sheet, June 1934. p.2.
NCEC, and other women's groups, from devoting considerable effort to helping the League of Nations Union canvass the general population for the National Declaration (or Peace Ballot) during 1934 and the first half of 1935.\textsuperscript{52} In fact, the WCG participated even though its highly respected former leader, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, made it clear that members should answer "no" to the ballot question referring to the possible use of military force against violators of the Covenant.\textsuperscript{53}

Events in the international arena in 1935, however, served to complicate the issues considerably. The dispute that was foisted on Abyssinia by Mussolini late in 1934 turned into an Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, and concerned women's groups were once again faced with the problem of devising a course of action against an aggressor. At this stage, it appears that the large, generally more conservative, NCW chose to withdraw from active participation in what seemed to be an increasingly problematic debate on foreign policy. It is likely that it continued to encourage, or at least allow, members of affiliated local groups to take part in peace campaigns and LNU-sponsored events, but the pages of its journal, \textit{Women In Council}, fall silent on international affairs for the next few years. There were probably too many women involved in the NCW who were supportive of the National Government's foreign policy, such as Conservative MP Nancy Astor, for the organization to be able to agree on resolutions critical of the government as the situation in Abyssinia deteriorated. Those NCW women who did not support government policy most likely looked to other groups or forums in which to express their views.

\textsuperscript{52}As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, the LNU's "Peace Ballot" was a broadly-distributed survey which was designed to demonstrate public support for the imposition of sanctions against aggressive states.

\textsuperscript{53}Letter from M. Llewelyn Davies to "Our Women's Pages." \textit{Co-operative News}, 3 Nov. 1934, p.16.
The NCEC, on the other hand, although a considerably weakened organization by 1935 in terms of the number of its affiliated local societies, seemed to make a serious effort to keep itself involved in issues of international affairs - likely due at least in part to the influence and encouragement of the international feminist organization to which it remained affiliated - the IAW - and that body's president, Margery Corbett Ashby. The NCEC pressed candidates on peace issues before the general election that year and, at both the national and local levels, sent numerous resolutions and letters to the government and other politicians regarding disarmament and sanctions.54

At the same time, another women's organization which had not shown any great interest in engaging in international affairs to this point demonstrated some willingness to broaden its scope by inviting Margery Corbett Ashby to be its President. As an organization with a shrinking membership in the 1930s, the Women's Freedom League was perhaps most preoccupied with attracting a very high-profile feminist leader in order to boost its visibility, as opposed to wanting to plunge whole-heartedly into foreign policy issues. Nonetheless, it willingly accepted Corbett Ashby's statement to the group that, while honoured by the invitation and happy to accept, she was focused on the cause of peace at that time and would likely have to oppose the government on its handling of foreign policy.55 Her influence on the WFL subsequently revealed itself over the issue of the Italian aggression in Abyssinia. For the group's next Annual Conference, the Executive Committee accepted Corbett Ashby's resolution which criticized the government's and the League's failure to act to check Italy, and

54NCEC Annual Reports - 1934-35 (2/NSE 342 NUSEC X1/3); 1935-36 (2/NSE 342 NUSEC X1/4).

55WFL National Executive Committee minutes - 13 July 1935 - noting letter of acceptance of nomination from MCA with her provisos and WFL's acceptance of her position. (2/WFL 55 FL 6/1 - Fawcett Library)
called for the strengthening of the League of Nations and action by the government to restore
certainty in collective security.\textsuperscript{56}

In the meantime, the WIL had been following the international course of events with
its usual careful attention - and finding few reasons to be optimistic regarding its primary
goal of disarmament. A serious problem in late 1934 and early 1935 concerned relations
between the British WIL, the international Executive at Geneva, and the continental sections
led by France; the British section was largely determined to remain focused on the armaments
question and the possibility of achieving agreements in reduction that would incorporate the
fascist powers, while many of the continental sections believed that "peace and freedom"
could not be achieved without first combatting fascism. In some cases this latter view had an
explicitly socialist agenda which demanded the achievement of "social and economic justice"
as a necessary first step. but this programme does not appear to have sat well with many of
the middle class British members whose politics tended to be "liberal." as opposed to leftist.
At the 1935 Annual Council meetings of the British section, some speakers referred explicitly
to the danger that the WILPF was turning into "a Left-Wing Party organisation." There was a
distinct lack of unity concerning the argument, repeated on this occasion by Kathleen Innes,
that women working for peace ought to be able to work together; the report of the meeting's
proceedings notes that someone suggested that "...it would be just as sensible to say that
every Peace organisation in England should be united and should produce common resolu-
tions." Hilda Clark went so far on this occasion as to suggest that the organization should

\textsuperscript{56}WFL National Executive Committee minutes - 24 April 1936.
cease to be the British Section of the WILPF and should instead be called the "Women's International League (British Group in correspondence with the WILPF)." While this proposal was rejected as being too drastic, by the end of the meeting Clark had resigned her position as Foreign Relations Secretary and Mary Chick had resigned as Treasurer (although they both remained on the Executive Committee) while Kathleen Courtney resigned her membership on the Executive altogether.57

This alarming evidence of discord appears to have led to a decision later in the spring of 1935 to "call a truce" with the continental sections and Geneva — at least until the next Congress in 1937.58 In fact, disagreement with the WILPF would manifest itself much sooner than that, but in the meantime the British WIL members had their attention focused on alarming developments at home and abroad that threatened their goals of disarmament and international cooperation through the League. In March, they had criticized the Government White Paper detailing increased estimates for the armed services, and in May they were

57Report on Annual WIL Council meetings in January - WIL News Sheet. March 1935, pp.1-2. (Oddly enough, the relevant Executive Ctte. minutes which comment on the meetings make no mention of these rather important resignations - 6 January 1935, p.3.) The specific reasons for each of these women's resignations are not completely clear. Courtney had resigned her position as Chair in 1933 because of her disagreements with WILPF Geneva and it is likely that all three women were unhappy with the structure of the organisation that made it difficult for individual national sections to be flexible in the campaigns they wanted to emphasise and instead created circumstances in which the international Executive appeared to be making dictatorial decisions about WILPF policy over which national sections had little control. The degree to which they each objected specifically either to a shift in emphasis from disarmament to anti-fascism or to indications of an underlying socialist agenda is more difficult to determine. In the case of Courtney, her own background showed her to be sympathetic to Labour in Britain. (Alberti. Beyond Suffrage, pp.57. 95-96) but she appears to have wanted to maintain a strongly pro-disarmament agenda at this stage. Dr. Clark would seem to have supported this position, given her editorial response to Hitler's repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles and his announcements of Germany's plans to re-arm. While acknowledging the problem of trusting Germany, she argued that the League of Nations "must not be absorbed in condemnation of Germany:" it should consider the grounds for Germany's accusations of bad faith by the former Allied powers and work to remove those grounds by planning "for the general reduction and limitation of armaments under international control which remains essential to the prevention of war, no matter what other measures are proposed." (WIL News Sheet, April 1935, p.2.)

58WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/11. 14 May 1935, p.1.
appalled at Government proposals to drill the general population for preparation against gas attacks - a practice which they viewed as simply encouraging a "war mentality" and which also could mislead the public into believing the "entirely illusory" suggestion that there was a real defence against air attacks. With respect to both of these issues, the WIL turned out to be in close agreement with the WCG, which also protested the White Paper in March and subsequently spoke out against efforts to co-ordinate effective measures of defence against air attacks. Like the WIL, the Guild feared the encouragement of a "war mentality" and did not hesitate in deviating from the male-dominated Co-operative Party (of the Co-operative Movement) over this issue.

On the international front, while both groups were aware of the recent troubling developments in German foreign affairs - the Saar plebiscite which returned that resource-rich League of Nations mandate to German control and Hitler's public announcement of German re-armament - Mussolini's actions appeared to pose a more immediate threat to the integrity of the League system. For a short while, the WIL appeared to be clinging to the hope that Mussolini would in fact live up to the role of a "great statesman" by choosing not to invade Abyssinia. At the same time, it knew it had to face the more likely scenario that it would take action from the other Great Powers to discourage Mussolini. Thus the dilemmas that it had faced after Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 were once again to the fore as

---

59 WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/11, 12 March 1935, p.2; WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/11, 14 May 1935, p.4.

60 WCG Central Committee minutes, 11-12 March 1935, p.6; "Our Women's Pages," Co-operative News, 18 April 1935.

61 WIL News Sheet, July 1935, p.2. For similar earlier comments, see Freda White's "Danger in Africa," WIL News Sheet, April 1935, pp.2-3.
the WIL struggled to determine what it should recommend as the appropriate League action.

Again, "sanctions" were a source of uncertainty and some distaste. As was the case when discussing states' options in dealing with Japanese aggression in the Far East, the WIL's position when contemplating Italy's actions naturally began with the assumption that military sanctions were out of the question. But beyond that, its position remained open to debate because of members' caution in contemplating other kinds of sanctions that might lead to military action, or sanctions that might be viewed as punitive to the Italian people as a whole and not just the government or the military establishment. In an effort to assist the debate, Hilda Clark presented the various options for the application of sanctions in the November 1935 news sheet and, significantly, took the opportunity to criticize as ineffectual an extreme pacifist stance which viewed "moral sanctions" as the sole legitimate option in this situation.

However, Clark's own preference among all the possible measures is, in fact, rather difficult to determine: in this respect she epitomized the uncertainty experienced by much of the WIL. More dogmatic pacifists could fall back on a moral certainty that they were justified in not compromising their stance, but many members found this unsatisfactory and impractical in the face of a deteriorating international situation which seemed to require them to contemplate options which might lead them away from their original goals and ideals. After stressing again the many difficulties in sustaining the pressure of economic sanctions without the force of a blockade. Clark ended her comments with a somewhat ambiguously worded statement which captured a kind of desperate hopefulness that would be characteristic of the WIL in the next few years: "It will clearly be the first duty of those who support Economic Sanctions, and who oppose the blockade which would make these rapidly effective, to keep the moral issue before the public and to work increasingly for just terms of
It seems clear that the debate over policy regarding sanctions within the WIL was taking place at all levels of the organization - including the highest national levels. The situation in the WCG appears somewhat different. As in the case of the WIL, the Abyssinian crisis clearly raised a number of questions by members at the branch level. However, the Central Committee responded quickly to branch requests for clarification or guidance with an unambiguous message that there should be no deviation from the Guild's peace policy and no support for sanctions against Italy.\(^63\)

However, if WIL leaders, unlike those of the Guild, found it difficult to clarify the specific details of their own policies regarding the pursuit of sanctions or "collective security," they found it much easier to react against government policies which seemed inadequate by anyone's definition. The revelations in December of 1935 of the Hoare-Laval plan, an Anglo-French deal which made concessions to Italy at the expense of Abyssinia, outraged the WIL (as it did other pacifist and internationalist groups in Britain) by its evidence of the government's apparent willingness to ignore the League Covenant, sacrifice the interests of a League member, and reward Italy for its aggression. During this period of uproar over Hoare-Laval, WIL leaders seemed to be able to agree that an embargo on oil to Italy was clearly called for and had been shamefully and unnecessarily delayed.\(^64\)

Unfortunately, this respite of greater certainty does not appear to have lasted for very


\(^{63}\)WCG Central Committee minutes. 7 October 1935, p.7; 8 October 1935, p.3; 20-21 Nov. 1935, p.6.

\(^{64}\)See the WIL News Sheet December 1935, p.1; January 1936, p.2; March 1936, p.1; and also the WIL Executive Committee minutes 1/12. 14 January 1936, p.3; 31 March 1936, pp.2-3.
long. In March of 1936, attention was shifted back to Germany in light of Hitler's re-militarization of the Rhineland and, suddenly the WIL had to contend with more actions by the WILPF in Geneva with which it was in sharp disagreement. The two international Chairs sent a letter on behalf of the WILPF to the President of the Council of the League of Nations calling for sanctions (except military ones) against Germany. From the British section's point of view, the organization was in danger of abandoning its principles. At the same time, it had to face the bitter reaction of some of the continental sections to British attempts to rein in the international Executive. These sections accused the British WIL of naively accepting Hitler's peace gestures (such as a 25-year Peace Pact) as sincere because Britain was conveniently isolated from the Continent.

However, it does not appear that WIL members were being willfully callous or blind to the fears of the continental sections: finding a path through the tangle of loyalties created by the international situation was the dilemma which frustrated them. When reflecting on the tensions openly expressed at the international Executive meeting in Prague in April, Barbara Duncan Harris (Chair of the British WIL since the beginning of 1935) stated,

In our League are running the same strong tides that are tearing at the world. We are now a body of women that [sic] have entered the political arena and have largely made our political alignments. The way of co-operation even on a well-defined pacifist platform is not simple. There are those in our League who believe profoundly that the first step to achieve Peace must be to oppose Fascism. and there are those. and it appears to me that this is the great

---

65The British section's anger at this move, made as it was without the consultation of the national sections, was considerable, and Kathleen Innes, as Secretary of the Executive, sent off a letter to the Manchester Guardian (which had printed part of the original WILPF letter) noting the dissent of the British section. The WIL was concerned that the international Chairs' recommendations did not exclude a food blockade and that they gave support to "the method of ultimatum and threat as a preliminary to negotiations...." (WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/12, 31 March 1936, pp.3-4.)

66WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/12, 21 April 1936, p.2.
majority, who even in the face of a threat of dictatorship believe that the way to Peace lies through methods based on understanding between all peoples and that, though slow, this way is both supremely right and also possible.67

Duncan Harris was speaking in this context of the divisions between national sections and her conviction that most sections still held to the original priorities of the WILPF. However, her comments can also be seen as a reflection of the state of the WIL within Britain. Indeed most British members were likely still strongly committed to disarmament and international agreement but they were also clearly not immune to other forces. The contents of the April 1936 news sheet provide an indication of their struggle to reconcile their recognition of current circumstances with their guiding principles. A report of the WIL's Annual Council meetings described an extended debate which had taken place concerning the proper reaction to Hitler. Freda White, one of the WIL's most active observers of international affairs and also a member of the League of Nations Union's Intelligence Department, had offered a highly sceptical view of Hitler's 25-Year Peace Pact and moved a resolution in favour of promoting a mutual guarantee among states in case of aggression by any state such as had been suggested in the rejected Geneva Protocol of 1925. However, she was subsequently convinced by the weight of majority opinion in the Council to withdraw her resolution because of concerns voiced by Catherine Marshall that the WIL should not put forward any suggestion which might necessitate the use of military force. This report on the Council meetings ended with an unequivocal reminder to WIL members (which, if anything, suggests that some members indeed needed reminding) of the organization's primary goals: "Over and over again must the same thing be repeated. the WIL stands for Peace and Freedom. It still

believes, as it has ever done, that it is possible to find means of settling disputes other than by war.  

By this time, it was becoming increasingly obvious that the divisions affecting the WIL's unity as a result of German and Italian actions were also becoming more difficult to dismiss within the WCG. Questions concerning the Guild's sanctions policy regarding the Abyssinian crisis continued to trickle in from the regional sections and local branches, and the Women's Pages of the Co-operative News reveal a sense of confusion over Guild policy in this period. In July, Eleanor Barton took the step of responding personally to such a letter - stating her surprise that the issue was being raised, since Guild policy was "clear," and then explaining the policy once more:

The attempt to impose sanctions means that a restriction here and another there opens out a field in which wider action than we are prepared to take may be involved. The best thing to do is say, 'A plague on all their houses,' 'let us scrap the whole lot and begin again on the basis of World Co-operation as a foundation rather than with pacts, treaties, agreements, etc., between a few powerful nations."   

The following week, however, saw a report from the Huddersfield Women's Guild of a unanimously adopted resolution condemning the National Government's removal of economic sanctions against Italy, calling it "a shameful flouting of democratic opinion" and "a betrayal of the trust which Abyssinia placed in the League of Nations" which would have a devastating effect on the League's credibility. Ironically, at least from the perspective of the National Guild, this local branch then ended its resolution by stating, "We as a women's movement stand definitely for peace, and strongly deplore any action which will endanger

---


If events in the first half of 1936 had shown the strains within the WIL and the WCG in sharp relief, then developments in the second half of the year only served to confirm and deepen them. The WIL Executive was, as usual, in recess during the month of August, but when it reconvened on September 1st, it quickly and unanimously condemned General Francisco Franco's use of armed violence "to upset the democratically constituted Government of Spain, thereby plunging the country into the horrors of Civil War." WIL leaders were in complete sympathy with Spain's elected Republican Government, but at the same time, fearing the threat posed by that conflict to international peace, they strongly supported an agreement for non-intervention by foreign powers and pressed the British Government to take the initiative in setting up an independent body under the Covenant of the League to see that this policy was observed. This was not a policy reached without self-doubt or questions. As Barbara Duncan Harris noted, the WIL found itself in a position similar to that of the early days of the organization during World War I. Members were faced with extremely difficult questions, such as: "In the face of dictatorship [would their] pacifist principles hold? Should they hold? [Might they] not be called upon to fight for freedom?"

At the same time as the WIL was struggling to remain united, the leadership of the WCG was engaged in a similar battle - but one in which the question of conflicting loyalties and ideals was made even more complex and emotional by the particular nature of the civil

---


71 WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/12. 1 September 1936, pp.2-3.

war in Spain. As a largely working-class organization, the Guild was unhappily confronted with a conflict in which its brothers and sisters in Spain appeared to be forming the bulwark of a fight against fascism and for freedom and democracy. While Guild leaders worked to maintain a consistently pacifist policy regarding Spain, the broader membership showed considerable dismay and frequently appeared to be trying to push the WCG towards a more pro-active, pro-Republican policy. The resulting struggle and confusion over Guild policy is clearly reflected in the minutes of the Central Committee and the Women's Pages of the Co-operative News.

In the September meeting of the Central Committee, there was considerable discussion of branch activity regarding Spain. A letter from one branch noted that its members felt they could no longer support the Guild's peace pledge - which entailed a personal abdication of aiding or participating in any war effort - in light of events in Spain, while another letter from a Mrs. Hamilton expressed concern over resolutions being passed in her district branches which were "felt not to be in line with Guild Policy on Peace." The Committee's response was to agree that the civil war was "a matter of deep distress to all," but also to note that "...[members'] sympathy must not let [them] lose sight of the real issue," and that this was "the testing time" of Guild pacifist policy. A discussion in the same meeting concerning topics for up-coming Sectional Conferences stressed the importance of calling for "a new way of life which accepted pacifism as the right thing no matter what the provocation."73

In the following month, long-time prominent Guildswomen Margaret Llewelyn

---

73WCG Central Committee minutes. 28-29 September 1936. pp.7.3.
Davies and Lilian Harris added the weight of their influential voices to the debate in an article for the *Co-operative News* calling for the application of "the Co-operative Rule of Life" to international relations. In the article, they condemned any scheme, including sanctions, in which there was "a loophole for the employment of armed force," and, in reference to any efforts to stop the Fascists and Nazis, stated that "If we use military measures to enforce peace, we shall be enflaming passions and sowing the seeds of new wars and revolutions...."74 On the other hand, it appears that the editor of "Our Women's Pages," Mary Stott, was sympathetic to the other side of the debate - in that her editorials consistently supported the sending of humanitarian aid to the Republican forces in Spain. In the December 19th issue, she stated.

Those who support non-intervention in the Spanish war, believing that armed force is at all times wrong, have perhaps a special responsibility to help towards providing some help and solace to the sufferers lest they should be accused of indifference. If we are not willing to risk our lives in defence of the freedom of Spanish workers, nor engage in a war in their defence, we should at least be prepared to suffer some little deprivation on their behalf, and equally, on behalf of the victims of the Nazi terrorism we detest.75

The tensions in both the Guild and the WIL became even more pronounced in 1937. In January, the WIL's Helena Swanwick, representing an extreme pacifist viewpoint, harshly criticized those who supported the sanctions clauses of the League's Covenant, which she believed "[poisoned] the air by filling men's minds with ideas of force, of punishment, or righteous indignation, of holy war, and [preoccupied] them to the exclusion of pacifism, i.e.,

---

74 *The Co-operative News.* 3 October 1936, p.11. Interestingly enough, this article was not printed in "Our Women's Pages," but earlier in the body of the newspaper.

peace-making." In the following months, Freda White and Hilda Clark offered warnings about the activities of the fascist powers, noting in particular the aggressive nature of the Germany-Japanese pact and the potential threat posed by Germany to Czechoslovakia. By April, Clark was speaking in bitter and angry terms of the "hypocrisy" of the Non-Intervention Committee, which had been revealed "to all save the most credulous of ostriches." Her following comment not only attacked the Government but also seemed to call into question the judgement of the WIL itself in having ever supported non-intervention: "...it is hard to believe that the British Government has ever thought that Mussolini meant to stop his support of Franco until he had achieved the defeat of the Spanish Government." As Kathleen Innes noted in May, the situation in Spain made it very difficult for the WIL to determine appropriate policy while being true to its peace principles. In spite of the risk of confrontation involved, the organization felt it had no choice but to urge the sending of food ships under convoy to Spain to counter the effects of Franco's blockade of the Republican-held port of Bilbao.

The aid issue continued to be a source of controversy within the WCG as well. Llewelyn Davies convinced the Central Committee in January 1937 to reject the suggestion that a delegate from Catalonia should come as an international visitor to the next Guild Congress. Her reasoning was that "...this would almost inevitably stir up a desire to send help to Spain, and it might mean military help which would not coincide with the peace

---


77 See the March 1937 issue of the *WIL News Sheet*, pp.2-3; as well as Clark's editorial notes regarding Spain in the April 1937 issue of the *WIL News Sheet*, p.1.

views of the Guild." Once again, however, a subsequent piece in the Guild pages of the Co-operative News reflected the confusion created by loyalties torn between pacifism and class solidarity. Beginning by arguing that even complete pacifists could send clothing and medical supplies to Spanish workers, the editorial went on to state:

There are others of us, less ardent in the cause of passive resistance, who sometimes long to join in the conflict ourselves and show the forces of reaction in the world that the workers value the good things they have won and are prepared to die in the defence of democracy and government by the workers for the workers. Family ties alone, if no other cause, prevent us from rushing off to join the International Column, and we must find less drastic ways of expressing our indignation.

The final paragraph appears to return to a more pacifist position but ends up sending an oddly mixed message:

Women's traditional duty of staying at home and joining working parties for the men who go and fight is irksome to some of our younger, ardent friends. But it is certainly better, judged from every angle, than doing nothing...and older, calmer minds will reflect that it is a piece of work which will never be regretted. The most righteous cause can not blot out the aftermath of bitterness for the man who loves his fellow-men, and in that cause has had to kill someone perhaps as young and fine as he. We can join in the war in Spain on the side we believe to be just by staying at home and sending all the material comfort we can to those whose struggle is so desperate.80

If this was a pacifist perspective, it was a rather narrow one which, in fact, implied that it was acceptable to Guild women for other people (mainly men) to bear the burden of killing for this just cause. And yet, two months later, the Central Committee rejected a request for the Guild Congress to collect money for the pro-Republican Spanish Medical Aid.81

Besides the unhappy developments in Europe, the WIL and the Guild were also

79WCG Central Committee minutes. 20 January 1937, p.2.


81WCG Central Committee minutes. 31 May 1937, p.1.
forced to confront the resurgence of Japanese aggression against China in 1937. At this time, many in Britain who were sympathetic to China's plight were lobbying for a boycott of Japanese goods. Within the WIL, there was considerable evidence of marked differences of opinion regarding the support of such initiatives. Hilda Clark, while recognizing Japan's "grievances" concerning its need for economic outlets for its expanding population, was one of those strongly in favour of a boycott on Japanese goods as long as that state persisted in its military action in China.\footnote{See Clark’s Editorial Notes. \textit{WIL News Sheet}, August 1937, p.1.} However, she ran up against resistance to this suggestion within the Executive Committee. Some members were reluctant for the WIL to sponsor such a boycott, in part because of a belief that it would be punitive to the Japanese population, which they believed did not support the actions of the military.\footnote{WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/13, 12 Oct 1937, p.5.} It was not until the end of the year that the Executive, on the urging of Mary Sheepshanks, Hilda Clark, Freda White, and Catherine Marshall, agreed to a cautious support of individual boycotts of Japanese goods - while remaining somewhat pessimistic about their impact.\footnote{WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/13, 14 December 1937, p.3.}

The WCG leadership, on the other hand, maintained a firm stand against boycotts in this period. Interestingly enough, the Central Committee and the Guild pages of the \textit{Co-operative News} appear to have been in agreement over this issue in 1937. An October editorial predicted that a boycott of Japanese goods would "whip up the war spirit in the Japanese people to still greater heights" and took a considerably more pacifist stance than had been the case over Spain.\footnote{"Our Women's Pages." \textit{Co-operative News}. 16 October 1937, p.12.} However, the Women's Pages' view seems to have shifted back to
a position of disagreement with Central Committee policy regarding the Japanese boycott by mid-1938, when it printed an appeal for support of the boycott by the mixed-membership China Campaign Committee - an appeal which noted that "a large number of co-operative women [had] given the boycott...their consistent support."  

Pessimism regarding the international situation confronted these organizations on all sides at the start of 1938. In her New Year's Message as Chair of the WIL, Barbara Duncan Harris once again tried to encourage the members and remind them of their purpose and goals:

We have chosen what is perhaps the most difficult path to follow at this moment. Believing war to be a crime, we are not prepared to seek security in the increase of arms, not even within the League of Nations, not even for use against the aggressor. On the other hand, we are not content simply to renounce war and violence. From the beginning the WIL has set itself to seek out the steps by which war may be superceded by the method of conference and law, and those steps must needs be sought in an armed world. It is small wonder if sometimes we find ourselves confused and dismayed.

The Council meetings in March revealed the careful balancing act that the WIL was trying to maintain in policy formation - a balancing act that was clearly unsatisfactory to some prominent members. The fighting in Spain and the Far East continued to receive considerable attention, but the WIL was also faced by alarming developments in Central Europe - in the form of the expansion of Germany's power as a result of the Anschluss with Austria. The Council passed a resolution strongly condemning the "forceful incorporation of Austria into the German Reich" but also, with an eye towards the implications of this event for other states in the region, urged the Government to state that "full economic and financial

---


sanctions" would be applied to Germany in the event of any further attempts to absorb other "German-speaking people" in territory outside Germany itself.\textsuperscript{88} At the same time, it appeared to view with great caution proposals for the appeasement of Germany through the granting of colonies to that state, while seeming somewhat more optimistic regarding the possibilities offered by a world-wide lowering of trade barriers.\textsuperscript{89} For some members, such as Freda White, these resolutions did not go far enough and she spoke out on the issue of neutrality and how, in its current manifestation, it benefitted the aggressors. In looking back on the March meetings, one member tried to provide a positive interpretation of the divisions in the organization by stating, "...to the puzzled anxious delegates it is comforting to find that they are being led by women honest enough to admit their different conclusions."\textsuperscript{90} However, these meetings also led to the resignation of Helena Swanwick, who found the policies proposed there - especially the resolutions noted above - "totally impracticable" in their misguided attempts to apply advanced principles of international conduct to the current situation when "men's minds" had not yet accepted them.\textsuperscript{91}

In the following months, the WIL kept up the struggle to maintain itself as a viable organization while viewing with anger and alarm the evolution of Government policy and the situation in Europe. As Hilda Clark offered dire warnings regarding the strategic


\textsuperscript{89}ibid., resolution 4. (a) and (b). pp.16-17.

\textsuperscript{90}WIL News Sheet. April 1938, pp.1-2.

\textsuperscript{91}WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/14, 12 April 1938, p.1. The implication of Swanwick's stance would appear to be that she had abdicated responsibility for trying to have any effect on the existing international situation and had chosen to focus exclusively on a long-term educational goal. Most other WIL members appear to have found this option unsatisfactory.
implications of a German take-over of Czechoslovakia, and wrote with disgust concerning the Anglo-Italian agreement and the recognition of Italian sovereignty in Abyssinia, the WIL leadership turned its attention to efforts to recruit more members and spread its message of peace and co-operation in settling "legitimate grievances." However, the Munich crisis and its aftermath dealt a serious blow to the organization's ability to continue justifying its promotion of maintaining international dialogue with the aggressive states. At a meeting of the international Executive in Geneva early in September, the Quaker pacifist Edith Pye acknowledged that the only way of stopping attacks on smaller states seemed to be through the threat of force: she went on to make a painful admission, stating: "The awful thing is that if I hear a sword rattle, I say thank God." Back home, the national WIL Executive announced that buying off Hitler with territory in Czechoslovakia only strengthened his position at home. It recognized that breaking up the frontier might make it impossible for Britain and France to guarantee the future of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Following the Munich settlement, an emergency meeting of the Executive drafted a message to the Czechoslovakian section of the WILPF in which the officers stated that the British members were "overwhelmed with shame at what [the Czechoslovakian members] and [their] country

---

92 For Clark's comments. see the April and May 1938 issues of the WIL News Sheet, pp.3-4, and p.2, respectively. Also in the April 1938 issue, Duncan Harris spoke of the need to reach the wider public and "convince women of the need to make their voices more effective in the affairs of [their] land by banding together for peace." (p.4) In July. the WIL Executive was immersed in plans to organise a "Women's Peace Day at Olympia" (a large exhibition site in London) in which numerous prominent women from various fields would participate. (WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/14 22 July 1938, p.3.)

93 Bussey and Tims. p.160.

94 WIL Executive Committee minutes. 1/14. 20 September 1938, p.2.
have suffered for the sake of the peace of Europe. After Hitler invaded the remains of that state in March of 1939, Hilda Clark assessed British policy of the previous year in the bleakest terms, which, by implication, also indicted many of the WIL's views as well:

It is better to face the truth and with all the gloom that is shed upon the democracies to-day by the now unconcealed facts, we must admit that it has done no one any good during the past year to rely on the camouflage put up by Hitler and Mussolini for their actions.... The Munich agreement brought about a situation which could only end in the break-up of the Czecho-Slovak State. To pretend that Czech independence of Nazi domination could be guaranteed after this was perhaps the most despicable of the efforts to calm public indignation in this country.96

The WIL was, at this point, left with few certainties and thus turned much of its attention to relief campaigns in the last months before the outbreak of war. It said relatively little on the subject of policy in this period, except to make clear its opposition to conscription and to encourage the Government to respond to overtures from the Soviet Union to offer a collective response to aggression.97 At the same time, it offered its support for a National Peace Council campaign for an international peace conference "to remedy economic grievances."98 By now, the WIL appeared as a shadow of its former self. Events had overtaken its goals and brought loyalties into sharp conflict that had once been inextricably intertwined. Once war began, the remaining members were left only with the hope of rediscovering their original purpose and finding a place of relevance in society once war had again

95Reference to Officers' meeting of 4 October 1938 - WIL Executive Committee minutes, 1/14, 11 October 1938, p.3.


97See, for example, the report of the WIL Annual Council meetings, 21-23 March 1939, pp.19, 22. Most of the resolutions from these meetings dealt with issues relating to human rights, refugee problems, or colonial policy towards India.

98Bussey and Tims. p.165.
ceased. In the early stages of the war, the British WIL recorded the following: "In war time to make war is not the only work of necessity; ideas are as strong as the sword; they are our weapons. Though we are often bewildered and baffled, we have proved that if we do the will [sic] we shall know the doctrine, or enough of it to live by. The Women's International League, holding on and standing fast, may be able to offer its own gift of light and healing when this war comes to an end. It was born in war; it must be born again in war."99

Ironically, while the WIL had been greatly weakened by the course of events in the latter half of the 1930s, the WCG managed to flourish in spite of serious divisions and conflicting loyalties. The end of 1938, in the aftermath of Munich, saw another intensification of the debate among Guild members over the absolute pacifist stance (supported by the leadership) versus support for collective security and effective opposition to fascism.100 However, 1939 saw vigorous Guild support for peace propaganda, including a No Conscription movement, and membership in the Guild actually peaked in that year at over 87,000.101 It seems likely that grave fears on behalf of male relatives facing conscription - at a time when war appeared increasingly unavoidable - provided a desperate impetus to the Guild's cause which might have overshadowed other misgivings.

As far as the other women's groups were concerned, the WCAWF was still active and vocal and, although still a relatively small venture, made increased attempts to broaden its base of support in the later 1930s by renaming itself the Women's Committee for Peace and

100 "Our Women's Pages." Co-operative News. 22 October 1938. p.16.
Democracy and by bringing in the indefatigable Margery Corbett Ashby as Chair. Engaged in numerous relief efforts for victims of fascist aggression around the world, the WCAWF/WCPD was still a strong advocate for "peace," but its primary agenda was clearly one of resisting further aggression and fiercely protesting any evidence of British complicity with the fascist powers. It came out strongly in support of boycotts of Japanese goods, it protested the Anglo-Italian agreement and rumors that Britain was going to recognize Franco's government in Spain, and it demanded that the government end its policy of depriving the Republican Spanish government of the right to buy arms.102

On the other hand, the WFL, whose selection of Corbett Ashby as president in the middle of the decade had implied a growing interest in international affairs, never really became comfortable with this new direction. Its records clearly reveal that there was growing discomfort among the membership in the latter half of the decade with the organization's involvement in such issues. While some remained in favour of continued engagement in this realm, others objected strenuously and, as a result, the WFL, always fairly limited in its foreign policy activism even with Corbett Ashby as president, gradually withdrew from such debates.103

The mainstream feminist organizations such as the NCW and the NCEC could be found in a kind of middle ground of partial and somewhat divided engagement late in the

102 For references to these policies, see, for example, issues of Women To-day, the publication of the WCAWF/WCPD, for November 1938, January 1939, and February 1939.

103 For evidence of tensions within the organisation over foreign policy activism, see WFL National Executive Committee minutes for 26 May 1936, 13 March 1937. Margery Corbett Ashby resigned as WFL President in 1938 due to all the demands on her time - which likely meant that her desire to focus on international affairs meant that she did not want to work at that time with an organisation which did not share her priorities.
decade. The NCW, quiet on foreign policy since the mid-point of the decade, re-entered the debate in 1938 over the issue of a possible boycott of Japanese goods. Like the WIL, the NCW decided to make the boycott a matter subject to individual conscience instead of official action. At the same time, it decided to print an article in its journal, *Women In Council*, by Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone concerning the situation in Europe and the need to fight to protect democracy within a united front which included France and Russia. The editor was subsequently attacked by a male reader for printing this article, but Elizabeth Cadbury defended the piece, saying that "...it would not be worthwhile to publish a muzzled periodical" and that Rathbone represented a large body of opinion in the country. These episodes provide evidence of continued differences of opinion on foreign affairs within the NCW - differences which were subsequently particularly apparent over the issue of supporting co-operation with the organization of Women's Voluntary Services for Air Raid Protection. The Executive decided to urge branches to take part in such measures, but there was some resistance from the more pacifist members who were upset with the Executive's lack of consideration for conscientious objectors within the organization who were opposed to armaments and other war preparations.

It is likely that similar divergences were present among members of the NCEC. The annual reports do not make explicit references to differences of opinion but their range of activities indicate that such differences probably existed, given that some branches seemed

---

104 *Women In Council*, May 1938, pp.50-51.

105 ibid., p.51; *Women In Council*, June 1938, p.78.

106 See the letter from Mildred Artemus-Jones, President of the Colwyn Bay Branch of the NCW, to *Women In Council*, January 1939, p.14.
particularly enthusiastic about peace work, while others were more active in sending off resolutions on Japan and Spain, and in participating in more explicitly politicised relief work, such as the pro-Republican Spanish Medical Aid Committee. The NCEC also became involved in the organization of the Women's Voluntary Services - which was viewed as an especially urgent measure in the aftermath of the Munich crisis in September 1938. In general, it appears that the NCEC was more unified than the NCW in its support for collective security in the months leading up to the war. In March of 1939, a resolution was approved for presentation at the annual council meetings which called on the Government to "[declare] publicly that Great Britain is willing to play its full part in resistance to aggression, to the extent compatible with its military situation, provided that other countries do the same." Although clearly not an endorsement for Britain to go to war under any circumstances, this statement represented a notable evolution of policy from the beginning of the decade when the NCEC was part of a cohesive movement of women's organizations working for disarmament and the rejection of war and militarism as a means of dealing with disputes between states.

As this chapter has demonstrated, many women activists clearly continued to believe throughout the 1930s that there was substantial value in the engagement of non-party

---

107 See, for example, the local societies' reports in the 1937-38 NCEC Annual Report, 2/NSE 342 NUSEC X1/6, pp.8-9.

108 Whether there was any dissent from local branches over this decision is unknown. NCEC Annual Report, 1938-39, 2/NSE 342 NUSEC X1/7, p.10.

109 Resolutions for Programme Passed at Annual Council Meetings, NCEC, March 1939, 2/NSE 342 NUSEC X2/2/1, p.2.
women's organizations in the realm of international affairs. Not all such groups chose to pursue this activity, but among those that did at various times, their members freely voiced their views on subject matter which society had traditionally viewed as the domain of men. In fact, one might consider that the continued opportunity to debate foreign policy provided by these forums was especially important for women in a period when this topic was gaining increasing prominence on the national scene. In any event, as we have seen, the most committed of them left few topics of international affairs untouched. Their demonstrated grasp of the issues and their articulation of policy options and dilemmas strongly suggests the value of incorporating their commentary more thoroughly than is generally done into broader historical discussions of informed public debate on foreign policy in this period.

At the same time, it is also clear that the involvement of women's groups in international affairs in the 1930s only became more difficult and stressful as the decade progressed. In some instances, tensions created by the deteriorating international situation led to an organization's withdrawal, partial or complete, from the realm of foreign policy advocacy. Such decisions were only infrequently reversed by a freshly perceived urgent need to re-engage in such issues later in the decade. In other cases, especially those of the WIL and the WCG, organizations fought, with varying degrees of success, to remain consistently credible and vocal critics of government policy. In some situations, they seemed to adapt to changing circumstances through a degree of compromise, while at other times they made a great effort to hold fast to their original goals and principles even in the face of conflicting impulses. On occasion, they appeared to be trying to do both. In the case of the WCG, this large organization, which began the decade as a relatively unified body in the composition of its membership and in its commitment to an explicitly pacifist stance, found it possible to
weather the stresses of the decade and maintain a consistent agenda. In the case of the smaller WIL, with its blend of political alignments on the centre and the left and with the presence of both pacifists and internationalists, the developments of the decade led to serious disagreements, confusion, and resignations, and, by the outbreak of the war, to a realization that the organization would have to re-create itself in order to re-claim its founding ideals.

The passionate, and sometimes poignant, debates noted here thus provide a compelling view of the complex response by women's organizations to the dramatic developments on the international stage in the 1930s and to the policy decisions by the British government which accompanied them. Although the decade began with many women's organizations banded together in a relatively cohesive movement in support of a common agenda, their response to the events and crises which followed was by no means uniform - but rather determined by the particular nature of each organization and the unique composition of the individual views of their members.
CHAPTER 2 - WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS II - STRATEGY AND RHETORIC

Having established the significant contribution of non-party women's organizations to the foreign policy debate of the 1930s, I would now like to turn my attention to addressing the important question of how these groups created spaces for themselves in this traditionally male territory. This entails a discussion of the specific strategies and tactics these groups employed to convey their views on foreign policy to the public and the politicians, and to keep themselves informed and up to date on events that were taking place in a very male-dominated sphere. Clearly there were certain disadvantages that went along with their status as women-only organizations. However, these groups also possessed certain strengths - including the ability to call upon a wealth of experience gained in previous years as a result of the numerous 19th and early 20th century campaigns by women for various aspects of social reform and, especially, for the vote. The knowledge of seasoned veterans combined with the energy and creativity of younger women to produce an impressive range of activities designed to further their own understanding of the international situation and make their views heard.

Aside from the issue of such day-to-day practicalities however, there is also the crucial issue of the ideological framework of this participation. Given that women did, after all, have the option in the interwar period of exercising their interest in international affairs in
other, mixed, public forums, and that women's organizations would have appeared far removed from the centres of power of foreign policy debate, one must ask how these groups justified their participation in this realm. This entails looking at how they spoke to their members, to the general public, and to the politicians, and determining in what sense or to what degree these groups envisioned foreign policy debate as a clearly gendered realm in which they had particular interests, and particular roles to play, as women. Finally, of particular interest to this study is the extent to which the expression of these gender constructions and their applications changed or remained constant during the transition from the relatively stable international situation of the 1920s to the tumultuous and alarming atmosphere of the mid to late 1930s.

The non-party women's groups certainly did not easily penetrate the world of foreign policy debate. Helena Swanwick identified many of the obstacles that a women's organization like the WIL faced in expressing its views on international affairs. She noted that, not surprisingly, women working only in women's organizations tended to be isolated from sources of information which were chiefly open to men. As Swanwick states, "[w]omen, when they first touch even the fringes of these sources of information, realise for the first time under what a heavy handicap of darkness they had previously to work; what endless detailed efforts they had to make, in order to obtain the information which is at the disposal of Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers or Civil Servants." Furthermore, she believed that it was not even merely the specific information obtained that was enlightening, but also "the atmosphere one inhales" - meaning that simply being exposed to more
privileged sources of information gave one an understanding of the inner workings of
government that, in itself, spawned further ideas. She also supposed that women working
apart from men would miss out on the more informal social intercourse and gossip that might
provide "a sort of psychological insight" into the products of negotiations reached in the very
male world of foreign affairs. Finally, the other significant disadvantage which Swanwick
noted was the fact that, as a rule, women were "not such important personages in the eyes of
the world" - that few women were nationally known or received significant attention from
the press - a fact which would inevitably make it more difficult for an all-women
organization to get its message to the public ear.¹

These constraints on educating themselves and convincing both politicians and the
general public of the merit of their views were hardly unfamiliar to the women's groups of
this period: they had fought similar battles in the past as feminists and/or social reformers. In
this particular situation, however, the obstacles they faced were perhaps somewhat greater
because they were treading on the traditionally male terrain of foreign policy and
international affairs. Although society might be generally receptive to an image of women as
peace-makers, this by no means entailed that specific recommendations by these groups
regarding the "real" issues of disarmament, international agreement, or collective security
would be listened to or regarded as valid.

In attempting to overcome such handicaps, the women's organizations conceived of
and employed a range of strategies and tactics. The problem of keeping themselves
knowledgeable and up to date regarding the latest developments in international affairs was a

difficult one, for the reasons noted above by Swanwick. However, this concern was mitigated to some degree by the fact that many of the women in these groups also chose to be involved in mixed membership organizations concerned with foreign policy - especially the League of Nations Union - in which there was a much greater probability than in the women-only groups that some of the members would be in contact with the inner circles of foreign policy formation. At the same time, organizations such as the WIL, the WCG, and NUSEC/NCEC made considerable efforts to take advantage of the information and expertise which was more readily available in the public domain. At both the national and local levels, these groups sponsored lectures by both male and female experts in international affairs, and also encouraged their members to attend lectures arranged by other organizations. The WIL similarly circulated a considerable amount of information in the form of pamphlet and monograph literature published under its own auspices, while also, like other women's groups, carefully drawing the attention of members to other works which they viewed as useful and informative. Each group also had at its disposal its own newspaper or journal, typically published on a weekly or monthly basis, with which members could be kept current on international events, government policy, and organizational activity.

Of course these efforts at keeping their own members informed were also part of their

---

1For instance, even though the WIL as a whole was more inclined towards pacifist policies than the League of Nations Union, many WIL members were also associated with the LNU. Two notable examples from the WIL's Executive for the first half of the 1930s were Kathleen Courtney, who was also on the Executive of the LNU, and Freda White, who worked in the LNU's information-gathering department.

2In the case of the Women's Co-operative Guild, it had both its own publication, Women's Outlook, which was published fortnightly and later weekly, and a section in the weekly Co-operative News. Unfortunately, I was never able to locate a run of Women's Outlook for the 1930s, and so had to rely on the latter source. However, for most of the decade both Guild projects were edited by the same woman, Mary Stott, and there is little reason to believe that there would have been a substantial difference between the views expressed in the two publications.
endeavors to circulate their views to the world beyond. These views needed to reach the
general public - both to attract new women members and to build support among the broader
population - and also the select group of politicians and diplomats involved directly in
foreign policy decision-making. These tasks were obviously challenging and, indeed, often
quite discouraging. Not surprisingly, one encounters deliberate evocations of past
campaigns, especially of the suffrage movement, as sources of inspiration.

In a lecture on "Women and Disarmament" delivered to a WIL branch in Manchester
in 1934, renowned author and feminist Vera Brittain noted that "[t]he old, successful suffrage
methods might well be used, and the force of direct appeal made by processions and
pageantry should be realised."¹ In the case of the WCG, an appeal was made in 1935 to
Guild members to revive the energy and determination of the militant suffrage movement.
The editor of "Our Women's Pages" of The Co-operative News asked, "where are our militant
pacifists?". and reminded readers that "[w]hen women were fighting for the vote, they felt so
bitterly the blank wall of prejudice that prevented their securing recognition as adult citizens
that they made the lives of Cabinet Ministers a misery, broke their windows, interrupted their
meetings, mobbed them whenever they appeared." She went on to note that these efforts had
been made by women fighting for themselves, but that the cause of fighting to protect the
lives of loved ones was even worthier and more inspirational: "...surely we care at least as
deply about the right of human beings to live peacefully in the world as we cared in the pre-
war years about the right to vote and enter Parliament?" Although women might be tired of
"processions, petitions, ballots. all the rigmarole of making [their] voices heard," these tactics

were important. The editorial ended with a necessary caveat (in light of WCG pacifism) that while there should not, of course, be a return to "the violence of the suffragette days," there were, nonetheless, "many ways of making one's views very unpleasantly felt, without resorting to illegal acts!"^5

In fact, both petitioning and public demonstration were tactics frequently employed by the women's organizations - often with the organizations working together in such efforts. A good example of a successful petition campaign is found in the National Declaration of the Disarmament Campaign, in which WIL members played a major role, both in organization and canvassing. The Declaration was part of a global effort, initiated by WILPF in Geneva, to present millions of signatures to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva when it opened in 1932. The petition asserted the futility and danger of an international armaments competition that rendered further wars inevitable - wars which, in the future, would entail indiscriminate destruction of human life - and stated that governments' assurances of peaceful policies were useless as long as the process of disarmament was delayed. In Britain, the WIL received cooperation from numerous women's organizations, including the many local societies affiliated with the National Council of Women and NUSEC, and even the conservative Townswomen's Guilds and the rural Women's Institutes. The campaign also mobilized the mixed membership peace groups as well as the League of Nations Union, and gained the support of at least one major national daily newspaper (The News Chronicle), all the non-conformist churches and a number of Church of England clergy, many trade unions, and the Liberal and Labour Parties.

By mid-January of 1932 almost two million signatures had been gathered in Britain.6

The local campaign workers, almost all women, stood outside cinemas, set up stalls in market-places, rented empty shops, organized poster processions, and, finally, did extensive house-to-house canvassing. Efforts in Wales were particularly successful - in North Wales, the Declaration was signed by 20% of the population despite the inherent difficulties posed by the region's terrain and geographically scattered inhabitants.7 The Declaration was, in fact, an impressive achievement in the mobilization of women.8

Besides getting members of the general public to sign petitions, the women's groups pursued a range of strategies designed to encourage people to offer tangible, visible support of a commitment to a particular policy. Petitions were intended for display to policy-makers, but it was also hoped that individuals could be convinced of the benefits of displaying artifacts of various kinds to demonstrate their beliefs to their local communities. One suggestion along these lines was for a kind of pledge card which committed the signer to supporting the peace movement. The WCG was particularly enthusiastic in such efforts. In January of 1933, the Guild's General Secretary, Eleanor Barton, suggested a pledge card similar to those which had been used for many years by temperance organizations.9 It was

---

6see notes of the WIL Executive Committee. 12 January 1932.


8A similar mobilisation occurred again a few years later when the women's groups threw their support and energy into the Peace Ballot sponsored by the League of Nations Union which, by the summer of 1935, had garnered over 11 million responses in Britain.

9WCG Central Committee minutes. 25-27 January 1933, p.3. The signed pledges of the various temperance organisations created during the 19th century in Britain were (and remain) a highly familiar feature of the anti-drink movement - in which women had been an important presence. For further discussion of the pledge phenomenon in that context, see Brian Harrison's Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in
hoped that such Guild Peace Pledge cards would be signed by "hundreds of thousands" of men and women and that they would "form a protective barrier against those who would seek to drive us into the horrors of another war."\textsuperscript{10} By October, the card was ready for issue; around its margins were a number of anti-war quotes from prominent public figures, while at the centre was the pledge itself, stating, "I solemnly declare my firm conviction that world problems can best be settled by reason rather than by force and I therefore decide that under no circumstances whatever will I take part in, or help towards, the propagation of War."\textsuperscript{11}

As subsequent Guild records indicate, the pledge card did not appear to catch on with either Guild members or the general public on a large scale.\textsuperscript{12} At the same time, however, the WCG was in the process of developing another "peace token" that would, in fact, prove to be a tremendous success. Shortly after Barton's suggestion for the pledge card came another proposal from a Guild member for the distribution of "White Poppies for Peace" for Armistice Day.\textsuperscript{13} In spite of some public opposition\textsuperscript{14}, as well as some difficulties in co-

\textsuperscript{10}"Our Women's Pages." \textit{The Co-operative News}, 25 February 1933, p.12.

\textsuperscript{11}Among the margin quotes were a statement by Albert Einstein and, interestingly enough, Edith Cavell's famous phrase made before her execution in 1915 in Belgium for aiding escaping Allied soldiers: "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone." (A copy of the WCG Peace Pledge card, issued October 1933, is located in the WCG papers at the BLPES - Coll. Misc. 268, 1933-34, vol.10, item 6, Folio 35.) Regarding the pledge itself, very similar sentiments appeared in the now more famous pledge first sent to the British press by Rev. Dick Sheppard in October of 1934 in which he invited men to send in postcards stating "We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another." The response to this call later formed the basis for Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union, in which women were eventually invited to participate. (Martin Ceadel. \textit{Pacifism In Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith}, (1980) p.177.)

\textsuperscript{12}In November of 1933, a Mrs. Marchant reported to the Central Committee that she was having trouble in her own branch with the sale of the card - finding it difficult to convince Guild members themselves that the expense was necessary. (WCG Central Committee minutes, 27-28 November 1933, p.4.)

\textsuperscript{13}Central Committee minutes for March 1933 note a letter from a Mrs. Adametz suggesting the white poppy scheme - at which time the committee agreed that Eleanor Barton should explore the possibility further. (WCG
ordinating and controlling the sale of the poppies, the Guild campaign was able to establish itself quite firmly by the 1934 Armistice Day - selling 30,000 poppies that year and doubling that figure by 1936. The success of the White Poppy subsequently encouraged the Guild to produce a range of other "peace tokens." including posters, handkerchiefs, table cloths, and napkins - often employing a dove and flower decorative motif and printed with the words "peace" or "pax."

Aside from encouraging support for the relatively passive options of signing statements and wearing emblems, the women's groups also arranged and participated in campaigns and events that required a more pro-active response. Among these were mass public demonstrations, both by individual organizations and in association with other women's groups and peace groups. Many of the women's groups took part in a "peace procession" in London in the summer of 1931 that was co-ordinated with a large meeting at the Albert Hall. A rather wry comment by a WIL participant in the procession (and, undoubtedly, a veteran of past campaigns of the women's movement) reflected that, "There

In the beginning, it appears that the Guild hoped to organise this campaign with the help of the British Legion - which was responsible for the distribution of the familiar red poppies worn to commemorate those killed during the world war. However, the Legion reacted quite negatively to the white poppies - fearing a decline in its own sales of red poppies and arguing that the white poppy was an insult to the memory of the war dead. In some cases, women's sections of the Legion made their own, specific protests to the WCG over the white poppy. (WCG Central Committee minutes, 3-4 October 1933, p.2; 11-12 March 1935, p.5.) In some cases, those objecting to the scheme threatened violence against people wearing or displaying the white poppies. (See WCG Central Committee minutes, 27-28 November 1933, p.4; 22-23 November 1934, p.2.

WCG Central Committee minutes, 22-23 November 1934, p.2; 16 November 1936, p.2.

See, for example, two photographs c.1937-38 from the WCG collection at the BLPES, Coll. Misc. 268, vol.11 - showing displays of Guild peace emblems. The poster shown in one picture depicts a baby and a dove, with the motto "Peace is Life." See also the WCG's 55th Annual Report - May 1937 - May 1938, p.4 - for mention of various available peace tokens.
were. here and there. scattered groups of individuals who were *men*. but women predominated as is usual in most affairs where a willingness to look foolish in the cause of right is required."\(^{17}\) If individual contingents from the various organizations in such marches were often "gallant" rather than large. and the attending crowds sparse. such activity. conducted in both national and local arenas. played an important role in maintaining a public profile for the goals of the women's organizations regarding international affairs.

At the same time. the petitions and demonstrations were obviously also part of these groups' efforts to put pressure on particular individuals who had an influence on policy formation. Another frequently used tactic involved the forwarding of resolutions to relevant members of the Government and representatives in Geneva. These resolutions came from the national level - from executive committees or from annual meetings or congresses - and from the local level. as individual branches and societies were encouraged to send their own resolutions in the hopes of impressing policy-makers with sheer numbers. As much as they were able. the women's groups also tried to address directly the inner circles of foreign policy formation through deputations (usually by members of the Executives) and by getting questions asked in the House by sympathetic MPs such as Ellen Wilkinson. Eleanor Rathbone. and. during her brief tenure. Edith Picton-Turberville. There were also attempts made to apply these pressure tactics (e.g. letters. deputations. petitions) internationally. on representatives of other states of whose actions the groups disapproved.

On other occasions. the groups chose more indirect methods. There was some attempt to capitalize on women's role as voters and contemporary perceptions of a potentially

unified "women's vote." Regarding the upcoming General Election in 1935, Hilda Clark suggested to WIL members that "...it is important for women to remember that they have a special opportunity to influence candidates. The uncertainty as to how women will vote at an Election makes candidates particularly anxious to know the wishes of the large organisations of women which are non-Party in character." With this in mind, the WIL proceeded to draft a questionnaire for candidates on various issues relating to disarmament and pressed its members to make the candidates realize that "women desire peace." The possibility of another election in the spring of 1939 encouraged more attempts to mobilize the "women's vote" on the part of the WCAWF, by then known as the Women's Committee for Peace and Democracy.

Additional consideration was given to the possibility of coordinating boycotts of offending states. Although this tactic was discouraged by the more pacifist elements in the women's groups, it was pursued with particular enthusiasm by the WCAWF. For example, the WCAWF fervently advocated the boycott of Japanese silk in the late 1930s in response to renewed Japanese aggression against China - demanding from readers of Woman To-day that they be ethical shoppers and forego the luxuries of silk dresses and stockings. Women were told that every length of dress silk, or every pair of silk stockings, would "mean another

---


A similar strategy was pursued by the NCEC - which circulated 2 questionnaires to candidates - one concerning issues of domestic feminism in their programme. the other on "peace questions" alone. (NCEC 1935-36 Annual Report. p.6 - 2/NSE 342 NUSEC X1/4)

20 Charlotte Haldane. "Calling All Women." Woman To-day. April 1939, 2.5, p.3.
bomb on defenceless Chinese children." and that men of real worth would appreciate their
decision:

The more serious-minded of us will probably frankly give up wearing silk, 
cross the more frivolous of our young men off our visiting-lists, and set out to 
content ourselves with the regard of those members of the opposite sex (I 
understand there are still some) who prefer sterling worth (or perhaps charm, 
or sincerity) to the most dazzling pair of limbs that ever carried a million-
dollar insurance. The more practical of us will set out looking for an effective 
silk substitute.... If we create sufficient demand, British manufacturers will 
take steps to meet it here. We've got to pester the stores until every stocking 
counter carries first-rate non-silk goods.21 

Not surprisingly, shopping boycotts were perceived by the WCAWF as perhaps one of the 

few effective options open to women wanting to affect policy formation. 

As a final comment on the strategies and tactics of the women's groups, it should be 
noticed that, although many of the abovementioned options were designed to have an 
immediate influence on foreign and defence policy, some of the groups also pursued a more 
long-term agenda that involved a gradual shift in societal attitudes away from an unthinking 
acceptance of various aspects of militarism. The peace pledges and tokens were part of such 
efforts to effect a change among the population in general, but considerable attention was 
also paid to the influences on children. The WCG, in particular, made numerous efforts to 
protest the presence of militarism in schools, including lobbying against the provision of 
government grants for Officer Training Corps and requesting the celebration of "Peace Days" 
in schools to counteract the militarist messages propagated on Armistice Day and Empire

21See "Yes it would look nice, but stop and think!" Woman To-day, 2.1. Nov 1938, p.7; and Leonora 
Gregory. "Sex Appeal Without Silk." Woman To-day, 2.4. March 1939, p.22.
As the above discussion demonstrates, women's groups employed a wide range of tactics and strategies to keep themselves informed about international affairs and to convey their views to the public and to politicians. They recognized the potential offered by many methods familiar to past public campaigns for other causes - in which a number of these women had themselves participated - and they added a few new wrinkles specific to foreign policy advocacy in this decade.

One notable aspect of this process was the creative effort to come up with activities which might especially strike a chord with the "average" working class or middle class woman, and allow such women, who might normally view foreign policy advocacy as a process very remote from their daily lives, to find this activism more relevant. Such efforts included the production of familiar household objects with "peace motifs" which women could use and display, and the promotion of the personal economic boycott of products from aggressor states - through which women could exercise their potentially considerable economic power as individual consumers and as shoppers for their respective households. These particular efforts serve as one indication of the ways in which the foreign policy activism of the non-party women's organizations featured deliberately gendered components. Specifically, they point to an attempt to tap into a broadly experienced and recognizable female consciousness - by suggesting to a mass audience of women that there was a place for

---

international affairs within the familiar gender roles in which most of them lived.

The appearance in this discussion of these explicitly gendered strategies leads one to further pursue the role of gender in this activism by examining the language used by these organizations and their members to justify women's participation in the male-dominated world of international affairs. In order to provide such justifications, activists could use explicitly gendered rhetoric which might evoke a feminist consciousness (either broadly defined or specifically equal rights or maternalist) or a more basic "female" consciousness.

The presence of an expressly gendered dimension to this activism was not a new phenomenon in the 1930s: indeed, precedents for the different feminist and non-feminist aspects of this rhetoric can be found in the various earlier stages of this activism. With reference specifically to the history of women's organized rejection of militarism, Jill Liddington has noted that it had a gendered component even in its early 19th century manifestations in the Quaker women's Olive Leaf Circles. This gendered component was generally not feminist in nature in that it usually involved no claim for women's rights, but it did articulate a form of female consciousness which stressed the value of women's maternal and civilizing influences in curbing the unrefined and destructive male tendencies towards war and violence.\(^\text{23}\) A distinctly feminist note was in fact later sounded in the 1840s and '50s by the Quaker preacher Anne Knight, a proponent of equal rights for women who argued that the attainment of women's suffrage would lead to peace.\(^\text{24}\)

---


\(^{24}\)Ibid., pp.16-17.
The Olive Leaf Circles went into decline during and after the Crimean War and the American Civil War, and feminism at that time developed separately from peace politics.\textsuperscript{25} The real beginnings of a feminist critique of militarism occurred in the late 19th century and were bolstered by John Stuart Mill's argument that war increased the subjugation of women. This view was supported by some members of the tiny Women's Peace and Arbitration Auxiliary - formed in 1874 with 137 members - but the Women's Auxiliary remained largely dominated by Quakers who emphasized a religious perspective.\textsuperscript{26}

Although a spirit of international sisterhood was encouraged among women's groups by the establishment of organizations such as the International Council of Women and the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, rhetoric making a special case for women's anti-militarism was relatively rare in Britain prior to the First World War. During the Boer War, divisions among British feminists over this conflict prefigured tensions that appeared during World War I. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, saw no connection between feminism and anti-militarism and passionately defended the Empire. Her patriotic stance was, in fact, not uncommon within women's groups generally - feminist or otherwise. A strong, but rather lonely, voice challenging this pro-war attitude was that of Emily Hobhouse who, through her exposés of British concentration camps in South Africa, argued that the cost of war fell most heavily on non-combatants and that militarism was the enemy not just of civilization, but of

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., pp.18-19.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., pp.23-29.
women generally.  

A rare prewar discussion of women's special stake in peace was published in 1911 in the weekly paper of the NUWSS, *Common Cause*, in a piece entitled "Women and War," which suggested that the unenfranchised women of the world - who could play no role in decisions to declare war - suffered the most from war as the mothers of the race which war destroyed.  

Besides this offering, British women were also exposed to writings by two admired foreigners - the American Charlotte Perkins Gilman and South African Olive Schreiner. With a heavy emphasis on eugenics, Gilman wrote of women's moral superiority and denoted all aggressive, war-like behavior as inherently masculine. In achieving independence from men, women could then work to turn society from war and secure the future of the race. Schreiner did not emphasize the eugenics argument or women's moral superiority, but she did support the view that women, as child-bearers and therefore producers of armies, suffered the most from war in witnessing the destruction of their own children and of all children of women generally. In the essay "Women and War," from her longer work *Women and Labour* (published in 1911), Schreiner argued that the enfranchisement of women would put an end to the use of war as a means of solving disputes.

---


Thus the 19th and early 20th centuries saw the establishment of a gendered understanding of women's anti-militarism that ranged from evocations of "women's virtues" that were not inherently feminist, to feminist expressions of women's interest in preserving peace because of their particular vulnerability to war. Within this latter, feminist, perspective, two distinct impulses were represented. An equal rights impulse suggested that women would be better able to protect themselves from war and its effects once they had obtained the franchise and other rights alongside men. A maternal feminist impulse emphasized women's right to have the power to protect their children and/or women's potential ability, as human beings with nurturing values and gifts (which were less developed, or non-existant, in men), to re-shape society and the old, confrontational rules of international relations.

However, while writings such as these and the active commitment of international organizations like the IWSA to the cause of peace were not without impact among British women activists in these years, few women took up this cause until 1915. The outbreak of the war itself in the summer of 1914 saw the resurfacing of the tensions of the Boer War. Most suffrage campaigners, including Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, came out in support of the government and the war effort. Millicent Fawcett and official NUWSS policy urged women to respond to the country's needs. As she stated in *Common Cause* merely days after Britain entered the war: "Let us show ourselves worthy of citizenship, whether our claim to it be recognised or not."31 However, it was not simply a

---

case, in Fawcett's view, of supporting the government in order to further women's cause, but also one of supporting a government and an empire which was "fighting the battle of representative government and progressive democracy all over the world" - a cause with which suffragists should naturally be identified.\(^{32}\) This particular argument, which identified the feminist struggle for equal representation with Britain's struggle to "defend democracy" in World War I is, in fact, one which should be kept in mind when turning to look at women's foreign policy activism in the 1930s - when it could certainly be argued that Britain and the world were facing a much more profound battle for "progressive democracy."

Millicent Fawcett's patriotic desire to mobilize women in support of the war was hardly surprising, given her stance during the Boer War. What was somewhat more startling was the rapid conversion of the leaders of the suffragette Women's Social and Political Union - Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst - to a rabidly jingoistic view of the war.\(^{33}\) Anne Wiltsher notes that, as late as the summer of 1914, prior to the outbreak of war, Christabel Pankhurst was attributing the horrors of warfare to political rule by men only.\(^{34}\) However, once the war started and Britain became involved, both women declared a ceasefire on the government and charged their supporters with whole-hearted support for the war effort. They

---

\(^{32}\)Wiltsher, p.67 - quoting comments by Fawcett from an NUWSS executive meeting in November 1914.

\(^{33}\)The two other Pankhurst daughters, Sylvia and Adela, took opposing views on the war from their mother and sister and supported the pacifist cause during the war. Sylvia Pankhurst had left the WSPU shortly before the war began to start her own organisation - the East London Federation of Suffragettes. She was briefly involved in the WIL but found it too conservative and left, carrying out protests against the war and conscription within the ELFS. (Wiltsher, pp.42, 133-134, 137, 142-143.)

\(^{34}\)Wiltsher, pp.36-37.
and other WSPU colleagues then threw themselves into army recruiting campaigns.\textsuperscript{35}

Representing the majority of feminists during the war, supporters of Millicent Fawcett and of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst opted to position themselves as loyal members of the national community and to stress their common bonds with the very state which they had been fighting only months earlier. Clearly in the minority were the small group of feminists who rejected this stance and came together to form the WIL. Even with the broadening of the women's peace movement later in the war through the Women's Peace Crusade, the number of women who were active peace campaigners remained relatively low. However, among these activists were some especially articulate women who further developed the rationales for an organized women's peace movement. To their voices, which were central to women's wartime peace efforts, would be added those of even more contributors in the post-war period and into the 1930s, as the movement evolved in new directions.

In examining writings by two of the women at the heart of the organization of the Hague Peace Congress and the establishment of the WIL, one is presented with a clear picture of the different connections being made at this time between gender ideology on the one hand, and anti-militarism on the other, and the complexity of these associations. The first chair of the WIL, Helena Swanwick, was also an important figure in a mixed membership organization known as the Union of Democratic Control, which called for the democratic control of foreign policy, the rejection of alliance systems, and disarmament. Early in 1915, Swanwick published a pamphlet through the UDC entitled \textit{Women and War}

\textsuperscript{\textit{Ibid.}, p.39.}
which gives a clear indication of the views which she brought to her involvement in the planning for the Congress and the formation of the WIL.

In this piece, she admitted the existence of "militaristic women" who sometimes sounded even more bloodthirsty than the men in their circles. Swanwick argued that such women were violent in speech because they lacked the outlet that men possessed as warriors. However, she added that it did not follow that these women would be anxious to go to war, because their support for militarism, whether eager or tacit, was the result of a lack of reflection on the conditions of their lives and a lazy acceptance of dominant male values.36 In her view, war and militarism could be seen as particularly detrimental to women; while clearly both men and women suffered from the direct physical effects of war, a militaristic system both excluded and enslaved women and offered them none of the perceived compensating "attractions" that were offered to men.37 She believed that war had a harsh economic impact on women by reducing the need for the kinds of services that they typically offered and, reminiscent of the commentators noted above, stressed the way in which war placed a unique burden on women by destroying the children they bore and the homes they maintained.38 She also pointed out that the cause of women's rights had much in common with that of the rights of small nations in that both benefitted from systems which valued intellectual and moral suasion over physical force.39 In Swanwick's view, women therefore


37Ibid., p.13.

38Ibid., p.2.

39Ibid., pp.5-6.
needed to recognize the logical flaw in their historical support for their male warriors, and, consequently, the militaristic society in which they lived.

All of these points were ones which Swanwick would make again in publications for the WIL. At the end of one such pamphlet, entitled The War in its Effect upon Women, she recognized that women had been used to thinking of foreign politics as being "outside their scope," but then noted that organizations like the WIL were now challenging this view and offering a framework for understanding women's motivations in working for peace.40 She consistently asserted that it was wrong to assume that all women, "as women," necessarily thought the same way.41 However, Swanwick was very clear in arguing that there nonetheless should be a distinct women's view on war and militarism - a view which demanded an alternative system of international relations.

A similar set of opinions was also espoused by Swanwick's WIL colleague Maude Royden, in an article published during the war entitled "War and the Women's Movement." Royden noted that women's support for the war in Britain had clearly revealed that women were not inherently pacifist but that there was no escaping the fact that the principles of the women's movement and militarism were inevitably in opposition. Royden argued that women were not men's equal in their capacity or willingness to use force, and that therefore there was little point in seeking equal rights in a world governed by force. Like Swanwick, Royden believed that the women's movement assumed the superiority of a system governed by moral force and that, while there were certainly at that time "militarists who believe


41Ibid., p.29.
themselves feminist. and feminists who are undoubtedly militarist." they had not yet confronted the "real contradiction" of these positions. When they did so, they would ultimately be forced to abandon any support for militarism.42

In the war-time writings of both of these women, one thus sees the strong expression of an explicitly feminist consciousness motivating women's organized rejection of militarism and war. Especially significant here is the complexity of the feminist rationales employed - which appear to constitute a blending of equal rights feminism and maternal feminism. Both writers make it clear that the achievement of equal rights for women was a central priority, for its own sake and to help shift societal values away from militarism. At the same time, both women seem to be espousing a view of women as, at least ideally, equal but different. Helena Swanwick in particular incorporated a strand of maternal feminism into her arguments by emphasising the common experiences of women as "life-givers and home-makers," who have natural rights over the bodies and lives of the sons they have carried and nourished, and who "...cannot ever compete with men in a world built upon competition, for [their] work is different..."43

Given this understanding of the gendered ideological framework of the WIL at its birth, one can now turn to an examination of the organization's rhetoric in the 1930s. In so doing, one finds an organization which continued to be highly flexible and creative in its application of gendered contexts to its justifications of women's participation in the realm of


foreign policy debate.

Still a central figure in the WIL in the early 1930s, Helena Swanwick's language had changed relatively little from 1915. She was as firm as ever in her belief that, although there was possibly not a unified "women's view" at that time, there indeed should be one that demanded the abandonment of militarism. Writing in the organization's news sheet in 1933, she berated women who did not make the mental effort to come to grips with the realities of both their own lives and modern warfare, calling them "half women" who were "...content to wear their opinions as they wear their coats, ready-made by a man tailor." Swanwick was a strong advocate of women's equal representation in "the world's councils" - or in the public sphere generally - but she also continued to assert that women could make a unique contribution which, if given equal weight, would change the nature of society - or indeed the world. She saw this contribution as one that should arise inevitably from women's recognition of the implications of militarism for the roles which society had constructed for them.

On occasion, Swanwick seemed to go beyond her emphasis on socially-constructed gender roles to recognize the possible existence of essential qualities linked to sex that might determine an appropriate women's stance on foreign policy. She suggested the possibility that women were "simpler and more direct in their emotions" and that consequently their "feelings in regard to peace" might be more intense than men's. She was also apparently willing to appeal to popular contemporary attitudes about woman's nature and appropriate

---

women's roles (attitudes which, in many other circumstances, she vigorously and unequivocally opposed) to bolster the idea that women should be pacifists. When addressing the possibility that, due to modern technology, women could assume combatant roles in a military conflict, she stated, "...even those who acclaimed the patriotism of women munitions makers would at present...shudder away from this possibility; which shows that, in present popular estimation at least, it is felt that women ought to have a different outlook."[my italics]45 Certainly Swanwick had, in other times and in other contexts, been quite happily out of step with the "present popular estimation" of women. but in this instance it served her purpose and could thus be marshalled alongside her other arguments.

The rhetoric of this highly influential member of the WIL is thus revealed as containing different strands of feminism, and both radical and traditional images of women and "women's nature." Swanwick's own feminist commitment was unmistakable but she was also evidently open to the possibilities offered to the cause of peace by gender imagery and gendered appeals which were not necessarily or inherently feminist, and might even be considered reactionary if encountered in a different context. However, Helena Swanwick was not alone in the women's peace campaign in demonstrating this kind of flexibility, as one sees in examining other voices and forums of the movement, beginning with those of her colleagues in the WIL.

In May of 1932, Dr. Hilda Clark published a call to action to the WIL's membership on behalf of the disarmament campaign in which she stated that women were "expecially

45 Ibid.
[sic] suited to do this work."

"as guardians of the childhood of the race."

Shortly thereafter, in July, Mrs. M.G. Thoday, the driving force behind the establishment of WIL branches in Wales, informed the Executive Committee of a suggestion from her region for a public campaign appealing in particular to mothers - for the sake of their sons. Both Dr. Clark's editorial and Mrs. Thoday's report from her Welsh membership employed an image of women as nurturers with specific responsibilities to protect children from war. Mrs. Thoday's report contained an unambiguous reference to women as mothers looking out for their own sons, while Dr. Clark's reference was to a more general women's duty to the vulnerable children of society at large, but both excerpts imply that women, by virtue of their gender-specific roles as "mothers" (in fact or in theory), were logically committed to peace. However, it must also be noted that the Executive decided that the Welsh appeal was too limited - that a better idea was perhaps a general appeal to all concerned individuals and organizations to save the rising generation. Understanding the potential mass appeal of language evoking motherhood, the members of the Executive clearly perceived a benefit in linking the cause of peace and disarmament to women's maternal instincts. At the same time, however, as appears also to have been the case with Dr. Clark's message, they obviously wanted to allow for the fact that many who might respond to such an appeal were not actually mothers themselves.

In some instances, the WIL appealed to some "essential" qualities of women, presenting them more broadly as the proper champions of humanity and civilisation. In a

---


47 WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/8. 19 July 1932, p.3.
policy statement in 1935. the Executive stated that it was literally not possible for them, "as women," to support a policy of retaliation against air attacks which would result in the slaughter of men, women and children in other countries. The actual reason why it was "not possible" was not given - it was apparently felt to be self-evident in light of women's "nature." Not long after this, in an article for the news sheet, Kathleen Courtney spoke in somewhat more specific terms when justifying women's role in the defense of civilisation from the horrors of air warfare. She called this cause "...a great field...for women to work in..."; rather than "a Utopian dream." such efforts were a matter of "practical common sense" that women were especially suited to engage in because they were "the practical sex...the common-sense sex." Here Courtney departed from explicitly maternal rhetoric, and chose instead a more implicit reference to women's capacity to be grounded in the realities of daily life. Ironically, in so doing, she combatted the general public's stereotyped image of women pacifists as sentimental dreamers with another stereotype which dissociated women from rarified intellectual activity.

Finally, when Barbara Duncan Harris took the opportunity in her 1938 New Year message as WIL Chair to remind the organization of its reason for being at a time of great strain given the bleak international outlook, she stated:

We are only small groups of women in most of the countries where the WILPF is represented, but just because we are women we have a common bond and a contribution to make to the thought of the world. By reason of our common experience we are more closely bound up than the other half of the human race with the preservation. not only of the physical life of each new

---

48WIL Executive Committee Minutes. 1/11. 14 May 1935, p.4.
49Kathleen Courtney. WIL News Sheet. June 1935, p.3.
generation, but of all that our own generation has achieved - of culture, of progress, of the raising of life to a finer plane - which we can pass on to those in whose hands the future lies.\(^5\)

Here Duncan Harris chose to avoid language that suggested any inherently female characteristics that pre-dispose women to peace. She referred to women's traditional societal roles as mothers and civilizers, but she chose to end with an emphasis on women's stake in social progress.

As a whole, WIL rhetoric which justified a special women's effort to engage in international affairs in the cause of peace was nuanced in its expression of gender ideology and feminism. Women had the right to participate in this realm as human beings and as citizens, but the value of their participation was also expressed in terms of their particular potential contribution as women. This latter point involved the designation of certain qualities to women which were either the consequence of the social construction of gender roles or inherent to women from birth. The imagery here was generally maternalist - in some instances explicitly expressed and in others more subtly or delicately implied.

Another important source of rhetoric reflecting a gendered conception of women's participation in peace work offered a similar message to that of the WIL. The attempt to motivate the mass of middle class women's organizations in Britain towards such efforts came, at least in part, from above - from the International Alliance of Women, to which NUSEC/NCEC was directly affiliated, and which was viewed sympathetically by the NCW because of the increasingly close relationship between the IAW and the International Council

of Women. Margery Corbett Ashby and Kathleen Courtney, who were tremendously influential in the British women's groups to which they belonged, used their roles to try to engage women's groups in international affairs not only in their own country but around the world.

The fact that the IAW as a whole was increasingly involved in peace work in the latter half of the 1920s was due in part to the efforts of these two women. Courtney, of course, had been involved with the WILPF from its inception, and she became a member of the IAW's Peace Committee when it was formed in 1926. Corbett Ashby, although not involved in the wartime peace campaign, was convinced by her experiences touring Europe and North America as IAW President in the 1920s that the promotion of peace was not only essential to the progress of the women's movement, but in fact in itself an unavoidable responsibility of women benefitting from that progress. In her first IAW Congress speech as President, in 1926, Corbett Ashby began by stating that "the women's movement exists in every country where civilisation is based on justice, peace, and liberty. Its goals are Equality, International Understanding and Peace."

In February 1930, when leading a deputation of women to the London Naval Conference, Corbett Ashby justified a role for women in international affairs: "I think the deputation is memorable because it is introducing women

---

51 The IWSA had changed its name in 1926 to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, which was commonly known by the short acronym IAW. The IAW had an Executive Committee on which prominent British feminists were represented, and British feminists were also deeply involved in the organisation's journal (originally known as Jus Suffragii, and later known as the International Women's News - published mainly in English with some parts in French) and in the international Congresses held every few years - in which representative delegates from affiliated national organisations participated. In 1935, the ICW proposed a fusion of the two organisations. Although this proposal was eventually turned down, the IAW did agree to an established policy of co-operation. (See Arnold Whittick, Woman Into Citizen, 1979, p.127.)

52 Whittick, p.92.
as a new factor in international politics. They come here because they feel that women are not only idealists; they will represent in politics a very practical force. They believe that reduction is practical..."53 Her faith in the value of the contribution that women could make in international affairs was unshakable, and she clearly perceived this role as one which followed logically from women's official entrance into national political life. It was not just an opportunity but a responsibility for women who had achieved a political voice, not only in Britain but in countries around the world, to use it to affect the international system.

Some of the IAW's feminist partners in Britain at this time were clearly uncomfortable with the increasing focus on peace in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the rationale employed to justify this activity as a feminist cause. Prominent women in the Six Point Group and the Women's Freedom League, both fairly small organizations with a strongly equal rights feminist orientation, objected to the IAW's new emphasis. IAW historian Arnold Whittick has noted a debate that took place within the pages of the International Women's News in 1928, in which Nina Boyle (of the WFL) and Helen Archdale (of the Six Point Group) expressed grave concerns at what they perceived to be the highly unfortunate diversion of the IAW away from feminism and into the peace movement. In January, Boyle wrote in a letter that the IAW had "...finally struck its flag to the two most dangerous rivals and foes of feminism - peace and the social reformers" and then asked "[a]re

53"Women and Disarmament" [a transcript of the women's deputation to the Chairman of the London Naval Conference at St. James's Palace on February 6th, 1930.] The Women's Peace Crusade, p.7. (Margery Corbett Ashby Papers - Fawcett Library) The deputation consisted of delegations from four of the five naval powers represented at the conference: America, Great Britain, France, and Japan. The British delegation, led by the prominent Liberal Lady Horsley, represented the organisations, both feminist and otherwise, associated with the Women's Peace Crusade, including the NCW, NUSEC, the Union of Jewish Women, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the WIL, Women's National Liberal Federation, the YWCA, the National Union of Teachers, the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations, and the Women's Total Abstinence Union.
we feminists, or are we pacifists?" In another letter in April, Boyle wrote, "the women's movement has been betrayed, and...those of us who have honourably refrained from bringing our imperialism into the movement, are deeply wronged by those who will not refrain from dragging in their pacifism." Not herself a pacifist, Boyle clearly resented the efforts to link the feminist movement with pacifist campaigns and she was also afraid that pacifism, along with "social reform" was going to weaken feminism by distracting the movement away from the continuing struggle for women's rights. She was subsequently supported by Archdale, who differentiated between feminism and humanism (with peace work being a function of the latter) and claimed that the IAW had deserted feminism for humanism. Clearly both women rejected the idea that there was any necessary connection between feminism and antimilitarism and, indeed, the two organizations they represented proved resistant to suggestions that they contribute in any substantial fashion with their limited resources to the organized women's peace movement.

54 Whittick, pp.97-99.

55 In the case of the WFL there was, in fact, some sympathy for the idea of women's natural commitment to peace. It is clear, however, that there were tensions in the group regarding this view and, as a result, attempts to act on this view were confused and generally unsuccessful. At the 1930 and 1932 annual conferences, a member raised the possibility of lobbying the Government to create a Minister for Peace in the Cabinet, and to have this position filled by a woman. At the 1930 Conference, the conference Chair, Mrs. Schofield-Coates, J.P., argued that it would be absurd to demand that such a Minister should absolutely be a woman "because you might find a man who was even keener on peace than women." She went on to state, however, that "Obviously women are keener on peace. They believe in total disarmament. The men bear the rifle but the women bear the race, and they ought to have some voice as to whether they are to be used as cannon fodder." In the end, the resolution that was carried called for the creation of the post but without any conditions on the sex of the holder. When the issue was raised again at the 1932 Conference, it was in relation to criticism of the lack of women Cabinet Ministers generally in the Government. However, even given that situation, and with some WFL women believing that a woman would be specially suited for the post, a motion to again call for a woman Minister for Peace was defeated by a large majority, with the representative for Portsmouth pointing out that such a demand for preferential treatment would compromise the WFL's support for equality. (Women's Freedom League - Annual Conference Reports - 24 May 1930. p.89; 16 April 1932. pp.53-54. 2/WFL 58 FL 6/2 - Fawcett Library)
Such instances of resistance, however, did not lead to a change in IAW policy. Corbett Ashby's enthusiasm, combined with her energetic efforts to maintain active links between the international body and the national organizations in Britain, played an important role in encouraging continued engagement in international affairs among many organizations which, unlike the WIL, had not been founded for the express purpose of such activity.

To this audience, Corbett Ashby's conception of women as a "new factor" in international politics and of women's responsibility in working for peace was typically presented in a maternalist context - which stressed women's roles as mothers and nurturers of not only their own children, but of children generally, and even of the world. A "Manifesto" issued in 1934 by the IAW Peace Committee and signed by prominent Board members, including Corbett Ashby, stated that "[b]ecause the care of the spiritual and bodily health of the race in early childhood is the special duty and privilege of women we have the urgent task of training the next generation in mutual understanding and tolerance, in love of justice and order rather than acquiescence in violence and tyranny."56 A few years later, in an atmosphere of considerably less optimism, Corbett Ashby herself called on women to "fight on for mercy and truth, righteousness and peace." with the reasoning that, "[b]ecause our hopes are so often enshrined in the lovely bodies of our children we cannot let our responsibilities and our work be limited by their needs. Perplexed and suffering mankind needs mothering by strong and valiant women who have won their own freedom, broken their

56"Manifesto," issued by the Committee for Peace and the League of Nations [IAW] - signed by Corbett Ashby, Josephine Schain, Dr. C.C. Bakker van Bosse, and Rosa Manus - (International Women's News, 29.3, December 1934, supplement.)
chains, tested their loyalty to their women comrades." Indeed, a clearer expression of maternal feminism than that found in these latter, strongly worded phrases - which portrayed emancipated motherhood as the world's salvation - might be hard to find.

The combined emphasis of women's right to participate in world affairs and women's duty to participate, from the perspective of their experiences as mothers, was a common theme in IAW rhetoric. Corbett Ashby spoke along these lines in "An Appeal to Women" that was adopted by the IAW Board:

We call upon women to clear their minds of unbalanced and fundamentally sentimental ideas of what their function in the world should be. There is, there can be, no system of government, be it new or old, which as a pure principle needs to discriminate against one sex. The function of maternity is physically different from the function of paternity, but parenthood is common to both sexes, and the interests of both sexes are identical in the peaceful existence and economic prosperity of the individual.... Stand out for your right to share the political, economic, and social life of your people on equal terms with your brothers. Refuse to be regarded as possessing one sole function, that of perpetuating the race by bearing children without the necessary power to protect them from evil, even possibly producing sons for a slaughter against which you cannot influence your country's policy. By the very virtue of motherhood, you should take the longer view and guard your children against all that is war-minded, all that is essentially tyrannical in any conception of the State.  

Corbett Ashby used language that blended various strands of feminism and tried to combine radical and traditional images of women. She called on her audience to realise the potential of the demand for equal rights but also to examine carefully the conditions of their lives and thus to be active, empowered mothers, and not passive breeders for the state's war machine.

A similar willingness to blend different feminist impulses and gender images is found

---


in Corbett Ashby's presidential speech to the Istanbul Congress in 1935, in which she combined a celebration of women's achievements around the world in expanding women's roles and an advocacy of women's equal rights in education, employment, and pay, with rhetoric that suggested that an expansion of women's contributions to society should be rooted in very traditional women's roles. In one breath, she looked forward to future revelations of "the creative power of educated, free, and responsible women," and in the next defined women primarily as nurturers - of their own children and of society as a whole:

[We shall raise a healthier, finer, more intelligent race, when we contribute our share to sweeping away ignorance and apathy, war and disease, and the fateful drift towards war, of bigoted nationalism. We shall share our love for our children with those of other races and classes. We shall bring to problems of citizenship and nation-building our special contribution and our special experience. Men say there have been no great women sculptors or painters, architects or musicians. May not the answer be that women's creative force is expressed, not through marble and stone, colour and harmony, but through social adjustment and experiment?\textsuperscript{59}

This same speech ended with a summation of the various recent gains made by women in countries around the world and a somber comment on setbacks suffered as a result of economic distress and threats to democracy. Her central message, however, was that the IAW's top priority was in working for peace and, in the interests of this cause, Corbett Ashby was clearly comfortable not only evoking the language of maternal feminism but also making the rather startling statement, for someone who advocated expanding opportunities for women, that women had perhaps not been great artists because their talents lay elsewhere - in social roles for which their experiences within their families had prepared them.

\textsuperscript{59}Margery Corbett Ashby. President's speech at the Istanbul Congress of the IAW, 1935 - MCA Papers - 7/MICA. #485 D(Misc).
The IAW and Corbett Ashby were attempting to appeal to and motivate networks of British women who represented a broad spectrum of gender ideology - including support for the ideal of equal rights but also likely incorporating a substantial degree of sympathy for conceptions of women that ranged from maternal feminist to simply maternalist. Within this context, the rhetorical variations noted here are hardly surprising. It is also worth noting that, while there is clearly a great deal of similarity in many respects between IAW rhetoric and the WIL rhetoric discussed earlier, it also appears that the maternalist language of the IAW was frequently more forceful and explicit. This may be partly explained by the dominant role played by Margery Corbett Ashby in broadcasting IAW priorities. The combination of her own extroverted public style and her personal circumstances as a wife and mother would inevitably have contributed to the dramatic quality of many of her maternalist comments.

If the WIL's maternalist rhetoric was, on occasion, more subtle or muted than that of the IAW, the organization most responsible for mobilizing working class women into the peace movement - the WCG - was enthusiastic in its use of such imagery. What noticeably distinguished the Guild's rhetoric from that of the IAW was its particular combination of gendered justifications with expressions of a non-gendered communal consciousness relating specifically to class interests.

In this respect, the Guild was historically linked to the Women's Peace Crusade of World War I which, like the WIL, asserted that militarism resulted in the subjection and exploitation of women, but focused in particular on the concerns of working-class women and their reasons for protesting the war. Liddington notes that the WPC was often not
concerned, in speaking to these women, with offering connections between anti-militarism and feminism. Instead it typically spoke in what she describes as "an urgent, pragmatic mix of maternalist and socialist arguments." Leaders of the wartime WPC such as Helen Crawfurd, a member of the Independent Labour Party and a former member of the WSPU, evoked the non-gendered communal consciousness of class interests when she made statements which emphasized the war as an exercise in the capitalist exploitation of the working classes.

Like the wartime WPC, the Guild drew a strong connection between peace work and class-related economic interests which, in its case, concerned a national and international community of men and women in the co-operative movement. Hopes for the successful establishment of an International Co-operative system were directly linked to the need to end war - the most extreme example of international competition. In the section of The Co-operative News set aside for the WCG, an article on Guild participation in a disarmament demonstration in July of 1931 stated: "[a]re guildswomen going to let the people march towards war without protest? If they are true to their co-operative ideals, with the shining Commonwealth (which is essentially peaceful) at the head, they are going to be solid, steady, but far from stupid. conscientious objectors. should another call to war be heard." The WCG also objected to militarism not only because of the threat it posed to the international system but because of its direct economic impact on the working class in Britain; they

---

60 Liddington, p.129.

61 See Liddington, p.123.

believed arms expenditures were "robbing [their] social services." At the same time, the Guild fiercely denied the pro-armaments argument that warned of devastating unemployment if the armaments industry in Britain was forced to cut back on production.

These economic arguments were linked to WCG members' second, and even more strongly voiced, explanation of their pacifism. As members of the Co-operative movement, they expressed their solidarity with workers at home and abroad. but they also emphasized their place in the international sisterhood of women. viewing as proof of women's abilities their own accomplishments as Guild women in organizing internationally and carrying out constructive work when other organizations were only talking about peace. The specific bond of sisterhood that they repeatedly invoked placed heavy emphasis on women's roles as mothers and their subsequent responsibility for their own children and the world's children.

These class and gender interests in Guild pacifism frequently appeared alongside each other in the organization's literature and in the speeches of its leaders. One particularly balanced expression of both interests is found in a statement by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, General Secretary of the WCG from 1889-1921 and one of the founders of the IWCG:

There is no class to whom the cause of Peace can make a stronger appeal than to International Co-operative Guildswomen. for war casts its dread shadow in a special way on the lives of wives and mothers. Nor is there any class whose

---


64 At the North-East Lancashire District Conference, a Mrs. Wightman addressed this issue directly, arguing that disarmament would eventually actually increase employment because money could be redirected to housing construction, raising the school age, and enlarging child welfare schemes. On the other hand, she believed armaments contributed to unemployment through the destruction of workshops and factories during war, and because they created suspicion, and thus trade barriers, between nations. The Co-operative News - "Our Women's Pages". 22 August 1931. p.13.

65 WCG Congress at Cheltenham - President's message from Mrs. A. Mellis - The Co-operative News, 13 June 1931, p.5.
ideals can more effectively undermine the causes of war. For the brotherhood of nations is the religion of Co-operators, and under an International Co-operative system of trade and industry the material interests of nations are no longer in conflict, but the resources of the globe are pooled and divided in the interests of all.  

However, while gendered and economic concerns were closely linked in Guild pacifism, it also appears that, due to the fact that the WCG was predominantly composed of married women, the maternalist arguments were seen as especially appealing and thus often emphasized. In February of 1932, The Co-operative News printed a message from Emmy Freundlich, president of the IWCG, "to the Women at Geneva" entitled "The Call of the Mothers Goes Forth. Down With War: Down With Arms" in which she first talked about women's role in the establishment of a new planned economy through their purchasing power, but then went on to state.

Besides the economic crisis. we women must fight against war. We, who create life, cannot allow life to be destroyed. ...This machine is devouring the prosperity of all the nations.... To be mothers of the world: that is the great mission of women. And so we are fighting to rescue the world's children - the children of all nations. Never shall the call of the mothers cease to sound. Down with Arms. Down with War. Hail the safety of the nations. Hail, Peace.  

The WCG itself spoke of "harnessing motherhood for disarmament" and stated that "[m]en can scoff as long and as loud as they like. but mothers are still the strongest and most wholesome influence in the world. That being so, isn't it time we used that influence to some purpose?" Pointing out the tragic irony of recent national efforts to "make motherhood safe," which actually meant bringing more children into the world "for war purposes," the writers of

---


57Emmy Freundlich, "The Call of the Mothers Goes Forth...". reprint from The Co-operative News, 27 Feb 1932.
"Our Women's Pages" in *The Co-operative News* argued that the Guild should go even further and "make the world not only safe for motherhood, but safe for manhood, too. That is the complete vision as we see it." They ended by pointing to the Guild task of specifically enrolling mothers in the Disarmament Campaign for this purpose.68

This maternalist rhetoric can certainly be seen to have had a feminist component to it, in the sense that these exhortations seemed to be calling on women to re-shape the world on maternal principles. However, such expressions could also clearly operate at the more basic level of appealing to a broadly "female." as opposed to feminist, consciousness - by evoking a basic, and very personally experienced, maternal instinct to protect one's own child. This aspect of gendered Guild pacifism is apparent in the material noted above, but comes across especially vividly and poignantly in an open letter written by a Guildswoman to the Prime Minister in the spring of 1939 which was published by the WCG:

Please be notified that I have not nurtured a son for twenty years in the principles of Christianity and good citizenship... for you, or any other Government, to claim him now to be a cog in the wheels of a military machine which threatens mankind with annihilation.... Since I am responsible for his being, I mean to see to it that he shall have the life which I thrust upon him and not the living death which you seek to offer him, nay to demand of him. So if you choose to collect him, you will first have to collect me, and behind me. I hope. for the sake of the freedom of England. all the mothers of sons of twenty, and also the mothers of sons who have already made the supreme sacrifice to show us that war is not the way to transform the world.69

In its combining of gendered arguments which. both explicitly feminist and not, were

---


certainly often maternalist and non-gendered arguments which evoked the economic-based communal consciousness of the Co-operative movement. WCG rhetoric was, in fact, similar in many respects to that of the last source to be discussed here - the Women's Committee Against War and Fascism. As Sue Bruley has noted, the WCAWF was "...not just against war and fascism; its founding manifesto placed its campaign in a socialist and feminist context." Its leaders included some of the most noted left-wing feminists of the decade, including Hilda Vernon and Charlotte Haldane.

In 1936, the WCAWF started a monthly paper, *Woman To-day*, which appears to have been directed mainly at the mothers and "ordinary housewives" of the working and lower middle classes. It was an explicitly feminist publication which advocated "full social, political and economic rights and liberties for women." However, its gendered rhetoric encouraging women to work for peace shifted between emphasizing women's interests in protecting their hard-won rights and evoking very traditional women's roles as keepers of the hearth - whose own homes, husbands, and children were threatened by war and who should want to help mothers in other countries already suffering. A 1938 article by Hilda Vernon was entitled, "Woman To-day - For Peace and Freedom - For Our Rights - For Protection of Mother and Child." As editor of *Woman To-day*, Charlotte Haldane once began her column, "Calling All Women," with the assertion that "[n]o one wants Peace as much as we women do. There are in this country millions of women to whom Peace does not mean

---

70Sue Bruley, "Women Against War and Fascism: Communism, Feminism and the Popular Front," p.136.

71Ibid., p.140.

72*Woman To-day*, 2.1, November 1938, p.2.
politics, but the security of their homes and the safeguarding of their children's lives...."

However, the same article ended with the statement that "[a]rdent feminists as all modern girls and women must be. they know quite well that men's and women's interests are fundamentally identical. It is only the present social system which makes them sometimes appear to clash. It is the system that needs altering - not human nature." In this same issue, the paper's "Home Page." carrying advice on spring cleaning, ended with the reflection that "The outside world is not too bright. but with brighter homes, you will be fit to be the Spring-Cleaners of World Affairs." In between the rather equal rights feminist arguments for peace and the appeals based on very traditional conceptions of women's roles, fell the familiar argument that it was women's special task as the civilizing force in the world to prevent war. In May of 1939, Haldane stated that "It is not enough in these days of conscienceless aggression to dislike war and be 'against war.' We have above all to love Peace. Our task as women is to save civilization: to save civilization we must fight to save Peace."75

Considering these comments from the rather bleak months of late 1938 and early 1939 in light of the evolution of WCAWF foreign policy recommendations at this time, one is inclined to step back for a moment and consider what was meant. at different times in the decade, by the varied gendered rhetoric of "women for peace" coming not only from this organization but from the other sources previously discussed. After all, the WCAWF had departed fairly substantially by the late 1930s from anything approaching a truly pacifist

73Woman To-day, 2.4, March 1939, pp.2-3.

74Ibid., p.11.

75Woman To-day, May 1939, p.3.
position given its support for economic boycotts of Japan and the supplying of arms to Republican Spain, which carried real risks of war. It becomes clear that both the feminist and female consciousness rhetoric employed by the WCAWF, while deliberately evoking different images of "women for peace." could be used to rally women not just to a pacifist ideal, but also to an aggressive stance against the fascist powers. The presence of this degree of ideological flexibility in turn leads one further to inquire whether voices representing this group or any of the other engaged women's organizations in the 1930s ever openly shifted the application of gendered justifications of women's foreign policy advocacy away from "women working for peace" to a policy which encouraged Britain to take a stand against the fascist dictatorships even at the risk of war.

In fact, what one finds is that, although such instances were relatively rare, they did occur in the latter years of the decade when some women were reconsidering both the justice and practicality of continuing to emphasize the need to work for peace. As the new leader of the re-named WCAWF in 1939, Margery Corbett Ashby stated, "...I feel sure we women have not grasped the political power we could have, if we could only unite and organize. As the later section of the community to get the vote, and as a section whose freedom to work is still severely limited, we more than men ought to realise the value of maintaining and extending personal liberty and of defending democracy...."76 If this line of argument sounds at all familiar, it is because it is very similar to the justification given by Millicent Fawcett in World War I for feminist support of the war effort: Britain was cast as the defender of the very democratic principles which were central to the feminist enterprise. Corbett Ashby had

76Woman To-day, March 1939, p.24
made a similar statement only a few months prior to her letter to *Woman To-day* when, in viewing the Munich settlement in the fall of 1938 as a shameful act of betrayal of Czechoslovakia, she attempted to mobilize women for an active defence of freedom and democracy through the forum provided to her by the IAW as its president. Speaking to both affiliated feminist groups and women generally, she stated in the *International Women's News*:

> We seem to have so little influence on the course of events. We have worked on and spoken for 20 years on international friendship, on support of the League of Nations, on the value of personal responsibility. Now are we quietly to submit as Europe returns to the barbarisms of the Middle Ages? Let us at least fight for freedom. Women must not allow themselves to be satisfied with home duties or even with the widest and deepest of social movements for the prevention and cure of suffering. We must join and work for the political parties who stand against dictatorship or tyranny in any form. Women have wasted 20 years of political opportunity: we have not used the machine which controls us. Let us awake and determine that women shall enter that machine to direct it for the defence of democracy. Let us awake before it is too late."

Whereas in earlier years Corbett Ashby had exhorted women to act on their emancipation and incorporation into political life in the interests of saving civilization by working for peace, she had by this point shifted the focus of such efforts to an active defence of democracy - fully cognisant of the risks this stance carried.

Besides this re-application of explicitly feminist rhetoric, the circumstances of the late 1930s also suggested to some women the potential re-direction of basic maternalist perspectives away from an exclusively pacifist or pro-peace agenda. In the aftermath of the Munich crisis, the WCG's Doris Tuckfield wrote in to the women's pages of *The Co-opera-

---

"Surely the most sacred duty of guildswomen is to protect life. They and I may be prepared to die at the Fascists' hands but are we prepared to deliver up our children to Fascist barbarism?" In this situation, a Guild member recognized the possibility that the WCG's logic in linking pacifism and maternalism was not incontrovertible in the face of a heedless militarism determined to destroy the very members of society, the children, that the Guild was trying to save from the horrors of war. Guild mothers' duties to protect children from war and to protect them from fascism made, by the later 1930s, a problematic combination, leading some Guild members to join other questioning women of the peace movement in encouraging women to press for a strong government stance against German and Italian aggression.

This final demonstration of the flexible nature of the gendered justifications offered for women's foreign policy activism effectively underscores the overall complexity of the participation of non-party women's groups in this realm in the 1930s. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the compelling narrative of the tensions and struggles over policy decisions relating to the specific developments of the 1930s, this chapter has opened up to closer inspection the methods and the ideological framework of that activism in all their variations. In examining the strategies and tactics of these groups, one is made aware of the

78 "Our Women's Pages," The Co-operative News, 22 October 1938, p.16.

79 In fact, Doris Tuckfield herself also became a member of the WCAWF which was much more willing than the determinedly pacifist Guild to lobby for strong sanctions against fascist aggressors and for tangible British support for democracies under siege. The similar class construction of the Guild and the WCAWF likely made the latter an attractive option for many less pacifist Guild members who desired an outlet for their anger at fascist aggression which the WCG did not satisfy.
obstacles and disadvantages they faced as women-only organizations trying to penetrate a male-dominated realm. To counter these difficulties, they harnessed the experience gained from participation in many previous public campaigns, including the suffrage battle, and carried out a wide range of activities designed to keep themselves informed, broadcast their views, and recruit new support.

In the process, the women's groups incorporated a notably gendered dimension into their efforts to evoke a response from women by demonstrating a connection between international affairs and the common experiences of the daily lives of many women as homemakers, wives, and mothers. Such efforts were clearly part of a larger program to provide an ideological framework which explicitly justified the participation of women and their organizations in foreign policy advocacy through the use of gender-specific images and arguments.

This is not to imply that this advocacy was seen by these groups only in gendered terms, for this was clearly not the case. A communal consciousness was at work in the aspect of this activity which was simply humanitarian and which involved co-operation with men engaged in like-minded efforts. It was also evident in the more specific evocations of class and economic interests shared by men and women alike. However, these non-gendered rationales worked alongside a set of justifications that, in the case of each of the four important examples discussed here - the WIL, the IAW, the WCG, and the WCAWF - worked to appeal to women at different levels of a gendered consciousness - both feminist and "female."

The significantly larger part of these gendered rationales was devoted to establishing
a link between women and peace - in spite of the occasional objections of some women's
groups that rejected the logic of such a link and feared that the feminist movement might be
derailed as a result. There were numerous antecedents to efforts to assert these connections
in the 1930s in both the immediate past of World War I and the 1920s, and the more distant
prewar period and the 19th century. The rhetoric of the women's groups linking women and
peace in the 1930s did not suggest any startlingly new possibilities in this respect. Both
feminist and non-feminist images and rationales were offered, sometimes in close
juxtaposition to one another. In describing specifically feminist peace rhetoric visible in the
early stages of World War I. Jill Liddington notes different strands of feminist anti-militarism
"jostling for space" while "considerations of theory and consistency were thrown to the
winds" because of the apparent urgency to rouse women to action by whatever means avail-
able; this characterization would in fact appear to be an effective one for gendered rhetoric in
this area in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{80} Women were asked to work for peace because war and militarism
oppressed women. because they possessed qualities and abilities as women, inherent or
learned. which gave them a special potential to change the confrontational international
system, and because they should act to protect "their children" - their own children or
children generally.

Maternalism had an especially strong presence in this gendered component of
women's peace activism. As Leila Rupp has pointed out in her discussion of the use of such
rhetoric by international women's groups in this period. maternalist appeals were both
sincerely felt by those expressing them and viewed strategically as an effective means to

\textsuperscript{80} Liddington. pp.87-88.
connect with a mass female public. In support of the latter point, Rupp quotes the American Emily Greene Balch, the head of WILPF in Geneva in those years, who stated in a letter to a colleague: "I see value in sentimental appeals to 'the mother heart.'" In relative terms, "maternalism for peace" was in fact perhaps most muted or subtle in the fairly small, elite pressure group of the British WIL. This may be in part because it had no expectation of becoming a mass organization and/or because many of its leaders happened to be personally inclined, emotionally and/or intellectually, to a relatively abstract conception of maternalism. Even in the WIL, however, maternalism was nonetheless in evidence. Beyond the WIL, maternalist arguments were evidently perceived as possessing great appeal for both middle class and working class British women - as seen in the often strongly-worded maternal feminism and basic maternalism of the IAW, the WCG, and the WCAWF.

However, having determined that the gendered component of promoting "women and peace" in the 1930s was neither exclusively feminist nor non-feminist, one must confront the additionally complicating fact that, while in some cases this rhetoric was consistently matched to a pro-peace policy (or at least vigorous attempts to maintain such a policy), in other cases its usage survived in organizations which were in fact shifting to a less "pacific" foreign policy agenda. This phenomenon could be the result of both a determined hopefulness or optimism that a more confrontational stance against the fascist dictators could still be seen as working for peace, and a perception that appeals for public support from women were likely to be most successful if the word "peace" was highly visible. Finally, this

---

"Leila Rupp. "Constructing Internationalism...." pp.1583-1584. The letter Rupp quotes was from Balch to Elisabeth Waern-Bugge, 12 December 1934 - from the WILPF papers - microfilm."
discussion also established that the gendered component of this foreign policy activism was not, in fact, exclusively associated with "peace." Especially in later years, a few voices offered a different set of gendered associations which evoked both a feminist and female consciousness in the cause of fighting fascism, as opposed to working for peace.

In determining the possible significance of this chapter's demonstration of the complexity of the strategies and ideologies at work in women's groups' foreign policy activism in the 1930s, one impression which stands out and is consistent with the findings of the previous chapter is the degree to which this activity was driven by deeply-held convictions about the current state of international affairs. Earlier in the decade, the organizations were energized by a sense of optimism concerning the possibilities for progress and even success in establishing a peaceful international system. Later in the decade, they were motivated more by fear and desperation as that system appeared to be breaking down. In either case, the perceived demands of the moment sparked creative responses, both in the day-to-day strategies and tactics of these groups and in the theoretical bases provided for their activism as women. In the interests of the foreign policy "cause," as it was perceived by the different groups and their individual members at different points in the decade, feminist and non-feminist gender ideologies were viewed as accessible concepts to be used in partnership with each other, when appropriate, but also, when necessary, to be adapted to fit new ends.
CHAPTER 3 - MIXED-MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

As noted in the previous chapter, prominent peace activist Helena Swanwick was well aware of the handicaps faced by members of women-only organizations who sought to influence foreign policy. The practical difficulties she identified as being associated with these segregated experiences, combined with the ideological divisions created by evolving circumstances which almost all groups (regardless of the nature of their memberships) faced, make the challenges to women's groups' engagement seem immense and their struggles both impressive and poignant. However, it is also clear that, within those exclusively female forums, members had considerable freedom as women to position themselves as foreign affairs experts, to make a case for women's involvement in this realm, and to respond to the policies of their own and other governments - all without having to compete with men for rhetorical space or power within the group. Keeping in mind both Swanwick's reservations, as well as the positive aspects of women's experiences in their own organizations, I would now like to explore the nature of women's relations with, and experiences in, the mixed-membership non-party organizations devoted specifically to international affairs in which women did compete with men for influence and recognition.

In fact, women constituted a significant percentage of the membership of most such organizations in the 1930s, large and small, and were often prominent on executive
committees and in group publications. Many of these groups can be gathered together under the banner of the peace movement in Britain in this period. Women were prominent in pacifist groups such as the No More War Movement, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Friends’ Peace Committee.\(^1\) Women were also important within the radical, isolationist, Union of Democratic Control, and were a major presence on the National Peace Council.\(^2\)

Among the internationalist organizations with women members were the New Commonwealth Society and the British section of the International Peace Campaign.\(^3\)

Moving further away from the peace movement, a number of women chose active involvement in those organizations which sprang up to press for a stronger British response to acts of fascist aggression - including groups focused on specific crises, such as the

---

\(^1\)The No More War Movement was formed in the early 1920s. Many of its members were socialists and many had been involved in the opposition to conscription during World War I. Its exact size is difficult to determine - Martin Ceadel notes that it went from 150 branches in the late 1920s to 83 branches c.1936. In 1937, most of the NMWM merged with the PPU. The Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Christian pacifist organisation, was established during World War I. Ceadel’s comments on membership state that it went from about 3,300 in the late 1920s to mid-1930s to close to 10,000 in 1939. The Friends’ Peace Committee was part of the Quaker pacifist movement and had been established in the late 1880s. (See Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith.*, (1980) Appendix I, pp.317-318)

\(^2\)The U.D.C. was formed at the beginning of World War I by those who believed that democratic control of foreign policy would keep Britain out of war. Helena Swanwick was for many years the editor of the U.D.C.’s journal, *Foreign Affairs*. In the 1930s, this organisation became more focused on anti-fascist research and propaganda - under the influence of Dorothy Woodman. The National Peace Council had been set up in 1904 to organise annual Peace Congresses and co-ordinate the peace movement generally in Britain. It had no membership of its own but consisted of representatives from groups across the spectrum of the peace movement in Britain - including both women-only organisations and mixed-membership groups. Among the women who sat on the Council during the ’30s were: Kathleen Innes, Barbara Duncan Harris, Lady Horsley, Elizabeth Cadbury, Lady Parmoor, Ruth Fry, Maude Royden, Honora Enfield, Hilda Vernon, and Dorothy Woodman. (See Ceadel, pp.318-319)

\(^3\)Both the New Commonwealth Society and the IPC were closely associated with the LNU. The former was organised in 1932 in support of the campaign for an International Police Force. Ceadel states that its membership stood at about 3,000 in 1939. (Ceadel, p.318) The IPC was organised in 1936 to build support for the League of Nations with the help of a range of voluntary organisations - including trade unions and religious, educational, and youth groups. Donald Birn notes that it was hoped that, within Britain, the IPC would have a broader appeal than the predominantly middle class LNU. (Donald Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945.*, (1981) p.173)
Abyssinian Association or the China Campaign Committee. A few women even became prominent within the discussions and activities of an elite pressure group known as Focus, which was formed in the latter half of the decade as a base of support for Winston Churchill's attacks on the government.⁴

Clearly women who were interested in becoming involved in foreign policy advocacy in mixed-membership settings, either in addition to or instead of participation within the concerned women's groups, had many options open to them. I intend to focus here on their experiences within the two most prominent of these organizations of the 1930s - the League of Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union.

The League of Nations Union was by far the largest of the foreign policy-oriented organizations of the inter-war period. Formed in 1918 as the result of a merger between two pro-League of Nations organizations created during the war, the dominant philosophy of the LNU was a liberalism which emphasized peaceful co-operation among nations with the assistance of free trade, international law, and an international body of representatives of member states to mediate the peaceful settlement of disputes.⁵ Among the organization's

⁴Focus was a rather loosely organised group of politicians and prominent public figures, with considerable involvement by key members of the League of Nations Union. Definite information concerning its membership is difficult to find but it was never engaged in building a mass membership among the general public. It meant to gain attention and influence not through its size but through the prominence of individual supporters. Lady Violet Bonham Carter was at the heart of Focus, while other women members included the Duchess of Atholl, Eleanor Rathbone, Clementine Churchill, and, rather surprisingly, Lady Chamberlain (wife of Sir Austen Chamberlain). (See Eugen Spier. Focus: A Footnote to the History of the Thirties, (1963), pp.53-54.)

leaders was an elite group of highly respected men, including Lord Grey, Lord Lytton, Gilbert Murray, and especially Robert, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, who was generally viewed throughout the 1920s and 1930s as the driving force and visionary of the Union. At the end of 1918, the LNU had a membership approaching 4,000: by the end of 1920, this figure had grown to 60,000. In 1925, the LNU collected over 250,000 annual subscriptions, and by 1931, this number had risen to its inter-war peak of over 400,000. In addition to individual subscriptions, the LNU also had "corporate members" consisting of various groups affiliated with the Union in some way. This membership grew from 575 in 1923 to over 3,000 in 1930.

It is difficult to determine with any precision the numbers of women involved in the LNU. Unfortunately, surviving records of membership figures provide no information on the gender ratios of the organization at the branch level. Contemporary impressions imply that women made up a significant, possibly majority, portion of Union membership and in fact, the likelihood that this assumption is close to the truth is quite high. In the absence of actual numbers, it is possible to piece together clues provided in Union records and accounts and in the papers of individual members to support this view.

---

6Birm, pp.11, 25.

7Ceadel, "The Peace Movement Between the Wars..." p.80. Exact figures of active membership for the LNU can be rather difficult to determine at any given point - as historians have discovered in trying to chart the organisation's growth. Annual subscription rates provide the most precise figures, but paying a subscription did not, by any means, guarantee active participation in local Union branches. As well, the LNU itself sometimes calculated its membership on the basis of the total number of members who had ever belonged, not including those who had died or specifically resigned. However, this number included those who had not kept up on their annual subscriptions - thus, in 1933, the Union announced that it had over 1 million members - at a time when its number of annual subscriptions had fallen below 400,000 and was continuing to decrease. (See Birm, p.130)

8Birm, p.130.
To begin with, it appears that both the LNU and its predecessors were open to women's participation from the start. In 1915, when small groups of people were meeting to discuss the possibilities of organizing a League of Nations Society, a Mrs. A.W. Claremont was a member of the select provisional committee set up to discuss the agenda of such an organization. She subsequently became the honorary secretary of the new League of Nations Society. The LNS, even while still a very small organization, attracted both men and women to its cause. When the League of Nations Union was formed in 1918, it too made a deliberate effort to reach out to women. At that time, and over the next few years, many of those who would become the Union's best-known and influential women members during the 1920s began their work for the LNU, including the writers Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, veteran feminist leaders Ray Strachey and Maude Royden, prominent Liberals Viscountess Gladstone, Lady Horsley, and Lady Layton, Cecil's niece Blanche Dugdale, and long-time peace activist Lady Parmoor.

By the 1930s, various aspects of LNU organization and activities indicate that women indeed represented a substantial portion of the organization's membership. The 1930
membership poll in the LNU's journal *Headway*, cited by Donald Birn as one of the few pieces of actual data concerning Union membership, provides, at best, only a very rough impression of the organization's make-up. However, in addition to a vague identification of "women" as a group tending to be sympathetic to the League, the poll pointed to "teachers" as another supportive group. If one takes into account the fact that the LNU was a largely middle-class organization, it is quite possible that "women," in this case, were understood to refer to comfortable, leisured, usually married, women who had the freedom and resources to volunteer their services to a popular, worthy cause. At the same time, because teaching was by this point a highly feminized profession, especially at the elementary school level, the labelling of "teachers" as pro-Leaguers brings in another large group of women - in this case professionals who were predominantly single.12

Although such contemporary impressions are left unsubstantiated by hard numbers, Union records do, nonetheless, provide more concrete evidence concerning women's roles in the various levels of the LNU's organization. At the local level, women's roles in shaping branch policy remain largely hidden, but they are highly visible in Union activities conducted within the sphere of traditionally female support roles. In the sections of *Headway* relating Union news, there are numerous indications of women's efforts driving branch initiatives and events. Many of the activities designed to raise funds, encourage local members, and boost memberships revolved around the kind of social occasions most certainly planned and run by women - such as pageants, garden parties, dinner parties, and fêtes.

Women's names also turn up frequently as organizers of the public meetings on which

---

the Union relied heavily to drum up support and they were clearly invaluable as canvassers at the local level, for both special LNU initiatives such as the 1934-35 Peace Ballot and the general ongoing recruitment of new members. For example, a Miss Stanley of Keswick conducted a vigorous two-week campaign early in 1931 which brought in sixty-two new members in her area - after which she wrote in to Headway with her tips on door-to-door canvassing. Branch news in the January 1933 Headway congratulated the Ashby and District Branch for its recent membership drive, in which eighty new members in the village of Measham were recruited "due to a fortnight's work of one lady collector." On two occasions, women from local branches reported considerable success in gaining new members by cultivating local women's organizations. A Mrs. Stocks. of Reading, took it upon herself to organize a Women's Peace Campaign and got members of supportive women's groups to subscribe to the LNU as individuals by paying one pence a month over the course of a year to meet the one shilling subscription rate - thereby bringing in over 300 new members to the Union. Another woman, M. Gladys Stevens, wrote in to Headway about her efforts as head of the Women's Section of her local branch, which resulted in the recruitment of over 320 women through local women's groups. She also brought up another issue of women's recruitment - which suggested the potential to broaden women's participation beyond that of the leisured classes - when she stated that some public meetings of the Union should be held in the afternoons, instead of the evenings, so that women without domestic help might find it easier to attend.13

In fact, it is quite possible that women made up the majority of Union canvassers.

---

This is implied by an article written for *Headway* in 1933 by Joyce Ansell (described here as the Honorary Secretary of the Hampstead Youth Group but who was shortly thereafter made a member of the Union's Executive Committee) on "The Case for Canvassing." Where one might expect her to have been encouraging women that canvassing was a safe and respectable activity, she in fact seemed to be directing her message more at young men by stressing the "adventure" that came from a "'What's around the corner feeling." She then went on to encourage canvassers to "hunt" in mixed couples - both to make it more fun and so that in each encounter on a doorstep "the prospective member may be disarmed at the start by the opposite sex!" All joking aside. Ansell clearly stressed the advantages of a gender-balanced canvassing effort and, although her attempt to make canvassing sound exciting may in fact have worked as an appeal to extroverted youth of both sexes, it seems most likely, given contemporary standards promoting the reserved demeanor of young women, to have been intended to strike a responsive chord with young men.\(^\text{14}\)

The fact that women are so visible in organizational roles or as eager recruiters suggests that the efforts of local women members most valued by the Union were those in which the women functioned in traditionally female spheres of social activity. A fête to raise funds for the LNU was hardly distinguishable in character from a fête to raise money for a new church organ - in either form it was familiar "womanly" terrain (even outside Agatha Christie's fictional village England.) If women were depended upon to help arrange and co-ordinate the constant flow of LNU public meetings (which frequently involved providing hospitality to the visitors), the speakers who appeared at these meetings were, by contrast,
typically men.

Moving up into the regional and national levels of the LNU, the search for women within both administrative and representative bodies is again, both frustrating and rewarding. At its national headquarters in Grosvenor Crescent in London, the Union employed over one hundred staff members.\textsuperscript{15} Exactly how many of these were women, is, unfortunately, difficult to determine, but their presence in some numbers is certain. In January of 1932, Margery Corbett Ashby noted in a letter to her mother that the "girls" at LNU headquarters were "thrilled at [her] going to Geneva" (for the Disarmament Conference).\textsuperscript{16} More specifically, women definitely worked in the Union's research, or "Intelligence," department - which was a vital part of the LNU's propaganda efforts throughout the inter-war period. Blanche Dugdale worked in this department before becoming a member of the Union's Executive Committee, and one of the most respected members of this department in the 1930s was Freda White (also of the WIL), who kept a close eye on events at the League Assembly in Geneva for the LNU and who wrote continually on League policies and on the various developments in international affairs in the 1930s.

The London headquarters also co-ordinated the Union's public speakers. However, it appears that the number of women officially employed in this capacity was rather small. A 1932 profile of a Mrs. M.E. Downer in \textit{Headway} describes her as "the only woman staff speaker of the Union" even though the journal notes both here and on other occasions that the

\textsuperscript{15}Birm. p.76.

\textsuperscript{16}Margery Corbett Ashby to Marie Corbett, 29 January 1932, MCA Papers - 7/MICA 477 - MICA/A33.
demand for "well-informed women speakers" was quite high. It appears that the Union tried to address this demand through the use of volunteer speakers, and there were in fact a number of women members who willingly gave their time for this purpose, as much as their other responsibilities allowed. Both Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain spoke on many occasions on behalf of the LNU - the former as much as she could up until her death in 1935, and the latter on a regular basis until her disaffection with Union policies in 1937. Kathleen Courtney, Maude Royden, and Margery Corbett Ashby also spoke on behalf of the Union, as did some women MPs who were associated with the LNU at different times in the 1930s, including Eleanor Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson, Megan Lloyd George, and Katharine, Duchess of Atholl.

Regarding women's contributions to special LNU campaigns coordinated at the national level, the Union's famous "Peace Ballot" effort of 1934-35 was directed by Dame Adelaide Livingstone, as Secretary of the National Declaration Committee. Designed to establish public support for disarmament and sanctions against aggressive states, this massive canvassing project (which eventually resulted in over 11 million completed responses), generated a number of new departments at the national headquarters to handle circulation, publicity, and statistical analysis of the ballots - efforts in which the Union's women staff members were likely deeply involved.18

Aside from the specific names of women mentioned thus far, clearly many of the women employed behind the scenes by the LNU to help run its day-to-day operations and

---


special campaigns remain largely hidden from view. They are, fortunately, more visible in the pages of the Union's monthly journal, *Headway*. Over the course of the 1930s, roughly half (and sometimes more) of the issues in any given year contained at least one article by a woman. These pieces were sometimes on issues likely viewed as specifically relevant to women, such as League efforts to stamp out the international "traffic in women and children," or efforts by women's organizations to get more women delegates at the League Assembly and more women employed in the League Secretariat. At the same time, the editorial position of *Headway* does not appear to have favoured the idea that there was a "women's point of view" on international affairs. In 1932, the column "Matters of the Moment" illustrated the Union's somewhat reluctant support for the efforts of the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. It stated that the prevention of discrimination was a worthy principle but that it was questionable as to whether there was "so definite a 'woman's opinion.' as distinct from men's opinion, on most political questions...."

This judgement meant that it was "...not quite clear why any special treatment should be sought for [women] as such."

This adherence to a theoretically gender-neutral position is, in turn, supported by the fact that most of the articles by women for *Headway* were on issues of general interest relating to League concerns and policies. By far the most important and frequent of these contributors was Freda White, who often took the opportunity in her reports on developments in Geneva to stress the importance of maintaining a strong and loyal League that defended states that were victims of aggression. Besides White, the most frequent contributors to

---

19 *Headway*, May 1932. p.82.
Headway were Winifred Paynter and Blanche Dugdale. But there is also a long list of women, many of whom were prominent in the LNU, who submitted articles at one time or another over the course of the decade.20

At the same time, while LNU women were certainly visible in the pages of the organization's main publication, this presence was nonetheless a relatively small one, and at some risk of being marginalized. While the journal was receptive to policy-based reflections and reports from Freda White, Winifred Paynter's frequent contributions in the early '30s were chatty travel pieces which enlightened readers on colourful local customs in places like Poland, Roumania, Palestine, or Spain, and which stood out (especially when they were the only articles by a woman in a given issue) as less substantial than the other, "serious," offerings by male contributors. Having said this, it is nonetheless apparent that women authors fared better in Headway when it was under direct LNU control as opposed to when, during a brief period of experimentation late in the decade, control shifted to a board made up of members of the group "Focus" in an attempt "to expand and improve Headway for newsstand sale and use it to campaign for collective security."21 In a supposed effort to make the journal more "interesting" to women readers, many of the articles by women in these issues were on domestic or social issues and had little or no foreign policy content.22 Even a piece

---

20 Among these women were Kathleen Courtney, Margery Corbett Ashby, Eleanor Rathbone, Viscountess Gladstone, Mary Omerod, Maude Royden, Elizabeth Monroe, Clare Hollingworth, Megan Lloyd George, Philippa Fawcett, and Edith Pye. Somewhat surprisingly, Headway also published an article in 1933 by fascist sympathiser Muriel Currey which praised and defended Mussolini and his policies. (Muriel Currey, OBE, "Italy To-Day: A New Political Experiment." Headway, February 1933, p.32)

21 This board consisted of Lord Cecil, Norman Angell, Wickham Steed, A.M. Wall, Lady Violet Bonham Carter, and Sir Robert Waley Cohen. (Birn, p.190.)

22 See, for example: Edith Summerskill, "Happy, Healthy Children," Headway, November 1938, pp.13-14; Amabel Williams-Ellis, "'Machine For Living." [re home design], Headway, December 1938, pp.12-13. Even
by the highly respected political commentator Lady Violet Bonham Carter - in which she focused mainly on a message to both men and women, encouraging them to "stand fast" against "aggressive tyranny" - was subtitled with the caption, "Lady Violet Bonham Carter puts the View of a Wife and Mother" and included a "Madonna and Child" photo of Bonham Carter and her young son Raymond.\textsuperscript{23} The journal also experimented briefly in these issues with a kind of women's column called "A Diary - For Women Only" which made somewhat confused attempts to spark women's interest in international affairs through simplistic analogies, gossip-like commentary, and even odd comments on contemporary women's fashions! The November 1938 column by "Irene" mentioned, among other things, the "psychological connection between flowers and peace" and "what international things gardens are," suggesting that statesmen should meet in gardens rather than "round the conference table in some imposing hall." Later in the same column, she encouraged women readers, obviously from privileged levels of society, to hire domestic help from among refugees from Austria and Germany. In the December 1938 column, written by Alison Graham, the author started out strongly with comments on the "male and aristocratic" "fortress of diplomacy" and the talent of women speakers on foreign policy such as the Duchess of Atholl, Edith Pye, and Isabel Brown, but then wandered into odd discussions of the origins of bobbed hair in the last war and the obvious benefits of a democracy in which

Freda White was made to fit into this mold for women's articles in a piece on an exhibit in London by a young Chinese artist, in which she only makes the most passing of references to international affairs by noting the threat to Chinese culture from Japan. (Freda White. "Plato Chan: Chinese Boy Artist Holds an Exhibition in London," Headway, December 1938, pp.33-34.)

King Carol of Roumania could drive safely through the streets of London with only a small police escort.\(^{24}\) Clearly, *Headway* under direct LNU control may have been a rather dry affair with only occasional contributions from women, but at least the women writers were not so explicitly constricted in subject matter and potential women readers not so obviously condescended to.

Women's opportunities and contributions in the Union's representative and policy-making bodies can best be understood in the context of the evolution of LNU policy over the course of the decade - as it was largely determined by the organization's leaders. During the first half of the 1930s, considerable emphasis was placed on advocating disarmament - a policy which was seen as compatible with "collective security" because it was believed that the latter could be effectively practised simply through the presentation of a united front of League states in condemnation of an aggressor. After 1935-36, with the Abyssinian crisis and the subsequent failure of hesitant non-military sanctions against Italy, the German re-militarization of the Rhineland, and the outbreak of civil war in Spain, the LNU leadership began to shift the organization toward supporting rearmament as a regrettable, but necessary, component of real collective security which carried the risk of armed conflict. While initial LNU responses to the various crises of the decade were generally cautious and often uncertain, the Union nonetheless moved quite noticeably from having cordial (or at least non-confrontational) relations with the government, to being in open opposition to the government policy of appeasement in the latter years of the decade.\(^{25}\)

\(^{24}\) *Headway*, November 1938, pp.31-32; *Headway*, December 1938, pp.34-35.

\(^{25}\) For a thorough description and analysis of LNU policy during the 1930s, see David Birn's *The League of Nations Union 1918-1945* (1981).
The evolution of Union policy had a notable impact on the cohesiveness of the organization. The LNU began the decade as a very broad union of views ranging from pacifism to internationalism to whole-hearted imperialism. Not surprisingly, tensions were apparent among the various factions from the beginning, but the combination of the Union's shift away from advocating disarmament and the growing amount of openly voiced opposition with the Union to the Conservative-dominated National Government meant that both pacifists and Conservatives increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction with Union policy and eventually began leaving the LNU in large numbers. At the same time, others within the Union who wanted the organization to push for a stronger stance against fascist aggression also made themselves heard.\(^{26}\)

Dissent regarding Union policy was frequently expressed within the context of the organization's representative body - the General Council. The Council consisted of delegates from local and regional branches in addition to some co-opted members and representatives of the Union's sub-committees (e.g. committees on Law, Trade and Industry, and Women's Organizations). In the early '30s, the General Council was re-organized and rationalised, transformed from the truly massive, unwieldy body it had become by the late 1920s, to a smaller and more "workable" entity.\(^{27}\) During the 1930s, the Council met twice a year - with additional "emergency" meetings occurring as events demanded.

If women members of the Union found the sphere of their local branches or regional

\(^{26}\)Ibid. - see especially Chapters 10 and 11.

\(^{27}\)See Birn, pp.75, 78. He notes that at General Council meetings in the late 1920s, which most eligible delegates did not attend, there could be close to a thousand delegates present. A campaign in 1931 to create a more efficient Council with greater influence over the Executive led to a decrease in the number of delegates - with local branches being allowed one representative for every 300 members.
associations less than adequately stimulating they. like their male colleagues, might have had the chance to voice their opinions on the crucial League issues at a national level if they were selected as delegates to the General Council. With the exception of a very few occasions, women delegates to the Council made contributions on issues of substance in every meeting held from 1931 until the outbreak of war in 1939. In so doing, they were revealed to be not a unified constituency advocating a particular perspective that might be identified as "the women's view," but a true cross-section of LNU opinion from all parts of the country in which, at different times, individual women articulated the views of the various major factions within the Union and sometimes even directly challenged the views of the largely male elite leadership.

Even the detached and dry quality of the Council's minutes cannot hide the liveliness and determination in some of the resulting exchanges. In June of 1933, two women delegates from Scotland found themselves on opposite sides of the issue regarding the Government's retention of the use of aerial bombing for "police purposes" in the Empire and in Britain's mandates. Cecil had moved a resolution asking the Government to take this reservation out of the Draft Convention for the current Disarmament Conference. Miss M.G. Cowan, representing the East of Scotland, argued against the resolution, stating that the use of bombing in those situations was "an unusually effective deterrent but also the most expeditious, economical and humane method of maintaining law and order therein." Miss Mitchell, from Glasgow, was part of a vociferous Council rejection of Cowan's argument. The uproar during this debate must have been impressive, for it took a very tactful Austin Chamberlain (former Foreign Secretary and brother of Neville Chamberlain) to calm things
down. He managed to get Miss Cowan to withdraw her amendment, while noting that she had "[spoken] with great courage to an audience which was at all times hostile, and sometimes scarcely patient."  

Later in the same session, when the topic switched to a discussion of Union policy regarding Japanese aggression in China, it was then the turn of Lady Horsley and Mrs. Warr, both from the Kensington branch, to challenge the Union's Executive for not pushing the government to stand up for China. Eldred Horsley was especially outraged at Baldwin's recent comment that he hoped the dispute in the Far East was practically over, and she speculated on how the government would feel if a foreign country had invaded Scotland and the government, in turning to other countries for help, had been told that they were neutral and that, after all, the invasion was completed. She felt that the Union was wrong to pass over a remark like Baldwin's in silence. Gilbert Murray's reply to Horsley emphasized the importance of not being seen to be "scolding" the Government, and of staying free of "party politics." This did not, however, end discussion of the Kensington resolution; Miss Mitchell of Glasgow again joined the debate, as did Miss E. Briscoe of Cambridge.  

Lady Horsley was, in fact, an insistent defender of the League of Nations and the Covenant - a position which not infrequently placed her outside of the careful line which the Executive took for much of the decade. In late 1936 she challenged the General Council to

---

28LNU General Council minutes. 20-22 June 1933, pp.20-22.

29Ibid., p.30.

30Eldred Horsley, born Eldred Bramwell, was the widow of a prominent surgeon, Sir Victor Horsley, who had died on active service in Mesopotamia in 1916. Both she and her husband had been supporters of women's suffrage and Eldred Horsley, besides her work for the LNU in the interwar period, was also an active member of the Liberal party and was especially prominent in the Women's National Liberal Federation.
support the Covenant - this time by calling for the condemnation of "special Regional Pacts" between states in specific geographical areas, which might serve to weaken states' obligations to protect League members outside of the area of a regional pact. Her resolution along these lines was, on this occasion, seconded by a Mrs. B. Williams of the Balerno branch, but was again opposed by Murray. The minutes then note that Lady Horsley "reluctantly seconded" a weaker resolution proposed by Cecil, which suggested that such pacts alone could never achieve collective security and were only of value "as supplementary to the obligations of the Covenant."31

The particularly vocal pacifist minority in the LNU also had women defenders in the General Council, but those who spoke out for pacifism also often found themselves challenged by women members advocating a stronger stance against aggression. In June of 1937, Nancy Parnell, of London, noted that it would be a tragedy if pacifists were driven from the Union. Her resolution for "an Invitation to Those who Have Renounced the Use of Violence" was seconded by the pacifist Lady Parmoor, of the LNU Executive, but was then opposed by Miss J. Fischer-Williams of Cambridge University, who asked if the Union really wanted people in their ranks "who were not working for precisely the same ends...." Fischer-Williams' target was clearly the Union's pacifists, given her accompanying comment that there were "still some things worth fighting for."32

Not surprisingly, some of the most consistently vocal women in General Council meetings were members of the Union's Executive Committee, the highest level of the

31LNU General Council minutes. 15-17 December 1936, pp.16-17.
32LNU General Council minutes. 15-18 June 1937, pp.25-27.
organizational hierarchy. While the LNU's leaders could not afford to ignore the General Council, the sheer size of that body and the broad range of sometimes sharply diverging opinion exhibited there made it difficult for the Council to agree on, and thus control, Union policy. Most of the power in the LNU thus rested with the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee's meetings took place at least twice a month and often more frequently, at times when international crises required quick policy decisions from the Union. Birn states that, by the late 1920s, this committee had about fifty members. However, at least in practice, the number of committee members who regularly attended meetings appears to have typically been smaller than this during most of the 1930s. As Birn notes and committee records illustrate, the LNU's leadership remained a remarkably stable group throughout this period. Cecil remained the undisputed guiding force of the Union, while only slightly less important were such figures as Gilbert Murray and Lord Lytton. While there were diverging viewpoints within the Executive Committee in the 1930s, these men kept a fairly firm rein on the direction of Union policy.

During those years, close to two dozen women served on this committee - some of them for the entire decade. Among the longest-serving were Kathleen Courtney, Lady Gladstone, Lady Parmoor, Lady Layton, Blanche Dugdale, Lady Hall, and Lady Violet Bonham Carter. Other vocal members of the committee for at least part of the decade included Eleanor Rathbone, Judith Corcoran, Margery Corbett Ashby, and Katharine, Duchess of

---

13Birn, p.75.
14Birn, pp.128-129. Birn states here that those who disagreed with Cecil found it easier to quit the Union than to fight him. At the same time, those who got along well with him lasted for a long time in the upper levels of the LNU's hierarchy. Among this group of favourites within the Executive Committee, Birn includes Murray, Lytton, Lord Queensborough, Philip Noel Baker, and Kathleen Courtney.
It was apparently easier for women members of the Executive Committee to make themselves heard at the large General Council meetings than at meetings of the committee itself. Although the Executive Committee met much more frequently than the Council, the cumulative total of women's contributions during the 1930s was much higher in the latter forum. The implications for women's influence in the LNU, even at its highest levels, were unfortunate, if not surprising - women had more opportunities in the considerably less powerful of the Union's two representative bodies.

At the same time, it is clear that a select group of women were considered relatively influential on the Executive Committee. Dorothy Layton (a feminist and active Liberal and wife of Sir Walter Layton, owner of the News Chronicle), and Blanche Dugdale both served on the Executive throughout the decade and were vocal on a range of issues. Lady Layton frequently took responsibility for introducing Executive motions to the General Council. Dugdale, a highly prominent supporter of a Jewish state in this period, became an especially insistent lobbyist in both Executive Committee and Council meetings on behalf of the rapidly growing numbers of displaced people fleeing from fascist regimes in Europe. In these efforts she was supported by a number of women on the Executive - but especially by the Independent MP Eleanor Rathbone - who joined that body in 1936. Rathbone, in spite of the heavy demands on her time as an MP and a participant in a wide range of relief campaigns,

35 Other women on the Executive Committee for some portion of the '30s included: Ruth Fry, Hilda Runciman, Mrs. Wilson-Fox, Lady Henschel, Joyce Ansell, Megan Lloyd George, Philippa Fawcett, Marjorie Graves, and Dame Adelaide Livingston. Vera Brittain was asked to put her name forward for the Executive Committee on a few occasion, but refused because she was trying to preserve time to write. (See letter from Vera Brittain to Maxwell Garnett, LNU Secretary. 3 March 1936. Vera Brittain Archive, correspondence - MacMaster University)
appears to have attended a large proportion of Executive Committee meetings in the later 1930s and consistently tried to push the LNU towards a stance which was less tolerant of pacifists (both within the Union and out) and more critical of the Government's reluctance to take a strong stand on issues such as sanctions against Italy and non-intervention in Spain.

Among the longest-serving members of the Executive Committee in the inter-war period were two of the LNU's most important women leaders - Dorothy Gladstone and Kathleen Courtney. A comparison of the nature of their roles and contributions offers some striking insights about women's experiences within the LNU as a whole.

Dorothy Gladstone was the daughter of Sir Richard Paget and Caroline Surtees, of Hertfordshire, and the wife of Herbert John, Viscount Gladstone, who died in 1930. Although raised a Conservative, she moved into prominent Liberal circles upon her marriage in 1901 and became a highly active and visible member of the Liberal party. Both she and her husband worked vigorously on behalf of Belgian refugees during World War I, and she in particular was actively involved in wartime nursing services - an interest she maintained after the war and again pursued during World War II. A member of the LNU Executive Committee from the Union's early years, Dorothy Gladstone frequently appears in LNU sources as one of a select group from the Executive Committee chosen to represent the Union in some official capacity - whether at international forums or in deputations to the Government.\(^{36}\) What is especially significant about Lady Gladstone's Union activity, however, is that much of it was conducted within an explicitly gendered context - in the sense that her

\(^{36}\)In the 1920s, Lady Gladstone, along with [Sir] Willoughby Dickinson and [Lord] David Davies, represented Britain at meetings of the Representative Council of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies. (See the International Federation's *Bulletin*, November-December 1924, No.5, p.5.)
particular tasks and influence were largely determined by the very fact that she was a woman.

This is first of all evident in Gladstone's chairing, for many years, of the "Hospitality" or "Welcome" Committee of the LNU. which was responsible for finding prominent women willing to act as hostesses - providing entertainment and/or accommodations - for international visitors associated with the League movement. In 1930, this committee co-ordinated 167 hostesses willing to give "afternoon and evening receptions, luncheons, and dinners." and 260 willing to give "residential hospitality."\[37\]

More importantly, Lady Gladstone also chaired the LNU’s Women's Advisory Council - which consisted of representatives from approximately sixty nationally-based women's organizations affiliated in some form with the Union.\[38\] The purpose of the WAC was first, "...to voice the views of organized women on all questions relating to the League of Nations and Peace. and to advise the Executive Committee of the Union concerning the opinion of its various constituent bodies." and second. "...to assist and stimulate these organizations in their work for peace."\[39\]

---

\[37\]See. for example. the International Federation of League of Nations’ Bulletin, November-December 1924, No.5. p.5 and April-July 1930. No.3. p.72.

\[38\]For example. WAC minutes from late December 1937 list 54 women’s societies associated with the LNU during 1937. plus 3 new affiliations for 1938. A selection of those organizations referred to includes: St.Joan’s Social and Political Alliance, the Girls’ Friendly Society, the National Sisterhood Movement, the Women’s International League, the National Women’s Citizens’ Association, the Union of Jewish Women, the Women’s Freedom League, the Central Employment Bureau for Women, the National Union of Teachers, the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, the Women’s National Liberal Federation, the National Council for Equal Citizenship, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, the Fabian Women’s Group, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the Women’s Engineering Society, the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women’s Organizations, the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Organizations - Women’s Advisory Council, the British Federation of University Women, the Baptist Women’s League, the National Association of Women Civil Servants, and the National Council of Women. (LNU Women’s Advisory Council minutes, 29 December 1937.)

\[39\]LNU - WAC minutes. Annual meeting. 26 January 1938. p.5. The WAC was in existence throughout the 1930s and while the LNU continued in the 1940s. It appears to have been a continuation of the earlier
It appears that, from Gladstone's point of view, at least, this could be a tricky balancing act. On the one hand, she had to work to get the Union's leaders to recognize the views and efforts of the WAC as important and legitimate. This was not always easy. In February 1934, after the Executive Committee had already approved a WAC resolution on the dangers of closed-door negotiations on disarmament, it was revealed that Cecil and Murray had decided privately that it should not be relayed to the Government because it contained no reference to a recent relevant government memorandum. Gladstone argued that withholding the resolution had been a mistake, and was apparently successful in winning the support of the rest of the Committee: the resolution was sent, albeit with a covering letter of "explanation" which apparently addressed Cecil's and Murray's concerns.

On the other hand, Gladstone also had to deal with an often widely-diverging set of opinions at WAC meetings, and she saw herself as responsible for getting all the representatives "on side" with LNU policy. Gladstone was aware of the advantages for the Union in being able to say that it represented, and had the support of, the hundreds of thousands of women who were members of these affiliated organizations. With this in mind, she wrote to the Duchess of Atholl to ask if she could co-opt her as a member of the WAC "Women's Organisations" sub-committee. There is, however, a puzzling and tantalising reference in the Executive Committee minutes to the "first meeting of the Women's Sub-Committee" on December 18, 1936. Again, it was Dorothy Gladstone who reported on this meeting to the Executive Committee but no details are given in the minutes. It is possible that this was a distinct sub-committee comprised of the women members of the Executive Committee - but no separate minutes for any meetings are located in the LNU collection at the BLPES and this is the only reference I have yet found suggesting the existence of such a body. (LNU - Executive Committee minutes, 14 January 1937, p.7)

"The records are regrettably vague on the specifics of their concerns. The significant point here is that a WAC resolution already approved by the Union's Executive Committee was quietly side-lined by the Union's two most powerful leaders - without any consultation with the rest of the Committee, let alone the WAC or Gladstone.

See LNU Executive Committee minutes - 1 Feb 1934, p.3; 8 February 1934, p.1.
because she felt that having another woman from the LNU's Executive at WAC meetings, besides herself and Lady Hall, would help sell LNU policies to the women's groups on the WAC.42

This particular combination - of articulating women's concerns and of mobilizing "women's influence" in a particular policy direction regarding international affairs - was also apparent in Gladstone's other contributions to Executive Committee debates and in her relations with the WAC. In her role as chair of the WAC, she received a telegram in March of 1936 from Princess Tsehai of the Ethiopian Women's Work Association which appealed to the "women of the world" to use their influence to protest the Italian attacks on the Red Cross and use of poison gas in that conflict. Gladstone brought this matter to the Executive Committee and obtained a resolution condemning these actions by Italy. At the same time, she used her prominent position within the LNU to try to convince other well-known public women to assist in a "united action by Women of England" to protest the Italian attacks.43

Finally, a couple of years later, Lady Gladstone emerged as the most insistent voice on the Executive calling for a nation-wide boycott of Japanese goods in light of renewed Japanese aggression in China during 1937. The goal of this campaign was partly to attain the support of both larger firms and smaller shopkeepers, but also to win the wide-spread grassroots support of consumers - especially the women who did most families' daily shopping. One aspect of this campaign was quite explicitly directed at women consumers' purchases of

42Dorothy Gladstone to Katharine, Duchess of Atholl, 11 December 1937 (Katharine Atholl Papers - Blair Castle - NRA 92/3.)

43LNU Executive Committee minutes, 26 March 1936, pp.9-10; Dorothy Gladstone to Nancy Astor, 26 March 1936 (Nancy Astor Papers - University of Reading - MS 1416/1/1/1235)
silk. Lady Gladstone brought the attention of the LNU Executive to the "Buy No Silk" campaign being organized by the China Campaign Committee (of which she was also a member) and encouraged the representatives at WAC meetings to support this campaign and recruit their societies to it. Like the leaders of some of the women's groups discussed earlier, Lady Gladstone demonstrated a clear sense of how women might be mobilized around issues relating to foreign affairs (which might otherwise be viewed as distant from, or unrelated to, their daily lives) by tapping into traditional "womanly" activities or roles and using the appeals and arguments of other women to do so. This understanding was then brought directly into the LNU and was likely the source of a large part of her influence within the organization's hierarchy.

Kathleen Courtney's roles and contributions can be contrasted to Gladstone's. Courtney, while Chair of the WIL from 1923 to 1933, had been an increasingly active member of the LNU throughout the 1920s and was invited on to the Union's Executive Committee in 1928. It appears that she very quickly established a strong working relationship with Cecil, who asked her to serve as "Deputy Chairman" of the LNU in January of 1930. Although she refused his request at this time, she later reluctantly accepted the position of Vice-Chairman (alongside Lord Lytton) in July of 1938.  

\[44\] LNU - Executive Committee minutes - 13 Jan 1938, p.3; 2 February 1939, p.2; LNU - WAC minutes - 26 April 1939, p.4.  

\[45\] Cecil to Kathleen Courtney, 24 January 1930, ff.1-3; Cecil to KC, 11 July 1938, f.83; KC to Cecil, 13 July 1938, f.85; KC to Cecil, 20 July 1938, f.89 - Cecil of Chelwood Papers, British Library Manuscript Collections, MS 51141. Her reasons for refusing the first offer in 1930 are not known, although they were possibly related to her already being Chair of the WIL. In 1938, Courtney stated that she felt very honoured by the offer but thought she should refuse because she was "too old" and thought they should bring in someone younger to work with Lytton - as a balance, and because she wanted to keep up her speaking for the Union and was concerned she would not be able to attend enough meetings. However, Cecil was able to convince her to try the position "for the time being." It is also worth pointing out, in relation to the subject of Courtney's
However, despite Courtney's well-known, deep involvement with various facets of the women's peace campaign in Britain for a large portion of the inter-war period, her functioning as one of the most important members of the Executive Committee of the country's largest international affairs organization reveals relatively little of an explicitly gendered dimension. Like Lady Gladstone, Courtney was well aware of the benefits of motivating and harnessing the energy of women's groups to the League's cause - she had, obviously, played a key role in this process in the 1920s and early 1930s. At the same time, she was not blindly enthusiastic about various Union ideas for mass campaigns to draw on women's support. On the one hand, Courtney did ask Cecil in 1934 to support a nomination of the Geneva-based "Women's Disarmament Committee" (a sub-committee of the Women's International Organizations, an umbrella organization representing international women's groups) for the Nobel Peace Prize. She did this partly because of the "useful work" that group had done in "representing the point of view of women on disarmament," in circulating information to other organizations, and in helping other pro-disarmament efforts, but also because the prestige value would help this committee's attempts "to initiate a great combined women's effort" of which she and Cecil had apparently "often spoken."\(^4\) On the other hand, in 1937, Courtney was much more cautious than Cecil in her response to a proposal from Lady Horsley to organize a large-scale campaign to get women's signatures on a pro-disarmament statement, in an effort similar to that of the Peace Ballot. In her view, the

prominence in the Union, that, in between these two offers, she was also elected President of the important London Regional Federation of the LNU in 1933 - succeeding in this role one of the LNU's founders, Lord Dickinson. (Headway. June 1933. p.122.)

\(^4\)Courtney to Cecil, 5 January 1934 (Cecil Papers, ff.29-30.)
potential benefit of another demonstration of women's support for this cause was outweighed by the troubling possibility of an aftermath of disillusionment in the face of government intransigence which might drive many women into the "ultra pacifist camp." For Courtney, the simple fact of an instance of women's participation in the international affairs debate was not sufficiently valuable in itself to cancel out other considerations in achieving a desired policy result.

Courtney did not sit on the LNU's WAC and, in her contributions to Union debates, she did not bring "women's views" or speak "as a woman" to committee meetings or General Council meetings at which she represented the Executive. Courtney typically focused instead on the theoretically non-gendered specifics of the topic at hand, whether it was disarmament, the failings of non-intervention in Spain, collective security, or the need for an international "air police force." This was also largely the case even when she engaged in speaking tours on behalf of the LNU, both at home and abroad. In these situations, Courtney relied heavily on a traditional, gender-neutral, rhetoric of international relations - whether she was talking about larger issues of international co-operation or specific issues such as the need for effective sanctions against aggressor states. Even when speaking to all-female audiences, she made only passing appeals to what might be considered special "women's interests" in supporting the League.

---

47Courtney to Cecil, 16 April 1937 (Cecil Papers, f.69.)

48For example, in a speech to women given in 1938 on her tour through New Zealand and Australia, Courtney included an analogy between international peace and peace in a family - noting that most women would not be satisfied with family relations characterised at best by an absence of "scraping." Her final point in this speech, however, is to demand that women educate themselves in foreign policy issues and act as responsible "fellow citizens with men." ("Precis of Miss Courtney's Speech," New Zealand and Australia tour, 3 May 1938 - Kathleen Courtney Papers - Fawcett Library - 7/KDC 455 D5 65-70)
In the experiences of Courtney and Gladstone, at the highest levels of the LNU, we thus have women playing two different kinds of roles that, in many respects, can be seen as representative of much of women's experiences within the Union generally for most of the 1930s. Kathleen Courtney seems to have felt relatively free to function in this context not simply as a "woman" representing "women's interests," but as a concerned and knowledgeable activist equal to her male colleagues. Although her influence on the Executive Committee likely came, in part, from her prominence in the women's peace movement, Courtney clearly never felt required, at least within the Executive Committee, the General Council, or the pages of *Headway*, to speak from an explicitly "gendered" perspective. In Dorothy Gladstone, on the other hand, we have a woman who found her place and influence largely through working within a distinctly gendered context. As with many LNU women at other levels of the organization, Gladstone worked to increase and solidify women's support, both collective and individual, for LNU efforts and ideals. At the same time, Gladstone tried to translate the potential of mass women's support into women's influence in the Union. The Union, in turn, was clearly appreciative of her efforts and those of other women who worked to bring new women into the association.

However, it is also apparent that, for most of the decade, the LNU felt no pressing need to make women's recruitment a priority. As the first part of this discussion demonstrated, contemporary perceptions of women's sympathy to League ideals, combined with scattered clues in LNU records indicating women's efforts in helping the Union to function and grow throughout the country, together support the view that women represented
a significant percentage of membership at the grass-roots level of the organization throughout the decade. This picture of the Union is, in turn, bolstered by the increasing visibility of women in the higher levels of the organization - especially in the representative and policy-making bodies. It seems reasonable to assume that, in an organization whose leadership was heavily male-dominated, the fact that women managed to achieve such a visible presence in the Union's higher levels suggests that women were present in the LNU in much greater numbers at the regional and local levels.

The result of this significant degree of women's participation was the lack of a special "gendered" campaign directed at women, even though the Union was suffering from a steady decline in membership generally over the course of the decade. The awakening of a particular concern about women late in the 1930s, by which time the decreases in memberships generally (both individual and corporate) were quite substantial, is evident only in a single reference in LNU records.\(^4\) The brief period of experimentation with the journal *Headway* in late 1938 and early 1939 noted earlier included some efforts to attract women to the cause through references to familiar "womanly" subjects such as motherhood, homemaking, and fashion, but such efforts were relatively short-lived.

The significance of the evidence for a large female membership in the LNU and of the organization's general lack of concern until late in the day for female recruitment is found in

\(^4\)Birm states that individual memberships fell from 406,868 in 1931 to 264,180 in 1938, while corporate memberships fell from 3,058 in 1930 to 1,936 in 1938. (Birm, p. 130.) In February of 1937, the LNU's Executive was alarmed at the failure of twelve Women's Institutes to renew their corporate affiliations with the Union and arranged a meeting of Cecil, Murray, Lytton, and Lady Gladstone with Lady Denman, the President of the Federation of Women's Institutes, as well as other prominent women from the WIs, to discuss the issue of the co-operation of the Institutes with the work of the LNU. (LNU Executive Committee minutes, 4 February 1937, p.2.)
the implications of these two circumstances for women's roles in the Union. On the one hand, the LNU, while not perceiving a particular need for large numbers of new women recruits, was clearly in a position to benefit from those of its women members who were especially keen to appeal to and motivate other women, or who were willing to carry out traditionally feminized social roles in supporting the Union. For the relatively small price of women's representation at the Union's highest levels, the LNU possessed the additional benefit of having access to the large organized women's peace campaign outside the LNU. At the same time, those women members who were particularly energized and engaged had the opportunity to emerge as respected, leading voices of the Union. Such women might, like Dorothy Gladstone, locate their work specifically within a gendered context. However, because there was no perceived need for an intensive campaign to draw in more of their own sex - a campaign which might have demanded that vocal Union women develop and focus on a gendered appeal in which they spoke "as women" - they could also take the opportunity to function in the Union in ways that were largely not gender-determined. Thus we see the emergence of women like Kathleen Courtney, Freda White, and many of the vocal women of the General Council, who were able to make a place for themselves in the LNU as experts in international affairs in their own right. This was not easy, by any means, given that the LNU was a heavily male-dominated organization (in position and influence if not in numbers), but it was nonetheless distinctly possible.

In turning now to look at women's experiences in the Peace Pledge Union, one encounters an organization that had many aspects in common with the LNU. However, what
separates the two organizations as far as women's experiences were concerned is the realization that there was much greater pressure in the PPU on women members to function first and foremost as "women."

An important part of understanding women's place in the PPU lies in the organization's origins - which quickly garnered a certain legendary or mythic quality, mainly because of the highly charismatic figure at its centre. Canon Dick Sheppard. According to Martin Ceadel, Sheppard. a former army chaplain during World War I. had announced his conversion to pacifism in 1927.\(^\text{50}\) In the early 1930s. Sheppard collaborated with Herbert Gray and Maude Royden in an effort to form a "Peace Army" made up of volunteers who were willing to travel to the Far East and position themselves, unarmed, between Japanese and Chinese forces engaged in combat. Most likely because the feminist Royden was the main force behind this scheme, the invitation was issued to women as well as men.\(^\text{51}\)

Although the Peace Army attracted some 800 volunteers, they were not able to find transport to the Far East in 1932, and the movement largely fizzled out. At the same time, Sheppard was suffering greatly from asthma, the illness which would eventually cause his premature death in 1937.\(^\text{52}\) In 1934, during a period of some improvement in his health, Sheppard again had some energy to give to the pacifist cause, and it was in the fall of that year that he sent his now famous letter to the press - asking for signed pledges which asserted

\(^{50}\text{Ceadel. Pacifism in Britain... p.67.}

\(^{51}\text{See copy of letter from Herbert Gray, Maude Royden, and H.R.L. Sheppard to Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 25 February, 1932. published in a leaflet entitled "Not a Fantastic Proposal," which also contained a copy of Drummond's reply to Royden, 1 March 1932, praising the initiative but noting his inability to bring it to the League Council in the absence of a "formal demand" for such an army from one of the member states. (A. Maude Royden Papers - Fawcett Library. 7/AMR 379)}

\(^{52}\text{Ceadel. Pacifism in Britain... pp.95-96.}\)
"We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another." However, in this instance, Sheppard was very explicit in directing his appeal to men only. The reason he gave was his belief that women had already demonstrated their commitment to protesting war through their large presence in the peace movement. He felt that it was men's turn to do their share, arguing that it was "...high time now that men should throw their weight into the scales against war."

Sheppard's letter resulted in an avalanche of postcards arriving at the home of fellow pacifists Frank and Grace Crozier (whose address Sheppard had given in his letter because he was going abroad). However, as Ceadel points out, Sheppard had no pressing desire to start a new organization at this time. Thus, nothing was done to mobilise the pledge signers until the Abyssinian crisis encouraged Sheppard to hold a rally at the Albert Hall in July of 1935, at which over 7,000 men attended. The lone woman present was Maude Royden, who appeared on the platform as one of the speakers. The momentum created by this meeting led to the formation of the "Sheppard Peace Movement." but even then there was some doubt as to what to do with the tens of thousands of men who supported him. It was not until the first few months of 1936 that Sheppard, apparently spurred on by developments in the Abyssinian crisis and by the re-militarization of the Rhineland, began to organize the Peace Pledge Union and look for sponsors.

The first Sponsor's meeting of the new organization took place on May 22, 1936.

---

53See, for example, the Daily Herald, 16 October 1934, p.3. The letter was sent to a number of major papers, including the Manchester Guardian and the News Chronicle.

54Ibid.

55Ceadel. Pacifism in Britain..., pp.178, 180, 222.
Those present included: Sheppard (in the Chair), Lord Ponsonby. General Crozier, (Canon) Charles Raven. James Hudson. (Rev.) Donald Soper. and the novelist Margaret Storm Jameson. Jameson's presence is perhaps somewhat startling given the group's supposed focus on recruiting men. but the minutes of this meeting reveal that. at some stage in the previous weeks, the movement's leaders had agreed that women would be invited to join the Union. At this inaugural meeting, the Sponsors approved the text of a letter to the press directed at women, with the proviso that "reference [would be] made to other pacifist organisations" (besides the PPU) that women could also join.56

Oddly enough, none of the organizational or scholarly accounts dealing with the history of the PPU offers a clear explanation of how or why this decision to expand membership to include women was reached. Ceadel notes that. from the beginning, the PPU was focused on the goal of expanding as quickly as possible and made few, if any, demands on those who. whether absolute pacifists or merely vaguely fearful of war, became "members" simply by signing the pledge.57 In this respect. the PPU was similar to the LNU in that both organizations emphasized raw numbers of recruits over actual. demonstrated commitment by an active membership to a united policy. One can thus speculate that, as the movement to organize the PPU gathered steam in a time of growing crises in international affairs. it was difficult to resist the potential boost in membership numbers that an inclusion of women might be expected to produce.

These expectations regarding women's response were. in fact. so high that there was

---

56 PPU - Sponsors' Meetings - minutes. 22 May 1936, p.4. (PPU Papers - Dick Sheppard House, London)

57 Coadel, Pacifism in Britain.... p.226.
initially a cap placed on women's membership - once the number of women's signatures had reached that of men's. a woman's pledge would only then be accepted if she also brought in a corresponding pledge from a man. 58 This qualification was, in turn, reflected in the first version of the women's pledge. While men initially continued to use the same pledge Sheppard had written in 1934, the women's pledge stressed the importance of their persuasive powers in convincing others (i.e. men) to support the cause: "I renounce war and never again will I support or sanction another, and I will do all in my power to persuade others to do the same." 59

To everyone's surprise, however, while 13,000 women joined the PPU in the last four months of 1936, their numbers never equalled those of the men. 60 Instead, they levelled off at approximately one-third of the organization's total membership - which, by 1939, stood at about 130,000. One possible explanation for this may be that, because membership was based on an explicitly personal pledge that many took to apply primarily to those faced most directly with the responsibility for carrying out a war (namely men), women may have felt it inappropriate to join. However, whatever the true reason for the "failure" of women to swamp the Union with their pledges, this unanticipated circumstance placed the debate over women's place in the Union and how best to appeal to them at the centre of Union concerns.

As Martin Ceadel has noted, the organizational structure of the PPU was fairly loose


59 Sybil Morrison, I Renounce War: The Story of the Peace Pledge Union, (1962), p.17. By September, 1936, it was decided that an identical, slightly simplified version would be used for both men and women. The PPU's pledge since that time has been "I renounce war and I will never support or sanction another." (See PPU - Sponsors' Meetings - minutes - 3 September 1936, p.16.)

and informal. The most important body for most of the pre-war period was the Sponsors, who met on a monthly basis to discuss "philosophical and strategic guidelines" for the Union. These men and women, of whom there were approximately 36 over the course of this period, included a number of the decade's most respected intellectuals and represented a broad range of pacifist beliefs. By virtue of his personal magnetism and boundless enthusiasm, Sheppard managed the difficult task of binding these disparate personalities together into a cohesive body. At the same time, most of the control of the Union's direction and day-to-day functioning rested with Sheppard. To relieve some of the burden on him in these matters, an Executive Committee (consisting of senior office staff and some Sponsors) was formed in early 1937 which met on a weekly basis and cope with the mundane issues of the PPU's routine. The result, however, was a tug-of-war for influence between the Executive Committee and the Sponsors with Sheppard trying to mediate. After Sheppard's death in December of 1937, Canon Stuart Morris took over many of his responsibilities, but without Sheppard's special leadership qualities, the Union was forced to establish a more formal hierarchy. In this process, the authority of the Sponsors was re-established, while the Executive Committee was re-named the Management Committee and was more clearly limited to administrative functions. 

The list of women who were active in the Union as Sponsors or as other members of the Executive Committee was a changing one during the period 1936-1939 and thus reflected

---

"Ceadel. Pacifism in Britain..., pp.223, 242-243, 269. There was one further step towards democratization in the Union shortly before the war, when, in the spring of 1939, the Sponsors were replaced by an elected National Council, and the Management Committee was re-named the Executive Committee and finally given "real executive authority" between Council meetings. (Ibid., p.273.) For a more detailed discussion of the PPU's structure, both during Sheppard's leadership and after his death, see chapters 13 and 14 of Ceadel's Pacifism in Britain...."
contemporary currents in the ebb and flow of pacifist commitment as the international situation worsened and pacifism became "a faith and not a policy." Among the earliest women Sponsors, besides Storm Jameson, were Ethel Lewis, novelist Rose Macaulay, and Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson. While Wilkinson resigned early in 1937 (her socialist feminist pacifism having given way under the strains imposed by the Spanish Civil War), Sheppard was apparently ecstatic over the addition. At around the same time, of novelist and journalist Vera Brittain, who had received widespread domestic and international acclaim since 1933 for her memoir of the first World War, Testament of Youth. She had become unhappy with the LNU’s evolving conception of "collective security" which increasingly appeared as a confrontational policy. Rose Macaulay resigned in March of 1938, but by April the Union had two more women Sponsors - Labour party activist Mary Gamble and barrister Elizabeth Thorneycroft (also a member of the WIL Executive Committee and previously the Chair of the important London branch of the PPU based in Hampstead.) Thorneycroft and Storm Jameson resigned in early 1939, but later that spring, Maude Royden and the actress Sybil Thorndike joined the list of Sponsors. To these names one can also add the following list of women - some of whom may also have been Sponsors but who clearly made important contributions in the Executive Committee and in the PPU’s administration: Ursula Roberts (better known by her pen-name as novelist Susan Miles), PPU Secretary Margery Rayne and her successor Nancy Browne. Dorothy Plowman, Thelma Niklaus, and Mair Saklatvala.

\(^2\)Ibid., p.194.

\(^2\)In a letter from Sheppard to Brittain in January, he notes that he “shouted with joy” when hearing that she was interested in joining the Union, and he quickly proceeded to asking her to be a Sponsor. (Sheppard to Brittain, 27 January 1937, VB Archive - correspondence]
At the same time as they were aiding in the running of the PPU, many of these women were also contributing to the organization's main outlet to its membership and to the general public - *Peace News*. Started in 1936 as a general forum for anti-war views, *Peace News* was quickly adopted in July of that year as the Union's weekly newspaper. After a somewhat slow start in the first few months of the paper's association with the Union, offerings from women writers appeared in a fairly steady stream for the remainder of the pre-war period. Not surprisingly, Vera Brittain was a noted contributor, as were Susan Miles, Storm Jameson, Rose Macaulay, Kathleen Bartlett, and Mair Saklatvala - to name only a few. *Peace News* also printed articles by women who were not necessarily members of the Union, but were supportive of its cause - including Helena Swanwick, Freda White, and Ethel Mannin.

Clearly the Union had considerable success in attracting some prominent, even famous, women to its cause. Some, like Wilkinson, Macaulay, Jameson, and finally Royden, came to reconsider their commitment to pacifism and ultimately found it inadequate in the face of fascist aggression. Others, like Vera Brittain, held on to the Union and to pacifism for the duration of the war and beyond - at times paying a heavy price in public persecution. However, whatever the length of their tenure with the Union, it is quite noticeable that many of these women, famous or not, were professional women who supported themselves (and occasionally their families) and who sometimes offered an explicitly feminist challenge to traditional gender roles.

In light of the achievements and lifestyles of these women, the evidence left of their experiences within the PPU's various forums presents something of an irony. There appears
to have been a significantly gendered quality to women's involvement in the Sponsors and the Executive Committee in the sense that they chose to act or were expected to act, specifically "as women." as opposed to simply being concerned individuals involved in the PPU on the same terms as men. In its less explicit form, this characteristic was evident when, in the midst of various policy and strategy decisions facing the Union, issues such as relief work or the care of child refugees, which might be viewed as relating to a maternal or nurturing role, were designated as the responsibilities of the women present at these meetings (as suggested either by the women themselves or by other members.)

Even more noticeable, however, is the fact that a large proportion of both the references made to women members as well as the contributions made by the women themselves related specifically to the issue of the recruitment of more women into the Union.

Surprised by what was perceived to be the relatively limited response by women to the organization's invitation to them to join the PPU, the Union quickly came to focus considerable attention on constructing strategies to remedy the situation. One manifestation of this approach was in a special effort to cultivate links with the Women's Co-operative Guild which, in its particular pacifist ideology, was the women's group most compatible with the ideals of the PPU and which, as a large (and growing) organization of predominantly working class women, also offered the PPU an opportunity to be less exclusively middle
Aside from the specific interest in the WCG, however, both the Sponsors and the Executive demonstrated an ongoing enthusiasm for strategies to recruit more women generally and, not surprisingly, plainly expected the prominent women members of the PPU to lead these efforts.

In July of 1937, Max Plowman proposed that a woman should be invited "to put the women's point of view" at the upcoming summer camp for Union members at Swanwick, and it was agreed that Mary Gamble should be approached for this task. Dick Sheppard went on to suggest that Gamble should be supported by a member of the PPU Women's Sub-Committee "with a view to propaganda for the women's campaign." Gamble appears to have accepted this role enthusiastically, as did Mair Saklatvala, who also became immersed in the running of the "women's campaign" in 1938 and received encouragement from the Sponsors for her efforts. When Saklatvala left England for a visit to India late in the year, the campaign fell into some disarray. Mary Gamble subsequently brought the possibility of reviving a "women's campaign" to the Management Committee in the spring of 1939.

---

65 See Cedel's suggestions regarding the class composition of the PPU. (Pacifism in Britain..., pp.233-234) Regarding the WCG, in March of 1937, General Crozier suggested that the Guilds be approached "with a view to asking individual members to sign the pledge." (PPU - Sponsors' Meetings, minutes, 8 March 1937, p.60.) In the June of that year, it was noted that the WCG had applied for affiliation and had been advised to encourage individual memberships. (PPU - Executive Committee minutes, 1 June 1937, p.67) In July 1938, Stuart Morris reported on a WCG meeting at Southampton which he had attended and he agreed to consult with Rose Simpson, the Guild's General Secretary, on the conduct of a "Campaign to Women." (Sponsors' Meetings - minutes, 6 July 1938, p.21) In September 1938, the PPU noted the Guild's plans for a large demonstration in Regent's Park on November 11 and agreed to give the WCG its "maximum support." (Sponsors' Meetings, minutes, 1 September 1938, p.31) Ironically, the PPU also came close to alienating the Guild in 1937 when the international pacifist organisation with which the PPU was affiliated - the War Resisters International - was discovered to have been selling the Guild's famous white poppies for a profit. Canon Morris was designated to try to sort things out with Rose Simpson and rectify the situation. (Executive Committee minutes, 7 December 1937, p.107.)

66PPU - Executive Committee minutes. 8 July 1937, p.75.

67PPU - Executive Committee (Management) minutes - 8 June 1939, p.52.
However, some of the women of the PPU were clearly less enthusiastic about being approached for such roles. Vera Brittain, Maude Royden, Storm Jameson, and a Mrs. Alderton all refused to serve in a special women's campaign. While their reasons for doing so are not entirely clear in these particular instances, and were not necessarily rooted in a distaste for a gendered campaign, it is significant that the PPU leadership explicitly approached them for this particular task - indicating that their importance in the Union was related not so much to any of their professional accomplishments (as impressive as they might be) as to the fact that they were "Women," who could be used to attract other women to the movement.

This approach, and the dilemmas it created for some PPU women, is most clearly demonstrated in an exchange of letters between Max Plowman and Vera Brittain in March of 1937. Plowman wrote to Brittain asking her to contribute to a PPU symposium in which a group of prominent members were to talk about the reasons for their pacifist "faith" from the point of view of their respective "vocations." In particular, Plowman wanted Brittain to speak from her experiences as a woman and mother, in spite of the fact that Rose Macaulay, also participating in the symposium, had apparently already pointed out to him that "to be a woman is no vocation." However, while a subsequent letter from Brittain to Plowman reveals the resistance she encountered to the idea that she contribute a piece as a pacifist writer - and the resentment she felt at being seen primarily as a "Woman" - it also tellingly indicates Brittain's perceptions of the "practicalities" of recruitment to the cause. She began

---

68 PPU - Sponsors' meetings - minutes - 28 February 1938, p.81; EC (Management) minutes, 28 February 1939, p.45.

69 Max Plowman to Vera Brittain, 11 March 1937, VB Archive - correspondence.
by stating:

My position was simply that the other contributors were apparently writing from the point of view of their jobs, and I do not regard being a woman, or even a mother, as a job in itself. I do not regard any form of personal relationship, whether for man or woman, as a vocation but simply as incidental to a vocation. I prefer being credited with a writer's point of view (even though in practice it is just as wide and indefinite) because I am so often asked, particularly in speeches, to give 'the woman's point of view' and I always say that it does not exist - that I will give my own point of view but I can't speak for other women....

However, Brittain then went on to recognize the importance of an issue such as "parental responsibility" and noted that she had enclosed a piece she recently wrote entitled, "To Mothers Especially." Naturally the irony of this was not lost on Brittain, as she stated of the article that it "...in its very title, appears to contradict what I have said in the rest of this letter! It is yet another example of the fact that in practice one's logic often tends to break down, but I do feel that our Movement greatly needs a simple leaflet addressed to the mothers with no political training...."70

Vera Brittain was obviously caught between a personal commitment to herself as a feminist professional and a public commitment to the pacifist cause which needed strengthening by whatever means necessary. The Union, on the other hand, clearly felt no compunction in harnessing her professional skills to an aspect of this cause with which she was not entirely comfortable. The fact that the PPU made the same propaganda demands of its other active women members is made readily apparent in an examination of gendered propaganda and women's writing for the Union in both individual leaflets and pamphlets and in the pages of Peace News.

70 Vera Brittain to Max Plowman, 17 March 1937, VB Archive - correspondence.
In both the pamphlet literature and *Peace News*, women were able to publish pieces from time to time that were theoretically gender-neutral in content. The PPU's *propaganda* campaign in 1937 included a pamphlet from Rose Macaulay entitled "An Open Letter to a Non-Pacifist" (previously published in the respected political and literary journal *Time and Tide*) in which Macaulay attempted to address various criticisms often posed to pacifists and, in so doing, made a point of not employing a typical plea for the threat war posed to women and children. In the case of *Peace News*, Vera Brittain did, in fact, contribute a *three-part* series entitled "Books and World Peace." in which she argued for the crucial role of modern literature "...to emphasize [sic] and develop any tendency or philosophy which creates an atmosphere of peace and makes war less probable." Both she and Maude Royden also wrote on the subject of Christian pacifism, while Mair Saklatvala and Caecilia E.M. Pugh contributed articles written from a socialist pacifist perspective which discussed reasons for the working class as a whole to support the PPU.

However, although these contributions were undoubtedly valued by the PPU, the Union was most interested in publishing pieces by women which were explicitly geared towards the "women's campaign." The majority of pamphlets and articles for *Peace News* written by women consisted of this kind of material - which both appealed to women directly and discussed strategies for the campaign.

---

71 Vera Brittain. "Books and World Peace - I." *Peace News*, 5 March 1938, p.7. See also *Peace News* for 12 and 19 March 1938 for parts II and III.

One thus has a sense of a gender dynamic operating in the PPU which seems noticeably different from that found in the LNU. As a new movement in the 1930s, whose nature changed relatively suddenly from being a one-time demonstration of support for a principle to an actual, functioning organization with a goal of mass membership, the PPU found itself in the position of inviting women into a formerly all male institution, and then being faced with a surprising lack of response from a constituency whose support they had taken for granted. The implication for the women who did associate themselves with the Union was that they were thus given the primary responsibility for rectifying this gender imbalance.

Some women apparently took up these duties eagerly and enthusiastically, while others were more reluctant and ambivalent. While all of these women might agree that having more women in the PPU was a positive and important goal, reaching agreement on the nature and priorities of an appeal to women was another matter entirely. As far as the Union leadership itself was concerned, there does not appear to have been a major concern with such an appeal conforming to a particular line of rhetoric or approach. They themselves may have assumed that the campaign would revolve around a conception of a unified "women's point of view" that was informed by traditional images of women's roles and nature. This perspective was apparent both in Max Plowman's comments on the subject, to the Executive Committee and to Vera Brittain personally, and in a June 1937 editorial for Peace News entitled "Women and War." in which Humphrey Moore spoke of women as being "long-suffering." "[I]ike the earth that bears us all." but also as possessing "real life-values" that would step in to protect the "children of their wombs" and challenge the intel-
lectual "abstractions" perpetuated by men which led to war. However, the main priority, as far as the Union was concerned, appears to have been simply to get its women members convincing other women to join by whatever line of reasoning or strategy available.

As a result, the appeal to women manifested itself in a variety of ways in PPU literature. The obvious point of comparison here is with the previous chapter's discussion of rhetoric employed by women's groups. Not surprisingly, much of the PPU language and arguments sound similar notes and, interestingly enough, reveal the same kinds of shifts in rhetoric and varieties of approach. The appeals used here reflect a range of feminist and non-feminist impulses which were often closely juxtaposed.

The dominant strain in much of this literature did, in fact, emphasize a maternalist perception of women. In its simplest form, often used in one-page PPU leaflets, this literature relied on the basic messages that women's homes and families were directly threatened by modern warfare and that women all over the world had a common interest in challenging this threat. One leaflet showed illustrations of clusters of housewives talking to each other, with the accompanying text reading: "Three women stood on a doorstep in England during the crisis and agreed that they didn't want war. 'And I shouldn't be surprised,' said one of them. 'if somewhere in Germany there aren't three women standing on a doorstep... exactly the same as us agreeing that they don't want war. and perhaps wondering if somewhere in England there aren't three women..."

Two other leaflets, in an attempt to more clearly indicate the PPU's appeal across class lines, contained poems written in the

---


74 "Three Women" leaflet - PPU. (1938).
voice of a working-class woman. "Mrs. Higgs." "Mrs. Higgs, Pacifist" contained the lines, "'Keep your 'eroics. mum.' I sez. 'I ain't no soldier, see./ The next war's cannon-fodder/ Is the blooming kids and me.'” Below the text of the poem was an illustration with three women costumed to represent the home-makers of England, "Europe." and the Far East.75 In "Mrs. Higgs to Mrs. Nobbs." the "narrator" states, "...it's time we spoke our minds out, Mrs. Nobbs./ It's the kids and us'll cop it/ Whilst the high and mighty hop it./ And we've dam well got to STOP IT. Mrs. Nobbs."76 The same simple message also appeared in longer story form in Peace News, in an article submitted by PPU ally Rose Simpson, the General Secretary of the WCG, in which she described the distress caused by the evacuation of children from London during the Munich Crisis, and used the threat of this and other hardships affecting women's families to motivate them to "understand the true meaning of real peace."77

In many of the longer texts, especially those individual pamphlets and articles for Peace News that were directed at a middle class audience, the messages that came out of this emphasis on the maternal were more complex and often combined gendered appeals that worked on a number of different levels or sent different messages to the reader. In addition to reminding women of the direct threat war posed to their homes and children, much of this literature emphasized a more abstract concept - similar to that proferred by the IAW and Margery Corbett Ashby for much of the decade - of woman as a creative force in nature, and

75"Mrs Higgs, Pacifist" PPU leaflet. (1938).
76"Mrs. Higgs to Mrs. Nobbs." PPU leaflet. (1938).
therefore predisposed to play a sort of iconic role of "Pacifist Mother" to the world. Thus, in
the pamphlet "Six Reasons Why Women Should Join the PPU Now," while the first reason
referred to the concrete fear that modern warfare brought war into women's homes, the
second reason pointed out that all women, whether in actuality or in theory, were "the bearers
and natural guardians of children and have a special responsibility to the future." Feminist
Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, in an article for *Peace News* later published as a pamphlet,
noted women's "special responsibility for resisting war" because they were "in a special sense
the custodians of human life." Also in *Peace News*, Alice Thorne referred to "the enormous
creative force of the mass of women in the world today," while Mary Gamble noted both
women's motivation to prevent the destruction of their homes, as well as the more abstract
concept of women's "fundamental instinct for creation." An especially blunt presentation of
these two messages came in a montage of various writers' reflections on war presented under
the headline, "A Question for All Mothers." The excerpts here from Salvador de Madariaga,
Kerr Eby, A.A. Milne. Olive Schreiner. and the poet Jessie Holt. all placed heavy emphasis
on women confronting the realities of the children they had raised with so much effort dying
horribly and senselessly in war, but the significant inclusion here was of the Schreiner
passage which began with the assumption that no woman, "whether she has borne children or
be merely potentially a childbearer." [my italics] could not be outraged at the destruction in

---

war of "so many mothers' sons."\(^{81}\)

While locating the justification for woman's pacifism within her traditional roles in the domestic realm, some PPU literature also followed a maternal feminist route, suggesting that, if women were to deserve the political, economic and social rights they had thus far achieved (rights which, by implication, challenged societal constraints which had limited them to that realm) they must work for peace or be unworthy of their emancipation. Thus, the "Six Reasons..." pamphlet followed the two reasons noted above with the further rationale that women, specifically as "home-makers," had "contributed equally with men to the shaping and building of civilisation" and must therefore work to preserve that civilisation. The corollary to this was that it was women's "...duty to use the freedom which they have recently won for themselves for the good of humanity.... The right to education and the right to work must carry corresponding duties to give time and thought and money to the solving of the greatest problem of the age - Peace and War." Since the "logical contribution" of women to civilisation was "the establishment of peace and the defence of right by non-violent means." working for this goal would provide "the justification of their present freedom."\(^{82}\)

Part of the irony of these assumptions that women were logically pacifist is that, at the same time as women were expected to be pacifists by virtue of their roles as mothers and guardians of the home, they were also being asked to go beyond this sphere - to venture outside of their normal routines as wives and mothers - to bring the benefits of their

\(^{81}\)"A Question for All Mothers." Peace News. 23 June 1939. p.6.

\(^{82}\)"Six Reasons..." PPU pamphlet. 1938.
"womanly" attributes and talents to society at large. Thus Alice Thorne advised women to "do less dusting and less cleaning" and to prepare fewer cooked meals, and spend more time "liberating" in the world at large the "family spirit" that women typically cultivate in the home.\textsuperscript{83}

Occasionally, the positive gender images of maternal, creative woman as inherently pacifist were juxtaposed with a negative gender image, in which women were blamed for the persistence of war because they were seen as primarily responsible for the glamorous appeal of war. Quoting Mary Gamble, an article by an unnamed \textit{Peace News} correspondent stated, "Women largely set the standard as to what is considered romantic and chivalrous, and women can destroy that old and false idea that there is any romance or glamour in modern war."\textsuperscript{84} This line of reasoning was also offered, in a more explicitly critical tone, in the "Six Reasons..." pamphlet, which stated that "...the glory and romance of war has been chiefly of woman's making" - a circumstance which is no longer "excusable" in an era of modern warfare when men are no longer fighting for food but rather for profits.\textsuperscript{85}

The rationale that was then used to reconcile these seemingly contradictory gender images was highly reminiscent of the views of Helena Swanwick. The negative image of women seducing or pressuring men to fight, in common with the phenomenon of women themselves buying into a rhetoric of honour and service by participating in ARP or other voluntary defence services, was a product of women's maternal tendencies being suppressed


\textsuperscript{85}"Six Reasons...", (1938).
or dormant. Thus if women "released" their creative energies or really thought "as women", as so many of these authors suggested, they would see their error and instead act in ways true to their natures.86

Thus one can see from the rhetoric discussed to this point that the use of maternalist images played a major role in the attempt to attract women to pacifism and the PPU, and that this maternalist appeal was complex - reflecting both seemingly feminist impulses which suggested that the logical corollary to women's emancipation was the introduction of women-specific values and abilities to the public realm, and non-feminist impulses which appealed to very basic maternal instincts. This material included a strong message to women of their possible empowerment as a force for good in the world and encouragement for them to reach beyond their traditional spheres, but also a simultaneous emphasis on very traditional, and potentially constraining, images of women's roles and nature.

However, the PPU's heavy reliance on these maternalist images did not go unchallenged. One of the earliest indications of the dissatisfaction of some women members with such appeals appeared in an October 1936 issue of Peace News, in a letter to the editor from one Anne Protheroe Jones:

...I should just like to say that, as a good equalitarian, I am often a little shocked at the rather antiquated attitude to women expressed by some of your contributors. Can this explain the slightly less appeal [sic] your cause has so far made? The reform for which, surely, men or women, we long with an equal ardour, the removal for ever from the world of the scourge of war, makes its appeal to us fundamentally upon a basis of humanity. ...let us most rejoicingly forget, in joining for this task, the 'accident' of sex, along with the accident of class or any other irrelevant division in a cause certainly great.

86 The logic of this argument is never firmly established, given that this literature does not explain how women, who if by virtue of their womanly nature cannot acquiesce in destructive activity, can also be the source of a positive image of war.
Although the dominant emphasis in the appeal to women would remain on the explicitly
gendered perspective described previously, the PPU clearly decided that it was either unwise
or unnecessary to silence calls for a more non-gendered approach. In the April 1938 editions
of Peace News, there were two presentations along these lines. In Morna Mactaggart's "Let's
Drop the Wife and Mother." the author asked, "Do we too easily assume that the way to stir a
woman's imagination is by appealing to her in her role of wife and mother?" She went on to
assert that, "[b]efore [a woman] was either a wife or a mother she was an individual. An
individual she remains. even with a dozen children." From Mactaggart's perspective, the case
for women being pacifists as a way of living up to their social responsibilities was more
compelling when women were seen not as mothers but as individuals equal to men. Susan
Miles subsequently supported this non-gendered emphasis in a three-part series later that
month on women and the peace pledge, although she took a slightly more tempered view by
simply urging that an appeal to women as individuals should take precedence over an appeal
to women as women:

My view emphasizes the need of women pacifists to sign the pledge primarily
in virtue of their humanity: the other view stresses the need of women
pacifists to sign in virtue of their womanhood. I do not want to belittle the
importance of the womanhood aspect of the question. There seems to me the
strongest reason why women as women should be acutely aware of the
outrage of war, which destroys or injures so wantonly lives which have been
nourished at such a cost. What I am suggesting is that this is an additional
consideration. It reinforces, it does not contradict what I have been urging.
Men and women differ inevitably in some extremely important respects, but


88Morna Mactaggart, "Let's Drop the Wife and Mother," Peace News, 2 April 1938, p.10.
what they have in common, their humanity, is even more important than what distinguishes them.

For Miles. the real issue at the heart of a pacifist commitment. for men and women alike, was not refusing to fight or protesting the deaths of husbands or children. but upholding a fundamental "freedom of the human will" to reject the imposition of a code which was repugnant to it.89

Clearly this approach stuck a chord with a number of women reading Peace News. A notable illustration of the tension between approaches is found in an examination of the special women's page that was started up by Mair Saklatvala and ran in the PPU's paper for most of 1938 (as the women's campaign gathered steam in response to Government attempts to recruit women for Air Raid Protection and to the Munich Crisis.) In its first few appearances. in March and April. the feature was entitled the "Woman's Point of View," but as Saklatvala later explained to readers. the name was quickly changed to "A Woman's Point of View" when she received a number of complaints from women who objected to being addressed "as women" and to the implication that a column written by one woman could be representative of the views of all women.90

While Saklatvala was sympathetic to this view. she was also somewhat impatient with those critics who. as she somewhat sarcastically stated. "...seemed to dislike being women," and she noted that. given the urgency of the pacifist cause. it was "...no time to be quibbling over the futility of generalizations."91 However. Saklatvala was also evidently not concerned

91Ibid.
with producing a women's feature which spoke from a uniform perspective in an appeal to women. The second edition of this page featured the call to mothers by Pethick-Lawrence mentioned earlier, followed less than a month later by Mactaggart's appeal to abandon the maternal message. Saklatvala's views are themselves difficult to pin down with any precision. Her comments noted above suggest that she wanted to be able to use a generalised appeal to women as mothers, but she also made it clear in her feature's first appearance that she felt that women were not "born pacifists" and that relying on instincts instead of "hard and honest thinking" was a mistake. In the next issue, alongside Pethick-Lawrence's article, Saklatvala included some brief comments of her own in which she stated that the feature would not contain recipes for "pacifist puddings or international fritters." but would provide "serious" and "informative" discussion and would be "womanly but not feminine, and probably far from lady-like." What she actually meant by this statement, however, is unclear.

Over the course of the year, this feature ended up incorporating a range of subject matters and perspectives, including Saklatvala's own interest in building understanding between classes and reaching out to working class women - both married and single.

The Peace Pledge Union's appeal to women thus provides an opportunity to compare the rhetoric of such an appeal in a mixed-membership organization with that of the women's organizations. Clearly, there were many similar aspects to the language of the appeals to women to join either type of organization in the name of pressing concerns in international affairs in the 1930s. In the case of the PPU, in attempting to mobilize women for a strongly

---

92 Mair Saklatvala. "This new feature gives the 'Woman's Point of View.'" Peace News, 5 March 1938.

pacifist cause, one sees a range of feminist and non-feminist impulses which is highly reminiscent of the language of the women's groups. In both situations there was a predominant emphasis on maternal imagery, both concrete and abstract. At the same time, an egalitarian impulse, which sought to downplay or challenge the appeals to women as "Women" - based on traditional roles - and instead emphasized the appeal to women as human beings and as responsible citizens equal to men, was somewhat more vocal in the PPU than appears to have been the case in the non-party women's groups. This suggests that the same egalitarian feminists drawn to pacifism who were uncomfortable with, or rejected, pacifist appeals which emphasized women's difference, were those who joined the PPU specifically because, as an organization of both men and women foreign policy advocates, it satisfied their desire to work alongside men as equals in a way in which the women-only groups of the peace movement did not.

Although only the PPU rhetoric has been described in any detail here, there is little reason to believe that the appeals to women by the other mixed-membership foreign-policy organizations of the period would have looked different - especially in emphasizing the maternalist angle. The National Peace Council, for example, perceived the benefits of emphasising women's traditional roles in its 1937 leaflet entitled "For your family's sake!", which linked the topic of disarmament with women's domestic concerns about war preparations driving up food prices. As far as the LNU was concerned, it is also unlikely that such gendered appeals would have been passed over if the Union had decided that a concerted drive specifically to recruit women was called for.

---

"For your family's sake!" NPC leaflet. 1937 (NPC records - BLPES, NPC 1/14)
This reminder that the LNU apparently felt such a campaign unnecessary for most of the 1930s brings us back to the question of how women's experiences as members of the LNU and the PPU compared with each other. Both organizations attracted women who were feminists and those who were not, and both contained women members who were content to play subordinate roles and those who were eager and willing to function as vocal leaders and spokespersons. Of this highly engaged portion of women in both groups, some were enthusiastic supporters of a gendered role and voice for women within these organizations, while others worked to establish a theoretically gender-neutral presence as foreign policy critics on equal terms with their male colleagues. This would not have been easy to do in either organization. In both the LNU and the PPU, power ultimately rested largely with a very select circle of elite men. Even in the LNU, where women made their voices heard on a range of issues in various LNU forums, their contributions still represented only a minority proportion of the whole.

Regarding the views they brought to the debate on international affairs, the women of both groups displayed as great a range of perspectives as did their male colleagues. In the case of the Peace Pledge Union, the pacifism of its women members was motivated, in different instances and in different combinations, by religious beliefs, political sympathies, humanitarianism, and feminism. For some of the women members, as was also the case for some of the men of the PPU, escalating fascist aggression in the late 1930s undermined their own pacifist rationales, causing them to leave the Union. There is little evidence to suggest that women members tended to be more or less committed to the PPU than men, or that they were more fluid as a group in their movement in and out of the PPU.
In the case of the League of Nations Union, the degree to which the variety of women's views matched the variety of those of their male colleagues is even more strikingly noticeable simply because, for much of the decade, the LNU incorporated a wide range of foreign policy perspectives. From the highest levels of the organization to its grass roots, there were women members who were pacifists and imperialists, internationalists and sanctionists. Among the more visible women of the LNU, some, like Kathleen Courtney, were closely associated with the Union's male leaders (especially Lord Cecil and Gilbert Murray), and with the formation and articulation of official LNU policy. Others, like Lady Horsley or Eleanor Rathbone, gained reputations as outspoken dissenters attempting to push the Union toward a less ambivalent or cautious position.

In the end, what differentiated the experiences of women in these two organizations, is that, as a result of recruitment concerns present in the PPU that were generally absent from the LNU (in which the proportion of members who were women appears to have been consistently quite high), women in the PPU who so desired had less freedom to pursue a non-gendered approach to their foreign policy activism. Gender images and gendered roles were by no means irrelevant in the LNU: for many women members, they were indeed central to their experiences in the Union. However, women in the LNU also ultimately possessed the opportunity to be seen and heard as other than "Women" to a greater degree than was the case for women in the PPU. Within this second organization, formed as it was in the latter half of the 1930s and eager to build a mass base of support as quickly as possible in the face of alarming international developments, the evidently unexpected need to recruit many more women had a very particular impact on the roles and opportunities of its women members,
and heavily influenced the way in which women's pacifism, generally, was depicted.

Whatever else women PPU members may have wanted to do or discuss, their main purpose in the organization was to act as women to carry out familiar "womanly" tasks within the Union and, more importantly, to demonstrate the movement's attractions specifically to women. Many PPU women were, in fact, not only willing but happy to contribute in this way. There was plenty of precedent for such activity outside of the PPU - in the women's peace movement - and indeed much of the PPU rhetoric of their campaign directed at women mirrored the maternalist emphasis of women's groups in the peace movement. However, for some PPU women, the role offered to them in light of the organization's needs seemed constraining and the dominant gender images used in this campaign unappealing. These women were not silenced. but it seems clear that, in staying with the PPU, they were expected to muffle egalitarian impulses - at least to a certain degree - for the sake of the more pressing cause of protesting the war with which Britain was increasingly threatened.
CHAPTER 4 - FOREIGN AFFAIRS WRITING AND PUBLISHING

Participation in any of the number of non-party pressure groups and organizations of the 1930s, both women-only and mixed-membership, clearly offered meaningful opportunities for women to enter the traditionally male realm of international politics and foreign policy debate. At the same time, this activity came with its own inevitable set of constraints - both those specific to women members and those experienced by anyone engaged in collective activity who (for the greater good of the organization) was therefore faced with pressures to compromise. For women who were more individualistic in nature and found this kind of group-oriented activism unappealing, and for those who were (or had been) active in such groups but also wanted an alternative forum in which to express their views, there were the possibilities offered by publishing written commentary in the mainstream press.

This would not have been an easy option to pursue at this time. As one might expect, the world of publishing in general was heavily male-dominated in the 1930s, and the narrower, and rather elite, realm of foreign policy commentary even more so. Certainly the important and influential figures were typically male - whether they were the press barons (like Beaverbrook, Rothermere, Astor, and Layton), the powerful editors (like Basil Kingsley Martin, J.L. Garvin, and Geoffrey Dawson) or the scholarly commentators and foreign
correspondents (like Arnold Toynbee, Hugh Seton-Watson, Frederick Voigt, Alexander Werth, Norman Ebbutt, Goronwy Rees, and Vernon Bartlett). In spite of intimidating circumstances, however, a number of women were successful in breaking into this elite domain.

Their efforts appeared in a number of different forms, including articles for the daily press and full-length monographs for established publishing houses. However, while I will make some reference to such work in the interests of conveying a sense of the broad scope of women's writing on international affairs in this period, I intend to focus primarily on a particularly valuable source for their commentary in this field - the political and literary weekly review which flourished in Britain in the 1930s. Women's contributions appeared in a number of those weeklies identified by Benny Morris as having the greatest reputation and/or circulation, including: The Spectator, Time and Tide, The Observer, The New Statesman, and Tribune, as well as in interesting and colourful efforts somewhat outside the mainstream.\(^1\) Looking for the work of women in these journals is not always a straightforward task because of the frequent practice, as in the daily newspapers, of printing articles unsigned.\(^2\) Fortunately, however, this was not always the case, and further clues and corroboration regarding authorship can also be gleaned from memoirs and other secondary sources.

---

\(^1\)For a detailed discussion of the treatment of foreign policy issues in the 1930s by the weekly press, see Benny Morris. The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s, (1991).

\(^2\)For example, in The Economist in this period, authors' identities were rarely indicated and, according to a recent history of this publication, office records noting these identities were started only in the 1940s. (Ruth Dudley Edwards, The Pursuit of Reuson: The Economist 1843-1993, (1993) p.482)
In the process of examining the various publications of the weekly press, a fascinating gallery of women journalists emerges, many of whom have received little historical attention. Moving from weekly to weekly, and including a final section on a few important women writers not prominent in the weekly press, this chapter will present these women's stories and their work, indicate the range of their opinions and perspectives on international affairs, and provide an assessment of the nature of their experiences in this world, both as writers generally and as women in particular.

Two of these writers, Elizabeth Wiskemann and Freda Utley, became frequent, regular contributors to the most widely read and perhaps the most important of the serious weeklies in 1930s, *The New Statesman.* Founded in 1913 as a voice for Fabian socialism, *The New Statesman* had achieved a circulation of around 30,000 by the end of the 1930s after absorbing two other publications, *The Nation* and *The Week-End Review,* in 1931 and 1934, respectively. The editor of the journal in these years (and indeed for many years afterwards) was Basil Kingsley Martin, a former lecturer at the L.S.E. and leader writer for the *Manchester Guardian* in the late 1920s. Morris notes that Kingsley Martin was almost completely responsible for shaping the journal's policy during the 1930s, and, in a general assessment of that policy regarding the dictatorships, describes it as "...meticulously inconsistent and confused." shaped at heart by a great fear of war. As an illustration of the jour-

---

4 Ibid.  
5 Ibid., p.25.
nal's confused policy, Morris points to a single issue, that of 26 March 1938, which carried articles "...variously and clamorously espousing British isolationism, pacifism, positive appeasement and military resistance to the aggressor states."6 Kingsley Martin consistently condemned the internal policies of Nazi Germany in The New Statesman in the 1930s, but his views on German foreign policy were less clear and in fact amounted to a hesitant acceptance of appeasement, in which he was supported by such influential thinkers and writers as John Maynard Keynes, H.N. Brailsford, and the pacifist C.E.M. Joad.

One challenging voice on the editorial staff from 1937 was R.H.S. Crossman, who generally opposed appeasement. In this opinion Crossman was supported by the journal's foreign correspondents in Europe, including Alexander Werth, Robert Dell, and Elizabeth Wiskemann.7 Kingsley Martin subsequently described the last of these three in his memoirs as having become "one of the leading authorities on Central Europe" and credited her with "persuading [him] that the Nazis represented a deep, nationalist force in Germany which appealed to something more primitive than class."8

Elizabeth Wiskemann was born in England of a German-born father and a British mother, and developed a fascination with "talk about international affairs" at a very young age. After studying modern history at Cambridge in the 1920s, she decided to take a break from the university in 1930 by going to Berlin for a stay of several months.9 In noting this

---

6Ibid.

7Ibid., pp.25-29.


decision in the introduction to her memoirs, Wiskemann states: "If I had remained an academic specialising in the nineteenth century, I suppose my life would have been considerably duller than it became." 10

Wiskemann did not, in fact, completely abandon her scholarly life and pursuits at this time. However, her interest in contemporary international politics was fed by her experiences in late Weimar Germany, in which she met some of the most famous foreign correspondents of the period, including Frederick Voigt (of the Manchester Guardian), Norman Ebbutt (of the Times), and Edgar Mowrer (of the Chicago Daily News). 11 By 1932, she had established a working rhythm of teaching modern European history at Cambridge during term time and spending as much vacation time as possible in Germany - a pattern which she successfully maintained over the next few years. Encouraged by many at home in Britain to write about her impressions of Germany, Wiskemann published her first article for The New Statesman in April 1932 on the re-election of Hindenberg as President of the Weimar Republic. In it she noted the decrease in support for the Nazis in the election in areas in which they had previously been highly successful - Bavaria, Hessen, Hamburg, and Thuringia - and speculated that Naziism or "Hitlerism" had possibly "reached its zenith" and might be a "bursting bubble." 12

Of her publishing opportunities at this point, Wiskemann states in her memoirs:

10Ibid., p.9. This is, of course, a misguided reflection, but understandably so given the subsequent events of her life and career.

11Ibid., pp.15-21.

"From spring 1932 onwards I found that I could generally place at least four review articles after each journey, and in those days they paid for a few weeks abroad lived frugally. The interplay of teaching about the past and playing with the fire of the present was extraordinarily stimulating." Indeed Wiskemann often found herself in the midst of the fire of current events in these years. She made a brief visit to Berlin days after Hitler became Chancellor on January 30th, 1933, returning again in March for a few weeks. In the winter and spring of 1933, Wiskemann's articles in The New Statesman illustrated the nature of the Nazi regime. Of the maneuvers which brought Hitler to power, she stated: "...there has been a skillfully organized Nazi stampede of the nation, by a dexterous combination of honeyed words from Hitler with the seduction of pageantry against a background of terrorism." In discussing Nazi foreign policy, Wiskemann pointed to the discrepancy between the "pacifism" in Hitler's speeches and the widespread persecution of pacifists under the new regime as "enemies" of a militaristic state. And, after a visit to Vienna in the late spring, drew attention to the widespread infiltration of Austrian officialdom by Nazis.

By this point, Wiskemann was able to publish "just about what [she] wanted" in The New Statesman and was now also increasingly in demand by other publications, including

---


14"Back in England, she tried to convince both Herbert Samuel and Colonel Wedgewood (whose children she knew) of "the truth" about Nazi Germany, and had to break herself of the habits of whispering in conversation when making any kind of non-neutral statement and of refusing to mention anyone's name on the phone. (Ibid., pp.32-38)


"Time and Tide" and another journal called *The Nineteenth Century*. This variety of options was crucial given that no publication was paying for either her travel or living expenses in Europe, let alone paying her a regular salary as a permanent correspondent. Wiskemann visited Austria again in 1934 and continued to write about the turmoil there, but much of her attention came to focus again on Germany itself and, in particular, on the situation in the Saar region. She was in Saarbrücken in late 1934 and into 1935, during the plebiscite on the future status of region.

Later in 1935, Wiskemann travelled from Germany to Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Danzig, and Memel, and repeatedly noted the tensions created by Nazi influences or activities outside Germany. That summer, she wrote articles on Danzig not only for *The New Statesman* but also for *The Economist* and the *Manchester Guardian*. In an article which she sent to *The New Statesman* in July from Prague, she speculated that British agreements with Germany were possibly "quite a good thing" but that they must be "accompanied by more criticism, not less." and also argued that Hitler's "subjective pacifism" would mean "peace at any price that Germany demand[ed]" once German rearmament had made sufficient progress. Back in Czechoslovakia at the end of the year, Wiskemann noted that the greatest threat to that state, "as for the whole of Europe," was Germany - a threat which manifested itself from without, through the encirclement of Czechoslovakia if Austria "went Nazi," and from within, through Nazi efforts to stir up the resentment of the German minority in the

---

17 *The Europe I Saw*, p.39.


Sudetenland.

In March of 1936, Wiskemann was once again in Germany, but by now was increasingly nervous about her position there. She also notes in her memoirs that it seemed an increasingly thankless task to write articles "which people at home found unpalatable." Wiskemann went on to state, however, that she did not remember doubting that the task was a necessary one. In July, she was back in Germany and made another brief visit to Danzig, where Nazi terrorism was once more on the increase. After a few days, she returned to Berlin and planned to go back to England shortly. On July 11th, however, Wiskemann's plans were alarmingly interrupted when she was arrested by the Gestapo.

Luckily, she was held only for a few hours and was able to leave for England the day after her release. The July 18th issue of The New Statesman carried both an article by Wiskemann on Danzig and an editorial comment describing her arrest and noting that the Gestapo agents had questioned her specifically about an article which she had written for the journal the previous year. Wiskemann's own piece made no mention of her personal ordeal, but focused on the situation in Danzig - arguing that "a little determination" in England and support from Geneva would both help Danzig and restore some of the League's standing after the betrayal of Abyssinia.

After this last scare, Wiskemann decided not to try to return to Germany, but to write

---


21The Europe I Saw, p.52.

22Ibid., pp.55-58.

23The New Statesman, 18 July 1936, p.75.

24Ibid., "The Free City of Danzig," p.79.
as much as she could on the threat posed by that country to the rest of Europe. Thus followed a spate of articles to *The New Statesman* and a number of other publications, including an article on Danzig for the *Daily Herald*.25 She did continue her professional travels on the continent in the fall of 1936, visiting Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Roumania.26 In October, she wrote again of Czechoslovak fears of Nazi Germany and the work of President Benes to step up rearmament and fortification efforts and strengthen links with the countries of the Little Entente.27

Early in 1937, Wiskemann was approached by the Royal Institute of International Affairs to do a study of "the Czech-German problem" - a task which meant that she had to give up her University teaching and "...plunge into uncharted seas with hurricanes blowing up." Wiskemann describes this as "a fairly agonizing decision to make" but states that she also felt that she "had to take this plunge."28 Thus she settled in Prague for some months in 1937 to do the necessary research. While continuing to write occasional reviews and articles on the situation in Central and South-Eastern Europe, for *The New Statesman* and other publications, most of her energy at this time was focused on producing the book - *Czechs and Germans* - which she returned to London to write as quickly as possible between October

---


26 Although she also visited Italy in the 1930s, Wiskemann made a conscious decision to not concern herself professionally with the political situation there, noting that she "had enough on [her] plate with Germany and most of Central and South-eastern Europe." The one article she wrote on Italy for *The New Statesman* in 1935 was, in her view, a superficial piece and one which the journal should not have published. (*The Europe I Saw*, p.176.)


28 *The Europe I Saw*, p.82. Wiskemann also notes at this point in her memoir that she had been told by Chatham House (the RIIA) that she had not been first on their list, but that her "rival or rivals had refused the undertaking" - a circumstance which may have appeared to Wiskemann as an appealing challenge.
1937 and March 1938. The German Anschluss with Austria occurred shortly after Wiskemann submitted her manuscript; after a brief period of "collapse" - brought on by exhaustion and fear for the fate of Czechoslovakia - she returned to Prague in May to write more articles. In late August, however, she was angry and deeply hurt to read Kingsley Martin's comment in The New Statesman that "[t]he strategical value of the Bohemian frontier should not be made the occasion of a world war. We should not guarantee the status quo." In Wiskemann's view, this position undermined everything she had tried to do for Czechoslovakia. Shortly thereafter, she left England for a three and a half month lecture tour in Canada and the United States and was clearly embittered about the difficulties of "writ[ing] the truth in Europe as long as the policy of appeasement lasted." At this point, her contributions to The New Statesman dropped off almost completely; in March of 1939, she began work on another book for Oxford University Press on post-Munich Europe.

As Elizabeth Wiskemann's writings for The New Statesman diminished with her enthusiasm for its editorial policies, another woman writer began to make numerous contributions to The New Statesman on international affairs concerning an entirely different part of the world. In December 1936, a review of a series of recent books on Japan appeared

---


30 The New Statesman and Nation. 27 August 1938. p.301.

31 The Europe I Saw. pp.91-92.

32 This book, Undeclared War, came out (unfortunately, from the point of view of the title selection) in the fall of 1939.
under the name Freda Utley. In the next few years, Utley produced a long list of articles and reviews relating to the Far East which were sharply critical of Japan and pleaded the cause of China.

Freda Utley's history is an unusual and dramatic one in many respects. Born in London in 1898, Utley became involved with the socialist movement at Cambridge after World War I and joined the Communist Party around the time of the General Strike in 1926. In this period, she was writing on domestic political and social issues for publications such as The New Statesman, Labour Monthly, The New Leader, and the Contemporary Review.

Also at this time, she met her future husband, Arcadi Berdichevsky, who was ostensibly a member of the Soviet Trade Delegation in London. In 1928, Utley went to live with Berdichevsky in the Soviet Union, and subsequently followed him to a posting in Japan. In 1929, she came back to England to work for the Communist Party, rejoining Berdichevsky in the Soviet Union in 1930. They lived there together for the next few years, and had a son in 1934. In 1936, Berdichevsky was suddenly arrested and imprisoned; Utley never saw him again and only learned years later that he had died in a gulag in the late 1930s.

Her experiences of living in the Soviet Union during Stalin's purges and, in particular, the fate of her husband, made Utley virulently anti-Soviet. In returning to England after the arrest, she found herself in the difficult position of not being able to speak out against the

---


35Ibid., pp.78. 88.

36Ibid., p.126.
Soviet Union for fear of reprisals against her husband (if he was still alive), and also of being alienated from many of her former colleagues who were now supporting the Popular Front. However, in looking for a way to support herself and her son as a writer, Utley benefitted from the notable success of a book entitled Japan's Feet of Clay - the manuscript for which she had completed while living in the Soviet Union. Published in 1936, this study of Japan's economic vulnerabilities was well-received in both England and the United States, and opened up opportunities for Utley to continue to write on the Far East, particularly in reviews and articles for The New Statesman. Repeatedly, Utley emphasized the theme that Japan's dependence on imports of raw materials made it vulnerable to economic pressure, especially from Britain and the United States, and that embargoes of raw materials and boycotts of Japanese goods by these two countries alone could put a stop to Japanese aggression in China and elsewhere in Asia.

Besides finding a home at The New Statesman, Utley also attracted the attention of the News Chronicle, which published a pamphlet she co-authored in 1937 with David Wills entitled Japan Can Be Stopped. In 1938, after finishing another book entitled Japan's Gamble In China, Utley travelled to China as a special correspondent for the News Chronicle in the war zone and sent articles back both to that paper and to The New Statesman from cities under air attack by the Japanese and from the army's front lines. Here she met the left-wing American writer Agnes Smedley, who was writing for the Manchester Guardian;

---

37Ibid., p.142.


the only unattached British or American women in the wartime capital of Hankow, they
came close friends.40 Of her experiences there, Utley noted that she was the only "'foreign
female person''' who got to the actual front lines of the fighting.41 She was viewed with some
initial misgivings by male colleagues because she was a woman, and herself felt a sense of
inferiority because of her lack of experience as a reporter.42 On her return to England, Utley
became involved with the China Campaign Committee and continued to write on China's
struggle in The New Statesman and other publications during 1939.43 She also published yet
another monograph. China At War.

Concerning the nature of Utley's relations with The New Statesman and its editor,
Kingsley Martin's own memoirs and Edwards Hyman's history of the weekly from 1913-
1963 are unrevealing - in fact they contain no references to her at all. Utley herself makes
only rare, passing references to her work for this journal in her memoirs, although she does
describe Kingsley Martin as having been a "good friend" to her. However, she also notes that
he began rejecting her anti-Soviet contributions to The New Statesman after the outbreak of
the war because he believed that it was important for Britain to cultivate good relations with

40Odyssey of a Liberal, p.184.

41Indeed Freda Utley appears to be one of the very few British women journalists in the 1930s to report from
the front lines of a conflict in progress. Another rare instance of this occurring was when Clare Hollingworth,
who had worked and written for the LNU earlier in the 1930s, found herself reporting to the Daily Telegraph
from the Polish border with Germany as the invasion was underway on September 1st, 1939. (See Selba,
pp.121-124. See also Clare Hollingworth. Front Line, (1990) p.15.) Among the very few American women
journalists (besides Agnes Smedley) also engaged in such activity in this period was Martha Gellhorn, whose
extensive front line experience began with reports from Spain on the Civil War for Collier's Magazine. (See Selba)


pp.41-42.
the Soviet Union at that point. Increasingly unhappy in Britain and now finding it difficult to publish, Utley emigrated to the United States late in 1939.44

While Utley herself had apparently had seen no reasons, ideological or otherwise, to forego the opportunities offered to her by Kingsley Martin (as long as they lasted), Elizabeth Wiskemann, on the other hand, had clearly found sufficient reason to be concerned about The New Statesman's foreign policy perspectives and eventually to distance herself from this publication. As she herself was aware, this was not an uncommon situation for foreign correspondents of either sex in this period. In The Europe I Saw, Wiskemann points to the experiences of her former colleague in Berlin, Norman Ebbutt, who faced restrictions from his employer, The Times, and also to the similar experiences of Lina Waterfield, the longtime correspondent in Italy for The Observer. Of Waterfield's relationship with this weekly, Wiskemann states. "...she encountered growing obstruction in London from her editor, J.L. Garvin, who became a leading appeaser."45

The Observer was owned in the 1930s by Viscount Astor, the husband of Nancy Astor, and its circulation in the mid-1930s was around 210,000.46 J.L. Garvin had become the editor in 1908 and had been a noted supporter of David Lloyd George's war policy during World War I. After the war, in which his son was killed, Garvin became an exponent of revision of the Treaty of Versailles out of his concern that its terms would lead to another

44 Odyssey of a Liberal, p.220. After the war, Utley became a committed participant in anti-communist activity in the United States, at one point working with Senator Joseph McCarthy.

45 Wiskemann, The Europe I Saw, p.175.

conflict. He greatly feared British involvement in another European war and, in the 1930s, his particular fear of an air war led him to become a vocal champion of British rearmament. Recognizing the danger of Nazi Germany, Garvin began by supporting British solidarity with France and by criticising conciliatory attitudes towards German ambitions in Eastern Europe. After 1935, however, his perceptions of the Western powers' unwillingness to unite against German aggression and of Britain's weakness served to shift his views to support for appeasement. Given his fears of Nazi Germany, he was not enthusiastic about taking an explicitly anti-Fascist line in *The Observer* on Mussolini and Italian policy. As a result, he came to an impasse in 1936 with Lina Waterfield, who had served as the weekly's Italian correspondent for the past fourteen years.

Lina Waterfield, the grand-daughter of Sir Alexander Duff Gordon, had been born in England in 1874 and convent-educated in England and Paris. She spent some time in her teens living with an aunt in Italy, near Florence. Having married the artist Aubrey Waterfield in 1902, Lina Waterfield stayed with her aunt in Italy during World War I, while her husband was in the armed services. She and her husband returned to Italy together in the 1920s to settle. In the fall of 1921, Garvin visited Italy while on his honeymoon and met Waterfield. After a social lunch, during which Garvin pressed her with numerous questions about Italian politics, she was surprised, as someone with no experience in journalism, to receive a letter

---


*See Lina Waterfield, *Castle in Italy*, (1961).*
asking her to be *The Observer's* Italian correspondent.\textsuperscript{49} The fact that she lived in a remote castle at a considerable distance from Rome also made her an unusual choice, but her social connections in Italy were valuable, making it possible for her to get an interview with Mussolini whenever she wanted.\textsuperscript{50}

In the years that followed, Waterfield wrote on Italian politics for *The Observer*, struggling with the constraints of Italian censorship which meant that articles "had to be tempered and written as best one could...." At the same time, she kept up an extensive and candid personal correspondence with Garvin in which she felt able to write "the truth."\textsuperscript{51} Waterfield herself was strongly anti-fascist, and she and Garvin maintained a running disagreement on the tone of her contributions and the editorial position of the journal. For some time, their differences did not disturb what became a close friendship.

In 1934, however, Waterfield passed on rumours she had heard of war with Abyssinia - which Garvin proceeded to brush aside.\textsuperscript{52} After the Italian invasion of that country, Waterfield and Garvin began to drift apart. In her memoirs, Waterfield states that, by the time of the Hoare-Laval pact, "[their] opinions had diverged on fundamental issues" - "[she] interpreted Mussolini's actions and intentions as detrimental to the future of Italy, while Garvin was optimistic and trusted in Mussolini's peaceful intentions."\textsuperscript{53} As a result, Garvin decided that Waterfield would no longer write for *The Observer*, telling her that her politics

\begin{footnotes}
\item[49] Ibid., p.179.
\item[51] Castle in Italy., pp.244-5.
\item[52] Ibid., p.240.
\item[53] Ibid., pp.244-245.
\end{footnotes}
were "early Victorian." To Lina Waterfield's regret, this meant the end of her friendship with someone she described as a "remarkable man."55

Lina Waterfield was not the only woman writer for The Observer to find herself with irreconcilable differences of opinion with the journal's editor on international affairs. Sheila Grant Duff, fresh from Oxford in the early 1930s and eager to immerse herself in current events on the continent, had an on-again, off-again connection with The Observer from 1935 until 1937 - at which time she resigned over Garvin's editorial line.

Sheila Grant Duff, born in 1913 and raised in privileged circumstances, came up to Lady Margaret Hall, at Oxford, in 1931. In the next few years, she developed close relationships with Goronwy Rees and Adam von Trott, and also became good friends with the philosopher Isaiah Berlin.56 For her degree, Grant Duff decided on the program of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, which she later suspected encouraged her in her subsequent career since it was "almost like a preliminary course in political journalism."57 During vacation periods, she and her friends travelled in Europe and even made a spur-of-the-moment visit to the Soviet Union in 1932. The latter trip did little to disillusion Grant Duff from the left-wing sympathies and admiration for the Soviet system which she had developed at Oxford, while her trips to Central Europe brought her into contact with the

---

54Ibid.

55It also meant the end of the private correspondence from Waterfield to Garvin which had provided him with a steady flow of information on Italian politics - whether he had liked what she had told him or not.

56Rees became Assistant Editor for The Spectator later in the 1930s; Adam von Trott, attending Oxford in the early 1930s as a Rhodes scholar from Germany, was subsequently attached to the German Foreign Office, and was eventually executed in 1944 for his involvement in the attempted assassination of Hitler in the July plot.

violence and tensions associated with the rise of Naziism.  

By her final year at Oxford in 1934, Grant Duff had wearied of what increasingly seemed like "a useless life in [the] ivory tower" while great and tragic events were taking place in the "real" world. She was advised by Arnold Toynbee, upon asking his advice on how she could help "prevent war," that the best thing for her to do was to "study the possible causes on the spot" by becoming a foreign correspondent for a major publication. However, when she approached The Times with a request to work as an assistant in the Paris office, Grant Duff was told by the Foreign Editor that "...it was quite impossible for a woman to work on the editorial side of the newspaper since it meant night work alongside men...", but that she was welcome to send them fashion notes from Paris. Not surprisingly, this offer did not appeal to Grant Duff, so she went to Paris on her own accord and managed to get work as an unpaid assistant to Edgar Mower, of the Chicago Daily News.

In January of 1935, Sheila Grant Duff was in the Saar region and, through somewhat roundabout means, succeeded in getting a chance to report on the plebiscite for The Observer, despite the fact that she had not yet written anything for a newspaper or journal and was completely unknown to The Observer's staff and management. With her new credentials, she inevitably met the other major British journalists in the Saar at that time, including Vernon Bartlett, Kingsley Martin, Alexander Werth, Frederick Voigt, and

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*
Elizabeth Wiskemann. At the time of the plebiscite, Grant Duff's copy served as the lead story for *The Observer*. Following the plebiscite, when most journalistic interest in the region faded quickly, she was given some leeway - because she was costing the journal almost nothing as a freelance correspondent who was paying her own way - to continue to use the journal to appeal on behalf of the anti-Nazi minority which remained in the Saar.

Following Grant Duff's time in the Saar, Hugh Massingham, the Foreign Editor of *The Observer*, suggested that she go to Warsaw or Prague, where the journal had no correspondents. More interested at this stage in understanding French and German attitudes, and less interested in simply any offer to "report news," Sheila Grant Duff decided to return to Paris to work with Mowrer. At one point she asked to go to Russia on behalf of *The Observer* but was refused by Massingham, who clearly found this suggestion much too daring for a woman. "I really must say how profoundly I disapprove of this desire to go into journalism," he remarked. "It is no life for a nice person."

In the fall of 1935, Grant Duff returned to England and worked for the Labour Party both during the General Election and after, at which time she served as secretary to the Labour spokesperson on foreign affairs, Hugh Dalton. Ultimately dissatisfied with this work, she approached Massingham in June of 1936 to take him up on his earlier suggestion that she go to Czechoslovakia for *The Observer* - a proposal to which he and Garvin agreed.

---

61 *Ibid.*, pp.77-79. There is little to indicate that Sheila Grant Duff and Elizabeth Wiskemann were more than acquaintances. Wiskemann was already fairly well-established as a journalist at this point and may have been a somewhat intimidating figure to Grant Duff.


Arriving in Prague, Grant Duff found she was the only resident British correspondent there. The arrangement with The Observer was again one in which she had no expense account, but was paid only for the cost of communication and the space her contributions filled in the journal. Unfortunately, it proved somewhat difficult to get her pieces published: two articles on the Sudeten districts - on Benes' conciliatory efforts and on the Henlein party - were refused as the journal began to take a strong pro-appeasement line regarding Hitler, and a critical line regarding Benes and Czech policy. One article that Grant Duff wrote on Czechoslovakian army manoeuvres was published under the title "Striking Power of the Czech Army." which, as she points out, made Czechoslovakia look like the aggressor. This circumstance served to make conditions difficult for her in Czechoslovakia, where her association with The Observer and its pro-German line made her suspect among many local officials and journalists.

Early in 1937. Grant Duff had a brief change of scene when she accepted an assignment from Edgar Mowrer to travel under the auspices of the Chicago Daily News to Malaga, now held by Franco, to investigate the treatment of Republican prisoners and, in particular, to get information about Arthur Koestler, a correspondent for the News Chronicle, who had been arrested as a Republican spy. The regular staff of the Chicago paper were too well-known for their pro-Republican positions. so Mowrer thought, "not altogether flattering" as Grant Duff states. that she might slip in unnoticed.

---

65 Ibid., p.127.
66 Ibid., p.138.
67 Ibid., pp.148-150.
Back in Prague in the spring, Sheila Grant Duff continued to write occasional articles for *The Observer*, but was increasingly disturbed by its editorial position. Finally, an article by Garvin in May on British policy and the European situation provoked her to resign. Unlike the break with Lina Waterfield, however, which signalled the rupturing of a friendship as well as a working relationship, it does not appear that Sheila Grant Duff's decision touched Garvin very deeply: throughout her occasional association with *The Observer*, there was little to no contact between them, and Garvin's response to Grant Duff's three-page letter of resignation (in which she took him to task for his views on Czechoslovakia) was polite but brief and, in Grant Duff's opinion, signed with a rubber stamp.68

Like many of the other women writers discussed in this chapter, Sheila Grant Duff was fortunate in finding more than one publishing venue for her work. When writing for *The Observer* became increasingly problematic, she was able to publish a pamphlet in 1937 for the New Fabian Research Bureau entitled *German and Czech*, and was also able to establish a foothold at another of Britain's most significant weeklies in the 1930s - *The Spectator*. These factors undoubtedly played a role in her being asked to write a book in 1938 for the "Penguin Special" series, entitled *Europe and the Czechs*.

Benny Morris describes *The Spectator*, established in 1828 and therefore "the oldest of the serious weeklies of the 1930s" - with a circulation growing from around 19,000 in 1933 to around 25,000 by 1939 - as "[embodying] the liberal Nonconformist conscience of

---

Britain. The editor in the 1930s, Henry Wilson Harris, a Quaker and a Liberal, generally controlled the journal's policies, with some occasionally considerable influence exercised by the two major proprietors at this time—Sir J. Angus Watson and Sir John Evelyn Wrench. While the views of these three men were not identical, under their direction The Spectator's position on international affairs in the 1930s was as follows: strongly pro-League short of military sanctions until 1935-36; committed to solid British relations with the United States and the Commonwealth; sympathetic to revision of the Treaty of Versailles; extremely anti-Communist; strongly anti-war; and firmly pro- appeasement as late as March 1939. Wrench was a Germanophile, and this attitude often found its way into the journal in the 1930s, especially between 1933 and 1937. Wilson Harris, although a strong supporter of appeasement, was less enthusiastic and more critical of Nazi Germany, and his assistant editor after February 1936, Goronwy Rees, was a consistent and strong critic of Nazi Germany.

Although Sheila Grant Duff never elaborates on the specifics of her connection with The Spectator, it is likely, given her close relationship with Rees in the first half of the 1930s, that the editor played some role in opening up this opportunity for Grant Duff. As was frequently the case with articles from the journal's foreign correspondents, almost all of Grant Duff's pieces were unsigned. However, given the references in her memoir to specific articles in The Spectator, the fact that she was one of the only British correspondents in

---

69Morris, pp. 11, 183.
70Ibid.
72Ibid., p. 15.
Czechoslovakia until the crisis neared in 1938, and the similarity in tone and viewpoint of the journal's articles from their "Czechoslovakian correspondent" from 1936 to 1939, Grant Duff's authorship of approximately a dozen articles (and possibly more) is reasonably certain.

In her articles for *The Spectator*, Grant Duff was able to write material supportive of the Czechoslovak government that *The Observer* had been reluctant to publish. She continually argued against the notion that the Sudeten Germans were an abused minority without rights. In her only signed article in 1938, Grant Duff wrote about the state of Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Austrian Anschluss with Germany and its greatly deteriorating political situation. She ended by stating: "With Czechoslovakia will go down the last resistance to German aggression in Central Europe. What will happen when Germany can spare all her troops for the Western front, all her bombers for Paris and London?"

Not surprisingly, Grant Duff saw in the Munich agreement the British government's complete abandonment of principle and of traditional British interest in supporting a balance of power.

While it appears that Sheila Grant Duff was the most frequent woman contributor on international affairs to *The Spectator* in the later 1930s, she was not completely alone. In many issues of *The Spectator* in these years, women's writings were certainly rare, especially on foreign policy, but Grant Duff's offerings were joined by a few articles from Elizabeth Monroe, who wrote from North Africa, and Dr. Hilda Ormsby, who also wrote on Czechoslovakia.

---


slovakia.\textsuperscript{76} In addition, \textit{The Spectator} frequently offered the regular column "Marginal Notes" to the novelist Rose Macaulay in 1936 and 1937, in which she often took the opportunity to air her pacifist views. In the spring of 1939, the familiar name of Elizabeth Wiskemann appeared with four articles in March and April: she apparently also found a refuge in \textit{The Spectator} after becoming unhappy with \textit{The New Statesman}.\textsuperscript{77}

The three weeklies whose main women contributors have been discussed thus far - \textit{The New Statesman}, \textit{The Observer}, and \textit{The Spectator} - were among the most respected publications of the British press in this period and their proprietors and editors were themselves men of considerable influence and power. In continuing this discussion of women's presence in the weekly press on the subject of international affairs, I would now like to turn to those publications in which women themselves exercised partial, or even total, control.

It is not uncommon to find such weeklies among those directed at particular segments of either end of the political spectrum, or geared towards specific causes or issues relating to international affairs. On the left, there was \textit{Tribune} - a weekly launched in 1937 by four Labour MPs - Aneurin Bevan, Sir Stafford Cripps, George Strauss, and Ellen Wilkinson. With a circulation that reached about 25,000 by 1939, \textit{Tribune} was primarily directed at members of the Labour Party and explicitly engaged in arguing on behalf of Republican


Spain and in promoting a campaign to unify all anti-fascist, anti-appeasement political forces in Britain. The journal's policy was determined by these four MPs and the editor at weekly meetings.  

Ellen Wilkinson's association with Tribune lasted through 1937 and 1938. The culmination of a conflict between the Labour supporters of the Unity Campaign and the Labour party leadership in 1939 led her to end her work for the journal and side loyally with the latter forces. During her time with Tribune, Wilkinson contributed to both editorial decisions and its pages. This latter contribution specifically took the form of articles on Spain that vehemently criticised non-intervention and promoted such aid campaigns as the Milk Token Fund. As a female contributor to Tribune, Wilkinson was joined by a number of other prominent women writers on the left, including Storm Jameson, Winnifred Horrabin, Frida Laski, Marjorie Pollitt, Winnifred Davies, Agnes Dollan, Sybil Wingate, and Dorothy Woodman.

In the case of Tribune, Ellen Wilkinson's influence was likely significant, but also ultimately limited by the inevitable circumstances of compromise inherent in a group effort. It is also highly probable that Cripps and Strauss (especially the former) played dominant roles as the main financial sources of the journal. To have real power over a publication, one needed to be sufficiently established in the world of journalism, through work experience and connections, to be invited by a proprietor to be editor-in-chief, or one needed to have the

---

78 Morris, p.46, 183.

79 See, for example - Tribune. 17 December 1937, pp.1, 11; 25 March 1938, p.9; 4 November 1938, p.13.

80 Morris noted that Cripps and Strauss "provided the bulk of the necessary capital." (p.46.)
resources to finance and produce a publication oneself. Not surprisingly, relatively few women were in either position in Britain in the 1930s. There were, however, some striking exceptions to the rule of male-owned and -run publications.

One of these was, like Tribune, also located on the left of the political spectrum and dedicated to a particular foreign policy cause. Its driving force was Sylvia Pankhurst - a woman whose surname was synonymous with women's activism and, in particular, the suffrage movement.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, Sylvia Pankhurst split from the militant suffragette movement led by her mother, Emmeline, and her sister, Christabel, and involved herself in the cause and concerns of working-class women in the East End of London. During the war, when Emmeline and Christabel became virulently patriotic supporters of the war, Sylvia chose to protest the war as a capitalist venture exploiting the working classes. After the war, she found herself on the far left of the political spectrum in post-war Britain. At this time she met a libertarian socialist from Italy, Sylvio Corio, and they settled down together and had a son in 1928.81

Both her partner's nationality and her own travels to Italy at various points in her life made Pankhurst especially interested in the fate of Italy under fascist rule. Her son, Richard, has noted that she inevitably rejected and despised fascism because of its opposition to a wide range of perspectives which she held dear, including "feminist, humanitarian,

democratic, socialist, pacifist and internationalist ideals." In the 1930s, watching the beginnings of Italy's fascist expansionism in the manufactured dispute with Abyssinia in 1934, Pankhurst took up the latter's cause, as a pacifist and an anti-fascist. Over the course of 1935 and early 1936, she wrote a barrage of letters to the press on behalf of Abyssinia; in April of 1936, fearing that the Italians would soon hold that country's capital and that Abyssinia would then be forgotten, she decided to start up a publication to keep Abyssinia in the public's eye. The title of the publication was *New Times and Ethiopia News.*

In its appearance, *New Times and Ethiopia News* was more like a newspaper than a journal but, like the publications previously discussed, it came out on a weekly basis. Pankhurst, with some assistance from Corio, edited the paper from their home in Essex. The circulation figures are uncertain: Richard Pankhurst notes that it "rapidly achieved a circulation of 10.000..." while the "Introduction" to the Sylvia Pankhurst collection states, possibly referring to a later date, a few years after the paper was first established, that "[it] reached a circulation of 40.000". The list of contributors to the paper was wide-ranging, including F.L. Lucas, Colonel Maurice Spencer, W. Arnold Foster, and Leslie Carruthers, and prominent Italian anti-fascists Angelo Crespi, Carlo Rosselli, G.E. Modigliani, and Gaetano Salvemini. Besides Pankhurst, there were a number of other women who also

---


83 Richard Pankhurst, pp.150-154. Sylvia Pankhurst preferred the use of the name Ethiopia to the more commonly used designation at that time of Abyssinia.


appeared in the pages of N.T. & E.N. - the two most frequent being Hazel Napier, of the Friends of Abyssinia League, and the notorious Nancy Cunard.

Cunard, the product of a highly privileged background and famous in the 1920s as a "bohemian," had already established a reputation as a poet and as a heated, if somewhat eccentric, champion of African and African-American culture and the rights of African-Americans. In 1936 Cunard became deeply engaged in the Spanish Civil War, and subsequently made a number of visits to Spain from 1936 to 1939, in which she regarded her most important role as that of a reporter writing for the Republican cause. She contributed interviews and articles to the N.T & E.N. which generally focused on Spain and drew attention to Italy's actions in that conflict.

The most frequently-heard voice in the paper was that of Sylvia Pankhurst herself. For the most part, she kept the focus of her writing specifically on fascism and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. In the first issue, the two slogans that ran at the top of the front page were: "Remember: Everywhere. Always. Fascism means War." and "We Stand for International Law and Justice." The following pages contained an interview by Pankhurst with a Captain Brophil, who had just returned from serving with the Ethiopian Medical Corps, and an article by Pankhurst entitled "Our Policy" which noted that "[the] cause of Ethiopia cannot be divided from the cause of International justice. which is permanent, and is

---


87After the fall of Barcelona in January of 1939, Cunard tried to return to Spain, getting only as far as the French border. From there she wrote an impressive series of articles on the tragic circumstances of refugees for the Manchester Guardian. (Chisholm. pp.309, 331-334.)

not to be determined by ephemeral military victories." She then went on to state, "'New Times' is opposed to the conception of dictatorship. It understands that fascism destroys all personal liberty and is in fundamental opposition to all forms of intellectual and moral progress."89

These basic messages were repeated in many different forms and at great length in the issues that followed. Besides her weekly editorials, Pankhurst frequently produced long serialised articles, such as "Fascism As It Is," which took almost fifty installments and ran to over 120,000 words.90 On a number of occasions, she directed her message specifically at women readers, appealing to them to both support another just cause as they had worked for the cause of women, and act as mothers in the best interest of their children to save them from growing up in a world of dictatorship.91

At the same time, as indicated by her interest in printing Nancy Cunard's pieces on Spain, Pankhurst did not limit herself to exposing fascist aggression in Abyssinia. At the beginning of August, 1936, she made a direct connection between events in Abyssinia and events in Spain, stating that "[we] are now in the world war of Fascism against Democracy."92 At the end of that month, she argued that it was a breach of international law to refuse the Spanish Government the right to buy "material which might be useful in

---

89N.T & E.N., 9 May 1936.

90Richard Pankhurst remembers his mother working at her desk all night at least once a week, writing her material out by hand. (Richard Pankhurst, p.157.)


92"The Fascist World War - Ethiopia and Spain." N.T. & E.N., 1 August 1936, pp.4-5.
maintaining order". Pankhurst continued to link the causes of Abyssinia and Spain, and subsequently also brought China's cause into the pages of her paper following the renewal of Japanese aggression in the Far East. Nazi Germany was naturally also included in Pankhurst's indictments of militaristic dictatorships, and she viewed the growing links between Italy and Germany with great alarm. During the Munich crisis, the paper carried the banner headlines: "Stand By Czechoslovakia - Peace Can Only Rest on Justice and Respect to Treaties - Further Concessions to Dictators will Destroy Us All."

Not surprisingly, Sylvia Pankhurst took a dim view of the foreign policy of the British government in these later years of the 1930s. In the spring of 1936, she attempted to remind Baldwin of his repeated promises "to make fidelity to the League the guiding policy of his Government." On the government's subsequent failure to support the League, Pankhurst speculated that the Baldwin Government was either a convert to Fascism or afraid of the Fascist Dictators. An even more bluntly phrased accusation along these lines was thrown at Neville Chamberlain in 1938 following the Anglo-Italian agreement, when Pankhurst stated, "The mask is off! Mr. Chamberlain has revealed himself as a supporter of

---


94 A supplement entitled "China News" first appeared in *N.T. & E.N.* in the 25 September 1937 issue, with the expressed purpose noted as: "Truthfully to inform the British public of the conditions of China during the Japanese invasion: To assist in defending not only the Independence of China, but also, to the utmost possibility, for the sake of common Humanity, the lives of her people."


96 Richard Pankhurst, p.163.


Fascist theory and practice." Inevitably, most of the Conservative Party was condemned alongside the leadership - with a few, occasional exceptions. Pankhurst clearly had difficulty deciding what to make of Winston Churchill. In October 1936, she found herself in reluctant agreement with her long-time political foe over his warnings about the dangers of a British alliance with Nazi Germany. Early in 1937, she identified him as a convert to the Ethiopian cause in his recent rejection of the possibility of dealing with any of the "totalitarian tyrannies." A few months later, however, Pankhurst noted that she and Churchill were back on opposite sides again after Churchill's "proposal" of a "four-power dictatorship" in Spain. The following spring, Pankhurst gave her approval to another rebel Tory - the Duchess of Atholl - whom she applauded for her "courage and independence" in publicly supporting the Spanish Government.

While Sylvia Pankhurst was busy in the later 1930s keeping up a barrage of criticism against the government from the left, another weekly publication owned and run by a woman was engaged in similar activity in the first half of the 1930s - from a perspective on the far right of the political spectrum. In 1933, a rather staid and quietly Conservative journal of political, artistic, and literary commentary, the Saturday Review, was purchased by the highly eccentric and colourful Lady Lucy Houston - who then proceeded to turn her new possession

100 "Plain Truths." N.T. & E.N., 24 October 1936, p.4.
103 N.T. & E.N., 4 June 1938, p.5.
into a wildly outspoken forum favouring an extreme form of patriotism, admiration for the muscular fascist dictatorships, and absolute abhorrence of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union.  

In attempting to distill a few reliable fragments of information about the life and career of Lady Lucy Houston from the sycophantic biography written by her editor at the *Saturday Review*, J. Wentworth Day, one has to wade through numerous anecdotes illustrating her stunning beauty (in her fifties, sixties, and seventies, she always looked twenty years younger), her sparkling wit, her lion-like courage, and her amazing foresight which would save Britain and, indeed, the Western World during World War II. An outline that emerges that may be near the truth is that of a woman born in the late 1850s to a London box manufacturer, who successfully attached herself to a series of men who, in turn, made her increasingly wealthy and offered her opportunities for entrée into the upper levels of British society. Her last husband, who she married in her sixties in 1924, was Sir Robert Paterson Houston, a wealthy ship-owner, who died in 1926.

Lady Houston apparently had a longstanding fascination with the world of publishing and journalism, and financed a few ventures besides the *Saturday Review* which also

104 Benny Morris states that the *Saturday Review* was purchased by Lady Houston in 1930, but both the highly visible dramatic change in the journal from March to April of 1933 and the course of events described in the biography of Lady Houston by her editor, J. Wentworth Day, support a 1933 purchase date. (With regards to the biography by Wentworth Day, although it is clearly a questionable source in many respects because of its extreme bias in Lady Houston's favour, there is little reason in this instance to question the author's version of when the journal was purchased.) (See Morris, p.44; J. Wentworth Day, *Lady Houston, D.B.E.*, (1958), Chapter XI.)

105 This last accolade is meant to refer specifically to Lady Houston's financing in the early 1930s of the development of the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine for aircraft which later became the Spitfire fighters used in the Battle of Britain.

106 Wentworth Day, Chapter 3.
reflected her extreme right-wing views, including Boswell Publishing and a magazine called *The Patriot*. After spending 1931 and 1932 engaged in a highly vocal public campaign in pamphlets and letters to the press, in which she condemned Ramsay MacDonald as a traitor and roared against the Soviet threat, the poor state of British defences, and the shameful abandonment of Empire in India. Houston seized the opportunity to buy the flagging *Saturday Review*.<sup>107</sup>

The journal's transformation could hardly have been more startling if it had become an organ of the left. From a publication reflecting mainstream Conservative political views presented in a typically plain and "tasteful" format, the *Saturday Review*, under Lady Houston's personal supervision, was turned into (as Wentworth Day states with pride) "a flamboyant, hard-hitting, hoydenish termagent... [which] bristled with home truths."<sup>108</sup> In appearance, it gloried in a new red, white, and blue cover with illustrations of a proudly waving Union Jack and a forlornly drooping Red Flag. In the interests of insuring that meaning and intention were thoroughly clear, the magazine now provided the reader with the additional benefit of frequent interjections of blocks of text in upper case type and/or in bright red ink, and generous quantities of exclamation points.

The contents of the journal, so strikingly presented, continued along lines similar to arguments Lady Houston had previously made elsewhere. Vociferous demands for large-scale rearmament appeared as a consistent, central theme. In her first month, she attacked the

---

<sup>107</sup>Benny Morris includes the *Saturday Review* in his discussion of British weeklies but it is, unfortunately, the only weekly for which he has no circulation figures or estimates. J. Wentworth Day states that the journal went from a circulation of under 3,000 to over 60,000 under Lady Houston but this figure cannot, as yet, be confirmed. (Wentworth Day, p.165.)

<sup>108</sup>Wentworth Day. p.165.
government under MacDonald as a set of "Die Softs" willing to do business with the "murderers and thieves" of the Soviet Union, and she condemned "Internationalism" (which covered, among other things, the activities of peace movements and the League of Nations) as "...an excuse for everything that is underhand and tricky that works against the nation." When MacDonald was no longer available as a target, and when Stanley Baldwin provided insufficient inspiration, she shifted much of her wrath to Anthony Eden, who was lambasted in the pages of the Saturday Review as completely ineffectual and a tool of the Soviets - judgements which were often explicitly linked to a perception of Eden as effeminate.

With regard to the right-wing, expansionist dictatorships around the world, Lady Houston used both Germany and Japan as reasons why Britain should be strong itself, but she also clearly indicated her admiration for their actions and strength. In February of 1934, she published an article entitled "Why Blame Japan? The Island Empire of the East," in which she stated, "Who can blame Japan if with the courage and fearlessness which once was ours she lights the torch of civilisation and Empire which our cowards in high places have dropped for sheer funk and ineptitude." Regarding Germany, she frequently expressed admiration for Hitler as a great leader who had lifted his country out of defeat and humiliation and made Germany "the greatest military power in the world." and praised him as a bulwark against Bolshevism.

Lady Houston's greatest praise, however, was reserved for Mussolini, on whom she

---

109Lady Houston in the Saturday Review - 1 April 1933, p.309; 15 April 1933, p.362.

110Lady Houston in the Saturday Review, 17 February 1934, p.175.

111Lady Houston in the Saturday Review, 14 March 1936.
showered compliments and congratulatory phrases. On two separate occasions in the Saturday Review she printed copies of telegrams she had sent to Mussolini in admiration. In August 1935, the printed text of one of these messages read: "English patriots present their homage to Mussolini the greatest patriot in the World - for his aim for Italy is to build up and achieve - while the British politician's aim is to drag down and destroy the British Empire. English patriots hope Mussolini will stand fast and damn the League of Nations - which only exists to enable Russian Bolshevism to destroy civilisation...."112 Not surprisingly, the Saturday Review was sharply critical of any suggestion of sanctions against Italy over Abyssinia.

While she was in charge of the Saturday Review, Lady Houston was also quite willing to print like-minded reflections on foreign policy written by women. Among these particular contributors were Nesta Webster (a prolific anti-Semitic author in the interwar period), Dorothy Crisp, and Marjorie Mackrill. But by far the most frequent female contributor to the Saturday Review (besides Lady Houston herself) was Meriel Buchanan, the daughter of Sir George Buchanan, the former Ambassador to the Soviet Union. In her opinions and language, Buchanan could match, and even outdo, Lady Houston. In one article on Eden, Buchanan managed to refer to him as "Litvinoff's mouthpiece" seven times on one page.113 She also espoused anti-Semitism (which Lady Houston did not especially appear to support), possibly because of her particular enthusiasm for Hitler - of whom Buchanan once stated,

---

112 Saturday Review, 31 August 1935. p.113. See also the Saturday Review of 9 May 1936 for the text of another telegram, praising Mussolini for his "victory" in Abyssinia. According to Wentworth Day, Lady Houston was so enamored of Mussolini that she named her pet dog "Benito" in his honour. (Wentworth Day, p.86.)

"...by his courage and determination he saved Europe from the spread of Bolshevik insurrection."\(^{114}\)

Lady Houston's energetic and alarming venture in journalism with the *Saturday Review* ended with her death at the end of December 1936. The first two issues of 1937 continued in the format she had established - one having been put together before her death, and the other a collection of tributes from her staff. By the January 16th issue, the journal had reverted to the staider tones of its former self, both in format and in content. It was back in the mainstream of Conservatism, expressing support for the National Government and even praising Eden. Of its former proprietor, the journal stated diplomatically, "Lady Houston may have at times lacked judgement - who does not? - but she was a great Englishwoman, impervious in life, as now in death, to the sneers of little men."\(^{115}\) Benny Morris notes that the *Saturday Review* only survived until April 1938, largely because of the irreparable damage done to the journal's reputation by Lucy Houston.\(^{116}\)

If both Lady Houston's *Saturday Review* and Sylvia Pankhurst's *New Times and Ethiopia News* can be designated as existing somewhat on the margins of mainstream publishing, one can close this discussion of women "press barons" in the world of foreign policy debate in the 1930s with an example which takes us firmly back into the mainstream. Owned and controlled by Viscountess Rhondda (Margaret Haig Thomas Mackworth), *Time*


\(^{115}\) *Saturday Review*. 16 January 1937, p.50.

\(^{116}\)Morris, p.46.
and Tide was not yet very old but had nonetheless established itself as a widely respected and significant forum of intellectual discourse.

Margaret Rhondda was born in 1883, the daughter of Sybil Haig (of the same prominent Scottish family as the World War I General Sir Douglas Haig) and David Alfred Thomas, the son of a Welsh grocer. D.A. Thomas, although keenly interested in politics, was most successful as a businessman, amassing a large fortune in the Welsh coal mining industry. Thus Margaret grew up in highly privileged surroundings in Wales and London, but also under a somewhat unusual combination of circumstances in which her father clearly expressed his disappointment at not having a son, but nonetheless had more contact with his daughter than was typical and encouraged her to think independently and become well-read. After receiving an unusually good education in her 'teens at a Scottish school for girls - St. Leonard's - she subsequently took the familiar route of having a London Season (which she found to be a miserable experience) and, after a brief stint at Somerville College at Oxford, married Humphrey Mackworth, the son of a close Welsh neighbor.117

Margaret Mackworth felt bored and trapped in her marriage. A solution to both of these problems was found in the sisterhood and excitement offered by the militant suffrage movement led by the Pankhursts. Ultimately uncomfortable with the side of the movement which encouraged the destruction of property, she nonetheless developed a broad base of knowledge about women's status in Britain and gained much personal confidence from her experiences.118 This latter factor proved especially useful when, shortly before the outbreak

---

117This brief biographical summary of Lady Rhondda's early years is based on material found in Shirley M. Eoff, Viscountess Rhondda. Equalitarian Feminist, (1991), Chapter 1.

118Eoff. Chapter 2.
of World War I, her father asked her to become his personal assistant and secretary - a highly unusual move in that it implied that she was to learn the business as would a male heir.\textsuperscript{119}

During the war, Rhondda's father was given a baronetcy for his efforts in arranging munitions purchases from the United States, and was then made the food minister in 1917 - at which point his daughter's role in his business became even greater. She also became deeply involved in organizing women's war work. Then, shortly before his death in 1918, her father was elevated to a viscountcy, with a special provision that the title would be passed on to his female heir.\textsuperscript{120} Thus Margaret Haig Thomas Mackworth subsequently became Viscountess Rhondda.\textsuperscript{121}

After the war, Lady Rhondda continued her participation in the world of business, now as the inheritor of a considerable fortune and a wide range of companies and financial interests. However, although it was important to her to perform well in this field, especially to disprove male skeptics, business was not her main enthusiasm and she would often sacrifice financial interests for the sake of other concerns.\textsuperscript{122} Her central interest in the 1920s lay in encouraging the cause of egalitarian feminism. Her first venture was to form the Women's Industrial League, a non-party pressure group of women's industrial workers. In 1921, she acted as one of the founding members of the Six Point Group. She also took on the fight to gain women's entrance into the House of Lords. However, the initiative which was to

\textsuperscript{119}\textit{Ibid.}, pp.34-35.

\textsuperscript{120}\textit{Ibid.}, p.49.

\textsuperscript{121}She would divorce Humphrey Mackworth a few years after the end of the war.

\textsuperscript{122}\textit{Ibid.}, Chapter 4.
dominate her life and public career (and consume most of her wealth) in the following decades was the journal she launched in 1920 - *Time and Tide*.

The impetus for *Time and Tide* was the perceived need for a non-party publication controlled and run by women which would provide a forum for discussions of women's rights and concerns. It was meant not only to make a case to society at large for various advances or initiatives but also, as Shirley Eoff points out, to act as a means of consciousness-raising for women themselves - to convince women of their own worth and to educate them on relevant legal, political, social, and economic issues.¹²³ At the same time, it was not to be solely a platform for feminism but also a publication that would hopefully have a broad appeal among the usual readership for the serious political and literary weeklies of the period.

Throughout the 1920s, the journal was supported by a number of the period's best-known women writers and activists, as staff and as contributors.¹²⁴ Some of these women were veterans of the women's movement and the suffrage battle, including Elizabeth Robins, Rebecca West, Cicely Hamilton, Helena Swanwick, and Chrystal Eastman. There were also faces of a new generation of feminists, including Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain. Other established literary figures writing for *Time and Tide* in the 1920s included Rose Macaulay, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Delafield, and Naomi Mitchison.¹²⁵ For the first six years, the journal's editor was Helen Archdale, a noted feminist with left-wing sympathies. In 1926, Lady

¹²³Ibid., p.121.

¹²⁴Eoff note that *Time and Tide* indeed had a women-only staff until as late as the mid-1930s. (Ibid., p.125.) There were, however, male contributors to the journal throughout the interwar period. Among these supporters in the early years were George Bernard Shaw, G.K. Chesterton, and Gilbert Murray. (Ibid., p.121.)

¹²⁵For a picture of *Time and Tide* in the 1920s, including brief profiles of these women and a selection of excerpts from the journal on various key themes in this period, see Dale Spender's *Time and Tide Wait For No Man* (1984).
Rhondda took over this role herself and, in consequence, the journal took over her life. She would serve as editor until her death in 1958 and was continually engaged in the battle to keep *Time and Tide* afloat financially and to secure and maintain its reputation as one of Britain's major weeklies. As she herself pointed out, this was not an easy task for a woman editor in this period. In letters to Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West in the 1930s, Rhondda noted the extent to which women editors were outsiders in the world of journalism, which showed in their exclusion from the usual avenues of gossip and the fact that it was much more difficult for them to secure advertising revenue and subsidies.\textsuperscript{126}

In spite of these handicaps, Lady Rhondda appears to have been successful in establishing *Time and Tide* during this decade. Circulation figures throughout the period are a bit uncertain, but one estimate suggests that they reached around 20,000 by 1939.\textsuperscript{127} However, as Eoff notes, this success has generally not translated into historical attention to the journal, partly because of opposing perceptions of *Time and Tide* which, ironically, have both resulted in its being dismissed. Some of those aware of the journal's feminist origins in the 1920s have categorised it as a "feminist polemic" and therefore not likely to be significant in a broader context, while feminists identifying a "decline" in the journal from an outspoken, progressive voice to a standard literary review in the 1930s view this development as sufficient reason to talk only of the early years.\textsuperscript{128}

These comments serve to draw attention to the interesting question of what happened

\textsuperscript{126}Margaret Rhondda to Virginia Woolf. 6 February 1938; MR to Rebecca West, 1 June 1931 - Eoff, p.57.

\textsuperscript{127}Morris, Appendix. p.183. Eoff points to a lack of subscription lists and records, but notes that *Time and Tide* increased to about 30,000 copies per week during World War II. (Eoff, pp.128, 136.)

\textsuperscript{128}Eoff, Preface. pp.vii-viii.
to *Time and Tide* from the late 1920s into the 1930s. If one looks at one of the few discussions of the journal in the 1930s, in Morris' *The Roots of Appeasement*, one is struck by the fact that there is no reference to it as a feminist publication. For Morris, *Time and Tide* is simply one of a collection of serious weeklies which, given an explicit interest in discussing important political issues of the day, inevitably focused considerable attention on foreign policy and the international crises of the decade. If one then takes a quick glance through the issues of the 1930s, this assessment of the journal's focus in these years appears to be largely accurate.

This does not mean that *Time and Tide* was suddenly devoid of feminist content or perspectives in the 1930s or that Lady Rhondda's belief in the justice of feminist causes had somehow vanished. In April of 1936, she published a column on an equal pay initiative introduced in the House of Commons by Ellen Wilkinson in which she noted that "[to] pay a woman less for admittedly equal and interchangeable work done side by side with men, for no other reason than that she is a woman, is a denial of the equality that in other spheres the law has granted." At the same time, she was sharply critical of the only two women MPs to vote against the amendment, the Duchess of Atholl and Eleanor Rathbone, but especially of the latter, whose different feminist perspective on the initiative almost appeared to be more offensive to Rhondda than Atholl's proud assertion of her anti-suffrage history.\(^\text{130}\)

\(^{129}\)This is somewhat surprising, given that Morris does refer briefly to Rhondda's militant suffragette activities prior to World War I. However, he makes no connection to Rhondda's feminism and the founding of *Time and Tide* in the 1920s. (Morris, p.21.)

\(^{130}\)"A Constitutional Issue." *Time and Tide*. 11 April 1936, p.517. Eleanor Rathbone voted against the amendment because it did not include any provision for what Rhondda referred to as Rathbone's "pet scheme" of family allowances. Of this concern, Rhondda then stated, "[the] idea that women's claim for equal status must somehow by mixed up with social reform dies hard. It has always been used as a kind of pious blackmail on the women." (Ibid.)
Throughout the 1930s, Rhondda also kept up a running criticism of the typical middle class wife and the societal expectations which prevented her from breaking out of her respectable leisure. Rhondda argued that middle class married women should not be prevented from working outside the home and that men should share equally in domestic tasks, and that it was important for married people to be seen as individuals independent of one another. Other favoured *Time and Tide* contributors were also occasionally allowed to interject feminist content into the journal's pages. In May of 1935, Winifred Holtby reflected on the Royal Jubilee celebrations and drew attention to the many achievements of the women's movement over the previous twenty-five years. In 1938, Cicely Hamilton used the journal to press for reform of the Abortion Law in Britain.

However, it is also clear that discussion of issues of special concern to women decreased dramatically from the late 1920s into the 1930s. Eoff notes that Rhondda went through the journal and removed references to women's names and "special interests" - a process which was seen as regrettable but necessary for the journal's survival as a viable mainstream publication. In 1937, *Time and Tide* was criticised in a letter from Monica Whately, of the Six Point Group, for not discussing a recent international conference in Geneva on the "Status of Women."

---


133 Cicely Hamilton, "Aleck Bourne's Contribution to History," *Time and Tide*, 23 July 1938, pp.1046-1047. In this piece, Hamilton's case centred around the contemporary story of a doctor who was on trial for trying to perform safe medical abortions.

134 Eoff, p.133.

The reason for this shift in content and approach, which began only a few years after Lady Rhondda became editor, had much to do with her response to the achievement of equal suffrage in 1928, when the franchise was extended to women on the same basis as men. With this achievement, she took the view that the "real task of feminism" was to "wipe out the overemphasis on sex that is the fruit of the age-long subjection of women. The individual must stand out without trappings as a human being."\textsuperscript{136} Making a success of a journal run by women was seen as an important step in a feminist effort to break down professional barriers and disprove traditional gender stereotypes.\textsuperscript{137} By the same token, standing up for the validity of women's views on the full range of important contemporary issues by publishing their work was also now an important feminist goal in itself. Regarding debate on international affairs, Eoff notes that Lady Rhondda believed that involving women "...set another critical precedent for women's involvement in nontraditional spheres and clearly extended the feminist tradition."\textsuperscript{138} On one occasion in 1936, Lady Rhondda drew attention in an opinion page in \textit{Time and Tide} to women's frequent exclusion from the world of foreign affairs when she noted her response to a recent letter from a "well-known" male writer who had asked her why more "prominent women" were not engaged in the act of "moulding public opinion in the direction of righteousness on the war issue." Her answer to this correspondent was to ask him to reflect on how few women were in the Civil Service, the Foreign Office, the Diplomatic or Consular services, the House of Commons, the higher levels at Chatham

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Time and Tide}. 6 April 1928. p.328 - quoted in Eoff, p.132.

\textsuperscript{137} Eoff, p.132.

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.}, p.134.
House, and the ranks of the political leader writers of any of the daily newspapers. Lady Rhondda's own assessment was that the doors to these positions were still "barred tight against all but an insignificant minority." Of her own unusual situation, she asserted that she had "energy and some capacity." but then stated. "...I have no illusions. I know perfectly well that, being a woman, if I had not happened to have a famous - and rich - father, devoid of the usual inhibitions about using female material if it happened to come handy, I should never have been heard of outside my own locality at all."139

Given the opportunity before her, Margaret Rhondda proceeded to take *Time and Tide* into the mainstream of British weeklies and indeed made herself heard on foreign policy. Her views were greatly influenced by the liberal internationalism of Norman Angell. Beginning in May of 1931, Angell's *Foreign Affairs*, formerly associated with the UDC, was published as a four-page monthly supplement to *Time and Tide*. In the early 1930s, much emphasis was placed on disarmament by agreement. but there was also early recognition of the nature of Naziism and the rise of Hitler in Germany - and, consequently, the threat this phenomenon posed to international stability. In October of 1933, an editorial exhorted the government to "Stand By the Treaties!" (referring to Locarno, the Kellogg Pact, and the


141For discussions in this period of the need for international disarmament, see *Time and Tide* - 31 January 1930, 20 September 1930, 28 January 1932, 16 July 1932. *Time and Tide* drew attention to the "new phenomenon" of the Nazi party in the 20th September 1930 issue. The impact of Hitler's election in 1933 on both German citizens and the international scene was also addressed in the journal in that year.
League Covenant) and not allow Britain to retreat into isolation. In the spring of 1935, Rhondda pushed the government to pressure Italy to end its aggressive stance towards Abyssinia by stating that it would support the League Covenant and also close the Suez canal. In the fall, Time and Tide's position was even more unequivocal regarding Italy, with an editorial of September 21 stating "...rigid sanctions, and even war, now may be the ironical test of collective action to keep the peace.... The unchallenged oversetting by force of international settlements, or the unresisted aggression upon smaller Powers by greater, can never be in the true interests of the British people, or of the Empire upon which their present well-being depends."

By the spring of 1936, however, Lady Rhondda had abandoned sanctions as a practical means of preventing war, and was sounding a view that the aggressive dictators of Europe were, in their actions in Abyssinia and the Rhineland, merely doing in a more ostentatious and aggressive fashion that which all countries had been engaged in for the past fifteen years - tearing up treaties. She also gave a sympathetic hearing to the "Haves" and "Have-nots" view of the international scene - the argument that Germany's and Italy's lack of imperial resources helped explain (if by no means justify) their aggressive actions and that some sacrifices on the part of the imperial powers might go a long way in decreasing the

---

threat of war. Regarding Germany in particular, Lady Rhondda had *Time and Tide* engaged in something of a balancing act, which reflected her own conflicting impulses. In July of 1936, the journal noted that the only path to peace lay in "co-operation," which should be pursued in spite of the "trying habits" of many of Britain's neighbors, including Germany which, "in its heart," feared war as much as any other state. The following month, however, *Time and Tide* praised the Duchess of Atholl for her efforts to draw attention to the danger posed by Nazi Germany.

With the outbreak of civil war in Spain, Lady Rhondda was a firm advocate of the policy of non-intervention. Although every effort should be made to insure that it was adhered to, even the existence of the non-intervention agreement, in spite of the breaches by Germany, Italy, and Russia, was important in preserving peace on a broader scale. However, she began moving the journal away from its conciliatory tone toward the dictators later in 1937. While still admitting the existence of "legitimate" grievances on the part of certain countries, she shifted *Time and Tide*'s long-standing support of disarmament to support for rearmament.

In early 1938, Lady Rhondda's move away from the promotion of appeasement so evident in the previous two years became more definite. In February, *Time and Tide*

---


147 *Time and Tide*, 4 July 1936.


indicated the threat faced by Czechoslovakia after the Anschluss, and suggested that bolstering the Spanish government by allowing it the right to buy arms was necessary to save western Europe, and might in fact help save Czechoslovakia as well.\textsuperscript{151} In early September, at the time of the crisis in Czechoslovakia, Lady Rhondda noted in an editorial that Hitler's objectives were clear: he meant to detach the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, then to gradually absorb the weakened Czechoslovak state - thus opening the way to Romania and its oil fields - and ultimately establish control over all of Central and South-Eastern Europe, with the likely result that Russia would be forced into association with Germany.\textsuperscript{152} Later that month, Rhondda referred to the policies of the Western Powers as shameful, and argued that even if war came as a result of taking a firm stand against Hitler, the Western Powers were in a better position to win such a war at that point than they would be later, after Hitler had further consolidated his power and taken advantage of the increased resources at his disposal.\textsuperscript{153} Like many others in Britain, Rhondda admitted in early October to being extremely grateful for the reprieve from war, but argued that the only justification for "the terrible price paid for it in honour, decency and security" was if the entire country united behind an effort to prepare itself for the coming conflict.\textsuperscript{154} Following the German occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March of 1939, Rhondda argued that Britain needed to take the leadership role in forming an anti-German coalition with France,

\textsuperscript{151}"After Austria...?" Time and Tide. 19 February 1938, pp.224-225.

\textsuperscript{152}"Great Britain's Role." Time and Tide. 3 September 1938, pp.1216-1217.

\textsuperscript{153}"Civilization Is Warned." Time and Tide. 24 September 1938, pp.1304-1305.

\textsuperscript{154}"If We Are To Survive." Time and Tide, 8 October 1938, pp.1865-1866.
Russia, Poland, Turkey, and Rumania, and also needed to further accelerate the rearmament program. By May, Rhondda was finally calling for the inclusion of her long-time foe, Churchill, in the government in order to send a firm message to the world that British government policy would be strong.

In determining *Time and Tide*'s editorial line over the course of the 1930s, Lady Rhondda was open to seeing the journal as a forum for a range of views on foreign policy, including those with which she was not in complete agreement, or even with which she disagreed sharply. She did, however, draw a line in some instances, with regard to both contributions she would accept and to the views of staff members working with her on the journal. Eoff notes that Rhondda could be unreceptive to left-wing political perspectives from her contributors. Like other male editors of her day, she also encouraged those staff members who disagreed with her editorial policy to resign. Even in the latter circumstances, however, she was generous enough to allow such dissent to be voiced in the pages of the journal. In June of 1936, Phoebe Fenwick Gaye, who had been Assistant Editor for the previous four years, resigned because she disagreed with Rhondda's abandonment of sanctions as a viable policy. The following month, she was given an opportunity in the journal's "Notes on the Way" (a regular feature in which a contributor was given free rein to express personal opinions without editorial interference) to make her case on international

---

155 "Divided We Fall." *Time and Tide*. 25 March 1939, pp.381-382.
156 "We Need Churchill." *Time and Tide*. 6 May 1939, pp.569-570.
157 Eoff, p.127.
This Gaye proceeded to do in no uncertain terms, stating at one point:

...if the alternative to being blown to bits is to keep on being kind to Mussolini and Hitler, to keep on ignoring Abyssinia and the perpetual Nazi persecution of the Jews, and telling ourselves that everything in the garden is lovely, well anybody can have my share. That kind of peace is not worth paying any price for.... Somehow, somewhere - in this new order of things, the old ambition of democracy: the greatest good for the greatest number - lies discarded.

Gaye's views were certainly explicitly challenged in this and other issues of *Time and Tide*; giving considerable or free rein to certain contributors - through "Notes on the Way" or other columns - in no way limited Lady Rhondda's opportunities to challenge them directly.

One figure with whom Lady Rhondda felt little reason to disagree in the years they worked closely together on the journal in the late 1920s and early 1930s was Winifred Holtby. Today Holtby is better known as the author of the Yorkshire novel *South Riding* and as the dear friend and companion of fellow writer Vera Brittain. At the time, however, Holtby was most famous as a gifted journalist. Her association with *Time and Tide* began in 1924, with an article on education which caught Margaret Rhondda's eye. In 1926, Holtby was asked to be a director of Rhondda's publishing company. In the years that followed until Holtby's early death in 1935, the two women worked closely together on the journal, at the same time forming a deep personal attachment. Holtby often ran the journal in Rhondda's

---

159"Notes on the Way" typically ran with the following parenthetical aside under the header: "In order to preserve the essentially individual character of Notes On The Way, we allow those who contribute them an entirely free pen. We must not be taken as being necessarily in agreement with the opinions expressed. - Editor, Time and Tide." In the particular instance of Gaye's "Notes on the Way." however, her piece was prefaced by a longer explanation of her resignation and the journal's decision to give her opportunity to express herself, and of *Time and Tide*'s particular points of disagreement with Gaye. (*Time and Tide. 25 July 1936, p.1067.*)


absence, and contributed numerous articles, leaders, and reviews in these years (the first two items apparently often unsigned.) Comment on foreign policy and international affairs often worked its way into her reflections. Although her main interest was in South Africa and the rights of black Africans, Holtby was also well aware of developments closer to home. Like Margaret Rhondda in the early 1930s, Holtby was a firm supporter of disarmament and was also deeply disturbed by the rise of fascism, especially in Nazi Germany. Regarding the former, Holtby noted in 1932 that disarmament would never be successful until countries realised the necessity of relinquishing a degree of sovereignty to make such a common effort possible. In *Time and Tide*, as in many other publications, she also did not shirk from pointing out the oppressive and terrifying nature of the Nazi regime.

Winifred Holtby stands as a notable example of a committed feminist whose connection to *Time and Tide* began when the journal was an explicitly feminist publication in the 1920s but who also apparently accepted the subsequent transition in the journal's direction under Lady Rhondda's editorship. She was, however, not the only such figure in the *Time and Tide* of the 1930s. In fact, many of the women whose writings had filled the journal in its earlier years continued to appear as contributors in this period, though now often engaging in commentary on international affairs and foreign policy.

One of these women was Cicely Hamilton. Born in the 1870s to a middle class family, Hamilton became an actress in the 1890s, on her way to becoming a successful

---


playwright by the end of the first decade of the new century. She also became involved in the suffrage campaign, belonging to the WSPU for a few months before leaving it to join another militant suffrage organization, the Women's Freedom League. In 1909, she published a non-fiction work that would have tremendous impact on many women (including the future Lady Rhondda) entitled *Marriage As A Trade*, which critically examined marriage as one of the only options available to women for earning a living. The reputation which she began to develop as a journalist at this time was further solidified after the war, and she became famous in this capacity in the 1920s.\(^{165}\)

The journal to which Hamilton devoted most of her attention was *Time and Tide*, for which she wrote numerous articles on political and feminist issues in the 1920s.\(^{166}\) In the 1930s, especially in the early years of the decade, she was again a prominent contributor - this time on the subject of Germany and the rise of Nazi Germany. In the September and October issues of 1930, Hamilton wrote on her recent experiences travelling in Germany and described her first encounters with the National Socialist German Workers Party. Here she talked about Nazi anti-Semitism and misogyny and their potential to undermine German democracy.\(^{167}\) In 1932 and 1933, Hamilton also wrote a series of lengthy supplements to *Time and Tide* on key issues relating to tensions in Europe. She argued for the necessity of recognizing the German public's keen desire to rearm, like Holtby she asserted that

\(^{165}\)The information which comprises this brief biographical sketch is found in Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton*, (1990).

\(^{166}\)Whitelaw, p.184.

disarmament was futile without efforts to make nations subject to a greater international authority, and she pointed to the particular dangers posed by German ambitions in Europe in such regions as the Polish Corridor. A few years later she returned to this last theme, noting Nazi agitation in Danzig.

Besides Cicely Hamilton, other prominent Time and Tide writers from the 1920s who offered their occasional reflections on international affairs in the 1930s included the novelist and long-time feminist Rebecca West and the novelist Rose Macaulay. Although Lady Rhondda made it clear that she was not herself a pacifist, Macaulay was given the opportunity to make the pacifist case in "Notes on the Way." even as late as July of 1939. Aside from these familiar names from the past, women who made names for themselves in the 1930s specifically as experts in an area of international affairs also appeared in Time and Tide. Margaret Lambert, author of a monograph on the Saar dispute, gave a brief commentary on this subject in December of 1934. Elizabeth Wiskemann also shared her expertise on Central Europe with Time and Tide readers. Emily Lorimer, the author of a monograph on German policy which came out in 1939, was asked to review a number of other works on

---

168 See, for example, Cicely Hamilton, "The German Case For Equal Armaments," Time and Tide, 17 September 1932; "The Herriot Plan," Time and Tide, 10 December 1932; and "Danger Spots in Europe," Time and Tide, 25 March 1933.


this pressing topic that summer, while Freda Utley wrote on the eve of war about the need for Britain to co-operate with the United States in opposition to Japan.\textsuperscript{174}

One particularly interesting writer on the international scene who offered a different perspective as a witty and candid outside observer of British society and politics was Odette Keun. The daughter of a Dutch chargé d'affaires in Constantinople, where she was born around 1890, Keun was a prolific writer who published in both French and English.\textsuperscript{175} The author of a popular series of books about her observations of the countries she travelled to or lived in, Keun gave a "non-British" slant on foreign policy developments which Lady Rhondda found useful and compelling, printing a number of articles with the "view from abroad" in the mid- and later 1930s. In the July 6th, 1935 issue, Rhondda gave Keun the space usually allotted to her editorial, with the prefatory note that she did so because "...we consider that [Keun] interprets with vigour and clarity a widely-held continental point of view which it is vitally necessary that we should appreciate...." The article by Keun which followed accused Britain of unthinking and/or deliberate blindness to the nature of the Nazi regime and the threat which it posed to Europe.\textsuperscript{176}

Aside from these women and others who also ventured briefly into discussions of the international situation, the woman who most frequently commented on such topics in\textit{Time and Tide} in the 1930s was the prominent feminist and Labour politician Ellen Wilkinson.


\textsuperscript{175}See prefatory comments and footnote on page 3 of Odette Keun's \textit{My Adventures in Bolshevik Russia}, (London: Bodley Head, 1923) - originally published in French under the title \textit{Sous Lénine}.

Like many of the women noted above, Wilkinson's association with the journal also dated back to the previous decade. A later chapter in this study on women MPs will explore the evolution of Wilkinson's foreign policy views in greater detail. It suffices here to note that she had a longtime interest in international affairs which encompassed peace activism and anti-fascist protest and eventually led her to demand a strong response to fascist aggression.

In the early 1930s, following her defeat in the 1931 General Election, Wilkinson travelled extensively in Europe and shared her reflections on developments there, especially in Germany, with the readers of *Time and Tide*. In January of 1933, she offered the overly optimistic assessment that Hitler was in the process of being "deflated." but subsequent discussions of Nazi Germany later that spring and the following year demonstrated a clear-sighted understanding of the nature of the new regime. In April 1933 Wilkinson wrote of witnessing the brutal repression of dissent, describing the atmosphere in Germany as a "queer mixture of sadism and religious revivalism." and warned that it was "dangerous for enlightened world opinion to treat Hitlerism as a bad smell, a temporary nastiness to be disinfected by boycott or perfumed by legality." Twice in July of 1934 she used "Notes on the Way" to continue her exposé of Nazi terrorism, in one instance submitting her piece from Berlin shortly after the purge of the S.A.

Even after her return to the House of Commons in the 1935 General Election, Ellen Wilkinson continued to write regularly, both for *Time and Tide* and other publications. She

---

still served as a foreign correspondent during her various trips to the continent in the latter half of the decade, and was, in fact, the first English correspondent in Germany at the time of the re-militarisation of the Rhineland to send back a report of this event - to the *Sunday Referee*.\(^{180}\) For Margaret Rhondda's purposes, Wilkinson was now also especially valuable as an inside observer of the political scene who offered pointed and witty critiques of her parliamentary colleagues. One of her favourite targets was Anthony Eden, of whom she said in early 1937:

> I never was one of the queue of Eden admirers. Silver-gilt is a pretty metal, but not too good at taking strain. Now that we have to endure Viscount Cranborne reading carefully prepared answers to questions, too obviously scared at the mere thought of the supplementaries lying in wait to catch him out, we realize how Eden has dramatized foreign affairs for the House. The elegant figure and long-lashed blue eyes bring back a whiff of the romance that somehow always clings to the idea of foreign affairs.\(^{181}\)

Wilkinson's commentaries for *Time and Tide* shifted in tone between this sort of clever, gently ironic portrayal of people and politics and the serious and often impassioned discussions which frequently characterised her articles written on the basis of first-hand experience abroad.\(^{182}\) In either case, she appears to have been allowed considerable latitude for her skillful pen by Lady Rhondda, even in spite of the left-wing views which also found expression in *Tribune* at this time.

Clearly *Time and Tide* was highly valuable in the 1930s as a forum in which women writers were able to voice their opinions on foreign policy and international affairs. In the

---


pages of this journal, the contributions of Winifred Holtby, Cicely Hamilton, Rose Macaulay, Odette Keun, and Ellen Wilkinson mingled with those of some of the most respected and well-known male commentators and artists of the period. It is true that Lady Rhondda's desire in this period to strike a balance between male and female contributors in each issue may have occasionally worked against the interests of individual women writers at any given point. However, in comparison to the relatively limited opportunities given to women writing on international affairs in the other major British weeklies, *Time and Tide* was important in acknowledging the equal credibility of male and female commentators in this realm. The only other publications which asserted women's voices in this fashion were, as has been shown, typically more explicitly limited or focused in their appeal. Margaret Rhondda herself was undeniably successful, despite the difficulties and prejudices she faced, in establishing her journal within the respected mainstream of serious British weeklies and thus in reaching an audience which, based on the partial evidence of readership provided by the letters to the editor published in each issue, was comprised of both men and women from across the political spectrum.

*Time and Tide,* under Margaret Rhondda's leadership and with its wealth of contributions from women writers, stands as perhaps the most substantial achievement of women's efforts to penetrate the world of foreign policy commentary in Britain in the 1930s. However, as the previously discussed material indicates, it was not a lonely achievement. In spite of challenging circumstances, there were other weeklies controlled by women, and a select group of women writers successfully established themselves, at least for a time, in the
pages of some of the most prestigious male-owned and -run publications of the flourishing weekly press.

Before closing this discussion, however, I would like to note, at least briefly, a few other women writers who, although not prominent in the weekly press, nonetheless made significant contributions in the area of foreign policy commentary in this decade which deserve some mention here. One of the most famous of these is Vera Brittain, whose memoir of her experiences in the years leading up to, during, and after the First World War - *Testament of Youth* - made her internationally famous and a much sought-after advocate for the peace movement in the 1930s.

While trying to establish herself in the 1920s as a novelist, Brittain worked to support herself as a freelance journalist. By the later years of that decade, she had become successful in having articles accepted on a fairly regular basis in a range of newspapers and journals, including the *Yorkshire Post*, the *Manchester Guardian*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *Nation and Athenaeum*. as well as gaining occasional opportunities to publish in the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and *Time and Tide*.183

Much of Brittain's journalism in the 1920s and early 1930s related to domestic feminist issues. However, there was also a significant proportion of her writing which, foreshadowing the appearance of *Testament of Youth* in 1933, recalled the horrors of the last war and urged the importance of work for peace. In a 1930 article for the *Manchester Guardian*, Brittain used an anecdote about hearing her children's nurse gaily promise them

---

183 Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, (1995), pp.220, 230. The particular outlet of *Time and Tide*, so valuable to Brittain in the early stages of her career in the 1920s, was no longer available to her in the 1930s apparently because of troubled personal relations with the journal's proprietor and editor, Lady Rhondda (of whom more is written later in this chapter.) (Berry and Bostridge, p.227)
each a red poppy for Armistice Day to reflect on the dangers of forgetting the nature of war.\textsuperscript{184}

Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge note that Brittain's journalistic output decreased noticeably in the mid- to later 1930s. She was in great demand as a speaker following the success of her memoir, which limited her opportunities to write at a time when she was also struggling to preserve time to write novels. Furthermore, following the death of her close companion Winifred Holtby in 1935, she had the emotionally draining task of working on a biographical tribute.\textsuperscript{185} In addition to these demands, her conversion to pacifism not only involved considerable commitment in time and effort to the Peace Pledge Union but also closed down some of her publishing options, especially with non-pacifist mainstream publications.\textsuperscript{186}

In spite of these constraints and the heavy press of other work, Brittain did publish occasional reflections and reports on international affairs outside of venues explicitly linked to peace groups such as the PPU. In 1936, the \textit{Sunday Chronicle} commissioned three articles from her on the reactions in Germany to the reoccupation of the Rhineland.\textsuperscript{187} In another instance, Brittain's views appeared in a forum which did not generally publish much serious political commentary for its readers - that of the popular women's magazine. Publications such as \textit{Modern Woman} and \textit{Woman's Journal} more typically printed fashion and style


\textsuperscript{185}Vera Brittain, \textit{Testament of Friendship}. (1940).

\textsuperscript{186}Berry and Bostridge, p.365-66.

\textsuperscript{187}Berry and Bostridge, p.344.
articles, domestic household tips, profiles of famous women, and serialised light fiction. Occasionally, however, exceptions were made to this policy. In the February 1934 issue of *Modern Woman*, Vera Brittain published an article entitled "Can the Women of the World STOP WAR?," which urged housewives to rouse themselves beyond their absorption in home and children to join in a militant movement for peace reminiscent of the suffrage battle. This theme of motivating women to work for peace surfaced repeatedly in Brittain's articles.

While disseminating her own feminist pacifist message, Brittain was also in close contact with a long-time proponent of this approach, Helena Swanwick. Swanwick had published books, lengthy pamphlets, and numerous articles on behalf of both the UDC and the WIL in the 1920s and early 1930s. In 1934 alone, Swanwick published three separate pamphlets with the WIL which critiqued various proposals in circulation in favour of an international armed force controlled by the League of Nations.

Later in the decade, however, as a result of policy differences with the WIL, Swanwick went to Jonathan Cape to publish two monographs - *Collective Insecurity* (1937) and *The Roots of Peace* (1938). Both works rejected sanctions and the whole mindset of

---

188 Vera Brittain. "Can the Women of the World STOP WAR?" *Modern Woman*. February 1934, pp.7, 62. Among the other rare appearances of such commentary in popular women's magazines were articles by Storm Jameson and Winifred Holtby. For the most part, however, awareness in these publications of international events or personalities was very limited, occasionally evident in "quizzes" to readers on current affairs.


191 See Helena Maria Swanwick's *New Wars For Old*, (1934); *Frankenstein and His Monster: Aviation for World Service*, (1934); and *Pooled Security: What Does It Mean?*, (1934).
the threat or use of force as a practice in international relations. She also used *The Roots of Peace* to reiterate her (by now) familiar views concerning the links between gender and the willingness to support or reject war - arguing that, while women still shared with men remnants of the "primitive instincts" to glorify war and battle heroes, they nevertheless "[hated] war more fervently than men...not because they are better than men, or wiser, but because war hits them much harder and has very little to offer them in return." Part of the solution to the current international crises was thus for women to accept the possibility that "stopping war [was] a women's business" - their life experiences made them skilled at "diplomacy of the right peace-making kind" because women were used to "...getting what they desire, when they do get it, by methods other than force, and they are not likely to fall into the peculiar fallacy of supposing that a forcible victory will have no ultimate results of a disastrous kind." Linking her discussions of gendered qualities and the virtues of negotiation and compromise to the specific context of international relations in the 1930s, Swanwick focused on the need to understand and address the grievances of the "Have-not" powers (Italy and Germany) currently bent on expansion.

In her continued vehement attack on militarism and war (and any policies which risked war) as being in opposition to women's interests, Swanwick was joined in the late 1930s by one of the country's most respected contemporary literary figures - Virginia Woolf.

---

particular letter from Brittain to Swanwick in April 1937 notes that Swanwick's original suggestions for a title were along the lines of "Sour Grapes" or "A Sour Grape" - about which Brittain, not surprisingly, was less than enthusiastic! (VB to HMS. 6 April 1937. Vera Brittain Archive - correspondence)

192 *The Roots of Peace*, pp.183, 189.

In 1938, Woolf published *Three Guineas*, which was perhaps the most famous feminist pacifist treatise of the 1930s. Woolf's arguments in this book were structured around an imagined response to a "solicitation" from a man running a society for the prevention of war and asking Woolf what women could do to help this cause. Writing of her own "class" of women - "the daughters of educated men" - Woolf suggested that they were ultimately inclined to work to prevent war because war was clearly a male activity and that these women, as "outsiders" in a society which still did not recognize them as members of equal importance, had no reason to accept patriotism and nationalism as reasons to fight.

Regarding this latter point, Woolf made one of the most famous statements of the book when she remarked: "...the outsider will say, 'in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.'" For Woolf, the necessary first steps for women to play a real role in preventing war lay in support for the education and access to the professions that would make her class of women independent and, consequently, influential in society. Then, in recognition of the fact that women's oppression and militarism were connected as common features of a patriarchal society (of which fascist regimes were the extreme example), women should work to prevent war - in co-operation with men but as a separate group so as to maintain their own identity.

Aside from the explicitly feminist pacifist offerings of Brittain, Swanwick, and Woolf, there were also monographs written by women other than Wiskemann, Grant Duff, and Utley which attacked government policy in the later 1930s for its reluctance to confront fascist aggression. We are already quite familiar with the activities of Freda White on behalf**

---

of both the WIL and the LNU. In 1935, she supplemented her work for their newsheets and journals with an extensive pamphlet on the conflict in Abyssinia. *The Abyssinian Dispute*, which was published under the auspices of the LNU.\(^{105}\) Two years later, however, White came out with a study of the Spanish Civil War and foreign intervention, *War In Spain: A Short Account*, which was published independently of any of her organizational affiliations. In a letter to Eleanor Rathbone in the spring of 1937, White stated. "Normally, of course, I should have published it through the LNU. But on such a controversial subject the various parties would have insisted on expurgations amounting to distortion...so I published it on my own responsibility."\(^{106}\) This decision was hardly surprising in light of the fact that she took the opportunity to condemn the non-intervention treaty as a sanction against a Spanish government which had been totally unprepared for war and had then been prevented from buying munitions.\(^{107}\)

Finally, I should mention the publications of two MPs who, although not matching the journalistic output of their parliamentary colleague, Ellen Wilkinson, somehow found time amidst all their commitments to each write their own extensive critiques of government policy in the late 1930s. Like Freda White, the Conservative Duchess of Atholl wrote on Spain. Protesting her own party's stance, she argued that, for humanitarian reasons, for the sake of democratic principles, and for vital strategic reasons, Britain needed to prevent the

---

\(^{105}\)In this work White argued vociferously that "an African problem is a European problem" because of the possible impact of the Abyssinian conflict on the "unstable balances of Europe," and that Britain had the greatest responsibility to make it clear that it was prepared to take action against Italy if necessary. (Freda White, *The Abyssinian Dispute*. (1935), pp.65-66.)


victory of Franco's forces. In a study which not only criticized the government but also minced no words in condemning pacifists. Eleanor Rathbone wrote on the possibility of achieving real collective security by overcoming contemporary defeatism and a paralysing fear of war through a sufficient force of will.

In this perusal of women's contributions to published foreign policy commentary in the 1930s, I have presented a number of women who were members of both a collective group of women writers and of the larger community of men and women writers and commentators in Britain at this time. At the same time, the women discussed here stand out as individuals making their own way in a highly male-dominated realm of publishing.

It is easy, having read the stories of all these women and seen the evidence of a body of writing that is both rich and varied, to come away with a sense of women's notable triumph in gaining acceptance in the world of foreign policy commentary in the 1930s. However, in order to truly appreciate the impressive nature of their achievements, it is important to recall the realities of this world and the evidence presented in these stories of the obstacles women faced. If one considers, for a moment, the overall picture of foreign policy commentary in this period, not only in the weeklies which were the focus of this discussion but also in the major daily newspapers and in the proliferation of both scholarly and more popular monographs over the course of the decade, it is clear that the presence of women in this field, both by choice and because of external obstacles, was relatively small. It was not

---


uncommon for women's efforts in foreign policy commentary to be viewed with a certain amount of skepticism by their male colleagues, as seen in the examples of the experiences of Sheila Grant Duff and Freda Utley. and there were certainly disadvantages, as noted by Lady Rhondda, in not belonging to that established "fraternity." Even a publication as successful in penetrating the mainstream as Time and Tide could not escape completely the "stigma" of being a women's venture, as is demonstrated in a comment by Kingsley Martin in his memoirs in which he notes the various journals that vied for the position of the leading weekly review in the 1930s, and states that "[in] those days Time and Tide made a good bid, with Lady Rhondda as editor, but it was too much a woman's magazine...."200 [my italics]

Given the unmistakable change in the journal by the 1930s, and the consequent weeding out of the great majority of specifically "women's content" from its pages, Kingsley Martin's assessment of Time and Tide's credibility and the degree to which it was accepted suggests that one perceived weakness of the journal was the fact that it was run by a woman and that it printed the work of a number of women authors.

Aside from the explicit comments made by the women themselves regarding the barriers to acceptance and success that they faced, further corroboration of the difficulties in pursuing their goals is provided by the fact that, in a number of the instances noted here, their activity appears to have been made possible only through some degree of financial independence, whether through a limited private or alternate income which made it possible to live abroad or run a shoe-string operation out of a home, or through the unusual

---

200 Kingsley Martin, Editor, p.13. He also describes Time and Tide in this period as "politically uncertain"—possibly a reference to way in which the journal's editorial stance shifted back and forth (until around 1938) between confrontation and appeasement of the fascist powers. Given the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the New Statesman's position, this assessment is a bit unfair (or at least hypocritical.)
circumstances of substantial personal wealth which made it possible to fund a large operation. Only a few of the women discussed here would have been able to support themselves primarily through their writing on international affairs and then only during especially prolific periods in which they found themselves in demand and publishers were actually willing to pay their expenses. Normally this kind of financial support was reserved for a publication's permanent correspondents in a particular city or country and, as Anne Selba points out. British editors were reluctant to hire women in this capacity in the interwar years. Of course many of the men writing on international affairs in this period would also not have been making vast sums of money for their efforts (especially during the hardest years of the Depression). but it is certainly true that they were much more likely than women journalists to have the security of a steady salary.

Having highlighted the obstacles women faced in this field, one can re-emphasize their relative success in finding opportunities to have a voice in this realm. Most of the women discussed here found more than one forum in which to publish their material; success with a particular publication often opened up other doors. While relations with the male establishment were not easy as a general rule, individual women succeeded in earning the respect and attention of a number of their male colleagues and, in some cases, forming close professional relationships with them. It also appears that the capacity of a few women to establish themselves in positions of authority over a publication in turn increased opportunities for other women writers. In such instances, women contributors were not necessarily favoured over men, but it is likely that they ran considerably less risk in being

---

201 Selba, p.85.
discounted simply because they were women.

In terms of their freedom to express themselves, individual women were not necessarily more constrained in comparison to individual male colleagues. Any writer wanting the greatest possible degree of freedom of expression would often have found it instead in the publishing of their own pamphlets or monographs. Certainly women writers took advantage of this opportunity, producing a body of literature which deserves a detailed discussion in its own right. Writing for the press, on the other hand, carried with it the limitations imposed by the editorial line that, as Elizabeth Wiskemann pointed out, led to difficulties for both male and female journalists trying to challenge their editors. One might speculate, however, that it would have taken an especially developed degree of self-confidence for these women, in particular the younger and less experienced of them, to have felt comfortable in taking on the "great men" of British publishing and journalism in these years. It is also clear that women were not typically sufficiently established as commentators on current events to be asked to serve in an editorial capacity at a male-owned enterprise. If a woman wanted this kind of influence in a publication, she generally had to own it herself - an option certainly not available to most women in this field.

What these women clearly did not generally lack, however, was determination - both to be aware of and engaged in international affairs and to assert their views and pursue their chosen causes, using whatever publication means were at their disposal. In terms of the impact of the course of events of the 1930s on their output, one can state that the sheer volume of written commentary generally increased in the latter half of the decade - even taking into account the deaths of such significant individuals as Lady Houston and Winifred
Holtby and the closing down of publishing opportunities for some of the women writers when their views were deemed unacceptable for a particular venue. The later 1930s saw a particular boom in the publishing of independent pamphlets and monographs. While a journal such as Time and Tide remained a consistent forum for women's foreign policy commentary throughout the 1930s, it was joined in the latter half of the decade by new venues giving opportunities to women - such as the New Times and Ethiopia News and Tribune - which were explicitly motivated by international crises in Abyssinia and Spain. Determined women writers frustrated in their efforts in one venue and feeling driven by a sense of urgency imposed by these crises and those in the Far East and Central Europe, often turned to another venue - whether another journal or newspaper or their own monograph - to make their views heard.

As has been amply demonstrated, the opinions of the writers discussed in this chapter crossed the breadth of the political spectrum, and argued for everything from complete pacifism to rapid rearmament, from appeasement to confrontation with the fascist dictators. In terms of the evolution of views represented in this commentary, the late 1930s saw a coalescing of opinion among many of these writers in strong opposition to government appeasement policies and in support of firm and effective resistance to fascist aggression - even at the risk of involving Britain in a war. Pacifist opposition to this position became very rare among women writers in the weekly press. To see this perspective more clearly, one had to turn to monographs written by eloquent supporters such as Swanwick and Woolf, and to relatively rare offerings by Vera Brittain in newspapers, minor journals, and women's magazines.
Concerning the nature of the rhetoric used by these writers which indicated their own motivations for this activity and their different understandings of how women generally fit into the realm of foreign policy commentary, there was relatively little explicitly gendered content or analysis present in their writings as a whole, especially beyond the feminist-pacifist commentaries of Swanwick, Brittain, and Woolf. In the weekly press, gendered images and appeals were evident in the anti-fascist arguments of Sylvia Pankhurst, who marshalled feminist and maternalist rhetoric which she had previously used as a pacifist to energize women in protesting fascist barbarities in Abyssinia, Spain, China, and Czechoslovakia.

However, most of the women writers discussed in any detail here examined the issues and presented their arguments from a relatively non-gendered, or "gender-neutral," perspective - invoking traditional strategic concerns, the good of the nation and/or the Empire, the cause of a class, the "universal" values of democratic societies, or basic humanitarianism. If gender imagery came into play at all in these contexts, it was in the linking of traditionally negative stereotypes such as feminine "weakness" with certain male political actors as a means of questioning policy - as was done on occasion in Lady Houston's *Saturday Review*. This kind of language, however, was rare in the other women's writings - even among the fiercest government critics demanding a strong stance against fascism.

The expression of a non-gendered perspective is hardly surprising for some of these women. It came naturally to women like Elizabeth Wiskemann and Sheila Grant Duff, who had no history of association with specifically women's causes or women's activism (feminist or otherwise). The more interesting phenomenon here is the adherence to a non-gendered
perspective by a number of foreign policy commentators who were also well-known feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone, Margaret Rhondda, Cicely Hamilton, and Winifred Holtby. In speculating on the significance of this circumstance, it is worth emphasizing that those feminists pursuing a non-gendered approach to international affairs were typically not pacifists. (Feminists Ellen Wilkinson and Rose Macaulay were both pacifists at one point in the decade, but both also abandoned their pacifism.) This finding supports the broader picture presented thus far in this study that it was the strongly pro-peace perspective that was most easily and most typically associated with an explicitly gendered justification of women's participation in international affairs. The application of a gendered context to women's advocacy of a non-pacifist stance certainly occurred, but in such cases it appears to have been used by women, like Sylvia Pankhurst, who in fact originally began their foreign policy advocacy as committed peace activists.
Thus far this study has focused on women’s engagement in international affairs outside of the more explicitly political realms of foreign policy debate. In theory, however, women’s expanded opportunities and increased direct participation in politics in the inter-war period implied that women would be closer to the inner circles of party and government which determined the direction of British foreign policy. My purpose here is to determine the extent to which women, as active participants in this political realm in the 1930s, saw foreign policy issues as part of their mandate, and to examine the nature of their engagement in foreign policy debate in this context.

I will begin this discussion by focusing in particular on women’s experiences in their separate forums within political parties. This entails first sketching out the political landscape in Britain at this time, and then demonstrating women’s significant numerical presence, especially in the mainstream parties, as well as the relatively constrained position of their segregated structures and forums within the male-dominated party hierarchies. With this picture in mind, it is then possible to look more specifically at the contributions to debate on international affairs found in the women’s forums within the parties. Given the availability of relevant sources for these forums, most of the discussion will focus on the mainstream
parties, with a particular emphasis on women's dialogue within the two parties actively opposing much of the National Government's foreign policy in this decade - Liberal and Labour. In order to provide a broader context for this material, the discussions relating to each party will be introduced by a presentation of scholarly assessments of the general tenor and direction of the parties' foreign policy views.

At the most basic level of this discussion, one can determine the relative degree of women's commitment to debating of foreign policy issues in these party forums - in which they would obviously also have been dealing with a wide range of domestic political concerns. Concerning the nature of this discussion, I will analyze the degree to which the policy positions women articulated in their party forums reflected policy debates and decisions taking place in the party as a whole - in order to establish the presence or absence of policy divisions along gender lines. The final issue to be examined is the extent to which the women expressed their views in these settings through an explicitly gendered perspective.

Material on women in the traditional surveys of politics and party in the interwar period is typically comprised of brief references to a few prominent women, such as Labour's Ellen Wilkinson or the Liberal party's Violet Bonham Carter. However, using a combination of primary source material and some of the valuable, newer, scholarly offerings which focus on women's experiences, it is possible to depict, in broad strokes, women's membership in the parties and the structures created for them.

In 1930s Britain, two parties dominated the political scene. Labour and Conservative, with a rather lop-sided balance in favour of the latter. The minority Labour government
which had been elected in 1929 was replaced by a national coalition government in 1931. In the General Election in the fall of that year, most Labour MPs ran in opposition to the National Government and their representation in the Commons was drastically reduced, while the Conservative party made tremendous gains. The Conservative-controlled National Government won another majority in 1935, but Labour did make a notable recovery in that election. On the other hand, the once powerful Liberal party was almost completely destroyed by the mid-1930s. Its decline had been underway in the 1920s and, by the early 1930s, the party had splintered into three factions.\footnote{One faction, led by Sir John Simon, allied itself with the Conservatives and became known as the Liberal Nationals (almost indistinguishable from the Conservatives). Most of the remaining Liberals, led by Sir Herbert Samuel, initially reluctantly supported the National Government but later moved into opposition in 1933. The few Independent Liberals, led by David Lloyd George, sat in opposition to the National Government from the beginning.} By the 1935 election, the opposition Liberals were down to a mere 21 seats in the Commons. Numerically speaking, the Liberals were thus approaching the margins of British politics, where there resided other parties that, unlike the Liberals, represented the extremes of the political spectrum. On the far left, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) managed to elect one member to the House in 1935. On the far right, the British Union of Fascists - under the leadership of former Labour MP Oswald Mosley - was the strongest of the contingent of generally small fascist groups in Britain, but they did not achieve representation in Parliament during the decade.

The patterns of women's membership in the mainstream parties in the interwar period were similar in nature. Women joined the Liberal, Labour, and Conservative parties in significant numbers in the 1920s - with the latter two parties experiencing a notable boom in women's membership as part of a dramatic increase in party membership generally. While...
exact figures are difficult to determine. it is clear that women became a highly visible, and
even majority, presence. at the local constituency level of both the Labour and Conservative
parties.2

When the Labour party transformed itself in 1918 from a body supported by
affiliations from trade unions and various socialist and labour organizations to a national
political party with both affiliated members and individual members in newly established
local party branches. women were targeted as a vital new source of individual memberships.
In the pre-war period, women had supported the Labour Party by joining branches of the
independent Women's Labour League. After 1918, these branches were converted into
Women's Sections of the party and were each assured of one position on the executive
committees of the new local constituency parties.3 women then had the option of joining the
party as individual members of the women's sections and/or of the local mixed-membership
parties.4 Because most male party members continued to hold their memberships through
their trade union affiliations, women actually made up a majority of Labour's individual
members in the 1920s - and have thus since been recognized as having been "...largely the
making of the Local Labour Parties" in this period.5

2The uncertainty regarding specific figures is often due to the lack of a consistently systematic tallying of
women members or to discrepancies in numbers arising from reported figures at any given point versus subse-
quent information on actual paid-up memberships.


4Ibid.

recruit men as individual members of local parties did not begin to gear up until after 1925 - as part of an
trompt to build up the finances of the local parties in order to support Labour candidates in political contests.
(p.174) Pamela Graves gives women's membership figures for 1922, 1925, and 1929 - at 100,000 in 800
women's local sections, 200,000 in 1,535 sections, and over 250,000 in 1,867 sections. (Graves, p.231, n.1)
Martin Pugh's figures for the 1920s are similar. (see Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, p.131)
Exact figures on membership for the Conservative party regarding either sex are, unfortunately, not available, since the party has never kept a national register of members. However, it is clear that, as in the Labour party, the Conservative party also saw a tremendous influx of women members after 1918 as a result of the absorption of women from pre-existing Conservative organizations into newly established women's sections and branches.

These branches in turn were highly successful in attracting more women in the 1920s, with the result that membership reached approximately one million women by 1928 and, as in the Labour party, constituted a majority of total individual membership.

Given that the Liberal party was already declining in influence relative to Labour and the Conservatives in the 1920s, it is not surprising that its numbers were noticeably less impressive. Nevertheless the Liberal party also clearly benefitted from the official incorporation of women's Liberal associations into the party after 1918.

---


7Many Conservative women had first worked for the party through the Primrose League, founded in the 1880s, as canvassers and distributors of electoral propaganda alongside male members of the League. Besides the hundreds of thousands of women involved in the League by the turn of the century, thousands more joined the various manifestations of women's separate Unionist and Tariff Reform Associations that existed in the years prior to World War I. (Joni Lovenduski, Pippa Norris, and Catriona Burness, "The Party and Women," in The Conservative Century, Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball, eds. (1994), pp.617-619)

8This estimation appears to be based at least in part on a comment by Countess Iveagh to the Conservative women's conference in 1928. (Lovenduski, et al., pp.623-24.) Martin Pugh agrees with this assessment and has been able to chart substantial growth in women's membership in a number of constituencies over the course of the decade. (See Pugh, Women and the Women's Movement, pp.125, 131.)

9The first national party organisation for women, the Women's Liberal Federation, was formed in 1886 to bring together fifteen pre-existing local women's associations with a total membership of over 6,000 women. Its goals were: "to organise women's Liberal associations throughout the country, and to secure the admission of women as members of existing Liberal associations; to promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the government of the country; to advance political education; and to promote just legislation for women, and protect the interests of children." (The Liberal Year Book - 1888, (1971), p.150.) However, while the WLF grew rapidly, both in numbers of affiliated associations and of individual members, the suffrage issue created serious divisions among these women. As Constance Rover points out, it was not so much a case of suffragists...
membership did suffer a decline in the early post-war years, but by the mid-1920s, most of the lost ground had been regained and numbers continued to rise for the rest of the decade. The generally uninterrupted growth in women's membership in the mainstream parties in the 1920s came to an end in the 1930s. The Conservative party was apparently the most successful in maintaining membership levels, as it experienced a relatively limited decrease while women members continued to outnumber male party members by a substantial margin. Women's membership in the Labour party was hard hit in the aftermath of the party's devastating losses in the 1931 General Election. However, it did recover some lost ground after that point and, although their presence in the party was relatively smaller in the 1930s, women continued to constitute a significant proportion of individual Labour party memberships.

versus anti-suffragists as it was a division between those Liberal women who placed women's rights first, and those who placed party loyalty first. In the 1890s, while the WFL persisted in pushing the suffrage issue, a second women's organisation was formed - the Women's National Liberal Association - which emphasised "the furtherance of Liberal thought and Liberal policy...." (Constance Rover. Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914. (1967) pp.140-141: The Liberal Year Book - 1919, pp.8-9) The two organisations were eventually reunited in 1919. The resulting new organization was the Women's National Liberal Federation, whose membership consisted of all organisations of Liberal women of twelve or more members, plus any male Liberal associations which had admitted women to their membership in places where there were no separate Women's Liberal Associations.

In 1920, the WNLF recorded its membership at 95,217, with 732 affiliated associations. After a sharp drop by the following year to around 67,000 members, the WNLF was back up to close to 1,000 affiliated associations and around 90,000 members by 1926. By 1928, the WNLF was described as being up to 1,200 affiliated associations and over 120,000 members. (The Liberal Year Book - 1920, p.6; 1926, p.10; 1928, p.6.)

Pugh uses Annual Conference Reports of the Women's Unionist Association to note a decrease to 940,000 women members by 1934. (Pugh. Women and the Women's Movement in Britain..., p.125.) Stuart Ball notes that women frequently outnumbered men in the local constituencies in this period, and also supports the view of women's numerical predominance with his estimation of total party membership in the interwar period as being between 1.25 and 1.5 million. (Ball. "Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation," pp.273, 291.)

1933 was apparently the first year that the Labour party began keeping track of more specific numbers of the break-down of individual party memberships by sex. In that year, women's membership was recorded as being down from the roughly estimated 250,000 - 300,000 of 1930 to 154,790, while men's individual
In the case of the Liberal party, concrete numerical evidence is scarce, but most indications point to a serious decline in women's membership that corresponded to the deteriorating fortunes of the party as a whole. During the period 1930-32, in which the Liberal party splintered into three factions, the number of associations in the Women's National Liberal Federation (WNLF) apparently remained stable at 1,500, but membership figures are unknown. In 1933, the year in which Herbert Samuel's Liberals finally moved into opposition, the number of associations was noted as suddenly dropping to 1,000. The WNLF's affiliations supposedly remained at this figure for the next few years. In the 1938 party year book, however, the description of the recently re-named Women's Liberal Federation gave no numbers at all for affiliations. It is, in fact, likely that the relative strength suggested by the affiliation numbers for much of the 1930s is deceptive. Chris Cook has noted the "almost total decay" of the Liberal constituency organization in the first half of the decade, and there is little reason to suppose that the local women's organizations were immune from this effect. While the WNLF continued to hold annual national conferences for

membership stood at 211,223. In 1936, women's membership was noted as 179,933, while men were at 250,761. Women's membership in the 1930s apparently peaked in 1937 - at 189,090, while the men's was at 258,060. In 1938, women's membership was down to 178,121, while men's was down to 250,705. (chart of party membership, 1900-1938. The Labour Party - Report of the 38th Annual Conference, 1939, p.92) The number of Women's Sections dropped during the decade from 1,969 in 1930 to 1,607 in 1933, increasing slightly by 1936 to 1,618 and staying at around that level for the next few years. (See reports on the Organisation of Women in the Labour Party Annual Conference Reports for 1930, 1933, 1936, 1939.)

13The Liberal Year Book - 1930, p.5: ...1931, p.5: ...1932, p.4. The WNLF's descriptions in the year books had, by this point, dropped specific references to women's membership figures - a circumstance which suggests that there was increasingly less to boast about in this area, in spite of the apparent increases in the number of affiliated Women's Liberal Associations since 1928.

14The Liberal Year Book - 1933, p.4.

15The Liberal Year Book - 1937, p.4: 1938, p.4.

Liberal women, its monthly journal, the *Liberal Woman's News*, was no longer able to publish after January of 1936 due to a lack of funds. The WNLF's reluctance in the 1930s to circulate individual membership figures, combined with the lack of any membership figures of any kind after 1937, suggest its need to camouflage a substantial decrease in actual numbers.

Shifting away from the issue of the number of women in the mainstream parties to the issue of women's structures or forums, I have already alluded to the fact that, in all three of these parties, the pre-1918 women's party organizations were incorporated into the parties after 1918 to form women's sections at the local level. While scholars have established (at least in the case of the Conservative and Labour parties), that there was a pattern of greater integration of women members into local constituency parties in the 1930s as opposed to the 1920s, it is nonetheless clear that separate women's sections or branches continued to exist in this decade in all three parties. Each party held annual separate women's conferences, and each party had regional and national committee structures to represent women's interests to the male-dominated party hierarchy. Conservative women were represented nationally by the Central Women's Advisory Committee. Labour women were represented by a Chief Women's Officer and the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations.
(which functioned as their national advisory committee), and Liberal women were represented by the executive committee of the WNLF.

In each case, however, it seems fairly clear that the parties effectively limited the influence of party women as a distinct group. Resolutions passed at the women's conferences could be reported to the party executive committees, and might be mentioned at annual general party conferences, but there were no provisions for these resolutions to be submitted at the general conferences to be voted on by the party as a whole. Graves has demonstrated that the Labour party even determined the composition of the top women's positions and structures in such a way as to limit the direct connection between rank-and-file Labour women and their own national representatives.

Given this picture of women's presence and their separate spaces in the mainstream parties, I will now comment briefly on the situation within the political elements on the fringes. Unfortunately, membership figures for women are generally unclear. In the

---

19The SJC was formed during World War I, and consisted of representatives from the Women's Labour League, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Federation of Women Workers, the Women's Trade Union League, and the Railway Women's Guild. While the RWG subsequently disaffiliated itself from the SJC, by 1918 the SJC's members were chosen by all industrial and political organisations of working women with memberships of 1,000 or more.

20In the Conservative party, the activities of the women's annual conference were reported to the National Union Executive Committee (which headed all the voluntary activity of the party) through the General Purposes Sub-Committee. Regarding the Labour party, Graves states that resolutions from the women's conferences were reported to the NEC, but could not be placed on the agenda at the general conferences. (Graves, p.110) Liberal women may have been helped by the fact that, although their conference resolutions were also not on the agendas of the general party conferences, the Liberal women's conferences, unlike those of the Conservative and Labour parties, were held (after 1930) at the same place and in the same week as the general Liberal conference - thus making it possible that the party as a whole was at least made more aware of the women's discussions than was the case in the other two mainstream parties.

21The party created the position of Chief Women's Officer, but she was on the party payroll and answered to the party's National Executive Committee, not to the local women's sections. The women's sections also did not have the power to elect women to the NEC and were limited to electing four of the eight Labour women on the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations - while the remaining four women were again appointed by the NEC. (Graves, pp.109-110.)
Communist party. It appears that women made up a small percentage of the total membership figures - which remained fairly stable in the first half of the decade at around 6,000, and then grew in the second half of the decade to reach approximately 18,000 in 1939. The party had been dominated from the beginning by industrial trade union membership and, although theoretically in favour of women's emancipation, made class war and the goal of the abolition of capitalism its top priorities. Thus the CPGB was not a particularly welcoming organization for women - especially in the 1920s and early '30s. Regarding the British Union of Fascists, a rare speculation in the literature suggests that women "...probably accounted for over 20 per cent of the membership of the BUF in the 1930s...." On the subject of women's structures within these two parties, the Communist party was slow to follow up on proposals made during the 1920s for the organization of women's sections and committees within the party. It was not until 1937, at the 14th Party Congress, that the decision was made to organize women's groups which would, in turn, be represented on the local branch committees. In the case of the BUF, women became a sufficiently visible presence to warrant the establishment of a Women's Section in 1933, and, by 1934, the women had their own headquarters and had organized local women's branches in 75 per cent of the locations.

---


23See the caption below a photograph of women Blackshirts at a BUF meeting in the photo section between pp.142-143 of Richard Thurlow's Fascism in Britain: a history. 1918-1985. (1987). It is generally believed that total BUF membership peaked between 40,000 and 50,000 in 1934, dropped off drastically by late 1935 to about 5,000, and then slowly recovered to between 20,000 and 25,000 by the outbreak of war in 1939. (Thurlow, p.122.)


that had men's branches.\textsuperscript{26}

Keeping in mind this picture of the political spectrum in Britain in the 1930s and of women's presence and positions in the various parties, I will now consider the particular area of foreign policy debate and the relevant contributions of women party members, especially within the richer sources of the mainstream parties.

On the subject of the Conservative party's foreign policy, historian John Ramsden has presented a situation in which the right wing of the party found itself in disarray following the triumph of the National Government's moderate policy over India in the first half of the decade that was pursued by Stanley Baldwin, the party leader. As a result of this disarray, Ramsden argues, the right did not make the strong call for increased national defence against the growing threat from Germany that it had made before the outbreak of World War I.\textsuperscript{27} The rest of the party was clearly concerned with the defence issue but, according to Ramsden, found it difficult to speak out for rearmament in the face of "the overwhelming weight of mass opinion" which feared rearmament and supported the League of Nations. Thus the great majority of party members chose to adhere loyally to the moderate policy advocated by Baldwin which combined a somewhat cautious advocacy of rearmament with support for the League. This party loyalty became even stronger under the leadership of Neville Chamberlain, even though he maintained a high degree of personal control over the direction of foreign policy and his appeasement policy towards the fascist dictators consequently had

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26}Martin Durham, "Women in the British Union of Fascists," in This Working-Day World: Women's Lives and Culture(s) in Britain, 1914-1945, Sybil Oldfield, ed., (1994) p.102.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{27}John Ramsden, The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940, (1978), p.336.}
little to do with input from the party. Domestic, most Conservatives generally ignored or viewed with distaste the activities of the fascist fringe, but in their international perspective, they sympathized with those on the right over those on the left. Anti-fascist activity had little influence in the party, and those who were openly critical towards the leader's policies (especially after 1937 when Neville Chamberlain led both the party and the government), were typically strongly condemned by local party organizations.

In turning to look specifically at the engagement of the party's official women's structures in these issues, it appears that the views and activities expressed here conformed closely to the patterns arising in the party as a whole. As members of the party dominating the National Governments in the decade, Conservative women were, like the majority of members generally, typically highly loyal to the party leader - and they made little comment on foreign policy beyond frequent expressions of approval to the National Government and encouragement for government rearmament plans. In relations between Conservative women's organizations and the various non-party organizations and initiatives related to international affairs in this period, the former remained cautious. They became increasingly...

---

28 Ibid., pp.341-342, 348, 366.


30 Public expressions of this kind of loyalty by Conservative women can be found frequently in the women's forums of the party. The Annual Conference of Conservative women in May of 1936 passed resolutions congratulating the government on both its handling of "the present difficult situation in Europe" and its defence programme. The 1939 Women's Conference passed a resolution which "warmly congratula[ed] the Prime Minister and thank[ed] him for his untiring efforts on behalf of world peace and assur[ed] him of its wholehearted support of the foreign policy of the National Government." (See Minutes of the Central Women's Advisory Committee - 26 March 1936, pp.36-37: 29 March 1939, p.223 - Conservative Party Archive (CPA), University of Oxford, CCO 170/1/1/1) One can find similar comments in the records of the regional women's organisations in this period as well. The records of the Women's Advisory Committee for the North-Western Provincial Area contain repeated references to regional support for rearmament initiatives. (See minutes of the WAC (North-Western Provincial Area) for 20 February 1936, 17 June 1937, and 16 September 1937 - CPA - ARE 3/11/1)
concerned, for example, about the activities and policies of the League of Nations Union, and their participation in this body was geared towards counter-balancing an evolving "anti-government" slant. The Women's Advisory Committees and the Societies of Women Organizers, at both the national and regional levels, made repeated references to the need to monitor the activity of the LNU as well as other organized initiatives relating to international affairs. At the national level, a Mrs. Wilson-Fox served as the representative of Conservative women on the LNU WAC and reported back to the Central WAC of the Conservative party on the anti-government direction being taken in LNU policy statements. A statement made at a meeting of the National Society of Women Organizers in 1936 captures the suspicion of Conservative women towards the LNU and pacifist organizations: "...representatives should be found to attend meetings of the League of Nations Union and the Peace Council. Miss Ferguson felt that such representatives must be 100% Conservatives, with strong conservative principles and prejudice, as otherwise if weaker representatives are sent to such meetings they sometimes get impressed with the views of the other side."

Concern about Conservative association with such organizations became even more marked in the next few years. The WAC for the Northwestern Provincial Area noted late in 1937 the "need for more Conservative support and influence in the branches of the [LNU]" and, in early 1938, warned members against participating in the "Peace Weeks" organized by the LNU in conjunction with the National Peace Campaign and the Peace Pledge Union - two organizations which they thought were "Communistic in outlook." While there was clearly an interest in keep-

---

31 Minutes of the National Society of Women Organisers, 30 September 1936, p.5. CPA, CCO 170/2/1/1.

ing women members at the party's local levels informed about foreign policy, the intent, not surprisingly, was not to foster debate or any kind of challenge to government policy, but rather to arm Conservative women with the appropriate propaganda to counter anti-government rhetoric.

The most serious opposition to National Government foreign policy naturally evolved in the two other parties of the political mainstream - Liberal and Labour. At this point, the Liberal party was in the very difficult position of having to re-establish a place for itself in the political spectrum in the 1930s, while at the same time being faced with the fact that its views on international affairs did little, especially in the first half of the decade, to set it apart from the public pronouncements of either Labour or the National Government. When Herbert Samuel's Liberals moved into opposition to the National Government in 1933, they shared with Labour a belief in disarmament and support for the League of Nations. The National Government also effectively claimed the middle ground of supporting the League at this point in the decade.\(^3\) Under the new leadership of Archibald Sinclair after 1935, the seriously weakened Liberals did shift their position on rearmament to support increased defence estimates in the interests of collective security.\(^4\) Some Liberals also advocated links with Labour in a United Front against fascism - but this venture met with little success. At the time of Munich, the few remaining Liberal MPs were apparently divided over appeasement, but the Liberal Party Organization condemned it strongly; Roy Douglas argues

\(^3\)Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party. 1900-1992.*, (1993), p.120.

that this view was, in fact, prevalent among Liberals throughout the country.¹⁵

In spite of the party's great difficulties and sinking fortunes in this period, Liberals appear to have found considerable time and energy to devote to foreign policy issues in the 1930s - a conclusion which is born out by the engagement demonstrated by Liberal women in particular. At the grass-roots level, they participated vigorously in the Disarmament Declaration and the Peace Ballot, and in relief efforts such as the organization of aid to Republican Spain. In their national forums, Liberal women debated and discussed foreign policy throughout the decade. In fact, many of the key figures engaged in this dialogue within the Liberal party are familiar to us from other non-party organizations previously discussed; it appears that these women represented a high proportion of the leading women activists in international affairs in Britain in the 1930s. The overlap between prominent Liberal women and the leading women of the League of Nations Union is especially striking - the list includes Dorothy Gladstone, Violet Bonham Carter, Margery Corbett Ashby, Dorothy Layton, Eldred Horsley, and Kathleen Courtney.³⁶

The fact that these women were not pacifists but rather internationalists who shifted from the peace movement to advocating an increasingly strong stance against the fascist dictators, points to the suggestion that their engagement in foreign policy issues both inside the party and out had much to do with their commitment to traditional principles of Liberalism. These principles included a firm belief in both the benefits of free trade among states - which would be brought about by the establishment of a peaceful and co-operative

³¹Ibid., p.241.

³⁶Megan Lloyd George also belonged to the LNU but, as LNU records indicate and her biographer, Mervyn Jones, points out, she was not a regular contributor to League policy debates.
international system - and the merits of democracy and the rights of the individual. These ideals had an obvious affinity with the mainstream internationalist opinion of the 1920s and early 1930s (most clearly embodied in the League of Nations Union), which supported disarmament by agreement as well as the principles articulated in the League of Nations Covenant of international co-operation - the peaceful arbitration of disputes, and "collective" action against violations of the Covenant. Later in the 1930s, the majority of Liberals argued for an increasingly stronger stance against fascist aggression - not only in an effort to maintain the international system but also in recognition of the challenge that fascism posed to democracy and individual rights and freedoms.

The policies advocated by leading Liberal women indeed followed this pattern over the course of the decade. In the early 1930s, they focused their attention on the issue of disarmament. Members of local Women's Liberal Associations were strongly encouraged to support peace and disarmament meetings and demonstrations, and to canvass for the WIL Disarmament Declaration. At the same time, great emphasis was placed on the need to stand by the League of Nations. At the 1931 Annual Council meetings of the WNLF, a resolution calling for substantial agreements at the upcoming Disarmament Conference in Geneva included a demand that the Government "...recognise in unequivocal terms the obligation of this country to give effective and loyal support to the League of Nations in the

---

37 In the April 1930 issue of the Liberal Woman's News, women were exhorted to attend the upcoming demonstration in London sponsored by the Women's Peace Crusade and "by their massed presence prove yet again that Peace and Disarmament hold a foremost place in the hearts and conscience of Liberal women." (p.401) Throughout 1931, Liberal women were instructed to assist in the WIL campaign. See article by Lady Horsley on disarmament in the April 1931 issue of the Liberal Woman's News, (p.572) as well as the Report of the 13th Annual Council Meetings of the WNLF in June 1931 - recorded in the June Liberal Woman's News, (pp.3-4).
event of an infraction of the Kellogg Pact and the Articles of the Covenant." After this resolution had passed unanimously, an emergency resolution carried which "strongly deprecated" a recent attack on the League in the Tory newspaper, the *Daily Express*.38 Not surprisingly, Liberal women, and indeed the party as a whole, were very pleased at the appointment of one of their own, Margery Corbett Ashby, as one of Britain's representatives at the Geneva conference.

Disarmament continued to be a priority in the next few years, but in this area and in other aspects of international affairs. Liberal women increasingly emphasized the need for collective enforcement of international agreements. By 1934, they were advocating the use of sanctions, including the possibility of total economic embargoes, to prevent the re-arming of the disarmed.39 Their interest in strong preventive measures had much to do with their perception of the Government's weak response to Japan's violation of the League Covenant in Manchuria. Throughout 1932 and 1933, Liberal women had been frustrated by the Government's failure to apply diplomatic and economic pressure against Japan, either alone or in concert with League members and the United States. In the *Liberal Woman's News*, Lady Horsley warned repeatedly of the damage to the League being caused by inaction over Manchuria.40 In September of 1934, Lady Gladstone wrote, "The ideal of a League of Nations relying on the moral force of world public opinion for maintaining peace and justice has been broken down by the events in the Far East. The failure of the Powers to prevent

---


40See the *Liberal Women's News* - July 1932, p.787; January 1933, p.866.
Japan from seizing four provinces from China has had a disastrous effect on the Disarmament Conference."41

Liberal women's other obvious immediate source of concern at this time was the attitudes and actions of the new Nazi state in Germany. Their response to developments in German policy, similar to much public sentiment in Britain at this time, was mixed. Like many people, Liberal women had sympathized with Germany's situation after the Treaty of Versailles and German desires in the 1920s and early 1930s to revise treaty provisions. At the same time, Liberal women recognized as early as 1930 the alarming rise of the Nazi party and the danger this situation posed to peace in Europe.42 The Nazi party itself was also perceived as a direct threat to Liberal values of "religious, racial, and political freedom," and in 1933 the WNLF Council expressed its "deep regret" at the "recent overthrow in Germany of those principles...."43 However, even as they came to recognize Hitler's government as a serious threat to the international system, Liberal women continued into 1935 to hope that Germany still wanted peace and could be satisfied with its reunification with the Saar and with significant progress in collective disarmament.44

Inevitably, attention shifted that same year to focus on Italy and its attack on

41 The Liberal Woman's News, September 1934, p.115.

42 See, for example, the October 1930 issue of the Liberal Woman's News - which contains two articles drawing attention to German resentment, especially in reference to the Polish Corridor, and the dangerous political climate in Germany. ("Lady Acland (WNLF President) reviews International Problems," p.476; "Some Difficulties in the Way of Peace." by Beatrix Briant, pp.481-482.)


Abyssinia. By the autumn of 1935, leading Liberal women were calling repeatedly for Britain to encourage vigorous League action to protect one of its own and to send a strong message to Italy, not to mention Germany, regarding the costs of aggressive action and violation of the Covenant. As Violet Bonham Carter, Lady Horsley, and Margery Corbett Ashby pointed out on various occasions, failure to support the League in this case would complete its destruction (which had started with Manchuria) and would open the way for further conflict. As Lady Horsley stated (in a vivid, if slightly peculiar, metaphor), "...here the sky gets dark with those chickens coming home to roost...those chickens hatched out by the National Government, with Sir John Simon as henwife, in Manchuria, the battle-ground of the Japanese dispute. The two cases are strangely alike."45 In a letter to the Times in late August, Bonham Carter had stated, "War is inevitable sooner or later if this coldblooded experiment in international anarchy is successfully carried through before a watching world. It is an example which some will not be slow to follow, and Europe may be their playground instead of Africa."46 Corbett Ashby subsequently made it clear that it was necessary to recognize and accept that a strong response, such as broad economic sanctions against Italy, carried the threat of war and must be backed up with British force, if needed: "...no one can be in favour of economic pressure without realizing that such sanctions may be regarded as a declaration of war. ... War can only be prevented if we show our determination to defend principles as we defend territory, making it quite clear that in the last resource [sic] we would


use our naval power to prevent the collapse of the Peace system."47 Not surprisingly, the Hoare-Laval plan was harshly condemned by Liberal women, with Lady Horsley referring to it as a "rich reward" for a "law-breaking State," and a "powerful incentive to future predatory wars."48 In the spring of 1936, the WNLF Council meetings included a demand to intensify sanctions against Italy and include oil among them, to refuse recognition of Italy's annexation in Abyssinia, and to exclude Italy from membership in the League.49

In the aftermath of the government decision to abandon sanctions against Italy, and in the face of the serious deterioration of the international situation - with the outbreak of civil war in Spain and the renewal of Japanese aggression in China - the majority of Liberal women lined up firmly behind a policy of harsh criticism of government conciliation towards aggressor states. Margery Corbett Ashby spoke out on the benefits offered by supporting a "People's Front" alliance of Liberals and those on the left in order to eject the National Government and effect a change in foreign policy.50 At the 1937 and 1938 WNLF Council meetings, the Presidential addresses (by Megan Lloyd George and Lady Gladstone, respectively) angrily attacked the government's strategy of preserving peace at the expense of weaker states. Gladstone's speech at the May 1938 conference was followed by a resolution - moved by Lloyd George, seconded by Dorothy Layton, and supported by Corbett Ashby - which specifically condemned the Anglo-Italian agreement which recognized Italy's gains in


49The Liberal Magazine, July 1936, pp.210-211.

Abyssinia in return for the supposed withdrawal of Italian troops from Franco's side in Spain. In July of 1938, Lady Gladstone addressed a meeting of the Liberal women of the Eastern counties with a speech which focused exclusively on foreign affairs. Beginning with the general statement that "[p]eace should rest on equal justice for all nations, great or small, strong or weak," Gladstone pointed to the government's effort to "cling" to "the blessed word non-intervention" - not only in reference to policy towards Spain, but also to the refusal of arms to Abyssinia and aid to China.

It was thus to be expected that leading Liberal women rejected the government's appeasement of Germany during the Munich crisis in the autumn of 1938. Violet Bonham Carter in particular found these events to be personally devastating. As a mark of the distance travelled since the first half of the decade when disarmament was the priority, the resolution at a meeting of the WNLF's Executive committee at this time which condemned government acquiescence to aggression also called for an all-party inquiry into the inadequacies of the nation's defences. By the spring of 1939, Liberal women were demanding an immediate alliance with the Soviet Union.

The strong thread of traditional Liberal ideology running through the foreign policy discussions of Liberal women is highly visible, and their policy decisions and resolutions

---

51 The Liberal Magazine - November 1937, pp.529-530: June 1938, p.283.


53 See Bonham Carter's "Introduction" to Eugen Spier's Focus: A Footnote to the History of the Thirties, (1963), pp.11-12.

54 The Liberal Magazine, November 1938, pp.557-558.

clearly place them within the mainstream of party opinion as a whole in the 1930s. At this point, however, one might ask if, amidst this conformity to the familiar terms of Liberalism, there are any indications of a specifically gendered perspective in their dialogue as party spokespersons on international affairs.

In fact, what quickly becomes apparent is the absence of such a perspective in Liberal women's forums. While the source material for an analysis of language is relatively sparse, it is nonetheless evident that there is, for example, little or no tendency to appeal to the language of "mothers for peace." It seems clear that, when appealed to, women party members were asked to act as Liberals, and not particularly as women.

A rare exception to this general lack of an explicitly gendered perspective may, in fact, indicate an underlying gendered assumption that informed Liberal women's views on foreign policy. At the 1936 WNLF Council meetings, a resolution was carried on the subject of "Women and Democracy" which stated that "[p]eace, democracy and the women's cause stand or fall together since they are based on the same principles: justice and equality between sexes, classes, and nations, the substitution of law for force, and co-operative action to secure for all security, freedom, and prosperity." This statement suggests the presence of a feminist perspective which implied an inherent responsibility of Liberal women to engage in international affairs and which argued that Liberalism should be applied equally to women's condition, to the condition of British society, and to the international system.

For the most part, however, these connections appear to have been generally understood, rather than articulated. This may have been partly due to the fact that, even when

---

speaking to their own. Liberal women were conscious of a degree of ambivalence within the party as a whole regarding anything that could be viewed as "feminist." In any event, the language used was typically such that could speak to all members of the party - men and women. In fact, it is interesting to note the frequent use of rhetoric that seemed to evoke a traditionally masculine perspective. It is particularly noticeable that throughout the 1930s, Liberal women made repeated references to the need to preserve British "honour." When Lady Horsley wrote on disarmament in 1931, she noted that "national honour" was at stake in the coming negotiations in Geneva. When Corbett Ashby called for a firm stance over Abyssinia in 1935, she quoted Norman Angell's reflection that everyone knew Britain would fight for any bit of its Empire, along with his question - "Shall we be less resolute in defence of our honour and our obligations to the League?" When Lady Gladstone spoke to Liberal women in June of 1938 on the cost of "avoiding the possibility of war at any price," she referred to Britain's "surrendering [of] honour." By equating the policies of support for the League and the protection of weaker states against aggression with the concept of "honour," these women, although speaking in these instances to a female audience, very likely intended their comments to sting the consciences (or egos) of the men of power for whom the concept

---

57Historically, elements within the Liberal party had been strong supporters of women's rights. However, the party's policy record in this area was mixed and evidence of a continuing degree of ambivalence towards feminism within the party was demonstrated in a piece in The Liberal Magazine in June, 1934 - which praised the non-party Women's Institutes as "...one of the most remarkable of the public forces of these times," but also as "a women's movement" which thankfully "betrays no hint of feminism." (The Liberal Magazine, June 1934, pp.236-237.)


60The Liberal Magazine, July 1938. p.335.
of "honour" would be assumed to have a particular cultural resonance.

It is true that the available records of the national forums of Liberal women are of little use in determining the degree to which rank-and-file women consistently followed or agreed with the policies advocated by leading Liberal women. In the absence of actual minutes or records of WNLF Council meetings, for example, (besides the relatively brief reports included in the *Liberal Woman's News* or the *Liberal Magazine*) there is little language of less prominent Liberal women to examine - in terms of either noting alternative policy suggestions from dissenting factions or analyzing the nature of the rhetoric employed by the "ordinary" Liberal woman in support of, or disagreement with, the leading women of the party.

However, if we must be satisfied with examining the views of leading women, we can nonetheless get a definite sense of their priorities and the ways in which they worked to engage Liberal women and direct their opinions and energies. It is clear that foreign policy was important for these Liberal women even if the party as a whole may have found it difficult to use this issue to aid in the party's recovery. While the party's fortunes and concerns were of great importance to these women, it is also apparent that their Liberal beliefs were ultimately responsible for giving high priority to a particular direction in foreign policy advocacy - which happened to constitute the mainstream of opposition to National Government policy. being internationalist, rather than pacifist, in nature and placing ever-increasing emphasis on the use of forceful measures to maintain the system of collective security. Implicit in the liberalism informing these priorities was an understanding of the
links between women's fate and the fate of both the nation and the international system, but it appears that this particular gendered perspective was only rarely articulated within the context of women's party forums.

In turning to the left of the political spectrum, where the tradition of the explicit rejection of war had been more firmly based than was the case among Liberals, one witnesses a heated debate over compromises of political ideology and party loyalty in the interests of anti-fascism. Within Britain's small Communist party, in which war was critiqued as the product of struggles between imperialist powers, the decision was made (with the blessing of the Communist International) to opt for a temporary compromise of allowing for the possibility of an alliance with those imperialist powers posing no immediate threat to the Soviet Union in order to combat the aggressive imperial powers that were fascist. The Communist party thus shifted emphasis at home in Britain away from an isolationist focus on class war to supporting first, a united front of all workers against fascism, and subsequently, the alliance of all anti-fascist forces in a Popular Front against government foreign policy.64

In this effort, the Communists were ultimately unsuccessful in gaining the support of the dominant party on the left - the Labour party. Michael Gordon summarizes Labour's foreign policy entering the 1930s as being essentially determined by a "distinct socialist commitment" which was based on four principles: "...internationalism, international working class solidarity, anti-capitalism, and anti-militarism." The different factions in Labour

---

64 For a detailed discussion of the complex evolution of Communist party doctrine on international affairs in the 1930s, see Kevin Morgan. Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist politics, 1935-41, (1989), chapters 1-3.
foreign policy all fundamentally agreed to these principles but differed on advocating "militant" or "moderate" variations intended to adapt, to a lesser or greater extent, to the "realities of the moment."62 In the early '30s, Gordon states, Labour took relatively little notice of changes in the international situation except to press hard for disarmament and arbitration of international disputes.63

After 1933, however, conflict arose over the proper course to advocate given the growing international tensions. Gordon describes three main factions within the party's debate over foreign policy. The party's Left Wing equated Tories with fascists, advocated unity with the Communists, did not support the League of Nations, and opposed rearmament. The majority faction equated collective security with disarmament and generally mistrusted force as a policy instrument. They were traditionally very sympathetic to pacifism but were convinced to reject absolute pacifism in 1935. However, this faction continued to resist rearmament for a few more years. Those pushing this majority group in the direction of greater temporary compromise of their anti-militarist principles were found in the party's third faction, which was especially dominated by powerful trade union figures - for whom fascism's attack on the trade union movement made a stronger anti-fascist stance, including rearmament, necessary. Gordon argues that it was the Spanish Civil War which ultimately convinced the majority to give grudging support to rearmament.64 However, the push by those on the left of the party to join in the united front and then the Popular Front, was

63Ibid., pp.62-64.
64Ibid., pp.67-76.
rejected by the large majority of Labour's leaders and those advocating the Popular Front were either threatened with expulsion or actually expelled. In general, the tensions in the Labour party made its foreign policy in the 1930s often seem somewhat ambiguous or confused.

In turning to look at the views and activities of Labour women in the 1930s, it becomes clear, first of all, that fostering an awareness of international affairs was a constant goal in this period. This became an increasingly central priority as the decade progressed and this awareness entailed more than simply espousing disarmament. As the international situation deteriorated, the volume of debate on foreign policy issues by Labour women increased significantly. Clearly many felt strongly that these concerns were of great importance to women members of the party.

At the grass roots level of the local women's sections and party branches, Labour women indeed became engaged in international affairs - often to a surprising degree given the very pressing economic domestic concerns that many of them faced in their daily lives. In spite of these preoccupations, Labour women throughout Britain worked vigorously in canvassing efforts such as the disarmament petition organized by the Women's International League at the beginning of the decade, as well as the Peace Ballot sponsored by the League of Nations Union a few years later. It is also evident that at least some of the local women's sections made a concerted effort to keep members up to date on developments in foreign policy issues, especially by the mid-point of the decade.65 Perhaps best known, however, of

65 The Labour Woman began running a section entitled "Political Diary" - which involved sections submitting diaries on a monthly basis which noted the political events that they were keeping track of and discussing. Each month one of these diaries would be chosen for publication. The Northfield, Birmingham section submitted a diary covering the period 20 December 1935 to 19 January 1936 which indicated considerable
these grass roots activities is the tremendous amount of women's work put into organizing aid for Republican Spain during the Civil War - which involved everything from raising money to collecting food, milk, and medical supplies to knitting campaigns and the making of clothing. In these efforts, Labour women frequently found themselves working side by side with women of the Communist party - who were deeply involved in all aspects of the Aid Spain campaign.

However, aside from the evidence of a high volume of grass roots activity relating to various international causes, it quickly becomes evident in looking at the national forums for Labour women that a unified "Labour women's view" on issues relating to foreign policy did not emerge to face the growing challenges of the decade. Instead, one detects voices representing all three of the factions noted by Gordon in characterising the views of the Labour party in general. The majority view within the party was represented in the pointed efforts by leading Labour women to keep the membership in line with policies being determined by the National Executive Committee. At the same time, both the more pacifist faction and the pro-Popular Front faction, in opposition to NEC policy as it was then evolving, refused to give up without a fight.

At the beginning of the decade, most of the interest shown by Labour women in international affairs revolved around the issue of disarmament. Articles assessing both the

attention to foreign policy issues, especially concerning the fall-out from the Hoare-Laval pact over Abyssinia, but also noting German rearmament and the Japanese withdrawal from the Five Power Naval Conference. (The Labour Woman, February 1936, p.27.)


Sue Bruley notes that, in fact, Communist women generally devoted more energy to this kind of humanitarian relief work than to political propaganda. (Bruley, p.146.)
domestic and international climate for disarmament graced many of the monthly issues of the
official women's party publication - The Labour Woman - even while most attention was
focused on the national economic crisis and the crisis facing the Labour party itself at this
time. Labour women were also strongly encouraged to participate in the WIL's disarmament
petition that was to be presented at the opening of the international Disarmament
Conference in Geneva in February 1932. 68

Clearly there was widespread agreement that significant measures in disarmament
were of crucial importance to preserving world peace. The debates among Labour women on
this subject focused on the question of whether Britain should settle for taking part only in
disarmament by collective agreement or lead the way in disarmament and thus set an
example for other countries to follow. In 1930 and 1931, this inevitably led to a situation in
which Labour women were being asked to show their support for, and loyalty to, the Labour
government's pursuit of the former option, even though a substantial proportion of women
members appeared to favour the second option. At the national conferences of Labour
women in those years, the membership was warned by both Mary Hamilton, one of the select
group of Labour women MPs, and Jennie Adamson, a member of the party's National
Executive Committee, against standing apart from established party policy in this area. At
the 1930 London conference, Hamilton stated that "[w]omen wanted the Government to feel

68 See, for example, Mary Hamilton's series on disarmament during the early 1930s, as well as Winnifred
Norrie's "Towards World Disarmament," The Labour Woman, April 1931, p.51, and Susan Lawrence's
"Disarmament," The Labour Woman, February 1932, p.20. In the August, 1931, issue, the journal published a
selection of extracts from parliamentary debate on disarmament - with the explicit instruction that these were to
be used as the basis for discussion in the local Women's Sections of the party. ("Further Towards World Disar-
mament," The Labour Woman, August 1931, p.115.)

69 Report of the National Conference of Labour Women, (NCLW), Blackpool, 1931, p.28; Winnifred Norrie,
that they were solidly behind them in their efforts." and that she "wanted to appeal to the
Conference to remember that they were a gathering of Socialist women and that they knew
their efforts were shorn of three-quarters of their strength when they acted alone. So also the
most sound, secure and safe way to world peace was by agreement and co-operation." At the
1931 Blackpool conference. Adamson countered arguments in favour of "disarmament by
example" made by well-known Labour figures Dora Russell and Lucy Cox by asking the
delegates to be "practical" and not "embarrass" the government or the future Labour
representatives to the Geneva conference. While the party line held in both cases, the
"disarmament by example" view received considerable support. with an amendment along
these lines to a resolution praising government efforts in peace and disarmament at the 1931
conference losing by 355 to 303 votes.71

Disarmament continued to be a priority for the next few years. However, strong
support among Labour women for the more pacifist of the two options noted above,
"disarmament by example." declined - likely because British policy at the quickly stalemated
and ineffectual Disarmament Conference indicated that the National Government needed to
be encouraged to pursue even collective disarmament.71 Armaments re-surfaced as an issue
and caused heated debate among Labour women later in the decade, when the party began


71 Resolutions concerning disarmament passed unanimously at the annual women's conferences in 1933,
1934, and 1935. Great disappointment was expressed at the lack of progress in Geneva and, in the case of the
1935 conference, the women delegates condemned the recent Government White Paper on Defence which had
called for increased efforts in British rearmament. During discussion at the 1934 conference of a lengthy report
submitted by Mary Sutherland (editor of The Labour Woman) entitled "Building for Peace." Barbara Duncan
Harris received some support for her calls for unilateral disarmament. but Sutherland countered her comments
with a specific argument for collective disarmament and Duncan Harris' amendment to the resolution
accompanying the report was "overwhelmingly defeated." (Report of the NCLW - West Hartlepool. 1933,
pp.10-12; Cheltenham. 1934. pp.29-31; Sheffield. 1935. pp.8-9.)
reconsidering its position on British rearmament during the Spanish Civil War.

In the meantime, Labour women had to respond to alarming international developments in the form of the rise of fascist states and increased militarist aggression. At the 1932 women's conference, delegates spent a considerable amount of time debating the appropriate response to Japanese aggression in the Far East. A Mrs. Malone introduced a resolution calling for a stronger League of Nations response to the invasion of Manchuria and for a strengthened League generally, as well as a prohibition on the export of arms to both Japan and China. In the discussion that followed, which resulted in changes to the resolution, the left wing of the party made itself heard - questioning the Labour movement's reliance on the capitalist nations of the League and calling instead for punitive action by the International Federation of Trade Unions, as well as for a clearly worded statement of support for Soviet Russia in the face of the threat to that country from Japan. In the final compromise version, the resolution stuck with an emphasis on working through the League but did include a strong statement on the need to resist any capitalist attacks on Russia.72

As a direct result of the rise of fascism, other issues arose which exposed some of the different ideological strains found among Labour women. In 1933 and 1934, some of their leading spokespersons began advocating a policy of boycotts of German goods as a form of protest against the maltreatment of their socialist comrades by the German government. The endorsement of this policy, which had been supported by the International Labour and Socialist Women's Committee and by the British Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, led to some pacifist protest by Labour women who disapproved of the use of

boycotts. At the same time, Labour women were also faced with the stirrings of sympathy for a "united front" of all working-class organizations in Britain to combat the threat of fascism at home. When an attempt was made at the 1934 conference to amend a resolution condemning fascism to include support of this kind of widespread co-operation, the amendment was apparently "overwhelmingly defeated." but the issue would re-emerge in a much more vocal fashion with the debate over the even broader "Popular Front" a few years later.

When confronted with military aggression by another fascist power, Italy, in 1935 and 1936, Labour women, like the party as a whole, became enmeshed in an increasingly ambiguous situation in which they were forced to try to reconcile familiar strategies for maintaining world peace with appropriate punitive responses to fascist violations of that peace and the integrity of weaker states. Disarmament continued to be the desired goal and the British government was harshly criticised for its decision to increase armaments expenditures. At the same time, the government was accused of abandoning the League Covenant and "collective security" in its response to Italian aggression in Abyssinia. In discussions of government policy in this period, women leaders touting the established party line led the majority of Labour women to condemn the limited (and soon abandoned)

---

73Jennie Adamson called for a boycott in the November 1933 issue of The Labour Woman, ("Boycott German Goods," p.168) in which she summarised the address on this subject that she had given at the International Women's Committee meetings in the spring. At the 1934 women's conference at Cheltenham, Adamson defended this policy from a pacifist protest by a Mrs. Borrett, of the Welwyn Garden City Women's Section of the party. (Report of the NCLW, Cheltenham, 1934, pp.27-28.)

economic sanctions against Italy. However, a significant portion of women members were concerned that strong support for sanctions implied support for the possible use of military sanctions and carried the risk of involving Britain in war - which they viewed as unacceptable.

Heightened tensions among Labour women following the outbreak of the civil war in Spain mirrored the strains facing the party as a whole in the later years of the decade. The Labour party chose in 1936 to support the government policy of non-intervention on either side of the conflict in Spain. Among Labour women, Mary Sutherland (Chief Women's Officer and editor of Labour Woman) was an early voice pointing out the advantage that British neutrality gave to Franco's forces since they were being supplied by Germany and Italy while the Republican government of Spain was prohibited from obtaining arms. However, at the annual spring conference in 1937, the delegates still unanimously accepted a resolution on Spain from Barbara Ayrton Gould which was limited to condemning violations of the non-intervention agreement by Germany and Italy and calling for increased shipments of food and medical supplies to Spain. Ayrton Gould's argument at this point was that supporting intervention might actually have meant that arms going to Spain from Britain

---

75See, for example, Mary Sutherland's "Editor's Monthly Letter" in the January, March, and July 1936 issues of The Labour Woman, as well as Susan Lawrence's resolution at the 1936 Swansea women's conference. (Report of the NCLW, Swansea, 1936, pp.8-9)

76When Susan Lawrence's resolution on the international situation at the 1936 women's conference referred to "emphatic support for the Covenant [as] the only way to prevent Italy from profiting by her wanton aggression." Dr. Edith Summerskill argued that this "emphatic support" meant sanctions and entailed the possibility of armed conflict - a connection that another delegate also made in this debate. Lawrence's response was that "sanctions" were "Party policy," and that "...it was because they hated war so passionately and desired peace so passionately that they must be prepared to preserve peace against a gangster's outbreak." Lawrence's resolution then carried by a substantial margin, but the vote of 210 to 130 indicated that a significant portion of delegates were uncomfortable with its implications.

77Editor's Letter, The Labour Woman, September 1936, p.130.
would have ended up in fascist hands because of the pro-Franco sympathies of the arms manufacturers.78

At the same time, the Labour party began shifting towards an acceptance of a level of British armaments that was "compatible" with British "commitments" to membership in the League. Grace Colman moved a resolution on behalf of the women of the London Labour Party at the 1937 women's conference which recognized the need for Britain to stand by a collective system of mutual assistance against aggressors, even if it meant resorting to military sanctions and the use of force to protect another country under attack. She went on to say that, although they did not trust the government and still refused to support its rearmament program, "the Party did not yield up entirely the use of arms."79 Spokespersons like Colman and Jennie Adamson attempted to camouflage the extent to which this policy represented a change for the party by continuing to stress the evils of rearmament and the importance of advocating general disarmament, but the shift was clearly evident, and caused considerable distress among the women pacifists. A number of women spoke out at the conference on the need to return to a Labour peace policy which absolutely rejected war and the use of force. They were, however, in the minority and Colman's resolution passed easily.80

By the time of the 1938 women's conference at Leamington Spa in May, the international situation looked truly threatening and the Labour party's foreign and defence

79 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
80 Ibid., pp.12-16.
policy balancing act seemed even more tenuous. At the conference, Barbara Ayrton Gould moved a wide-ranging resolution addressing the international situation - including the continued war in Spain, the renewal of Japanese aggression in China, and the German union with Austria and threat to Czechoslovakia. The resolution spoke generally about "Labour's constructive peace policy." but, more specifically, it also called for an end to the "sham" of non-intervention and the raising of the embargo on arms to the Spanish government, as well as a trade and financial embargo on Japan and consumer boycotting of Japanese goods. The following discussion then saw a lengthy and heated debate concerning the relationship of the armaments issue to the resolution. One suggested amendment argued that there had to be a Socialist government before there could be any support to an armaments program and the provision of arms to another country. When this proposal was defeated, a strongly pacifist amendment was moved asking the party to reverse its current support for the rearmament programme because this policy contradicted everything Labour had ever said about the links between the build-up of arms and war. This amendment was also soundly defeated. In both circumstances, those supporting the amendments were criticised for being impractical in the face of current international realities - that their Spanish comrades could not wait for Labour to gain power and that they themselves could not "afford" to be pacifists when the struggle for freedom and democracy was being forced on British workers.81

After getting through this lengthy debate, conference leaders then had to face a battle over the Popular Front issue. Party policy had previously established that an alliance with the Communists and government opponents among the Liberals and Tories in order to bring

---

down the National Government and effect a new foreign policy was out of the question. However, clearly women were among those party members who questioned this policy - ultimately at the risk of being expelled. The women who spoke out against party policy in this area at the 1938 women's conference were greatly out-numbered, but Popular Front support among Labour women was by no means stamped out.82

This record of the discussion and debate over foreign policy-related issues by Labour women in the 1930s clearly indicates that, like their Liberal colleagues. Labour women were concerned with this realm and perceived a responsibility to address developments within it, and that they did so by articulating policies that reflected not a unified gender-based division from the men but rather ideological currents that crossed the boundaries of gender. Thanks to the more detailed source material for the Labour party, we can see not just a majority view sponsored by women leaders that corresponded to established party policy generally, but also the dissenting voices among Labour women that mirrored the trends of dissent within the party as a whole.

This dynamic among Labour women supports Pamela Graves' general assessment that there was a shift in the relative importance of gender identity as a priority for Labour women from the 1920s to the 1930s. Graves has suggested that the 1930s saw a closing of the gender gap that had existed in the party in the 1920s - during which time Labour women had struggled for support for reforms in the areas of birth control and family allowances and had

82Ibid., pp.42-46. Mary Sutherland, as National Organiser of Labour women, continued to use her position as editor of The Labour Woman to discourage women from joining the Popular Front campaign during 1938 and 1939.
tended to push harder for an influential role in the party as women and had emphasized the existence of a women's point of view. In the 1930s, Graves argues, there was considerably greater acceptance of the common concerns of both men and women in response to shared working class experiences regarding economic hardship, the rise of fascism, and the growing threat of war.\footnote{Graves, p.182.}

The transition from one period to the next, however, was not necessarily an easy one. At the turn of the decade, many Labour women were part of a last stand against the masculine near-monopoly of power within the party. At the 1929 women's conference, delegates were almost evenly balanced over the issue of whether or not to allow male representatives from the NEC to speak at the women's conference. Those who disapproved of this practice were thinking very clearly of a situation that had arisen at the previous year's conference, in which Arthur Henderson had spoken on why the party had continuously rejected the women's demands for birth control measures because of public opinion, and in which the women delegates had subsequently been convinced, by a narrow margin, to support the party line on this issue. At the 1929 conference, those pointing to the previous year's events argued that women should have control over deciding their positions on women's issues without male intervention. A Mrs. Tess Nally, of Netherfield, stated that "[w]here the issue concerned women only, it was surely only freedom to let the women cast their votes without any outside interference."\footnote{Report of the NCLW. Buxton, 1929. p.33.} At the 1930 women's conference, delegates tabled resolutions objecting to the recent amendments in the party constitution decreasing the
number of delegates at the annual party conferences (which would affect women's participation considerably) and calling for recognition of the women's conference as an official gathering, as well as for official recognition of their resolutions. Both resolutions carried - the second, regarding the influence of the women's conference, by a large majority.\textsuperscript{85}

However, at both the 1929 and 1930 conferences, leading Labour women were responsible for the arguments against gender-based influence. Especially prominent among these voices was Susan Lawrence, whom Graves describes as "the most powerful woman in the Labour Party at the time."\textsuperscript{86} At the 1929 conference, Lawrence ridiculed delegates who objected to men speakers at the women's conference by stating that this encouraged the idea that women "...were such babies that if a man made a speech against the majority, the majority would run around like little dogs and wag their tails."\textsuperscript{87} She was followed by a comment from a Miss Scott of the Leicester Labour Party, who also felt that this suggestion was "an insult to the women of the Labour Party" and who hoped that "...the women of the Party would realise that they were members of a family, that they were only a section of the movement, and that no family was complete without men."\textsuperscript{88} At the 1930 women's conference, Barbara Duncan Harris echoed Lawrence's language when she opposed the resolution asking for more influence for the women's conference, arguing that the conference had been initiated to serve as "a nursery for new voters." and that women "did not want to be

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{86}Graves. p.112.

\textsuperscript{87}Report of the NCLW. Buxton. 1929. p.33.

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
in the nursery any longer." but should rather "stand upon their feet as members of the Party...."

Clearly the message being given to Labour women in these debates was that they should be thinking of themselves as Socialists and party members first, and women second. The attempt to claim real power in the party for Labour women as a whole was abandoned in the 1930s. In summarising the impact of this trend on Labour women's rhetoric, Graves states that they "...signaled their move away from a focus on gender-specific policies by abruptly dropping from their speeches and writings all references to women's special interests and the necessity for their voices to be heard in the movement." The question that remains for my purposes is whether this trend actually led to the absence of references to gender roles or gendered perspectives in their rhetoric relating to foreign policy issues within the women's forums.

During the transitional period for Labour women in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the use of gendered rhetoric in discussions of international affairs and, specifically, the cause of disarmament, was, in fact, quite evident. In many respects, the language used here was very much like that which we have encountered elsewhere in the non-party women's groups and mixed membership organizations which linked women's roles as wives and mothers to the cause of peace. The similarities between Labour women's maternalist rhetoric and that of the Women's Co-operative Guild were especially apparent - a circumstance which is hardly

---


90 Graves. p.182.
surprising given that a number of women belonged to both organizations, and the links between Labour and Guild women were strong. In this instance, Labour women's maternalist rhetoric appeared to be mainly concerned with evoking a broader female consciousness (as opposed to an explicitly feminist perspective) that might speak most naturally to the majority of working class women.

At the annual women's conference prior to the 1929 General Election, Jennie Adamson had called on women to reject armaments expenditures by virtue of their dual roles as housewives and mothers - appealing to women's experiences in spending money wisely to provide for human needs and to the burden they carry for the life they bring into the world. At the 1930 women's conference, Adamson again evoked the maternal role, this time referring to mothers' desires the world over to have their sons as comforts to them in old age, to support a resolution praising the Labour government's initiatives in foreign affairs. In 1931, Leah Manning introduced a resolution at the women's conference praising the government's pursuit of peace and disarmament, and followed it with a reference to the money that could be spent on children's education, housing, and maternity services, instead of on armaments. Her resolution was seconded by a Mrs. Leighton, who stated that "[i]t was almost unnecessary to come to a Conference of Labour women and ask for support for such a resolution, because she was sure that they, as the mothers of sons, wives of husbands and women with male relatives, would not vote in any way against disarmament." In the

---

91 Mrs. Jennie L. Adamson, Chair's Address - Report of the NCLW, Buxton, 1929, p.10.
93 Report of the NCLW, Blackpool, 1931, p.64.
February 1932 issue of *The Labour Woman*, which focused heavily on disarmament in honour of the opening of the Geneva conference. One of the articles was entitled, "Husbands, Sons, and Disarmament." and contained the statement that "Disarmament is the responsibility of the mothers of the world."94

Graves argues that, after 1932, Labour women used this kind of maternalist peace rhetoric less frequently.95 By and large, this assessment holds true as a reflection of the tenor of much of the language used in discussing issues relating to international affairs in the rest of the decade. Instead, discussions were couched either in the rhetoric of a primarily class-based socialist ideology or in the internationalist, pro-League of Nations, pro-collective security rhetoric of the period. When Ellen Wilkinson criticised the disarmament resolution offered at the 1933 women's conference, calling it "too tame for a Labour Women's Conference," she stated. "[w]e who are Socialists, had expressed in the resolution regret at the delay of the Disarmament Conference. As Socialists, did we expect this Disarmament Conference to succeed, was not the fundamental fact of all our belief our own knowledge that capitalism dare not disarm?"96 She was the followed by a Mrs. Dollan, of the Scottish Socialist Party, who stated that "[w]ar was the capitalists' way out of unemployment."97 In her 1934 report and resolution on "Building For Peace," Mary Sutherland placed considerable emphasis on the economic causes of war found in a capitalist system and the need to work harder to

95See Graves, pp.182-186.
implement League principles of international co-operation and a collective peace system. When Barbara Ayrton Gould discussed British policy towards the Spanish Civil War in 1937, she noted that it had not been easy for them, as Socialists, to support non-intervention, and that "[t]heir feelings and thoughts had naturally leapt towards supplying the workers in Spain with arms to fight for democracy and freedom...."

On at least one occasion, Labour women were actually explicitly asked to reject a gendered identity in addressing the international situation. When Susan Lawrence offered the resolution at the 1936 women's conference that condemned government policies over Abyssinia and asked for "emphatic support for the [League of Nations] Covenant," she stated that "[t]hey were not there as frightened women, but as statesmen conscious of the importance of their task and its difficulty, but not flinching from it." [my italics] In this case, it is likely that Lawrence was concerned that, as "frightened women," delegates might resist the implied support for possible military sanctions provided for in this resolution and opt for the traditional pacifist position of Labour women and its perspective of peace as the work of wives and mothers who feared for the lives of their husbands and children.

However, evocations of a maternalist perspective did not disappear entirely in the 1930s. Ironically, Lawrence's resolution was seconded by a Mrs. Mullings, of North Battersea, with the argument that they needed to take a strong stance because it was "...up to the women to see that their children should not be cannon fodder for another war." At the

---

same time, Dr. Edith Summerskill, speaking for Green Lanes, South Tottenham, used the maternal perspective to protest the resolution's support for sanctions by pointing out that "their children" might be told to fight in a war over British imperial possessions.\textsuperscript{101}

In many respects, this exchange at the 1936 conference is indicative of the evolution of the role of gendered rhetoric in foreign and defence policy debates among Labour women in the 1930s. Lawrence's comments were notable in not mincing words, but, in general, her position was representative of the dominant tendency that evolved in this period to de-emphasize gender identity among Labour women. However, on those occasions when that gender identity was evoked, as in the comments of Mullings and Summerskill, these instances reveal a degree of flexibility among Labour women in the potential applications of gendered rhetoric.

For those Labour women protesting party policy, and especially those remaining more committed to pacifist ideals, it was simply consistent to use the gendered rhetoric that had characterized the mainstream pro-peace discussions of international affairs in previous years. Summerskill's objection to Lawrence's pro-sanctions resolution at the 1936 women's conference falls into this category, but even more explicit examples are found in the debates over international policy at the 1937 conference. Those supporting a strongly pacifist amendment to the suggested resolution in this debate repeatedly argued their case from the point of view of "wives and mothers." A Mrs. Boddy, of Norwich, said that "...as a mother of three children she felt impelled to speak...." while a Mrs. Sutton, of Stavely, stated that "they had got to choose whether they would be prepared to allow their sons to be butchered and

\textsuperscript{101}ibid., p.9
gassed, or else they had to take up a strong position and say they were not going to have any kind of war, whether through collective security or anything else.\textsuperscript{102}

However, while pacifist Labour women continued to evoke traditional "women's interests" to protest against shifts in party policy, it was also true that a flexible approach to this kind of gendered appeal allowed it to be used by other women to support party policy. We see this in the argument used by Mullings to support Susan Lawrence at the 1936 conference, and again in the debate at the 1938 women's conference over the resolution dealing with the international situation. In this latter instance, a Mrs. Cayford, of Hampstead, supported the resolution which called for the end of non-intervention in Spain and a boycott of Japanese goods (all in the name of "Labour's constructive peace policy") by speaking "as a mother" and arguing that "the Government had led them into the position whereby their children stood the chance of being blown to pieces" (whereas the action suggested in the resolution would help in the establishment of peace).\textsuperscript{103}

The logic at work in the statements of Mullings and Cayford was based on the premise that, as long as Labour party foreign policy continued to present itself as a "peace policy" - even as it became increasingly distanced from actual pacifist priorities - then Labour women within the mainstream of the party might employ the familiar evocations of women's roles and special interests in rallying their colleagues to support party policy. In this context, while peace was no longer solely a "women's issue" (as it had been perceived in the 1920s), but rather a common concern for both Labour men and women, women could be shown how


\textsuperscript{103}Report of the NCLW Leamington Spa. 1938, p.33.
their interests arising from their particular experiences as women coincided with their class interests as articulated by the party hierarchy.

A general expression of this perspective is found in Anne Loughlin's address as Chairman to the 1935 women's conference, in which her opening comments on their purpose as Labour women at that gathering reflected an attempt to reconcile new priorities of common interest with men in the party with an older vision of a special women's perspective:

We meet in a conference as women, but also as workers and citizens. A separate assembly of women associated with the Labour Movement is a long-established institution. It is one that we maintain for the purpose of proclaiming our solidarity, and not for the purpose of emphasising differences of view between the women and the men whom the movement unites in the fellowship of a common cause. Yet there is a woman's point of view in matters of public policy: there are questions which face us that are the vital concern of women....¹⁰⁴ [my italics]

She then went on to identify the most important concern for women at that time as "the growing danger of war," and proceeded to articulate party policy on the dangers of the armaments race and the need to work within the framework of the League of Nations and bring Germany back into a collective security system.¹⁰⁵

What is revealed by these occasional interjections of gendered content into a dialogue on international affairs that predominantly conformed to the decade's trend of greater emphasis on common class and party issues between men and women is that Labour women nevertheless did not completely abandon the language of gender identity that had largely shaped such discussions in the 1920s. The fact that international affairs became a shared concern for Labour men and women did not prevent some Labour women from recognizing


¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp.3-4.
the continued effectiveness that specific, familiar appeals to women as women might have. In the use of maternal imagery and appeals by pacifist Labour women in the 1930s, we see the greatest degree of continuity with the earlier tradition within the party of peace as a "women's issue." However, the evocations of such imagery and, more generally, of women's "special concerns," by the increasingly less pacifist mainstream of the party reveal the extent to which the rhetoric of gender identity which had been perceived as divisive within the party in the 1920s was a malleable commodity which could also be used in the 1930s to bring women into the party fold - as a supplement to the preferred cross-gender, class-based appeal.

In summarising this chapter's findings regarding women's participation in foreign policy issues specifically within separate women's forums in the political parties (as revealed particularly by Liberal and Labour sources). it is clear. first of all. that they participated in at least some fashion on a consistent basis throughout the 1930s. and. in fact. often became deeply involved in these issues in the latter half of the decade. This participation occurred in spite of the fact that women's official avenues to influence as a distinct group within the parties were circumscribed and that they thus might have been expected to focus almost exclusively on what would be considered "women's issues" in order to use what influence they had to speak for women. The reason that this engagement in international affairs took place was. of course. due partly to the rapidly growing urgency of international crises and their overshadowing of other issues. However, the political aspect of foreign policy also played an important role in ensuring this engagement. In this respect. the experiences of women's party structures were clearly distinguished from those of non-party women's
organizations which could not address international affairs regularly (however urgent the circumstances) because their primary mandate was to address women's domestic concerns and, consequently, their membership was too politically varied to agree on policy. Although obviously also concerned with domestic political issues and therefore not focused exclusively on international affairs to the same degree as an organization such as the Women's International League, women's forums within the political parties did approach the scope of commitment shown by a less specialized organization such as the Women's Co-operative Guild.

The issue of political ideology was central to the nature of this foreign policy-related dialogue. In all three of the mainstream political parties in this period, opinions voiced in the women's forums reflected positions based primarily not on gender identity, but on gender-inclusive politics and ideologies. Available sources for the Conservative and Liberal parties indicate the great extent to which the majority views on foreign policy in the women's forums mirrored the majority views historians have described for these parties generally. In the more detailed sources of the Labour party, we see the women's forums reflecting not only the majority view, but also minority views which clearly caused tension within the party across gender lines.

The primacy of political ideology is also apparent in the actual rhetoric employed to argue the case for majority or minority policies in the Liberal and Labour parties. Liberal women favoured the familiar, traditional language of liberalism, which emphasized the virtues of democracy and international co-operation as they might appeal to all citizens. Labour women emphasized the traditional language of socialist ideology and class interest.
However, this is not to indicate that the language of gender identity was completely absent from party women's dialogue on international affairs. Liberal women perceived links between women's interests, the interests of all citizens, and the interests of all nations - revealing a feminist commitment to equality and justice for all. For their part, Labour women did not totally abandon the maternal rhetoric emphasizing women's "special interest," particularly as wives and mothers, that had characterized the more divisive gender identity politics within the party in the 1920s. In the 1930s, this rhetoric became more flexible in its application. It could still be harnessed to the consistently pacifist cause, as it was by a minority of Labour women, but it could also be used to convince women to support the party leadership's policies even as they shifted further away from actual pacifism and toward an acceptance of military intervention.

The combination of the overall decline of the use of gendered rhetoric, and its flexibility when it was employed, support two conclusions concerning its place in party women's foreign policy dialogue. The first conclusion is specific to the experiences of women within political parties, in that it would seem that the main priority of women's party structures in the 1930s was integration into the male-dominated party. They chose this option, as opposed to emphasizing a separate women's identity, as a means to women's political empowerment. Gendered rhetoric did, after all, possess a potentially powerful emotional appeal and its appearance on some occasions was likely the product of heated, impassioned debate. Under the circumstances, the fact that this language was not used more often in part suggests party women's widespread acceptance of the importance of being identified primarily as Liberals or as Socialists rather than as women. Those who wanted to
be able to speak to the international situation from a clearly gendered perspective would, after all, have been able to do so in other public forums. As a prominent member of the Women's International League, Barbara Duncan Harris fought to keep that separate women's organization healthy and spoke explicitly of the relevance of women's common experiences to their engagement in international affairs. The same woman also argued that Labour women should not set themselves apart and demand influence as a distinct group. Within the specific context of the male-dominated world of party politics, behavior that stressed common, cross-gender interests and women's integration into this world was likely perceived as the road to acceptance and credibility, and thus as a more effective means to achieve the desired results - both in politics in general and in the specific realm of foreign policy.

The second conclusion concerning the nature of gendered rhetoric in the foreign policy dialogue of party women's forums relates to a broader phenomenon emerging in this study - in which the use of a gendered perspective, especially a maternalist one, was most typically linked to a strong pro-peace, or pacifist, stance. As support for this position shrank, the appearance of gendered rhetoric in the debates of women party members inevitably declined. In these forums, as we have seen in other forums of women's foreign policy activism, non-pacifist approaches were more typically allied with rhetoric which evoked various aspects of a non-gendered communal consciousness - whether referring to humanitarian concerns, democratic values, or class interests. In those instances in which gendered rhetoric was used to support a non-pacifist position, it was often done so by women who were traditionally sympathetic to a gendered perspective on political activism (feminist

---

106 See Chapters 1 & 2.
or otherwise) and who sought to re-apply gendered rhetoric they had used in the past in the cause of peace to serve a different foreign policy agenda.
CHAPTER 6 - THE POLITICS OF FOREIGN POLICY II - WOMEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The segregated political forums of women's party organizations gave politically active women opportunities to address policy on foreign affairs. Clearly the parties expressed a notable degree of interest in getting women members engaged with the party leadership's policies. However, women's participation in these issues within these forums inevitably occurred at a distance from the real venues of political power in Britain. This circumstance leads me to the final discussion of this study, which concerns the degree to which politically active women engaged in international affairs were able to penetrate such venues in the public realm, and the nature of their participation when they were successful.¹

The natural focus for this topic is women's activity as members of parliament in the House of Commons. Following a brief presentation of the difficulties women faced

¹One possible area of further research which is beyond the scope of this project is the intriguing, although somewhat problematic, question of the behind-the-scenes activities of women of influence who were able to participate in the more private realms of the politics of foreign policy - often making use of or cultivating personal relationships with men of power. Certainly some prominent women of the 1930s (such as Nancy Astor and Ivy Chamberlain) gained both a contemporary and a historical reputation for such activity. One of the difficulties here is in determining the realities of their activities and assessing their actual impact. It may very well be the case that other women (perhaps Violet Bonham Carter as one example) had greater influence that these two notorious figures - whose real historical significance may consequently lie in the nature of their contemporary personas in the public's eye. Ultimately, a more complete picture of this potential "world of private politics" than that which can be alluded to here may be made apparent through an extensive study of the private papers of male politicians of this period.
in being elected to this body in the 1930s, and a comment on the significance of foreign policy issues in their campaigns. The greater part of this discussion concentrates on the nature of women's contributions in the "masculine" sphere of foreign policy debate within the political institution central to British society which remained very much a "men's club". Using the rich record of parliamentary debate provided by *Hansard*, it is possible to comment on the sense of purpose and persistence of certain women in making themselves heard, the specific nature of their contributions, and the reception they faced from male colleagues. Once again, I am interested in analyzing the roles played by gender and gendered rhetoric in women's foreign policy activism.

In the course of this discussion, some attention will be paid to the occasional supporters of government policy found among the women MPs. However, most of the emphasis here will fall on three women critics of the government who were by far the most vocal of all their female colleagues in the House on foreign policy issues. Coming at the events in the international arena of the 1930s from very different political backgrounds and perspectives. Ellen Wilkinson, Eleanor Rathbone, and Katharine, Duchess of Atholl ended up constituting an unlikely alliance in strong opposition to government policy regarding the fascist dictators and, in the process, were largely successful in carving out space for themselves as respected foreign policy commentators in the male-dominated House.

As has been clearly established by studies of the integration of women into British political life in the 20th century and by many biographies and memoirs of individual
women politicians, the process involved in a woman becoming a candidate and then in getting herself elected to parliament in the 1930s was often a difficult one, to say the least. In the first place, as Brian Harrison has pointed out, the contemporary view broadly held by both men and women that women's main concerns in life should be of the domestic/familial realm discouraged many women from becoming involved in public politics in the first place. This same view made it difficult for women willing to take the plunge to be taken seriously. A few women were selected by local riding associations and subsequently elected because they were viewed (rightly or not) as safe replacements for husbands who had been MPs but who had died or been raised to the peerage, or otherwise prevented from running again. Most interested women, however, faced local party associations sceptical of their abilities because of their sex and, when women were offered a seat to contest, it was quite often for a hopeless cause that no male candidate was willing to take on (especially in the cases of the dying Liberal party and the beleaguered Labour party.)

However, in spite of the contemporary stereotypes which made it difficult for women to run, it is also true that, for those women who were selected to do so in the two general elections and various by-elections of the 1930s, foreign policy issues formed an inevitable part of their campaigns, as they did for male candidates as well. It was

---


3Harrison, p.625.
naturally to be expected that all candidates would refer to these issues in their speeches and campaign literature at least to some degree, even if their main interests or the pressing local issues were in other policy areas. In some cases, however, foreign policy issues, by a candidate's choice and/or by circumstance, dominated a particular campaign; this was often the case in by-election campaigns conducted later in the decade. 4

In a few instances, women candidates figure prominently in such campaigns. In her unsuccessful 1935 and 1937 campaigns as the Liberal candidate for the Tory stronghold of Hemel Hempstead, Margery Corbett Ashby made foreign policy a key issue in her campaign literature. Corbett Ashby in fact ran in a number of elections in the interwar period, but apparently never wanted to get into Parliament. 5 Instead, she appears to have used her prominence as a Liberal and as a public figure generally, to obtain public platforms for causes close to her heart. In the 1930s, these causes were clearly related to foreign affairs. In 1935, most of her open letter "to the Parliamentary Electors of the Hemel Hempstead Division" focused on defence spending, disarmament, and the need for world conferences to solve international grievances and ensure peace. 6 In 1937, when she ran against Conservative Viscountess Davidson (whose husband had resigned the Hemel Hempstead seat upon being elevated to the peerage) Corbett Ashby again

---


5Mary Agnes Hamilton. Remembering My Good Friends, (1944), p.52.

61935 General Election literature - MCA Papers, MICA/B9.
heavily emphasized foreign and defence policy in her election pamphlets. In 1938, foreign policy was not surprisingly, a key issue in three by-elections involving women candidates. In April, Dr. Edith Summerskill, although usually primarily interested in public health issues, made criticism of government foreign policy a central theme in her successful campaign as a Labour candidate in West Fulham. In November, Jennie Adamson won another seat for Labour, this time in Dartford (for which she had previously run unsuccessfully in the general election of 1935). According to Roger Eatwell, debate over government policy regarding Czechoslovakia was the dominant topic in this election. To an even greater extent, foreign policy dominated the by-election the following month in the Scottish riding of Kinross and West Perthshire, in which the renegade Tory Duchess of Atholl ran as an Independent campaigning almost exclusively on a protest of government foreign policy. In this contest she was opposed not only by a local Conservative candidate (who ultimately won) but also, until mere days before the election, by a Liberal woman candidate, Mrs. Coll MacDonald, who explicitly

---

71937 By-Election literature - MCA Papers. MICA/B9. The 1937 campaign literature in this file of the Corbett Ashby papers is also interesting in terms of what it reveals about women candidates positioning themselves for the electors. Corbett Ashby's literature reveals something of a balancing act in the way it emphasises her expertise in international affairs (gained as president of the International Alliance of Women and as a government-appointed substitute delegate to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva from 1932 to 1935) but also shows her to be a "womanly woman" by carefully slipping in references to how she still found time for home life as a companion to her husband and how proud she was as a mother of her son Michael, who rowed for Oxford. This file also contains some of Lady Davidson's campaign literature - in which she carefully positions herself as carrying on the work of her husband and refers to the way in which they both viewed the constituency as "a big, happy family."


9Eatwell notes the Times evaluation of 9 November that "[T]he principle issue in the campaign was the foreign policy of the Government" and Adamson's own appraisal that the election had demonstrated public condemnation of this policy. (Eatwell, p.130.)
challenged the credibility of Atholl's foreign policy stance and who had to be pressured by her party to withdraw from the race so that the anti-government vote would not be split.¹⁰

In view of the willingness, even eagerness, of some women parliamentary candidates to wade into foreign policy debate in their respective campaigns, one is led to consider the fate of women candidates generally at election time and the extent to which those successful candidates took the same plunge in the House of Commons.

Inevitably, the difficulties women faced in being accepted as credible politicians combined with the typical problems confronting their male colleagues to take their toll at election time. The number of women Members of Parliament in the 1930s at any given point never rose higher than fifteen - a peak achieved in 1931. Following the 1935 general election, there were nine women MPs, with another four elected in the by-elections of 1937 and 1938. The combination of the women's small numerical presence and the long-established traditions and rituals of the institution meant that the Commons seemed, as Edith Summerskill stated. "...like a boys' school which had decided to take a few girls."¹¹

According to Harrison, the contemporary views concerning women's roles, which

¹⁰ A clipping from the Dundee Courier and Advertiser, 19 December 1938, from the Katharine Atholl Papers. (NRA 22/7) notes that Sir Archibald Sinclair, the leader of the Liberal party, had asked Mrs. Coll MacDonald to withdraw. The Atholl Papers also contain a letter from Kathleen Courtney to KA of 2 December 1938 (NRA 22/32) in which Courtney noted that she, like many others, had been "begging" MacDonald not to stand.

¹¹Summerskill, p.61.
discouraged many women from running in the first place, also had an impact on the nature of their contributions in the House. He refers to "the widely held idea (explicit or implicit) that men and women should occupy separate metaphysical space - that is, concern themselves with different areas of policy." In his analysis of the debating contributions of the women MPs in his period, Harrison delineates the "contours" of this segregation, concluding that "Woman's special sphere [in Parliament] seemed to be the family, welfare, and international peace."\(^\text{12}\)

Clearly the last element brought women into the realm of foreign policy debate and, indeed, Harrison notes that foreign and defence policy ranked second-highest as a percentage of women MPs' total debating contribution in eight policy areas. However, the gap between foreign policy contribution - at 14% - and the highest area, welfare - at 49% - was quite wide.\(^\text{13}\) Even though "world peace" may have been viewed as an appropriately "womanly" concern, it still could not have been easy for women MPs to catch the eye of the Speaker during foreign policy debates. This was due, in part, to the fact that backbenchers (as women MPs typically were) generally would have found it difficult to intervene in these debates. Eleanor Rathbone expressed the frustration she felt as a result of this circumstance when describing her attempts to comment on disarmament initiatives during 1932: "...the House was given few opportunities of discussing the

\(^{12}\text{Brian Harrison, pp. 625, 636.}\)

\(^{13}\text{Although it is worth noting that Harrison shows that foreign policy ranked higher than "women's questions" (including the topics of equal pay, family allowances, family law reform, equal franchise, women's war service, women's employment, and women's rights and status) which constituted 13% of debating contribution. (Ibid., p.637)\)
subject and those of us backbenchers who care for it - who include members of all parties - were reduced to making our points by skillfully designed questions...." It is also hardly wild speculation to suppose that the heavily male-dominated House would not have been particularly interested in, or receptive to, women's contributions to debates concerning issues of diplomacy, strategy, and military expenditure. The situation for women MPs wanting to comment on foreign policy issues was surely not helped by the fact that the Speaker of the House in the 1930s, Captain Edward Fitzroy, was perceived as being particularly unreceptive, or even hostile, to women members. Conservative MP Thelma Cazalet-Keir described Fitzroy as "a walking frigidaire towards any idea coming from a woman M.P." and stated that "[o]ne felt that Captain Fitzroy resented women in the House as deeply as Colonel Clifton-Brown [Fitzroy's successor as Speaker] welcomed them."

For whatever reason, the end result of an examination of Commons debate of foreign policy issues in the 1930s clearly reveals that women MPs, as a whole, contributed only a small proportion of the discussions. No more than a dozen women commented on these issues throughout the decade. Under these circumstances, one might assume that their voices were drowned out amidst the general clamour surrounding foreign policy issues. especially during periods of crisis. However, even under these...

---

14 Eleanoir Rathbone (ER) - circular letter to constituents, January 1933, Rathbone Papers, R.P.XIV 3.4.

15 Thelma Cazalet-Keir, From the Wings. (1967), p.141. Her Labour colleague, Edith Summerskill, has also noted that Fitzroy "ruled the House with a rod of iron". and that "[i]f one was to judge by the way he occasionally reproved Eleanor Rathbone I do not think that he approved of women in the House." (Summerskill, p.63.)
In terms of the policy positions articulated, the women MPs who spoke on foreign
and defence issues in the 1930s can be divided into two fairly distinct groups - those who
generally supported National Government policy and those who openly opposed it. The
former group, not surprisingly, was made up of a group of about a half dozen
Conservatives, while the latter group, noticeably smaller, represented a fascinating, and
rather startling, range of political affiliations and views. It is, in fact, in this select group
of critics of government policy that one finds three very disparate figures - Eleanor
Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson, and Katharine, Duchess of Atholl - who were, by far, the
most vocal women participants in foreign policy debates in this period, especially in the
latter half of the decade.

The Conservative women MPs who actively supported National Government
foreign policy in the House were themselves an interesting group. One of these women,
of course, was the colourful and irrepressible Lady Astor, the first woman in Britain
elected to Parliament who actually took her seat in the House and also likely the most
universally recognizable of the women MPs in the interwar period. She also became one
of the women politicians most closely identified in the public's eye with foreign affairs in
the 1930s, an association which has lingered in popular perceptions of that period to this
day. The circumstances behind this association are rather ironic, in that they were due
almost entirely to contemporary media attention to stories and rumors about Nancy
Astor's activities as hostess at the great English estate of Cliveden, rather than to her
contributions in the House or her public speeches outside the House. In fact, Astor's comments on foreign policy in the Commons were both much more limited and more loyal than one might expect from this figure with a general reputation for outspokenness and a lack of concern for adhering to the party line.

Her relatively few comments on foreign and defence issues were delivered in her characteristically blunt fashion and were strong in defence of her party and the government. In March of 1935, she spoke out in support of the White Paper on Defence, which had called for armaments increases, and attacked the Labour party for its attempts to lay sole claim to being the party of peace, at one point stating that she did not wish to be rude, but that she believed that the greatly divided Labour movement was jealous of the more unified Conservative party.16 In December of that year, Astor stood up in defence of the Hoare-Laval pact over Abyssinia, saying that she was "...glad that the Government [had] stuck to their guns." and that no nation at that time, including Italy, wanted war.17 In May of 1936, she spoke out on the need for a strong navy, and congratulated the government on the recent naval agreement with Germany, stating:

I think the Government were [sic] right to make it and I hope they will go on making peace with Germany and getting in touch with Germany. Peace lies far more in that direction than in talking about collective action under the League of Nations when the others will not collect. I am perfectly unrepentant and I am prepared to go to my constituency and make these statements. I have fought long and hard for the League of Nations but I am not going to fight a day longer for a sham.18

18Hansard. vol.311. col.1427. 4 May 1936.
Astor's only other really substantive comment on foreign policy before the war came in March of the following year, when, in the course of defending Neville Chamberlain's rearmament bill, she took the opportunity to air her well-known prejudices about France, stating that Britain had been "the great friend of France" for too long, and that Britain should "...not base [its] foreign policy on that of a shell-shocked nation." 19

Astor's knack for controversial comments, even in support of her own party leaders, likely contributed to her notoriety, with the possible side effect that other comments on foreign policy from female Conservative colleagues were overshadowed. However, in the case of two of these women, Marjorie Graves and Mavis Tate, there was a background of specific expertise and interest in foreign and defence policy issues which lent a greater depth to their contributions.

Marjorie Graves, who had defeated Labour MP Herbert Morrison in the Hackney South riding in the 1931 election, was only in the House until the next general election in 1935, but during her tenure many of her contributions were on foreign policy topics. In her debut speech in July of 1932, Graves drew attention to her presence in an official capacity at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919: 20 she had also worked at the Foreign Office during the war itself and was subsequently employed by the Intelligence Department of the Home Office after the war. 21 Much of her first speech in the Commons focused on British foreign and defence policy: she defended the navy from further cuts

---


21 Brookes, p.100.
and called for a renewal of foreign policy that would evoke "the spirit of Palmerston" and make Britain "the chairman of Europe." In the following year, Graves was the second woman MP to draw attention to the threat posed to the world by the new regime in Germany - in a firmly-worded observation which was then followed by a reassuring reference to "the subtle strength of the British Empire." Some months later, Graves saw the signing of a pact between Germany and Poland as a promising key to peace, and also spoke in glowing terms of the National Government's foreign policy, stating that Britain was an admired world leader in international morality. In 1935, before her electoral defeat, Graves spoke out twice at length on foreign affairs, suggesting in May that Britain should exercise some care in not associating itself too closely with France, and in July that, since Italy's actions were an understandable response to its need to find an outlet for surplus population, an Italian mandate in Abyssinia through the League of Nations was the best course to pursue.

Marjorie Graves' clearly demonstrated interest in foreign affairs and her apparent comfort in tackling these issues during her tenure in the House suggests that, if she had retained her seat in the latter half of the decade, she might have indeed continued to serve as a significant female presence in these debates. Graves' colleague, Mavis Tate, was not as vocal as Graves on these issues, but she nonetheless stands as an interesting example.

---


23 *Hansard*, vol.280, cols.394-397. 5 July 1933.

24 *Hansard*, vol.285, cols.1017-1018. 6 February 1934.

of another woman MP who engaged in this "masculine" subject matter from the
perspective of personal expertise. Tate, elected in Willesden West in 1931 and in Frome
in 1935, had a pilot's license (an unusual achievement for women in this period) and took
a considerable interest in aviation. While more of her energy was directed towards civil
aviation, she did apply her knowledge to questions relating to military aviation and
Britain's capabilities in this area. Interestingly enough, it was Tate who made a point of
addressing what she viewed as the general misconstruction of Stanley Baldwin's famous
comment in the House in 1935 that "the bomber [would] always get through." She
argued that Baldwin had not meant that there was no possible defence against air attack,
but that he had simply said that some machines would always get through defences - a
very different point, and one which indicated the urgent need for air pacts and a strong air
force.26

Other Conservative women who offered brief comments on foreign policy in
these years were Mary Ada Pickford, whose short career in Parliament ended suddenly
with her death in 1934, and Irene Ward, who had beaten the one woman cabinet
minister of the previous Labour government - Margaret Bondfield - in 1931.27 Somewhat
more vocal on foreign affairs was Thelma Cazalet (who won East Islington from another
Labour woman MP, Leah Manning, in 1931), who spoke out in support of the policy of
non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War and who questioned the value of visits by pro-

26Hansard. vol.299. col.1135. 19 March 1935.

Republican MPs to Spain. Finally, attention should be drawn to the contributions on foreign policy from Florence Horsbrugh, a Scottish MP for Dundee who also entered Parliament in 1931 but who did not make her first comment on foreign policy until late 1935. Her venture into this subject came in the form of a lengthy speech in which she urged the need for adequate British armaments to support a system of collective security. While Horsbrugh also stands as the only Conservative woman to offer a substantive comment in the Commons in defence of government policy in 1938, perhaps the greater landmark of her contributions in the 1930s came in November of 1936, when she was chosen to be the first woman MP to offer the Reply to the King's Address (the only Speech from the Throne made by Edward VIII). Horsbrugh used the opportunity to praise the government for keeping Britain out of "entanglements that might lead to war" and to again press the need for strong armed forces.

While these examples of contributions regarding foreign policy issues demonstrate that women supporters of the National Government, and of the Conservative party leadership in particular, were not silent in the Commons in this period and, indeed, were sometimes deeply interested in these issues, it is nonetheless clear that these contributions were relatively few and far between. This is especially noticeable in the later 1930s: comments from these women appear to have peaked in 1935 and then

---


29 *Hansard*, vol.305. cols.387-400. 24 October 1935.

30 *Hansard*, vol.339. cols.520-527. 6 October 1938.

31 *Hansard*, vol.317. col.16. 3 November 1936.
declined to one or two instances a year. One likely explanation for this decline is that the number of Conservative women MPs dropped sharply after the 1935 general election, with the notable impact in this area being felt through the defeat of Marjorie Graves. At the same time, Astor, Horsbrugh, Tate, Cazalet, and Ward all remained in Parliament. The decline in the contributions of women government supporters may thus also be due to a combination of two factors. The first of these was the recognized on-going resistance of the Speaker to women members (perhaps especially in the case of Nancy Astor.) The second factor was the fact that, as the decade progressed and the international situation worsened, the women MPs loyal to the government would likely have been called upon to devote even more energy to speaking outside Parliament to the public, especially women, on the merits of government policy - while the task of defending foreign policy in the House was inevitably even more exclusively assumed by the male front bench under attack by government critics.

However, while women MPs loyal to the government figured less noticeably in foreign and defence policy debates after 1935, contributions from women critics of government policy were coming into their own and, in the period 1936-1939, far outweighed in sheer volume the contributions of the women just mentioned from the whole of the decade. Three women were responsible for this dramatic increase in women MPs' participation in foreign policy debates in this period, and, between them, they represented the broad spectrum of political beliefs among both women and men which came together in this period in opposition to government foreign policy. From the left
wing of the Labour party there was Ellen Wilkinson. from the centre of the political spectrum (an Independent with some sympathy for socialist reforms) there was Eleanor Rathbone. and from the right wing of the Conservative party there was Katharine, Duchess of Atholl. Already familiar figures in this study, their undeniably central role in a discussion of women MPs and foreign policy makes it especially appropriate here to describe the evolution of their respective foreign policy opinions. which led them to become vocal advocates at the centre of Britain's public political realm.

As various summaries of Ellen Wilkinson's political career make clear, a large portion of her attention in the inter-war years was devoted to domestic socialist and feminist concerns. Neither of these priorities is particularly surprising given her upper working class upbringing in turn-of-the-century Manchester - a city in which both the early labour movement and the suffrage campaign were strong. According to her biographer, Betty Vernon, it was Wilkinson's socialism, in particular her membership in the Independent Labour Party, that led to her interest in international affairs; she saw war as a product of capitalist and imperialist interests. Her sympathy with pacifism, combined with her connections to the constitutional suffragism of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, led her to join the newly-formed WIL during World War I. Following the war, through her involvement in the WIL, she developed a strong commitment to the ideal of peaceful co-operation embodied in the League of Nations.32

32Vernon, pp.34. 42.

33Ibid., p.43.
Wilkinson carried these ideals with her to Parliament following her election as Labour MP for Middlesborough East in 1924. Most of her energies in this period were devoted to improving the conditions of working men and women in Britain. However, she also indicated her views on international affairs by showing her support for the League and for disarmament. In 1930, she travelled to Geneva with fellow Labour MP Susan Lawrence, an official delegate to the League Assembly, while at home she worked in co-operation with the WIL to get questions asked in the House on the subject of the Government's attention to public support for disarmament.²⁴

Along with many of her Labour colleagues, Ellen Wilkinson was defeated in the general election of 1931. During the next few years, until she was elected to represent the economically devastated Tyneside constituency of Jarrow in 1935, she had the opportunity to write and to travel, especially in Europe. Many of her contributions during these years to various journals and newspapers, including *Time and Tide*, reflected her growing awareness of international affairs and her concern about the alarming politics of right-wing regimes.

In 1933, Wilkinson wrote vividly of the persecution faced by many different segments of German society and warned that the situation was bound to worsen as the Nazi regime established itself.³⁵ As a feminist, she was particularly concerned with the

---

²⁴*Hansard*, vol.236, cols.1315-1316. 12 March 1930. Wilkinson was definitely more circumspect about intervening in foreign policy debates at this time than she was later in the 1930s. While listening to a long and formal speech by Austen Chamberlain (while he was still Foreign Secretary before the Conservatives' defeat in the late 1920s) Wilkinson whispered to F.W. Pethick-Lawrence that "it [seemed] like being in a church." (Lord Pethick-Lawrence, P.C., *Fate Has Been Kind*, (1943).)

³⁵see Ellen Wilkinson (EW), "Thinking With Blood" - *Time and Tide*, 1 April 1933, pp.381-384.
conditions faced by German women and the fact that they were being forced out of employment in the public sphere. Urging British women's organizations to protest, she stated, "[t]he liberties of women in this country, as of others, have been too hardly won, and are even now too precariously held, for it to be safe to allow the case of the German women to go by default." Her exposure to *Mein Kampf* only increased her repugnance but also raised fears relating to Hitler's expansionist foreign policy rhetoric.

Wilkinson was back in Parliament in late 1935 - just in time for the political uproar over the Hoare-Laval pact regarding Abyssinia. She had been horrified at the Italian invasion of that state but was also angry and cynical because of her belief that British policy was being determined by imperial interests. During the first half of 1936, her pacifism determined her angry reaction to Government announcements concerning rearmament. In the Commons, Wilkinson spoke with heavy irony of the justification for rearmament as "...something which simply cannot be helped because we are, as always in this country, on the side of the angels." She went on to state:

The British Navy has never fired a shot except for the loving kindness of everybody, and we have collected our Empire partly in a fit of absent-mindedness, and partly by going out and getting the countries of the world to bestow upon themselves the blessings of British rule. It is very comforting except for the people who may be suffering under us. We have this enormous Empire, and a Navy, Army and Air Force, and all the rest of it

---


37See, for example, the monograph co-authored by Wilkinson and Dr. Edward Conze, *Why Fascism?*, (1934), which examines both the Italian and German regimes and critiques fascist militarism from a socialist perspective. In its discussion on fascist foreign policy, the book focuses heavily on Nazi Germany and clearly perceives it as the greater threat.

and the net result, apparently, is that in 1936 we are on the verge of war.\textsuperscript{39}

Her views on this subject remained intact even after having first-hand knowledge of Hitler's re-militarisation of the Rhineland in March.\textsuperscript{40} She subsequently became one of the first woman sponsors of Rev. Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union. By the summer of 1936, however, her loyalties were torn as a result of the outbreak of civil war in Spain. The fact that the conflict seemed to be so clearly a struggle between fascism and her comrades on the left made it increasingly difficult for Wilkinson to hold on to her pacifist ideals. Her gradual shift away from pacifism consequently brought Wilkinson closer to the perspective on foreign policy held by Eleanor Rathbone, with whom she had longed shared commitments to feminism and social reform, despite occasional differences on strategies and priorities.

Rathbone came out of a prominent Liverpool family that was well-known for its nonconformist beliefs and reform activism. Throughout her life she was driven by a commitment to aid the disadvantaged members of society - a commitment which revealed itself in her feminism and in a more general humanitarianism which she would apply to both Britain and the world at large.

Following her years at Somerville College, Oxford, in the 1890s, she was closely involved in local Liverpool politics and social activism and particularly in the suffrage movement. By 1900, she was on the Executive Committee of the National Union of

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Hansard}, vol. 309, cols.298-299. 25 February 1936.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Vernon}, p.134.
Women's Suffrage Societies, the constitutional suffragist organization. Shortly before the outbreak of war in 1914, Rathbone resigned from the executive because of her objections to the Union's alliance with the Labour party. However, after the war began, she came back to the NUWSS when a number of executive members resigned en masse because of the society's refusal to support a women's peace movement. While these women went on to form the WIL, Rathbone, not herself a pacifist, became increasingly prominent within the Union. In 1919, following the retirement of Fawcett, she was elected president. The Union's name was changed to that of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and, as president of NUSEC from 1919 to 1928, Rathbone became one of the most prominent and influential feminists of the inter-war period. She was known, in particular, for her espousal of what was called "new feminism" (a new name for a strain of maternal feminism which had existed before the war and in the 19th century) which downplayed the relevance of demands for equality and instead focused on domestic issues believed to be of greater significance in improving life for the majority of women.

While president of NUSEC in the 1920s, Rathbone was not particularly involved in issues relating to international affairs such as the peace movement and disarmament. Eventually, however, her feminism helped shift her attention to the international stage. In 1927, Rathbone read Katharine Mayo's *Mother India*, and was horrified at the author's descriptions of the suffering of Indian women through child marriage, premature

---

41Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.102.
childbearing, and unskilled midwifery. According to her biographer, Mary Stocks, it was her hope of being able to do something to effect this situation that led her to run for Parliament in 1929. Once elected as the Independent Member for the Combined English Universities, Rathbone's interest in Indian women brought her into the political debate in the early part of the 1930s over the British role in India.

As a candidate and, later, as a sitting member, Rathbone did feel it was her responsibility to make her principles and opinions clear on issues relating to international relations. She was unambiguous in her support for the ideals of the League of Nations, although she also carefully referred to the concept of "Peace with Security," which differentiated her from the pacifist position. In the early years of the 1930s she pressed the government to take a stronger lead on disarmament, but by 1933 she was increasingly concerned with the government's apparent unwillingness to act to deter aggressors in the international arena - both in the Far East and in Europe.

Rathbone was particularly anxious about the advent of Hitler in Germany. As with Ellen Wilkinson, her growing knowledge about the nature of the Nazi regime led to her involvement in a number of organizations and campaigns to aid those suffering directly under it. In a strongly worded letter to the Times in April 1933, Rathbone


47The Combined English Universities constituency was made up of Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Reading, and Sheffield, and had two seats in the House. Eleanor Rathbone held one of these seats from 1929 until her death in early January of 1946. There were three other English university constituencies - Cambridge and Oxford, which also had two seats, and London University, which had one seat. The University of Wales and Queen's University at Belfast also each had one seat, while the Combined Scottish Universities, representing Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews, had two seats.

46ER - Parliamentary election pamphlets - 1929, 1931, Rathbone Papers, R.P.XIV 3.3.
characterised the new German regime as "an autocracy more complete, more truculent, more contemptuous of individual liberty and of minority rights, rashier and more inexperienced, than any Government before the War."\(^4^5\) Shortly thereafter, Rathbone spoke out in a similar vein in the House, being the first woman MP to do so on the subject of Nazi Germany. She was also quick to note the implications that the nature of that regime held for the international system and had no faith in the possibility that German foreign policy would be any more rational or less brutal than its internal policy.\(^4^6\) She was aware of the particular strategic threat posed to Great Britain by an aggressive Germany, but she also perceived a broader ideological battle taking shape globally between fascism and democracy. This led her to suggest serious preventive measures on the part of democratic societies. Neville Thompson has noted that Winston Churchill's first strong endorsement of the League as the basis for a defensive alliance against aggressors in Europe was made in the House in July of 1934.\(^4^7\) However, even Churchill would continue to hedge his bets on this subject after this date, and show a willingness to accommodate other existing or emerging fascist powers in Europe. Rathbone, however, began cautiously proposing the need for a "defensive alliance, for political and cultural purposes, of the free democracies of the world" as early as May of 1933.\(^4^8\) The nature of

---

\(^4^5\) ER to The Times, 3 April 1933: R.P. XIV 2.6. 6.1.

\(^4^6\) Hansard, vol.276. col.2765. 13 April 1933.

\(^4^7\) Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s, (1971), pp.60-61. He is referring specifically to a speech of Churchill's on July 13th, 1934 (Hansard, vol.292, cols.730-1.)

\(^4^8\) See ER's speech to the Proportional Representation Society, 10 May 1933, R.P.XIV 3.11; see also Hansard, vol.285, col.1087. 6 February 1934.
the "alliance" was left rather vague, but her statements still stand as an early espousal of a strong line against Germany, relative to the position of other British politicians.

All this is not to imply that Rathbone was in favour of large-scale British rearmament, or immediate military responses to aggressive actions. Although she had left much of the rhetoric and tactics of the peace movement far behind, she was still firmly committed to the preservation of international peace. However, in the aftermath of the failure of the League of Nations in Manchuria, and of the Disarmament Conference, Rathbone was anxious to support a form of international action that would prevent a general drift into isolation and rearmament. She quickly came to focus much of her attention on the provision in the League Covenant for the use of sanctions against aggressor states. She accepted the possibility of military sanctions as an ultimate option, but firmly believed that a coordinated system of economic sanctions would be sufficient to effect aggressive policies.

It was then a severe disappointment for Rathbone when, in the course of the developing conflict between Italy and Abyssinia, the British government's position shifted from a seemingly promising stance in favour of sanctions against Italy in the autumn of 1935, to the concessions of the Hoare-Laval pact at the end of that year and the final abandonment of sanctions in June of 1936. In July of 1935, it had been Rathbone who directly confronted Marjorie Graves' suggestions of an Italian mandate in Abyssinia, asking angrily, "Does the hon. Lady think that it would be a good way of maintaining the authority of the League to reward Italy for a flagrant violation of the Covenant of the League by giving her a new mandate, and would Italy's threats of aggression against
Abyssinia be a hopeful augury for good relations between the mandatory nation and the country placed under it?"49 Briefly, in the fall of 1935, the government had seemed willing to support the League and collective action against Italy, but the Hoare-Laval pact in December was deeply offensive to Rathbone, and she viewed it as yet one more example of League principles being betrayed.50 She was also afraid of the possible consequences of revealing the weakness of the League system - fears which seemed to be confirmed by Germany's re-militarisation of the Rhineland.51 On the eve of the summer adjournment in 1936, she warned the House that Germany would likely soon present Britain with another fait accompli - perhaps an attack on Czechoslovakia - and was gravely concerned that Britain would passively acquiesce or, even worse, give Germany its blessing.52 Under these circumstances, and in light of the revolt against the democratically-elected government of Spain by fascist forces - as well as early evidence of material support for Franco's forces from the European fascist dictatorships - Rathbone resigned herself to the fact that pursuing international agreement on disarmament was temporarily impractical and that attention needed to be sharply focused on making collective security a forceful reality. The situation in Spain and Central Europe by the end of 1936 and into 1937 made this task Eleanor Rathbone's top priority.

51see, for example, Hansard, vol.310, col.2544. 6 April 1936.
In the case of Katharine Atholl, it should be noted that she did, in fact, share at least some common ground with Eleanor Rathbone in terms of their respective backgrounds. They were close in age, roughly a generation older than Ellen Wilkinson, raised in similar circumstances as the daughters of liberal scholars, and they had been imbued with similar humanitarian values. At this point, however, the similarities end. In terms of circumstance, of course, Atholl set herself apart from the other two women by marrying - and in particular by marrying into the aristocracy and adopting with seeming ease the highly conservative values associated with her situation. One of the peculiarities of the Duchess of Atholl's career is the fact that she went into politics as a known former opponent of women's suffrage. As an anti-suffrage campaigner in Scotland, she had argued that most women were simply not sufficiently informed to make valuable, educated contributions as voters or politicians. Obviously she exempted herself from this judgement when she picked up the reins of her husband's Commons career once he became Duke of Atholl. In 1922, she was elected as the Conservative member for the Scottish riding of Kinross and West Perthshire, in which the family estate was located at Blair Atholl.

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education for the Baldwin government from 1924 until its defeat in 1929, Atholl devoted most of her political energy in the 1920s to educational issues. Her positions on issues of international

---

54Ibid.. pp.63-65.
55Ibid.. Chapter 11.
affairs around the turn of the decade were very much in accord with Conservative principles - and were even often on the right wing of the party. She was, at this time, relatively enthusiastic about the League of Nations as a useful and friendly arena for the discussion of international problems. At the same time, she was adamant in her position that armaments reduction had its limitations as a means to promote peace. The Duchess was particularly aware of Britain's reliance on overseas trade, as well as its imperial commitments, and was therefore in favour of the maintenance of a strong Navy. She went further, however, in also emphasising the threat posed by Soviet Russia, a country outside the League which possessed a large army and air force while being "ceaselessly engaged in world-wide revolutionary propaganda." Not surprisingly, given these views of British interests and security concerns, Atholl was less than enthusiastic regarding disarmament and very wary of supporting any campaigns or initiatives which might suggest that Britain should lead the way in such ventures.

Her solidly right-wing views on imperial policy actually resulted in getting the

[54]Katharine, Duchess of Atholl, *Women and Politics*, (1931), pp.22, 28, 69-70. Indeed, even her outspoken Conservative colleague and fellow peer, Nancy Astor, once described the Duchess as "ready to be locked up on the subject of Russia." (NA to Philip Kerr, Lord Lothian, 4 March 1932, Nancy Astor papers, University of Reading, MS 1416/1/2/102) (However, it is also worth noting that the Duchess did not appear to have had a very high opinion of Astor's foreign policy views either; later in the decade she referred with alarm to the "strange brand of Conservatism" which Astor was expounding to the North American press.) (KA to Mrs. Stirling of Keir, Dunblane, 4 September 1935, Katharine Atholl Papers, NRA 22/3)

[55]In January of 1931, the Duchess refused a request from the Women's International League to sign a Disarmament Declaration being sponsored by that organisation. She maintained this position even after it was suggested to her by people within her party that signing the petition would not be a problem. Her views remained basically the same a year later when she told a League of Nations Union branch in her constituency that Britain could not disarm further until other countries had made reductions, especially in light of Russia's armaments development under its Five Year Plan. (KA - letter to Edith Zangwill of the WIL, 28 January 1931; Letters between KA and Austen Chamberlain, 23 April 1931, 1 May 1931; KA - letter to Comrie LNU branch members, 3 February 1932. KA papers, NRA 36)
Duchess into trouble with her party in 1934 and 1935 over the issue of colonial devolution and India. Atholl's particular interest in India was not new. In 1929, she had in fact worked in partnership with Eleanor Rathbone to draw the attention of a generally uninterested and unsympathetic House to the controversial humanitarian issues concerning the treatment of young girls in India. Five years later, however, she and Rathbone were on opposing sides over the issue of supporting the National Government's India Bill in favour of devolution. Atholl was extremely pessimistic about the Indians' capacity for self-rule and was also concerned with the need for Britain to present itself as a strong imperial power within the international arena. In the spring of 1935, Atholl, along with five other Conservative MPs, went so far as resigning from the Parliamentary party to indicate their disapproval.\textsuperscript{58}

This gesture lasted until the fall, when she rejoined the party in the interests of presenting a united government front during the developing crisis in Abyssinia. A key reason for Atholl's emphasis on the need for Britain to show some strength in the international arena by flexing its imperial muscles had been her growing concern regarding the increasing militarism of the Nazi regime in Germany. This concern also made her afraid of the risks of alienating Mussolini by a punitive policy of sanctions - which she felt might serve to "[throw him] into the arms of Hitler." While deploring Italy's breach of the League Covenant and of the Convention against the use of poison gas, she believed that Britain could not afford "to lose Italy's co-operation in preserving

\textsuperscript{58}Hetherington, pp.138-148.
the peace of Europe."59

This willingness to set aside League principles and humanitarian concerns seems to have been the result of a recent self-immersion into details of Nazi foreign policy. Her alarm at the obvious indications of German expansionism found in the German edition of Mein Kampf was confirmed and heightened by the re-militarisation of the Rhineland in March of 1936.60 Over the course of the closing months of 1935 and the first half of 1936, Atholl's foreign policy priorities seem to have come together in an increasingly coherent form. In spite of her earlier, virulent distrust of the Soviet Union, she repeatedly described Nazism as posing a greater immediate danger than Communism. She defended France's position in Europe and the Franco-Soviet Pact, and called for a strong European system of mutual assistance.61 Atholl was highly sceptical of Hitler's proposal of a 25-year non-aggression pact in the West, fearing that such a measure would put many of the vulnerable states of Central and Eastern Europe at risk from German expansionism.

Once again, Atholl was willing to set herself apart from official government policy and the mainstream of her party. Abyssinia had brought her out of the political wilderness in which she had found herself after the India Bill, but this demonstration of unity was only temporary. Increasingly, Atholl came to feel the inadequacy of the Government's foreign policy, especially as it related to Europe and the issues of rearmament.

---

59 11 June 1936. KA to Mr. R. Balfour. Aberfeldy Branch of LNU. KA Papers. NRA 92/3.

60 19 May 1936. KA to Baldwin. KA Papers. NRA 22/4.

61 See pamphlet - "Facts Bearing on the International Situation" - reprints of letters to the Press by KA - including: the Manchester Guardian, 13 March 1936; the Glasgow Daily Record, 16 March 1936; the Daily Telegraph, 25 July 1936; The Scotsman, 28 July 1936; the Morning Post, 30 July 1936. (KA papers, NRA 22/2)
and diplomacy. In this respect, she found a familiar Conservative ally from the days of the India Bill in Winston Churchill. However, she also began reaching out to colleagues outside her party whose views she found sympathetic. Although they had recently disagreed over policy towards Abyssinia, Katharine Atholl and Eleanor Rathbone started to concur over the course of 1936 as a result of their shared concerns regarding Central Europe. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the involvement of the fascist powers in this conflict brought their views even closer together as the Duchess of Atholl, in her anger over Mussolini's actions in aiding Franco, abandoned the possibility of a conciliatory policy towards Italy. In fact, the evolution of her foreign policy views brought the Duchess not only into an alliance with some figures of the center of the political spectrum, as represented by Rathbone and a number of liberal politicians, but also with figures on the left (and even the far left) of the spectrum, including Ellen Wilkinson.

By December of 1936, all three women were speaking out against the Government during the same House of Commons debates concerning policy toward the

---


63 Apparently Atholl wrote to Rathbone, possibly following the latter's speech in the Summer Adjournment debate on foreign affairs in July 1936, to congratulate Rathbone on her comments on the threat posed by Germany to other vulnerable states in Europe. According to Atholl, Rathbone "...seemed more surprised than [Atholl] had expected..." to receive this praise. (Brookes, pp.116-117) In any event, this seems to have marked the beginning of their alliance over foreign policy in the 1930s, and the two women subsequently offered their first joint attack on the government in the Commons in November of that year - focusing on concerns relating to Central Europe. (*Hansard*, vol.317, cols.331-344, 5 November 1936.)
situations in Central Europe and Spain. For example, Ellen Wilkinson took the Government to task for "tak[ing] a lead in organizing a [munitions] blockade by democratic governments of the democratic Government of Spain." and herself laid the blame at the feet of class interests. She noted a "curious aspect" of the situation, in which Britain's imperial interests (and, in particular, the threat to Gibraltar). which were typically a high priority for supporters of the National Government, were clearly conflicting with class interests, since the rebels in Spain "[were] the people with whom they normally associate[d]." In this clash of interests, Wilkinson saw class as being the obvious winner - to the detriment of both imperial interests and Britain's responsibility to another democratic state.

Following this speech, and a speech by Duncan Sandys in support of the Government's blockade Bill. Rathbone joined the debate - picking up especially on the extremely problematic application of non-intervention which had given Italy and Germany a great deal of time to send arms and material to Franco before they had even pretended to agree to non-intervention in late August. She went on to speak at length on the lack of any indication, in the investigations in which she had been involved, that the Soviet Union was sending any aid to the Spanish Government before October. Interestingly enough, Rathbone concurred with the class argument offered by Wilkinson, stating that, if the Government continued to focus on the Soviet Union's intervention in Spain, and not on that of Germany and Italy, then Government Members "must not blame other Members for suspecting there is class prejudice in the matter." At the end of her speech,

---

64Hansard, vol.318, cols.1114-1116, 1 December 1936.
she stated "The struggle is between class fear and fear for private interests on the one hand, and fear for democracy, for liberty, and the sense of honour to the weaker countries that trust in us on the other. and in the clash between those two motives, class interest wins every time. I am not a Socialist and I am not a Communist, but I see the facts. Can one wonder that those of us who see those facts feel suspicious of a Bill like this?"65

When Katharine Atholl added her voice a few minutes later, she took some exception to this class argument and the implications it had for the motivations behind Government policy. She said specifically that, in light of the terrible situation in Spain, she did not intend to quarrel with either Wilkinson or Rathbone "...if they said some rather hard things about what they feel is the attitude of Members on these benches...," but she did disagree with Wilkinson's view that the Government had not honestly been trying to carry out "a really impartial policy" with non-intervention. However, having defended her own class and Government to this extent, she then made no bones about the negative impact that non-intervention had had on "the constitutionally elected government of Spain." Following up on the comments of Wilkinson and Rathbone regarding foreign intervention in Spain, Atholl insisted on recognition of evidence that large amounts of aid were flowing from Germany and Italy to Franco in the first half of August, and that it was very clear from the nature of the fighting that the Government side had received little to no outside assistance early in the conflict, with the exception of a few international volunteers. She had little difficulty in looking beyond her inherent

65Ibid., cols. 1123-1127.
dislike and distrust of Communist Russia to take what she believed was a more realistic assessment of the political situation inside Spain and the implications of a Franco victory with considerable aid from the Fascist powers. She trusted Wilkinson's assessment of the situation inside Spain that stressed a greater presence of Anarchists over Socialists and Communists, and she did not believe that a victory by the Republican Government would mean Soviet control of Spain. At the same time, like Wilkinson and Rathbone, she stressed the danger of a victorious Franco having to repay Italy and Germany with the transfer of strategic territory or the use of ports and air bases. Atholl's pragmatic approach is neatly summed up in statement near the end of her speech in which she said, "...I think that, though there may be dangers to be feared on both sides, if the Spanish Government win [sic] we might have a not very orderly Spain. the dangers that that would involve to this country are very much less than those with which we might be faced if the insurgents won."^66

From this point in late 1936 on, it became a common occurrence for the voices of Atholl, Rathbone, and Wilkinson to be raised in joint protest over government foreign policy. References to circumstances in Spain, Central Europe, Abyssinia, and the Far East would, on many occasions, be interwoven into an ominous presentation of the global threat to democracy, the League, and Britain's own interests. However, even when the focus was on events in a particular arena, the larger context of the need for Britain to lead collective action against the fascist powers was always present.

---

In the interests of bolstering the credibility of their protests and obtaining first-hand knowledge and experience of the conditions which concerned them so deeply, all three MPs travelled to the continent in the first half of 1937 and consciously presented a united front. In February, in response to a request from the National Council of Romanian Women, Katharine Atholl invited Rathbone and Dorothy Layton to travel with her on a tour of Roumania, Yugoslavia, and Czecho-Slovakia. In the course of what turned into an exhausting tour, the three women were even more convinced of the vulnerability of these states to Nazi aggression and the internal fragility of their pro-democratic forces - two factors which made the need for a strong show of British support for collective security even more pressing - especially in light of the ambiguous messages conveyed by British policy regarding Abyssinia and Spain.

Upon their return to Britain, both Rathbone and Atholl attempted to make this point in the House. Rathbone pointed to Britain's special responsibility to these states of

---

67 Katharine Atholl's attitudes regarding collective security and the nature of the Nazi regime would appear to have received a significant amount of press in Europe and led to some very interesting correspondence. In September of 1936, she was in communication with the former German Chancellor Bruning on the need to publicise Nazi atrocities. In mid-November, she received thanks from Jan Masaryk on her November 5th speech. On a minor, but in retrospect, highly ironic note, her anti-Nazi stance brought her a request in October from one Gerhard Fuchs, by way of his brother Klaus, to help in obtaining the release of Gerhard's wife and infant son from prison in Germany. (At this time, Klaus Fuchs was in England, working at the H.H. Willis Physical Laboratory.) (see KA Papers - correspondence between KA and Bruning. September 1936, NRA 95; Masaryk to KA. 16 November 1936. NRA 93; and Gerhard and Klaus Fuchs to KA. 15 October and 19 December, 1936. NRA 93.) The letters from Romanian women were thus no anomaly in this period, but it is interesting to note that, when discussing the justifications of the proposed journey to Central Europe with Rathbone, the anti-feminist Duchess was careful to point out that she had been "flooded" with telegrams and letters from Romanian women. MPs as well as members of women's organisations, thanking them both for their pro-collective security stance. Rathbone picked up on the possibilities suggested by this communication and expressed an interest in evaluating the women's organisations that they would encounter - with an eye to establishing and maintaining contacts with them. See the Duchess of Atholl's "Reasons for Proposed Journey to Roumania" (ER Papers. R.P.XIV 2.9.6) and Rathbone's "Points for Observation During Our Tour", 30 Jan 1937. (ER Papers. R.P.XIV 2.9.23)
the Little Entente - states that Britain helped create in the Versailles settlement - and emphasized the risk of these countries turning to Nazism and Fascism, especially if large landholders had any say in the matter. As had been the case in the House in late 1936, a degree of class loyalty again raised its head and Atholl took some exception to this last statement, making reference to Rathbone's "slightly suspicious reference to landowners and their supposed aims and objects." but she was otherwise in "warm agreement" with the rest of Rathbone's speech. However, Atholl's comments on this day are perhaps more striking because of the opportunity she took to reverse publicly her position over Abyssinia. News of the extremely brutal nature of the on-going Italian campaign in that country, combined with what she knew of Italian intervention in Spain, led her to state that, although she originally had been prepared to support the Hoare-Laval pact (partly because of scepticism over the virtues of the Abyssinian government), she now believed that Italian rule in that part of the world would be disastrous. She then proceeded to call on the government to take a firm stand on the expulsion of Italian and German troops from Spain.68

The second trip to the continent taken by Atholl and Rathbone in 1937 occurred less than two months later. This time the destination was Spain and the trip was organized by their colleague Ellen Wilkinson, who had already travelled once to Spain

68see Rathbone's speech. 3120-3124, and Atholl's speech. 3124 and 3126; 25 March 1937, H.C. Deb. 5 s., vol 321. As recently as November 1936, in a letter to her constituents, the Duchess had stated that "as much as [she] felt for the Abyssinians," she still agreed with the policy of raising sanctions after the Italians had seized Addis Ababa because of the tense situation in Europe created by the German reoccupation of the Rhineland. (KA letter to Kinross and West Perthshire Constituency. November 1936. KA Papers. NRA 22/2.)
earlier that year, with the purpose of investigating relief activities in place. In mid-April, they left for Barcelona, accompanied by Dame Rachel Crowdy. Because of their well-known views on non-intervention, the women were warmly received by the Republican Government and were given a car to travel to Valencia and Madrid, the beleaguered outpost of Republican resistance. This visit had a profound impact on these women - especially Rathbone, Atholl, and Crowdy, who had not visited before. In Valencia, they encountered scores of refugees who described being machine-gunned on the road. In Madrid, they experienced air raids and shell fire, and were amazed at the ability of the inhabitants to adjust to these conditions.

At the same time, they received depressing validations of the ineffectual nature of British policy and the Non-Intervention Agreement. They received no positive or optimistic comment regarding the latest proposals for observation of the Spanish frontiers to prevent the passage of foreign military personnel and equipment. More generally, they were deeply chagrined to witness the growing disillusionment with Britain in Republican Spain - learning, as Rathbone later stated, that the British Government's oft-heard claim in the House of Commons that it "had no information" regarding reports of the German and Italian presence in Spain had become a rather grim international joke. In short, the

---

69 Wilkinson had gone with representatives of the Haldane Society, to help jobless anti-Nazi academics. See Vernon, p.165.

70 See KA's letter to Atholl - written from Valencia (no date). KA papers, NRA 54 bundle 12.

71 See "Notes on the Scheme of Spanish Frontiers Observation" - "made by The Duchess of Atholl, M.P., Miss Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., Miss Eleanor Rathbone, M.P., and Dame Rachel Crowdy, R.R.C. during their recent visit to Spain" (marked "private: not for publication"): see also Stocks, p.242.
women returned to England with little reason for optimism aside from being impressed at the tenacity and endurance of the Republican forces. In the House, Wilkinson expressed their collective sense of shame regarding British policy and called for an end to non-intervention so that the Spanish government could purchase the necessary arms.\textsuperscript{72}

The bombing of Guernica further fanned the flames of their outrage at the inadequacies of non-intervention and most of their contributions in the House for the remainder of 1937, both before and after the summer recess, continued to be concerned with needling the government on this score. In Question Period and in debates on foreign affairs, they challenged the Government regarding evidence of specific instances of breaches of the agreement and of Britain's inadequate and illogical response to the consequences in human suffering that resulted from these breaches.\textsuperscript{73} When given the opportunity to speak during debates, they used such examples to highlight the larger implications of the Government's policy regarding Spain. In July, Rathbone spoke bitterly on the hypocrisy and head-in-the-sand attitude of the Government's fervent adherence to non-intervention, drawing a bleak picture of the consequences of this stance:

"I have very little doubt that the Government will succeed in keeping out of war. The war may come later, at a time when we have destroyed one democracy after another in

\textsuperscript{72}Wilkinson stated, "It was an awful humiliation for the deputation that went to Spain to have to realise the changed attitude in Spain to this country. ...What they could not understand was not the idea of non-intervention, but that non-intervention should be used by this country in such a way as to form the most effective weapon that General Franco had." (\textit{Hansard}, vol.323, col.1359. 6 May 1937)

\textsuperscript{73}See, for example, Rathbone's pointing to evidence of the presence of large numbers of Italian troops in Spain and of the bombing of Basque towns by German aircraft, and of her harsh criticism of the Government's failure to allow British ships to intervene within the three mile limit imposed off the Spanish coast to rescue drowning refugees. (\textit{Hansard}, vol.324, col.991. 2 June 1937; and vol.328, col.64. 26 October 1937)
Europe, compelling us either to submit - [Interruption.] We shall find ourselves confronted with war at last, at a time when the complete selfishness and lack of principle of our previous policy have left us without one real friend in Europe."

The Duchess of Atholl echoed this sentiment shortly thereafter, when taking Winston Churchill to task for his suggestion that Franco be recognized as the legitimate ruler of Spain: "Any action of this kind would be knuckling down to lawlessness and an encouragement of a regime which [Churchill] himself admits has brought about a situation which seems full of danger to us."75

Even as the war went increasingly badly for the Republican forces in Spain, all three women remained strongly committed to the legitimacy of that Government as the only true expression of the democratic will of the Spanish people. Ultimately, in the face of the farce of non-intervention, this led Rathbone and Atholl to take up Wilkinson's plea that the agreement be abandoned and that the Republican Government be allowed to purchase arms.76

---

74*Hansard*, vol.326, col.1899. 19 July 1937. At this point, Rathbone was clearly nervous about the Government's intentions regarding both Spain as well as other threatened countries over the course of the next three months when Parliament would be adjourned. In a draft of a speech for the Summer Adjournment Debate on Foreign Affairs, she stated "Of course it is to the advantage of the Government that the backs of the Opposition should be turned. and it is all the more to their advantage when they are contemplating doing something more than usually shady...," (30 July 1937, draft of speech for Summer Adjournment Debate in the House, ER papers, R.P. XIV. 3.42.)

75*Hansard*, vol.326, col.1900. 19 July 1937.

76In May, Rathbone was still arguing that it was unrealistic to abandon the non-intervention policy because the democratic governments involved were too deeply committed to it: the goal should be to make non-intervention a reality through vigorous scrutiny and investigation. (26 May 1937 - speech to the Comite' Mondial Contre La Guerre et le Fascisme - International Meeting on Spain in Paris. ER Papers, R.P.XIV, 3.37) By the autumn, however, Rathbone had completely lost faith in this possibility - largely, it seems, because of the Government's conciliatory attitude toward Italy and her belief that they were being duped by Mussolini's promises of a withdrawal of troops from Spain. In October, she stated: "I see no hope but in the abandonment
The year 1938 saw their sense of purpose heightened, as crisis followed crisis in the international arena. Although most of their attention had been focused on Spain during the previous year, the three women had not forgotten about their larger fears concerning the intentions of fascist regimes elsewhere. Early in 1938, these fears seemed to be coming to fruition, as Austria fell under Germany’s sway in March and Czechoslovakia’s fate looked increasingly bleak. As the threat to Austria loomed, Ellen Wilkinson scornfully questioned the Government on how many times Britain had guaranteed the independence of Austria since 1918, and how many similar assurances had been given to Czechoslovakia since the same date. When the Anschluss was fact, the Duchess of Atholl urgently pressed the Government to disassociate itself from "the terrible crime" that had been committed by the German Government, and warned of the "great danger that there is of acts of aggression of this kind spreading speedily in South-Eastern Europe. unless some firm and clear line is taken by the Government of this country." The line that she wanted was one that would be established by "a firm policy of

of the once well-meant but long-proved complete sham of non-intervention and in restoring to the legal Government of Spain the right to purchase arms for her own defence." (22 October 1937, draft of speech to a conference of the International Peace Committee. ER Papers. R.P.XIV. 3.43) Atholl made this point in the House in November in the context of both her familiar concerns regarding the strategic threats posed to Britain and France by the Italian and German presence in Spain and her belief in the righteousness of the Republican cause. (Hansard, vol.328. cols.644-655. 1 November, 1937)

In the fall of 1937, the Duchess of Atholl paid a visit to Schuschnigg, in Austria, out of concern for the increasingly precarious situation of that country in the face of Hitler's ambitions. All three MPs were also aware of the resurgence of Japanese aggression against China during the year, and Eleanor Rathbone reported to her constituents on her efforts to encourage economic action by the League and the United States against Japan. (letter to her constituents - January 1938 - reporting on her activities of the previous year - ER Papers, R.P. XIV 3.4)

Hansard. vol.332. col.8. 21 February 1937.
collective defence between Britain, France and Russia.\textsuperscript{79}

At the same time as these MPs were frustrated by their Government's response towards German actions, they were appalled by overtures being made to Mussolini in the ongoing hope of detaching him from Hitler. Although Eden had long been viewed as a rather inconsistent ally in the cause of collective security through the League (and, in fact, an obstacle in their attack on non-intervention in Spain), they applauded his resignation as Foreign Secretary on 20 February, 1938, in the midst of Chamberlain's efforts to begin talks with Mussolini.\textsuperscript{80} Later that spring, both the Duchess and Rathbone vigorously condemned the signing of the Anglo-Italian agreement in the House. Rathbone pointed out the complete lack of safeguards for the interests of the people of either Abyssinia or Spain - both fellow-members of the League: "The wording of the Agreement represents, quite frankly, without any humbug about it, a policy of completely unashamed national egotism, with not a thought, with not even the pretence of a thought, for the misery which the Government's policy has brought upon these unhappy peoples."\textsuperscript{81} As it turned out, the Government's policy towards Italy not only appeared to be selfish and uncaring, it

\textsuperscript{79}Hansard, vol.333, col.120, 14 March 1938.

\textsuperscript{80}It was publicly believed at the time that Eden was resigning because of a conflict with Chamberlain over the latter's willingness to overlook the fact that Mussolini had not followed through on promises to remove Italian troops from Spain, and to offer de jure recognition to Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. In fact, the rift between Eden and Chamberlain had appeared earlier. Eden was not actually opposed to talks with Italy, but disapproved of them being inaugurated without any significant show of good faith by Mussolini. (see Neville Thompson, pp.142-144.) In any event, Eden's actions were perceived as a strong stance against the appeasement of Italy and these women MPs appear to have read them as such - in spite of the fact that they had not been particularly impressed by Eden's record as Foreign Secretary prior to that point. (see ER Papers, R.P.XIV 3.47 and 3.49 for comments on his resignation.)

\textsuperscript{81}For both Atholl's and Rathbone's statements on this subject, see Hansard, vol.335, cols. 608-9, 617-618, 642-643. 2 May 1938.
seemed increasingly illogical. In June, as Franco's forces bombarded Barcelona, Wilkinson focused on the tragic absurdity of the Government's position that anti-aircraft guns could only be placed on the list of allowable exports to Spain with the general acceptance of the members of the Non-Intervention Committee. Her scorn and disbelief was palpable when she asked Chamberlain in the House. "When the right hon. Gentleman says 'general acceptance.' does that mean that this cannot be done without the concurrence of the very nations [Germany and Italy] that are engaged in that bombing?"\(^2\)

At the same time, Rathbone was pushing the Government to respond vigorously to the bombing of British ships, and was furious at Chamberlain's explicit desire for Franco to win so that Britain could maintain relations with Mussolini.\(^3\)

Watching with anguish the events in Abyssinia, Spain, and the Far East, and with grave concern the Nazi agitation in Czechoslovakia and alarming evidence of Hitler's ambitions in that country, the three women struggled on to fight what they perceived to be Britain's total abdication of responsibility for both its own security and international security. Eleanor Rathbone pulled no punches in her attacks on the Government, and her tone was bitingly critical in the months leading up to the summer recess of 1938. On the eve of the recess, she catalogued the Government's various acts of weakness - committed out of fear of Germany, Italy, and Japan and "...a desire to conciliate them, or, to put it more crudely, to buy them off by encouraging them to vent themselves on weak nations, in the hope that, having become sated, they will leave us and our possessions alone." She


\(^3\)Hansard, vol.337, cols. 1373. 1376. 23 June 1938.
went on to question whether there were any indications that this policy, which she called "ignoble at best," was succeeding, and returned to her familiar prophecy that, once Britain had finally reached a point "in that intolerable descent into the valley of humiliation" at which it decided to fight, it would be fighting alone. In particular, however, she was most immediately concerned with what the Government might do regarding the situation in Central Europe while Parliament was not in session, and clearly dreaded the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia to Chamberlain's quest for peace.84

In the event, of course, these fears of Rathbone and her colleagues were realised in the Munich Agreement arrived at on 29 September 1938 between Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, and Daladier. It seems fairly clear that all three women MPs had accepted the risk of war entailed in Britain taking a strong stance against Germany at this time; their commitment lay in their sense of everything that was at stake — including the lives of the citizens of Czechoslovakia, Britain's honour, and the strategic situation in Central Europe, not to mention their particular concern regarding the negative impact that a concession to the dictators in this situation would have on the continuing struggle in Spain. Thus they heard of the details of the final stages of the negotiations, and of the terms of the Munich Agreement itself, with real dismay and a great feeling of shame, and a very limited (to non-existant) appreciation of Chamberlain's dramatic efforts at personal diplomacy during the crisis.85

---

84 *Hansard*, vol.338, cols.3015-3021, 26 July 1938.

85 "On 22 September, while en route to New York from Boston, Atholl wrote home. "I do hope you feel as I do about the shame of letting down the Czechs [sic] as we have done. I can't think of anything so disgraceful in our history. ...all the papers I have seen are at one mind as to our having made a shameful surrender, and I
At the same time as they were fighting their battles in the House, these three women, like their colleagues (both male and female) were faced with a range of responsibilities outside the House. In the case of Wilkinson, Rathbone, and Atholl, the host of activities and campaigns relating to international issues and concerns in which all three women were involved outside of the House were undoubtedly time-consuming, but they also likely provided a degree of comfort and relief. As Mary Stocks points out, Rathbone's work alongside the Duchess in such organizations as the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, or the Basque Children's Committee, was "a pleasant change" from "hurling invective week after week against a wall of unresponsive Front Bench faces."\(^8^6\) Such opportunities to work and take action with sympathetic individuals must also have been appreciated by Katharine Atholl and Ellen Wilkinson.\(^8^7\)

---

\(^8^6\) Stocks. p.244.

\(^8^7\) Wilkinson was also deeply involved in these Spanish relief efforts, and all three women sat on the Parliamentary Committee for Spain, along with fellow women MPs Edith Summerskill (Labour) and Megan...
Besides these campaigns, the MPs also had to keep up with their constituency responsibilities and maintain working relations with these local communities. Wilkinson and Atholl, of course, faced the additional task of dealing with fellow party members, at both the local and national levels.

Eleanor Rathbone developed a very strong degree of support within her unusual constituency over the course of the decade after something of a rough patch in the early 1930s when she had found the pacifist initiatives in many of the English universities in this period troubling. However, Rathbone was returned unopposed in the 1935 general election and subsequently reported a flood of constituency correspondence supporting her protest of the Hoare-Laval agreement. By the height of the Spanish Civil War, Rathbone's constituents firmly backed her foreign policy stance.

Wilkinson's and Atholl's circumstances were less straightforward. For Ellen Wilkinson, complications arose in her relationship with the upper levels of the Labour party hierarchy. At the local constituency level, in Jarrow, she became extremely popular

Lloyd George (Liberal). (See Jim Fyorth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39*, (1986) for further references to the activities of these women related to the civil war.) All three women were also involved in aiding refugees from Nazi Germany, while both Rathbone and Atholl were also members by this point in the League of Nations Union, with Rathbone serving on the Executive Committee.

In February 1933, the Oxford Union Society passed a motion by a large margin stating "That this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country" - an incident which quickly became an international news story. Similar resolutions were subsequently passed at universities in Rathbone's constituency, including Manchester University. (See Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945*, pp.127-128.) In a letter to the Manchester Guardian on May 2nd, Rathbone expressed her sympathy for the students' views but suggested that, in the current climate of international affairs, it was risky to give the impression that British youth would not fight under any circumstances. (ER Papers. R.P. XIV 2.6.6.3)

In a Commons debate on the University Franchise in February 1936, Rathbone used as a justification for the extension of this franchise the great out-pouring of protest against Hoare-Laval from the Universities and their graduates - a protest which she saw as evidence that they were "beginning to play their part in the van of progress" by submitting foreign policy to fine intellectual scrutiny. (ER Papers. R.P. XIV 3.29.)
(nicknamed "Our Ellen") as a result of her obvious determination and passion in fighting for government responses to the desperate economic straits of her area. However, while she became an increasingly well-known personality in the Labour movement in the 1930s, she also came under fire at the national levels of the party in 1937 and 1938 for her espousal of a united front against fascism. In 1937, Wilkinson supported the Unity Manifesto that was published jointly by the Socialist League, the Communist Party, and the Independent Labour Party. She and the other left-wing manifesto supporters elected to the party’s National Executive Committee were out-voted in that body’s decision to disaffiliate the Socialist League from the Labour party and to reject the united front policy. Wilkinson continued to support the unity campaign in 1938 and she, along with Harold Laski and D.N. Pritt. was one of the only NEC supporters of Stafford Cripps’ January 1939 memorandum - which called for the United Front to win an anti-Chamberlain majority in the next election (which was expected within eighteen months.)

When Cripps openly defied the NEC by taking his memo to the constituencies, his expulsion from the party was assured: Ellen Wilkinson was the only NEC member to vote against his expulsion, since both Laski and Pritt were absent.

However, in the aftermath of these events, she chose to accept the party’s decision and remain a loyal member, which meant that she would no longer speak on all-party

---

90 "She was greatly admired for her participation in the Jarrow Crusade in October 1936 in which 200 working men marched from Jarrow in the north to London to deliver petitions to the government requesting work. In 1939, Wilkinson published a book on her constituency’s plight entitled The Town That Was Murdered. (See Vernon, pp.139-147.)

91 Vernon, pp.172-173.
platforms, even for Spain. Vernon suggests that Wilkinson's apparent decision not to venture completely beyond the pale of party acceptance may have been due, in part, to the influence of Herbert Morrison, a well-known opponent of unity front tactics with whom Wilkinson appears to have had a close personal relationship.\textsuperscript{92} Also, Wilkinson could not have been unaware that, as a highly popular, well-known Labour politician and as one of a very few women to enter into the party's inner circles, she was relatively well-placed in terms of her chances of being asked to enter the government in the event of a Labour victory in the next General Election. In any event, she refrained from giving the party irrevocable cause for expelling her, although it was likely a near thing.\textsuperscript{93}

Katharine Atholl, on the other hand, found herself alienated from the vast majority of her party and was indeed cast off by the Conservatives in the spring of 1938. The real problems for the Duchess, regarding both the party leadership and her constituency, arose over her deep involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Although her earlier dissention from party policy over the India Bill had undoubtedly caused some concern within her constituency, there are no indications that her local Conservative Association ever considered removing its support: indeed, it is possible that her diehard stance was received positively among some members of the prominent "county set" in her riding. Certainly the results of the 1935 General Election, which she won with a strong majority,\textsuperscript{92, \textsuperscript{93}}

\textsuperscript{92}Vernon, pp.172, 174.

\textsuperscript{93}Her relations with the upper levels of the party in 1939 were also likely not helped by the fact that she championed Herbert Morrison's bid for the party leadership when Atlee was sick in June. Hugh Dalton, in referring to this episode, and in particular to a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, noted the general anger at Wilkinson, whom he described as "...not popular with most of the men [of the PLP] at the best of times...." (Hugh Dalton, \textit{The Fateful Years: Memoirs 1931-1945}, (1957), pp.222, 224.)
indicate little residual concern with her having resigned the whip for some months that year over India. In fact, it is interesting to note that she gave her electors plenty of warning that, although she supported Government policy over Abyssinia, she planned to remain free to make her own judgements on policy according to the best interests of her constituency, Britain, and the Empire.\(^4\)

Unfortunately, however, when the Duchess took up the cause of Republican Spain, and thus appeared to be allying herself with the "evil forces" of the left, she increasingly came to be viewed as the pariah of her party and a serious problem in her constituency. Although some very well-known Conservative MPs came to be associated with opposition to Government foreign policy, Atholl was one of only a very few who extended that opposition to incorporate policy towards Spain. When she did so, some of the more extreme-minded of her Conservative colleagues had little difficulty in labelling her a traitor to her class. In April of 1937, she received a letter from Alfred Denville, who stated.

> I am not surprised at the attitude anyone is taking in regard to you to-day. It is a much more amazing position that we find a British Duchess letting all her friends down by associating herself with the extreme element and visiting Spain in company with a couple of the extreme element, and who when she returns will only be strengthened in her desire to help the Communist Government of Spain. In fact, my dear Duchess, you must not be cross with me if I tell you that the House of Commons, without exception, are astounded at your `volte-face.'\(^5\)

Such sentiments stood as a fair representation of the anger felt by her colleagues at her

\(^4\) 1935 Election Address - to the electors of Kinross and West Perthshire. KA Papers. NRA 90/11.

\(^5\) 14 April 1937, Alfred Denville. MP to KA. KA Papers. NRA 35.
actions both in and out of the House. This particular situation finally came to a head in the spring of 1938, following the Anglo-Italian agreement, which the Duchess felt was very damaging to the situation in Spain. On April 22, she wrote to Chamberlain expressing her dissatisfaction with the Government's abandonment of the League and collective security and her inability to support the agreement, suggesting that she might have to resign the whip. Chamberlain noted in his response that he had instructed that the whip be withdrawn.⁹⁶

The situation in the Duchess's riding had been equally uncomfortable during the previous sixteen months. The earliest letter in her papers indicating dissent within her Association is dated 4 January 1937, in which the Organizing Secretary mentions a Mr. McNair Snadden and efforts to keep him from making trouble over "the Spanish business."⁹⁷ It soon became clear, however, that there was a core of vocal dissent in the constituency that strongly objected to her involvement in the Republican cause in Spain and found her expression of her views on that subject both inappropriate and offensive. At a constituency meeting in June, at which the Duchess was present, the attack on her policies was led by one Colonel Dawson, who would subsequently publish his views concerning Katharine Atholl in pamphlet form and would keep up a barrage of letters to the press.

Although the actual strength, at any given point, of the campaign within her

⁹⁶ 22 April 1938. KA to Chamberlain: 26 April 1938. Chamberlain to KA - KA Papers. NRA 22/2.

⁹⁷ 4 January 1937. A.C. Alston. Organising Secretary of the Conservative Association. to KA. KA Papers, NRA 22/5.
Conservative Association against the Duchess is difficult to determine, it clearly gained momentum towards the end of 1937 and into 1938. After resigning the whip, the Duchess wrote to her constituents to explain her actions, outlining the dangers of the Government's foreign policy and noting that she believed that the opinions she had expressed in the past two years regarding the League of Nations and collective security had met with the approval of the constituents. She also asserted her continued belief in Unionist principles. In spite of her arguments and those of her loyal supporters, the local Association remained convinced that her views were dangerous and that she had become a communist sympathiser. On 27 May, the Executive of the Association decided not to re-adopt the Duchess as their candidate for the next election.

Following the Munich crisis and her return from a North American tour in the fall of 1938, the Duchess appears to have decided that, since the Association was reiterating its intention to adopt another candidate, it was necessary for her to have an opportunity to bring to public attention the currently precarious state of international affairs and to receive affirmation from her constituents that they supported her views. As a result, she resigned her seat and a by-election was called for 21 December - in which she would run as an Independent.

---

"The campaign appears to have had significant support from the women on the constituency association's Executive Council, including two very active members, Margaret Dawson and Peggy Stirling. Dawson in particular was clearly engaged in必须ing opposition to the Duchess among the other women on the Council. (See constituency correspondence, 1937-38. KA Papers. NRA 22/6 - including Margaret Dawson to the Duke of Atholl, 23 June 1937, James Paton to the Duke of Atholl (regarding activities of Dawson) 27 June 1937, Duke of Atholl to Peggy Stirling. 15 November 1937)

"6 May 1938, KA's letter to her constituents. KA Papers. NRA 22/2."
Not having the familiar machinery of the Association behind her put the Duchess at somewhat of a disadvantage during the campaign. She also suffered from press coverage, which was largely pro-Chamberlain. While attracting a wide spectrum of support from fellow opponents of the Government, all their efforts failed. The weather was very bad on the day of the election, and it appears that one reason for the loss was that the Duchess's opponents were more successful at getting their voters out. The final result saw her defeated by approximately 1300 votes.

Katharine Atholl’s frustration following her loss must have been severe, especially in light of the international situation. Almost immediately after the election, the Duchess began considering the possibility of trying to become an Independent candidate for the Scottish Universities seat. She also involved herself in some of the new extra-parliamentary organizations springing up to challenge Government policy and educate the public. However, although she did re-enter the party after the war began, once Churchill was Prime Minister. Katharine Atholl never made it back into the House of Commons as a MP. She continued to fight to make her views heard in the months leading up the outbreak of war, and pressed especially for an alliance with Russia, but she had paid a heavy price for her desire to redirect the policies of her own party.

In light of the previous summaries of the evolution of the political engagement of

---

100 She ended up being chair of an organisation called “The Hundred Thousand” - which merged in the spring of 1939 with another group known as the “Active Democrats.” Also involved in these efforts were Randolph Churchill, Duncan Sandys, Vernon Bartlett, Liddell-Hart, and a number of prominent public women (specífics uncertain).
Wilkinson, Rathbone and Atholl in foreign affairs in the 1930s. I would now like to focus more specifically on the nature of their activity in the House of Commons as women. Although faced with the difficulties mentioned earlier in getting recognition from the House Speaker and with their multiplying responsibilities and stresses outside of the House, these three women maintained a remarkably consistent presence in foreign policy debates in the House in the latter years of the decade. They made speeches when they got the chance and continually challenged the government in Question Period.101

Their outspokenness in the House regarding this traditionally "masculine" subject matter suggests self-confidence on the part of these women, regarding both their positions as MPs in the Commons generally and their legitimacy as foreign policy commentators.

In light of this, I would like to consider what can be said more specifically about if and how these MPs and their other women colleagues in the Commons justified their "intrusion" into this realm, and how they were received by their male colleagues.

In spite of the fact that the House of Commons could be less than welcoming for women as a physical space, and that one might expect it to be psychologically very intimidating for such a small minority female presence in the 1930s, it is not uncommon to find that women MPs of this period spoke fondly of their time there. Nancy Astor fiercely resisted retiring and Susan Lawrence was extremely disappointed at never

---

101 A complete listing of their appearances in the pages of Hansard in the context of foreign policy debates and questions in this period is too lengthy to include here, but an indication of their energy and determination can be provided by drawing attention to their contributions in the month of March, 1938 - in which one or more of this threesome spoke out on foreign policy on the following dates: March 2nd, 9th, 14th, 16th, 17th, and 21st. (See Hansard, vols. 332 & 333, March 1938.)
making it back into the House after her defeat in 1931. Aside from Astor's famous irreverences, the women appear to have respected Parliament as an institution and appreciated the Commons' practices and rituals even though they often found them frustrating. As a general reflection, Edith Summerskill stated that "[t]hose who say they dislike the House have never deliberately accustomed themselves to it." Of the rough and tumble of debate on the floor of the Commons, with the frequent taunts and jokes at members' expense. Rathbone stated that she "...rather liked the House when it [was] in this rollicking mood...." Wilkinson showed no compunction in pointing out the flaws of the House and its members on several occasions. but even as she did so she revealed her belief in its potential as well as the high degree to which she herself revelled in its atmosphere.

In light of these indications of their relative acceptance of "House rules," one is led to consider how women MPs chose to enter foreign policy debates and how they chose to present themselves as participants in these debates. As in previous discussions, this line of inquiry revolves around the question of the role or influence of gender identity and the extent to which explicit evocations of gender identity appeared in the women MPs' contributions.

102Summerskill. 62.

103Quote from the Woman's Leader. ER's "Notes from Westminster" written under the pseudonym "Cross Bench." 24 July 1931 - from Stocks. p.141.

104See, for example, Wilkinson's analysis in "Notes on the Way" for Time and Tide of the contemporary lack of respect for Parliament. 2 April 1932. as well as her series of brief portraits of House personalities in "A Parliamentary Tour - personally conducted by Ellen Wilkinson, M.P." also in Time and Tide. 8 May 1937.
On the general topic of their roles or potential contributions in the House as women, of the women whom I have emphasized thus far. Nancy Astor stands out as the MP likely most identified in the public view as "the women's MP" because of her status as the first woman in the House, her reputation as a feminist, and her support, sometimes across party lines, for initiatives to benefit women. Astor's personal papers reveal that she received an endless stream of correspondence from women (not only from her own constituency) who clearly expected her to represent their interests and "women's interests" in general. To a certain extent, it appears that Astor accepted this role, but she also clearly had no desire to limit herself to "women's issues."

This desire not to be limited to "women's issues" at the expense of other issues which were equally or more interesting was also present in Ellen Wilkinson, Eleanor Rathbone, and Katharine Atholl. In terms of personal reflections on their own particular roles in the House as women, they made relatively few comments, with the notable exception of Wilkinson's statement early in her parliamentary career that she did not want to be known purely as "a woman's MP" even though she had "women's interests" to look after. However, it is occasionally possible to intuit their views from some of the rare comments made about women MPs in general. Wilkinson was the least likely to use gender to justify a particular position, although she did occasionally imply, only partly tongue in cheek, that the women members worked harder and were more intelligent than

---

105 Vernon. p.79.
the men. The Duchess of Atholl, on the other hand, talked about the value of women's influence in Parliament "on women's issues." but was careful to object to any situation that might entail women members being "confined" to these issues. and "[prevented] from having a real say in big questions of national or imperial or international policy...." Rathbone's position appears to have been close to Wilkinson's. She, too, saw the need to represent women's interests to a largely indifferent male House of Commons, but while allowing for the possibility that some part of women's contribution in Parliament would be unique to women. Rathbone asserted that the much larger proportion would be revealed as "a fair sample of the whole mixed bag of parliamentary effort" which was typically dependent on the "interacting forces" of heredity, education, social environment, party politics. and constituency interests which differentiated MPs regardless of sex.

Among the women MPs as a whole, the most notable example of a consistently explicit gendered perspective on foreign policy is found in the speeches and writings of Nancy Astor, who clearly and vociferously argued the particular feminist position that women not only had a right to participate in international affairs, but that they would consequently bring to this sphere special qualities and priorities as women which would

---


107 From a copy of a letter by KA to a periodical called "Light on Health" in which she expressed her concerns about the possibility of the formation of a separate "Women's Party" - March 1934. KA papers, NRA 43.

effect the nature of international politics for the better.\textsuperscript{109} These qualities and priorities were, according to Astor, determined largely by women's roles as mothers, which made women naturally disposed to preserving world peace. In an article for the \textit{Pictorial Weekly} in 1933, Astor stated that "...the woman force is the motherhood of the world; and once it is aroused to concerted action it cannot be denied."\textsuperscript{110} In speaking at an LNU mass meeting in 1934, Astor stated: "I believe peace ultimately is coming through the women."\textsuperscript{111}

Nancy Astor chose to employ the same kind of gendered rhetoric when intervening in foreign policy debates inside Parliament. In March of 1935, Astor spoke at length in a debate on defence, noting that peace was "particularly a woman's question" and that the women of Britain should realize that the rearmament initiatives announced in the government's White Paper on Defence were the best way to keep the peace.\textsuperscript{112} In May of 1936, in defending the naval agreement with Germany and arguing again that a "strong Britain means world peace." Astor stated "...I think it is a woman's job to be always on the side of peace."\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{109}Astor was part of an ongoing campaign in the 1930s to open up career opportunities for women in the Diplomatic and Consular services, and had also encouraged Sir John Simon to appoint Margery Corbett Ashby as a delegate to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva. (See NA papers. MS 1416/1/7/66, newspaper clipping from the \textit{Express and Star}, 21 April 1930; MS 1416/1/7/75, NA letter to Manchester Guardian, 30 April 1936; MS 1416/1/1/1124. NA to Simon, 21 November 1931)

\textsuperscript{110}Nancy Astor. "This Burden We All Bear." \textit{Pictorial Weekly}, 8 April 1933. NA papers - MS 1416/1/7/70.

\textsuperscript{111}clipping from the \textit{News Chronicle}, 7 February 1934. NA papers - MS 1416/1/7/71.

\textsuperscript{112}\textit{Hansard}, vol.299, cols.122. 124. 11 March 1935.

\textsuperscript{113}\textit{Hansard}, vol.311, col.1429. 4 May 1936.
Nancy Astor was not alone in making explicitly gendered references in the Commons. Her Conservative colleague, Florence Horsbrugh, stated in her October 1935 speech on rearmament that she "[wanted] to speak now particularly as a woman" and that Parliament would have to answer to the women of Britain if the country was left unprepared to defend itself. Horsbrugh returned to this theme in her speech to the throne in 1936, when she asserted that she was "speak[ing] for the women of Great Britain." who would not want to suffer in another war with the knowledge that the fighting forces were ill-equipped. Following the Munich Crisis, Horsbrugh drew her colleagues' attention to women's gratitude to the government for "saving peace," noting that the women of Britain, in preparing their children for possible evacuation during the crisis, had been thinking of the mothers and children in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and France.

The approach employed by Astor and Horsbrugh was, as we have seen, a tried and true method for many women wishing to venture into the masculine realm of the high politics of international affairs. Use of this kind of gendered rhetoric served as a justification for their "intrusion." which was likely both rooted in sincere beliefs on the part of these women and a strategy to invoke the electoral clout of a large proportion of society which political leaders might view (correctly or not) as a unified political interest.

---

114 *Hansard*, vol.305, col.399, 24 October 1935.

115 *Hansard*, vol.317, col.16, 3 November 1936.

116 This latter observation drew an irate response from Ellen Wilkinson, who pointed out that many Czechoslovakian mothers were now in flight with their children as refugees while their husbands were being shot or placed in concentration camps. (*Hansard*, vol.339, cols.520-521, 526-527, 6 October 1938.)
However, this was not the only tack taken by women MPs in these debates. The other option that is clearly evident in such contributions, and especially those of the women MPs who spoke frequently on international affairs, was that of taking a non-gendered approach - one that did not evoke a specifically feminist or female consciousness as a rationale for speaking or for advocating particular policies.

The choice of this approach by Ellen Wilkinson and Eleanor Rathbone is particularly interesting given their standing in this period as prominent feminists. In general, neither woman provided an explicitly gendered context to international affairs in her speeches and writings. In reference to the connections between their ever-increasing foreign policy activism in the 1930s and their feminism, one can say that the latter, which came out of their experiences as women, predisposed them against the fascist regimes and led them to fear the danger these governments posed to other countries as well as their own. Ellen Wilkinson had herself long supported the feminist-pacifist perspective in the 1920s and early 1930s, but in the period of her career, in the second half of the 1930s, in which she became a prominent foreign policy advocate in Parliament, circumstances led her to abandon this perspective, and consequently, the gendered rhetoric which accompanied it. She then apparently chose not to emphasize any other kind of gendered perspective in framing her foreign policy views at this time. Eleanor Rathbone, who had rejected feminist-pacifism in World War I, consistently adhered to an non-gendered perspective in international affairs.

In the case of the Duchess of Atholl, we have an example of someone who was not totally averse to evoking a gendered perspective when speaking outside the House -
especially to a general female audience. On one occasion, Atholl stated that she wanted women to see their responsibilities regarding international affairs as an extension of their traditional roles within the family—of nurturing and of holding the family together as the moral centres of the home. In this instance, she equated "the share of women in keeping alive the torch of faith in personal matters" with women's "duty" to keep alive "League ideals." However, when we focus again on language employed in Commons' debates on foreign policy, we see that Katharine Atholl joined Wilkinson and Rathbone in refraining from making explicitly gender-specific references in speeches and questions in the House relating to foreign policy issues.

Even when pleading on behalf of refugee women and children, Wilkinson, Rathbone, and Atholl did not speak from an explicitly "female" position. The same can be said of their other contributions on foreign policy. Whether attacking the Government's policies of non-intervention in the civil war in Spain, deals with Mussolini which sacrificed Abyssinia to Italian control, or acquiescence to Hitler's ambitions in Czechoslovakia, they did so using language and rationale that could just as easily have been employed by male colleagues opposing the Government. The questions they introduced revealed careful preparation and research and were clearly designed to try to catch the Government out on specific points. When they did get the chance to speak more extensively, each woman typically spoke with authority and considerable knowledge of the complex issues involved and the larger international situation.

117KA. "Women's Influence in Foreign Affairs" - addressed to the Editor of the *Sunday Sun*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Autumn 1936. KA papers. NRA 43.
At the same time, the three MPs also revealed the distinctive colouring of their individual political views. When Atholl followed up on a speech by Rathbone in November of 1936 regarding the need to support and strengthen the League of Nations, she spoke from a traditional understanding of imperial power when she stated, "If you can keep the peace in Europe, you will keep the peace over a great part of the world at any rate, and if you can keep this country safe, it will mean the safety of the British Empire as a whole, because we are the nerve-centre of the Empire."118 The following month, Wilkinson offered a bitter criticism of the Government that policy towards Spain was determined by class interests - a point which she continued to hammer away at up until the actual outbreak of war in 1939.119 On both these occasions in 1936, and in her other speeches throughout the decade, Rathbone continually emphasized the need for Britain to act in a principled manner and to shoulder the responsibility for helping to defend democracy.

The use of language on the floor of the Commons by these three women that did not make explicit reference to a "women's view." but instead evoked priorities and ideologies familiar to the traditionally masculine political world, suggests that, for a woman MP successful in establishing a regular presence in House debates on foreign policy issues, the preferred strategy was to position herself as a knowledgeable expert.


with a clearly demonstrated ability to engage in these debates on terms identical to her male colleagues. A feeling for audience in this particular context might then explain Katharine Atholl's willingness to use gendered references outside the House, especially to a female audience, while adhering to a non-gendered perspective inside the House. This strategy of positioning oneself as a "gender-neutral" expert also presents itself in the language used by Marjorie Graves, who spoke in terms similar in their ungendered nature to those of Wilkinson, Rathbone, and Atholl.

At the same time, it is also likely that the use of non-gendered rationale specifically by Rathbone, Wilkinson, and Atholl was linked to the foreign policy positions they advocated and the nature of their attacks on the government. Whereas some of their women colleagues who supported the government may have viewed the expression of "pro-peace"/"safety of Britain" policies in maternalist terms as not just strategically but also ideologically sound, the three vocal critics may have seen the advocacy of potentially riskier and more confrontational policies in the heavily male House as an inherently gender-neutral enterprise.

In light of these conclusions, it is interesting to then turn to examine the question of how these women were received by their colleagues in the House. It should first be pointed out, as a general comment, that Rathbone, Wilkinson, and Atholl seem to have had notable success in earning the respect of their peers. Wilkinson and Rathbone were both known for their speaking abilities, and the commitment and integrity of all three.
were clearly recognized.\footnote{In reflecting on Wilkinson and Rathbone after their deaths, fellow MPs willingly acknowledged their speaking skills. Of Wilkinson, MP Jack Lawson stated that "[i]n her voice was power and music with a tone like that of a well cast bell. and she knew how to use it...." (Vernon. p.85) MP Harold Nicolson drew attention to Rathbone's verbal "slings" which were "weighted with the pebbles of hard fact," as well as her "ringing and convulsive tones." (Stocks. p.143) Both men referred in almost the same breath to the commitment and integrity of these two women and, while the Duchess was not perceived as a compelling speaker in the House, her integrity also was well recognised, both in the Chamber itself and at the time of her decision to call a bye-election in 1938 on foreign policy issues. (See, for example, an exchange between KA and an opponent, Sir Henry Croft. in the Commons - Hansard. vol.326. col.1853. 19 July 1937: as well as a letter from MP Josiah Wedgwood after her defeat in the bye-election, in which he praises her for having "kept faith and conscience" and ends by offering a "suitable" quotation - "'[I]et the victors. when they come. when the forts of folly fall, find thy body by the wall."' - JW to KA. 23 December 1938. KA papers. NRA 22/31)} Having said this, it also appears that they were each received rather differently as a result of the great differences between them in personality and presence.

Ellen Wilkinson, the youngest of the three women by more than fifteen years, is known to have made quite a stir when she first entered the Commons in the 1920s.\footnote{Vernon. pp.78. 115.} She was quite small in stature, with bright red hair, and she had a reputation for wearing colourful and stylish clothes in the House.\footnote{ibid.. p.80.} Her youth and striking appearance, when combined with her quick wit and impassioned rhetoric, made her highly visible and, it appears, something of a Commons pet or mascot. At one point early in her career, a Tory member irritated by her interjections during Question Period gave her the nickname "Little Miss Perky," which apparently caused her some amusement.\footnote{Stocks, p.194.}

In the early 1930s, Eleanor Rathbone once described herself as simply a "portly, elderly lady," but this clearly did not do justice to the impression she made on her...
colleagues. Ellen Wilkinson described Rathbone, after their visit to Spain together, as "...an embattled Britannia in her indignation." Following her death, a former male colleague also described her as a powerful force, remembering that "benign and yet menacing, she would stalk through the lobby [of Westminster]" while nervous Ministers and Under-Secretaries tried to make themselves invisible. While both descriptions convey Rathbone's strength of purpose, the second reflection conveys a sense of uncertainty felt by male MPs when dealing with an older, strong-minded woman who was difficult to dismiss or distract.

In noted contrast to the dynamic Ellen Wilkinson and the impressive Eleanor Rathbone was the Duchess of Atholl. Wilkinson often described her as frail and a bit inconspicuous and it appears that many others shared this view. Hetherington has noted that, by the 1930s, she was perceived as being rather dowdy and that she had a reputation for being a boring speaker in the House. As a result, many of her colleagues held a somewhat negative image of the Duchess as a school-mistress who lectured her

---


125Stocks, pp.142-143 - from Harold Nicolson's tribute to ER - February 1946.


127In fact, they could be considerably more cruel. Sir Henry "Chips" Channon noted in a diary entry in December of 1938 that he had woken from a nap in a library in the House "to find the Duchess of Atholl, so sour, sunken and sallow. peering at [him]." (Robert Rhodes James, ed., *Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon*, (1967) p.142. James notes in an aside that Channon, an American-born MP who made it his "whole life's work" to become "anglicised." once described the House as "this smelly, tawny, male paradise." pp.4, 114)

128Hetherington, pp.131, 150.
fellow members as though they were not especially bright children.

These brief sketches of these three MPs provide a background of general impressions, including certain gendered stereotypes or perceptions, against which one can evaluate specific reactions to particular speeches and questions. It is, of course, impossible to recapture completely the tone and nuances of the proceedings recorded in Hansard; any efforts in assessing these reactions are somewhat handicapped in this respect. However, it appears that these reactions, while on the surface not explicitly tailored to the sex of the speakers, were occasionally coloured by an awareness of gender that could be used to call into question the women's credibility.

There is little evidence to suggest that Wilkinson, Rathbone, and Atholl's male allies in the House hesitated to refer to arguments and evidence offered by the women when they made their own comments. Assessing the reactions of their opponents is a little more difficult. It would be easy to assume that a condescending reply was a reflection of a male politician's view that these women were attempting to speak on subjects outside of their proper domain. However, given the fact that condescending comments and insults were common practice in the House among the men present, the validity of this assumption is open to debate. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that there were a few incidents in which certain replies might indeed be seen as "loaded"

---

129 It is even possible to speculate that male government critics on the left particularly appreciated opportunities to point out their common ground with a right-wing Tory Duchess such as Katharine Atholl. M.P. Price followed Atholl's speech on foreign affairs on 5 November 1936 with admiring references to her views as a Government back-bencher on the League and on Spain, and Sir Stafford Cripps took obvious pleasure the following month in complimenting Atholl on her speech on December 1st and using it to argue for the existence of sharply divided opinion on the Government benches. (See Hansard, vol.317, cols.344-346, 5 November 1936; vol.318, col.1134, 1 December 1936.)
with underlying gender-related tensions. A particularly obvious example was in an exchange from December of 1937 in which Tory MP Captain MacEwan was being needled by both Wilkinson and Atholl, who were pressing him to admit that the Government was not committed to supporting the duly-elected democratic Republican government in Spain. MacEwan was reduced to trying to escape the issue with a clearly gendered barb, stating "If I refuse to be led astray by one siren [referring to Wilkinson's leading the attack], I am not going to be led away by two...."130

A more subtle dig might be read into Prime Minister Baldwin's reply to Rathbone's criticism of the Government for the Hoare-Laval pact in December of 1935. He stated that he had listened to her "with great respect and interest." but did not think that "these matters [were] so simple as she would have us believe" and that he "should tremble if she were Foreign Secretary at this moment."131 The last statement is of particular interest: although it is something that might also have been said to a male MP, it is difficult to believe that Baldwin was unaware of the potential for making Rathbone in particular look ridiculous by conjuring up an image that would have been inconceivable to himself and his colleagues - that of a woman, of all things, in charge of foreign policy.

In a final example, one can examine an exchange from May of 1938 between the Duchess of Atholl and Wing-Commander James. After criticising her for her "extreme credulity" in swallowing "Left Wing and Communist propaganda" regarding events in Spain, he then took exception to her information regarding the number of foreign


131Hansard. vol.307. cols.848. 858. 10 December 1935.
volunteers involved in the civil war at that point, stating: "...she, with a facility which must be the envy of every general staff in Europe, thinks nothing of shifting 10,000, 20,000, or 30,000 troops round the world, with no more trouble than there would be in taking a week-end ticket to Brighton." Again, there is nothing here that one could not imagine being said in similar circumstances to a male colleague. However, it is not hard to imagine that James was exploiting stereotyped notions of feminine naiveté about military manoeuvres and the circumstances faced by professional soldiers, not to mention the possibility that he intended a bit of a sexual joke at the Duchess's expense by linking her older, and very proper, person with the well-known popular image of the "dirty week-end in Brighton."

As far as Wilkinson, Rathbone, and Atholl were concerned, comments like these were possibly annoying but also likely viewed as par for the course. They had had to accept long before that they were entering a grueling arena that was highly masculine in both atmosphere and traditions. In fact, it appears that they did not necessarily hesitate to reply in kind - adding a gendered barb to their own characterisations of government policy-makers. Ellen Wilkinson and Eleanor Rathbone, in particular, deliberately prodded the government with phrases which, both implicitly and explicitly, questioned the presence of "manly qualities" of strength and courage in the men sitting opposite to them in the House. Wilkinson, in attacking the government after the German annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia in March of 1939, stated that the government was led

\[132\textit{Hansard}, \text{vol.335, col.621. 2 May 1938.}\]
by "old men" who were merely trying to "last their time" thus using images associated with infirmity and weakness to imply that the country's leaders were afraid of taking the necessary risks involved in pursuing an appropriately "virile" policy. Rathbone accused the government of being "cowardly" on more than one occasion and, in January of 1939, made the following comment concerning her "observation of the opposite benches" during a speech by the Prime Minister on foreign affairs: "...as my eyes passed from row to row of hon. Members opposite I felt that I had never looked at a more doubtful, hesitating set of men." It is difficult not to imagine that such a statement, in which Rathbone deliberately noted that she had visually appraised these men and found them wanting, carried with it an underlying gender-related tension which heightened the impact of the comment in a manner which would not have occurred if a similar comment had been made by a male critic.

It is also possible that a similar effect was achieved when Rathbone, in evoking what she perceived to be an ideal code of behavior for the nation, laid claim to the rhetoric of "honour" so closely associated with the typically masculine ethos of her generation and social level. In fact, Rathbone claimed a sensitivity to this ethos on behalf of all members of the House and all citizens of Great Britain, both male and female. In protesting the Hoare-Laval pact in late 1935, she stated "...there is not a man or woman in

133 *Hansard*, vol.345, col.480. 15 March 1939.

134 *Hansard*, vol.343, col.147. 31 January 1939; See also *Hansard*, vol.328, col.67. 26 October 1937 and vol.337, col.1376. 23 June 1938.
this chamber or in Great Britain whose honour is not at stake in this matter." Almost a year later, Rathbone noted that "[t]he uprising of indignation at the Hoare-Laval proposals showed that the nation still cares for honour and freedom and fidelity to its pledged word and the security of smaller nations, as well as for peace." In 1937, attacking non-intervention in Spain, she noted that the government had "smirched the honour of Great Britain in the eyes of the world" and that, although "...'honour' has become an unpopular word with the younger generation. ...after all, there is such a thing, and in the minds of many of us it is a thing without which, properly interpreted, life is not worth living, either for a nation or an individual." Rathbone's use of this language of "honour" to a predominantly male audience in the Commons is reminiscent of language used by prominent Liberal women in speaking to the female party membership. Thus I might again speculate here that the deliberate use of such language, laden as it was with associations of masculinity and idealised masculine behavior, sprang both from Rathbone's own ideology and principles (which posited a code for both men and women, as well as nations, to live by) and from a hope that her words might hit particularly close to home for her male opponents, many of whom were of a generation and social position similar or close to her own.


136 *Hansard*, vol.317. col.336. 5 November 1936.

137 *Hansard*, vol.326. col.1899. 19 July 1937.

138 Johanna Alberti suggests that Rathbone's patriotism "...imagined 'the nation' as a site of moral behavior with the same ideals [Rathbone] held up to individuals." (Johanna Alberti, *Eleanor Rathbone*, (1996) p.128.)
The particular combination of Eleanor Rathbone's convictions, political acumen, and rhetorical skill made her ventures into foreign policy debates in the 1930s impressive in both scope and style. She was fully aware of the constraints she faced in making herself heard as an MP on foreign policy issues. However, she just as clearly did not see herself as helpless in this situation. The same can be said of Ellen Wilkinson and Katharine Atholl who, alongside Rathbone, established themselves as regular, vigorous commentators in the traditionally male-dominated sphere of politicians' debates on international affairs, in spite of the difficulties their views created for themselves both inside the House and out.

As this chapter demonstrated earlier, these three women politicians were not alone in venturing into this territory in the 1930s. Election campaigns provided occasions for a number of women candidates to tackle these issues. Within parliament itself, a desire to express support for National Government foreign policy inspired other women MPs to speak out. However, as outspoken government critics, Rathbone, Wilkinson, and Atholl clearly offered the lion's share of women's contributions on foreign affairs in the public institution at the heart of Britain's political world. The evolution of the respective foreign policy views of each member of this somewhat unlikely alliance brought them from disparate perspectives and priorities to a common ground of rejection of government foreign policy as unethical and ineffective. In the process, their individual political differences were never masked, but their objectives became remarkably similar and they did not hesitate to indicate the substantial areas of their mutual agreement.

In establishing a place for themselves as women foreign policy commentators in
the often unforgiving House of Commons. these three MPs and a few of their other 
women colleagues faced options similar to those of women entering this realm of debate 
in other contexts. Again. the nature of the rhetoric of women MPs likely had much to do 
with both practical and ideological considerations. The language they used was based to 
some degree on perceptions of their audience and the strategic judgements they made 
(either as occasional or frequent contributors) in entering the male-dominated debates of 
international affairs. It was also determined by the presence or absence within each 
individual of an ideological affinity between an explicitly gender-based activism and the 
foreign policy views they advocated.

Once again. it appears that gendered rhetoric. typically maternalist. was usually 
linked to ostensibly "pro-peace" policies. A few women MPs who took this line in 
supporting the government deliberately evoked a gendered context in order to suggest 
their claim to represent the need for peace and security felt by British women generally. 
On the other hand. Rathbone. Wilkinson. and Atholl. advocating more confrontational 
policies. used non-gendered language. or even rhetoric which appropriated terms clearly 
understood to be "masculine." The constant flow of speeches and questions from these 
three women was characterized by an assumption that the relevant issues and information 
were not. of necessity. linked to gender identity - but rather to broader (or at least 
different) cross-gender communal identities.
CONCLUSION

This study began with a snapshot of one particular woman, Margery Corbett Ashby, who was an especially outspoken advocate of women's participation in international affairs. Early in 1931, in the pages of the *International Women's News*, Corbett Ashby commented on a mass meeting in London organized by the Women's International League at which Arthur Henderson, then Foreign Secretary, appeared as the chief speaker. In her statement she noted:

> Few of us who were working for the vote could foresee the day when the Foreign Secretary of a Great Power would announce policy at a meeting organized by women. In 28 other countries women wield the same political power as they do in Great Britain and could stage such a demonstration. We want, not feeble, isolated, efforts, but real union of strength, nationally and internationally.¹

As both an expression of satisfaction at what women had thus far achieved in penetrating the male-dominated world of international affairs, and a call to action for women to continue such efforts, Corbett Ashby's comment revealed the depth of her own commitment to women's participation in this realm and her sense that such activity was a logical and necessary continuation of women's integration as full citizens into the world of political activism. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Corbett Ashby herself, through her

seemingly tireless personal efforts. exemplifies a number of the opportunities taken by women to make themselves heard on foreign policy issues in the 1930s.

For the most part, of course, the vast majority of women attempting to engage in international affairs (Margery Corbett Ashby included) did so as outsiders in a very real sense, whether they were elected officials or not. The actual determination of foreign policy in Britain in the 1930s took place within a small, highly elite, circle of male politicians. Even when one expands the circle of foreign policy debate a bit further to include prominent and powerful politicians outside of the government, women were still largely shut out.

In the case of these rarefied political circles, one suspects that a few individual women in fact played not insignificant roles in what might be considered the behind-the-scenes world of "private politics" - in which well-positioned interested women benefitted from situations of social, even familial, intimacy in gaining the ear of powerful public men. Popular mythology may have exaggerated the roles played by such people as Nancy Astor, but this should not cause us to dismiss the possibility of the existence of other women of greater significance in this private realm of British foreign policy in the 1930s. For example, historians have long referred extensively to the voluminous correspondence between Neville Chamberlain and his older sisters. Hilda and Ivy, as a source for his views - without acknowledging the possible significance of the sisters' continuous, strongly-worded endorsement of their brother and his policies. One might also speculate as to the importance of the firm support expressed in her diaries by former Liberal MP Hilda Runciman for her husband, Sir Walter Runciman, who led the government's mission to Czechoslovakia in the late summer of 1938 as that country's crisis with Germany deepened. As a final example, the
hints provided in Winston Churchill's diaries of a close personal relationship with Lady Violet Bonham Carter suggest that this astute and highly respected political woman, whose engagement in foreign policy issues in various public forums has been indicated in previous chapters, had the ear of the most famous foreign policy critic of the decade.

Certainly the potential for roles for women in the behind-the-scenes settings which are often so crucial to policy formation would appear to warrant further research. Besides bringing even more hitherto neglected women actors to our attention, such a project might in fact suggest a new and fresh approach to the substantial collections of important male politicians' personal papers that have served as a central source for the more traditional examinations of the shaping of British foreign policy in the 1930s.

My work, however, has deliberately focused on women's participation in foreign policy debate in the public realm - a decision which the rich and fruitful material in the previous chapters has amply justified. My ambition has been to contribute both to the typically male-dominated historical record of this public debate in the 1930s and to an understanding of the history of women's activism in the public sphere in Britain.

At its most elementary level, this thesis has demonstrated that issues of international affairs were indeed an area of high concern and interest for many women active in the public realm in the 1930s. Their efforts took place both within and outside of the explicitly political arena of foreign policy debate and, in both instances, were pursued both in the context of collective action and independently of organizational affiliations. Some of the prominent women in this narrative chose to focus their energy and efforts fairly exclusively in one particular context or strategy, while others, like Margery Corbett Ashby, pursued a range of
Of the various possible contexts or forums for this activity, the one that could be considered the furthest from the circle of foreign policy insiders in Britain was that of the non-party women-only organizations and pressure groups. Helena Swanwick pointed out interested women's groups' effective isolation from sources of information and influence. In spite of the difficulties created by these circumstances, however, certain women's organizations in Britain, especially the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Women's Committee Against War and Fascism, and the Women's International League, vigorously contributed to public dialogue on international affairs and were thus central to the involvement of many women in this realm in the 1930s. Led by veterans of previous public campaigns (both explicitly feminist and in the general area of social reform), these groups could, and did, draw on a wealth of experience in tactics and strategies to recruit support and make themselves heard. The women in these groups also benefitted from the fact that they had considerable freedom amongst themselves to express their views and debate the issues without fear of having to prove their right and ability to do so to men.

At the same time, many of these women also chose to work alongside men in one or more of the many mixed-membership non-party organizations devoted to issues of international affairs in this decade. Such organizations, whether broadly conceived to work for general principles of peace or the support of the League of Nations, or focused on specific campaigns relating to events in Abyssinia or Spain or China, also attracted women who were perhaps leery or sceptical of women-only efforts as isolating or potentially ineffectual, or found those women's groups engaged in international affairs unsatisfactory for other reasons.
In any event, there is considerable evidence to suggest that women generally made up a substantial proportion of the membership of many of the mixed-membership groups, including the largest and most prominent of these organizations, the League of Nations Union. The potential and actual value of women's presence was even recognized in vigorous recruiting efforts by an organization such as the Peace Pledge Union, which had had its origins in an effort directed explicitly and exclusively at men. The specific, important examples of the League of Nations Union and the Peace Pledge Union reveal women's significant and vital contributions to these organizations at both the local and national levels. They also reveal the ways in which working in the generally male-dominated hierarchies of these organizations could circumscribe the roles and power of women members.

A select group of women also chose to attempt to influence public opinion on foreign policy outside of the organizational context - by speaking directly to the public as writers and as publishers. Again, this was an option which some women (such as Freda White or Eleanor Rathbone) pursued as a supplement to their work in other contexts, while for others (such as Margaret Rhondda or Elizabeth Wiskemann) it served as their primary outlet. On the one hand, working outside of an organizational framework (party or non-party) offered a potential freedom from the inevitable constraints and compromises associated with that framework. On the other hand, working in the highly male-dominated world of publishing foreign policy commentary could be isolating as well as constraining in its own right. Women in this field often faced an uphill battle to be accepted as credible commentators and only a very few (such as Lady Rhondda or Lady Houston) had the resources at their disposal to support their own significant publishing ventures. In spite of these difficulties, however, individual
women were successful in getting their views on foreign policy to a wider audience.

Undeniably, such publishing efforts by women - although potentially influential - operated at a remove from the heart of the political process of policy formation. Getting closer to this process was, at least in theory, possible through participation in the explicitly political realms of party and parliament. One aspect of this participation involved the segregated collectives of the political parties' women's organizations. Unfortunately, although women were clearly a significant numerical presence in the various political parties in Britain at this time (especially the mainstream parties), women as a group were given little power or influence within the party hierarchies. In spite of these limitations, there were notable efforts in the women's organizations - particularly in the parties in opposition to the government (Liberal and Labour) - to devote time and energy to discussion of foreign policy issues and the effort to engage the broader women's party membership in these concerns.

Regarding what might be termed the nonsegregated political experience - in which men and women worked alongside each other within the political arena - opportunities for women were, not surprisingly, limited - especially at the level of national politics. Only a few women successfully established themselves in the top ranks of the political parties, and only a very few made it into the nation's elected legislative body in the 1930s. Being elected to the House of Commons as MPs was the closest that women would get in the public realm to having direct access to foreign policy formation. Participating in the "high politics" of international affairs in the extremely male-dominated House was not easy for them. In many respects, such participation (especially for a woman sitting as an Independent, like Eleanor Rathbone, or for a rebel against her party, like Katharine Atholl) was a highly individualistic
experience similar to that of the women writers commenting on foreign affairs outside of parliament. Like that select group of writers, the small group of women MPs did make themselves heard in this intimidating forum and three women in particular - Rathbone, Atholl, and Ellen Wilkinson - were successful in establishing themselves as regular, outspoken participants in these debates.

In the course of exploring the extensive range of opportunities created by women to participate in foreign policy debate, this project exposed me to a broad spectrum of opinions expressed on British policy and the international activities of the fascist dictators. Brought together here are women whose perspectives ranged from absolute pacifist to internationalist to rabid nationalist, and who advocated everything from avoidance of conflict at all costs and total disarmament, to confrontation with fascism and reluctant or necessary rearmament, to friendship with the fascist powers and emulation of their militarist ethos.

In fact, the inability of members of non-party women's organizations to agree on a particular policy line or agenda was a common reason for some of these groups to question their involvement in foreign affairs in the first place. For those groups committed to such involvement, like the WIL or the WCG, disagreements over policy were often highly visible, causing some women to refer wistfully to the unity of women in the suffrage movement. In light of the memories of that campaign, it was not always easy to face the fact, openly acknowledged by some at the WIL's 1935 Annual Council meetings, that it was unrealistic to expect all women to think the same way on foreign policy issues.

These initial indications that women's foreign policy views would not be unified by
virtue of sex or gender were born out as this study moved from the non-party women's groups to other forums for women's activism. The vigorous debates within the women's organizations revealed in vivid fashion the presence of two distinct camps - pacifists, who rejected war under any circumstances, and internationalists, who worked for peace and international understanding but who did not advocate peace at any price. These camps began the decade in relative harmony but their views increasingly diverged as many internationalists (some quickly and others more slowly) came to accept the risk of war entailed by a policy of collective security in order to oppose fascist aggression. This particular division was then mirrored in other forums, where the scope of women's views was also further widened. Women members of the League of Nations Union were on both sides of the main divide between pacifists and internationalists, and even a few women imperialists made themselves heard on occasion. In the forum of women's published commentary on foreign affairs, the gamut of opinion ran from the far left to the far right. Among women in the political parties of the period, there was clearly no unified gender imperative but rather a definite expression of the full range of foreign policy views present within the parties generally which supported or protested government decisions. For example, the records of the debates of the women's organization in the Labour party reveal the same tensions broadly felt within the party between a pacifist approach and confrontation of fascism.

In the early years of the 1930s, whether in separate women's forums or alongside male colleagues, there existed a broad degree of agreement and co-operation between women pacifists and internationalists (and even some cautious support from more conservative elements) over the desire to uphold League principles and work for significant levels of
disarmament. The lead-up to the international Disarmament Conference in Geneva sparked considerable women's activism, including one of the most impressive large-scale women's projects of the decade - the Disarmament petition. Sponsored by the WIL, this campaign was also assisted and supported by a broad range of institutions - including other women's organizations (party and non-party), mixed-membership organizations such as the LNU, and major organs of the press (including *Time and Tide*).

Events in the Far East in the early 1930s did not go unnoticed among women observers of international affairs but, with the exception of a few who focused considerable attention on Japanese actions in 1931 and 1932 (such as Freda White and Hilda Clark), interest in this distant region was limited until later in the 1930s. Even then, although one can point to the silk boycott efforts, the China Campaign Committee, and the writings of Freda Utley, the larger part of women's interest and concern was centred much closer to home - on the activities of the European powers.

As the decade progressed, women maintained a constant presence at the extreme ends of the spectrum of views on foreign policy, although the rabid nationalism of the far right generally constituted only a very small proportion of women's public responses. The death of Lady Houston in the middle of the decade removed perhaps the most prominent woman in this camp. Women's commitment to pacifism, however, was a consistently more visible and significant phenomenon. This study's discussions of the WIL, the WCG, the PPU, Labour women, and independent women's writings indicate a core of women's pacifism within each of these contexts that was under siege but not silenced - even on the eve of war.

However, it is also clear that the increasing pressure to respond to the course of events
in the international arena and the British government's policies made the realm of foreign
policy activism a dynamic and fluctuating one for many women. The rise of the Nazi state in
Germany inevitably interested those already active in foreign affairs but also served to bring
more women into this realm - both as independent commentators and as participants in new
organizational efforts. Fascist aggression in Abyssinia and Spain in 1935 and 1936 further
energised women's activism. and subsequent developments. especially in Spain, along with
dramatically heightened tensions in Central Europe. intensified women activists' focus on
international affairs. However. the dynamism of this scene was not only produced by the
incorporation of new women or new efforts, but also by the evolution of views and the
struggle on the part of many women to determine priorities and goals in the face of a
constantly changing international situation. For most activist women, circumstances seemed
to demand a continuous re-evaluation of positions. Some moved fairly steadily from an
internationalist sympathy for pacifist ideals to a decision that such ideals were impractical in
the moment and that the need to confront fascist aggression was greater. For others, the
increasingly imminent threat of war made internationalism or support for collective security
seem inadequate or dangerous, and led them in turn to a pacifist commitment. Still others
found themselves vacillating between different impulses for much of the decade - engaged in
what must have often appeared to be an unreconcilable yet unrelenting struggle between
conflicting values and loyalties.

An important contribution of this project is thus its revelation of British women's
complex and variegated responses to the changing international situation and to government
policies. These findings alone demonstrate that greater representation of women's voices in
both general and specialized studies of public debate on foreign policy in Britain in the 1930s is warranted.

The unfortunate persistence to the present of the view that foreign policy in the 1930s was the political territory of men reminds us of the other key issue discussed in this project, which centred around the question of how women made a place for themselves in these debates at a time when their official incorporation into the electorate and the world of politics was still of a very recent date and their presence in this world still questioned. What motivated these women to participate in international affairs and how did they justify this "intrusion" into traditionally male territory within the various forums in which they worked?

In my introduction to this thesis, I described a framework for an analysis of women's public activism suggested by Nancy Cott which can be nicely adapted to this discussion of women's activism in international affairs. This framework posited the existence of women-identified motivations - which might be either feminist or the product of a "female consciousness" - and of motivations based not on an explicitly articulated gender identity but on a "communal consciousness" which emphasized solidarity with a group of men and women. From this study, we can see that women's public activism in foreign affairs in Britain in the 1930s demonstrated both gendered and non-gendered rationales in action in each of the forums identified here.

At a certain level, many of the women discussed here recognized a degree of "communal consciousness" - although certainly different definitions of "the group" were evoked. Thus one sees women in organizational contexts (women-only and mixed membership, party and non-party) and independent women commentators explaining their
activism and views by evoking their membership in the largest "group" of all - humanity - asserting that, as human beings, women had the desire and the responsibility to involve themselves in issues which affected whole populations both close to home and on the other side of the world.

The "group" of men and women evoked could also be more specific. On some occasions women spoke from an awareness of their positions as members of a community of free and democratic states, or as citizens of their particular state, or as members of a certain social class, or as supporters of a particular political movement. In evoking a "communal consciousness," women typically used language that was theoretically gender-neutral, or gender-blind, or which at times even appropriated traditionally "masculine" rhetoric of "honour." "chivalry." and "courage" on behalf of both men and women of the "community."

At the same time, women also often used expressly gender-based motivations and rationales for their activism in foreign affairs. In the first chapter's discussion of a familiar and established site of women's public activism - the non-party women-only organization - an examination of the rationale of those groups which chose to engage in international affairs laid out a broad range of gender-based motivations which then surfaced again in later chapters. These motivations can be seen as expressing either a feminist sensibility - offering a challenge to male supremacy or the traditional patriarchal order - or a "female consciousness," in which women's actual acceptance of gender-based divisions in society leads them to public activism out of a sense of the obligations attached to their assigned roles.

Women's expressions of their need to involve themselves in international issues which concerned threats to women's rights or reforms favouring women (for example -
understanding and protesting the treatment of women under fascist regimes) demonstrated a broadly feminist sensibility. A note of equal rights feminism was sounded in the open expression - for example by the WIL or by Corbett Ashby on behalf of the International Alliance of Women - of women's right to participate in international politics as equals alongside men.

However, the feminist language which dominated was that which specifically emphasized women's differences from men and suggested that women's engagement in international affairs was both justified and necessary by virtue of special values or insights unique to women that they would bring to the debate and thereby effect a change to the clearly flawed "masculine" or patriarchal system of international politics. These values were identified as those associated with women's roles as childbearers and, more generally, as nurturers of life, which made them logical opponents of a system which had traditionally valued or accepted militarism. In some instances, this emphasis on the radical potential offered by women's maternal roles was based on an understanding of these roles as socially constructed over time: in other instances, these roles were understood as inherent to women's make-up - that all women were born with these qualities and were thus nurturers by nature. In either case, activists used the logic of maternal feminism to justify women's work for peace. They called on women to save the world from the old rules of international relations established by men and based on confrontation and violence, by offering an alternative system based on women's experiences of valuing life and using non-violent solutions to disagreements. In the earlier years of the decade, while feminist pacifists and feminist internationalists were in greater accord over goals, the rhetoric of maternal feminism was
linked to women's work for peace by both groups. Later in the decade, as the internationalists diverged from the pacifists, the rhetoric of maternal feminism remained most closely linked to, and mainly used by, feminist pacifists.

It would be misleading, however, to incorporate all maternalist rhetoric associated with foreign policy activism under an umbrella of feminism. At times, it would seem more accurate to characterize it as evoking a "female consciousness" which spoke simply and directly to the realities of life for the majority of women. For example, statements from women activists which asked other women to protect their children or husbands or show sympathy with mothers in other parts of the world simply by joining a particular organization or political party, or by buying a token of some kind in order to support others working for peace or fighting fascism were not inherently feminist simply because they involved women's engagement in the world outside the home. In themselves, these appeals posited no inherently feminist challenge to a male-dominated system but simply desired that system to implement a certain policy. By the same token, statements which asked women to support a particular foreign policy agenda by refusing to buy goods imported from certain countries, such as Germany or Japan, seemed to be geared not necessarily at evoking a feminist response (although they might appeal to some feminists) but at tapping into a "female consciousness" which counted both on women's economic power (as established through the allocation of the money at their disposal), and on the fact that shopping for the household was a common and accepted women's task.

The point of making this distinction is not to employ some sort of "litmus test" of feminism with regard to various statements, or to arrive at two distinct sets of neatly
categorised expressions. Indeed, in a number of instances, one might debate endlessly over whether a particular evocation of motherhood or "women's nature" is a clear expression of maternal feminism or "female consciousness." This would not be a very useful exercise, nor is it necessary in order to deepen one's understanding of such rhetoric. The fact that there are some instances to which one can point, with some certainty, as indications of either a maternal feminist consciousness or a "female consciousness" is sufficient for my purposes to argue that maternalist rhetoric was an important aspect of women's foreign policy activism in the 1930s and that it consisted of a flexible or malleable set of terms and images that was available to more than one gendered perspective of this activism. The maternal feminist impulse and "female consciousness." in conjunction with other feminist impulses and the non-gendered "communal consciousness." represent a compelling view of the full range of rationales evident in women's foreign policy activism that rightfully emphasizes the diversity of their views regarding the relevance of gender to this debate.

Our understanding of the complexities of women's responses in this area is further extended by this study's findings that the expression of these different types of consciousness was a matter of both personal conviction and context and strategy. At any given point, we can identify one or both of these major factors at work. Thus we see expressions of "female consciousness" from both women who did not consider themselves feminists at all, as well as women who are indeed familiar to us from other contexts or comments as feminists but who, in the interests of appealing to a broader spectrum of women for the sake of a foreign policy agenda, chose to speak in a particular instance in terms which were specific to women's experiences but did not necessarily require a feminist response. We also see expressions of
"communal consciousness" coming, predictably, from women who did not specifically identify themselves as women in their activism or engagement, but also from those for whom this kind of explicitly identified activism had an important, even central, place in their public lives but who also wanted to acknowledge, even emphasize, the relevance of international affairs to a broader community of both men and women.

As previously noted in relation to women's actual presence in the various forums or contexts of foreign policy activism available to them, a pattern emerged which saw some women working solely or primarily in one context, while other women chose to work in a range of contexts. A similar pattern emerges here in the rationales of this activism: some women adhered fairly consistently to articulating one aspect of consciousness while others demonstrated in their language that different aspects of consciousness were not mutually exclusive, but rather could and did co-exist in their approach to foreign policy issues.

Unfortunately, the immediate impact of all this activity on the formation and execution of British foreign policy appears to have been very limited. It is likely that the government was influenced by this activism more in the nature of its efforts to present policy to the public (and to women voters in particular) than in the actual policy decisions made.

Some critics of government foreign policy laid at least part of the blame for the shape of that policy at the feet of the majority of politically active Conservative women. Ultimately, however, there is little evidence to corroborate the kind of active, formative influence implied by such statements. A more accurate characterization of the relevant efforts of such women is that they, like their male colleagues, offered their loyal support to
the party leadership and consequently contributed to propaganda efforts in foreign policy, especially those directed at women.

There is also little reason to believe that the government viewed contemporary women critics as sufficiently influential to acknowledge their views in any substantive fashion. Women's anti-militarist rhetoric and imagery could be appropriated to some degree to support appeasement, while the women activists articulating this rhetoric (who would not necessarily have been pleased with this appropriation) could be dismissed even more easily than their male colleagues in the peace movement as naive and impractical. At the same time, those women who came to advocate a strong stance against fascist aggression could be represented as warmongers who would see Britain dragged into another terrible conflict, and who also could be considered as having little right, as non-combatants in a potential war, to take such a position.

In spite of itself, however, the British government was fortunate in gaining the support of a large proportion of the women activists in the nation's effort in World War II. There were certainly vocal women who remained committed to pacifist protest - Vera Brittain was one of the most prominent of these - but pacifists clearly represented only a small minority of the population as a whole during the war and there is no question that women's peace work generally was substantially reduced. The WIL saw its membership numbers fall off even further and the WCG, although never abandoning peace rhetoric, frequently gave its support to aspects of the war effort which offered comforts to fellow citizens and the soldiers.² Among some of the noted individuals whom this thesis has

²See Liddington, p.171; Black, pp.152-153.
discussed, Ellen Wilkinson was included in Churchill's wartime coalition government in 1940, while other wartime women MPs, including Eleanor Rathbone, Nancy Astor, Irene Ward, Mavis Tate, Edith Summerskill, Thelma Cazelet-Keir, and Megan Lloyd George worked hard to establish legitimate and recognized roles for women in the war effort.\(^3\)

Journalists Elizabeth Wiskemann and Sheila Grant Duff offered their expertise in European affairs to the government. Grant Duff worked first for the Foreign Office and then as the Czechoslovakian editor for the European section of the BBC, while Wiskemann was sent to Switzerland by the Foreign Office to work on anti-German propaganda.\(^4\)

In terms of the impact of women's foreign policy activism in the 1930s on British women generally and on the activists themselves, it is perhaps helpful to remember Martin Pugh's comment that assessing the fate of feminism in the interwar period can be largely a question of perspective.\(^5\) On the one hand, one can argue that this activism, in all its variations, had a positive impact on women's status— in that a case can be made that it maintained women's public political profile during a period in which there were considerable social pressures on women to stay in the home and in which foreign policy issues increasingly dominated the political agenda and crowded out other concerns (including those domestic issues especially relevant to women.)

On the other hand, it is also true that this activism sent out a number of different,\

---

\(^3\)Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement...*, pp.276-277.

\(^4\)Sheila Grant Duff, *The Parting of Ways*, p.214; Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Europe I Saw*. Wiskemann notes the security clearance procedure which she went through before going to Switzerland— in which a "top" security officer "rather engagingly" informed this experienced writer that she "...was not nearly such a fool as he had expected a woman would be." [p.140.]

\(^5\)Pugh, p.236.
often mixed, messages about women and gender roles - some of which were liberating, but others of which potentially, or even explicitly, undermined women's status. It is thus when one considers the issue of the variations within this activism and its intentions, that one confronts the difficulty in assessing the "impact" of women's foreign policy activism as a whole.

In the quote which began this chapter, Margery Corbett Ashby explicitly expressed a feminist desire for a cohesive or unified effort among women to influence international affairs. The fact that women's foreign policy activism in the 1930s instead developed into a phenomenon which encompassed a wide range of views on foreign policy and on women's particular role in the debate, limits the degree to which it can be seen and judged as a conscious dimension of the women's movement, thereby rendering problematic one obvious option in an assessment of impact. Certainly Corbett Ashby was not alone in wanting the world of international affairs and foreign policy debate opened up to women - a stated goal that went hand in hand with certain foreign policy views. For such women, there was at least a partial, albeit limited, realization of this feminist agenda. Others, however, did not view their foreign policy activism in this light, or at least did not see this broader feminist priority as central to their efforts. If their work can be said to have had a feminist aspect, it was largely, sometimes wholly, an unconscious one - created simply by the visibility of these women in the male-dominated debates concerning international affairs.

As a final comment on the impact of this activism, one should consider the women activists themselves, and the extent to which they might have viewed their achievements as empowering. Certainly they could have gained considerable positive reinforcement from
such aspects of their activism as: being part of various supportive and impassioned communities of women; gaining acceptance from, and the respect of, male colleagues; and seeing tangible evidence of the dissemination of their views to a wider public. However, as we have seen, there were also factors present which would have subverted their sense of empowerment. Margery Corbett Ashby spoke triumphantly in 1931 of the acknowledgement of women's activism by the powers that be. However, the reality that, over the course of the decade, very few women foreign policy activists would have had a real sense of their voices being heard by policy-makers and of having an impact on policy formation must have made their tasks often seem more frustrating and draining than empowering. When one also considers the difficult choices facing many of these women in light of the troubling developments in the international arena - choices which undoubtedly caused considerable soul-searching and periods of self-doubt even among the most confident - the fact that embattled groups like the WIL or determined individuals like Margery Corbett Ashby or Eleanor Rathbone maintained their commitment to foreign policy activism for as long as they did is truly impressive.

In the end, this project leaves us with a much more thorough understanding of the permutations of women's foreign policy activism in Britain in the 1930s than has yet been provided by any other study. Other scholars have noted the significant degree of interest shown by many feminists in international affairs in this decade, but here we are provided with a deeper understanding of both the internal variations of that feminist response and the extent to which women's foreign policy advocacy, as an activity which was not inherently
feminist. brought feminists and non-feminists together over common foreign policy agendas. The right and the need to engage in this traditionally male-dominated debate was asserted by these women in a variety of contexts in both gendered and non-gendered terms, but at the centre of this activism were always the foreign policy agendas themselves - conceived in the early years of the decade in an atmosphere of relative optimism and then later in one of growing alarm. Most certainly there was no unified "women's response" among these activists and commentators to international events and British policy in this turbulent period.

This study thus accomplishes two important tasks. From the point of view of scholars of the politics of foreign policy in Britain in the 1930s, it expands the parameters of contemporary debate to include and recognize fully the range and substance of women's contributions. As soon as one acknowledges, as so many scholars have, that the study of a state's foreign policy can and should go beyond a very small circle of policy-makers, then the value of adding previously neglected women's voices to the historiography is clear - especially when one is studying a democratic state with a rich history of women's political activism prior to the period in question. The implications for further study in this field are varied, ranging from simply reminding scholars not to automatically pass over references to women and women's observations in the records they study as inherently insignificant or uninteresting, to suggesting the potential value of adding an awareness of gender roles and gendered rhetoric to other aspects of the debate and to studies of significant male figures in the story.

This study also emphasizes the potential insights to be gained concerning women's political activism by examining such activity in an area which was widely seen as the
political domain of men and which also did not necessarily appeal to interested or concerned women as a feminist issue. Here one is reminded that, while feminism is an important part of the story of women's participation in the public sphere - as is indeed revealed in this study - it is not the whole story. This is perhaps a point which is more typically recognized in relation to earlier periods in women's history but which can seem obscured in a 20th century context. This study further demonstrates that the dichotomy between feminism and non-feminism that is so often central to discussions of women's activism in the public realm does not adequately capture the complete experience of this activism. It clearly has great relevance for some aspects, but not necessarily for all. If one needed a vivid reminder of how the complex patterns of divisions and alliances found in women's foreign policy activism in Britain in the 1930s demonstrate the truth of this statement, one might look no further than at a telegram sent to the Duchess of Atholl during her by-election fight in December 1938 by none other than Sylvia Pankhurst. Fundamental differences in their respective opinions of women's place in society forgotten in light of the opportunity to come together over the current urgent international situation, the well-known feminist and left-wing radical's message to the right-wing Tory and former anti-suffrage campaigner was: "All wishes for success - Every woman who prizes her vote should vote for you."6

---

6Sylvia Pankhurst to Katharine, Duchess of Atholl, 20 December 1938, NRA 22/31.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Personal Papers and Organizational Records

Margery Irene Corbett Ashby Papers - Fawcett Library. City of London Polytechnic
Nancy Astor Papers - University of Reading
Katharine Atholl Papers - Blair Castle, Blair Atholl, Perthshire
Vera Brittain Archive - McMaster University
Viscount Cecil of Chelwood Papers - British Library, Manuscripts Collection
Austin Chamberlain Papers - University of Birmingham
Neville Chamberlain Papers - University of Birmingham
Kathleen D'Olier Courtney Papers - Fawcett Library
Catherine E. Marshall Papers - Cumbria Record Office
Sylvia Pankhurst Papers - Women. suffrage and politics [microform]: the papers of
Sylvia Pankhurst, 1882-1960 - from the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale
Geschiedenis, Amsterdam
Eleanor Rathbone Papers - Sydney Jones Library. University of Liverpool
Agnes Maude Royden Papers - Fawcett Library
Hilda Runciman diaries - University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Conservative Party Archive - Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
Archives of the Women's Labour League and successors. Sussex: Harvester Press
Archives of the British Labour Party 1873-1973 [microform]. Reading, Berkshire:
Women's Co-operative Guild - Brynmor Jones Library. University of Hull
Women's Co-operative Guild - British Library of Political and Economic Science
(BLPES), University of London
League of Nations Union - BLPES
Women's International League of Peace and Freedom - BLPES
National Peace Council - BLPES
Fellowship of Reconciliation - BLPES
Six Point Group - Fawcett Library
NUSEC/NCEC - Fawcett Library
Women's Freedom League - Fawcett Library
National Council of Women - Cumbria Record Office

Newspapers, Periodicals, and other Serial Publications

The Co-operative News
Headway
Jus Suffagii - International Women's News
The Labour Woman
The Liberal Magazine
The Liberal Woman's News
The Liberal Year Book
Modern Woman
The New Statesman
New Times and Ethiopia News
Peace News
The Observer
Saturday Review
The Spectator
Time and Tide
Tribune
Woman To-day
Woman's Journal
Woman's Leader
Women In Council
Women's International League Monthly News Sheet

Hansard - Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons
Published Monographs and Pamphlets


Jameson, Storm, ed. Challenge to Death. 1934.


Royden, Maude. War and the Women's Movement. 1915.


New Wars For Old. London: WIL. 1934.


China At War. New York: Day. 1939.


Published Memoirs, Diaries, Letters


SECONDARY SOURCES

Monographs


Gordon, Michael R. *Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965.*
Middlemas, Keith. *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-

1963.

**Articles and Essays**


