

Envoys

Working for Peace in 1916

Jo Vellacott

In her 97th year, Jo Vellacott sends fresh insights into old conflicts. She is the author of Conscientious Objection: Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists (£14.99) and From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The story of Catherine Marshall (£17.99), both published by Spokesman.

Once the First World War started there seemed to be no way to stop it. Casualties mounted, rhetoric escalated, leaders in the belligerent nations focused on victory, even to talk of peace was seen as treasonous.

The International Women's Congress held at The Hague in April 1915 was truly remarkable. Pulled together by a handful of women, all suffragists (but without the blessing of any major international organization), the Congress was attended by over a thousand women, from neutral nations, from both sides of the conflict, and from both shores of the Atlantic. Jane Addams, later a peace laureate, and already a widely respected feminist well known for her social work in Chicago, and for her public presence, agreed to serve as President.

The name chosen in 1915 for the organization formed at the congress was 'International Women's Committee for Permanent Peace' (IWCPP), although it would become better known by its later name, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), under which name it is still active. The earlier name had significance at the time; this was not a simple 'Stop the War' initiative, but the beginning of an attempt to formulate principles of international relations that could undergird a lasting peace.

Scarcely a handful of the women who met at The Hague so much as had a vote, but all had given time and thought to how the basis of international relations could be improved. First, it was essential that the war must end in a just and negotiated peace. Recriminations and blame-laying for the present war were ruled out of order in their

discussions. The hope was to see the settlement embody systemic changes designed to forestall future conflicts, and to set up a mechanism for peaceful resolution if they did occur.

Not surprisingly, the resolutions passed by the Congress show awareness of the special vulnerability of women in wartime, as well as of the need to include women in all decision-making, and emphasize the changes that they hoped political empowerment of women might effect. But notably, they do not dwell on the victimization or even the empowerment of women. They are not confined to what were then seen as 'women's issues' but show a mature grasp of both problems and solutions of international relations, focusing instead on drawing up a blueprint for a just and lasting peace.

The principles affirmed include: no transfer of territory without consent of the populace; denial of the right of conquest; democratic control of foreign policy; future disputes to be referred to arbitration or conciliation (enforced if necessary by sanctions); removal of private profit from the arms industry; and – of course – women to have equal political rights and international representation. Other resolutions urge the establishment of a permanent International Court of Justice (enlarging the function and powers of the existing court at The Hague), and the establishment of a permanent conference to further international co-operation.

The wish list is long. A century later these are still admirable goals; we have, perhaps with reason, diminished faith in the will of politicians to carry them forward.

The Congress deliberately stayed away from any demand for a quick end to the war. A draft resolution calling for a truce was quickly withdrawn, largely because of the hostile reaction it met with in the public press and among politicians. But clearly, an end to the war was the heartfelt wish of those gathered at The Hague, and they readily accepted a proposal suggesting a way towards this. Present among them was Julia Grace Wales, a young Canadian teaching at the University of Wisconsin, who had already sought long and intelligently to find a way to help turn the world from the tragic path it was on. As a Canadian she was a British citizen, but living in Wisconsin exposed her to open discussion of peace and war; and the considerable number of young Germans among her students helped her maintain a balanced perspective. Congress had recognised that the core difficulty in opening negotiations is that the side that believes itself to be on top at any given time sees no reason to negotiate, since it will soon be victorious and in a position to dictate; the side that is struggling thinks any peace overture or call for a truce will

simply be seen by the enemy as an admission of weakness. Almost obsessed by the call she felt to find a way towards peace, Wales had recognised the centrality of this difficulty and already, before the Congress was even planned, had drafted a plan that might circumvent it. Embodied in a pamphlet called *International Plan for Continuous Mediation without Armistice*, Wales's idea rapidly gained support among peace people in the US. A similar plan had been advocated from the outbreak of the war by a Hungarian, Rosika Schwimmer, who was also at the Congress, and the voyage to The Hague had provided opportunity for further discussion.

Wales did not suggest solutions for any particular issues between the belligerent nations, but laid out a mechanism by which small steps could be taken towards addressing the issues. Her proposal was that a neutral country, or group of countries, would agree to set up an ongoing conference to receive proposals, even tentative or partial statements of war aims, from belligerents, on which a move towards resolution could begin, and should also be actively engaged in drawing up and submitting to the warring sides 'reasonable proposals as a basis of peace'. Because it would facilitate mediation without a call for armistice, the plan would enable a start to be made without either side appearing to show weakness, and had the potential to offer a viable way forward. At the Congress, Grace's plan was readily accepted and approved.

After a few short days, the work of the Congress was done. Understanding had greatly increased among the women present, and they could leave satisfied that excellent resolutions had been approved, including one agreeing to meet again when and where the peace conference that should end the war would be held.

But what satisfaction was there in suggesting solutions that the statesmen would not read, might indeed never hear of?

Rosika Schwimmer, for one, could not bear to see the good work of the Conference used only for propaganda among the already converted. In the last hours, she called on the women at the gathering to send envoys out to meet with heads of state and foreign ministers in both belligerent and neutral nations, carrying with them the Congress resolutions and the plan for continuous mediation. Dr Alice Hamilton, an American physician who would make a name for her work in occupational medicine, described how Schwimmer, the only delegate who 'could swing the Congress off its feet' made a final impassioned appeal and succeeded in having them 'pass the resolution which filled most of us with dismay ... that the resolutions passed by the Congress be presented by a committee to the various Powers'.

Despite some evidence that she shared the initial dismay at the boldness of the plan, Jane Addams gave no public sign of hesitancy, and accepted the expressed will of the gathering. She came to see it as a more than worthwhile attempt, and she gave it all she had, despite her own ill-health.

Plans were made and delegates chosen with remarkable speed and efficiency. Addams would lead the delegation of women from neutral nations that would visit the capitals of the belligerents, while women from the belligerent nations could be among the envoys to the neutrals, or at times to statesmen of their own countries. It was understood from the outset that the main focus of their visits would be to bring forward the plan for neutral mediation, although other principles of peace should be discussed. What developed, in the event, was a kind of unofficial shuttle diplomacy, where the women took the role of message-carriers – a role that could not have been taken by any man at that time – from one nation to another, and sometimes back again, exploring possibilities and sounding out official opinion.

Delegation to the belligerent capitals

Addams's fellow delegates to the war capitals were Aletta Jacobs of The Netherlands, and Rose Genoni of Italy. Frau van Wulfften Palthe (Netherlands) and the doubting Alice Hamilton travelled with them as unofficial companions, although it still seemed to Hamilton to be 'a singularly fool[ish] performance'.

Throughout their visits to the warring nations, Jane Addams and her fellow envoys were met with caution, but never with outright rejection. In England, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was divided over the issue of peace efforts, and gave no official support, but Catherine Marshall, former Parliamentary Secretary to the NUWSS, used her pre-war political contacts to set up interviews for Addams with Prime Minister Asquith and Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, both of whom agreed, albeit with reluctance. Addams also met officially with Lord Robert Cecil and Lord Crewe, both cabinet ministers. When she lunched with Lloyd George, newly appointed as Minister of Munitions, at 11 Downing Street, she even found an opportunity to tweak his Welsh conscience. Mary Sheepshanks, herself an active pacifist, later wrote that when another guest left the room Lloyd George's mood changed: "Last Sunday" he said, "I was in Paris planning increases of munitions with Albert Thomas. I heard the church bells ringing, and I said to myself 'is this the right thing to be doing on the Lord's Day?' "Well, Mr. Lloyd

George,” said Miss Addams, “perhaps when these thoughts come we ought to listen to them”.’ Evidently, the incident stayed in Lloyd George’s mind, even as he tried to brush it off: the following week ‘Lloyd George said to his guests, “Who do you think I had here last week? Jane Addams trying to convert me to pacifism!”’

The British statesmen did not close the door, despite their caution in the choice of words. Sir Edward Grey wondered aloud whether the neutral nations would hold off from action until the whole of Europe had been destroyed, although he is also reported to have said that if anything at all was said about the belligerents being willing to consider peace negotiations, he would deny it even if ‘every word was true’. Lord Crewe, acting Foreign Minister at the time, rejected the word ‘accept’ as too strong for the attitude the British government would take towards the formation of a Neutral Conference, but he made the crucial statement, on paper, that they ‘would not place any obstacles in the way of the formation of such a body or make any protest against its existence if it should come into being’.

Meeting with major leaders was not all that was expected of the envoys. In every country peace activists provided what opportunity they could for the envoys to meet with politicians and potential supporters. In England in particular, the programme followed by Addams was daunting. A list dated ‘June 26?’ and headed ‘People we saw in England the last week for short half an hour’ contains 48 individual names, not including ‘180 members of English Committee, Settlement people, etc. etc.’ Included are Members of both Houses of Parliament, senior journalists and other writers, bishops, and many well known people, and the list is, to my knowledge from other sources, by no means complete.

Addams painted a vivid picture of the major players among the Central Powers. The German Foreign Minister, von Jagow, told the women that ‘this is what women *ought* to do, and he couldn’t understand why they hadn’t done it sooner’. He also pointed out, reasonably, that acceptance of any US intervention was made more difficult by the shipment of American arms to the Allies. He even suggested that now was the time to go ahead, since neither side had an advantage.

The envoys saw a very human side of the German Chancellor, Bethmann von Hollweg, who had himself lost a son. Addams reported that ‘He said nations at war *can’t* begin negotiations, and he thought neutral nations had been too feeble – they should have taken a stronger line at once’. At the same time, he had ‘slammed England’ for her lack of understanding of Germany, and for her avowed determination to crush

Germany utterly, claiming (rather implausibly) that he never heard Germans saying that they wanted to crush England. Overall, Addams felt that the Chancellor was a good man, anxious to find a way out.

In Austria, the envoys found the suffering caused by the conflict already tragically visible; there were wounded soldiers everywhere, and a shortage of wheat had brought widespread hardship. Their meeting with the Prime Minister, Karl von Sturgh, proved to be one of the highlights of the journey. After they had introduced their scheme, Addams, never over-confident, said apologetically that perhaps their mission might seem very foolish to him. His response was emphatic: 'He banged his fist on the table. "Foolish?" he said. "Not at all. Those are the first sensible words that have been uttered in this room for ten months. ... Men are fools! For nine months they've come to me in this room asking for more men and more money, and now at last you come with a reasonable proposal and ask for negotiations".' Count von Burian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, stressed the need for a forceful move to implement the proposed conference as soon as possible: the neutrals, he said, must not ask "'may we negotiate?" but must come with definite proposals again and again. And they *must not* wait.' The more countries came into the war, the more difficult it would become.

Visits to Allied countries were more difficult and discouraging than those to the Central Powers. The French Foreign Minister, Delcassé, whose country was, with Belgium, suffering the burden of invasion, treated them personally with courtesy. His picture of what was going on was a mirror image of what Germany was saying about the Allies, but he seemed to the envoys to be 'what you call a Jingo,' declaring that France would accept no terms until Germany was rendered incapable of aggression for a hundred years, which he said had to be done even if it cost France two men for every German life lost. He claimed that German resources were nearly at an end; Addams and her companions meanwhile had seen no signs of serious shortage in their visit to Germany, though they had in Austria. Only in France was the deputation 'followed everywhere by the police,' and they made little progress in what talks they had with Mille Schlumberger, President of the French Suffrage Society. France was the only major belligerent from which no delegates had made their way to the Congress in April. Soon, however, other French suffragists would form a branch of the ICWPP, and issue a manifesto of support for the Hague Congress.

The visit of the delegation to the Belgian government, in exile at Le Havre in France, brought 'the first disagreeable experiences with the police,' other than being 'followed everywhere,' and having 'to be

extremely careful' throughout the whole visit to France. In Le Havre the police officer objected to the Resolutions they were carrying, and said that they should have been censored, and the hotel where they had booked refused to take them in. But this mattered less to them than that M. d'Avignon, the Belgian Foreign Minister, met with them and admitted that a negotiated peace would be preferable to having the land fought over all over again. All the Belgians they met with wanted more than anything to get back to their own country; any kind of indemnity payment was less important for them. And even Belgium still had its pacifists; before leaving The Hague, Grace Wales had a long conversation with Mr Otlet, a leading Belgian pacifist who had years of work behind him in facilitating international federations of a variety of organizations, and who was eager to express his support of the plan for a conference of neutrals.

Italy came into the war on the Allied side while the delegation was on its way, so the Envoys who had planned to visit it as a neutral nation found themselves instead visiting a nation at war, and Rose Genoni had to leave them. Not surprisingly, the visit was discouraging; they were met with all the excitement and propaganda of early war involvement, not yet tempered by the realities of death and destruction. The War Ministry struck Jane Addams as 'boyish and pleased with their new toy'. The women did, however, add a long unplanned meeting with the Pope, and found him not only 'deeply distressed' by the war, but ready to have the Vatican take a part if a neutral conference of mediators should be formed.

The other delegation, consisting of Emily Balch, Chrystal Macmillan and Cor Ramondt-Hirschmann also interrupted their visits with the neutral nations to take a demanding three-day journey to Petrograd, where, after a delay of more than a week, they had an hour-long meeting with Sergei Sazonov, the Russian Foreign Minister. Their conversation ranged widely over a number of the issues dividing the nations. Sazonov blamed Germany for the war and took every opportunity to boost Russia's image. Less open than he seemed, he claimed that Russia had no further territorial ambitions – the envoys did not know that he had already concluded secret agreements with Britain and France to take over Turkish territory. As was their pattern, the envoys asked how he would respond to a conference of neutrals – would he see this as unfriendly? No, he said, it would be 'not unacceptable' and even agreed to sign a written statement to this effect, though he insisted that it should also include his opinion that 'it would not lead to any results'.

Clearly, the statesmen of the warring nations would take no first step – indeed, would profess indifference –and doubtless it could have been a

challenging task to bring political opinion in their own countries into agreement. But the women were not laughed out of court. The responses they received contain a curious note of what can only be called wistfulness. The warring leaders left the door a crack open, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, as human beings, they were yearning for someone else to open it wider. But, more than that, as statesmen, despite the reserve of their responses, they had, with only the one exception of France, dwelt on the inability of the nations at war to initiate any move to negotiation, and had indicated that they saw it as an important and expected role for the neutrals, almost an obligation.

Talking to the neutral nations

The second delegation, travelling to the neutral Scandinavian countries, included Emily Balch, Rosika Schwimmer, Chrystal Macmillan and Cor Ramondt-Hirschmann. Grace Wales went along at the beginning to lend a hand; although she did not attend the formal meetings with statesmen, she took the opportunity to talk to many peace activists in the Scandinavian countries and to diplomats in several embassies before returning to



Jane Addams photographed in 1915

Canada, and then to her job in Wisconsin. She remained active and would later take part in Henry Ford's peace initiative.

The delegation to the neutrals worked on and off throughout the summer and fall of 1915, sometimes all together, sometimes in pairs, sometimes joined by Aletta Jacobs. At times, individual enthusiasms and skills helped their work; at other times eagerness and over-confidence was a hindrance. The forceful character of Rosika Schwimmer, which played so essential a role in the launch of the whole initiative, rendered her increasingly unwilling to listen to wise advice, let alone accept a part in what most of the ICWPP women were trying, rightly, to set up as an efficient functioning democratic organisation with a responsible decision-making and reporting process. At this time the international Council of Women for Permanent Peace did not even have a constitution or an international office and its strength and leadership were effectively divided between Britain, The Netherlands and the United States.

Misunderstandings occurred, funds were hard to come by, occasionally opportunities were missed; those who cared about process were driven almost to despair. But none of this should take away from the picture of a remarkable enterprise, carried forward despite wartime difficulties of communication, dangers and hardships of travel, and some serious ill health. It also renders even more striking the willingness of individual statesmen to meet with them.

In the neutral nations the principles the women envoys stood for met with support among statesmen as well as in the general public. The Netherlands had a strong peace movement, and had, of course, hosted the Women's Congress, in the planning of which Aletta Jacobs had played a large part. Jacobs was not alone in hoping that Holland might be persuaded to take the lead in calling together a conference of neutral nations to offer a forum for mediation. Before leaving after the Congress, Addams had had a cordial meeting with the Dutch Prime Minister, Cort van der Linden, and she met with the Prime Minister again while the other Envoys were still travelling. He gave her active encouragement to find out informally from the American President, Woodrow Wilson, whether he would take part in a mediation initiative.

Public response was a factor in how the Envoys were met in every country that they visited, and must always have borne on how the statesmen received them. Almost everywhere, public meetings were organised, usually by local peace groups, and were well supported. In Switzerland, the leaders were more reserved in their response to the Envoys than elsewhere; Swiss statesmen, with some justification, feared

the European war as a potential divisive element in their own nation, exacerbating tensions between their German-speaking and their French-speaking citizens. But even here, the Prime Minister said that his country would come in when other neutral nations made a move.

In Denmark the Envoys were well received; the reception by the leading statesmen was formal, and although there was no sign that they would take the lead, the Envoys thought that Denmark would join if the initiative came from elsewhere. In Norway, they met separately with the King, the Foreign Minister, and the Prime Minister, who all gave them considerable time and showed genuine interest in the proposals.

Wherever the envoys met with encouragement, they followed up. Schwimmer, with Chrystal Macmillan, made return visits to most of the northern neutral capitals before the summer of 1915 was over, bringing renewed hopes after they heard how the delegation to the war capitals had been received. Sweden and Holland were soon identified as the nations showing most promise. In Sweden, it became apparent during their meetings with Knut Wallenberg, the Foreign Minister, that he would like to see his country play a role in getting negotiations started, and would gladly host such a conference as that suggested in the plan brought forward by the Envoys. He had played an important part in keeping the Scandinavian nations from involvement in the war, and had earlier made his own attempt, on behalf of Sweden, to approach Germany with an offer of mediation. Understandably, he wanted to know that a conference of neutrals would not be ‘unacceptable’ to the belligerents (none would use the term ‘welcome’), and he made use of the Envoys to sound them out on this issue. It was in response to his wish for evidence that they made a point of getting a signed note from Sazonov, in Russia. They were welcomed again by Wallenberg on their return from Russia and large, and enthusiastic public peace rallies suggested that he would have public support if he took action.

The Envoys continued to travel in hope after Jane Addams left Europe. Some of the reports touch on the vision of Jacobs that her country might emerge as a leader. Never mentioned but perceptible is the sense that perhaps Wallenberg or Cort van den Linden – in addition to their genuine desire to bring the slaughter to an end — might reach for the personal glory that would attend success.

A remarkable document drawn up by Rosika Schwimmer and Chrystal Macmillan, dated 2 August 1915, sums up their experiences and the responses they had met with, and spells out the way forward, emphasizing the need for a special method to meet the unprecedented difficulties of

moving forward. The belligerents claimed that they could do nothing: ‘... only the neutrals can act in this matter. Every day’s delay means loss, irreparable loss, not only to the belligerents but to the whole world. This method provides the machinery for taking the first steps towards a settlement. It is for the neutrals to put it into motion.’

A precise proposal follows: a group of five nations, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland should come together at the call of one (Sweden or Holland were identified as the most likely to take this initiative) and should then issue invitations to other neutral nations to form part of a conference, which would immediately begin, with the help of experts, to draw up preliminary proposals to submit to the warring nations. ‘By this method of continuous mediation in which the proposals would be initiated by an impartial body we can hope to see established the peace based on the principles of freedom and justice for which all the belligerents in their official statements, whether to the public or to our delegations, declare themselves to be fighting.’

Overall, the European journeys of the envoys provided reason for hope. Approval and a tentative willingness to participate had come from the neutral nations, and leaders in the war nations had officially stated that they would not stand in the way. A scarcely concealed longing comes through the words of some individual statesmen.

Taking the message to Woodrow Wilson

Reservations expressed by European leaders, especially in countries supportive of the German side, about the extent to which the US could be seen as neutral, or indeed had any understanding of Europe, led Schwimmer and Macmillan to propose that the conference for continuous mediation should be convened by European neutrals. Nevertheless, they recognised the need for the United States to be included, and the neutral statesmen clearly saw that no serious official conference was likely to take place without US encouragement and participation. The Dutch Prime Minister, Cort van den Linden, spelled it out explicitly, saying that he could not take the initiative unless he knew that Wilson approved, and would bring the US into such a conference, telling the Envoys, ‘If you can bring me as soon as possible unofficial[ly] a statement of Pres. Wilson’s attitude I consider this as an act of great importance’.

Wilson had let it be known that he wanted to see Addams on her return from Europe, and she tried to recruit several well known British men known to be active for peace to accompany her, believing that a male presence would be helpful (according to Bertrand Russell this was because

Wilson was 'anti-feminist'). Russell met with her, and heard details of her visits in Europe. Initially he found Addams 'very impressive' and said that he would 'love' to go with her to see Wilson, although he feared that the British Embassy would be against it. But he was dissuaded, partly by circumstances but largely by meeting – less than a week later — with Alfred Jay Nock, a libertarian journalist then working for the *American Nation*. An acquaintance of William Jennings Bryan, Nock was a peace advocate, but wholly antagonistic to Jane Addams, whom he described to Russell as 'about as welcome [in Washington] as the black plague', a description accepted by Russell but hardly borne out by Wilson's keenness to meet with her.

President Wilson, in fact, was accessible to a degree hardly credible to our age, although at times he expressed reluctance to meet with delegates from belligerent nations. Over the next few months he met several times with Addams, Schwimmer and Balch, as well as a number of others supportive of intervention that might bring peace closer. Aletta Jacobs brought the President a direct, if informal, question from the Dutch Government repeating van den Linden's question as to whether he would like to take the lead in calling a conference of neutrals or, alternatively, would join such a conference if called by others. Some of Wilson's top-level advisers also met with one or other of the women and with others promoting the same cause of neutral facilitation of peace negotiations.

The efforts of the women envoys had not fallen on completely deaf ears in either belligerent or neutral nations. In a letter to House written in August 1915, Grey wrote of having been pressed by neutrals for a response to the formation of a conference of neutral states. He told House that such an effort could not be resented but that it had little chance of success unless the US took part. Significantly, although Grey spoke of Britain's current focus on victory, he did not dismiss the idea that the war might end by mediation, if the US facilitated the solution.

The women Envoys continued to press for a commitment and were joined by other influential US peace advocates, and by major peace societies. Dr David Starr Jordan, President of Stanford University, was deputed by a prestigious International Peace Congress held in San Francisco in October 1915 to meet with Wilson and ask him to convene a conference of neutrals. Advocates met with Wilson through November; some came away hopeful, others were discouraged, suggesting that he was indeed having trouble making up his mind.

Balch had understood in August that President Wilson 'said definitely that he would not wait to be asked to mediate, if he saw any opportunity

to be of any use he would take it'. But the President's closest advisers, Colonel House and Robert Lansing, were firm if covert opponents of the scheme and did much to discredit it with Wilson; their influence far outweighed that of William Jennings Bryan, Secretary of State at the time. In July, House, notifying Wilson of a coming visit from Addams, had dismissed the journeys of the Envoys in a few contemptuous words: 'Jane Addams,' he wrote 'has accumulated a wonderful lot of misinformation in Europe. She saw von Jagow, Grey, and many others, and, for one reason or another, they were not quite candid with her, so she has a totally wrong impression.' Wilson, I think, had glimpsed the potential opportunity offered by the work of the women Envoys: House was quite unable to understand that what they had done was something that could only have been done by women in that strange period when they still lacked political power. In the long run, Wilson failed to take any initiative, or to give the needed leadership.

By November, it was often House who met with any who came to advocate for mediation; he seems to have developed skill in appearing to listen while having a closed mind, and even delighted in setting them to argue among themselves when he could. House undoubtedly would have liked to see the US play a stellar role in bringing the war to an end by diplomacy, but the plan he was himself developing, not revealed until some years later, depended more on playing the belligerents off against one another than it did on focusing on what of common ground there might be in the declared goals of the two sides, and seeking a point where mediation might begin.

Meanwhile time and events moved on, deaths demanded more deaths and the window of opportunity was closing. As the US advocates of peace came to realise that the President was not going to act, they explored the possibility and potential of a standing international conference of influential and respected private individuals, to perform the role that had been proposed for the neutral statesmen. Henry Ford, replete with money and more good will than good sense, hired a ship and set out for Europe with a motley assortment of peace people including some of the women who had been among the envoys. The journeys of the women envoys and what fruits they had borne had been the product of hard-won self discipline and team work, at times seriously flawed but never completely broken. The Ford Peace project, despite the good intentions and ability of many of those who set sail in the *Oscar II*, had no such framework, and was beset with lack of focus and interpersonal disagreements; we shall not follow that story here.

Once the USA entered as a belligerent, in 1917, any possible role as a

mediator was of course at an end. There is plenty of evidence that Wilson listened to the women attentively; ironically, his famous ‘Fourteen Points’, brought to the Versailles table after victory, were largely based on the resolutions passed by the women of the Hague Congress: by then these principles of peace lacked the power they might have borne when there was a peace to be negotiated, not merely the spoils of victory to be debated.

Conclusion

I find enough evidence in the story of the journeys and of the reception accorded to the women envoys to suggest that, if only they had found one statesman great enough – preferably Woodrow Wilson — to take the ball and run with it, drawing others along with him, tentative peace negotiations might have opened before the end of 1915. Presented with a clear plan and strong presidential leadership, public opinion might well have rallied behind a vision of the United States as a peacemaker.

What this could have meant should not be measured only, or indeed mainly, in terms of the countless deaths that we know occurred during the next three years, but in the different spirit that might have informed the peace that followed. Imagine a world in which the Second World War had not happened.

In writing this article, I have used and briefly quoted from the following books:

Mercedes Randall: *Improper Bostonian: Emily Greene Balch* (N.Y.: Twayne, 1964); Addams, Balch and Hamilton: *Women at The Hague*, (1915, Garland reprint, 1972); Anne Wiltsher: *Most Dangerous Women* (London: Pandora, 1985); Mary Jean Woodard Bean: *Julia Grace Wales: Canada's Forgotten Heroine and the Quest for Peace* (Borealis Press, 2005); Sybil Oldfield, *Spinsters of this Parish* (London: Virago, 1984).

Other details and quotations are drawn from contemporary pieces, many handwritten, scattered through collections in the United States, Europe and the UK, from correspondence and reported conversations, notes made by several women who were present at an informal gathering in London, reports to their organization filed by delegates, and other personal recollections. I have drawn this material from the following collections: Catherine Marshall Papers, Cumbria Record Office; Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging, Amsterdam; Lady Ottoline Morrell Papers at

Humanities Research Center, University of Texas; several sub-collections in the Swarthmore College Peace Collection; Women's International League Papers at University of Colorado, Boulder. I appreciate the help I received from the archivists at these collections. At the time of my research, I was not able to obtain access to the Schwimmer/Lloyd Collection at the New York Public Library, but have made use of papers selected and sent to me by Edith Wynner.

I also appreciate permission to quote from Mary Sheepshanks, 'Women Suffrage and Pacifism', unpublished autobiography, seen by courtesy of Sybil Oldfield.

Detailed references can be supplied on request.



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WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR **PEACE & FREEDOM**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) with National Sections covering every continent, an International Secretariat based in Geneva, and a New York office focused on the work of the United Nations (UN).

Since our establishment in 1915, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace by non-violent means and promoting political, economic and social justice for all.

Our approach is always non-violent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.

Our strength lies in our ability to link the international and local levels. We are very proud to be one of the first organisations to gain consultative status (category B) with the United Nations, and the only women's anti-war organisation so recognised.

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