Crossing Boundaries
Women’s Organizing in Europe and the Americas, 1880s–1940s

Edited by
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Abstract

What is the history of feminist internationalism? This volume contributes a series of essays to this important question, examining the attempts of feminists and socialists in Western Europe and the Americas to establish meaningful connections with fellow activists across national boundaries, whether through travel, written communication, or face-to-face meetings. Their attempts to communicate transnationally reflected diverse intellectual and political goals, as well as different organizational forms, ranging from the establishment of solid institutions to the most personal and passionate alliances of political friendship. In order to understand the history of feminist internationalism, we must analyze the motives, means, successes, and limitations of women’s past efforts to cross the boundaries of nation, situating women’s organizing within the historical contexts that shaped their political activism.

*Keywords:* internationalism, feminism, socialism, political organisations

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Crossing Boundaries: 
Women’s Organizing in Europe and the Americas, 1880s–1940s

Joan Sangster

Since the early 19th century, European and North American feminists have been engaged in attempts to make meaningful connections with fellow activists across national borders, whether through travel, written communication, or face-to-face meetings. These attempts to communicate and collaborate transnationally, often building international organizations, have reflected diverse intellectual and political goals, as well as different organizational forms, from the establishment of hierarchical and well-funded institutions to the most personal and passionate alliances of friendship. Feminists concerned with international organizing have also looked to the past for insight and inspiration, attempting to understand the antecedents, flaws, and successes of women’s past transnational political connections, even while recognizing the very different historical contexts that spawned these organizational efforts.

Second-wave feminism in North America, for instance, resulted in the proliferation of new international links between women, both highly institutional and more informal ones, as well as research that probed women’s previous alliances, institutions and lobby groups, whether they were liberal, socialist, feminist, pacifist, or hybrid versions of those politics.¹ More recent concerns with globalization and its discontents have also led to renewed feminist attempts to explore the global historical connections shaping women’s lives, particularly the unequal colonial relations of power that characterized the 19th and 20th century worlds.² Feminist intentions to move research


²For example, Peter Waterman, Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalism (London 2001), chapter 6; Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, eds., Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class (London 1995); Mrinalini
away from the confines of the nation-state, and to move beyond the dominating intellectual and economic hegemony of the West, have led to innovative attempts to “internationalize” women’s studies research and writing: these have taken the form of new writing on diverse areas of the globe, as well as more integrative studies that try to connect different areas of the world through the thematics of women’s and gender history. Some efforts to “internationalize” women’s studies have been criticized for being partial or inadequate, or for failing to jettison a dominating and domineering western perspective on modernity; however they still look very different than women’s studies research of thirty years ago, when feminists were more likely to use terms such as “universal sisterhood” rather uncritically. Moreover, other feminist voices also remind us that, however important global studies are, the local and national contours of women’s lives matter as subjects of study, and that for some women in marginalized groups or nations, simply bringing their own specific experiences to historical view is still an important endeavour.

Indeed, internationalization has also become a keyword of significance in North American academic circles of late: national studies are seen as narrow and suspect, while the global is new and innovative. At its best, internationalization denotes efforts to extend our research beyond the limitations of the nation-state to explore global patterns and human connectedness, or to build a global community of debate, discussion, and awareness. In North America, it is also, ironically, associated with pressures to package, commodify, and justify our research for the state, as academic institutions assume the clothing of a neo-liberal rationale that values the so-called globalized “knowledge economy.” While internationalism was once associated with socialism and the left, it later became linked to capitalism’s unchecked march across the

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1 These approaches are illustrated by articles in Bonnie Smith, ed., *Women’s History in Global Perspective*, vols. 1, 2, 3 (Urbana, IL 2005).


4 Ann Curthoys, “We Just Started Making National Histories and You Want Us to Stop Already?” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham, NC 2003), 70–89. As Curthoys points out, the same applies to Canadian history. See also Joan Sangster, “Archiving Feminist Histories: Women, The ‘Nation’ and Metanarratives in Canadian Historical Writing,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 29/3 (May/June 2006), 255–64.

globe, and this remains one of its current and most destructive manifestations, one which many feminists would argue needs vigorous counter critique.

The essays in this book emerged much like earlier feminist organizing: first through informal discussions, later through international meetings. Contacts made through email, at conferences, and through the sharing of research information led to a meeting at the University of Uppsala, Sweden, where many of the papers were presented. The goals of the collection are modest, for in no way are the essays global and comprehensive in their reach. Rather, the authors were all doing research on women’s transnational and international connections focusing on western Europe and the Americas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and many of us were examining socialist women’s organizing in particular. Drawing on a range of primary sources, we wished to shed light on the variety of methods women used to communicate across national borders, in some cases maneuvering around difficult political, material, and physical barriers. At the same time, our intent is not to celebrate an idealized, universal, unproblematic sisterhood of internationalism; rather, we wish to dissect the hard work, difficult efforts, conflicts, and barriers to feminists’ efforts to communicate politically across national borders.

There already exists a rich literature on the history of women and internationalism on which to build. In the last thirty years, for example, historians have provided insight into transnational labour organizing and institution building, as well as the political mobilization of women across nations, in organizations like the International Council of Women, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, to name a few. Scholarship has reached back to the early 19th century, exploring the radical feminist and socialist networks of communication that criss-crossed the Atlantic. Motivated by a resurgence in socialist theorizing in the 1960s and 1970s, writers also sought out women activists who, near the turn of the century, tried to create a hyphenated socialist-feminist politics in the international arena. There has been some discussion of the

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personal networks of friendship that sustained organizing across borders, as well as women’s transnational discussions on key feminist issues, such as protective legislation and child welfare issues.¹⁰ Last but not least, an important body of work has explored the relationship between women, feminism, and colonialism, highlighting the unequal relations of power that characterized western women’s political visions and organizing.¹¹

The essays in this volume are intended to augment earlier scholarship on western-sphere international feminist organizing, examining new sources and adding new perspectives to the existing research. Many studies have focused on the period up until World War I; they also explore more established, middle-class women’s organizations, which were more likely to leave an accessible archive for historians. We were interested in combining essays on this crucial period of feminist organizing with ones on the interwar years as well (a period sometimes wrongly assumed to be a “trough” for some feminist activity), and also in exploring socialist women’s organizing, in terms of both individual biography and networks and institutions.¹² The interwar period is often seen as a time of “crisis” for internationalism, at least for socialists, yet women continued to organize to promote peace, labour, and social welfare issues. Thus, Silke Neunsinger’s article explores women’s work in the interwar Labour and Socialist International, a topic barely mentioned to date in histories of the left, and Joan Sangster looks at three kinds of transnational practice involving the left, from the 1920s through the 1950s, emphasizing not institutions, but more informal and ephemeral modes of communication.

Karen Hunt’s article provides a case study of the transnational transmission of ideas, politics, and aspirations by focusing on the travels of British writer and political activist Dora Montefiore, in the process revealing Montefiore’s substantial contributions to the development of feminist organizing.

¹⁰ Mineke Bosch with Annemarie Kloosterman, eds., Politics and Friendship: Letters form the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (Columbus, OH 1990); Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Jane Lewis, eds., Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the US and Australia, 1880–1920 (Urbana, IL 1995).


¹² The very notion of waves has encouraged this view. For example, DuBois assumes that left-feminist activity declined after 1920. See “Woman Suffrage and the Left,” 44.
fiore’s principled commitment to a range of political causes encompassing both socialist and feminist ideals. Using a transnational comparative analysis, Pernilla Jonsson asks how women actually financed their domestic and international political work; her careful dissection of the account books of women’s organizations across four nations provides insight into the ways in which the material and political mattered in feminist organizing. Interrogating how feminism financed itself is a question few researchers have tackled; this is perhaps ironic, given how many of us have worked in badly-financed, if not impoverished, feminist lobby groups.

Two other essays touch on the history of women’s international organizations, though with the purpose of exploring political debates, points of view, and trajectories. Ulla Wikander’s discussion of the night work debate within international women’s organizations helps us understand the complex and contested feminist perspectives on this issue, and also how one political discourse came to dominate by World War I. Conflict, differences, and unequal relationships between groups of women are highlighted also in Sue Wamsley’s exploration of the Pan-American Inter-American Commission of Women. Her examination of the encounter between Latin American and American feminists, the former proud and politicized, and the latter often paternalistic and condescending, connects well with current historical research exploring colonial and neo-colonial relationships between women across the globe.

Although we use the word “feminist” to describe the political work and practices of these women, we recognize it is a term historically fraught with some ambiguity that may reflect our own need to “categorize” activists in the past and the politics of the women we write about. While many of the women documented in these papers believed their political work would lead to women’s enhanced dignity, freedom, and independence, some would have rejected the term feminist: for many socialists, it was equated with bourgeois political practices and parties, and for some Latin American women, it denoted an approach to emancipation that ignored women’s different and special commitment to motherhood and families. Nonetheless, the term is useful as a means of differentiating the women described in these essays who, for the most part, supported the ideal of gender equality and women’s emancipation (though they were hardly a politically homogeneous group) from groups of women who consciously opposed gender equality and social transformation.

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Certainly, international networks of women committed to varieties of conservatism, “traditional” roles, and even fascism existed; understanding their motivations is important, but it is not on our agenda in this book.

The terms transnational and international also need some explication. Although authors use the term somewhat differently, transnational here usually refers to practices, organizations, and ideas that crossed national boundaries. Transnational histories may also offer us parallel and comparative analyses, as does Pernilla Jonsson’s essay on the finances of various women’s movements. Transnational practices might well intersect with, and build, international connections, as communication across borders created and sustained organizations, ideas, and activities that were “above and beyond the nation,” and that were intended to create change in the international arena. International organizations emerged as feminists, both as individuals and as representatives of national groups, sought a shared space for dialogue, debate, and action. Many feminists hoped that transnational practices would lead to internationalism, the notion that one could “transcend the nation” in one’s outlook and loyalties, creating a broader community of solidarity and common purpose.

Transnational political engagement, however, did not automatically lead to respect, equality, or even common agreement, as Sue Wamsley’s article indicates, and efforts to create both socialist and feminist internationalist organizations could be sundered by national, political, and ideological disagreements. The transnational and the international are thus parallel categories that change over time: they are related, overlapping, connected, and complementary, but also divergent. This complexity bears some similarity to the changing historical relationship between nationalism and internationalism. While some early 19th century socialists were committed simultaneously to both national and international projects, by the 20th century the two were often perceived to be antithetical. In the early 20th century, some liberal feminist international organizations believed that a “sisterhood” of common purpose could be constructed on the basis of women’s national self-identification, but socialist-feminist women, on the contrary, believed, at least in theory, that socialist principles should trump nationalist loyalties.

International organizing was sometimes quite conscious and purposeful as policies were voted on, and strategies and propaganda deliberated about by women; it might also occur in a more happenstance manner as women shared personal feelings and ideals in their private letters. The essays in this collection point to a number of overlapping areas of women’s political connection. The most obvious was the international organization or institution. Often constructed from memberships of national political parties or organizations, these stood at the forefront of organized international politics, pro-

15 Here I am drawing on definitions used in the essays by Hunt and Neunsinger.
viding a political face for transnational activities, as well as offering an organizational structure that regulated and guided political projects. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, the Inter-American Commission of Women, and the Women’s Secretariat of the LSI are all good examples of international organizations; some were focused on single issues, others on broader political perspectives and undertakings. Moreover, international organizations also spawned international debates and discussions that took on a life of their own. As Ulla Wikander’s article shows, the debate about protective legislation was not limited to one women’s organization; rather, it took place across a series of organizations and in a number of international venues, including labour organizations dominated by men. By researching transnationally and interrogating feminists’ international discussions on night work, Wikander is able to draw out the ways in which a discourse of difference overtook one of equality, narrowing feminist lines of vision in many countries as well as in the international sphere.

The written word, both public and private, was also crucial to transnational political connections. In an era in which both written texts and public meetings were still major conduits of political organizing, we should not underestimate how important these forms of communication were. Newspapers like Clara Zetkin’s Gleichheit, or Robitnytsia, the Ukrainian communist paper for women, described here by Joan Sangster, were circulated nationally and transnationally, providing women with political information, arguments, and propaganda, though always formulated within a particular political point of view—socialism in the first case, communism in the latter case. Newspapers like the women’s supplement of the International Advisory Committee of Women were translated into more than one language, providing a crucial means of communication across national borders and language barriers, and the “protocols” (speeches) of debates at Der Internationale Frauen-Kongress in Berlin, 1904 were circulated to women in many countries after the congress. As Wikander points out, these particular protocols are a tantalizing but limited historical source for they were not verbatim texts and some speeches were shortened when reproduced (probably intentionally), others not. However they do indicate how important the written word was to the communication of political issues across national borders. More private forms of communication were also significant. Women’s letter writing, for instance, kept up transnational communication for those who could not travel. Letters might deal with official business, political communications, information, or advice; they might also involve more informal forms of support and the sharing of personal news, the “gossipy” pieces of information that were still an important means of cementing ties of feminist commitment and loyalty.

Travel and political tourism also provided a means of moving people, ideas, and writing across nations. Simply attending an international conference involved travel across borders, though this was only a possibility for a small group of more affluent women, or those with enough stature in international organizations to have their way paid—and there were few of those. Travel had multiple uses and outcomes, a fact well illustrated by the example of Dora Montefiore, who travelled to international conferences, made political contacts while she was away, spoke to audiences in foreign countries, and then perhaps most importantly, brought home tales of her travels that embodied political messages. Her public discussions of Finland’s suffrage victory given to British audiences, for example, were intended to offer powerful lessons about the appropriate strategies and methods for securing the vote at home. Montefiore’s public reporting was very similar to the practice of political tourism in the 1930s, described in Joan Sangster’s article. Political tourism involved expert observers, writers, or political leaders, who shared their observations about a foreign country’s society and politics when they returned home; it might also denote ordinary tourist-travellers who travelled purposefully to another country to understand its political, economic, or social system, sharing their observations with a smaller circle of friends at home.

Many of these forms of transnational and international connection intersected with each other. This was true, for instance, of unwritten forms of international communication, often used to create or solidify internationalist feeling. Iconography, rituals, music, and demonstrations, for instance, were all used at some point by feminist organizations or in meetings, personal encounters, texts, or travellers’ accounts to make a political point. While some liberal women’s organizations integrated national symbols, such as
costumes and flags, into their ceremonies, social organizations created unifying symbols that were meant to transcend the nation, as with the song, the *Internationale*. Iconography and rituals might stress an idealized solidarity of women, or of the working-class, but many of the articles here also indicate that internationalism was often more ideal than reality. Indeed, internationalism was neither uniformly positive in its application, nor easily attained. International political collaboration might not necessarily embody or implement truly emancipatory goals; moreover, women encountered concrete difficulties and limitations in their international organizing.

The historical context framing women’s international work obviously had a great deal to do with the limitations they experienced. The rise of fascism in the 1930s, as Silke Neunsinger shows, was deeply debilitating to women’s organizing within the LSI, as fear, flight, and exile stalked the organization from the mid-1930s until World War II. Similarly, the growing imperialist hegemony of the US in Latin American politics and the prevailing discourses of American “superiority” and Latin American “backwardness” could not help but influence women’s Pan American collaborations.

Secondly, material resources were a crucial determinant of, and often an inhibition to, women’s political work. Jonsson’s transnational comparison indicates the range of financial strategies for survival pursued by four different middle-class women’s organizations, from innovative microcredit loans in Sweden to memberships and donations in other countries. She concludes that culture, class, material context, and gender all shaped how money was perceived and utilized. Whether or not women worked for the organization for pay and whether they were self-supporting were two important factors shaping their understanding of movement financing. Given women’s lower incomes and their more precarious economic security across many nations, the question of *which* women were able to engage in transnational practices is an important one.

Class repeatedly appears in these essays as both a structure and an identity that shaped and separated women’s transnational political practices, though ideology, race, ethnicity, and colonialism were all implicitly important, and became far more so in future attempts to mobilize international women. The Latin American feminists who travelled to Inter-American Commission of Women meetings were primarily well-educated professionals or women of some material means and, as Hunt and Neunsinger show, even socialist women involved in international causes were predominantly older, educated (and thus more multilingual), and also of middle class background, suggesting again some economic security—though there were a few notable exceptions to this rule. Perhaps this is why the communists discussed by Sangster tried to create a sense of internationalism for their working-class members on the home front through newspaper articles, rituals, and travellers’ reports.

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*18 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*. 

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of the Soviet Union. In mixed-sex international organizations, women’s ability to participate was limited by their underrepresentation at the high leadership levels, but their marginal role was also due to the fact that women were less likely to have paid work to sustain themselves independently, and many were responsible for daily social reproduction that is, caring for their families. As British working-class suffragists so aptly put it, when it came to politics, women had “one hand tied behind” their backs. While travel and political participation were much harder, and nearly impossible, for many working-class women, some of the same obstacles did apply to middle-class women.

International work of an institutional nature also inevitably became centralized in certain metropolitan areas, where political resources were located, and it had a decidedly western focus. It goes without saying that the essays offered here are predominantly “views from the centre;” they indicate how Euro-centred women’s and feminist internationalism was in the period up until World War II, and how it lacked a thorough-going critique of colonialism. This is not to deny Wamsley’s important point that Latin American women provided a “counter perspective”, talking back to the metropolitan centre, but rather to stress that imperial and political power did matter, and shaped the contours of women’s international organizing quite profoundly.

Given the limitations on women’s international and transnational work, and the possibility of conflict and disagreement as much as solidarity, why was it so appealing for women to cross boundaries and borders? For one thing, international connections provided women with a new and valuable political space that held out the possibility of furthering their political causes and enriching their own political education and collective practices. It was not simply that women exchanged ideas, strategies, support, and debates, but also that the idea of an international endorsement of their demands—as a moral principle that transcended the nation—offered them some clout in their home nation, just as appealing to United Nations policies does today on issues such as human rights and women’s equality.

For feminists, therefore, transnational political connections and attempts to create internationalist organizations and sentiments were always a double-edged sword. International spaces of political endeavour might offer women the inspiration to carry on struggles in their own national contexts, though women might also find that their specific cultural, class, or political needs were downplayed on the international agenda. On the one hand, there was the appeal of transcending the nation, creating solidarity, and working collaboratively for equality, though on the other hand there was a danger that

international efforts would simply reflect, or worse, perpetuate colonialist agendas, or even diminish feminist goals. This was most obviously true for the communist women associated with the Communist International, increasingly rigidified in Stalinist times. But Wikander’s essay offers a more complex example, for it raises the question of whether the international organizations which increasingly eschewed feminist “equality-based” arguments concerning women’s labour were shaped by national input, or whether such organizations played a prominent role in promoting this emerging discourse of difference across various nations. As Wikander also shows, the impulse on the part of the ICW to become more politically respectable led to its neutrality concerning women’s suffrage and labour market equality while the decision of the IWSA to concentrate solely on the practical goal of winning suffrage led to its exclusion of issues relating to women’s economic independence. Perhaps what was transpiring was a mutually reinforcing national-international process of political debate. One must therefore recognize the international arena of women’s organizing as a complex place of negotiation, conflict, and accommodation, rather than an idealized centre of pure feminist principle.

I do not want to end on a note of pessimism. For many of us still hopeful that international feminist dialogue matters, and convinced that international feminist and/or socialist coalitions—for example, anti-globalization protests—should be pursued, there are excellent reasons to advocate for transnational research in the present as well as a better understanding of transnational practices of the past. Transnational research that offers comparisons and contrasts between women’s organizing in different national and social spaces can offer us new understandings of how and why equality-seeking movements and ideals take root in some contexts but not others, why some political paths are abandoned and others pursued, and what the consequences are. Exploring women’s transnational practices of the past may help us “see” our own national feminist movements through different eyes, though the term “national” is a somewhat contradictory term for those of us who live in fractured nation-states encompassing multiple nations. Exploring transnational organizing, and especially women’s efforts to create international bonds and organizations, also provides insights into the intellectual and personal meaning that feminism and socialism had for women in the past, the ideological passions that formed and re-formed their politics. It inevitably necessitates a historical analysis of women’s oppression and exploitation, but it also exposes the divisions between women based on class, race, ethnicity, and colonialism. Understanding inequality and power relations with all their complexity and contradictions, however, is an essential goal of feminist history. We hope that these essays will, in some small way, contribute to that project.
Suffrage and the Labour Market:
European Women at International Congresses
in London and Berlin, 1899 and 1904

Ulla Wikander

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the first wave of the women’s movement was characterized by an evolution from informal networks to international organizations. The transfer from personal relations to solid organizations took some decades and there were several aborted attempts to internationalize by persons with different agendas. One important way to express the urge to internationalize was to arrange an international congress. Examining two such congresses, this paper explores the women’s movement’s gradual displacement of women’s earlier insistence on equality in the labour market as the more established organizations took over the initiative. By examining two congresses sponsored under the auspices of the International Council of Women (ICW) in London, 1899 and in Berlin, 1904, with a focus on the question of the night work prohibition for women, we can see a significant shift away from an interest in equality in the labour market by the mainstream of the women’s movement as it grew and became more formalized and respectable.

Thanks to Pernilla Jonsson, Lynn Karlsson, Joan B. Landes, Silke Neunsinger, Leila Rupp, and Joan Sangster, among many others, for suggestions to improve this article. This article was originally prepared for the European Social Science History Conference, Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands, May 1996. It was later discussed at the Internationale Tagung in September 2005 at Bremen University under “Kommunikation—Mobilität—Netzwerke. Die internationale Dimension der Frauenbewegung”. It was again altered for and after a workshop, “Crossing Borders: Women’s organizing in Canada, Great Britain, Sweden and the US 1880–1950”, June 2006, Uppsala University.


I am now studying some of these small but ambitious attempts to internationalize during this same period. Such attempts were found in Switzerland, as well as in France and elsewhere.

This topic is developed in Ulla Wikander, Feminism, familj och medborgarskap: Debatter på internationella kongresser om nattarbetsförbud för kvinnor 1889–1919 [Feminism, family
The shift away from demands founded on arguments of women’s equal value in the labour market to an emphasis on women as mothers and family members was clearly evident. It was very much in tune with the agenda and lobbying by men’s international congresses, including congresses dominated by socialists and trade unions, the most important being the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen 1910, as well as organizations from the bourgeois social strata, which were promoting protective labour legislation. All of them agreed on the promotion of an internationalization of protective labour legislation generally, and all of them found it relevant to begin with a night work prohibition for women.

The marginalization of a discourse of women’s economic independence and equality in the labour market—also among women activists—occurred parallel to the growth of women’s formal international organizations, which often concentrated on one question at a time—for example temperance, suffrage, peace, or opposition to trafficking in women. As more women engaged in these different struggles, the former important discourses of equality and women workers generally heard at feminist congresses slowly dissipated.

The International Council of Women (ICW), the first lasting organization, was drained of its early potential radicalism as it decided to accept any women’s group regardless of its political platform or activities. This development opened up the path for a consensus between politically active men and many of the recently organized women who could all agree that a strict gendered division of labour was consistent with women’s emancipation. A split in the women’s movement became evident in more or less all western countries, with the younger generation integrating more traditional roles for women in their demands for social reforms. This fin-de-siècle shift from a discourse of legal equality to one of different treatment because of sex might be compared to the swing from a demand for equality to an emphasis on women’s culture in the second wave of the women’s movement, a trajectory shown in Alice Echols’ history of the North American movement. The

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and citizenship: Debates at International Congresses on a Night Work Prohibition for Women, 1889–1919] (Stockholm 2006). The book deals with the redefinition of women’s rights and duties as workers (as evidenced by an international convention of night work prohibition for women that was later made into an ILO convention) taking place at several kinds of international congresses, some dominated by women, others by men; Cf. Ulla Wikander, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Jane Lewis, eds., Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880–1920 (Urbana, IL 1995)


5 Hedwig Dohm, Die Antifeministen: Ein Buch der Verteidigung (Berlin 1902).

6 Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975 (Minneapolis 1989); for Germany, see Claudia Pinl, Vom kleinen zum grossen Unterschied: “Geschlechterdifferenz” und konservative Wende im Feminismus (Frankfurt am Main 1995).
developments that followed this shift are also comparable, though not equal, to the “backlash” that followed first and second wave feminism, both in society and among women’s organizations. The concept of a backlash is apt; in both cases, this took place in society as a whole and touched the majority of the women’s movement, resulting in internal splits.

The paper also shows how international connections between women during the first wave of women’s movement could be fraught with tensions, conflict, and ambiguity; women did not always promote cooperation and sisterhood. As well, I highlight the difficulty of analyzing the history of the debate on night work prohibition in terms of simple national or party/political differences. Women’s positions on a ban on night work did not follow clear divisions in such regards; rather, the opponents of protection for women only were a mixed lot in terms of nationality and political values.

International organizing and the night work debate

Political citizenship became an important legitimate claim by women in the late 19th century, as men in these decades raised the question of general suffrage, while forgetting to include women. Emancipated women did not accept this disregard any longer. Feminists were arranging international congresses where “equality”—that is, the equal legal treatment of women and men—was very much on the agenda. Women with aspirations to become economically independent by securing the same rights as men in apprenticeship and education, at work and in the family, including political rights, were organizers of a series of international congresses held in Paris and Brussels in 1878, 1889, 1892, 1896, and 1897. An example of an international union different than the ICW was l’Union Universelle des Femmes. It was founded in Paris in 1889, focused on equality, and acted against the night work prohibition as a question of principle. It was small, but members had contacts in many countries in North and Central Europe.

7 The first such congress ever to call itself “feminist” (Le congrès général des sociétés féministes) was held in Paris in May 1892. It was an international congress with participants from Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Switzerland, Spain, and Sweden. Thirty-five persons came from outside of France, representing 15 countries, most of which were European. My definition of “feminist” here, as well as in my book, is the one used by these French women. They demanded legal equality with men—that is, no special legislation for women in any case. Cf. Wikander, *Feminism, familj och medborgarskap*, chapter 6, 352 f.

The ICW was formally founded in 1888 in Washington but did not really become an international agent until 1893 in Chicago. It was initiated, and then dominated, by English-speaking countries. As an organization, it wanted to function as an international umbrella for national women’s organizations of all kinds: it sought to build a broad alliance of women’s groups and thus its strategies soon centred on consensus. The ICW invited women to discuss controversial questions but did not suggest any special political direction or solution. No wonder its near-to-total neutrality soon frustrated and alienated the more radical women who wanted equality with men in all respects, and wanted activities to promote this.

In London in 1899 and Berlin in 1904, the rhetoric taking up more and more space in the ICW was a new—or in fact rather old—version of “the Woman” as complementary to man. But still the question of a night work prohibition remained on the agenda, and there were diverse opinions about the issue.

Two equality questions had been central for feminists during the 1890s, especially in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries: protests against new obstacles to women’s equality in the labour market, and demands for suffrage. The first topic was triggered by the spread from country to country in the 1890s of legislation forbidding women’s night work. In short, there were two basic demands: one for political and one for economic citizenship for women. Behind both lay the fundamental principle of women’s equality as citizens. Both these specific claims were more or less displaced by the ICW during the period discussed here.

When the ICW arranged its first European congress in London in 1899, suffrage was supposed to be discussed, albeit in a neutral way as the ICW did not want to take a stand on the issue. A huge—and successful—counter-meeting was arranged, and some activists were already at that time making plans for a new international organization which would dare to make suffrage its only demand. In Berlin on 4 June 1904, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) was founded. The ICW thus definitely lost its chance to become an important international forum for women’s political struggle for equality with men. The IWSA was created demonstratively some days before the third Quinquennial Meeting of the ICW and its associated congress, Der Internationale Frauen-Kongress, in Berlin.¹⁰

The IWSA was established as a protest against the cautious politics of the ICW and with its creation the international organization of the women’s movement split into two. The IWSA was implemented by women from the so-called left wing of the bourgeois German women’s movement and some foreign representatives who had met in the Bechstein-Hall at Linksstrasse.

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⁹ Rupp, Worlds of Women, 15 ff.
Susan B. Anthony, then 84 years old, had come by boat and train all the way from the United States to take part in what a Swedish journalist called “the fulfilment of her life’s work”\(^\text{11}\)—internationalizing the suffrage movement. German Minna Cauer presided and her compatriot Anita Augspurg gave the first speech. German female social democrats were critical of the new association, and the majority of the bourgeois German women’s movement found it too daring.\(^\text{12}\) The controversial topic of women’s political citizenship had found a home in an organization focusing on this question only. It would become the leading international organization of women for the following decade.

The question of women’s economic citizenship was left to drift inside the ICW. Discussion of economic equality was treated as the debate about suffrage had been: with neutrality. The organization would make no commitment to it, but allowed free scope for discussions as long as all opinions were heard and the ICW and its presidency did not have to take a stand. Women who wanted equality with men in the labour market—in other words, economic citizenship—were held at bay. The Berlin congress in 1904 definitely exposed the meek character of the ICW. Until the congress in London in 1899, some women had had hopes for a fighting organization, although a tendency towards ambiguity had been prevalent as early as 1888 and 1893 at the founding congresses of the ICW.

From 1890 onwards, the controversial question of economic citizenship for women took the form of divergent opinions on the question of a night work prohibition for women. It had been on the agenda before, and during the three decades up until 1919, the subject triggered lively public discussions. A law to forbid night work would introduce new restrictions on women’s labour force participation, at a time when women saw other hindrances being removed. Influential groups, dominated by men, were working in the same period for an internationalization of this gendered protection as part of their attempts to secure standards of labour protection generally. The question of night work was a pressing one at many international congresses, and with only a few exceptions, men were far more united than their female counterparts in the view that women needed special protection. In response to this push to restrict women in the labour force, the night work prohibition was considered a “burning question” among activists for women’s emancipation. It was seen as a question of principle: should new obstacles be introduced in a labour market that was about to open up new possibilities for women? Women were divided on the question of special protection for their sex.

\(^\text{11}\) Dagny (1904), 271.
\(^\text{12}\) Dagny (1904), 271ff; Aftonbladet 6 June 1904. This meeting had been in preparation since the International Congress of Women in London in 1899, held in connection with the second Quinquennial Meetings of the ICW. For more, see Wikander, Feminism, familj och medborgarskap, chapters 11 and 12.
At the fin-de-siècle, a majority of women active for women’s emancipation came to approve of, and even work for, labour laws containing *special* conditions for women. This went hand in hand with discourses accentuating woman as “Mother” and “Wife”, rather than as “Worker” and “Trade Unionist”. Such a discourse was also soon adopted by many women in their arguments for suffrage, including the Swedish author Ellen Key. In the beginning of the new century, it became more and more common to argue that women’s “difference” ought to be seen as a needed complement to the political system; as a consequence, to give women the right to vote would in no way put them in competition with men’s primary role in society, as providers. Married women were supposed to stay at home and be mothers.

The night work debate also indicates how central the “equality versus difference” debate was at the time. But this debate was not characterized by strong opposing opinions regarding women’s biological difference to men since everyone agreed upon such biological differences. What was at issue was the necessary legal consequence of such biological differences: should laws treat women according to “equality”—the concept behind the French Revolution—or should women’s different physiology be the reason for their different treatment in legislation?

Those opposing the ban on night work for women demanded equal treatment in the labour market by legislators: justice and economic independence formed the basis of their arguments. Without equal treatment, they believed, there was no equality as citizens. The proponents of such legislation—and its diffusion internationally—often argued from the point of view of biology and difference. For them, a gendered division of labour was a good solution to the exploitation of women because women had different bodies and were more endangered by wage work. They thus accepted a gendered division both in the labour market and in the family. These strong international debates—also conducted with fervour at international congresses—resulted in the first international convention regarding labour conditions, which was accepted in 1906 in Bern and sponsored by the International Association for Labour Legislation, founded in 1900. This convention forbade women to work at night in industries with more than ten workers. Eventually in 1919 it became an International Labour Organization (ILO) convention and, as such, has been on the list of the ILO conventions for the whole of the 20th century.

I would argue that, around 1900, we can clearly discern a conservative turn in the recently organized international women’s movement that amounted to a backlash. From a focus on “equality” we can see a broaden-
ing discourse of “peculiarity”/“Eigenart”, “difference” and, with that, an emphasis on “motherhood”. The conservative turn marginalized the question of women’s equality in the labour market, created a discourse legitimating the gendered division of labour, and supported legislation that differentiated between men and women in the workforce.

Of course, this change was part of a longer process, but I propose that it can be clearly demonstrated at the congresses arranged by the ICW, and that it was linked to the emerging concentration on the suffrage question in the one-question-organization of the IWSA. This paper will thus dissect discussions at the congresses in London in 1899, and in Berlin in 1904. Women who wanted equality with men in the labour market still raised their voices within the ICW, and did so because they had no other international forum in which to speak. They tried to formulate a discourse in the new public sphere of politics for women, which such congresses constituted, because they still thought that an equality discourse belonged there. At several earlier international women’s congresses held in Europe, strong opinions had been heard urging a struggle against labour legislation for women only. Such opinions had even been backed by resolutions. At the same congresses, demands had been raised that the night work prohibition should include men.

The debate in London and Berlin around the night work prohibition as a special form of labour legislation for women clearly exposed different discourses, or ways of thinking, about women and work. Some radical women were not willing to back away from a vision of equality in the work place, while others defended complementary visions and strategies, now perceived as new and modern. The opponents of different labour laws for men and women in the labour market, as well as its proponents, saw it as an important, even fundamental, question for the future of women’s emancipation.

In the words of German Alice Salomon—influential in her home country as well as within the ICW—“it was one of the most important [issues] for the whole women’s movement. The view you take in regard to this question gives away your view of the whole movement and its final goal.”


17 In 1911, some years after these two congresses, women even managed to create an international organization of their own, the International Correspondence to promote equality in the labour market, which sadly disappeared in the turmoils of World War I. See Wikander, Feminism, familj och medborgarskap, 303, 305 f., 324, 339, 354 f.
18 Dagny (1899), 274 f.
19 „zwar eines der wichtigsten für die gesamte Frauenbewegung. Denn in der Stellung hierzu offenbart sich die ganze Stellung zu unserer Bewegung, das letzte Ziel kommt hierin zum
From the discussions at the congress in London to the one in Berlin, one can follow a change in the place given to opposition to protective labour legislation. This can be seen in who was invited to talk, how many of the invited speakers were for or against legislation, who was included or excluded from the printed protocols of the congress, and also in the leading speakers’ treatment of the question of equality—in other words, how they dealt with or accentuated women’s nature and role in society.

London 1899: Varied opinions

Opinions about women and their “duties” vis-à-vis a gendered division of labour were not conventionally connected to other political dividing lines. At the London congress no other political position a woman took determined her expressed opinion about the night work prohibition. Some socialist women were for the legislation; others were against it. Supporting the prohibition were socialists of different nuances, such as Beatrice Webb from the Fabian Society, Amie Hicks from the Social Democratic Federation, and labourite Margaret MacDonald, all from England. On the opposite side were socialist feminists, such as Harriot Stanton Blatch, the Fabian Society, and Dora Montefiore, who felt all labour protection should include men as well, a view heard earlier at international socialist feminist congresses in Paris. As socialists, they were against special legislation for women only. That was also the case for Swiss-born Gertrud Guillaume Schack, who had organized working women in Berlin and, because of her political activities as a socialist, had been forced to leave Germany. She lived in exile in London. What we might call a purely feminist approach—equality with men whatever the conditions for men were—was defended by Camille Bélilon, journalist from La Fronde in Paris. She put equality first, saying that if men were not protected, women should not be either; if the legislation was changed to include men, then women could accept it as well. She had no preference for or against protection. For her, equality was the only important claim for feminists. Among the so-called bourgeois women, German social worker Alice Salomon was very much in favour of special legislation for women and thus for a night work prohibition, whereas the Finnish author and longstanding ICW activist Alexandra Gripenberg was a bourgeois feminist who stood strongly against it.

At the International Congress of Women in London in 1899, a heated discussion on special labour legislation for women took place. At the congress many arguments, weaving together a complicated array of opinions,
were heard: the discussion was focused on women, of course, but most of the speakers were also positively inclined toward the idea of state intervention to protect workers more generally. The overarching question was how to treat women in relation to men. Alice Salomon stated that most countries “try to protect the life and health of women in their special capacity as females and as mothers of the future generation.”20 This “special capacity” was her main reason for supporting differentiated legislation. By this, she implied that being a woman was almost the same as being a mother; as all women were potential mothers, they should all be treated as such.

According to Salomon, the other benefit of special legislation for women was that in the longer run, it would reduce men’s working hours as well. Such an argument was often raised by socialists, though she was not one. Salomon did not fear that this special legislation would reduce women’s chances to get wage work. Her emphatic denial of such possible limitations was probably a response to the doubts expressed by other women that the special legislation would make it harder for women in the labour market. Salomon insisted on the opposite, referring to the division of labour already in existence:

> Women will not be worked out of the labour market on account of such restrictions, because employers cannot spare them any more. Their peculiar skill in certain trades and occupations will compel the employers in many trades to manage their business according to the terms which the law appoints for the employment of women. Moreover, such legislation will produce for the labouring classes what we must struggle to attain for all classes of humanity—a division of work according to sex on account of special qualities; it will put in place of a mechanical or organic division of work a division according to characters and constitutions! Also the sphere of industrial work has space for the peculiarities of both sexes, and we hope that special labour legislation for women is one of the means for securing influence for these peculiarities in daily life.21

Her vision of a better society entailed an even more rigid gender division of labour suited to the different “characters and constitutions” of men and women. The subtext of this argument is a hope that competition between men and women in the labour market would come to an end if women’s “peculiarities” were taken seriously. Her method of arguing, however, does not make it clear if she considered women’s “peculiar skill” as biological or acquired. Her remark that “we must struggle to attain” a gender division of labour shows her own insecurity (or her unawareness of the contradiction), and perhaps a consciousness that social and cultural conditions did have a role to play in the sexual division of labour, even if they had to be controlled.

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Alice Salomon (1872–1948) social worker, economist and pedagogue. From 1900 she was on the board of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine. She became the first woman to receive a doctoral degree at Berlin University in 1906. Her dissertation was entitled *Die Ursachen der ungleichen Entlohnung von Männer- und Frauenarbeit*. In 1908 she founded a school for social workers in Berlin. In 1909 she became Secretary of the ICW. (*Courtesey of Ullstein Bilderdienst*)
Thus, Salomon was not simplistic in her view of woman as a purely biological creature, but she firmly believed that a woman ought to be treated differently by law, and segregated from men at work, in order to maintain her valuable femininity. It seems paradoxical, then, that she could argue that special legislation would preferably spread to male workers as well. If women needed different working conditions than men, why then hope these conditions would spread to men?

Another prominent speaker was Beatrice Webb.22 England had special legislation for women,23 and Webb defended this state of affairs. Her premise was that everybody wanted general protective labour legislation for all workers. Special protection should be seen as the first step to such general protection and it was easier to get protective laws for women only through Parliament. On the other hand, to prohibit night work for women was good in itself, because “regulation positively improves the economic and social position of the persons regulated.”24 Webb continued, using the pronoun “we,” thus including the audience, or at least part of it, in her designation of who was truly “progressive”:

[S]o we progressive women are prepared to accept for our sex regulations which we cannot at present enforce on men. What injures women as a class in their struggle to obtain employment is not their occasional competition with men, but their reckless underbidding of each other. It is this reckless underbidding of each other, as regards hours of work, conditions of work, and wages of work, which makes women-workers as a class underfed, overdriven, untrained and incompetent. And this, therefore, is why they find themselves, as a class, relegated to the inferior grades of work.25

She implied, in the first instance, a deep solidarity between all women and their common interest; resistance to special legislation would be an act against women’s interests. Yet in the next sentences she situated herself—and the audience?—apart from “women-workers as a class,” along with their bad conditions and low wages, by calling them “they.” She underscored that these women, through their own stupid act of competing with each other, had placed themselves into the lowest class of labour. Interestingly enough, Webb used the expression “women as a class” again and again, evidently inspired by socialism to use the concept of class. But socialists did not speak about women as a separate class; rather, they were part of the working class.

22 She spoke under the title “Special Legislation for Women” on “the position with regard to factory legislation which is taken up by the English Factory Acts, supported by the trade unionists, both men and women, and now generally accepted by progressive public opinion.” Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 40.
24 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 41 f.
25 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 42.
Webb, in contrast, seems to have considered women as a class with special problems and conditions. Moreover, she held that the problems of this class of women would be solved by special legislation, enacted by a benevolent state.

Despite how her speech began, Webb later on argued that labour legislation could never become general, but had to be concerned with special conditions. Sometimes those special conditions were connected to the sex of the worker, while other times they were associated with machinery or working conditions. When Webb demonstrated why sex had to be the basis of legislation, she brought up the argument of giving birth. She did not seem to distinguish between two types of protective legislation for women: one aimed at all women as potential mothers, and the other focusing on women as individuals, protecting them if and when they gave birth, and thus only when they actually became mothers. Such a distinction was clear to other socialist women, for example to Danish and Swedish women at the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen in 1910.

Beatrice Webb claimed women’s bodies were more sensitive to certain poisons than men’s. She also used the rhetorical construction “if”, blurring the line between facts and hypotheses. For instance, “if” it was proven that

habitually work in underground mines, or take the night-shift in a factory, without serious deterioration of health and character, [although] men [could] do so and yet retain a high standard of citizenship, it is not in the interest of women to insist that they should be free to do whatever the men do. I need hardly say that this principle applies both ways.

What did she mean? She argued that men, but not women, could “retain a high standard of citizenship” under certain work conditions. Did she have different definitions of citizenship for men and women? Webb was far from clear in this passage. She was talking about men as different from women, and did not explicitly mention that men and women were competing in the labour market. Yet she was not blind to men’s struggle to retain higher wages in that very labour market:

It would be suicidal for the men compositors’ trade, [sic] to allow their [sic] members to accept wages below a man’s standard of life. We must, in fact, get rid of this idea of sex rivalry. Each distinct set of workers, whether men or women, or both together, must aim at enforcing the particular minimum

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conditions which their particular circumstances render necessary. These will differ from trade to trade, from age to age, and occasionally from sex to sex. Without the enforcement of such minimum conditions as will protect every set of workers, whether men or women, from physical and mental deterioration, the nation will not reach its maximum strength, and women, therefore, will fail to attain their maximum development.  

Webb defended men’s fight to preserve higher wages because men and women had “their particular circumstances”; she simply accepted men’s higher “standard of life” as the norm for men only. Webb accepted the status quo of wage differences as a result of abstract “circumstances” which could not be changed. Her defence of these discrepancies was inconsistent and makes interpretation of her thinking difficult. But it is evident that she sided with the male typographer, defending his rights. This statement must be seen as a polemic directed at other feminists, who often used the printing industry as an example of how selective labour legislation was used to exclude women from well-paid skilled work.

Webb also objected to what she termed the “idea of sex rivalry” in the labour market. In this she differed from the dominant socialist analysis, which often pointed out that women competed with men for work, and thus lowered men’s wages. Webb seemed eager to paint a brighter picture. Women only competed with women. Protection of women was important both for them and for the nation. National strength was equated with women’s health. Behind such a view, though not openly expressed here by Webb, was a desire for a strong population, born by women who were not worn out by their work, thanks to protective labour legislation. Images of the mother of the race, often raised in this period, were very close to this argument. Beatrice Webb, after all, was an adherent of Social Darwinism and an admirer of Herbert Spencer.

Three women were against any form of special legislation for women only: Camille Bélilon from France, Alexandra Gripenberg from Finland, and Harriot Stanton Blatch from the United States of America and England. These three were invited speakers at the congress, together with Salomon and Webb. In different ways, they all pointed effectively to the way in which women’s inequality with men in the labour market was also a hindrance to women’s emancipation.

Mme Camille Bélilon confronted the question of class. The increase of paid work had, according to her, made it more common for men of all

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32 Camille Bélilon was a pen-name for Ernestine Tournemine; the title of her speech was “Sur le Travail des Femmes”, Aberdeen, *Women in Industrial Life*, 43–48.
classes to try to exclude women from jobs. After a few examples from the higher classes, she turned to the trade unions. Their policies were full of a “misogynistic spirit”. In the case of typographers, she used the word “hatred.”33 Hers was a theory of conspiracy, according to which trade unions were behind demands for special legislation for women because of their “hatred” of female competition. The purpose of the legislation, which since 1892 had forbidden women to work at night in France, was to put a stop to that competition.34 Claims of high death rates among children, and thus the nation’s endangered future, had paved the way for an understanding of the need for such legislation,35 particularly in France, with its low fertility rate. The discourse of motherhood had moved the representatives of the people to support protective legislation. Bélilon hinted that all men actually knew this to be a pretence. Parliament, she claimed, neglected other dangers to the race, most conspicuously alcohol; no legislation was contemplated against the heavy consumption of alcohol. She believed that an unspoken alliance had been forged between men in Parliament and those in the trade unions, in order to keep women economically dependent on men. In opposition to this, she voiced a demand for justice and economic independence. Her argument was full of rage against the immorality of a situation that legislation had forced upon women:

And to make the woman dependent on the man, do they actually understand what it means? Of all unfair treatments, this is the worst! Yes, because if the inequality between the classes is unfair, then it is not more unfair than the one existing between the sexes. It is in the highest degree immoral, both in itself and because it invites immoral behaviour. Yes, it is not only an attack on the principle of freedom, it is not only that violence is allowed to get the upper hand over the law, it is also to disempower woman and give the man all support. It is to put vice before competence and virtue. To force the woman to ask the man for bread, that is to introduce prostitution, or worse to give the power to the prostitute. We really have had enough of this continuous abjection.36

35 Aberdeen, *Women in Industrial Life*, 44.
36 “Faire dépendre la femme de l’homme, sait on bien ce que c’est? De toutes les iniquités, c’est la plus odieuse! oui, car si l’inégalité qui existe entre les classes est injuste elle n’est qu’injuste tandis que celle que l’on a établie entre les sexes est, avec cela, profondément immorale, et à part qu’elle est immorale, en soi, elle entraîne avec elle l’immoralité. Oui, ce n’est pas seulement un attentat contre le principe de liberté, ce n’est pas seulement la force primant le droit c’est encore la toute puissance de la femme par la faveur de l’homme, c’est le vice primant le mérite et la vertu. L’obligation pour la femme de demander son pain à l’homme, c’est le règne de la prostitution et ce qui est pis, le règne de la prostituée. Ah! nous avons assez de ce régime d’abjection.” Aberdeen, *Women in Industrial Life*, 45 (my translation).
Bélilon’s indignation, voiced with an affirmative and repetitive “yes”, is captured by this speech. She compared the economic dependency of a married woman to the situation of a whore. And she said that such legislation produced a system (“règne”) deeply unfair to women. Comparisons between the situation of the married woman and the so-called “kept woman” or prostitute were not unheard of in debates about women’s emancipation.

Without mentioning her name, Camille Bélilon attacked Beatrice Webb when she scorned persons who blamed women for accepting low wages while at the same time promoting state interference in the legal system. According to Bélilon, such individuals were supporting policies that made women less attractive to employers. The fact that men excluded women from jobs was the main reason for women’s difficulties in supporting themselves. It was ironic to call laws protective when their result was women’s unemployment. No “feminist” could reason thus, according to Camille Bélilon. To feminists, equality was the main principle: “Faithful to our principle, we do not want to be for or against regulations of working hours. We will not abandon the feminist standpoint, but stick to demanding the same freedom for women as for men.”

Camille Bélilon—and not for the first time—also talked about her own definition of “feminism” as the principle of equality between men and women. This was feminism without any compromises, and a feminism that could be achieved with or without socialism. The Bélilon brand of feminism, however, had few followers in debates at the international congresses in Europe. The larger group of “feminists” of the 1890s had striven to melt together social justice for both workers and working women, as well as for women of all classes. Their brand of “feminism” was as committed to equality as was Bélilon’s, but they wanted it to go hand in hand with current socialist ideas of equality (an idea that the majority of socialists did not accept as Realpolitik concerning women) and with social reform. As a matter of principle, the very simple equation of “feminism” with “equality” is of great interest. Even today, it can be interpreted in two ways: as equality between

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37 Bélilon quoted articles about female typographers by Maria Martin from Journal des Femmes in 1895 and 1896, where Martin wrote that about 7,000 female workers had gathered in Berlin to protest the German protective legislation. Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 46.

38 One example is the couple E. Marx and E. Aveling, who argued thus in 1885. See Ellen Carol DuBois, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage (New Haven; London, 1997), 66.

39 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 47.

40 “Fidèle a notre principe, nous ne nous prononçons point au sujet de cette réglementation, nous abandonnons pas le terrain féministe et nous nous bornons à réclamer pour la femme la même liberté que pour l’homme.” Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 48 (my translation).

all women or as equality extended to all humans. The common ground for
most feminists at the time was to argue that men should be included in a
social reform such as labour protection.

Alexandra Gripenberg, “during all of the congress the darling of the pub-
lic,” was considered the best speaker against protective labour legislation. Equal rights and equal citizenship were her demands. Women should not have any special benefits:

The idea of special labour laws for women is an outcome of the old principle
that women must have privileges, not rights, that they must be protected in-
stead of having the power to protect themselves that they are—as the national
economists say—“[a] people’s most precious property”, instead of forming a
part of the people itself.

Women should be citizens under the same conditions as men, not human
property, said Gripenberg. She mentioned women’s lack of power as the root
of their dependency and considered “sex rivalry,” the struggle between the
sexes, as simply a reality at the time. She even pronounced a barely veiled
threat that women’s bitterness at being controlled by men could result in
actions, maybe even a revolution, if nothing changed. Her way of express-
ing herself at this point was similar to that of a reformist socialist, with her
views translated into a feminist politics: she did not like violence, but saw it
as inevitable in the longer run if women were not treated as equals.

Gripenberg’s analysis of women’s history and work integrated both paid
and unpaid work: through industrialism, she argued, women had gradually
been driven away from work they had dominated earlier. First they had been
driven away from their plentiful work in the home into factories and work-
shops. Now they were being driven away from these newer workplaces.
Every new regulation made it harder for women to keep a job and get decent
pay. Gripenberg accepted the analysis of competition at work between men
and women as a problem, though she appeared less antagonistic than
Camille Bélilon toward men, and spoke more of longer historical develop-
ments. She wanted more education for women, more job training, and more
apprenticeships for skilled work to compensate for women’s inequality. She
also saw the importance of better protective measures at workplaces for both
men and women. Equality was her fundamental demand—political equality
and equality in the labour market. And if men were not protected, women
should not be either. Her concern for equality took a higher priority than her

42 “under hela kongressen allmänhetens gunstling,” Dagny (1899), 273 ff. (my translation). Her
speech, “The Drawbacks of Special Legislation,” is fully quoted in Dagny for the Swedish
audience as typical of the opinion of this side. See also Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 48 f.
43 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 49.
44 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 49.
45 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 49f
concern for better conditions for all, even if that was her expressed wish for the future.

The next key speaker, Harriot Stanton Blatch, stressed the injustice to men that was the inevitable consequence of special benefits for women. But all of the three speakers who were against special labour laws for women had a fairly similar interpretation of the negative consequences for women of a gendered division of labour. Blatch, an American who had lived in Great Britain since 1882, spoke about factory legislation. She was the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the most famous leaders of the American women’s movement and still a radical in her old age. Stanton Blatch—just like her mother and her brother Theodor—was an activist for women’s emancipation. She was a member of the Fabian Society in England, as was Beatrice Webb. She belonged to a group of women that had tried in vain to make the Fabians identify “openly with women’s rights and [that] wanted the society to debate and support issues of sexual equality,” according to her biographer, the American historian, Ellen Carol DuBois. Within the Fabian Society, there had been a fight for at least half a year over the special night work prohibition for women, a debate that Beatrice Webb and her adherents had won. At the international congress Harriot Stanton Blatch must have been relieved to hear others share her opinion, and she took the opportunity to contradict Beatrice Webb once again before another, more international, audience.

According to Harriot Stanton Blatch, labour legislation for women had produced several negative consequences for everybody—women, children, and men. Such laws had first “handicapped the evolution of women’s economic position,” and second, contributed to an increase in the hiring of children; these also led to an “indifference to the interests of men, and helped to destroy the balance in the numbers between the sexes.” Women had been obliged to leave certain jobs; Stanton Blatch mentioned bleaching and printing as two concrete examples. But where men and women were treated as equals, the number of working women increased. Regulation was thus a

46 She is called “Black” instead of Blatch in the printed protocols. Stanton Blatch was one of the nine conveners of the session on industry and legislation, and her name is spelled the right way on the list of convenors. Stanton Blatch was born in 1856; she married in 1882 and then lived in Basingstoke, west of London. Susan B. Anthony, the leader of the American delegates to the meeting, stayed with her during the congress of 1899. Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, no page number; Elisabeth Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York; Oxford 1984), 181, 214, 229.
48 DuBois, Harriot Stanton Blatch, 74.
49 See Wikander, Feminism, familj och medborgarskap, chapter 11.
50 Aberdeen, Women in Industrial Life, 50–54.
hindrance and equal education a necessity. Stanton Blatch spoke about what she called the prevalent “invalid theory of woman’s emancipation” (an ironic play on words). Such a theory saw female waged workers as invalids: they were weaker and less competent than men. The result of the theory was that women were not valued as highly as men in the labour market. Using her play on words, she denounced the whole theory as “invalid”. Women could cope with every form of work if they were accepted under the same laws and conditions as men. “The invalid theory” saw women as weak, when women in real life were cleaning, scrubbing, washing, and caring for sick people—all jobs that required a lot of strength.

Harriot Stanton Blatch argued that the fact that women lived longer than men was another way of disproving “the invalid theory of women’s emancipation”. The legislators’ concentration on women had also resulted in a disregard for youth, children, and men. Stanton Blatch echoed Gripenberg’s demand for better hygienic conditions at work for all. She rephrased the demand for special labour legislation for women into a demand for such legislation for all workers, casting the light on the common interests of men and women. She maintained that “the principle reason for making legislation equal is that men need legal protection as much as women.”

This had been the feminist demand at international women’s congresses in Paris during the 1890s, which had all adopted resolutions on labour protection, while opposing special conditions for women.

Harriot Stanton Blatch’s final words were for those people who always connected three things—the human race, the woman as a mother, and the nation—with special labour legislation for women. These themes were often taken up by defenders of protective legislation for women: “Can any woman doubt that the nation is leading a saner life, a better life, where the balance between the sexes has not been destroyed by protecting one half of the race, and leaving the other half exposed to every danger?”

By mentioning the issue of race, she indicated that her contribution to the debate of the day was also influenced by Social Darwinism, though she used Social Darwinism differently than did Beatrice Webb. Pointing to men’s health, she argued that men were also sexual creatures and thus also had to be protected if their children were to be good for the nation.

In the debate that followed, Dora Montefiore, a socialist from England, reformulated the feminist view already brought up by Stanton Blatch, saying that “she was in favour of restrictions upon all, but asked for no restrictions which did not apply equally to the men and women in the same trade.” In opposition to this, Emma Brooke, Margaret MacDonald, and Clementina

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Black all supported the night work prohibition. Their reasons reiterated the arguments of previous speakers: if all protection was good, selective protection could not be bad. In the final analysis, no consensus could be reached at the congress. As no resolutions were taken or recorded, we do not know the views among the public. The discussion would continue five years later in Berlin, with some of the same persons involved, but now with a different bias.

International organizing, Berlin, and backlash

In 1900 the enormously large and exciting world exhibition took place in Paris. Several international congresses discussed night work for women during that summer. An important decision, affecting discussions among women later on, was taken at the International Congress for Labour Legislation (Le Congrès international pour la protection légale des travailleurs) held in Paris that very summer. At the end of the congress, an International Association for Labour Legislation was founded. It was a private organization, with good connections to ruling and influential political circles, such as several state departments, academics, and diplomats. Its aim was to create a body of public opinion in favour of the internationalization of labour legislation. One of its foremost concerns was the night work prohibition of women. The association started its work in 1901, and by 1906 the so-called Bern Convention was already a reality. This was the first international labour convention and it forbade women to work at night in industries with more than ten workers. After 1900, more and more women shared the opinion that a night work prohibition for women—and women only—was something necessary and good. Even before the international convention was established, the propaganda for a night work prohibition had been insistent and penetrating. General public opinion on the issue was positive, and this in turn affected activists who worked for women’s emancipation.

In the summer of 1904, women gathered in the new German capital to establish another organization, the IWSA. However, the biggest event was Der Internationale Frauen-Kongress in Berlin, a congress of the International Council of Women. One of the congress themes was “Women and Industrial Work”. Whenever that theme was discussed, Alice Salomon was present,

56 Le Congrès international pour la protection légale des travailleurs was held at Musée Social rue las Cases 5, Paris was held from 25–28 July 1900; Victor Böhmert “Die Weltkongresse für Arbeiterwohl auf der Pariser Weltausstellung von 1900”, *Der Arbeiterfreund* 38 Jg (1900), 335–349; *Congrès international pour la protection légale des travailleurs. Tenu à Paris, au Musée Social, du 25 au 28 Juillet 1900. Rapports et compte rendu analytique des séances* (Ministère du Commerce, de l’Industrie, des Postes & Télégraphes, Exposition universelle internationale de 1900, Paris 1901) III & XXff.
most often as the chairperson.\textsuperscript{58} In one of the sessions, a Dutch woman pleaded for the protection of women and for their right to organize in trade unions.\textsuperscript{59} Hers was a common and accepted socialist solution for the exploitation of women in industry: special protection and unionizing.\textsuperscript{60}

The first session on women and work was about child care, the eight-hour day, and welfare programs at workplaces.\textsuperscript{61} At the end of this session, a woman asked for suffrage for women. According to her, women’s work could only be regulated in a fair way if women had a say in the legislative process.\textsuperscript{62} This woman evidently wanted to postpone dealing with the divisive question of the labour market until after the vote was won. She was arguing that the question ought to be solved at the political level, with male and female voters. This view would become the opinion of more and more women. Whether they were for or against a new kind of role for women as waged workers, they would—and could—unite in a struggle for suffrage during the coming years. Women who argued for equality in all respects saw suffrage as an important struggle, and so did women who accepted a differentiated gender division of labour. Suffrage was thus a question that could unite women across the divide over protective legislation.

The political question of equality was a question of achieving formal legal rights. It was taken for granted that women ought to be able to vote and eligible for office. Fewer women addressed the question of what policies women would pursue after the vote was won—this was too sensitive an issue. Even the simple question of suffrage engendered discord: did this mean general suffrage or suffrage under whatever conditions men had? It also raised potentially divisive questions about the tactical means of securing the vote—militancy or constitutional lobbying. Given these minefields, the organization for political citizenship (IWSA) was, and wanted to be, neutral on the question of waged work. In a way, to unite around suffrage was a way of avoiding taking sides in the heated debate on women and work. Arguments for women’s suffrage could be made within a discourse of “difference” and “motherhood,” as well as within a discourse of “equality.”

The great debate on special protective labour legislation for female workers (“Arbeiterinnenschutz”) at the congress in Berlin took place with Alice Salomon as the chair.\textsuperscript{63} Two speakers had been asked in advance to prepare

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\textsuperscript{58} Der internationale Frauen-Kongress was held from 13–19 June 1904. Stritt, \textit{Der internationale Frauen-Kongress}, 177; \textit{Handbuch für die III. Generalversammlung des internationalen Frauenbundes in Berlin vom 6.–11. juni 1904 und für den internationalen Frauenkongress in Berlin vom 12.–18. juni 1904. Herausgegeben vom Lokalkomitee (Berlin 1904), 81.

\textsuperscript{59} Henriette van der Mey, Stritt, \textit{Der internationale Frauen-Kongress}, 188.


\textsuperscript{61} Stritt, \textit{Der internationale Frauen-Kongress}, 195 ff.

\textsuperscript{62} Mrs. Schouk-Haver, Stritt, \textit{Der internationale Frauen-Kongress}, 197.

\textsuperscript{63} Stritt, \textit{Der internationale Frauen-Kongress}, 444 ff.
introductory contributions. Helene Simon, Berlin, spoke for the legislation, and Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema, Rotterdam, spoke against it.

Helene Simon brought up two major arguments for the protection of women: it was strategic—i.e., possible to implement—and women were weaker and different because they were mothers. Her arguments were similar to the ones presented by Beatrice Webb in London five years earlier and that was no coincidence. Simon had studied at the London School of Economics earlier and had then become a member of the Fabian Society. She had worked with factory inspectors and took an active interest in social issues. She defended the rights of male workers, arguing that they were not asking for fewer work hours for women “to harm female workers, but only with the outspoken wish to shorten their own working day.” This was the often-repeated “women first” argument.

One part of Helene Simon’s speech is worth a closer look because it mentions the relationship between men and women, but did not draw the conclusion some other women did about competition in the labour market or—in Webb’s formulation—“sex rivalry.” Simon wanted to stress that the question was not whether “woman was worth less than man and not about if she was weaker than man; she was more overworked than he, because she had to serve two Masters at the same time, the duties in the workplace and in the household.” Simon used the expression “two Masters” (“zwei Herren”), but it was alien to her to associate the two masters with real men as husbands and employers. Instead she spoke of them as abstract concepts; the “two Masters” were symbols of two kinds of duties, not examples of patriarchal or paternal power. Women were not serving two real men, but tending to their own two duties, at work and at home. Simon left real men out of her analysis. In her opinion, it was self-evident that woman herself had a responsibility for the “duties”. She did not question that woman had these duties: she used “zwei Herren” as an image to explain why women were overworked. Remarkably enough, for us living today, she managed to disregard real men: her choice of words suggests to us a problematized (unequal) power relation between men and women. However, Simon did not have such an understanding, despite her way of using the metaphor.

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64 “wie man ihnen vorwirft, um die Kolleginnen zu schädigen, sondern in der offen ausge- sprochenen Absicht, damit auch den eigenen Arbeitstag zu kürzen.” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 447 (my translation).
65 “Nur manchesterliche Verblendung kann sich der Einsicht verschliessen, dass allein der Staatsschutz hier abhilft. Ich wiederhole: nicht um eine Minderwertigkeit handelt es sich hierbei, nicht einmal um die Frage, ob die Frau an sich schwächer sei als der Mann; sie ist überlasteter als er, weil sie zwei Herren zugleich dienen soll: gewerblichen und häuslichen Pflichten.” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 448 (my translation).
66 It is not long ago that the expression “women’s double burden” was frequently used in a similarly unconscious way.
Helene Simon pleaded for a broader gendered division of labour and saw protective labour legislation as one step in bringing it about. She maintained that “[l]egal protection of a woman is thus not to her detriment, but it is the only way for her to have equality with a man in the labour market, through the full appreciation of the natural duties of her sex.”

What kind of equality was to be obtained by invoking a rigid gender division of labour was not evident. Clearly Simon still considered “equality” (“Gleichstellung”) a goal, despite mentioning “natural duties,” and thus natural differences. She spoke within a social context—a Women’s Congress—in which the concept of equality was considered positive, and she could still ask for the protection of women’s special needs. Without a doubt, she wished women to get better pay for their work, and she also thought it right that they work outside their homes, although she avoided specifying to what degree, and within which occupations. A gendered division of labour was appropriate, though the existing one was not ideal. It was clear that motherhood had a great influence on women’s lives and occupations. Thus, for Simon, the woman with children became the model for all women.

Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema, Rotterdam, spoke against labour legislation directed only towards women, using concrete examples from her own country, Holland, as well as from Germany and France. She gave a vivid account, for instance, of the firing of women in the newspaper trade since the night work prohibition had been legislated (in Holland in 1889, in Germany in 1891, and in France in 1892). In the printed protocols, her speech was summarized in one page, while Helene Simon’s paper was over five printed pages, evidently published in its entirety. While in the printed protocols of the congress, some contributions are absent because there were no manuscripts, this cannot be the reason for the short summary of Rutgers-Hoitsema’s presentation since her entire speech was published in 1904 in Dagny, the journal of the Swedish women’s organization, the Fredrika Bremer Association and the translation into Swedish from the original manuscript was six printed pages long. Rather, the exclusion of the contribution against the night work prohibition for women was a sign of censorship by the editor, Marie Stritt. She was the head of the international congress in Berlin and was known as a rather “progressive” leader of the German women’s umbrella organization, Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (BDF), at the time. Stritt’s greatest concern was suffrage, and her interest in economic citizenship was

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68 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 445 ff.
69 Dagny (1904), 377–383.
evidently not comparable to her desire for political citizenship. We have to leave the question unanswered as to the precise reasoning behind the exclusion of Rutgers-Hoitsema’s eloquent defence of the continental feminist demand. I would suggest that Stritt found her own position supporting suffrage hard enough to handle within the BDF, and that this might have made her less willing to dwell upon other controversial questions. Such an interpretation would also support my hypothesis that the question of suffrage smothered other equality issues for women, and in particular, the issue of economic independence. Stritt’s censorship could also be explained by the political situation in Germany, where there was unity about the positive consequences of a night work prohibition for women. In order to appear fair, the congress had two persons with opposite views introduce “the burning question” of labour legislation for women. This also gave the audience a chance to discuss it. Several persons supported Helene Simon; fewer were against, according to the protocols—though these are not reliable, as we have seen. In the end, no resolution was passed.

A longer contribution by Dora Montefiore from London on the question of protection found its way into the printed book from the congress. Montefiore said she wanted to place the discussion in the context of basic principles, and she presented four points that ought to guide the women’s movement. Her explanation offered the often-expressed socialist feminist view on equality in the labour market that urged the inclusion of men in protective legislation. Although she used the word race it was less in a Social Darwinist sense than as a reference to the human race as a whole. She asserted that “[a]gain, as humanitarians, we would not desire to legislate for women at the expense of men, but recognising the solidarity of moral and of economic interests of the whole race our aim should be, where restrictive legislation is necessary, to protect men, as well as women.”

It goes without saying that her speech was against special labour protection for women. By not confronting the policy issue directly, she managed to get her opinion printed. Her final comment expressed the belief that suffrage would help solve the question of women’s equality in the labour market. Political equality, she hoped, would also bring equality to the labour market.

As in London, Alexandra Gripenberg, Helsinki, spoke against special protection. She added her fear of future exclusions of women from work opportunities to her earlier arguments and saw such a tendency in new labour

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71 Her demands were divided into four points: 1) equal labour protection for men and women, 2) a maximum daily work time, 3) more protection for women giving birth including pay during the legal leave, and 4) state nurseries for children of female workers, Dagny (1904), 383.
72 The question was called “burning” in, for example, Dagny (1899), 275 f. and Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 4.
73 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 451–455.
74 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 453.
75 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 454 f.
market conditions. She asked: “Has not experience taught us that men usually have taken over the biggest part of formerly female work areas when industry has developed?” She mentioned women typographers especially as female workers already being excluded in many countries.

In the heated debate that followed, Else Lüders, Berlin, accused “feminists” of going too far and “pointed to the problems that earlier too far-reaching equality demands by feminists might lead to.” In these discussions, the feminist opinion that protection was good, but had to be equal for men and women, had lost its former centrality. Between the congress in London in 1899 and the one in Berlin five years later, there is a clear difference in focus. Taking an even broader perspective, the change between these years is even more evident. The discourses about women and industrial work have to be read in the context of the entire congress in Berlin and from the position of the BDF, the organizer of the congress. Radical texts were sometimes given small space in the printed version of the conference proceedings. Marie Rutgers-Hoitsema’s speech was considerably shortened while the prominent American radical Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who discussed “A New Theory on the Woman Question”, did not see her contribution printed. Perkins Gilman spoke at the end of the congress. The speeches beginning and ending the congress—and those selected for printing—reveal the conservative turn of the International Council of Women and its activists.

The inaugural speech in Berlin was given by Marie Stritt, who emphasized that the women’s movement did not have any intention of destroying “the female peculiarity” (“die weibliche Eigenart”). On the contrary, it wanted to ennable this “peculiarity” through emancipation and make it more central to society: “It is not because she wants to be similar to the man (“dem Manne gleich”), that woman asks for the right to decide over herself, but because she wants to become totally herself (“ganz sie selbst”).” It is evident that Marie Stritt was fending off accusations that women in the women’s movement were unfeminine, and that she wanted to establish an image of exactly the opposite. But when she defended woman’s right to be “herself” (“sie selbst”), she acknowledged at the same time the accusation that some women had wanted to be “similar to/alike” men (the German word “Gleich” does not have the double meaning the English word “equal” has). But “equality”, meaning equal rights and possibilities, was what Bélilon, Gripenberg, and others asked for; they were not at all talking about being “similar to a man.”

76 “Hat uns nicht die Erfahrung gelehrt, dass die Männer allmählich mit der Entwicklung der Industrie den grössten Teil der früheren weiblichen Arbeitsgebiete annektiert haben?” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 455 (my translation).
77 “Sie wies auf die Fehler hin, zu denen das zu weit getriebene Gleichheitsstreben der Feministen führe” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 451 ff., (quote 456 f., my translation).
78 “Nicht um dem Manne gleich zu werden, sondern um mehr und ganz sie selbst sein zu können, fordert die Frau das Recht der freien Selbstbestimmung auch für sich ...” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 5 (emphasis original, my translation).
Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), novelist, author of emancipatory books, and lecturer. In 1898 she became famous for her book *Women and Economics*. In 1903 she published *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, with a critique of what an ordinary home did to keep women subordinated. She was a socialist and a Social Darwinist of a special kind: if society hindered women’s emancipation, it was acting against natural selection and would go under. (*Courtesy of Ullstein Bilderdiest*)
While Marie Stritt promised that the women’s movement was no threat to the differences between men and women, she stressed that women had to define their femininity (“weibliche Eigenart”) themselves, without pressure from outside. She was convinced that women would not be like men or even take men’s positions. Her speech shows all the paradoxes of woman’s place and identity that are present in a highly gender-segregated society, with strong differences between men and women. Women, according to Stritt, promised not to do, or want, what men did or had. Women would remain, redefined by themselves, forever “different.”

Helene Lange, Berlin, spoke at the end of the conference and showed a clear conservative bias. Her premise was woman’s high moral standard as compared to man, and she praised the complementarity between men and women. She cited the famous English critic of the French revolution, Edmund Burke, who, she said, had a perception of human nature much like her own, that is, one sceptical of rationalism and science. Such human traits were very much in the nature of woman. Helene Lange saw protective labour legislation as one of the most important means of getting women back into the home. This would benefit the whole of society and, if not achieved, lead to great misfortune. Hindrances to women’s emancipation came, said Lange, from science, but also from women themselves, who had initially offered solutions for women’s problems that were much too simple, such as “the dogma that a total freedom in the labour market would be better than the most needed labour laws for women ...” She also worried about the loss of control of instincts that Ellen Key’s idea of “esthetical individualism” had suggested to the women’s movement. She saw the movement zigzagging from one side to the other, and wished it would take responsibility for “the full consequences of [women’s] femininity, their peculiarity, in all the different aspects possible in the whole of society.”

Identifying woman as different was a theme repeated again and again at this congress. Women’s equality in the labour market was not appreciated in the leading women’s speeches—indeed, quite the contrary. Woman was, and ought to be, a mother, and as such, should not participate in the labour market. That was the inner meaning of protective legislation:

Therefore the most important social policy task would be to get women away from the terrible toil of industrial work, back to her work as a mother, through a delicately implemented protective labour legislation for women. Otherwise we would all generally lose a part of the female influence [in

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79 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 609.
80 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 610.
81 Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 611.
society] which cannot be gotten from any other sources or brought back in any other way.\textsuperscript{82}

I have to agree with Helene Lange. The international women’s movement, as it was presented at these international congresses, was indeed zigzagging from one side to the other. And at the turn of the century, mainstream women’s organizations were zigzagging away from a fight for equality towards an emphasis on suffrage, women’s difference, and motherhood. That shift meant in turn that the struggle for a more equal division of labour was abandoned. The emphasis on suffrage was also linked to the emerging backlash to, and within, the growing women’s movement and to the overall change in the prevailing “Zeitgeist” as it turned toward motherhood and an emphasis on biological differences. Indeed, this was part of more general intellectual and social trends occurring since the 1890s, reflected as well in growing, almost virulent anti-Semitism and the propagation of racist ideas, now appearing as scientific news. Along with the growth of theories of difference there was an upsurge of misogyny (a hatred of women generally). Difference, at least biological difference, was part of the modern way of seeing the world. To accept it and argue for it as a rationale for women’s suffrage indicated the embrace of a pragmatic, if not opportunistic, strategy of necessity. Equality was no longer perceived to be an efficacious argument.

Concluding remarks

At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, most of the radical forces among women became united in a struggle for political citizenship. The international suffrage movement, and great parts of it, organized in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. It spearheaded the women’s movement during the period from 1904 to the outbreak of the war in 1914. Within the alliance, during this era, the struggle for the vote held back discussions of what would come after suffrage; this was a conscious strategy to encourage unity, even if inside the IWSA some voices were raised to promote and organize for equality at work.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82}“Deshalb bleibt es natürlich doch mit die wichtigste sozialpolitische Aufgabe, durch den Verhältnissen vorsichtig angepassten Arbeiterinnenschutz die Frau aus der ungeheuren Tretmühle der Industrie für ihren Mutterberuf zurückzugewinnen. Sonst würde hier allmählich ein Stück weiblichen Einflusses verloren gehen, das an keiner anderen Stelle zu ersetzen, auf keine andere Weise wieder einzubringen wäre.” Stritt, Der internationale Frauen-Kongress, 612 f.

\textsuperscript{83}Thus in Stockholm in 1911, at an IWSA congress, an international organization was proposed with an aim to promote equality in the labour market and work to annul the night work prohibition for women. However, the women’s movement was not homogeneous; it had a mainstream, but also alternative currents. In this, feminists would not be totally silenced about economic equality. They also refused to be dismissed as representatives either of an “out-
How did the question of suffrage become the most important of all the demands for legal equality that the first wave of the women’s movement included in its much larger agenda? The first and rather evident point is that men in the western world put up a struggle for a “general” political citizenship during this period. As a movement, these men did not place woman suffrage very high on their agenda. Women therefore had to put up a fight of their own, and organize for a political citizenship that included women.

The second point is that a one-question-organization was easier to handle politically than a full emancipatory program. Moreover, in the IWSA, women could unite over the suffrage question even if they had very different views of women’s other duties and roles in society. To persuade as many persons as possible, male as well as female, to support suffrage for women, the IWSA concentrated its forces on one topic. At the same time, a one-question-organization could less easily become unwieldy, and the IWSA was already full of tensions about how to formulate the demand for suffrage. And gender questions were not—as this article shows—easily connected to the existing political structures.

The third issue is the fact that suffrage was likely less important to women’s emancipation than the gender division of labour. Thus, suffrage was a perfect first question to solve. It provided women with a possible mission, not a utopian one. To alter the structure of the gender division of labour would mean a much deeper reorganization of the power relations in society than suffrage. Some of the activist women were already well aware of this around 1900. Wilhelmina Drucker from Holland expressed this at an international feminist congress in Brussels in 1897, when she predicted that suffrage would not be very hard to get compared to achieving equality in the labour market: “It is understandable; suffrage does not change men’s monetary interests; on the contrary, waged work does.” It was easier to gather around a concrete and less threatening goal—and to get a hearing, and a victory. Charlotte Perkins Gilman expressed a similar view of the relative importance she saw between suffrage and economy. In her autobiography she formulated it thus:

As to women, the basic need of economic independence seemed to me of far more importance than the ballot; though that of course was a belated and legitimate claim, for which I always worked as opportunity offered.

The positive view of a gendered division of labour that developed inside the leading circles of the international women’s movement in the beginning

84 Wikander, Feminism, familj och medborgarskap, 159 (original in French).
of the 20th century also had its counterparts on national levels. The ILO convention of 1919, taking up and expanding the night work prohibition for women only, simply confirmed the widespread view, now with deep roots in the international women’s movement, and articulated both in the ICW and the new IWSA, of the necessity of treating women workers in different and special ways. Despite some revisions, this prohibition remained valid at the ILO during most of the 20th century, thus spreading and legitimating the idea across many nations that women were different in the labour market.

One could end more positively on this question of equality in the labour market by reiterating the findings of Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, who have shown that protective labour legislation remained an unsolved problem, eternally raising discussions within the women’s movement, long after World War I. With the development of the international women’s movement—in the course of creating what Rupp and Taylor call a “collective identity”—the importance of a demand for economic citizenship was persistently underestimated politically and only fostered by smaller groups of feminists. 86

But the issue of economic citizenship never disappeared totally from the emancipatory agenda. In 1926 the IWSA changed its name to the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, and a commission for equality between men and women in the labour market was already functioning. One of the resolutions discussed was a condemnation of the Washington Convention of 1919 on night work prohibition for women, and a counter proposal suggested a night work prohibition for all workers. This was directed towards the ILO. The resolution was not accepted unanimously, quite the contrary. Angry protests were raised. 87 And so the debate has continued into the 20th and 21st centuries. The convention on night work prohibition is still a hot question among women activists in different parts of the world. And the question of how to deal with women’s “different” bodies in legislation is still very much on the agenda. How to deal with “difference” and “equality” in many more respects is still an unsolved political and practical question for today’s feminists.

86 Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor “Feminist Internationalism in the Early Twentieth Century: The Construction of a Collective Identity”, article to the first European Social Science History Conference in Amsterdam, May 1996; See also Rupp, Worlds of Women.
Constructing Feminism Across Borders:
The Pan American Women’s Movement and the Founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women

E. Sue Wamsley

In 1928 in Havana, Cuba, on the occasion of the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), Jane Norman Smith, a member of the National Woman’s Party (NWP) and a major player at the conference, wrote to sister NWP member Mabel Vernon:

At the last minute some of the Cuban women got out of hand, [sic] so great was their enthusiasm to be heard on votes for women in Cuba and the Cuban constitution, that they almost disrupted our program by demanding that a [Cuban] woman lawyer … be [heard]. We finally went to Dr. Bustamante [president of the conference and Cuban diplomat] and ask[ed] him to extend the time … We had made our program with the order of speakers, only to find…that Dr. Bustamante had changed the order and put the woman lawyer … up near the top of our program … This is for your information—not for [publication in the journal] Equal Rights.

Clearly, the founding of the IACW, despite a rhetoric of cooperation, unity, and equality, involved a struggle over who would control the direction of the women’s program, US or Latin American women. But the IACW did not appear out of nowhere. An examination of women’s activity in the Pan American arena leading up to and including the events in 1928 will illuminate our understanding of the roles of Latin American and US women in the construction of Pan American feminism.

By the early 20th century, Pan Americanism, the idea that nations in North, Central, and South America should work together in the development of the western hemisphere, had gained a firm foothold in social, economic, and political thought in Latin America and the US. Women, like their male counterparts, shared in this enthusiasm and formed many organizations focusing on “mutual knowledge, understanding and true friendship among the

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1 Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, 8 February, 1928. National Woman’s Party (NWP) papers, Microfilm Collection, reel 38.
women of the American Republics.” Still, national and cultural tensions imbued relationships, sometimes impeding notions of cooperation and collaboration.

The idea of Pan Americanism dates back to the Latin American independence movements of the early 1800s. Between 1810 and 1822, a number of Latin American Spanish colonies rebelled, founding sovereign nations. As a gesture of recognition to the newly formed states, the US passed the Monroe Doctrine in 1823. On the surface, this document seemed to protect the young, vulnerable nations from Spain, as well as from other European countries interested in expanding their domains. This diplomatic nod, however, had both political and economic ramifications. The US used its position to carve out a role as the dominant power in the western hemisphere, expecting to gain the lucrative Latin American markets once controlled by Spain and Britain. At first the autonomous nations welcomed their powerful neighbour to the north, in spite of US hegemony. Quickly, however, many came to believe that such US goodwill was a mask for imperialism. To complicate matters even more, throughout the 19th and into the early 20th centuries Latin American nations fought among themselves. Conflict arose over territorial lines, internal military upheavals led to political and economic instability, and differences resulting from diverse cultural, racial, and political structures created distinctive national socio-economic characteristics and institutions. Thus, events surrounding the Pan American Union from its establishment in 1890 into the 20th century were fraught with conflict. It was in this political and economic climate that women came together in the Pan American arena.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries brought about the emergence of an international women’s movement. With the founding of the International Council of Women in 1888, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1904, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915, Euro-American feminists had begun a worldwide campaign to improve women’s lives. And by the late 1920s women’s international organizing was widespread with women from around the globe pursuing issues of concern to women. Though the literature on women’s international organizing efforts has recently flourished, scant historical attention has been paid to the thought and activism of the transnational contacts of women on the left, those who used informal channels of communication, and the complexities of “colonial” interactions between women. As my essay and others in this volume point out, a variety of social, political, cultural, and national contexts characterized women’s transnational organizing. Pan American feminism

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2 “The Pan American Round Table,” Pan American International Women’s Committee (PAIWC) papers, box 4, Library of Congress (LC).

and the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women in 1928 was one part of this campaign.

In this paper I examine those activists who advocated a liberal feminist agenda. Liberal feminism, for the purposes of this paper, promoted the attainment of women’s political and civil rights as the best way to eliminate gender inequity. Liberal feminism by no means embodied every facet of US or Latin American feminist belief. Pan American feminists, like other international-minded women, represented a variety of perspectives. Socialist women fought for egalitarian labour restructuring, conservative women based their activism on women’s differences from men, and still others did not find a discrepancy between advocating legal exception while supporting blanket equal rights legislation. Pan American feminism was thus multi-layered and complex, with beliefs overlapping, changing over time, and stemming from national political and cultural interests. Latin American feminists likewise embraced a host of visions about the meaning and understanding of feminism(s) and how to elevate women’s status.

One of the most thorough examinations of the intricacies of Latin American feminism is Asunción Lavrin’s Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, & Uruguay, 1890–1940. Lavrin argues that feminism took several forms including socialist, liberal, and conservative, among others, and that Latin American feminists often organized within larger political and social movements. To evade conflict, Latin American feminists would find common ground on which they could agree and stayed clear of points of potential contention. Lavrin goes on to say that Latin American activists, unlike their northern sisters, did not find a contradiction between fighting for both special or protective laws and those that treated women and men the same. K. Lynn Stoner makes similar argument about Cuban feminism. In From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Women’s Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940, Stoner posits that motherhood was central to the Cuban women’s movement and that most Latin American feminists based their activism on their traditional role as mothers. The idea of women as mothers and by extension “social redeemers” and nurturers of all humanity played a pivotal role in the development of Latin American feminism. Despite such disparities and the potential for conflict, the women studied here managed to work around differences and define mutual interests rooted in the advancement of women’s civil and political rights.

These women were educated, from the upper- and middle-classes, and were primarily of European origin. Such class and ethnic homogeneity helps

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4 Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, & Social Change in Argentina, Chile, & Uruguay, 1890–1940* (Lincoln, NE 1995).


6 Although most of the women in my study are of European origin, a few Latin American women are referred to as “from a good Indian family” and having formal education.

This study builds on the works of other scholars who have examined the problematic nature of women’s international organizing. Existing literature has pointed out that the complexities of women’s lives created conflict among women in organizing efforts beginning in the late 19th century. But despite recognition that women’s diverse cultural experiences based on race, ethnicity, class, religion, and nationality led to varied understandings of womanhood, feminism, and the central issues around which women organized, the literature concentrates on transatlantic activities among European and US feminists.

Scant scholarship exists on Latin American women’s organizing efforts, and most of it focuses on women’s movements on a national level. Francesca Miller is the only scholar to investigate in any significant way the Inter-American Commission of Women. In *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, she examines the commission as an autonomous unit within the Pan American Union, the parent body of the IACW.\footnote{Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH 1991).} She concludes that Latin American and US activists cooperated in the spirit of Pan Americanism. Two other important works on Pan American women’s organizing include Christine Ehrick’s “*Madrinas and Missionaries: Uruguay and the Pan-American Women’s Movement*” and Donna J. Guy’s “The Politics of Pan-American Cooperation: Maternalist Feminism and the Child
Rights Movement, 1913–1960.” Ehrick focuses on the development of liberal feminism from the vantage point of Uruguayan women, while Guy examines the ways that women’s roles as mothers helped to shape notions of Latin American feminism and feminist issues. My research explores the Pan American women’s movement in the context of Latin American and US feminists in the development of the IACW. I emphasize that conflict, evolving largely from imperial relations between the US and various Latin American countries, sat alongside cooperation and permeated the activities surrounding the founding and development of the IACW. By shifting the focus to the interactions between Latin American and US women, my research provides fresh insights into the process of transnational organizing among women.

To construct the story of women’s Pan American organizing, I examine Latin American and US women’s interactions from 1915, the year that the first organized women’s conference took place, to 1928, when the Inter-American Commission of Women was created. I argue that many of the Latin American feminists who participated in Pan American activities viewed women’s suffrage as central to the promotion of women’s concerns, despite US presumptions about the “backwardness” of Latin American feminism; that Latin American and US women struggled over leadership, with Latin American feminists acting in ways that challenged US characterizations of them as timid, shy, and conservative; that Latin American women often initiated and took the lead in promoting Pan American feminism; and that by 1928 Latin American women had a well-organized women’s movement.10


To gain insight into the role of Latin American women in the history of Pan American feminism, I apply the approach of the Subaltern Studies group and rely on the elite records of women’s international and US organizations to examine the discourse of Pan American feminism. In his work on the peasantry in India, Ranajit Guha has shown that by using official government documents and critically analyzing them, the historian can glean insight into the discursive relationship between the dominant group and the subaltern, providing an indirect avenue to the subordinate’s voice. Because the IACW was housed in Washington, DC, and a US member chaired the commission for the first decade of its existence, the official records are located in various archives in the US. These documents allow me to explore US feminists’ assumptions about their Latin American colleagues and the ways that Latin American women defied and resisted these often-times imperialist attitudes. Only rarely did US women openly question the abilities of Latin American women, limiting the opportunities for a direct response to such condescending views. Even using sources primarily generated from one side of the relationship, one can see the resistance, expertise, and struggle for control of Latin American women whom the US perceived as “backward” and inexperienced.

Prior to the founding of the IACW, Latin American women interested in activism had participated in scientific conferences—meetings devoted to the study of the scientific, economic, social, and political life of Latin America—dating back to 1898 when the first Latin American Scientific Congress was held in Buenos Aires. Women presented papers and held official membership. In 1905 at the Third Latin American Scientific Congress in Rio de Janeiro, Constança Barbosa Rodrigues, wife and collaborator of the director of the Botanical Gardens of Rio de Janeiro, served as honorary president. In 1908, the Fourth Latin American Scientific Congress became the First Pan American Scientific Congress, with women, mostly school teachers, comprising 6 per cent of the total membership. W.R. Shephard, professor at Columbia University and an official US delegate at the conference, remarked that Latin American female delegates “expressed their opinions, as well as their differences in opinion from those held by educators of the other sex, ...
with a degree of freedom and frankness quite surprising to anyone who might fancy that no phase of the feminist movement had yet reached Latin America!” From the early 20th century, then, Latin American women had asserted themselves and their agendas in Pan American conference proceedings, even male-dominated ones. But it would not be until 1915 that women would establish all-female groups in the Pan American arena.

From 28 December 1915 to 7 January 1916, under the auspices of the Second Pan American Scientific Congress, the first organized Pan American women’s meeting took place in Washington, DC. US women with the authorization of the United States Department of State and the Executive Committee of the Pan American Union had formed a separate women’s auxiliary group. Organizers proposed the group in the “hope that an opportunity to become acquainted and to exchange views, not only on subjects of special interest to women, but on all matters pertaining to Pan-Americanism might create even greater desire on the part of the women of the Americas for friendly and harmonious cooperation.” Now women took part in scientific congresses outside the main events, but instead of this separation providing autonomy, the women’s auxiliary had to rely on the approval of male union members for its program and agenda. In 1917 John Barrett, Director General of the Pan American Union, wrote to Emma Swiggett, Executive Secretary of the Women’s Auxiliary: “I want it distinctly understood that I think that anything which is done should have the unofficial approval of the Department of State, so that, [sic] there would be nothing done which the Department did not approve of.”

What happened to many of the female members of the Latin American scientific congresses remains unclear. A few of them participated both in the Second Pan American Scientific Congress as well as the First Women’s Auxiliary. Evidence suggests, however, that women lost their official voice within the larger Pan American Scientific Congress and that US and Latin American diplomats controlled the membership in and activities of the newly formed women’s group. Pan American officials invited mostly their wives and daughters to the congresses, potentially excluding the professional

15 Even in this congress, a few women participated in subsections of the men’s scientific congress, focusing mainly on education, anthropology, public health, and medical science.
16 The idea for the Women’s Auxiliary came from Mrs. Charles R. Crane, wife of a US government diplomat, who endowed the group with a yearly income of $1,000 for five years. Executive Committee Minutes, 25 November 1918, PAIWC papers, box 6, LC.
17 Pamphlet entitled, “Pan-American Conference,” PAIWC papers, box 3, LC.
18 John Barrett to Mrs. Glen Levin Swiggett, 25 February, 1917, PAIWC papers, box 3, LC.
19 Some of the same women—in particular Paulina Luisi from Uruguay and Professor Adelia Palacio from Mexico—who had participated in the Latin American Scientific Congresses also took part in the Women’s Auxiliary in 1915.
Latin American women who had participated in the earlier meetings. In some cases union members recruited women from colleges and universities as well as from other prominent, though conservative and traditional, women’s organizations. Nevertheless, the women in the auxiliary took their “quasi-governmental” role seriously, with hundreds attending the Washington conference where women, both from the US and Latin America, presented over 30 papers on such topics as the welfare of women, children’s rights, women’s education, sanitation, and domestic science. Such seemingly non-political activities contributed to the development of the Pan American women’s rights movement, helping to lay the groundwork for the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women in 1928.

In the 1920s Pan American female activists expanded their initiatives. In 1922, for example, the US based League of Women Voters, with the collaboration of Latin American feminists, put together a Pan American women’s conference in Baltimore, and in 1923 women in thirteen countries in the western hemisphere simultaneously held conferences in celebration of Columbus Day, called El Día de la Raza in Spanish. In 1924, under the auspices of the Third Pan American Scientific Congress, Peruvian women planned and coordinated the Second Pan American Women’s Conference.

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20 The Women’s Auxiliary estimated that 300–400 women attended the women’s sessions daily. *Report on the Women’s Auxiliary Conference.*

21 Third National Convention and the Pan American Conference of Women, Baltimore, 20–30 April 1922, League of Women Voters (LWV) papers, Microfilm Collection, reels 2–4. For a thorough discussion of the 1922 conference and its key players, including Latin American female participants, see “Pan-American Women at the Baltimore Convention of the League of Women Voters,” *The Woman Citizen* (22 April 1922), 7–10, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC; *Proceedings and Report of the Columbus Day Conferences Held in Twelve American Countries on October 12, 1923* (New York 1926), PAIWC papers, box 3, LC. Various participating countries also put together and published their own programs: *Sesión Extraordinaria: En Homenaje al Día de la Raza Programa* (Buenos Aires 1923), PAIWC papers, box 7, LC; *Conferencia de la Sección Nacional Colombiana del Congreso Internacional Panamericano de Señoras, el Día de Colón, 12 de octubre de 1923: Programa* (Bogotá 1923), PAIWC papers, box 9, LC; *La Unión Femenina Pan-Americana (Sección de México): Sesión Extraordinaria: Día de la Raza: Programa* (1923), PAIWC papers, box 7, LC; *Conferencias Celebradas por la Sección de Panamá del Comité Internacional Panamericano de Señoras el ‘Día de Colón’* (Panama 1923), PAIWC papers, box 9, LC; *Fiesta de la Raza: Programa* (Costa Rica), a typed unofficial looking document with no publication information, but attached to this program is an official document entitled, “Resoluciones para ser presentadas a la Conferencia del Día de Colón, que habrá de celebrarse en la Sección de Costa Rica el día 12 de octubre de 1923,” signed by Luisa de Anderson and Angela Acuna, president and secretary, respectively, of the Costa Rican national section of the Pan American Women’s Auxiliary, PAIWC papers, box 7, LC. Latin American newspapers also covered the women’s activities; see, for example, the Costa Rican papers *La Cribena*, 7 August 1923, and *Reportorio Americano*, 6 August 1923, PAIWC papers, box 5, LC, and the Chilean paper *El Mercurio*, 12 October 1923, PAIWC papers, box 7, LC.

22 *Tercer Congreso Científico Pan-Americano: Segunda Conferencia Pan-Americana de Mujeres: Constitución y Programas* (Lima, Perú 1924), Columbus Memorial Library (CML), Washington, DC. For a Peruvian newspaper account of the women’s conference, see *El Comercio*, which provided daily coverage of the women’s activities, including the resolutions.
And in 1926, Ester N. de Calvo, Panamanian feminist and Women’s Auxiliary member, organized a women’s conference in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of what Latin Americans considered the first Pan American conference, held in 1826 under the direction of Simón Bolívar, a heroic Latin American independence leader. In all of these conferences, except for the one in 1915, women’s rights issues won a prominent place on the agenda, with Latin American women, contrary to most US feminists’ views, spearheading many of the feminist initiatives. Nonetheless, US feminists, even though they sometimes recognized these accomplishments, persisted in viewing Latin American women as backward, unsophisticated, and uninterested in women’s rights.

Antoinette Burton in her path-breaking work on middle-class British and Indian women argues that British feminists used imperialist notions of superiority to substantiate their demands for political rights. In spite of the fact that Indian feminists, both in Britain and India, were fighting for some of the same goals as their British sisters, British activists viewed their Indian counterparts as a “white woman’s burden” in need of their experienced, emancipated “older sisters” in the struggle for women’s rights. This imperial attitude of perceived authority and expertise can also be seen in the attitudes of US women toward Latin American feminists in the development of the Pan American women’s movement.

Concerning the 1915 conference, for example, a US female participant commented with evident surprise that “to the great delight of their hostesses the Latin-American guests, [sic] not only seemed interested in the addresses, but they themselves most generously took part, making fluent and capable comments and speeches …” Alice Thatcher Post, US member and journalist, asserted that the US women’s committee had been concerned about whether the “Latin American women [would] care for speeches and papers … the courtesy of being good listeners was the greatest cooperation they [US

and La Prensa, which concentrated more on the end of the conference and the final acts. The CML houses clippings from both of these newspapers.

23 Congreso Inter-Americano de Mujeres, junio 18 a 25–1926, (Panamá 1926). For details of the Bolívar congress, see Centenario del Congreso de Bolívar, 1826–1926 (Panamá 1926), PAIWC papers, box 4, LC. Group pictures of the women who attended and participated in the conference are also included in this box.

24 US women affiliated with government diplomats spontaneously organized the first Pan American women’s conference. Consequently Latin American women had little to do with the programming, perhaps helping to explain the absence of feminist initiatives on the agenda. Moreover, in the auxiliary’s first bulletin published in 1921, some Latin American contributors focused on feminist issues. Bulletin of the Women’s Auxiliary Committee of the United States of the Second Pan American Scientific Congress in cooperation with the International Committee (1921).


26 “An International Report,” [1918], PAIWC papers, box 4, LC.
members] could possibly expect from their guests.”

Over a hundred Latin American women attended the conference and many presented essays, demonstrating their enthusiasm for women’s Pan American organizing. Yet in the wake of the congress, Mrs. Stuart Rawlings, US Auxiliary member, lamented that the Peruvian Auxiliary has “little initiative” and that she “cannot imagine that the Peruvian women will be equal to the demands” of organizing the Second Women’s Auxiliary meeting. A journalist in the Washington Times perhaps best summed up the US imperialist attitude:

It was a meeting between the progressive, modern women of the United States, and the conservative women of Latin America. The women of the north, fair-skinned, alert and mindful of the power they wield in the affairs of this country, were calling upon the timid women of the southern countries to take up with them the task of bettering the social conditions of the western hemisphere. And from the women present from Latin-America came ideas which showed that they too, were beginning to awake to the part they should play.

By the time of the 1928 conference, condescending attitudes had become well ingrained. Perhaps part of the reason lies in the fact that the NWP was the major US player in Havana. White, formally educated, and from the upper-middle class, NWP members had a history of elitist and arrogant behaviour and had assumed that they would dominate the leadership there. As leaders of the militant branch of the US women’s movement, they had played an important, yet uneasy, part in the fight for suffrage. In addition to their use of aggressive tactics and outspokenness, members had exerted an air of snobbery and self-importance often alienating other feminists on the national as well as international stage. They had had numerous squabbles over leadership, tactics, and turf. Exacerbating their relationship with their Latin American sisters were disparities in the understanding and meaning of feminism. As others have pointed out, Latin American feminists did not find a conflict in preserving traditional notions of womanhood while also demanding rights of citizenship. NWP members, by contrast, based their activism exclusively on gender equality and women’s unconditional entitlement to the same rights as men. The NWP clearly viewed the Latin American brand of feminism(s) as backward and unprogressive in the promotion of women’s rights.

Jane Norman Smith cautioned Margaret Lambie, sister member of the NWP, “It seemed to me that we might offend these South American women if we should take the leadership … whereas after we are upon the scene in Havana, we might then urge them to do something as the occasion arises.”

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27 The Public, 28 January 1916, PAIWC papers, box 5, LC.
28 [Eva Moore?] to Mrs. Swiggett, 19 July 1919, PAIWC papers, box 1, LC. Rawlings is quoted in the letter.
29 Newspaper clipping, Washington Times, 28 December, 1915, PAIWC papers, box 5, LC.
30 Jane Norman Smith to Margaret Lambie, 2 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
Such a view implied that US women would automatically be best suited to organize and direct the campaign in Havana. Smith noted, “it would be very nervy of us to tell these women what to do”.\[^{31}\] She elaborated further:

> Women there are in about the same state of mind that we were in the early days of suffrage, when we thought any woman who spoke on the street was a bold hussy! … While upholding our principles, we must try to keep that in mind … and not offend them.\[^{32}\]

US women maintained that Latin American women constantly sought them out for advice and guidance. Doris Stevens, self-proclaimed “youngest international feminist” and NWP leader, complained that even her “sitting room is constantly filled with visiting Cubans who come to look at us…I have to stand behind a hat rack if I have to change my dress in the middle of the day.”\[^{33}\] Another US woman similarly claimed that “we have spent hours and hours conversing with them. They talk on forever and use up our precious [sic] time.”\[^{34}\] In a report on the activities of the 1928 meeting, Mississippi-born wife of the first governor of Puerto Rico, Muna Lee, maintained that “[t]here was no escape—not at the Yacht Club nor the Jockey Club, not on the Golf Course nor at a dinner dance … Wherever there were women …”\[^{35}\] She described her NWP colleagues as “valient [sic] emissaries of equal rights,” while Smith proclaimed “we have revived… [Latin American women’s] interest in feminism.”\[^{36}\] These comments suggest that in the minds of US women, the Latin Americans had little to offer as far as ideology or strategy, and that US feminists had led the campaign in Havana with Latin American women merely following and serving as assistants, at best, or annoyances, at worst. But the Latin American women’s interest in discussing women’s issues with their North American sisters can be understood as a commitment to Pan American feminism.

Seldom did US women openly or publicly criticize what they perceived as Latin American women’s lack of ability or initiative, keeping their imperial attitudes about the “other” to themselves, and thereby not allowing Latin American women to respond directly to such condescension. It does not necessarily follow, however, that Latin American women were unaware of

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\[^{31}\] Jane Norman Smith to unknown, 31 December 1927, NWP papers, reel 38.
\[^{32}\] Jane Norman Smith to Margaret Lambie, 6 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
\[^{33}\] Doris Stevens to Jonathan Mitchell, 16 January and 22 January 1928, Doris Stevens papers, carton 3, The Schlesinger Library (SL), Cambridge, MA.
\[^{34}\] Jane Norman Smith, 18 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
\[^{36}\] Muna Lee Report; Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, 18 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
Yankee elitism. Rather, they seemed to find an alliance with US feminists beneficial in the promotion of their own causes.

For example, Flora Díaz de Parrado, Cuban lawyer, feminist, and participant at the 1928 meeting in Havana, recognized the differences between US and Latin American feminists. Possessing a sense of potential solidarity, she bluntly told the NWP: “I am sure North American women do not know much about women in Central and South America, just as they do not know very much about you. This ignorance is very inconvenient for our common aims.” She further advised that “[w]hen women understand that ‘in union is strength’ and when we leave behind little suspicions in our struggles, we will get all our ideals and we may help directly to develop society with more peace and freedom.” Parrado, perhaps, referred to more than just the relations among the women from different continents, alluding to the neo-colonial antagonisms that existed between the US and various Latin American nations. Ester N. de Calvo also portrayed a sense of the desirability of mutual cooperation among women of the Americas by appointing Carrie Chapman Catt as the honorary president of the 1926 Pan American women’s congress in Panama, in spite of the fact that Catt could not find the time to attend the women’s meeting.

Latin American women’s commitment to Pan American collaboration can also be seen in the attitude and concerns of Amanda Labarca Hubertson, Director of Liceo de Ninas (high school for girls) in Santiago, Chile, and member of the Chilean Auxiliary Committee. Hubertson wrote on a variety of issues including the need for regular communication between Latin American and US women, women’s labour, the nature of women’s status in Latin America, and ways to popularize women’s cause. Concerning the relationship among women of the Americas she observed:

North American women do not know us. We South American women do not even know each other … [t]he Social Problems which the Latin American women are trying to resolve at this time are very different from those confronting you, because among us conditions of life, the economic situation, education and customs are very different. Hence, we have greater encouragement in the example of women from Latin American countries than from the United States, as it is difficult for us to imitate the women of the latter country …

37 Equal Rights, 14 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38. Parrado made this speech at the headquarters of the NWP in Washington, DC in celebration of the 135th anniversary of Lucretia Mott, prominent 19th century US feminist. For more on Parrado’s and other Cuban feminists’ views, see Mariblanca Sabas Aloma, Feminismo: Cuestiones Sociales-Critica Literaria (La Habana 1930).
38 Equal Rights, 14 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
39 Amanda Labarca Hubertson to Señora Glen Levin Swiggett, 9 April 1918, PAIWC papers, box 1, LC.
Instead of viewing this situation as hopeless, she suggested a way for the different groups of women to become better acquainted. Hubertson proposed that the US and Chile develop an exchange program for female teachers to work in the schools, thereby gaining knowledge of the pedagogical systems and, perhaps even more importantly, each other’s culture and people. Such a situation, according to Hubertson, would deepen the relations of women in the Americas, help them overcome their ignorance of one another, and lead to better understanding overall.

In a rare example of a US woman’s open criticism of Latin American women’s abilities, Emma Swiggett questioned the originality of the Mexican women’s Columbus Day program. Adelia Palacio, chairman of the Mexican section of the Auxiliary’s International Committee, nationally recognized teacher, and an official delegate at the 1908 Latin American Scientific Congress, retorted to Swiggett: “It surprises me your question ‘if all the material I sent was prepared by our association.’ Yes, didn’t you see the program! … all I sent was done by our circle.” Even though Swiggett’s doubts certainly insulted Palacio, an experienced women’s rights and educational leader in Mexico, the two women remained collaborators in the struggle for women in the Pan American arena.

Latin American women in many ways and on many occasions defied the US feminists’ narrow imperial views. They put together conferences, founded women’s rights groups in their home countries, and displayed widespread support for women’s Pan American efforts, often taking the leadership role in organizing Pan American women’s activities. In 1916, immediately following the first Pan American women’s conference, Latin American and US women started planning for the second women’s meeting. They exchanged numerous letters expressing their support for women’s Pan American organizing, excitement about the future of women’s role in the Pan American arena, enthusiasm for a Pan American sisterhood, and desire for a permanent organization. Lucila Gamero de Medina, president of the Women’s Auxiliary of Honduras, wrote an article entitled “Conditions of Women in Honduras” for the *Women’s Auxiliary Bulletin*. She also sent names of Honduran women interested in women’s Pan American activities and was in contact with the Honduran press to promote women’s rights. As well, Medina proudly announced that the recently revised Central American Constitution included women’s suffrage. Luisa de Anderson, member of the Costa Rican Women’s Auxiliary, exclaimed her “deep interest in and enthusiastic devotion to things which the Congress represents,” while Maria Cristina Zapata, director of the Voice of the People in Nicaragua, offered her cooperation in promoting the auxiliary. Julia G. de Batres of El Salvador supplied the auxiliary with the names of qualified women to serve on the International Committee and sent

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40 Adelia Palacio to Mrs. Glen Levin Swiggett, 23 May 1924, PAIWC papers, box 7, LC.
41 Lucila Gamero de Medina to Mrs. Glenn Levin Swiggett, 1917, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC.
her hopes for the prosperous future of women’s Pan American organizing. Similarly, an Ecuadorian member referred to the Auxiliary as a “noble cause” and “believed that she would be able to be of help to her North American sisters.”

Paulina Luisi, a prominent Uruguayan feminist and physician, could not attend the 1922 Pan American conference in Baltimore because she had to travel to Paris to represent her country and the medical faculty at the International Congress of Social Hygiene. She wrote to Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the International Woman Suffrage Association:

As it concerns a scientific congress related to the medical profession, I believe that I will serve the feminine cause better by accepting that appointment. You know that there are not yet many women in the world who have been called by name to represent a Government and a scientific institution such as the Medical Faculty in an International Congress.

Clearly, Luisi considered herself a worldwide leader in the women’s movement and did not hesitate to remind Catt of her status.

Even though Luisi could not attend the Baltimore meeting, she viewed Latin American women’s participation as vital. She contacted a feminist group in Paraguay, one in Chile, and the heads of two “exclusively” suffrage groups in Argentina—Liga por los Derechos de la Mujer president Dra. Elvira Rawson de Dellepiano and Partido Feminista Nacional president Dra. Julieta Lanteri Renshaw—about the conference. At least one of these groups, the Liga por los Derechos de la Mujer, established in 1919 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, sent a delegate. Furthermore, the representatives from Uruguay presented a proposal, written by Luisi, to create a permanent Pan American feminist association. Responding to the recommendation, the Executive Committee of the League of Women Voters held an extraordinary resolutions meeting inviting only Latin American delegates, Catt, and Sidney Small of Canada. The session resulted in the founding of the Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women, later renamed the All-America Union. Such initiative of the Latin American delegates echoed their enthusiasm for and leadership in the Pan American women’s movement.

On yet another occasion Latin American women asserted their opinions and ideas in opposition to US activists. In 1923, US women had attempted to control the simultaneous Columbus Day celebrations by outlining confer-

42 Luisa de Anderson to Mrs. Robert Lansing, 2 July 1921, PAIWC papers, box 1, LC; Maria Cristina Zapata to Mrs. Glen Levis [sic] Swiggett, 13 October 1918, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC; Julia G. de Batres to Mrs. Robert Lansing, 26 February 1919, PAIWC papers, box 8, LC.
43 Unsigned to Mrs. Robert Lansing, 19 May 1919, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC.
44 Dra. Paulina Luisi to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, 3 May 1922, Carrie Chapman Catt papers, Microfilm Collection, reel 4.
46 Minutes of the League of Women Voters, 25 April 1922, LWV papers, reel 2.
ence programs. In general, the various Latin American sections followed the suggestions of the US Executive Committee, but at least three of the twelve participating countries broadened the US proposed agenda and included the controversial issues of suffrage and feminism. This Executive Committee had not directly excluded these topics but during a planning meeting members had “agreed that humanitarian service would be added to religion and that politics be omitted…” They had carefully outlined acceptable topics and had advised all national sections to send their programs and speeches for approval. In the end, both religion and politics appeared in Columbus Day programs with Latin American women presenting essays on women’s suffrage as well as on the benefits of feminism. Brazilian women members, led by the international feminist activist Bertha Lutz, included a discussion of women’s suffrage, and Julia Lopes de Almeida, President of the Brazilian section of the Auxiliary’s International Women’s Committee, presented a report on the progressive nature of the feminist movement in her country. Ana Rosa Chacon of the Costa Rican section spoke on the necessity of the feminist movement for perfect health of the body and mind, and Elvira Santa Cruz Ossa, secretary of the Chilean International Committee, promoted women’s civil and political rights.

Latin American women not only advocated women’s suffrage and other feminist issues, they also discussed and took political stands on subjects considered traditionally male. A member of the Women’s Auxiliary, Mrs. [Alice Thatcher] Post, had received a letter from a woman in Mexico asking the US to join with Venezuela in requesting the freedom of political prisoners. The committee members brought up the issue during an Auxiliary meeting and decided not to take any action.

It turned out to be the US women who showed a lack of enthusiasm for women’s Pan American activities, especially those taking place outside of the US. Concerning the Second Pan American Women’s Conference to be held in 1924 in Peru, Cuban feminist Blanche Z. de Baralt, complained to Emma Swiggett—

> [o]ur congress in December is going to be a great success—that is if the element from the United States responds, and we don’t know yet—at this eleventh hour—if it is going to or not. As for the Spanish American countries they have responded most enthusiastically and are going to make a fine showing…

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47 Proceedings and Report of The Columbus Day Conferences.
48 Minutes of the United States Section of the International Committee, 3 June 1922, PAIWC papers, box 6, LC.
49 Proceedings and Report of the Columbus Day Conferences.
51 Minutes of the Women’s Auxiliary Committee, 23 November 1922, PAIWC papers, box 6, LC.
52 Blanche Z. de Baralt to Mrs. Swiggett, 27 October 1924, PAIWC papers, box 8, LC.
At the end of the conference, Mercedes Gallagher de Parks, chair of the Peruvian women’s organizing committee, similarly questioned the integrity of the US women’s commitment to Pan American women’s activism, commenting—

though the members of the American Delegation were all very charming and cultured women, it seems to me that, outside of the Washington Committee, the really important women in the States do not seem to have taken great interest in the Conference, if any at all…

Like Baralt and Parks, Panamanian Ester N. de Calvo, who organized the Congreso Inter-Americano de Mujeres in 1926, had anticipated much more interest in the conference from US women. Calvo wrote to Catt:

According to the program adopted last April in our Conference in favour of our ideals of fraternity and friendship between the women of the Americas, I have worked very hard, but I have to feel quite disappointed with the results of my work in the United States.

This Pan American women’s meeting had a deep meaning for Calvo. Even though she was pregnant, she often worked until “two and four o’clock in the morning” organizing the conference. She took great care to assure the visiting women that all the female delegates would be guests of the government and receive a 24 per cent discount from steamship companies. And the female participants took the occasion to show their commitment to Pan American feminism, cancelling a social gathering to hold an extra business meeting.

Before their Pan American feminist activities, Latin American women had organized women’s rights groups in their own countries. In the 1800s they had participated in the independence movements of Central and South America, and like their male counterparts, had envisioned an egalitarian society in which women would have more educational opportunities, as well as legal rights, in the newly formed sovereign nations. Although various governments had broadened women’s political role and talked of suffrage, many female activists felt cheated because of the unfulfilled promise of enfranchisement. Largely in response to such exclusion, by the early 20th century Latin American women had organized all-female groups and put together conferences to examine women’s concerns, including the issue of suffrage.

As early as 1910, for instance, women of the Southern Cone had advocated suffrage. The organization of Universitarias Argentinas put together

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53 Mercedes Gallagher de Parks to Mrs. Swiggett, 13 January 1925, PAIWC papers, box 8, LC.
54 Ester N. de Calvo to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, 11 May 1926, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC. Calvo’s reference is to the 1925 All America Women’s Conference held in Washington, DC in 1925.
55 Ester N. de Calvo to Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, 11 May 1926, PAIWC papers, box 4, LC.
the First International Women’s Congress, and in that same year the Argentine section of the National Council of Women held the **Primer Congreso Patriotico de Señoras en America del Sur** in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Argentina’s independence. Both included suffrage on their agendas.\footnote{\textit{Primer Congreso Femenino Internacional de la Republica Argentina} (Peru 1911); \textit{Primer Congreso Patriotico de Señoras en America del Sur} (Buenos Aires 1910).}

In 1917 and in the 1920s, in Argentina and Uruguay, respectively, the National Council of Women published journals promoting women’s rights. In 1920, Peruvian Miguelina A. Acosta Cardenas prepared a thesis on the necessity of equal rights for women and men in partial fulfilment of her doctorate in jurisprudence.\footnote{\textit{Revista del Consejo Nacional de Mujeres de la Republica Argentina} (25 November 1917) and \textit{Accion Femenina}, (including nos. 25–26, 28–29, 37–39), PAIWC papers, box 10, LC; \textit{Reformas Necessaries del Codigo Civil Comun Peruano Tendientes a Hacer Efectiva la Igualdad Civil y Juridica del Hombre y la Mujer} (Lima, Peru 1920), PAIWC papers, box 10, LC.} In 1923 in Havana, the National Federation of Cuban Women’s Associations organized a conference with women’s suffrage and other women’s rights issues making up a large portion of the program; while in 1927 Cuban feminists formed the **Partido Democratica Sufragista** devoted exclusively to women’s suffrage.\footnote{Mary Elizabeth Springer, “The Feminist Movement in Cuba,” \textit{Bulletin of the Pan American Union} 57 (1923), 580–590; Aida Palaez de le Villaurrutia, \textit{El Sufragio Femenino} (Habana 1923), PAIWC papers, box 10, LC, speech given at the 1923 Cuban women’s conference; ‘Partido Democratica Sufragista Comision Gestora Nacional,’ Habana, October 1927, copy of the original statement of purpose and membership application, DS papers, carton 10, SL.} By 1923 Mexican activists had established the Mexican Feminist Council, a women’s suffrage association, and in 1924 in Santiago, Chile, supporters, composed of approximately fifteen “important” women’s organizations, founded an association to work for women’s civil, administrative, and political rights in the vein of the International Suffrage Alliance.\footnote{\textit{Bulletin of the Pan American Union} 57 (1923–24).}

By 1928 Latin American women had a well-organized women’s movement with women from many parts of the Americas organizing within and outside of the Pan American arena. Instead of staying content to remain “auxiliary” to the Pan American Union, many of these women strove for and won an official place in the western hemisphere with the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women in 1928 in Cuba. The IACW thus marks not the US-inspired beginning of Pan American organizing among women, but the culmination of years of effort by women from countries throughout the western hemisphere.

Other US women’s groups such as the US chapter of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom attended the 1928 meeting in Havana, but the National Woman’s Party played the dominant US role. Ironically, however, it was the Cuban lawyer and feminist, Flora Díaz de Parrado, who first alerted the NWP to the importance of the conference. Five years earlier, in 1923, at the Fifth International Conference of American States in Santiago,
Cover of the 11 February 1928, issue of *Equal Rights*, the National Woman’s Party’s journal. The picture was taken in Havana in 1928 at the founding of the Inter-American Commission of Women. The caption “The Front Line in Havana” refers to the collaborative efforts of the Latin American and US feminists in their campaign at the Sixth International Conference of American States to gain support for the establishment of the commission. (*Courtesy of the National Woman’s Party Collection, The Sewall-Belmont House and Museum, Washington, DC*)
Chile, the issue of an official woman-centred governing board made it onto the Pan American Union’s approved agenda. Maximo De Soto Hall, Guatemalan delegate at the congress, initiated a series of resolutions including the promotion of women’s education, a systematic examination of laws pertaining to women among the various countries, the establishment of a body in the union to analyze women’s civil and legal status, and the appointment of women as official delegates to Pan American Union conferences. To discuss and investigate these concerns, union members promised women seats at the upcoming Sixth Pan American Conference to be held in Havana in 1928. They neglected to nominate women as delegates, however, even though women’s issues remained on the program.

Before Parrado’s visit, US women had displayed no interest in the proposal or in the 1928 conference. As early as 1924 Brazilian international feminist Bertha Lutz had corresponded with Carrie Chapman Catt about the 1928 meeting and had urged her to send delegates. Catt, however, thought that the trip to Havana would be too costly and the expense not worth the potential outcome, discounting the importance of Pan American feminism and viewing it as secondary in the promotion of women’s rights on the international scene. Indicating the NWP’s lack of awareness, Jane Norman Smith wrote to Margaret Lambie, “It is such a pity that we did not know about it sooner for it is very important.” In a letter to NWP colleague Mabel Vernon, Smith further lamented, “While you were away Margaret Lambie wrote to me about Dr. Parrado and the Pan American Conference … It is too bad that we didn’t know about it long ago.” The Women’s Auxiliary similarly displayed no concern for the meeting in Havana until the NWP announced its intention to attend and promote the Equal Rights Treaty, at which time Emma Swiggett as executive secretary decided to travel to Havana. Such behaviour mirrored the lack of enthusiasm of US women for Pan American meetings held outside the US.

Latin American women clearly had a strong women’s movement by 1928. But in contrast to US feminism, most Latin American feminists based

60 Actas de las Sesiones Plenarias de la Quinta Conferencia Internacional Americana (Santiago de Chile 1923), 287–290.
61 Circular to Board of Officers of the League of Women’s Voters, 23 April 1924, LWV papers, reel 15.
62 Jane Norman Smith to Margaret Lambie, 18 December 1927, NWP papers, reel 38.
63 Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, December 1927, NWP papers, reel 38. In fact only a few NWP members, Jane Norman Smith, Margaret Lambie, and Katherine Ward Fisher, initially wanted to attend the Havana conference.
64 Alice Paul, co-founder of the National Woman’s Party, wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposal granting women in the US the same legal rights as that of men. The Equal Rights Treaty was similar to the amendment but applied to laws around the world. Carol Ann Miller in “Lobbying the League: Women’s International Organizations and the League of Nations” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1992) argues that the NWP promoted the treaty as a way to pressure the US congress into passing the amendment at home.
their activism on their differences from men and on their traditional role as mothers. Though Latin American feminists came from a variety of perspectives, virtually all strove to distinguish themselves and their efforts from their US sisters, viewing “Yankee” feminism as a threat to country and family. Nevertheless, some Latin American women recognized the influence of the US in the Pan American Union and many believed that cooperation might help advance their causes, bringing about positive results on the national scene. Parrado took this view: “While the resolutions adopted by the Pan American Congress have no legal force in the countries of the Americas, they are very important in influencing the course of legislation, particularly in South and Central America.”

Despite their differences, in Havana, US and Latin American women worked side by side planning, organizing, and lobbying members of the Sixth International Conference of American States to secure a hearing to discuss the formation of a committee to examine women’s civil and legal status in the Americas. The NWP reported in its journal, *Equal Rights*, “neither the women of the National Woman’s Party nor the Cuban and Latin American women were idle … and before the conference was opened they were ready with the proposals they wished to submit to the conference for consideration.” From the US perspective, “[t]he Cuban women are cooperating wonderfully.” Over time, however, it became clear that their Latin American colleagues had definite ideas about women’s rights and the way the lobbying campaign in Havana should be run. The women were different than what Smith had expected. Initially she spoke kindly of them, stating “we haven’t found any of the ‘shrinking, conservative, timid kind. They are far more aggressive than we are, only they are new to political and press work.” Later, when the Cuban women’s agenda interfered with the US plan, Smith criticized their behaviour, exclaiming “Ye Gads!—They told us about the ‘conservative, sheltered Cuban woman,’ who must be handled with gloves! I’ve never meet their equals for aggressiveness.” Smith continued:

Our hearing comes off tomorrow—we have only one precious [sic] hour, which we have to divide with Cubans, who are more concerned about votes for women in Cuba than an Equal Rights Treaty. We have had a ghastly time to keep them from taking control of the program, hearing, and everything else …

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65 For a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between motherhood and Latin American feminism see the works of Chris Ehrick, Donna J. Guy, Francesca Miller, Asunción Lavrin, and K. Lynn Stoner.

66 Latin American feminists frequently referred to US feminists as North Americans and Yankees, often calling their brand of feminism “Yankee.”

67 *Equal Rights*, 17 December 1927, NWP papers, reel 154.


69 Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, 26 January 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.

70 Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, 5 February 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.

71 Jane Norman Smith to Mabel Vernon, 5 February 1928, NWP papers, reel 38.
How ironic this statement seems given the US women’s assumptions that they would have to take the lead.

Latin American women, like US women, displayed an air of confidence and accomplishment concerning women’s Pan American organizing efforts. Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Latin American women had participated in transnational as well as national women’s activities. They had taken part in the sexually-integrated Latin America scientific congresses and by the third decade of the century had formed numerous all-female groups devoted to women’s issues, including the divisive issue of suffrage. Even though US women espoused a rhetoric of Pan American sisterhood and recognized Latin American women’s accomplishments, they viewed feminists from south of the border as their “little sisters,” taking an interest only when the US was in charge, and seeing themselves as the “natural” leaders. Latin American women, in contrast, considered Pan American women’s activities an avenue for broadening their feminist base and energetically engaged in Pan American women’s meetings, even those congresses held outside of the southern continent.

Latin American women eagerly participated in and organized Pan American women’s activities, had ideas about the meaning of feminism, supported the relatively radical issue of suffrage, and were instrumental in paving the way for the establishment of the Inter-American Commission of Women. In spite of the fact that US women sometimes recognized these efforts and achievements, and at times even praised Latin American women’s abilities, US women revealed deeply rooted assumptions about the lack of emancipation of their Latin American colleagues. Still, the United States or dominant group had to recognize and deal with the interests of its Latin American colleagues. Though the Pan American arena was not ideal, Latin American feminists found this forum a useful place to pursue their goals. And through the strains of an imperial relationship with conflict, alongside cooperation, the feminists worked together to negotiate differences and define common interests in their struggles for women’s rights, eventually taking their campaign to the League of Nations in the 1930s. The history of women’s Pan American organizing, in the context of the imperial or “neocolonial” relationship between the US and Latin America, is a complex story whose outlines can only be discerned in the interactions among women from different nations. This essay, like others in this volume, suggests that the construction of feminism(s), especially on the intercontinental stage, does not fit neatly into existing conceptual categories and challenges us to rethink in creative ways the history of women’s international activism.
Transnationalism in Practice: 
The Effect of Dora Montefiore’s International Travel on Women’s Politics in Britain before World War I

Karen Hunt

As the opportunities for global travel and for migration exploded from the second half of the 19th century, so did the possibilities for the transfer of all aspects of culture between peoples across the world. One aspect of this cultural interaction which was particularly amenable to transfer between different localities was politics. Travellers and migrants took with them political experiences and practices which consciously or unconsciously shaped their interactions with the societies they encountered or in which they settled. In turn, their stories and letters about their new lives could feed back into the politics of the countries from which they had come. As people became more mobile so did political ideas, aspirations, and strategies. Thus with the migrants, itinerant workers, and travelling propagandists came the political press (national, provincial, and parochial) which could find an echo in societies thousands of miles away from its point of production. This was particularly the case with those who were part of the new progressive movements of the later 19th century—socialists, anarchists and feminists—who shared internationalist aspirations. What exactly they meant by internationalism may have varied but all sought in some way to connect the struggles of the oppressed across the world. Mapping the extent and form of this radical diaspora and its effects on both the metropolitan centre and the often colonial periphery is only just beginning. This is one aspect of a broader desire, often more culturally focused, to understand the processes which constituted transnationalism.

One of the ways in which we can begin to understand what transnationalism means in practice is to explore one individual’s internationalist practice set within an ever changing political context—a context of evolving personal politics, of the politics of specific organizations (locally, nationally, and transnationally), of national and international histories. The task is to establish how an individual not only moved between different national contexts

1 A particularly compelling example of this is Jonathan Hyslop, The Notorious Syndicalist. J.T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa (Johannesburg 2004).
but also made connections between them. How were experiences which were derived from one national culture put into play in the politics of another?

The subject of this paper is Dora Montefiore (1851–1933), a British born socialist, suffragist, and later communist who, though based in England, spent key periods of her life travelling, networking, and making her politics outside Britain. I make no claims for her typicality in any respect (as a socialist woman, suffragist, or internationalist), but by assessing where, and in what ways, her experience was distinctive, we may see more clearly the parameters in which a transnational practice might be developed in the early decades of the 20th century. Dora Montefiore was well placed to build a transnational practice, spurred as she was to develop an internationalism which challenged class, gender, and even racial divisions. Yet she sits awkwardly within national historiographies and within the historiographies of transnational organizations. We have little to date which allows us to explore the ebb and flow of ideas, experiences, and campaigns not just between national socialist or suffrage movements but also comparatively across the world. This study is therefore a contribution to the larger project of mapping the nature and effect of transnational practices among progressives in the early decades of the 20th century.

Dora Montefiore’s life and politics sit at the intersection of a number of often separate historiographies where key terms can have slightly different meanings. I therefore will follow Leila Rupp in her important study of the international women’s movement and use the term transnational to describe activities, organizations, and practices which cross national boundaries.

Such transnational activity could literally be international—that is, not only communicating across national borders but also between and even above nations. However, there can be no presumption that transnational or international activity will also be internationalist. Thus Rupp has explored how women active in women’s transnational organizations struggled with their nationalism and in many cases constructed a version of internationalism that did not challenge national identities and loyalties.

For others, the focus of their concern with transnationality arises from the study of the movement across the world of peoples and their cultures, practices, and ideas. This too is relevant to my concerns here because it alerts us not only to an increasingly mobile international proletariat in this period, amongst whom there were political activists, but also to the fact that these diasporas were not necessarily homogenous but might more usefully be thought of as “an evolving collection of transnational, multi-sited social networks.”

To what extent was

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there a socialist, labour, or feminist transnational, multi-sited social network in the early years of the 20th century and did its transnational character override the traditional areas of tension within national or local environments? Once the terrain of the transnational was entered, how divisive were different political philosophies such as socialism, anarchism, labourism, or communism and different political priorities (for instance, fighting gender, class, or race power) among the mobile or travelling activists?

It may be that rather than seeing the transnational as a space of cultural transfer where unmediated ideas pass from one context to another, it might be more useful to trace how individuals sought to build a transnational practice which was premised on making connections between disparate experiences located in political spaces which were foreign to them. Such a practice might then be as much about how these foreign experiences were deployed by the political traveller as it was about the experiences themselves. I want to begin to explore some of these issues in relation to one political woman for whom travel was a central thread through her activism.

There are many ways to narrate the life and politics of Dora Montefiore, for example by headlining her suffragism or her socialism, or by focusing on her experience of being represented as “a difficult woman”, a woman who does not fit into the traditional stories told of her time either by contemporaries or by historians. Her organizational affiliations changed over time but give some sense of her location within and across the key issues of her day. Thus she was a member of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (c.1900–1912), the British Socialist Party (from 1916), and a founder member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, but she was also involved in the Union of Practical Suffragists, the Women’s Social and Political Union, and the Adult Suffrage Society, as well as being associated with other broad left activities such as the Clarion Scouts, the Daily Herald League, and the Central Labour College. Such lists only tell us so much, and give no real flavour of how she and others built a political practice as socialist women.

Internationalism was a central feature of Dora Montefiore’s evolving politics. Elsewhere I have explored the extent to which internationalism enabled Dora to link together the socialist and feminist (not a term she used of herself) parts of her politics when organizationally, and even conceptually, there was so much tension between the two. To place Dora’s internationalist

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Politics into a context I have also discussed the challenges that internationalism presented for British socialist women more generally before the First World War. In this paper, I want to explore the specific effect that one important stimulus to Montefiore’s internationalism, her extensive foreign travel, had on her own politics, and through her, on British women’s politics more generally.

Dora’s Victorian middle-class childhood gave her some of the means to make use of opportunities to travel as an adult. She developed a facility with languages that she put to good use in her later political work—translating for the movement, publishing in foreign-language journals, and making herself understood by a wide range of audiences abroad. These skills were first developed at her school where lessons were conducted in German in the morning and French in the afternoon. Her background also gave her the class confidence and the financial wherewithal to travel, for although the economic position of her father, Francis Fuller, was not always secure, he did enable his large family to lead a middle-class life. Dora in turn married within her class, if not her nationality, when in 1881 she wed the Australian merchant George Barrow Montefiore. His sudden death eight years later left her in a position where she did not need to work. As a widowed mother of two young children she was understandably always worried about money, but it was the anxiety of someone who was never in danger of sinking into poverty.

In her memoirs Dora recalled travel of various sorts in her early years. She remembered summer holidays travelling in continental Europe with her father as he researched papers to Social Science Congresses on topics such as scientific farming and afforestation. Dora acted as his translator. These travels were, she said, “some of the happiest and most valuable in my life.” Already travel was not simply about leisure. Her longest journeys in the years before she became politicized were those she took to and from Australia. She travelled out on the long sea voyage to New South Wales, accompanied by a cousin, so that she could undertake the duties of an unmarried daughter helping her eldest brother’s delicate wife manage the housekeeping and the care of the children. It was in Australia that she began to take the first steps on a political journey that would occupy the rest of her life. Australia was to play an important role in her evolving politics, both as the location of key political experiences— politicization as a suffragist (1889-92); as a socialist activist encountering White Australia (1911); and as communist (1923)—but also as a source to which she instinctively turned for compelling examples to

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9 Dora B. Montefiore, From a Victorian to a Modern (London 1927), 27.
10 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 27.
11 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 30.
use in her work as a political propagandist.\textsuperscript{12} Thus although Britain (mainly England) was where she centred her political activism after 1892, it was an important feature of her politics that another country, albeit part of the British Empire, had shaped her first political steps and continued to have personal as well as political significance for her.\textsuperscript{13}

Travel continued to be an important feature of her life. She lived in continental Europe (Paris and Brussels) at various points after her return from Australia and often chose Europe, particularly Italy, as a place to recuperate or as a place to holiday (with her children and later on her own or with friends). She also began to travel for political reasons: to attend conferences (both international congresses and the national congresses of other national socialist or suffragist organizations); to make speaking tours; to conduct investigations; and to accept invitations which resulted from networking at international events. There were also more extensive trips to the US, Australia, and South Africa where she often moved from observer to participant in the political life of the country. She was able to do this through her journalism and by editing newspapers, participating in political congresses (rather than just witnessing them), and taking on short term political tasks, such as being a scrutineer at a count for one of the first socialist candidates in a South African election.\textsuperscript{14} She also provided financial support to ventures and campaigns within the country she was visiting.

The destinations of her travels could therefore provide new experiences and encounters which she reported back to British and other audiences but which also stimulated reflections, revisions, and even reconfigurations of her personal politics and the priorities within them. For example, in 1913 she reflected to \textit{Daily Herald} readers:

\begin{quote}
The more I have travelled, the more I have compared programmes and parties the world over, the more I incline to the opinion (though I have fought myself on the subject now for some time) that no real revolution can come about through the agency of a political party.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} For the significance of Australia to Montefiore, see Karen Hunt, “Learning from One Another? Gender and Labour History as an Anglo-Australian Comparative Project,” paper to the Anglo-Australian Labour History Conference, Manchester, July 2003. For the power of the Australian example in labour politics, see Neville Kirk, “The Australian ‘Workingman’s Paradise’ in Comparative Perspective, 1890–1914,” in his \textit{Comrades and Cousins: Globalization, Workers and Labour Movements in Britain, the USA and Australia from the 1880s to 1914} (London 2003), 59–148.

\textsuperscript{13} Her children were Australian and her son returned to live in Australia as an adult, serving in the Australian Imperial Forces in the First World War. The widowed Dora also derived her income from Australia, where the investment fund which managed her husband’s estate was located.

\textsuperscript{14} Dora Montefiore was one of two scrutineers at the count when Harry Norrie was the first United Socialist Party candidate to contest a South African parliamentary seat (\textit{Justice}, 3 August 1912).

However, it was not just the destinations that presented new political possibilities, it was also the journeys themselves, particularly sea voyages. These provided opportunities which Dora seized on to network, to reach different audiences, and to engage in “political tourism”—brief meetings organized on the shore and new literatures picked up along the way. But

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16 See descriptions of Dora’s journeys from Australia to South Africa in 1912, and from South Africa to England in 1914 (Montefiore, From a Victorian, 146, 182–3).
rather than provide a chronology of Dora Montefiore’s travels, I want to take
the example of one particular foreign trip and examine how Dora used this
experience as part of her political practice. Through this I will consider
whether the foreign travel of one particular woman activist directly affected
women’s politics in Britain.

In the summer of 1906 after the end of the six week siege by bailiffs of
her home in Hammersmith, Dora Montefiore decided to visit Finland. Her
refusal to pay taxes when she had no say in how those taxes were spent (a
banner outside her home carried the resonant slogan “No Taxation Without
Representation”) had been dramatised by the siege of what became known as
“Fort Montefiore.” This was the latest episode in her increasingly militant
suffrage activism which later that year would climax with her imprisonment
in Holloway. Her example of tax resistance as a political tactic was reported
around the world. It was a strategy which drew on earlier 19th century feminist
examples and, of course, echoed the demands of American rebels in their
War of Independence. So why go to Finland? Finnish women had already
achieved what Dora was fighting for—full enfranchisement. So Dora
announced both in the socialist press and also in her local newspaper that she
was going to Finland to learn more about how Finnish women got the vote.17

In 1906, there were few countries where women had achieved enfran-
chisement (only New Zealand, Australia, and Finland) and in the increas-
ingly combative suffrage politics of Britain these examples were deployed by all
sides within the debate. Raewyn Dalziel has shown how the pioneering New
Zealand case was mobilised not just by various strands within suffragism but
also even by their opponents.18 However, unlike the examples from within
the British Empire, Finland was not a country with which many within
British progressive politics had personal connections or intimate knowledge.
It therefore did not figure within the rhetoric of suffrage debate. Yet Dora
Montefiore had already referred to Finland on one of the occasions when she
addressed the crowd from “Fort Montefiore.” She taunted the government
that “[t]hey were even behind Finland where women had been enfranchis-
ed.”19 Once the siege was over, Dora travelled to Copenhagen to attend the
International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) congress.

This was not her first trip to Scandinavia. She had been to Denmark the
year before in circumstances which illustrate the way in which transnational
connections could operate in practice. Dora joined a party visiting the coun-
try to learn about its ancient and modern institutions. She described a kind of
“political tourism” where travellers “arm themselves with mackintoshes and

17 Justice, 25 August 1906; West London Observer, 31 August 1906.
18 Raewyn Dalziel, “Presenting the Enfranchisement of New Zealand Women Abroad,” in
Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds., Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Per-
spectives (Auckland 1994), 42–64.
19 West London Observer, 1 June 1906.
circular notes of credit, and with these weapons force an entry into the remotest regions and over the most inaccessible mountain passes.” In this case, each of the group had paid a guinea to the woman who organized the party who, in turn, “provided lectures, arranged excursions to co-operative dairies, Poor Law and Municipal institutions, educational centres, etc—sides of life which it is usually very difficult for the ordinary tourist to see during a short visit to a foreign country.” The group, which included travellers from Holland, Bohemia, Sweden, Germany, and England, was accompanied by a Danish woman whom Dora had met at the International Council of Women (ICW) congress in London in 1899. Nellie Hansen was a women’s trade union organizer—her paper to the ICW was on working women’s trade unions in Denmark—and a socialist who was married to the editor of one of Denmark’s socialist daily newspapers. Among the English in the group was Mary Higgs from Oldham, a social investigator who had gone on the tramp to expose the lives of destitute women, as well as the head of a London settlement, a lecturer from the labour Ruskin College, and a lady farmer from Shropshire. In a fortnight’s trip Dora therefore not only learned about matters of interest to her in Denmark, for example meeting the founder of the domestic servant’s union, she also soaked up the experiences of many of her travelling companions. Her conversations with Mary Higgs were soon translated into a feature in Montefiore’s women’s column in the radical paper New Age which focused on Higgs’ thoughts on how best to “help the most helpless, the most cruelly crushed, of her fellow women.” Dora also filled her journalism with more direct reportage drawn from this trip, such as on the land question in Denmark and the country’s high school system. The choice of topics not only reflected her curiosity, it was also political, as was the way in which she chose to represent them to a wider audience. Here the political tourist melted into the activist who had to do something with what she had seen. For Dora, such experiences were translated into her work as a propagandist whether in her journalism or through public speaking, as in her lecture to the socialist Kelmscott Club on “Socialism in Denmark.”

The following year, on the 1st of August 1906, Dora began her journey to Finland, leaving London with her son, an eighteen year old student at London University. They spent a few days in Cologne and then travelled on to Copenhagen via Hamburg and Kiel. Dora had come to Copenhagen to take part in a more formal kind of transnationalist practice, attending an international conference. She was already an experienced participant in such events,

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20 *New Age*, 24 August 1905.
21 *New Age*, 24 August, 31 August 1905.
22 *New Age*, 14 September 1905.
23 *New Age*, 7 September 1905
24 *Justice*, 10 March 1906.
25 Montefiore, *From a Victorian*, 84.
having attended her first international conference in 1897. As the women’s transnational organizations began to grow, Dora explored whether the ICW and/or the IWSA would provide an opportunity to publicize her particular reading of British women’s politics and allow her to connect with the experiences of women activists from other countries. Initially she was optimistic that women’s transnational organizations constituted a promising additional political space. She reported to her readers in *New Age* her experience of the ICW/IWSA congress held in Berlin in 1904, noting that it “has given to women working all over the world in the cause of their sister women a feeling of solidarity and of sisterhood such as they never possessed before!”\(^{26}\) She was particularly struck by the earnestness of the delegates and “their thirst for knowledge about conditions and statistics in other countries which might throw light on and help them in their own work.”\(^{27}\) For her the purpose of such gatherings was clear—women would learn from one another, “gain courage and experience in methods of pushing their demands for political and social emancipation” and thereby “free themselves and their sisters from economic slavery.”\(^{28}\) However, Dora’s optimistic view of the opportunity that transnational women’s organizations presented was shaken by experiences which began in Copenhagen.

In 1906, Dora was a fraternal delegate to the IWSA congress representing the already militant Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). She had also represented the WSPU at the 1904 congress but two years later Dora found that her credentials were now challenged.\(^{29}\) The congress only recognized the constitutionalist National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) as the sole representative of British suffragists. Dora questioned the representativeness of the “National” Society as they did not, according to her—

> represent any of the aspirations of Ireland towards woman suffrage; they did not represent the Lancashire and Cheshire textile workers, who pay, as Trade Unionists levies to send members to Parliament, but get no representation through these members; and they did not represent the thousands and tens of thousands of working women who sympathise with, and work actively in, the Women’s Social and Political Union, under the battle-cry of “Votes for Women!”\(^{30}\)

Dora’s emphasis was on democracy. At the time, she worked on the ground with a range of suffragist organizations, as well as within a socialist party, making clear she saw the demand for women’s enfranchisement on the same terms as men (a limited franchise based on property) as a stepping stone to

\(^{26}\) *New Age*, 28 July 1904.  
\(^{27}\) *New Age*, 30 June 1904.  
\(^{28}\) *New Age*, 29 January 1904.  
\(^{29}\) *New Age*, 30 June 1904.  
\(^{30}\) *Forward*, 20 October 1906.
the goal of full adult suffrage.\textsuperscript{31} Even in these early days of the WSPU, it was unusual to combine membership in the Social Democratic Federation with suffragist activity, and Dora did this in both constitutionalist and militant organizations. Although the WSPU had grown out of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the connections were already becoming more tenuous.\textsuperscript{32} The more common British combination of socialism with suffragism was membership in the ILP and the NUWSS, of which a leading example was Isabella Ford.\textsuperscript{33}

As we have seen, before the 1906 IWSA congress Dora had taken part in early forms of militancy culminating in “Fort Montefiore.” Some WSPU women had already been to prison and Dora was to be among a group of suffragist prisoners sent to Holloway later that year. At the IWSA congress she defended this new militancy, speaking “of the members of her Women’s Social and Political Union now in prison for having tried to enforce their demand of the vote in their own aggressive way rendered necessary by the tactics of their opponents.”\textsuperscript{34} Indeed, when the validity of her credentials was raised, in Dora’s account, the Dutch and Hungarian delegates wrote to the IWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt asking that Dora should be heard “on behalf of the insurgent women of England.” Dora reported that, “[t]he letter was not written in vain; and the Congress decided against the wish of Mrs Fawcett, the leader of the orthodox English “National” Union, that the Heterodox and Revolutionary delegate was to be allowed twenty minutes in which to corrupt the suffrage morals of the various countries represented.”\textsuperscript{35} Dora, the “Heterodox and Revolutionary delegate,” was now allowed to address the meeting. In accounts of the congress she was represented as, but also claimed for herself, the role of militant outsider. Despite her changing organizational affiliations, this was a space that Dora was to continue to occupy in relation to women’s transnational organizations and into which others would seek to corral her within the Socialist International. Yet she persisted in trying to bring her politics to various transnational fora in order to engage with activists well beyond her immediate experience.

Aside from attending the congress, Dora and her son were, she recalled, “most hospitably entertained by groups of students, suffrage friends from many parts of the world, and Danish families.”\textsuperscript{36} They also spent a few days holidaying by the seaside at Marienlyst before Dora saw her son off on his journey back to London. Her kind of political travelling always seemed to

\textsuperscript{31} See, for example, New Age, 14 April 1904.
\textsuperscript{33} June Hannam, Isabella Ford (Oxford 1989).
\textsuperscript{34} Bulletin of Monthly Correspondence of the IWSA, 15 September 1906.
\textsuperscript{35} Bulletin of Monthly Correspondence of the IWSA, 15 September 1906.
\textsuperscript{36} Montefiore, From a Victorian, 85.
give some space both to leisure and pleasure, as well as informal interactions with local contacts. Dora continued on to Gothenburg and then to Stockholm where she was due to speak at the Folkets hus on “Women’s Suffrage.” Travelling for three days on the Götacanal, she not only got a real sense of the local terrain, she was also able to leave the steamer as the boat negotiated the canal’s locks; here, her walks among the hills were “interspersed with chats with peasants.”

She also learned from the experiences of her fellow passengers, one of whom was the English suffragist Florence Balgarnie who was engaging in some political travels of her own. Balgarnie, an advocate of temperance, was studying the Gothenburg system for the state control of alcohol. Together they stayed at the Kronprins Hotel in Stockholm. Through her lecture on women’s suffrage, Dora met local activists who then became her guides as she sought to gain a picture of Swedish workers’ lives. Much later Dora recalled one guide in particular: Miss Anna Lindhagen, sister of the Mayor of Stockholm, who was also one of the founders of the Swedish social democratic women’s committee and one of the first women in Stockholm’s local government. As an activist herself, Anna Lindhagen was able to take Dora not just to interesting galleries and museums—for she did not eschew the interests of the conventional tourist—but also to the kind of places which were well-off the tourist trail. Dora was particularly captivated by newly constructed working-class housing which impressed her because it was extremely well-thought out from the working woman’s point of view, both in terms of labour-saving devices and also, as importantly, aesthetically.

After her brief visit to Stockholm, Dora travelled on by sea to Helsinki in Finland.

Once in Finland, as she later recalled, “the real object of my journey began—to find out how the Finnish women had gained their political emancipation.” This involved a close study of Finnish, Swedish, and Russian history as well as participation in the fast-moving events around her. She attended the final meeting of the Chamber of Nobles before they were dissolved as part of the new democratic constitution. When she got to know Minna Sillanpää and some of the other working women’s leaders, they helped her to understand more fully the meaning of the scene she had witnessed and the reasons for the success of the Finnish women. In particular, Dora was struck by the crucial role of the mobilisation of domestic servants, of whom Sillanpää was the organizer, and who, at the eleventh hour, joined in the general strike. This gave the signal to include women in the franchise which

37 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 86.
40 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 87.
was then won “by a stroke of the pen of an autocrat.”41 While in Finland Dora also benefited from the help of feminists such as Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg and Annie Furuhjelm, who had attended the IWSA congress in Copenhagen the month before.42 They not only facilitated her research in the university library, they also, as she later recalled “put me in the way of visiting many schools, institutions and art collections, and at their houses I met most cultured and delightful circles of friends, all of whom helped to make my visit to Finland a very happy spot in my memory.”43 Dora also found time to make a rush visit to St. Petersburg, where she spent a day with literary friends. The city was under martial law and her friends’ flat had been raided by the police the previous night. Even when a visit like this one had no explicit political purpose, Dora was acquiring experiences which would inform her judgements and practices as a political woman.44 Soon after the trip to Russia, Dora’s visit to Finland was over. She sailed from Helsinki to England, arriving at Hull on 16 September 1906.

Dora’s trip to Finland caused some contention back in England. It allowed some to poke fun. The West London Observer commented: “It is believed that Mr Asquith would gladly subscribe to a small fund to send the rest of the suffragettes with her, in the hope that their investigations would be prolonged out there—that, in fact, they would never Finnish.”45 Fort Montefiore had made Dora a recognizable public figure as a suffrage activist. This in turn made some of her socialist comrades uncomfortable. When Dora announced that she was going to Finland, Herbert Burrows (a fellow SDFer) publicly criticised her for using her foreign trips to misrepresent British suffrage politics to an international audience: “If Mrs Montefiore cannot really work for it she might at least leave off talking about ‘solidarity’ of the workers. I hope the Finnish women will teach her what real suffrage means.”46 Here from one of the SDF’s leading pamphleteers on the woman question was a reminder of the SDF’s view that the only acceptable socialist position on the franchise was adult suffrage and even that was not a political priority.47 Dora Montefiore’s by now longstanding and increasingly notorious activism for women’s suffrage, which predated her membership in the SDF, was what rankled Burrows.

41 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 89.
42 Annie Furuhjelm became a Vice President of the IWSA in 1909 and was a Member of Parliament in Finland from 1913–29 (Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Kloosterman, eds., Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Suffrage Alliance, 1902–42 (Columbus, Ohio 1990) 16, 85.
43 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 90.
44 For example, later in her career she would have to evade police surveillance.
45 West London Observer, 31 August 1906.
46 Justice, 1 September 1906.
Dora had replied to Burrows from Helsinki. She took the opportunity to give her reading of the state of transnational suffragism in 1906 and her place within it. She reminded him that she had represented two suffrage societies at the recent congress in Copenhagen (the WSPU and the Hammersmith Suffrage Society), one militant and one constitutionalist. At the IWSA, she said, there were women from almost every European state, from America, and “from our various colonies”:

I venture to say that every one of these delegates (with the exception, perhaps, of the half dozen sent by the so-called English “national” Suffrage Society) were Adult Suffragists, as I myself am; but, as each country possessed its own, more or less complicated franchise basis, so each country provided a different problem for the women working therein for their emancipation; and in each country this problem resolved itself into a question of tactics.

It was these tactics which were discussed in public meetings of the congress and more privately among the socialist group of delegates. Dora then went on to explain how women had recently achieved adult suffrage in Finland—through a general strike. She structured her narration of the Finnish victory to make a point to her domestic audience:

Those six days of darkness, of lack of most of the necessaries of life and civilisation, brought both Liberals and Conservatives to their knees, and the three parties coalesced for the time in a general demand for Adult Suffrage. Other factors that made for victory were the complete organization of the workers (including domestic servants) in the ranks of Social Democracy, and the self-abnegation of the nobility, who voluntarily renounced their privileges as hereditary legislators. As we cannot at present hope in England for the apparition of either of these most desirable factors; and—as far as I know—Comrade Burrows has not yet begun to organize for a general strike, I and my friends shall continue our campaign of “Votes for Women” in the hope that by educating the women to demand the vote we may obtain it before long for all women.

Dora’s Scandinavian travels left her “much invigorated by contact with congenial spirits in various countries.” But this was not just about renewing her energies in order to face the increasing demands of the struggle. Having investigated the Finnish achievement for herself, Dora’s conclusions about Finland were now to feature in her propaganda work. Speaking on her return to England with Mrs. Pankhurst and Flora Drummond at a WSPU meeting in Bury, Manchester, Dora used her Finnish experience to justify militancy and her belief that the ultimate goal of suffrage activism was adult suffrage. She argued that recent events in Finland showed that people who were outside

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48 *Justice*, 15 September 1906.
49 *Justice*, 15 September 1906.
the Constitution could not work by constitutional methods; that it was only by getting the sex disability removed that adult suffrage could be achieved; and that women’s enfranchisement had not resulted in the dominance of women in public life (an anxiety of anti-suffragists). 51

As Dora began to give more extensive lectures and to write articles on Finland, she drew a picture of a society, little known to a British audience, that was “the land of free womanhood”:

Women are everywhere, work at everything, succeed apparently in most things. Both men and women with whom I have talked seem to agree that the evolutional forces which have emancipated women are co-education, the very large and important share taken by women in the work of the country..., and the way women have stood by men, and shown their solidarity with men in the various political causes through which Finland has recently passed. 52

Her highest profile meeting on Finland was held later in 1906, after her release from Holloway, at the South Place Institute, Finsbury (a well known venue for progressive meetings). The radical journalist and women’s suffrage supporter, W.T. Stead, was in the chair and the meeting was also attended by the Mayor of Hammersmith. This was the borough where Dora lived, and where she was active locally in suffrage politics and with other socialists on the local Distress Committee. The meeting was reprised on behalf of the Hammersmith Suffrage Society at Hammersmith Town Hall a few days later. Although initially presented as an example of exotic tourism—her “tour of the land of the lakes” would be illustrated, the adverts announced, with a series of lantern views, many taken by the lecturer herself—Dora left her audience in no doubt of the purpose that underlay such travel. The West London Observer noted that “Mrs Montefiore prefaced her description of Finland by saying the only way of learning to ‘think Imperially’ was to hear something about empires past and present. Such studies, she thought, would make them not imperial, but international, thinkers.” 53 Dora said that people had the wrong impression of Finland as a bleak and half-civilised country and people. After all, the Finns had obtained home rule from Russia and universal suffrage. It was her contention that their political emancipation had been brought about largely by the revival of national folklore, art, and literature. In her view, Finland was a beautiful country and “the land of schools” with an education system better than any other in Europe. It was her description of the range of paid work undertaken by Finnish women (whether in banks, on steamers, or as building labourers) which particularly caught her audience’s attention, or so the West London Observer noted.

51 Manchester Guardian, 19 September 1906.
52 Dora B. Montefiore, “First Impressions of Finland,” The Race Builder, October 1906. This article was also discussed in New Age, 11 October 1906.
Observer reported, choosing to emphasize the more colourful rather than the didactic aspects of Dora’s talk.

When Dora lectured for the ILP in Hammersmith on “Socialism in Scandinavia,” the political message was more explicit. For Dora, Scandinavian workers, women as well as men, were better organized than in England and had managed to achieve far more effective labour bureaux for the unemployed (an interest of hers in England), as well as better housing conditions. She felt that such comparisons underlined the need for British working men to organize and maintain solidarity as, she argued, these foreign examples showed that no government could resist the organized demands of the workers. She implied that understanding how working people in other countries had made real advances could itself be the spur to domestic political action. At the close of 1906 she reviewed the year’s suffrage politics in England and saw the success of Finnish women as a crucial example:

Could not the working women of England make use of the stream they [the Finnish women] have already set running in their direction, and uniting with it the great tide of democratic demand for equality of opportunity, force universal Adult Suffrage in the place of manhood suffrage, and thus range themselves side by side with the freed women of Finland?

The year 1906 had been crucial for Dora’s own suffrage politics. She had always stressed that the suffrage she sought was for working women. This was a position she had arrived at before she called herself a socialist. She was not alone in expressing her support for one demand (women’s suffrage on the same terms as men’s) as a means to achieve the full demand (adult suffrage). It had been the emphasis on working-class women in the early propaganda of the WSPU which had attracted her to the new organization. In January 1904 she announced to her readers in New Age that she had joined the WSPU and called on others to do likewise. She was to be an organizer, public speaker, and militant for the cause. Indeed, in 1906 her personal militancy escalated to a significant degree while at the same time her understanding of the politics of the WSPU came into tension with other leading members, particularly Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. During that year Dora described herself as one of “we women agitators” and talked of “revolutionary methods.” She described the WSPU to the IWSA congress in Copenhagen as “a movement of working women led by Socialist women of intellect and culture, bringing to downtrodden women the gospel of their

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54 West London Observer, 21 December 1906.
55 New Age, 3 January 1907.
56 See Hunt, “Journeying Through Suffrage”.
57 New Age, 7 January 1904.
58 New Age, 5 April 1906; 10 May 1906.
This was a view increasingly at variants with the WSPU leadership whose antipathy toward a socialist analysis of suffrage had become more explicit from the summer of 1906 when Christabel Pankhurst unilaterally introduced a policy of opposing Labour as well as Liberal candidates at by-elections. \(^{59}\) By early 1907 Dora was no longer a member of the WSPU. Sandra Holton argues that Dora was the first of the original leadership to be expelled, probably because of resentment at the personal following that she was building up within the London WSPU. \(^{60}\) In her autobiography, Dora said somewhat enigmatically, “I broke off my working relations with the WSPU.” \(^{61}\) From that point on she identified as an unequivocal adult suffragist, no longer being convinced that the limited demand could be an effective means to achieving full enfranchisement. From 1907, she worked as part of the Adult Suffrage Society. By 1911 she was arguing that “[b]eneath the suffragette skirt peeps the cloven hoof of extension of political power to property and privilege.” \(^{62}\) Increasingly she saw suffrage as a class issue, even claiming against limited women’s suffrage that “[t]his movement is a desperate and spasmodic effort of entrenched capitalism to keep back the rising waves of democracy.” \(^{63}\) For Dora, the Finnish example countered the continual disparaging of adult suffrage within Britain as a utopian demand or even as a wrecking one; for example, Teresa Billington Greig argued that adult suffrage “was obviously raised to postpone our equality measure.” \(^{64}\) As it was universal suffrage rather than a partial property-based female franchise which had been achieved by the first European country to enfranchise women, the publicizing of the Finnish example could give considerable weight and political legitimacy to the demands of adult suffragists like Dora Montefiore.

Dora narrated the achievement of women’s suffrage in Finland to audiences in Britain and beyond in a particular way. The fact that the full democratic demand had been won without the kind of compromises which featured in the mainstream demand for women’s enfranchisement on the same terms as men was clearly important to her representation of the Finnish victory. But so too was the crucial role of a labour movement in which even women servants were organized (not an area of work which many in the British movement saw as a fruitful area for organization). Yet, Dora later recalled that what had seemed such a persuasive and hopeful achievement to a so-

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\(^{59}\) New Age, 16 August 1906.


\(^{62}\) Montefiore, From a Victorian, p.108.

\(^{63}\) The Socialist (Melbourne), 10 March 1911.

\(^{64}\) The Maoriland Worker, 11 August 1911.


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cialist woman who supported adult suffrage was not always heard in this way by her audiences:

To speak of getting the vote for women through a general strike, followed by an autocratic stroke of the pen of the Sovereign was too much like a comic opera for English psychology, and when the English press announced that the first woman to be elected to the Finnish Parliament under the new Constitution was a servant..., the whole affair seemed to be outside the bounds of “practical politics.”

Indeed, she felt that when she laid the “facts” she had discovered before English suffragists and at public meetings, “I found unfortunately, that they were as bewildered by them as were Continental and American audiences.” This was because few understood the differences between those who argued for limited women’s suffrage and those who insisted on adult suffrage.

Dora was not the only person who brought the Finnish suffrage story to a British audience. Some Finnish women also managed to give an account of their victory. Baroness Alexandra Gripenberg, novelist and long-time women’s rights advocate, published her account of “The Great Victory in Finland” in The Englishwoman’s Review. Gripenberg, whom Dora had met in Helsinki, stressed how important the strategy of demanding universal suffrage had been to the women’s success, both for getting male support and for ensuring that women were included in any reform. She, unsurprisingly, placed less stress on the role of the labour movement and suggested that the Social Democrats were not happy with the fact that the qualifying age for the vote was 24 and not 21 as they had wanted. Gripenberg even suggested that women Social Democrats might, as a protest, refuse to exercise their new voting rights.

For Dora, the example of Finland remained relevant and provided a stimulus to her evolving propaganda work as a socialist woman. Long after her Scandinavian visit, Dora continued to network with Finnish women and write articles about women’s position in Finland. In 1909 when the IWSA met in London, the leading socialist women Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai stayed at Dora’s home in Hammersmith. Dora said of the visit, “It has been a great help and refreshment to me.” An additional guest was “an emotional Finnish woman,” according to Kollontai. This was Aino Malm-

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66 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 89–90.
67 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 89.
70 Justice, 15 May 1909.
berg who stayed on with Dora after the congress as she was writing a pamphlet for the Women’s Freedom League (WFL) on how Finnish women had achieved adult suffrage. Dora reported the presence of this visitor to her readers in *Justice*, where she was now editing the women’s column. Apparently Malmberg was having trouble with her project as the WFL had asked for all references to Finnish Social Democrats to be removed. Dora made the point that this was a rewriting of the past as the Social Democrats’ agitation had been one of the factors in obtaining this political reform. Dora could not believe that this censorship had been undertaken with the consent of either Charlotte Despard or Teresa Billington Greig (leaders of the WFL) as they were both also members of socialist organizations. This episode therefore allowed her to underscore the centrality of socialists to the suffrage campaign—an issue which by 1909 was becoming more and more contentious in Britain.

Dora was also still in contact with Finnish activists and made use of these networks in domestic politics. She got the latest news from Finland from Hilja Parsinen, who she had met at the Socialist Women’s International Congress in Stuttgart in 1907, and passed this on to the adult suffrage demonstration held in London in April 1909. Now that the vote was won in Finland, it was important, from Dora’s point of view, to focus on the nature of post-enfranchisement women’s politics in that country. The lesson, she felt, was clear: the class struggle did not end with the achievement of suffrage rights. Dora used Parsinen’s report of the class conflict between Social Democrat and “reactionary” women members of the Finnish Diet to make a point against the politics of the rival British socialist organization, the ILP. The ILP’s paper *Labour Leader* had reported that there were now 25 lady members in the Finnish Diet. Dora countered:

> The point for us Socialists to record is surely not how many “lady members” there were or are in a National parliament, but how many Socialist women members have been elected, and to point out that the fight between the class interests of women Socialists and of all middle-class women is as keen inside Parliament as outside.

For Dora, the Finnish example showed not only that adult suffrage could be achieved, particularly if the socialist movement took a lead, but also that the persistence of class politics would always undercut any cross-class alliance between women. It was as a socialist woman advocating a woman-focused socialism that Dora made her politics at home and it was this identity which underpinned the transnational networks she participated in.

When the American socialist women’s monthly *Progressive Woman* profiled Dora in August 1909, it was as a well-travelled political woman with

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extensive contacts. It was announced that she had been invited to come to
the United States to share the insights she had gained through her trans-
national interactions by giving lectures on “Socialism in Many Lands” and
the “Position of Women in Many Lands.” American readers were informed
that Dora had begun her work in Australia, and had spoken for socialism and
suffrage in France, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Hungary. The special
visit she had made to Finland was highlighted; its purpose was to “learn how
the Finns have obtained their democratic constitution under the autocratic
suzerainty of the tsar.”74 When Dora travelled in the US in 1910, she contin-
ued to draw on her Finnish experiences and personal connections. She told a
New York audience how much she had learned from meeting Minna Sillan-
päää, whose life story was evidently so different from that of the middle-class
Montefiore. Minna had started working as a domestic when she was ten
years old, was self-educated, and had become an organizer of other servants.
She eventually became one of the first Social Democrat women to be elected
to the Finnish Diet where she did “excellent work” until the Diet was swept
away by the tsar. Apart from drawing attention to the fickle behaviour of
autocrats and the temporary nature of anything wrung from them, the Fin-
nish story Dora used also emphasized the need for class-conscious men and
women to work together in politics and in the trade union movement as they
had done, and were doing, in Finland.75 This analysis was partly for the bene-
fit of Dora’s American audience, showing that an internationalist practice
could be built from such transnationalist connections and examples, but it
also reflected her judgement that radical movements which were divided
along the lines of gender (the masculinist labour movement, the women’s
suffrage movement) were fatally flawed. Dora was impressed with the
women comrades that she met in the US and, once again, drew comparisons
with what she had seen in Finland:

There is no doubt in my mind that the reason why women, both in Finland
and in the United States, take a better position in our movement than they do
in other countries is that they have been educated side by side with the men—
mutual knowledge of and real respect for each being the result.76

Whether this was an accurate view of the gender politics of either the Fin-
nish or the American socialist movement is less important here than the fact
that once again Montefiore was deploying foreign examples within British
politics.77 These comparisons had power for the British audience to whom they

74 *Progressive Woman*, August 1909.
75 *New York Call*, 21 May 1910.
76 *Justice*, 6 August 1910.
77 For the gender politics of these national socialist movements see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women
and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana, IL 1981); Maria Lähteenmäki, “To the Mar-
gins and Back? The Role of Women in the Finnish Labour Movement in the Twentieth
were addressed as they were drawn from the direct observations of someone who by now was recognized as a well-travelled international socialist.\footnote{At one of her earliest public meetings in Australia in 1911 Montefiore spoke on “Why I Am an International Socialist,” (International Socialist [Sydney], 11 March 1911).}

After her American trip, Dora returned to England and then attended the International Socialist Congress (both the main congress and the women’s conference) in Copenhagen. In October 1910 she left London on her longest trip to date, to Australia and then to South Africa. She did not return to Britain until September 1912. Her experiences in these two examples of the White Dominions of the British Empire were to crystallize changes of emphasis within her own politics as she reached toward the possibility of an internationalism which challenged hierarchies based on class, gender, and race. She was still committed to the fight for adult suffrage, launching a new journal Adult Suffragist in July 1914.\footnote{For the announcement of the first number of the bi-weekly Adult Suffragist, see Daily Herald, 1 July 1914.} However, her earlier Finnish travels now had less resonance for her immediate political priorities which centred on the fight against imperialism and militarism. This was reflected in her domestic propaganda where her comparative examples were now much more likely to come from Australia and South Africa.

So what can we conclude from this one example of Dora Montefiore’s travelling? What was the relationship between her international travel and her politics? Travel clearly had a practical effect on Dora. It could provide relaxation and respite from the demands of politics. Conversely, travel also provided stimulation to her as a political woman. She could find challenges to her ideas and access experiences very different from her own. Most of all she recognized that for her travel “knitted up the bonds of comradeship” and made her feel “how vital and vibrating was the force of international Socialism.”\footnote{Justice, 11 June 1910; 28 May 1910.} Like many of her comrades, she could make statements which sounded purely rhetorical. When she left for Australia in 1910 she cabled from on board ship: “The circle of the workers and the fighters is being linked up, and the Red Flag waves all around the world.” Yet her journalism and her behaviour as more than a political tourist suggests the energy she gave to, and derived from, her travelling encounters. Although she talked disparagingly of “political globe-trotters” she clearly did not see herself as one.\footnote{Daily Herald, 25 August 1913.} She painted a picture which was far less about being a passive observer and much more about her own personal and political engagement. So as she left for her visit to the United States, she explained to the readers of her column “Our Women’s Circle” in Justice—
[as I know from correspondents who write me from time to time, I have “Circle” friends and comrades in many parts, and I hope not to break the link formed by this column in “Justice”, but perhaps to strengthen it, whilst on my travels, for I hope to learn much about the American movement, and to meet face to face some of those splendid women comrades who write for the “New York Call” and for the “Progressive Woman”. The joy of Socialism is that we find friends and comrades and fellow-workers in every land. So I only leave for a time to find others: I only turn my back on Socialist work of one sort to plunge into Socialist work of another sort.]

Dora sustained many of these friendships through correspondence and particularly through echoing the hospitality that she herself so often encountered on her travels. This applied as much to leading women figures such as Clara Zetkin, whom she last met up with in Moscow in 1924, as to many lesser known figures, such as the Russian emigrés who met at Dora’s home in the early years of the century.

As for the specific effect of her travels on British women’s politics, this is more amorphous. Dora reported on her experiences to British audiences (suffragists, socialists, and other progressives) both in person through public meetings, lectures, and speeches at demonstrations, and in the press. Almost invariably, she used her interpretation of a particular foreign experience to make a propagandist point. Rather than relating her adventures and encounters, she used specific examples to support the case she was making. She also used her foreign contacts to bring new experiences and perspectives to British politics so that those who were unable to travel could share what she had learned from the “many inspiring and inspired Socialist workers” that she had met. More specifically still, Dora’s example showed to her audiences how one could begin to translate internationalist aspirations into an internationalist practice. This of course worked both ways, for at the same time Dora was using international examples to serve national ends, she was also taking her reading of British women’s politics to an international audience. This often did not go unchallenged, as in her disputes with other British women socialists, particularly Margaret MacDonald, at the Socialist Women’s International Congresses.

Dora was determined that as an internationalist, the politics she made and in which she took part should not be parochial. This was a political practice premised on making connections; after all, her political journey had begun by connecting her experience (as a disenfranchised widow with no right of guardianship over her children) to that of other women. When she became a socialist, she never saw a contradiction between her middle-class background and her increasing espousal of revolutionary politics. It was her experiences, conversations, and campaigning with people

82 Justice, 30 April 1910.
83 Montefiore, From a Victorian, 70.
84 See Hunt, “The Immense Meaning of It All".
of other classes, nations, and later races which fuelled her politics as a socialist, then communist, woman.

Dora was engaged in many ways in a form of transnational practice. She made connections across national borders and between the parallel universes of the socialist and women’s internationals. This was not always easy nor was she always successful, as her right to participate was often challenged. But for her the connections themselves could empower. It was not simply a case of transferring one set of practices, arguments, or tactics from one country to another. She was not just arguing that ideas or methods successful in Finland or Australia should or could work in Britain. But her travels did give her a sense of new possibilities and challenges, as well as international solidarity. Travelling not only enriched Montefiore’s own politics, it enabled her to connect with others. In Melbourne in 1910, she had spoken for nearly one and a half hours on “The English Movement and Internationalism.” It was reported that she “held the rapt attention of her delighted and appreciative listeners. Applause was frequent and the speaker’s points sharp and telling.”  

Most of all it enabled other activists who had no prospect of attending an international conference or engaging in any kind of foreign travel to feel that they too could aspire to internationalism. As one woman SDFer said of Dora’s column in *Justice*, she welcomed news of “the organized fight of the working women in those lands against the forces of tyranny and reaction. We recognize that we are one with them, and our hearts rejoice.” This was the kind of dividend that Dora’s brand of transnationalist practice could produce. Travelling was never very easy in Dora’s lifetime but it could be personally and politically productive.

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85 *The Socialist* (Melbourne), 16 December 1910.
86 *Justice*, 1 May 1909.
The sound of the *Internationale*, the rousing hymn of the international socialist movement, provided a stirring and emotional moment for many left-wing women when they left their own nation to attend political meetings and conferences in other nations. Jessica Mitford, an ex-patriate British communist living in the US, recalled how she loved hearing the song, even though she had the words “tis the final conflict” confused as “it’s a fine old conflict.” The ritual of performing the song symbolized an international fraternity and sisterhood of like-minded socialists, and later communists, both those primarily dedicated to a class-based struggle, as well as a minority who saw women’s and class emancipation as closely linked. While feminist historians have provided insightful discussions of women’s international efforts which emerged from, and built, formal organizations, we have spent less time exploring the less formal rituals, practices, correspondence, and personal connections that allowed political women to debate, organize, and bond across national borders. These connections were often intertwined with more formal institutional ones, but they might be more ephemeral and temporary, subject to the vicariousness of personal connections, volatile state regimes, and changing political loyalties; as a consequence, they left fewer tangible records for historians. Moreover, scholarship to date has focused on the US and European nations, and on liberal feminist organizing, perhaps taking socialist internationalism for granted, given socialists’ long-standing claims to represent “human” rather than national interests.

This paper discusses three examples of attempts by women on the left to “transcend the nation towards a wider community,” in order to advance the
cause of women and socialism. Drawing on the history of the Canadian left, I will examine the cross-border connections of both socialist/social democratic and communist women by looking at the practice of political tourism, the creation of a diasporic left-ethnic press, and the exchange of political advice through letter writing as three examples of international organizing in-the-making. Many of these practices were linked, in some way, to formal parties or organizations that also provided an essential network for women committed to either social democratic or communist principles. Formal organizations offered inspiration, policy discussions, and leadership that either bound women to parties, or united women across a number of political parties, as did the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). However, formal structures might also seriously constrict debate on women’s equality and dictate policy, as did the Comintern after Stalinism triumphed in the late 1920s. Also, within national parties, both social democratic and communist, women’s emancipation was sometimes accorded low status in the hierarchy of political priorities.

The implications of internationalism, as Perry Anderson writes, are often assumed to be “positive,” in contrast to more negative and contested suspicions of “narrow” nationalism, yet those of us still inspired by the sound of the Internationale should not gloss over a more complex history. Politics pursued under the nomenclature of internationalism also had problematic and destructive moments, not only on the left, when Comintern representatives advocated torturing other leftists in Spain, but also on the right, as fascists from various nations found inspiration from each other through writing and travel. Canada’s foremost dame of consumption, Lady Flora Eaton, the wife of a department store magnate and an advocate of eugenics at home, travelled to Italy in the thirties and returned to write of her positive encounters with Italian fascism, which, she pointed out, had cleaned the beggars off the streets and away from the cathedrals. While ostensibly calling up notions of universal humanity, connectedness and cooperation, interna-

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4 I am going to refer to these women as “social democratic” in this paper, even though some would have referred to themselves as socialists, both in Canada and abroad. Most believed in a peaceful, evolutionary path to socialism, rather than revolution, even though some continued to read Marx and Engels, and call for the end to relations of private property.
5 Our views of nationalism also vary according to region, culture, and nation; in Canada, French Canadian feminists have a more positive view of nationalism than some European feminists. See Jill Vickers and Micheline de Sève, “Introduction,” Journal of Canadian Studies, 35/2 (Summer 2000), 5–34; Joan Sangster, “Archiving Feminist Histories: Women, the ‘nation’ and Metanarratives in Canadian Historical Writing,” Women’s Studies International Forum, 29/3 (2006), 255–64.
6 Stanley Payne, The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union and Communism (New Haven 2004).
7 Rod McQueen, The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada’s Royal Family (Toronto 1999), 73–4.
tionalism could take many political paths, some of which were destructive to women’s equality and to human rights more generally.

Women’s international organizing in the decades after World War I also had very distinct class, ethnic, and racial biases, tensions, and boundaries, despite claims and organizing attempts to the contrary. Interwar organizations set up by women who had “woman identified” politics, as Leila Rupp points out, tended to come from middle-class, white, European, and North American backgrounds, as well as former colonies represented by white, not Indigenous, women. There were some women’s organizations with a wider membership, such as the WILPF, which drew in socialist women from a range of social backgrounds, but the Women’s [Suffrage] Alliance and the International Council of Women were, primarily run by more privileged and educated women. Those in their midst who appeared to embrace socialist free love ideals were disdained; the Alliance’s notion of a nice gift for its long-time supporter, Lady Aberdeen, was a motor car—a rather clear marker of class distinction.8

Social democratic women occasionally found common cause (especially on questions of peace) with these liberal, gender-identified feminists, but they, and certainly communist women, usually distinguished themselves from this group, referred to in polemical parlance as the “bourgeois women’s movement.” Liberal feminism had not always defined international women’s organizing. An earlier 19th century practice of women’s internationalism, argues Bonnie Anderson, was characterized by far more radical ideas relating to sexuality, gender relations, and private property9—a reminder that we need to avoid a “whig” view of women’s internationalism in which radicalism and organization automatically grow over time. By World War I, both liberal feminist and socialist women’s organizations existed on the international scene, with the latter usually loyal to social democratic and socialist political parties of the Second International. In the wake of the nationalist retraction and horror of World War I, these contacts were sundered, though they were resurrected again when the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), discussed in this volume by Silke Neunsinger, was re-formed in 1923. The LSI remained a fairly de-centralized group, however, with some of its member groups increasingly threatened by fascism.

In contrast to the LSI, the Comintern emerged after the Bolshevik revolution as a more centralized and disciplined organization, and by the late 1920s it was determined to guide the practice of national communist parties; this guidance included advice from the Comintern’s Women’s Secretariat on the organization of women across many nations. The Comintern had a complex, changing, and sometimes contradictory effect on women’s communist

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8 Rupp, Worlds of Women. Rupp’s book is noteworthy as it does include discussion of women’s personal connections and networks.
9 Anderson, Joyous Greetings, 27.
organizing in Canada: though at times an energizing force, offering new ideas on theory and practice, it could also stifle attention to women’s oppression and separate women’s organizing, denying that gender inequality was anything other than a mere reflection of capitalism.¹⁰

Left-wing women’s international organizing in the three decades after the Great War was therefore diverse. It varied over time, it reflected various socialist, social democratic, and communist points of view, and it was linked to formal organizations and parties in decidedly different ways. The following are three examples of women’s political communication that established and sustained international links across borders in the three decades following World War I; these connections played a role in fostering internationalist sentiment on the “home” front just as they did for the women who travelled across borders.

The 1920s: The power of print and the diasporic Ukrainian Press

By the end of World War I, there was an established tradition of Canadian women’s political communication across national borders through suffrage organizing, the peace movement inaugurated in 1915 at The Hague, the circulation of socialist newspapers, and also through personal friendships and letters. When Canadian women attempted to start labourite and socialist parties before World War I, for example, they naturally turned to their British Labour Party (BLP) counterpart, Margaret MacDonald, for advice and support.¹¹ After the war, farm, socialist, and labour newspapers with women’s sections, such as Violet MacNaughton’s columns in the Western Producer, continued to offer a vehicle for political discussion and connection across national borders. Further left, the Canadian Communist Party’s paper for women, The Woman Worker, published until 1929, was an innovative experiment that offered a more revolutionary view of women’s needs and politics, though it drew astutely on the views and writing of some social democratic and non-party members as well.¹²

Especially interesting from an international perspective was the non-Anglo “ethnic” press that circulated across multiple borders, facilitating a transnational discussion of women’s oppression within capitalism and their role in left-wing politics. The Canadian communist newspaper for Ukrainian women, Robitnytsia, [The Working Woman] became a model of international communication in the interwar period, publishing material from Euro-

¹² Margaret Hobbs and Joan Sangster, eds., The Woman Worker (St. Johns 1999).
pean, American, Canadian, and even some South American correspondents. While it was clearly designed to draw readers to the communist cause, both in Canada and internationally, the paper also saw its role more generally as aiding the political education of marginalized, oppressed, and illiterate Ukrainian women, as well as encouraging the political education of Ukrainian men who were far too unreceptive to women’s participation in the left.13

Robitnytsia bore some resemblance to Gleichheit, Clara Zetkin’s socialist newspaper for women. While it was edited from Germany, Gleichheit published reports drawn from women in other European countries; it was an educational tool intended to foster an international socialist politics for women. Robitnytsia, in contrast, spoke directly to women’s cultural and ethnic identity, attempting also to reach out to those unaffiliated with a left-wing party. It must be situated within an international diasporic Ukrainian community of socialist and later communist activists, many of whom were also writers. Since the late 19th century, many Ukrainians, especially from Galicia, had immigrated to North America in search of better economic lives and increased political freedom. In Canada, Ukrainian socialists established new political groupings, parties, and newspapers, often centred in the prairie West. After the Russian Revolution, some Canadian Ukrainian socialists created a new language-based federation, the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association (ULFTA), which was loosely allied with the Communist Party.14 Only a minority of ULFTA adherents were actually party members; it drew on a wider circle of Ukrainian leftists, motivated by their experience of poverty and class exploitation, their sympathies for the Bolshevik revolution, and also their strong ethnic-cultural identity—one might even say “nationalist” feeling.15 ULFTA offered first and second generation Canadian-Ukrainians a form of collective pride in their history, culture, and language in a new country where they were often seen as ignorant and uncultured, far from the preferred Anglo “white” immigrant.16

14 ULFTA members were a mainstay of support for the Communist Party, even if they were also marginalized and derided by the party’s Anglo-British leadership, which in the 1920s and early 1930s was locked in ongoing inner-party battles with ULFTA. Both sides appealed to the Comintern to support their own position. Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC), Comintern papers, reel 8 K 276, file 59, Central Executive Committee (CEC) Minutes, 5 February 1928 and file 64, 26 May 1928.
16 On ULFTA see Peter Krawchuk, Our History: The Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Movement in Canada, 1907–1991 (Toronto 1996) and on the nature of Ukrainian immigration, Mariusia
The monthly rhythm and rituals of articles in Robitnytsia, published by ULFTA from 1924 to 1936, was deliberately constructed around international struggles, testimonials, and themes, all intended to incur internationalist Ukrainian-socialist sentiment. January often commemorated the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, while February marked Lenin’s death, and March was dedicated to discussions of International Women’s Day. March issues of the paper might also discuss the Paris Commune, with special attention to Louisa Michell and the revered Ukrainian poet, Tara Shevchenko. June marked the death of Ukrainian poet Ivan Franko, September the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, and November came to be associated with the deaths of Stepan Milnychuk, Petro Sheremeta, and Ivan Tsepko, three revolutionaries killed in the Western Ukraine, still under Polish rule, in 1922. Religious holidays, of course, were jettisoned, with these dates used instead to challenge the “opiate” of religious belief, assumed by Robitnytsia’s male editors to especially control women’s minds and loyalties.

Edited through most of its formative years in the 1920s by a creative and dynamic Ukrainian Bolshevik, poet, journalist, and playwright, Myroslav Irchan, the paper could draw on his literary connections in the Ukraine and to “Hart” an international web of ex-patriate Ukrainian writer-revolutionaries. There were poems and articles by Myroslava Sopilka, described as a “worker-poet” from Galicia, running from 1928 to 1930, including one description of the Polish police searching her apartment and seizing Robitnytsia as a banned newspaper. Because of the strong cultural orientation of the paper, it featured articles on well-known female Ukrainian artists and writers like Lesya Ukrainka, as well as poems by female correspondents coming from as far away as Argentina.

The paper thus was a form of international communication, designed to develop bonds of solidarity, as well as convey information about women’s

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17 On the creation of internationalist feeling through celebration, see Andrée Lévesque, “Anniversaires et manifestations des camarades: la culture internationale et l’identitaire communistes au Canada pendant l’entre-guerres,” Labour/Le Travail, 49 (Spring 2002), 83–92.


19 This is probably a pseudonym to protect her identity. See Joan Sangster, “Robitnytsia,” 71.

20 Robitnytsia (hereafter R), 1 July 1929, 389 and 1 February 1929, 143.
Robitnytsia announced a “festival of labour” on its May Day cover, 1 May 1926.
lives across many borders. Within North America, it served not only Canadians, but also Americans, whose own Ukrainian communist paper for women lasted only a brief period of time in 1919 before collapsing.\(^{21}\) Ukrainian women’s groups in the US subsequently secured subscriptions to *Robitnytsia* and in some issues a significant proportion of the letters came from US correspondents. The “Rosa Luxemburg” Ukrainian women’s organization in New York City secured a bulk order of thirty papers for its members, claiming this was not enough to satisfy the demand for this “popular” organ, and subsequently raising some money to support the growth of the paper.\(^{22}\) *Robitnytsia*, noted another women’s organization in the US, named for Ukrainian writer Lesya Ukrainka, provided the group with “spiritual food” for its political organizing.\(^{23}\) American correspondents also submitted articles ranging from a denunciation of the deleterious effects of alcohol on the family to tales of women’s exploitation in factory jobs and commentary on the use of exiled white Russian officers and generals—“litter of the Soviet Union”—in Hollywood films.\(^{24}\)

Some of the foreign female correspondents were also eager to engage in the “porcupinism” debate that raged in the paper from 1929 to 1930. Described as the “most significant” debate about women’s political role in the history of the newspaper, “porcupinism” was a word play on the pen name of a particularly chauvinist and misogynist writer who contributed an article completely denouncing the idea of women’s involvement in politics. His polemic went beyond a call for their return to the domestic sphere, acerbically denigrating their intelligence, capabilities, and character. Probably intended deliberately to incite discussion, the article was followed by appreciative letters and articles from some chauvinist male supporters, but also many responses from outraged opponents. The latter group included men who advocated on women’s behalf (though some were quite paternalistic in their arguments), as well as many women correspondents who disputed the “porcupine’s” arguments one by one. The debate became a forum for Ukrainian women to argue why they should be involved in politics, and also for them to detail the many barriers—not the least of which was their unending domestic labour—to their political participation. The debate became an international one, as writers from Europe and the US joined in. One American from Detroit claimed to have followed the debate “with pleasure,” agreeing heartily with another contributor who saw porcupinism as “deeply incorporated into the consciousness of simple men and even working men.

\(^{22}\) “Success of the Working Woman,” *R*, 1 August 1924, 39–40.
\(^{23}\) “Working Women Unite!” *R*, 1 August 1924, 40.
activists in the U.S.A.” The discussion about women’s role simply proved that Canadian and American workers should engage in more mutual work and understanding, joining together to “fight porcupinism, capitalism, and any other ‘ism’ to spread education, solidarity and comrade love among the Ukrainian masses.”25 The ongoing debate extended across the Atlantic, with the Ukrainian female poet, Sopilka, also participating in the critique of the porcupine’s views.

Robitnytsia’s strong internationalist inclinations during the 1920s were encouraged by its creative and cosmopolitan editor, Irchan, who returned to the Ukraine to re-join the revolution in 1929, only to be executed by Stalin in 1937. Ironically, one of the last pieces he sent back to be published in Robitnytsia in the early 1930s covered a special Canadian women’s delegation to the Soviet Union (SU). His reports stressed the necessity of North American support for the Soviet communist state as it was under international siege, and also emphasized the immense contributions of the SU to women’s equality within its own borders and across many nations. Those reports were some of his last before his arrest. Tragically, party members who remained loyal to the Stalinist SU later used the pages of Robitnytsia to justify Irchan’s political persecution within the SU.26

The 1930s: The practice of political tourism

Debates about “what it was really like” in the Soviet Union also provided one example of political communication and discussion that circulated among women on the left, drawing in a range of self-identified progressive women in the 1930s. During this period, some women engaged in political tourism, a practice that involved visiting another country in order to explore, enjoy, and tour the foreign land, though the trip was simultaneously made to observe a place’s distinct political, cultural, and social organization. Political tourism involves expert journalists, observers, or writers who share observations about their trip with a wide readership or community on their return, but it also takes in ordinary tourist-visitors who may or may not report on their experiences and findings outside of a small circle of friends when they return home. While political activists also went to other countries to attend meetings or even fight in wars, only some used these opportunities as a tourist to view the country, assess its society, and offer commentary on their return. Before World War I, activists like Dora Montefiore, the subject of Karen Hunt’s article in this book, fit the latter category well. Visits to the Soviet Union, the first communist “experiment,” were perhaps the archetypal form of political tourism in the subsequent interwar period, but admirers of

Mussolini undoubtedly had similar goals when visiting sunny Italy. In more recent times, political tourism includes the well-worn path of Canadians to Cuba, viewing cooperative farms and partaking of sunny beaches. While tourism studies have tended to stress tourism as involving a search for tradition, history, or native “authenticity,” and travel as an escape from modern or capitalist alienation, political tourism might be a search for modernity as tourists were searching out an answer to the future as much as to the past.  

One of the first women in Canada to publish a book about her trip to the Soviet Union was Margaret McWilliams, a Winnipeg feminist who saw herself as a liberal, progressive reformer. Her account of the Soviet Union, written with her husband, was intended to contribute to a broader debate about socialism (will it work? is it contrary to human nature?) as well as the specific question of whether the new Soviet regime was a “success.” Margaret and her husband had clearly been warned about the dark, dangerous, and foreboding Soviet Union, where they would be followed and indoctrinated, so she was pleasantly surprised to find helpful guides, clean and reasonably priced hotels, as well as complete freedom to go where she pleased and ask any questions she wished. Her final account of the SU offered a liberal balance sheet that warned that some communist ideas, such as “each according to his own need,” simply don’t work because of human nature, but it also credited the regime with reforms such as increased education for all women, and

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27 The definition of political tourism is my own. The classic study of tourism and alienation is Dean McCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley 1999) while John Urry stresses the “tourist gaze” as a search for objects of difference in *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society* (London 1990). Many works have also explored the relationship of tourism to colonialism and neo-colonialism: for example, Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Horde: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery* (London 1975); John Hutnyk, *Rumours of Calcutta: Tourism, Charity and the Poverty of Representation* (London 1996) and Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk, *Travelworlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (London 1999). Colin Hall looks at tourism and politics, but not political tourism, in *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place* (Chichester 1994) and there is a substantial literature on tourism and ethnicity/Indigenous cultures, such as Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC 2005) and Hal Rothamn, ed., *The Culture of Tourism, the Tourism of Culture: Selling the Past to the Present in the American Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM 2003). Current trends do not stress political “ideology” as much as discourse, representation, and identity; for example, see C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker, eds., *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities, Representations* (London 2004). Canadian works like James Overton’s *Making a World of Difference: Essays on Tourism, Culture and Development in Newfoundland* (St. John’s 1996) and Ian McKay’s *The Quest for the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal 1994) examine the construction of the tourist experience as an anti-modernist search for the “folk” and authenticity, but they do not suggest that this quest underpinned all tourism. McKay’s political analysis of power relations and ideology might be a useful means of thinking also about some political tourism, and one could argue that political tourism is, in some respects, a search for a different kind of authenticity.

28 McWilliams was also connected to an international organization, the International Federation of University Women. University educated, she served as an alderman in Winnipeg in the 1930s. See Mary Kinnear, *Margaret McWilliams, Interwar Feminist* (Montreal 1991).
better maternity and child care. Access to housing, education, and food, however meagrely rationed for all, have visibly transformed the lives of Russia’s poor and oppressed, she conceded. While not an avid anti-communist, McWilliams also clearly stated her fears about the Soviet state undermining women’s role in the “traditional” family and about communism becoming a “religion in itself.” In a period when anti-Soviet propaganda was still extremely bellicose, however, the book’s cautionary acceptance of the new SU was noteworthy.

For women who were more fiercely loyal to the Bolshevik revolution, McWilliams’ liberal sympathies undoubtedly discredited her cautionary analysis of the Soviet Union’s achievements. In contrast, the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) was optimistic that it could use political tourism as a means to enhance its profile and membership by sending a group of Canadians on a women’s tour of the Soviet Union in 1930. Not all the tour members were Communist Party members, but those selected from the nominated group were chosen with the party’s needs in mind, as region, language group, and occupation were all considered. Accompanied by a prominent party leader, Becky Buhay, five women went on the trip, including the wife of a coal miner from Cape Breton, Annie Whitfield, a young Finnish woman from northern Ontario who had worked as a domestic, Elsa Tynjala, a Ukrainian garment worker, Annie Zen, and two trade union women, Bessie Schacter, a Montreal tailor, and a Winnipeg emigré and Polish-Jewish fur worker, Pearl Wedro, added at the last minute to attend the Red International of Labour Unions. At precisely the moment when the Canadian party had embraced the ultra left “Third Turn”, stressing intense class conflict and the motto that “feminism has no place in the party,” the women who went to the USSR were supposed to observe what socialism looked like from women’s eyes.

Behind the public face of the Communist Party, the trip was a source of conflict, reflecting smouldering divisions and disagreements between the Finnish and Ukrainian language groups and the Anglo party leadership; moreover, at least one male party leader disputed the decision to send a women’s rather than workers delegation. However, little of this debate reached public ears. After three months in the SU, visiting Leningrad and Moscow, factories, farms, educational institutions, and sanatoriums, the women returned to a rousing meeting of one thousand in Montreal; resolutions were passed, not only to organize women in Canada, but also to create a new organization, the Friends of the Soviet Union. Clearly, this was one of

29 R.S. and M.S. McWilliams, *Russia in Nineteen Twenty Six* (Toronto 1927).
31 *The Worker*, 28 February 1931.
the pre-arranged goals of the CPC. The delegation was supposed to tour the country, speaking and writing articles that reflected the glory of the Soviet experiment, particularly for women. However, save for Buhay, the seasoned leader, few followed the prescribed script. Despite pressure from CPC leaders, a determined Annie Whitfield refused to tour, saying she had to care for her family, and there was some suggestion of dissatisfaction with what she had seen in the SU.33 Tynjala seemed more worried—understandably—about having no job on her return than about political touring. She was also seen as young and politically “inexperienced” by the party leaders, though she did publish an article on Soviet youth in *Vapaus*, the Finnish left-wing paper, extolling their full access to schooling and work, in comparison to young Canadian women, who faced unemployment, the streets, or meagre wages for a ten hour day. Nor would the Soviet Union sacrifice its youth to a capitalist war machine, she argued, the way that Canadian youth had been sacrificed in 1914.34 Finally, Wedro, despite her self-deprecating calls for party criticism of her failure to write any articles about the SU, did report that she had spoken to at least seven public meetings in Winnipeg, some of them attended by hundreds of people and one by an audience of over a thousand. The pressure for these women to tour, and especially write, seemed to ignore their immediate material needs as well as their poor English literacy, and in a period when “the meeting” was still a major means of political communication for working people, one wonders why Wedro thought she needed to be criticized for her efforts.35

It was left to Buhay to write for the English-language newspaper, and articles like hers and Tynjala’s likely did encourage positive views of women in the Soviet Union—after all, many Canadian Finns returned to the SU in this period to help build Karelia.36 In *The Worker*, Buhay announced the delegation’s intention to detail the “marvellous progress” of women in the SU, as well as aid with the organization of working women in Canada.37 Equal pay for equal work, regular vacations, free crèches, and communal kitchens were just some of the achievements described by Buhay in another

33 She was probably summoned to Toronto by the party leaders, including Annie Buller, in order to see if she would say negative things. In correspondence from Moscow, another party leader noted that she was causing trouble, threatening to “tell the truth” on her return. See Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 70.


35 On Tynjala, see AO, CPC Papers, 11c 2986, 2A1313, and on Wedro, 3A1683. When Zen would only speak to Ukrainian audiences, the leadership suspected she was refusing to deal with English audiences for reasons other than language—perhaps because of tensions between ULFTA and the leadership.

36 Those returning to the SU included women. *Letters from Karelia*, NFB Film, 2004, Dir: Kelly Saxberg. Many of the communist recruits died or were executed in the SU.

article detailing the delegation’s “witnessing” of the SU. The wider impact of this orchestrated political tourism on the public, however, was likely limited due to the party’s rigid line at the time, its recent Stalinization and membership losses, and its isolation from many workers, a problem the party readily admitted. The written report, illustrated book, and concerted unionization of Canadian women promised initially by the delegation never materialized. Nonetheless, the experiment indicated the potential of organizing groups of “ordinary” working-class people as witnesses for political tourism, a shift from the long-standing predominance of more affluent and educated political commentator-tourists.

The later 1930s proved to be a more propitious time for political tourism, and less obviously orchestrated reports were more effective in creating sympathy for, and discussion about, women in the SU. Popular Front politics encouraged a wider range of visitors to the SU, including social democrats: the most famous political tourists of the thirties were perhaps Britain’s social democratic duo, the Webbs. Canadian Margaret Gould, the executive secretary of the Child Welfare Council of Toronto and part-time lecturer at the University of Toronto, also wrote extensively after her trip to the Soviet Union, publishing *I Visit the Soviets* in 1937. Much of Gould’s book was also serialized in the daily *Toronto Star*, for she had been asked by its liberal editor, Joseph Atkinson, to record her views for the newspaper. A more resolutely left-wing cultural paper, *New Frontiers*, also published her impressions but the publicity garnered by the *Star* articles was significant. Although it is difficult to measure its precise impact, her writing was widely circulated, and the support of some social democratic women for the Communist-inspired Popular Front—against the expressed orders of their own party—may be one indication of wider sympathy for the SU at the time.

Gould’s book was written in the vein of other travel memoirs, recording sites of interest as well as offering commentary on the people, language, and culture. She quite forthrightly located herself as a tourist and compared her views to those of other international tourists. Like them, she visited the opera, took a cruise on the Black Sea, and looked at some of the old palaces and new sights of Moscow, including its new subway line. A key theme of the book was that many other Western tourists did not understand the SU since they lacked a historical and relativist point of view: they needed to compare the current SU to the impoverished Russia of 1901, rather than

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39 Gould had a degree in Political Science from the University of Toronto. She worked for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America for nine months in the 1920s, then later for the Toronto Federation of Jewish Philanthropists. *Social Welfare*, (August 1926).
40 On this conflict, see Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, chap. 4 and John Manley, “Women and the Left in the 1930s: The Case of the Toronto Joint Women’s Committee,” *Atlantis*, 5/2 (Spring 1980), 100–119.
simply observing that, in comparison to their own countries, the people were badly dressed, the roads poor, or the buildings "shabby." Tourists who go to Soviet Russia without knowledge of the social history of the revolution and the "mess the Soviet government inherited," are often looking for a holiday, Atlantic City style, she cautioned, and thus are simply "blind to the surge of life and purpose around them." They are simply "wasting their boat fare," concluded Gould in a New Frontiers piece.

As a social worker, Gould was also keenly interested in any organization or group of people representing the social welfare system in the SU. She visited factories, crèches, schools, family apartments, Young Pioneer headquarters, and countless other spots, interviewing people in order to see how families survived, and what kind of education, medical care, and social supports they had. She repeatedly stressed that her party of three women visitors was not inhibited from travelling anywhere or talking to anyone; clearly, she wished to dispel the notion that they were simply led to scripted encounters by the Soviet state, even though we know that most political tourists were carefully monitored and guided to the "right" sites. Gould did record some unhappiness with the new regime on the part of her informants, but their views might also be subtly discredited, as was the bourgeois woman’s who complained bitterly about the regime; it was suggested she simply did not want to work for a living and was unhappy with her fall from privilege and affluence.

Such limitations notwithstanding, this book and Gould’s columns, distributed to thousands of Toronto readers, offered a favourable view of the progress made in the Soviet Union. She stressed the “social wage” that families were offered through free health care, education, culture, and especially training for young children, and her assessment of the transformation of gender roles was positive. Women’s roles as doctors, political leaders, and other professionals were lauded, as was their access to education and especially to maternity and child care: all this stood in contrast to the “degradation” of women under Czarist Russia. Gould claimed that her party of three doubting Canadians kept pressing their female interviewees for the “real story” about their double day of wage and home labour, but their informants quite adamantly denied this burden, claiming that they had so many social supports, along with “fine cooperation from their husbands” that this was simply not true. Given the reality of women’s double work day within the SU, there is good reason to assume that her interviewees were carefully chosen.

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41 Margaret Gould, I Visit the Soviets (Toronto 1937), 58.
43 Gould, I Visit, 127
44 Gould, I Visit, 148. Although she claimed she interviewed many people, one does wonder how much the list was shaped by her Soviet guides since this comment is clearly not a reflection of women’s work at that time.
or were reluctant to complain to an outsider. Gould especially stressed women’s maternity care to make the point that this was still women’s “highest” and most rewarding calling—even painless childbirth was now in the realm of the possible in the progressive SU. Perhaps most important in the context of the late 1930s, Gould commented on the changes to divorce and abortion laws which were causing immense debate in the West as some critical observers saw the SU’s abandonment of these rights as a blatant attempt to increase the birth rate at the expense of women’s health and autonomy. She admitted that there were some strong differences of opinion within the SU on these issues, but generally justified the legal changes as a logical outcome of the excellent medical care and economic security now possible for women.

Gould was thus countering some of the most trenchant feminist criticisms of the SU at the time, and providing legitimacy to the claims of communists outside the SU that women had achieved an unparalleled level of social equality in the USSR. Her role as educated expert, her status as a leader in the social service movement, and her links to the University of Toronto, as well as to the Toronto Star, all gave her rendition of women’s lives under communism political and intellectual weight. Gould took personal messages back and forth between people in Canada and the SU, and likely talked within social service circles about her trip, but her published observations were most important in the ideological context of the period. Moreover, her style of travel writing—understated rather than dogmatic and seemingly taking various points of view into account—undoubtedly gave her observations veracity as she did not appear to be the single-minded Communist Party polemicist.

Gould’s message was intended not simply to support the Communist Party but to influence Canadian politics more broadly. Society would benefit enormously, she indicated, from a universal and rational system of state-sponsored social services, education, and medical care as basic rights for all citizens—the contemporary platform of social democrats as well. Finally, her writing also contributed to the political project of the Popular Front, linking women with communist and social democratic perspectives together in an alliance that, in the long run, undoubtedly favoured the former rather than the latter.

1940s: Advice letters from the mother country

Political tourism persisted long past the thirties, though many liberals and socialists were no longer singing the praises of the Five-Year Plan in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the post-war Soviet occupation of eastern Europe. After World War II, communist women established a new organization, the International Women’s Democratic Federation, and social democ-
ratic women re-grouped through the new International Council of Social Democratic Women, based in London and led by a German refugee from Hitler, Mary Saran. The council linked together women from European nations who, by the late 1940s, could travel to summer institutes and annual meetings to share ideas, research, and strategies. Canadian social democrats, far more isolated within North America, still turned to European women as sources of advice and as models for women’s organizing, but much of this guidance came through personal letters and the circulation of written material. Just as the pre-World War I labour and socialist women had written to Margaret MacDonald for guidance, so too did later Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) women turn to the British Labour Party for organizing tips and political inspiration.\footnote{45}

Since the CCF’s establishment in 1933, Canadian social democratic women had developed a plethora of local organizations and in the aftermath of World War II some of these became provincial CCF Women’s Committees. Though a national CCF women’s organization was formally set up in 1949, it was not very strong, lacking funds, organizers, and essential political support from the party leadership. The Ontario CCF Women’s Committee, founded in 1947, was one of the strongest provincial organizations, led by a core of energetic and talented activists, primarily educated, middle-class homemakers, and professionals, though also including some trade union leaders. It saw its role as helping the larger party, particularly electorally, but it was also dedicated to drawing women into the party based on their special political interests and expertise—relating to home, family, education, welfare—and to raising these as key issues within the party. A “status of women” committee also researched and lobbied on issues pertaining to wage-earning women, such as equal pay.

CCF women’s connections were primarily with British activists, though in the aftermath of the war, letters from social democratic women in Germany were circulated through the Ontario CCF Women’s Committee. In 1947, the Chief Woman Officer of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Herta Gotthelf, sent out a circular letter that was forwarded to the Canadians detailing the desperate conditions in Germany, as well as the difficulties of political organizing when travel was almost impossible and the basic necessities of food unattainable. “We are happy to celebrate IWD after 15 years,” she wrote, while at the same time expressing concern about the “communistic

and nationalistic forces” which were using the Germans’ hunger and despair to agitate against the social democrats.46

The letter was read at a the provincial gathering of CCF women, galvanizing Lucy Woodsworth47 to write to the Women’s Committee about the inspiration of social democratic women elsewhere, and the need to support their struggles. “How it stirred one to learn at first hand,” she wrote, “that those women and men, who had survived the Nazi terror and yet kept faith with socialism, were putting up such a struggle .... [N]othing but an unshakeable faith in our common cause could have sent those women ill clad, lacking enough to eat, travelling in danger to life and limb upon speaking tours, training younger women either to write or to memorize and deliver election speeches ... when in Ontario, we women see as clearly .... [W]e shall win a clear majority for socialism.”48 Woodsworth then organized a plan for Canadian women to send care packages of food to their comrades in Germany as a further means of showing their solidarity and keeping in touch with German socialist women.49

Invitations for the Canadians to help rebuild an international alliance also came from other groups, such as the Swedish Federation of Social Democratic Women, but it was difficult for most of the Canadian women, even these middle-class ones, to travel this far after the war.50 When female BLP leaders toured Canada, however, CCF women organized their speaking engagements, met with them, and then followed up with correspondence: Marjorie Mann, a driving force behind the Ontario WC, was often in the forefront of this personal transatlantic network. British MP Alice Bacon visited in 1947, as did the Chief Woman Officer for the BLP, Mary Sutherland. CCF women could barely contain their “excitement”51 at connecting with these BLP luminaries who represented a successful party and movement, both in terms of membership numbers and electoral victories. The Canadians were clearly impressed with Bacon’s description of the BLP’s Women’s Sections, as well as the role of women in local advisory committees set up by the new Labour government. Even if women’s integration into the top corridors of BLP power was definitely limited, the Labour Party’s

46 LAC, Marjorie Mann Papers (hereafter Mann) MG vol. 1, Ontario CCF Women’s Committee, (CCFWC) 1937, Herta Gotthelf to Avis McCurdy, 9 April 1947.
47 Lucy Woodsworth was the widow of the CCF’s first (and revered) leader, J.S. Woodsworth.
mobilization of women looked extraordinary to the Canadians.\(^{52}\) As a consequence, they were eager to take advice from British women on the mechanics of organizing. And the British leaders were in turn happy to give advice, seeing their trips to the dominions as something of a social democratic missionary encounter.

In circulars to the CCF WC, Mann passed on suggestions she had gleaned from Sutherland, with whom she corresponded. Sutherland, for instance, suggested that a key to their own success was regular circular letters to all the local Women’s Sections, asking about local conditions, such as maternity services and education, and passing on information about parliamentary debates, membership campaigns, worthwhile issues to pursue, and so on. Mann also took heart in the fact that the British women, despite their successes, faced antipathy—just as Canadian women did—from male party members opposed to the semi-autonomous organization of women: “I notice after 30 years, you are still having to answer to the critics too,” she wrote, and Sutherland joked in return that “old fashioned” attitudes about women in politics persisted even if it was now “unfashionable” to voice them.\(^{53}\) As Mireke Bosch points out, the “gossipy” sections of women’s transnational correspondence often interwove personal friendships and political practice; women might use this “private space” to “articulate feminist views that could not be shared in public.”\(^{54}\)

The CCF women, increasingly facing a bleak electoral situation at home, looked longingly at the British Labour example. Sutherland sent Mann copies of the constitution of the Women’s Sections, as well as reports of conferences and resolutions pertaining to women and the family. Mann often quoted Sutherland when offering both advice and pep talks to the fledging Ontario WC. Like a New Zealand Labour Party visitor, Margaret Thorn, with whom Mann also corresponded, Sutherland had counselled the Canadian women to reach out to the wives of trade unionists as a way of building their organization. “Thorn told us that we have to convince the wives and daughters of wage earners that this is THEIR party ... this is the same as Sutherland, who looked at a tram driver [when she was visiting Toronto] and said when his wife is coming to CCF meetings, you will be in office,” wrote Mann.

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\(^{53}\) LAC, Mann, vol. 2, Mary Sutherland file, Mann to Sutherland 11 May 1947 and Sutherland to Mann, 23 September 1947.


\(^{55}\) LAC, Mann, vol. 1, Ontario CCFWC file 1949, Mann to Ontario WC.
Personal letters between Mann and Sutherland thus created a flow of advice and suggestions, generally from the mother country to the colony, but the Canadians were occasionally asked for articles for the BLP’s *Labour Woman*—for example, on the role of a typical Canadian housewife—with Mann guiding Sutherland’s choice of author. Sutherland also arranged with national CCF secretary, David Lewis, to send 200 copies of *Labour Woman* to CCF women across Canada, selected by Mann and party leaders. One can surmise that the importation of this BLP magazine was not encouraged by Lewis simply to mobilize women, given his own indifference to this cause. Rather, it was very consciously intended to reinforce the ideological sway of “respectable” labourist views in the CCF, which was facing dissent from more left-wing socialists within its ranks, whom Lewis fought vigorously. Transnational political links that the (male) leadership encouraged for its own reasons, however, might still be used by women to further more feminist political goals.

Even though shared political proclivities clearly shaped this practice of informal letter writing, advice giving, and personal connection, ethnicity and culture were undoubtedly also factors. Describing her visit to Canada for readers of *Labour Woman*, Bacon remarked positively on how many CCF women she had met who “had British accents.” The Ontario CCF WC also supported a “Buy British” movement after the war. While described as an aid to reconstruction and the incumbent BLP, the committee’s support for “Buy British” undoubtedly also reflected a strong identification based on culture and ethnicity as many CCF women (and indeed many working-class Canadians) were of Anglo-Celtic background. While looking to their British international advisors for advice on how to build the modern social democratic state, these women were thus also drawing on prevailing sentiments of ethnicity, tradition, and heritage, just as the earlier Ukrainian left-wing activists did.

Well into the 1950s, Mann continued to keep these informal lines of communication open, taking counsel from British comrades and offering them information on the Canadian CCF. As the party spiralled downward in elections, hearing of Labour victories elsewhere in the world might have provided some small ray of hope to Canadian social democratic women. When Mann attended the Scottish women’s labour conference in 1952, she kept copious notes on the discussions and resolutions, one assumes as a means of informing Canadian practice at home. Connections between the Labour Party and the CCF, and between Canadian and European social democratic women, were facilitated by other party members as well. British Columbia CCF leader Laura Jamieson attended an International Council meeting, and even after the New Democratic Party was formed in 1960, its

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57 NAC, Mann, vol. 4, “Notebooks on Scottish Women’s Labour Conference.”
woman organizer, Eva Latham, was in touch with the Scottish Labour Party. The Mann-Sutherland correspondence, however, provides an excellent example of the power of personal connections, sustained not only by a sense of feminist camaraderie and common purpose, but also by Mann’s immense energy, talent for letter writing, and determination to build CCF women’s committees. Like other informal feminist-socialist connections across borders, advice through correspondence could inspire, but it might also prove temporary and ephemeral, relying on women with the time and political inclination to keep cross border connections alive.

Conclusion
While feminist historians have documented the importance of international organizations, alliances, and meetings in furthering international political bonds and objectives, we have paid less attention to more informal forms of cross border organizing and connection, such as the way in which advice, debate, and information circulated through newspapers, personal letters, and visits. Understandably, these connections left fewer documentary traces as they might be fleeting and subject to the vicariousness of political loyalties, women’s work lives, limited time and resources, and the wider political context. Moreover, women on the left faced very different barriers and circumstances than those negotiated by liberal, middle-class internationalists. While both groups had to deal with language differences, women on the left did not always have the money and ability to travel; as well, some faced political persecution, and their connection to women’s or “feminist” ideals might be complicated by loyalties to socialist or communist parties that were wary of “liberal” feminism corrupting the socialist cause.

Yet all three examples cited here testify to women’s efforts to maintain international contacts and to secure advice, support, and inspiration from women of other nations; in the process, women imagined themselves as part of something larger than the nation, integrated into a noble and global movement dedicated to common goals of social transformation and female emancipation, regardless of nation or ethnicity. Somewhat paradoxically, these very same international ties might then be put to use to further a political agenda of building socialism in one nation state. Moreover, informal patterns of connection were undeniably intertwined with more formal parties and international organizations. These could have positive benefits for women’s international organizing, offering leadership, resources, written materials, and strategic advice, but formal organizations on the left might also contain and limit women’s organizing as well, creating rigid program-
matic suggestions or denigrating the importance of gender oppression. Moreover, rank-and-file women in the socialist and communist movements, particularly working-class women, were limited in their ability to travel, both because of lost wages or families needing care. As a result, they were less able to make the connections that male party leaders often did through formal organizations. Finding inspiration in the pages of an international paper like *Robitnytsia*, writing for advice to political friends abroad, or reading the narratives of political tourists were three ways that women could stay in touch internationally, while still remaining at home.

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58 It is difficult to comparatively assess the effects of the three examples of international political communication outlined here as they were so very different; informal letters, for instance, are difficult to compare to a political newspaper. However, in all three cases “the party” as a means of organization benefited socialist women, though also constrained them ideologically and practically, both in terms of an analysis of inequality and political strategies for change. While we often stress this point in terms of communist parties, supposedly determined by Comintern priorities, we should not forget that social democratic parties had their own set of ideological certainties and a less-than sympathetic male leadership.
Creating the International Spirit of Socialist Women: Women in the Labour and Socialist International 1923–1939∗

Silke Neunsinger

During the occupation of the Ruhr area by French and Belgian troops, 620 representatives for socialist parties from 30 countries met in Hamburg for the foundation of the Sozialistische Arbeiterinternational (SAI) on 21 May 1923.1 The loose federation of social democratic parties had to face a scenario that recalled the problems that led to the end of the Second International: warfare pulling apart former comrades on either side of the front line. In order to avoid a similar crisis, the congress made two major decisions that had consequences for the organizational structure of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) as it was called in English. First, the delegates agreed that the International should be an instrument not only during peacetime, but also during wars. Secondly, during conflicts between different nations, the LSI was to be the supreme authority.2

Organizing internationally during times of increased nationalism was no easy task, as the decisions mentioned above illustrate. Several historians have stressed the differences between the ambitions and practice of internationalism. Richard Hyman has emphasized that the reality of internationalism has been and still is characterized by a complex of organizational dilemmas and conflicts.3 Thus, we need to understand the conditions for work at the central international level, such as the problems of creating an organizational structure, available human and monetary resources, and the possibilities and limitations of creating the feeling and experience of internationalism at this level.

∗ I want to thank Karen Hunt, Pernilla Jonsson, Lynn Karlsson, Klaus Misgeld, and Joan Sangster for discussions and comments which helped to improve this article, and I want to thank the staff at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. This research has been financed by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation and the Ernst Wigforss Fond.

1 Julius Braunthal, Geschichte der Internationale, Bd. 2 (Hannover 1963), 284 f.
Conditions for organizing can be expected to be even more difficult for special interest groups at the central international level. Particularism is challenged by claims of universalism among the members of the special interest group in international organizations. Focusing on women during the interwar period raises several problems. Although women had gained the right to vote in many countries at that time, they were still under-represented in different political arenas, organizations, and political bodies. The interwar period is also characterized by a generational change among activist women. While members of the older generation, especially those who had been active in the struggle for general suffrage, were more accustomed to cross-class strategies, part of the younger generation tended toward cross-gender strategies, which made separate women’s organizations look politically redundant in their eyes.

The aim of this article is to shed light on the conditions for women’s political work in an international socialist organization in order to understand the influence of gender and class on the practice of internationalism between the two world wars. The main questions are as follows: How did the organizational structure of the Women’s International influence the conditions for women’s work for internationalism in the LSI and the work directed toward women’s movements on a national level? What kind of political action was done by socialist women at the international level? What kinds of resources were available at the international level for the women’s movement? How was internationalism constructed and legitimized?

As was the case with national congresses, the rate of women’s participation in international socialist congresses was very low. As June Hannam and Karen Hunt have stressed, the cost and impact of travelling on women’s domestic lives were often the reasons why women did not go to local or national meetings, and this was accentuated when it came to international congresses. Moreover, we still know very little about the conditions of socialist women’s work at the central level in international socialist organizations. Earlier research on the LSI has barely mentioned women. Research has been more concerned with either the autonomous feminist women’s movement or the impact of internationalism on the work of socialist women at the national level. In her study of three international women’s organiza-

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5 Braunthal, *Geschichte der Internationale.*
tions of non-socialist women, Leila Rupp shows that the members in these organizations were an elite from the middle class, who, despite economic crisis, could at least afford to travel. These women had the time, the money, and the education to work at the international level.® They could afford to travel and were conversant in different languages so that they could communicate with each other.

Who were the representatives for socialist women? Who was able to work at the international level? Who had the time and the language skills, and who paid for this work and the travelling? Did class matter on an international level, and, if so, how did it matter?

Individual socialist women have been the focus of a number of different studies. Antje Schrupp has studied the political ideas of four women in the First International. Her results show that women active in the First International were pro-feminist, staying in touch and engaging in a dialogue with both women from the “bourgeois” women’s movement and socialist men.® Interesting in this context is also the brief information given in the appendix of her study, which shows that these women came from middle-class families.® Schrupp also shows that the First International not only ignored matters of gender, it was outspokenly antifeminist.® The LSI, however, was influenced more by the Second International, and it was shaped in contrast to the Third International, though these conclusions have not been studied systematically with women as the focus.

The international dimension of socialist women’s work has also been highlighted in biographies about leaders such as Clara Zetkin and Sylvia Pankhurst.® Some of the studies of socialist women’s movements at the national level have pointed to the importance of international work for national organizing, while others have discussed the international dimension more en passant.®

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Workers Around the World (Toronto 2002); Franca Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto (Montreal 1993).


® Antje Schrupp, Nicht Marxistin und auch nicht Anarchistin: Frauen in der Ersten Internationale (Königstein 1999), 242 f. The women studied are Virginie Barbet, Elisabeth Dmitrieff, André Léo, and Victoria Woodhull.

® Schrupp, Nicht Marxistin und auch nicht Anarchistin, 319–29. Schrupp does not give any information about the family background of Virginie Barbet.

® Schrupp, Nicht Marxistin und auch nicht Anarchistin, 40.


Christine Collette has analyzed the role of internationalism for the British Labour Party (BLP) between 1918 and 1939. The analysis of women’s role in the LSI is more “additive” in her book as Collette is interested in providing a more nuanced picture of the LSI and challenging the belief that it was an organization only for men. She does this by giving an overview of the International Cooperation, the Youth International, and the International Advisory Committee of Women (IACW), and exploring the relationship of these groups to the British labour movement. In a larger study of socialist women, June Hannam and Karen Hunt have analyzed the role of internationalisms for British socialist women. In contrast to Collette, Hannam and Hunt focus on the effects of internationalism on different groups of socialist women in Britain, trying to understand how internationalism, both suffrage-oriented and socialist internationalism, united British socialist women. Similar to other research on the international labour movement, Hannam and Hunt show that creating a women-focused socialist internationalism was more of an aspiration than a reality. Few of the women had experienced what socialist internationalism meant in practice.

Earlier research on socialist women’s internationalism has either focused on the international dimension of national work or on earlier periods. The situation between the two World Wars was different from earlier periods, however. In many countries, women’s citizenship rights had improved after the First World War. However, many women were disappointed about the fact that the newly won equality did not automatically improve their political power in parliaments—only few women had become members of parliaments. This put women in the paradoxical situation of having struggled for and received political equality, while at the same time remaining rather powerless. Susan Zimmermann has claimed that the international arena could be used as an alternative public sphere for women. The question is, of course, whether political matters concerning women were handled by international organizations and how much influence international decisions had on national legislation. Could the LSI women’s committee use its position to act within and on the international arena or use its platform to influence politics in national parties?

This article can be regarded as a contribution to the history of the LSI. However, in addition to understanding socialist women’s internationalism, this article seeks also to contribute to our understanding of women in politics, both from a class and a gender perspective.

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Internationalism and transnational work

Historian Klaus Misgeld defines internationalism as an international activity in order to create change in an international context. He stresses the qualitative difference between national activity and international activity: according to his definition, internationalism supports activity that is of interest both for national and foreign organizations, but it is also in the members’ interests. However, not all the work conducted at the central level of international organizations can be regarded as internationalism, at least according to this definition.

Recent studies have illustrated the transfer of ideas and methods between different national women’s organizations and movements through international organizations. These kinds of transfers did not necessarily imply a qualitative difference when actions carried out in one country were transferred to another country through the central level of an international organization. People could also exchange ideas at international meetings without formal decisions. Women from different areas of the world did meet and discuss; they became friends, visited each other, and wrote letters, as the contributions of Karen Hunt and Joan Sangster in this volume show. Their meetings inspired further political action in different parts of the world.

Internationalism has in this context been regarded as a practice to create a community among women from different parts of the world. Here, it might be best to talk about the experience of internationalism as both a political value and a tool for organizing. In the following I will use internationalism, as defined by Misgeld, as an activity to create change in an international context.

The transfer of ideas and methods that is part of the creation of an international identity can also be defined in terms of transnationalism. Transnationalism has become an important issue in historical research during recent years, as the number of publications, conferences, and internet discussion groups remind us. However, the difficulties of defining the concepts of transnationalism and internationalism have been the subject of much discussion.

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16 Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830–1860* (New York 2000); Rupp, *Worlds of Women*; Ulla Wikander et al., *Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1890–1920* (Urbana, IL 1995); Susan Zimmermann, “Frauenbewegung. Transfer und Trans-Nationalität.” See also Ulla Wikander, *Feminism, familj och medborgarskap: Debatter på internationella kongresser om nattarbetsförbud för kvinnor 1889–1919* (Göteborg 2006). See also ongoing research by Eva Matthes, University of Augsburg, on the discourses within the International Council of Women (ICW) and the National Council of Women of Germany; and Susanne Schötz, TU Dresden, on “Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein” and international communication. Moreover, most of this research also shows that the transfer was not global, although it did extend beyond the North Atlantic women’s movement.
The debate has certainly not reached an end yet. Kaelble, Kirsch, and Schmidt-Gernig have defined transnational as follows: *Transnational* means the interaction between individuals, groups, organizations, and states which act beyond national borders and form structures that go beyond the nation-state. Transnational social space refers to different forms of border crossings and not only to the traditional fields of migration or the transnational structures of companies and organizations. It also refers to other exchange processes that transcend national integration, such as religion and the spread of new forms of knowledge. In this sense, socialism created transnational processes somewhat similar to those related to religion. Transnational, therefore, will refer to the process of transfer and exchange of political communication between the international and national/local levels, as well as between groups from different nations.

The concepts of internationalism and transnationalism are at first glance gender and class neutral; however, a study of women’s work in the LSI can shed light on whether, and how, gender and class mattered for internationalism and transnationalism. How did the organizational structure of the LSI influence the internationalism of LSI women, and how did it influence women in the affiliated parties? Did women in the LSI experience internationalism, and through which practices was this experience constituted?

Regardless of the nationality of the political subjects mobilized by social movements, there are often similar political issues to face: How does one legitimize both the program and the organizational structures? Movements and organizations must be able to stand up for their political demands. New members have to be recruited, and solidarity among existing members must be kept up. Interests have to be framed in a way that makes the public pay attention to the organization’s claims. Support from other organizations and

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groups has to be organized. International work differs here to some degree from national work. International work requires time for travelling and money to finance travel expenses. An international organizational structure can contribute to keeping travel expenses down, as well as facilitate the co-ordination of work through an administrative structure. How did women in the LSI solve these problems? In order to understand to what degree class mattered, I will finally discuss how the conditions and the content of socialist women’s work differed from those organizations analyzed by Rupp.

This study focuses entirely on the central level of the LSI women’s committee. However, my analysis of women’s work at the core leadership level can also indicate new areas of research that need to be investigated in order to understand the implications of women’s international work on the affiliated parties and organizations at the local level. My research is also limited by the available sources. The material left by the International Advisory Committee of Women in the LSI archives is not complete. Several investigations carried out by the Committee lack the incoming replies from women’s national organizations. Minutes from committee and bureau meetings only show the decisions and not the discussion that took place. This makes it difficult to understand how discussions developed and changed, the different positions that existed, and whether there were any major controversies. It also makes it difficult to see where ideas originated. A lot of sources and personal papers have disappeared in connection with the rise of fascist states, when many of the activists had to flee from their countries of origin. However, some discussions, especially about the statutes of the IACW, can be found in the International Information, a newsletter published by the LSI and the most important source of information on women’s organizing, as it included a women’s supplement from 1927 on.

The bureau and the executive records also include scattered information, though they obviously lack some of the material originally produced. Moreover, the minutes of the LSI executive and bureau meetings have also been analyzed, though they show surprisingly little information on the women’s committee. Nor are there traces of conflict left in the sources, surely a sign that these records are limited by their “official” nature. Finally, it is important to mention that I have studied most of the material in German, as these records were the most complete, although some of the material also has been analyzed in the English and French versions. For this reason, my translations are not necessarily identical with the expressions used in the English version. The original citations are presented in the footnotes.


21 For a listing of LSI/SAI sources, see also http://www.iisg.nl/archives/nl/files/l/10769987full.php
Statutes for an international women’s committee

Statutes can tell us something about the political scope envisioned by the organizational structure. The negotiations about the statutes of the women’s committee illustrate that it was a difficult task trying to combine both integration in the LSI and the need for support of women in the LSI and the affiliated women’s organizations. Several different interests had to be taken into account, and different tactics were used to influence the design of the statutes. Much of the discussions about the statutes and their final design mirror the history of socialist internationalism, but also the special context the LSI was established within.

Richard Hyman has discussed some of the problems concerning international unionism. He differentiates between agitational and bureaucratic models of organizations. The first one seeks to improve national organizing through the establishment of an international organization. The bureaucratic model is more concerned with a long-run strategic perspective. This means that the central level of the international organization decides on a program, which has to be strictly followed by national organizations.\(^\text{22}\) One of the problems of internationalism is that powerful national organizations do not want to be overruled by international decision-makers. As a consequence, bureaucratic international centralism has to be cautious regarding political routines and platforms, looking for the least common denominator that all can agree on. While the LSI fits Hyman’s agitational model more closely, the problems associated with the bureaucratic model still characterized the work of the LSI.

The practical organizing of LSI internationalism was conditioned by the affiliated organizations’ interests and strengths. The difficulty was to create an organization that reflected affiliated parties’ strength and interests. In combination with democratic ideals, this was a difficult administrative task on an international level. It is therefore not surprising that the statutes were modeled after the predecessor, the Second International, and in contrast to the Third International. The congress was the supreme authority, and it was to meet every third year. Between the congresses the executive was the main organ of the LSI; its members were elected by the member parties.\(^\text{23}\)

Representativeness was a complicated question in international organizations. And it did not become less complicated with women’s separate organizing. The day before the Hamburg congress in 1923, women met for a socialist women’s conference.\(^\text{24}\) This was nothing new; just as in the case of the statutes there was a continuity from earlier Internationals. The first international women’s conference of this kind was held in 1907 in Stuttgart under

\(^\text{22}\) Hyman, “Agitation, organisation, byråkrati, diplomati,” 21.


\(^\text{24}\) Collette, The International Faith, 155; Kowalski, Geschichte der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale, 43.
the leadership of Clara Zetkin. In Hamburg, sixteen years later, women’s participation in the LSI needed mobilizing structures, and regular women’s conferences were supported by the LSI congress. A second demand for a female representative in the executive was, however, voted down. Instead, women obtained the opportunity to send one representative without voting rights to executive meetings. Active voting rights in the executive were therefore not available for women as women. As one of the leaders of the Second International, Clara Zetkin always had access to both decisions and information. But after the split of the Second International, she had no self-evident successor. Instead, women’s access to the executive and to the political leadership in the LSI had to be negotiated over a longer period of time.

In August 1925, the women’s conference was held in Marseille right before the LSI conference. This time the demand to appoint an International Advisory Committee of Women (IACW) was accepted by the LSI congress. One year later the LSI secretariat presented a first draft for statutes for a women’s advisory committee. The first official LSI women’s conference was held in Brussels in December 1926, with eighteen women representatives from twelve countries, in order to discuss the statutes.

The discussion of statutes mirrors the different forms and strengths of national organizations among women. In her report about the LSI meeting in 1926, Independent Labour Party (ILP) representative Dorothy Jewson noted that instead of exploring what internationalism meant for socialist women, participants spent most of the time discussing organizational matters. In February 1927 the IACW was officially established.

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25 Socialist women had participated early on in international congresses; see Schrupp, *Nicht Marxistin*.
27 See Evans, *Sozialdemokratie und Frauenemanzipation*; Thönnessen, *Frauenemanzipation*.
28 Sekretariat der SAI, “Die Frauen in Der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale. Bericht Vorgelegt Der Dritten Internationalen Frauenkonferenz Der Sai Und Dem Dritten Kongress Der Sai Vom Sekretariat Der Sai” (paper presented at the Dritter Kongress der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale, Brüssel, 1928), Abteilung III, 3. See also Frauenbeilage der Internationalen Information I.I.38 Januar 1927. The representatives were Mariette Adam and Josephine Stas (B), Henriette Crone (DK), Marie Juchacz, Gertrud Hanna (D), Louise Sau-moneau (F), Susan Lawrence, Agnes Dollan (GB Labour Party), Dorothy Jewson (GB independent labour party), Klara Kalnin (Latvia), Adelheid Popp (A), Justyna Budzinska-Tylicka, Dorota Kluszynska (Pol), Signe Vessman (S), Betty Karpiskova (Czechs in Czechoslovakia), Fanny Blatny (Germans in Czechoslovakia), Dr. Marion Phillips (Chief Women Officer Labour Party), Spaak (B), Nelly Thuering and N. Ahlström (S), Friedrich Adler (LSI).
30 International Institute of Social History (IISH), *Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale (SAI), Internationales Frauenkommittee*. Letter from Edith Kemmis to the women correspondents of the LSI, 7 March 1927.
What can the statutes and discussion about the statutes tell us regarding the political scope of the women’s committee? What kind of international organization was it?

The resolution of the Marseille congress said—

an international women’s advisory committee should be composed of representatives of the national sections … the committee should be composed on the same basis as the LSI executive committee … the administration of the international women’s committee shall be conducted by the secretariat in agreement with the international women’s committee.\footnote{IISH SAI 4359, Letter from Friedrich Adler to the affiliated parties 19 March 1926.}

The LSI served explicitly as the model for the IACW statutes. The Marseille congress decided on a temporary committee consisting of five members who, together with the executive, would decide on which affiliated parties would be represented in a future women’s committee. As the countries with the strongest labour movements, England, Germany, Austria, and Belgium were chosen to send a representative each (see table 1). The Slavonic and Baltic states were to send a joint representative. The strength of national organizations was given priority, leaving less space for common interests on the agenda of internationalism. The congress decision allowed women to take the initiative in shaping their political work within the LSI. However, difficulties in the organization of the IAWC were also due to diverging versions of the German and English publications of the decisions made at the Marseille congress. The temporary women’s committee was not mentioned in the English version.\footnote{Internationale Information, Frauenbeilage (hereafter IIF) 1927, i.i. 36.} This was probably partly why the committee was not established immediately after the congress. Whether the differences in the two versions were the result of a discussion that did not come to an end or a proposal that was not accepted by the different sides is difficult to tell. The development illustrates that language was one of the major obstacles for international work.\footnote{Hyman, “Agitation, organisation, byråkrati, diplomati,” 17.} As no decision had been made about the representatives by the affiliated parties, the LSI secretariat decided in cooperation with Adelheid Popp, the women’s representative on the executive, to approach affiliated parties in five countries in order to make them chose a representative. At this stage, the women’s committee seems to have been an elite project initiated from above with little feedback from the national level. General-secretary Friedrich Adler’s circular sent to the affiliated parties shows clearly that he was interested in co-operation between the women’s national organizations and the parties, something that was strongly questioned by the BLP and the Independent Labour Party.\footnote{IISH SAI 4359, Letter from Adler to the parties, March 1926.}
The statutes were a balancing act between national interests and the need for an international organization. The aim of the committee was to enable women to communicate their aims and methods beyond national borders and not to act politically on an international level toward other international organizations. This illustrates the agitatorial character of the committee. The committee was also initiated to advise the executive on issues concerning women and to organize international women’s conferences in connection with the LSI congresses. This advisory function somehow solved the problem of not having voting representation on the executive.

Members of the IACW were to be elected by the executive of the member parties. Here the statutes emphasize that it was important that the IACW representatives were the “real” representatives of the active women organized in the affiliated parties. This formulation was the result of a discussion between women from the BLP and other women’s organizations. Especially in Great Britain, with several socialist parties, the matter of “real” representatives was a problem. To what extent the LSI women were the representatives of the “real activists” was never discussed. Even later on, no discussions about the responsibilities of international activists or their mandates took place. At

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35 IIF 1927, i.i. 43.
the international level, this discussion was about whether the party leadership or the leading women should decide who could be sent as a representative. However, at the national level discussions were different. In the minutes of the Swedish Social Democratic Women’s Federation, discussions took place regarding whether a person could be sent who could afford to travel to international meetings by her own means, instead of having no representative at all. The Labour Party in England decided on the ILP representatives to the LSI.  

The number of national delegates was calculated by the same quantitative equation used to decide on the number of LSI delegates. Up to three representatives could be sent to the committee; in countries with several nations, representatives for each nation could be sent according to a formula, made by the LSI executive, that was to be revised periodically. The distribution of the seats—three representatives for Great Britain and Germany, two representatives for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Czechoslovakia (one German and one Czech), and Poland, and one representative for all the other countries—was the result of a complicated investigation about the national strength of female membership. Table 1 illustrates the different ways of measuring national strength used by the LSI. A large national membership of women was rewarded with more political power in the committee. A women’s national federation or committee did not necessarily imply more power at the international level. Both Sweden and Finland had their own women’s federations, but only a fraction of the female party members were members of the women’s organization. The attitude of parties opposed to autonomous women’s organizing was buttressed by this distribution of power.

The way in which decisions were made in the women’s committee underlines the assumption that women representatives voted according to their nationality. The voting was done by a show of hands, and in case of divergent opinions, the LSI executive committee was to be informed about which countries and nations had voted against a proposal. Although the women’s committee had a structure of its own, the statutes also show its limited autonomy and strong dependence on the LSI secretariat and its secretary Friedrich Adler. The women’s committee elected a “working” bureau from

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37 SAI 1928, Abteilung 3, Statuten, 4.
39 In 1931 Sweden reported 26,018 women among a total of 189,122 party members, but only 5,100 were members of the women’s federation. The Finnish social democratic party had 8,000 female members, but only 2,525 were members of the women’s federation. SAI 1928, Abteilung 3, Organisation der einzelnen Länder, 9.
40 SAI 1928, Abteilung 3, Statuten, 4.
41 Adler took part in all the meetings. IISH, SAI 3390–3392.
its members to maintain the advisory function demanded by the LSI secretariat between the meetings of the women’s committee. If necessary, it could be called to meetings by the LSI secretariat. However, the next paragraph of the statutes underscores, again, the dependence on, and control through, the LSI secretary. All the necessary administrative work of the committee was conducted by the LSI secretariat. This work was conducted by the clerks of the LSI secretariat under “permanent agreement” with the LSI secretary and the special women’s secretary.\textsuperscript{42} These IACW statutes remained unchanged until the LSI was dissolved. Only the distribution of seats in the committee and the bureau changed when fascism made several social democratic parties illegal.\textsuperscript{43}

The statutes were the result of the tension between women’s national organizing and different organizational concepts, but also of different gender ideologies concerning the aims and methods of socialism. It was a conflict between more resolutely socialist ideas, implying that socialism would liberate everyone, including women, and more feminist ideals that assumed women should create their own semi-autonomous structures in order to improve their own situation. The surveys conducted regularly by the bureau showed the different forms of women’s organizing within each national context, a variety that made organizing at an international level difficult. Tables 1 and 2 are the result of one of these surveys published in 1931. They show the variation of national movements and organization structures as well as their access to different resources.\textsuperscript{44} Conditions for women’s organizing, for instance, differed between countries where women did not even have the franchise, as in France, and Sweden, where women not only had the vote, but also had a separate socialist organization with its own periodical and its own income and budget. One way to solve the problem of these differences was to create a rather loose network structure, though this indicates, again, how circumscribed the power of the committee was.

However, a separate organization was an exception to the rule. British women had earlier had a separate women’s organization, but after the end of the

\textsuperscript{42} “im ständigen Einvernehmen,” SAI 1928, Abteilung 3, Statuten, 4.

\textsuperscript{43} IIF 1939, i.i. 369.

\textsuperscript{44} Dahlerup has identified three different ways in which women were recruited for the labour movement and how women handled the problem of retaining their independence within the wider movement. They all included some form of women’s organizing, but did not always result in the founding of a women’s organization: Type 1: The party recruits male members and a separate women’s organization recruits female members. Type 2: The party recruits both men and women; women can become members by joining the women’s committee, the party, the trade union, or all three of these. Type 3: Men and women are both members of the party and eventually a women’s committee is started to handle “women’s issues” within the party. Drude Dahlerup, “Zur Frage Der Selbständigen Organisierung Der Sozialistischen Frauen. Dargestellt Am Beispiel Der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Dänemarks 1871–1939,” Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung XIV. Linzer Konferenz 1978 del II (1980), 66, 451.
Table 1: Women’s Representation in the Labour Movement 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Politically organized women</th>
<th>Politically organized women (per cent)</th>
<th>Unionized women</th>
<th>Unionized women (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain (Labour Party)</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>430,532</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>228,278</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>228,179</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>161,314</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>143,478</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>57,191</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>57,610</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>49,723</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>38,171</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>57,807</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia (Czech)</td>
<td>26,279</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>115,532</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia (German)</td>
<td>25,712</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>53,560</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>24,135</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>16,635</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>21,577</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>16,106</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain (Independent Labour Party)</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>9,200</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>24,941</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>8,850</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>19,451</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11,771</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia (SDAP)</td>
<td>illegal</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2,835,200</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>not registered separately</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>not registered separately</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>not registered separately</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gdansk</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>2,620</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>6,547</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxemburg</td>
<td>not registered separately</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First World War they were integrated into the party structure.\(^{45}\) Nor were there separate women’s organizations in countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Denmark.\(^{46}\) In those countries women could have their own women’s conferences and access to their own women’s secretary. The parties did have women’s conferences and local women’s committees, but they were generally well-integrated into the party structure. Sometimes women were especially represented in national executives by a chief women’s officer, who often worked as the national women’s organizer. These varieties in organizational structure reflect different parties’ attitudes toward women’s organizations and movements and are at the same time an expression of the federalism of the LSI. The decision was left to the affiliated parties, without real power for women’s national organizing to influence the election of representatives if their parties did not accept them as being the “real” representatives of women. Christine Collette has emphasized the difference between women being consulted about possible representatives and women’s opportunity to elect their own representatives directly.\(^{47}\) It was the same old discussion about women’s independence in the labour movement, but it was enforced by the federative character of the LSI.

The discussions at the conference in Brussels, published in the women’s supplement of the *International Information*, show the diverging views of the representatives from different nations. While the British labour representative wanted a large women’s committee, the Belgian representative demanded a smaller committee, similar to the women’s bureau that was actually established. A large committee was important for the smaller countries, such as Latvia, which had well-organized women, but this had the disadvantage that it was more difficult to make quick decisions. A smaller bureau was regarded by some as a necessary guarantor for the continuity of the committee’s work. The decision to establish a large committee was made by a total majority of representatives, while the decision for a bureau was accepted with four dissenting votes.\(^{48}\) The discussion about the size of the committee not only reflects the problems of democratic representation in federal structures, it also shows that there were different expectations about the committee’s future task. Those who wanted to emphasize the advisory character of the committee held that the number of representatives was not really important.\(^{49}\) The discussion also underlines women’s ambitions for true


\(^{47}\) Collette, *The International Faith*, 156.

\(^{48}\) *IIF* 1927, i.i. 43.

\(^{49}\) This point was made by Gertrud Hanna, German representative. *IIF* 1927, i.i. 43.
internationalism. This might be an indication of a different gender ideology and method of reaching equality in the LSI. Not demanding representatives from each country did imply that the international representatives, independent of their nationality, could speak up for women’s demands. During this discussion it also turned out that the proposals made by the Belgian and BLP representatives were not the result of a discussion among female party members, but came from their male-dominated party executives. Thus, they were not necessarily even the opinions of the represented women.

The discussion and the organizational structure itself show the difficulties of creating democratic institutions at an international level. As there already existed rather different views on how women should organize even at a national or local level, a simple solution could not be expected. Not only should members be represented adequately according to their national origin and the strength of their national movements, the structures also had to guarantee that work could be conducted in a smooth and effective way. Even today’s statutes of the Socialist Women’s International have an almost identical purpose as those of the interwar period. This could indicate that the unchanging character of transnational work makes similar statutes necessary or that the statutes did not limit the scope of the work so there was no need for a change—or both. What might be regarded as problematic from today’s point of view was the total integration between the LSI and the IACW, limiting the committee’s work to an advisory function. The sources left by the IACW do not indicate that the integration and lack of autonomy were ever regarded as a problem. One interpretation of this could be that as women had reached more equality in citizenship in most of the countries, women’s access to politics was no longer regarded as problematic and separate structures were no longer needed. As the figures in Table 1 show, many of the parties had recruited an impressive number of female members. These numbers could have dismissed earlier critiques that the party did not actively recruit female members at the turn of the 20th century as out of date, and by that measure, also question the demand for separate mobilizing structures.

There was also an ideology inherited from earlier socialist women’s work regarding how to reach gender equality. Clara Zetkin had always worked for the integration of women in political organizing, although she was among those who started separate women’s conferences. The strategy was not to separate women’s political activity from party structures, as this would have marginalized women and their work. Instead, the ideology held that women’s activities should be integrated, and in this way supported by the

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50 IIF 1927, i.i. 43.
whole party. The attitude of British women, which led to the demand for a
decision by the executive on which women should be sent to international
meetings, was probably an expression of this ideology.

Pin money for transnational work?

One of the arguments used against a large committee structure was financial
considerations. One representative protested against this by remarking that
financial considerations were only invoked in connection with women’s
organizing. However, when plans for the IACW were discussed, British
representatives considered the meetings planned for the bureau to be too
expensive and wanted to decrease the number. Austrian delegates had de-
cided to send only one representative in order to keep costs low so that the
expenses for the committee could not be used as an argument against it, as
some male comrades had maintained. Thus monetary resources mattered,
and they were seriously considered when the IACW was created. Women’s
“separate” organizing would probably have been questioned even more had it
burdened the LSI with extra expenses. Every attempt to engage in collective
action demands some kind of resources. Resources also play an important
role in the exercise of power, in both an active and a passive sense. Access to
resources has an impact on an organization’s external strength, but it is also
important for the initial internal mobilization process. Over time, some re-
sources can become more valuable and others less so. This transformation
often motivates a change in tactics or politics. The finances of the IACW
can be described in one word: non-existent. There are neither financial
records for the committee, nor entries in the LSI records for the expenses of
women’s transnational work. How is this possible, and how was the work
paid for?

Although the women’s committee was structured after the model of the
LSI, such was not the case for its finances. This was a consequence of the
integration of the committee in the LSI and its auxiliary character and lack of
autonomy. Other interest groups close to the LSI, such as the Socialist Youth
International, received regular monetary contributions from the LSI. The

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Karen Hunt and Matthew Worley have shown that Zetkin commented on a draft of the
Communist Party of Great Britain’s women’s section, discussing integration of women’s

IIF 1927, i.i. 43.

IIF 1927, i.i. 43.

Klas Åmark, Maktkamp i byggbransch: Avtalsrörelser och konflikter i byggbranschen
1914–1920 (Lund 1989), 75.

The entry from 1932 was a special deposit for a women’s study week to be held in the
future. IISH SAI 3409 Budget für 1932. See also Tabelle V Special Fonds und Depots.

IISH SAI 3409, Bilanz für 1931, Bilanz für 1932. They received 1,000 Swiss Francs.
LSI contributed in a different way to the resources needed for socialist women’s work at the central international level. The women’s committee had access to its own women’s secretary, working as an officer at the LSI secretariat. Edith Kemmis and later even Alice Pels translated information and sent out calls for conferences and meetings. The women’s officer took care of all the correspondence, the *International Information*, and other administrative tasks.

Administration and periodicals have been and still are difficult to finance for women’s organizing, and probably for most social movements. Administration can require more resources and be no less important at an international level than at a national one. Through this arrangement of integrating the women’s secretaries into the existing administrative structure, the LSI probably saved a great deal of money. The IACW got an opportunity to have a professional administration with paid staff in exchange for having no influence on financial priorities. Single international meetings were much more expensive and time-consuming than those at a national level. This was often offset by having fewer meetings. However, a centralized administration at an international level was a way to reduce costs in terms of money and time for activists. Good administration was the only way to keep members informed about decisions and plans between congresses. Taking into account the heterogeneous structure of the affiliated parties, information became even more important.

Another expense was created by language differences, similar to organizing in multilingual countries. Notices for meetings, minutes, and bulletins were translated and published in three languages: English, French, and German. This demanded professional translation, as precision was important. These expenses were covered in an “all inclusive” manner, though at the cost of the IACW being an auxiliary within the LSI. This also meant that the IACW did not have any responsibility for its budget and did not have to make financial cuts as most movements and organizations did during eco-

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58 IISH SAI 4359, “(a) The administrative work in connection with the Women’s Movement falls within the general tasks of the Secretariat of the L.S.I., for which the secretary of the L.S.I. is ultimately responsible.

(b) The practical carrying out of this administrative work, especially the correspondence with the women’s organisations of the individual countries will be deputed to a member of the Secretariat, Comrade Edith Kemmis, who will perform this work in permanent understanding with the Secretary.” Letter to affiliated parties, without date.


60 See Jonsson and Neunsinger, *Feminine Finances?* for the problems that geography can create for organizing.

61 It was even regarded as impossible to have the same member fees for affiliated parties, as was the case in the International Trade Union Confederation, due to organizational differences. IISH SAI 3395, Sitzung der Exekutive der SAI, Februar 1930, undated.
nomic crises. Whether this should be regarded as an advantage or not is debatable, but there is a parallel to the question of statutes and the way women were to be chosen as IACW representatives. Others made the decision and the women were not asked their opinion. It appears from the sources that women simply never had a choice in this matter.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to compare the costs of the Women’s International with other international organizations. However, there is some information left about the officers’ salaries. According to financial records, the women’s secretary had an annual income of 12,000 Belgian Francs. Friedrich Adler’s salary was 140,000 Belgian Francs. Adler had different responsibilities than the women’s secretary, but it is interesting that his salary was mentioned just after the women’s secretary in the list of salaries. The women’s representative at the LSI executive was paid for by the LSI. Whether bureau meetings were paid for by the LSI or by the affiliated parties is impossible to tell for sure. There is some indication that some of the meetings were paid for partly by the LSI and partly by the affiliated parties.

Another difficulty was the cost for meetings. It is not possible to say for sure how meetings were financed, as the finances of the women’s committee were hardly ever discussed. Nor is the financial structure mentioned in the statutes, as has been the case for other women’s organizing and for the LSI. The decision to organize the women’s committee in the same way as the LSI executive makes it very likely that meetings of the women’s bureau, the IACW, and the national conferences were financed in the same way as the LSI meetings and conferences: delegates’ fees and travel expenses were paid for by the affiliated parties. Similar to the statutes, financial contributions to the LSI were based on a complicated system, taking into account national wealth, workers’ income structure, and national inflation. Travel expenses and conference fees were paid by the affiliated parties. The Belgian party was the only one that suggested that the LSI should pay for the travel expenses of the women’s committee. However, there is no proof that this suggestion was accepted. It is instead likely that the affiliated parties paid for the expenses of their national delegates to the IACW meetings. The fact that some countries could not send delegates due to a lack of money indicates

62 Gilla Dölle, Die (Un)Heimliche Macht des Geldes: Finanzierungsstrategien der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung in Deutschland zwischen 1865 und 1933, Siegener Frauenforschungsreihe (Frankfurt am Main 1997). For the SAI, see IISH SAI 3409, Bericht des Kassierers der SAI 1935 & Sitzung der Exekutive der SAI Februar 1933.
63 IISH SAI 3404, Beschlüsse des Bureaus der SAI III Gehalte.
64 IISH SAI 3409; see entries for Ausgaben Bureau und Exekutivsitzungen, Delegationen und Reisekosten.
65 IISH SAI 3392, meeting of the women’s bureau in connection with the International women workers’ Trade Union conference; Susan Lawrence’s expenses were covered by the LSI, while Juchacz’, Popp’s and Kluszynska’s expenses were paid by their parties.
66 IISH SAI 3391, letter to the members of the executive, the secretaries of affiliated parties, and the women correspondents of the LSI, 23 October 1926.
that this kind of federal financing structure existed. This makes the work of the committee even more dependant on the affiliated parties, which not only had the financial means to decide whether women would attend the meeting or not, but also the power to decide who was going to the IACW meeting.

There was another financial item of rather large political importance in connection with conferences: the printing and distribution of congress minutes. Conference minutes were sold to cover the cost of their printing. When the economy was poor, members discussed whether the minutes should be translated into several languages or published in German only. Again, language proved an obstacle for democratic communication.

Information to members was also integrated in the *International Information* in the form of a women’s supplement. The newsletter was published in three languages, with subscriptions available mainly for affiliated parties, but also for individuals. It informed women about the work of the IACW, but also about what happened in the different countries. This guaranteed the necessary information for a transfer of methods and ideas. Contributions came in the form of articles and letters from the different countries. As the women’s supplement was just a smaller part of the *International Information*, any rise in the price of paper and printing costs was taken care of by the LSI.

If ordinary expenses were taken care of by the LSI, which distributed costs between the different member parties, how were extraordinary expenses handled? International study weeks held in the 1930s illustrate the financial strategy of the committee. These study weeks were planned as an opportunity to educate newcomers and leaders. In the beginning they were paid for by an international fund that was built up through contributions from female Members of Parliament (MPs). Social democratic women MPs were among the few women in the movement who earned money from their political work. MPs were to give a sum equivalent to their own income of one day’s allowance for the fund. The fund would then be used to finance the study week. The idea was a response to the precarious financial situation of national women’s movements. This was during a time when the national women’s movements still had a number of representatives in parliament and shows that MPs were not only important, as they had access to political decision-making, but probably also in a better financial position than the average member (see table 2).

The first study week had to be postponed and was finally held in 1936 in Belgium. Its development illustrates the major problem of the LSI during the 1930s. Members decided not to use the money from the MPs’ fund; instead, all the participants were to pay for themselves or have their way

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67 *IIF* 1927, i.i. 50.
68 SAI (1928), Abteilung II, 57–59.
69 IISH SAI 3400, Vorwort von Alice Pels.
70 IISH SAI 4360, Zirkulare und die Mitglieder des Internationalen Frauenkomitees.
paid by their affiliated parties. Even the original idea of educating newcomers was changed into the education of leaders. In the beginning of the 1930s, the Women’s International had expanded and could afford to use resources for recruiting and educating new members. By 1936 the focus shifted to established leaders; now resources were used to maintain existing structures. This was probably a result of the decreasing number of members. The financial records of the LSI show that the 1936 study week cost more than 14,000 Belgian Francs. The talks were published in the form of a book that was financed through income from sales. In 1938 there were plans for another study week in the Netherlands but the threat of control by the Dutch police postponed the meeting. It was to be held in Britain in 1940 instead but did never take place. Another 15,000 Belgian Francs had been budgeted for this event.

The LSI went through major difficulties in the 1930s. The first reason was the financial crisis in the beginning of the 1930s, which affected the affiliated parties and, through this, their ability to contribute to the income of the LSI. The second reason was the growth of fascism, which turned two of the largest member parties, the German and the Austrian, into illegal parties. This also meant a loss of income for the LSI as the illegal parties no longer contributed to the budget. This loss of income resulted in the LSI secretariat moving to Belgium in 1935, which decreased its spending by 28 percent due to lower wages and cheaper living conditions there than in Switzerland. This illustrates also that administration was one of the major expenses for the LSI.

Women’s work in international organizations was dependant on the goodwill of the affiliated parties and the LSI. The women’s committee’s own separate source of monetary income was nationally based, as the example of the contributions from MPs shows. This kind of income was used to cover extraordinary outlays. Finding its own sources of income, such as the contributions from MPs, became more and more difficult with growing fascism in Europe. This also meant that fewer resources were available to foster internationalism. Transnational work was cheaper to carry out within the existing administrative structure of the LSI.

72 IISH SAI 3401, Treasurer’s report at the executive, 8 March 1937.
73 IISH SAI 3402, 3403, 3404, 3405.
74 IISH SAI 3404, Finanzlage der SAI; 3409, Bericht des Kassierers der SAI April 1932; Kowalski, *Geschichte der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale*, 122–33.
Table 2: Women’s Representation in Parliaments and Access to Periodicals 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women’s suffrage</th>
<th>Total number of women in all parties</th>
<th>Number of socialist women</th>
<th>Women candidates for Parliament</th>
<th>Women’s press</th>
</tr>
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<td>in the Senate</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>one monthly (free for leaders), one every half year</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>one monthly (compulsory), one weekly (not compulsory)</td>
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<td>two weeklies (one Flemish and one French, partly compulsory)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>one monthly (compulsory), one weekly (not compulsory)</td>
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<td>one monthly (partly compulsory)</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>one monthly (not compulsory)</td>
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### Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women’s suffrage</th>
<th>Total number of women in all parties</th>
<th>Number of socialist women</th>
<th>Women candidates for Parliament</th>
<th>Women’s press</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>in the Senate</td>
<td>in the House of Commons</td>
<td>in the Senate</td>
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<td>one monthly bulletin (translated into three languages)</td>
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<td>Russia (SDAP)</td>
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<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Gdansk</td>
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<td>- - - - -</td>
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<td>Luxemburg</td>
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<td>- - - 1</td>
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<td>one weekly women’s supplement in the party bulletin</td>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>4 - - - 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>one women’s supplement in the party bulletin</td>
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</table>


It is a paradox that the work of the women’s committee seemed to become more and more important in the LSI despite the growing lack of resources.\(^77\) Reading the sources in chronological order gives an impression that women’s issues were becoming more, not less, important; the fact that the women’s study week was one of the few activities conducted by the LSI during the end of the 1930s indicates this. Not only did the LSI offer more

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77 IISH SAI 3405. The last volumes about finances contain mainly information about the women’s committee; the executive seems not to be very active anymore. See also Collette, *The International Faith*, 160.
financial resources to the committee, but women got even more involved in
decision-making at the end of 1939. Because of the growing number of par-
ties that were made illegal through fascism and Stalinism, women also had
more seats on the executive, which led to a change in the balance of gender
representation. Women got the right to representation at the executive meet-
ings according to their numbers in affiliated parties. An interesting question
here is whether women’s position improved when an organization as a whole
was weakened. A study of LSI congress, bureau, and secretariat’s minutes
would be necessary in order to shed more light on the internal position of the
LSI women’s committee.

Human resources: Women as socialist activists in the
international arena?

Monetary resources are important, but human resources are also necessary
for the existence and work of every social movement. Human resources can
be divided into specialized ones, such as status and access to different net-
works and decision-makers, and unspecialized ones, such as expertise and
members’ time and commitment. Members themselves are important as
their number can show the strength of a movement or an organization. So
too is the status of members significant: whether or not they are considered
experts or have access to networks, such as media and decision makers, is
very important. Finally, members’ time and commitment is important. What
kind of human resources did the IACW have access to?

The number of members in the affiliated parties, but also the number of
affiliated parties, has been important for LSI women from the very begin-
nig, both for their organizational structure and for their external strength.
Table 1 illustrates which resources were regarded as important for national
strength. The number of members was decisive for the distribution of politi-
cal power and financial responsibilities. Although the IACW did not have
individual members, the number of organized women in the affiliated parties
was important. Statistics regarding national membership were collected from
time to time and sent by national women’s correspondents to the secretariat.
Calculating the number of members was a difficult procedure. In order to
define the number of congress votes, the strength of the national movement

78 Collette, The International Faith, 161.
79 This concept is the result of a modulation of Joe Freeman’s model, presented by Pernilla
Jonsson and Silke Neunsinger, “Organizing at Any Rate? Resources in Founding Bourgeois
and Socialist Women's Movements,” Centre for Feminist Research Working Paper Series 9,
no. 1 (Spring 2004).
80 Statuten der sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale. Beschlossen in Hamburg am 23. Mai
81 IISH SAI 4359, Zahl der organisierten Frauen in den der SAI angeschlossenen Parteien.
was decisive. However, there was a qualitative element regarding who could be counted as a member. Women in parties with affiliated members, such as trade unions and co-operatives, were only counted when they were actually politically organized; otherwise those working within a special women’s organization were to be taken into account. The number of women in trade unions was considered instead of party women if their stated number was more than double the number of female party members. Finally, the choice between different ways of counting the number of members was to be made in a way that gave the maximum number of votes.  

One of the main aims of the IACW was to strengthen women’s organizing and contribute to propaganda among women. When Adelheid Popp presented a motion to start a women’s committee at the 1925 LSI congress in Marseille, she reported that about 800,000 women were members in the affiliated parties. According to her, there was a chance that more women could be mobilized through the efforts of other women. The success of the socialist women’s movement was measured by its growing number of members. When Popp opened the women’s congress in Vienna in August 1931, she referred to this growth; the number of female members had grown to more than 1,280,000 in 1930. The growing number of members probably legitimized the work of the women’s committee, not only in the LSI, but also in women’s national organizing and parties, as Table 1 shows.

But members are not only important because of their numbers; their attributes, education, and prestige are high valued as well by movements and organizations. Both women and men who worked at the central level of the LSI belonged to the elite of the affiliated parties. Some of them had a great deal of experience from the international socialist movement. Like the men, many of the women had been pioneers in different areas. Neither Popp nor any of the other women were political newcomers. The members of the first women’s bureau, Marie Juchacz (D), Susan Lawrence (GB), Adelheid Popp (A), Elisabeth Ribbius Peletier (NL), and Dorota Kluszynska (POL) were all members of the affiliated parties’ elite. With the exception of the much younger Ribbius Peletier, all of these women belonged to the same generation, born in the 1870s.

82 IISH SAI 4359, Guiding principles for the distribution of votes.
83 SAI Zweiter Kongress der Sozialistischen Arbeiter Internationale Marseille 22 bis 27. August 1925, 126.
85 SAI Kongress 1931 Popp p 768 IX. Popp reported 739,571 women for 1925, 1,132,542 in 1928 and 1,282,588 for the end of 1930.
Führende Frauen der internationalen Sozialdemokratie

Source: Kuckuck No 31 2.6. 1931. (See next page for a translation of the text in the picture.)
Leading Women of the International Social Democracy

1. Dr Marion Phillips, women’s secretary of the British Labour Party, member of the British Parliament, member of the IACW.
2. Jennie L. Adamson, member of the executive committee of the IACW, member of the executive of the British Labour Party, member of the London Trade Union Council.
3. Louise Saumoneau, France, one of the first French socialist pioneers, who was imprisoned during the war because of her resistance to it: has been the long time editor of “Femme Socialiste”.
4. Suzanne Buisson, women’s organizer for the socialist women of France, member of the IACW.
5. Alice Pels, Belgian member of the executive of the IACW.
6. Isabelle Blume, member of the IACW, women’s secretary of the Belgian Workers’ Party.
7. Marie Juchacz, member of the German Parliament, member of the executive of the German Social Democratic Party.
8. Toni Sender, member of the German Parliament, member of the IACW, editor of “Frauenwelt”.
9. Henriette Crone, Denmark, member of the Danish Senate and the IACW.
10. Sigrid Gillner-Ringenson, Sweden, member of the IACW.
11. Elisabeth Ribbius-Peletier, secretary of the Dutch Social Democratic Party, member of the IACW.
12. Fanny Blatny, Czechoslovakia, German Party, member of the Czechoslovakian National Assembly, member of the IACW.
13. Irene Kirpal, Czechoslovakia, German Party, member of the Czechoslovakian National Assembly.
14. Betty Karpiskowa, Czechoslovakia, editor of “Zenske noviny”, member of the Czechoslovakian National Assembly, member of the IACW.
15. Dorota Kluszynska, Poland, member of the Polish Senate and the IACW.
16. Klara Kalnin, Latvia, member of the Executive of the Latvian Social Democratic Party and the IACW.
17. Ostra-Cinas, leader of the Estonian Women Workers, member of the IACW.
18. Anna Kéthly, member of the executive of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party and the Hungarian Parliament, president of the Women’s Central Committee.
19. Lydia Dan, representative of the Russian Social Democracy in the IACW.
20. Adelheid Popp, leader of the Austrian Women Workers, president of the IACW.
21. Gabriele Proft, member of the Austrian National Assembly, member of the Austrian Party Executive.
22. Marta Tausk, Zurich, secretary of the IACW, editor of the Swiss monthly “Frauenrecht”.

Source: Kuckuck No 31 2.6. 1931
Popp and Juchacz were the only ones who had themselves been workers, as had their parents. Both they and Dorota Kluszynska 87 had made impressive careers in their parties. Popp, the fifteenth child of a weaver, organized the first women’s strike in Vienna in 1893. Juchacz had been a party member since 1908, and she became the women’s chief officer in Cologne in 1913, a position she held at the national level by 1917. Both Popp and Juchacz edited socialist women’s periodicals and both were the first female members of parliament and members of the party executive. Later, both had to emigrate during fascist rule, which illustrates their political convictions and commitment. 88 Lawrence and Ribbius Peletier came from middle- and upper-class families. Ribbius Peletier was the daughter of a cigar factory owner while Lawrence was the daughter of a wealthy solicitor. Ribbius Peletier had a doctoral degree in law and went to Great Britain to study social work in factories. This is also how she came in contact with the BLP at a meeting that awoke her interest in socialism. In 1925 she became a member of the Dutch Social Democratic party. Soon after that, she became the women’s secretary and started to organize women’s work in the party together with Mathilde Wibaut. Ulla Jansz mentions in a short biographic note about Peletier that it was her financial independence that made her an important candidate for this job. 89 Susan Lawrence was the only of these four whose political work was not interrupted by fascism. 90

The IACW also consisted mainly of women who were members of national parliaments or members of party executives. They were leaders of women’s federations or women who belonged to the union elite. Some of them even worked as ministers or secretaries in national governments. If the women were not well-educated, they had instead made brilliant political careers and were the political pioneers of their time. These women had access to decision-makers and to different networks in the labour movement; they were in charge of the women’s periodicals and, in addition, some of them had gone through higher education and had academic degrees. That these women were conscious of the importance of these kinds of resources is

87 I have not been able to trace much information on Dorota Kluszynska yet due to language problems.
shown by the fact that the situation of women MPs and members of state commissions was an issue discussed by the IACW.  

Most of the leading socialist women were thus well educated, with prestige and access to influence within their own parties. This did not mean, however, that they were immune from persecution. From 1933 on, reports about members of the IACW who had been imprisoned, or who died in prison, committed suicide or were just missing were published with frightening regularity in the *International Information*. The reports about suicides and imprisonment are a sad testimony to another important resource LSI women had access to: a never-ending commitment to the cause of socialism. Fascism deprived the LSI not only of economic and human resources, but also of meeting space. Over the years it became more and more difficult to congregate; fascist countries were off the list and even other countries became more difficult to visit. This was a problem for most international social movements, as the case of the much more conservative International Council of Women also proves.  

There is not much evidence of co-operation between the IACW and these other women’s organizations. There was an exchange between the IACW and union women’s international meetings, but contacts with other women’s organizations, such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, were stopped by LSI secretary Friedrich Adler as they were suspected of being a cover for the Comintern. It seems that as a consequence, the IACW did not have any contact with the international women’s movement and, because of this, probably did not have a great deal of status in this cause. This also circumscribed the scope for internationalism. The importance of the women’s committee should not be underestimated for women’s national movements. Most of the national movements reported to the *Inter-*

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91 IISH, SAI 4371, Meeting of the Bureau in Paris 31st of July 1927. Kluszynska stresses the importance of this kind of discussion.  
92 Eva Broido was imprisoned, SAI (1928), Abteilung VIII, Bericht über die Dritte Internationale Frauenkonferenz der SAI, salle de Conférence des Volkshauses in Brüssel, 3–4. August 1928, 7; Toni Pfülf zum Gedächtnis IIF 1933, i.i. 303; Frauen Opfer der Hitler Barbarei, IIF 1933, i.i. 304; “Gertrud Hanna’s sisters and Käthe Leu dead. Isabelle Blume imprisoned, women arrested in Austria, Poland and Belgium,” IIF 1935, i.i. 82, “Suicide of Mathilde Wurm and Dora Fabian,” IIF 1935, i.i. 178; “Clara Bohm-Schuch dies in prison,” IIF 1936, 57.  
93 National Archives of Canada, Lady Aberdeen’s papers, ICW letters to honorary treasurer 1933–1934.  
national Information about their activities, and if they could afford to do so, they took part in the congresses. In order to understand the status of the committee, a special investigation of the different national movements would be necessary. A study of national minutes and LSI minutes, but also letters written and sent between the different active women, could shed some light on how ideas and actions travelled and transformed across borders, including which ideas came from the local and national levels and how these were received at the international level. In short, an investigation into the effects of transnational work could help to understand the relation between the national and the international level.

The human resources available for the Women’s International very much resemble those available in the women’s organizations studied by Rupp. The leaders of the socialist women’s elite consisted of well-educated—albeit self-taught—elderly middle-class women. Surprisingly few of the women came from working-class backgrounds. They had some knowledge of languages other than their mother tongue, as well as political experience and high status among their fellow party comrades. Because they did not cooperate with movements outside the socialist movement, their loyalty to socialist ideals and the movement was unquestioned. Their age also guaranteed that they had more time for political activity than younger women with children. Their loyalty and their political experience of working together with a preponderance of men made them the ideal leaders of an integrated women’s committee. Both their long experience of working for women’s issues and their status in politics guaranteed the perpetuation of Zetkin’s strategy of integrating women’s activities in the work of the whole organization in order to make women’s issues less marginalized. Whether or not women’s issues remained less marginalized in the LSI remains to be seen.

Creating an international feeling

When at the end of the Brussels conference the proletariat’s song of freedom was sung by women in ten different languages, happiness was vibrating, as we had achieved our aspirations.95

The creation of a collective identity and solidarity among members is an important task for social movements and, to some degree, a precondition for political work. The LSI statutes mirror the attempts to create transnational work as the concept is presented by Kaelble, Kirsch, and Schmidt-Gernig.96

95 Adelheid Popp’s report in the International Information, 12 März 1927, my translation (“Als am Schluss der Brüsseler Konferenz in zehn Sprachen der Freiheitsgesang des Proletariats von Frauen gesungen ertönte, da vibrierte die Freude, dass es gelungen war, das Werk soweit zu vollenden.”)

96 SAI 1928, Abteilung 3, Statuten.
The statutes were based on the national strength of members, which was
decisive not only for financial contributions, but also for the number of
votes. Women working at the international level, Leila Rupp argues, found
that it was difficult to define internationalism. It was something that had to
be experienced, or rather was experienced as a feeling. Rupp states that
internationalism are ways to form collective identities. How was this
international collective identity formed? Organizations depend not only on
statutes, but also on symbols and rituals. How was the “feeling of interna-
tionalism” created in the socialist women’s international?

The creation of an “international spirit” was closely related to growing
nationalism. As shown by the decision of the LSI regarding the validity of
international work in the national context, the creation of an “international
feeling” was even more difficult after World War I. Rupp shows that inter-
nationalism was created in different ways in different feminist organizations.
All three organizations she studied used national symbols such as flags, na-
tional costumes, or the singing of national anthems. For women in these
organizations, it was the summation of national differences, or the fact that
they could be presented side by side, that constructed the “international
spirit”. Some of the feminists studied by Rupp were explicit nationalists,
while others had lived in several different countries or were refugees. They
went to peace conferences, meeting women from enemy countries. The
feeling of internationalism was constructed in many different ways and at
many different levels. Nationalism and internationalism were regarded by
some as complementary and not in opposition, although all agreed on the
importance of internationalism. Rupp states that socialist women working
in international organizations lacked the common ground and collective
identity that women shared in separate “liberal” feminist organizations.
However, much of the research done on socialist women at the local and
national level indicates that even socialist women had access to these gender
segregated organizations. Socialist women were active in the suffrage move-
ment and had often started or worked in women’s trade unions. Furthermore,
socialist women were well acquainted with the “feeling of internationalism” as
a socialist tradition going back to Marx and the First International.

Symbols have also been of major importance also for the labour move-
ment, however, the reports about the meetings of the LSI women and even

97 Rupp, Worlds of Women.
98 Rupp, Worlds of Women, 111–21.
99 Rupp, Worlds of Women, 121, 123.
100 Rupp, Worlds of Women, 225.
101 Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914,” in Eric J. Hobs-
bawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge 1992), 284. See
also Margareta Ståhl, Vår fana röd till färgen: fanor som medium för visuell kommunikation
under arbetarrörelsens genombrottstid i Sverige fram till 1890, 1. uppl. ed., Linköping
the few photographs that exist do not mention flags or show women in national costumes. In terms of music, while bourgeois women sang different national anthems, the labour movement had its own common song. The *Internationale* illustrates how internationalism could be transformed into transnational processes in socialist organizing. The same song was translated into different languages in order to make it fit different national contexts. It was sung by LSI women as a medley of different languages, just as it was around the campfires during the Spanish Civil War, thus creating a sense of internationalism despite the use of many languages.\(^{102}\) Music had the advantage of allowing feelings to be visibly expressed, making them for a short time more important than opinions. As the above quotation by Adelheid Popp shows, conferences ended with members singing the *Internationale*, a practice which created feelings of commonality and community, even after controversial issues had been aired.\(^{103}\)

In contrast to the women’s organizations studied by Rupp, socialist organizations had common symbols which were transferred from the international level to the national level, often inspired by national initiatives. And socialist women had their own rituals and symbols of internationalism. A typical example of this is International Women’s Day, the one symbol that was used only by women.\(^{104}\) It was the main activity that promoted the feeling of internationalism among socialist women in many countries, and it is celebrated even today, although now it has become more of a feminist celebration than a socialist one. Initiated by American socialists in February 1909 when a suffrage demonstration was held in New York, the event inspired the German Luise Zietz to demand celebrations of International Women’s Day at the women’s conference in Copenhagen in 1910.\(^{105}\) The following year it was celebrated for the first time in Europe without a specified date.\(^{106}\) Among socialist women, the event was not celebrated on the same day, while communist women during the 1920s started to celebrate it on the 8\(^{th}\) of March. The symbolic dimension of International Women’s Day was transferred from an international level, while the organization, practical arrangements, and exact date were decided nationally and sometimes even locally.

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\(^{102}\) Collette, *The International Faith*, 133.

\(^{103}\) Collette, *The International Faith*, 131.

\(^{104}\) IISH SAI 3391, Bericht des Sekretärs 11. April 1926; 3392 An die Frauenkorrespondentin- nen der SAI, 7 März 1927; 4360, Zirkulare and die Mitglieder des Frauenkomitees 21. November 1927. Juchacz proposes to synchronize different International Women’s Day celebrations during the month of April as it would be too difficult to organize around one day; 4364; *IIF* 1927, i.i. 49; i.i.50, i.i. 111, i.i., 226; *IIF* 1930, i.i. 34; *IIF* 1931, i.i. 17, i.i. 200.


International Women’s Day represented international solidarity and peace, as well as women’s rights, though the event was not as powerful as May Day celebrations, which demonstrated the power of workers through their absence from work. Celebrations had a similar symbolic effect. Both May Day and the International Women’s Day illustrate the power of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the invention of tradition. These special days came to symbolize the strength of the labour movement and, in the case of International Women’s Day, the strength of the socialist women’s movement. Both were initiated during times when these movements showed growth and expansion. While May Day had been coordinated and turned into a ritual, women lacked the administrative resources to synchronize International Women’s Day in a similar way, although they wanted to. And in contrast to May Day, International Women’s Day only became a public holiday in the Soviet Union, established by Lenin and Zetkin in 1922.

Symbols used in the Women’s International again show the importance of language: the international arena demanded a different language than the home arena. Esperanto, although called “le latin de la democratie”, was used neither by the LSI leadership nor conference participants, though this was suggested. Language created barriers between the different speakers at conferences. The above mentioned example of different translations also illustrates the problems of finding a language that was suited for transnational work. As was the case for the International Council of Women, English, German, and French were the official languages used by the LSI secretariat so activists needed good language skills to communicate with their peers.

Unlike in the organizing studied by Rupp, the “international feeling” was not constructed as a compilation of national symbols among activists on the left. Rather, socialists created their own symbols, such as the singing of the Internationale that offered a sense of common purpose, not only for women, but for all socialists within the LSI. Moreover, the Women’s International also used International Women’s Day as an added important symbol of its own, even if it was never as visible as other demonstrations of international solidarity in the labour movement.

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109 Collette, The International Faith, 125, 128.
110 The conference minutes indicate when a speaker was using a different language than that of the minutes.
An international agenda

The “feeling of internationalism” was not only created through symbols, it was also the result of practical political work. What did women’s work at the international level mean and what did it entail? How does it relate to specific understandings of internationalism on the one hand, and the specific circumstances of national organizations on the other?

Henriette Crone, Danish delegate at the fourth congress of the Socialist Women’s International, noted the limitations around how international political decisions could be put into practice and what kind of difficulties the activist would meet:

It is, in my opinion, a mistake if international resolutions go into too much detail. They should outline the major directions, while the details and practical accomplishment should be left to the different countries and should be adjusted to their special conditions. If we do not do this, we will split instead of unite, while the latter should be the task of this conference and all international meetings …

She also mentioned the difficulties of balancing national conditions with international political demands. Her analysis indicates very well the way political action was conducted, and shows the limitations of internationalism. What is not mentioned in Crone’s statement is the political reality that feminist demands could not challenge solidarity between men and women. Women’s work needed to be legitimate inside the whole LSI. What were the issues that could be handled under such circumstances and how did national interest and international decisions coincide?

Two types of political work characterize the political agenda of the Women’s International: the first, and perhaps the one that best fitted the purpose of the IACW, was the exchange of information, coordinated at the international level, between different countries. This work was systematic transnational work. Administrative channels were created for the transfer of ideas and practical political work between different national organizations. The second type of work was initiated at congresses and concerned women’s questions that were discussed in several countries at the same time. They could be defined as the major women’s questions of their time, usually because of international economic crises or issues relating to democratization.

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111 Henriette Crone on the fourth international LSI women’s conference in Vienna 1931, my translation (“Es ist meiner Ansicht nach ein Fehler, wenn internationale Resolutionen zu stark auf Einzelheiten eingehen. Sie sollen nur die großen Linien vorzeichnen, während die Einzelheiten und die praktische Ausführung den verschiedenen Länder überlassen bleiben und ihren besonderen Verhältnissen angepasst werden sollten. Tun wir das nicht so werden wir eher spalten anstatt zu vereinen, dies letztere scheint mir aber die Aufgabe dieser Konferenz und aller internationaler Zusammenkünfte zu sein …”).

112 IISH SAI 4359, An die der SAI angeschlossenen Parteien. Beschluss der Sitzung der Exekutive vom 12 April 1926.
and citizenship. Both demanded political action in the international arena. In order to address these issues, the Women’s International sent letters and sometimes even took part in meetings of international bodies such as the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO).\textsuperscript{113}

The most important political work for member organizations and movements, and probably the most legitimate work of the IACW in the LSI, was the collection of information about women’s organizing in the different member countries. The purpose here was to spread this information between countries, thus providing new ideas that might improve the mobilization of women for socialism. The women’s secretary and the LSI secretary collected statistics not only on women’s movements, but also on types of organizations, special activities for women, and how often meetings were held. Information on the existence of women’s periodicals, collaboration with other organizations and movements, the ways in which women were recruited for the party, and whether they were individual members or included in men’s membership, were collected and published in the \textit{International Information}. The women’s secretariat was also interested in women’s position in the affiliated parties, such as the number of women in the executive, the number of female representatives at national congresses, and the choice of women as parliamentary candidates (see tables 1 and 2).\textsuperscript{114}

The women’s bureau exchanged leaflets and brochures and tried to collect pictures and photographs of the different national organizations.\textsuperscript{115} During the 1930s when conferences were no longer held and the number of affiliated women’s organizations had decreased, making political work more difficult, statistics of a different type were collected. The needs of working-class households were investigated after a model already applied in Sweden and Belgium.\textsuperscript{116} This illustrates the situation of the socialist movement, which was concerned less with expansion than survival. Moreover, there were plans to analyze the effects of the international crisis on the health of children, adolescents, and adults.\textsuperscript{117} From 1937 on, topics such as women, population politics, and social policy, as well as aid to Spain, became more and more important.\textsuperscript{118} Fascism also put the question of aid for refugees on the agenda.\textsuperscript{119}

The results of investigations and reports about the work of women’s national movements were published in the \textit{International Information}. This

\textsuperscript{113} IISH SAI 4367, Sitzung in Brüssel 27–29 August 1936; SAI 4359, Schreiben von Alice Pels an Mitglieder 1936; SAI 4360, 9 November 1936.
\textsuperscript{114} IISH SAI 4362, Meeting of the IACW in Cologne the 10\textsuperscript{th} and 11\textsuperscript{th} December 1927; see also SAI 1928, Abteilung II, 2. Organisation der einzelnen Länder, 8–40.
\textsuperscript{115} IISH SAI 4362, Letter from Edith Kemmis, 7 November 1927.
\textsuperscript{116} IIF 1935, i.i. 309; IISH SAI, 3401 Exekutive 16–17 Januar 1938; 4367, Sitzung Brüssel 27–29 August 1936.
\textsuperscript{117} IISH SAI 4367, Sitzung Brüssel 27–29 August 1936.
\textsuperscript{118} IISH SAI 4368, Meeting in Paris 15 June 1937.
\textsuperscript{119} IISH SAI 4370, Meeting 10 August 1939.
“publication” not only reported on the decisions made by the committee and the bureau, it also published different opinions and controversies. These debates illustrate the importance of Crone’s point that it was always important to recognize national differences while creating frameworks of consensus which would leave space for national transformations. Exchange also took place on a practical level. Transnational work between affiliated parties and even shared meeting places were suggested, taking into account that the movement did not have very much money.

The lack of an official program can be interpreted as a result not only of the advisory character of the Women’s International, but also of the agitatorial organization of the LSI. However, discussions at congresses illustrate that there was an agenda that was renewed before every congress. The issues were prepared by the IACW, and different reporters were chosen to prepare the different subjects. Among the recurring issues were the following: the political mobilization and organization of women, labour protection and the protection of mothers and children, and matters of equality, which included married women’s right to work and married women’s citizenship.

The issue that received the most attention was the protection of women and mothers. In particular, the night work prohibition was discussed, as were contraception and abortion. The night work prohibition was a controversial issue, as Ulla Wikander’s contribution in this volume illustrates. Still, during the interwar period the attitude among the affiliated parties diverged considerably. Scandinavian representatives, like the Open-door movement, argued against special protection for women in favour of the same conditions for men and women, while others like the British Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party representatives were divided on this issue.

In the case of night work, Marta Tausk made it very clear that it was not just a discussion about women and men having the same rights, but rather about women being given the option to decide where they would work. This same view was stressed when women’s right to citizenship was discussed. A woman, it was argued, should not lose her nationality without her consent upon marrying a foreigner. Tausk wanted the wife to be able to choose which citizenship she would to have. The issue was especially difficult for women who had married stateless men.

The Women’s International also protested against a new trend to dismiss married women during times of economic crises and high unemployment.

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120 SAI 4360, Zirkulare an die Mitglieder, Schreiben von Alice Pels.
121 IISH SAI 4360, Zirkular an die Mitglieder des Internationalen Frauenkomitees 27 April 1928, Edith Kemmis.
122 IISH SAI 4361, Sitzung in Brüssel 4–5 Dezember 1927.
123 IIF 1933, i.i. 497; IIF 1927, i.i. 36, IIF 1930, i.i. 34; IIF 1931, i.i. 17, IISH SAI 4364, Sitzung des Internationalen Frauenkomitees 11. Januar 1931: SAI 1928, Abteilung II, 8–14, SAI 1931, Abteilung IX, 790–796.
124 SAI 1931, Abteilung IX, 840.
The fact that women did not have the right to vote in all countries also made the fight for suffrage a permanent topic of discussion. Women from France and Belgium were represented in the bureau but did not have the vote and were some of the few that were not female MPs. Although the fact that many countries had introduced suffrage for women meant that the issue was not interesting for all or seen as the burning question it once was, it was a matter of showing solidarity with other each. Over the years, more or less spontaneous protests and solidarity actions against fascism became more and more important. Socialist women condemned fascism and demanded boycotts of German products.

The methods of political work suggested, discussed, and selected show that members of the Women’s International did not regard themselves as an auxiliary but rather as political actresses in their own right. Their work also indicates the truly internationalist ambitions of these women. The IACW had future plans to place representatives in all the important League of Nations committees concerning women and education, as well as in other trans-governmental organizations such as the ILO and the Amsterdam trade union movement. Understandably, the particular subjects they focused on changed as fascism rearranged power relations in the Women’s International. Scandinavian women gained more influence, as they and the already powerful British representatives were among the few who did not fear the terror of political prosecution.

**Conclusion**

Like members of other international organizations, LSI women had to face the differences between their ambitions for political work and the reality they experienced. What can the conditions for women’s political work in the LSI tell us about their ambitions for internationalism, and how were their pursuits restricted by such conditions? What role did class and gender play for political work at the central international level?

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125 SAI 1931, Abteilung III, 205.
126 IISH SAI 3393, Meeting 9th of February 1928. Susan Lawrence regarded suffrage as too narrow a subject for the International.
127 IIF 1933, *Die Frauen der Sozialistischen Internationalen gegen den Faschismus*, i.i. 497.
128 IIF 1935, *Methoden der Propaganda und der Mitgliederwerbung*, i.i. 309
129 IIF 1927, *Konferenz der in der sozialistischen Arbeiterinternationalen organisierten Frauen, im Volkshaus in Brüssel 4–5 Dezember 1926*, i.i. 50.
As a movement within a movement, socialist women’s work at the international level can be characterized by a lack of autonomy. From the very beginning, this influenced both the form and content of women’s political work. Socialist women were integrated into male-dominated organizations. Women-centered politics were subordinated in the LSI, but LSI women were also left without a choice to join feminist organizations. However, women in the LSI did benefit financially from the integration into the LSI, as their administrative work was covered by LSI staff.

The conditions were also affected by traditions about women in the socialist international. The strong organizational and financial integration into the labour movement must be regarded as the result of strong ties with traditions from the earlier Internationals and the work done by Clara Zetkin. Integration also meant legitimacy in the LSI; separation was regarded as a betrayal of the labour movement. Already at the Hamburg ordinary congress in 1923, delegates were afraid women would start their own separate International. As a consequence of the integration into the labour movement, cross-class strategies on an international level became impossible for the LSI women.

Did the lack of real power actually make it easier for the women’s committee to function? The transnational work initiated and partly carried out by the committee was in one way a result of the powerlessness of the committee at the international level. This could help to strengthen national women’s movements in the way Hyman has described for the agitatorial model. For the powerless national movements, the transnational work could have inspired new political activity.

Although the committee had ambitions to act in the international arena, this was circumscribed both by its membership in a socialist organization and by the lack of women’s power in transgovernmental organizations. Conditions for women’s work in the LSI changed over time. The scope for such work changed as an indirect consequence of fascism. The disappearance of the most powerful European socialist parties paralyzed the LSI. At the same time, this gave more space for women’s issues at executive meetings, as the reports about women’s activities became more and more extensive. The IACW also broadened its activity over time. Meanwhile, fascism deprived the Women’s International of the few resources that made it a bit more autonomous. This made work difficult not only in a material sense, but also on a psychological level. It was difficult to work hearing the never-ending news about the murders and suicides of leading socialist women. Moreover, fascism limited travelling and made it more difficult to find places to meet.

Although it seems that the women’s committee was one of the most active groups in the LSI during the second half of the 1930s, it is difficult to say in which way it influenced the work of the LSI. According to sources in the Swedish Social Democratic Women’s Federation’s archives, the women’s committee was an important influence on the work of affiliated
organizing.\textsuperscript{130} An investigation of the transfers between the affiliated organizing coordinated by the Women’s International could shed new light not only on the effects of socialist women’s transnational work, but also on how ideas discussed at an international level took shape when they were transferred into different national contexts.

The international arena has sometimes been described as an alternative public sphere for women. This study indicates that the arena could be used for transnational work, and it would be worthwhile to systematically investigate the effects of transnationalism on national women’s movements. As well, this limited investigation into the Women’s International shows that socialist women had to cross more than just national borders before they could start their international career; only the elite among them had access to this public sphere, although a long political career enabled a few women with a working-class background to join the international scene. This means that class did matter for access to the international arena. Similar to the men in the LSI, female working-class heroes had to have a political career; otherwise it was mostly well-educated middle-class women who represented the interests of the working class. What did this mean for the content of their politics?

The subjects discussed show an agenda that was very similar to that of international feminist organizations and movements. Suffrage, the night work prohibition, and married women’s right to work, along with their right to decide on their citizenship, were discussed in most of the industrialized countries, both by socialist women and other feminists. They were the result of larger “global” changes such as industrialization and democratization. Matters of morality and prostitution were not discussed to the same extent as was the case among the three international feminist organizations studied by Rupp.\textsuperscript{131}

Can we trace any women-centred internationalism? What did socialist women contribute at the international level? In contrast to other feminist movements, socialist women could make use of traditional socialist symbols and rituals, created mainly by men and used to form an international community. But socialist women also invented their own symbols and rituals, which were kept up by socialist women during the interwar period. International Women’s Day was not only celebrated in many countries, it also united international and local sphere of activity. The success of this tradition later turned it into not only a socialist but also a feminist tradition, celebrated on 8 March all over the world. The lack of international power of women, but also the resources used, could explain the late coordination of Interna-

\textsuperscript{130} A study of socialist women’s access to resources in Canada and Sweden shows that international contacts were of major importance for the mobilization and organization of women at the national level when the cash box was empty and resources necessary for organizing were out of reach. See Jonsson and Neunsinger, \textit{Feminine Finances}?

tional Women’s Day. It was the result of an agitatorial approach, rather than a bureaucratic one, used by the women’s committee.

The distribution of seats in the IACW also shows that “international”, in this context, meant European, as no representatives from non-European countries were among the members. The sources do not indicate that there has ever been a discussion on this subject, either among the women or among the LSI leadership. Although the LSI was Eurocentric too, there were at least some representatives from outside Europe, which was not the case for the IACW. This may in part reflect the Eurocentrism of socialist politics of the time, which were not yet centrally concerned with colonialism. It might also reflect the special problems that non-European women had in leaving home countries to join international meetings.

Socialist women in Europe dealt with a range of identical issues, although they did not always agree on methods and goals. Organizations such as the IACW were important for the transfer of experiences in women’s mobilization and organizing between different national movements and organizations, and the integration into the LSI did enable women to carry out this transnational work. But the Women’s International also created an experience of internationalism for the elite women who were able to come to international meetings. The IACW contributed symbols, an agenda, and ideas for mobilizing and organizing women at the local level for socialist women’s work in affiliated parties. Information was certainly important as similar issues were discussed in most of the national movements. As both a material, but also a symbolic resource, international solidarity could sometimes be worth more than money.
Money and resources are of particular interest in relation to women and women’s organizations since access to them is highly gendered. Legal restrictions, social norms, and a segregated labour market have left most women with less access to monetary resources than men. Clearly, resources matter for organizing, although how much is open to discussion. Very few studies have dealt with the subject of women and finances in relation to women’s organizing. In the women’s movements’ own histories, discussions of the financing of, and paid labour for, the women’s movement have been lacking. Even in later scholars’ writing, the finances of organizations and what such resources could have meant for the political work of a group have received little attention, with some rare exceptions. This silence may have something to do with a gendered concept of money; Viviana A. Zelizer has proposed that the notion of money is a social construction and can not be regarded as neutral. The kind of money—pin money, a gift, a salary—involved, and who received it, put limits on how money could be used, at
least according to the dominant societal norms. The notion that money was fundamentally connected to a male sphere and the idea of a higher moral standard for women working for the “Women’s cause” could both serve to keep the concepts of women and money separated. In light of these factors, we need to re-think the connections between women’s political work and money.

The early women’s movement had to face legal restrictions on women’s right to property as well as an image of “bourgeois” women that assumed they were not economic agents in a public sphere. Both of these factors affected the outcome of political struggles. To achieve political goals and run an organization required funds, with political opportunities thus affected by the resources mobilized. According to studies of resource mobilization theory, resources are crucial for organizations to make their voices heard, keep the organization going, and achieve external strength. Later studies have put more emphasis on “frames”, “cultures”, and strategies for using resources, rather than the actual amount of resources, in order to explain the outcomes of organizations. How the goals were expressed and received by potential members, and also how the women in the organization thought about money, would then be crucial. This paper deals with resources and resource mobilization in moderate women’s organizations connected to the International Council of Women (ICW). My main focus will be on incomes, income sources, and strategies for using and investing income. However, I also pay attention to how money was discussed by the women active in the women’s

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3 For example, see Viviana A. Zelizer, The Social Meaning of Money (New York 1994); Dölle, Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes, 18–19; Boylan, The Origins of Women’s Activism, 186.


movement, and to what extent their attitudes could be interpreted as circum-
scribed in terms of gender or class.

The choice of cases and sources
Comparisons that cross national borders are all too rare in the history of the
women’s movement, even though a comparison of women’s organizations
with similar organizational structures, class base, and political strategies in
different countries provides an excellent opportunity to uncover the influence
of national and cultural contexts on women’s organizing.7 By comparing
“bourgeois” women’s organizations in different countries, a number of gen-
eral patterns may be discerned; at the same time, differences will need to be
explained in terms of the distinct national and cultural contexts women
encountered.

The organizations chosen for this study include: the National Council of
Women of Great Britain and Ireland (NCWGB), the National Council of
Women of Canada (NCWC), the National Council of Women of Germany
(Bund Deutscher Frauenverein, BDF), and the Fredrika Bremer Association
(FBA) in Sweden. All these organizations took part early in the work of the
ICW; this allows us to follow their histories during more or less the same
timeframe and state of organization. Despite the common framework of the
ICW, the formation of these organizations differed. The Swedish Fredrika
Bremer Association was established in 1885 and although it was not a na-
tional council, it is essential to consider since it completely dominated the
Swedish scene during its first decades. It initiated the National Council of
Women of Sweden in 1895, but remained the main organization for Swedish
liberal and conservative women nationally and internationally until the
1910s.8 This makes the FBA an organization comparable to the others, with
similar administrative and political work on its agenda, but with a different
organizational structure as it was not, like some of the others, an umbrella
organization.

The other organizations in this study, in contrast, were umbrella organi-
zations and national councils affiliated with the ICW. However, the way they

7 For a discussion of the importance of comparative studies of the women’s movement see
Pernilla Jonsson and Silke Neunsinger, “Comparison and transfer—a fruitful approach to
national history?” Scandinavian Journal of History 3 (2007), forthcoming; Diane Rothbard
Margolis, “Women’s Movements around the World: Cross-Cultural Comparisons”, Gender
8 Lovisa af Petersén, Formering för offentlighet: Kvinnokonferenser och Svenska Kvinnornas
Nationalförbund kring sekelskiftet 1900 (Stockholm 2006); Pernilla Jonsson and Lovisa af
Petersén, “Resources and Swedish Women’s Organisations’ Participation on the International
Scene, 1885–1916,” in Eva Schöck-Quinteros, Anja Schüler, and Annika Wilmers, eds.,
Communication—Mobility—Networks. The International Dimension of Women’s Movements,
became national councils reveals some important differences. The National Council of Women of Great Britain first got its name in 1918, but it had acted as a national council long before that. Its precursor, the Central Conference Committee (CCC), was established in 1891 to arrange national conferences inspired by the Women’s Congresses held in Paris 1878 and Washington 1888. Only in 1895 did it become a national organization, the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW), which associated with the ICW in 1897. In contrast, the Canadian and German organizations, established in 1893 and 1894 respectively, were products of existing women’s organizations that were transformed into umbrella organizations after the ICW’s proposals on national councils.

Notwithstanding the differences, all the chosen organizations expressed a common goal of working for “the social, moral, and religious elevation of their own sex”, with women’s right to higher education and the professions high on their agendas. They could be defined as associations of mainly white, liberal or conservative middle and upper-class women who were generally “moderate” in their politics, having no aspirations to fundamentally alter the gender order. Some of them were hesitant regarding the question of women’s suffrage and even expressed conservative positions on women’s equality. However, their politics varied over time, both within the organizations and also between the national organizations. The Canadian organization was from the start the most conservative, while the German and Swedish organizations could be regarded as liberal and, on some questions, rather

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9 The NCWC was established in October 1893, after Lady Aberdeen had become the president of the International Council of Women (ICW). Women from the Dominion Women’s Franchise Association, the Dominion Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the Anglican Women’s Auxiliary, and other organizations that had attended the 1893 congress in Chicago were active in its establishment. Naomi E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada 1893–1993* (Ottawa 1997), 21; Veronica Jane Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893–1929* (Ottawa 1976), 61–73.

10 The BDF was established in Berlin in March 1894. The initiative was taken by women’s organizations working for women’s emancipation, such as the Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein, and organizations working more specifically for women’s education, such as the Letteverein and the Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein. The Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein was the first women’s organization in Germany established at the German women’s conference in 1865. The initiative was taken by Luise Otto and Auguste Schmidt, and the latter became the first president of the BDF. Barbara Greven-Aschoff, *Die bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland 1894–1933* (Göttingen 1981), 72–89; Else Wex, *Staatbürgerliche Arbeit Deutscher Frauen 1865–1928* (Berlin 1929), 12 and 33.

11 London Metropolitan Archive (hereafter LMA), the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland (hereafter NCWGB), Minutes “Conference of Women’s Workers, Proof Nov. 1891” from the statutes of the pre-organization CCC in the conference in Liverpool.

12 From the start a complementary view of the sexes and a domestic role for women dominated. Women were seen as the guardians of positive virtues in a society threatened by industrialization and urbanization, and the NCWC “formally embraced the suffrage cause only in the 1910s.” Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, 81–86 and 100–104. See also Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision*, 49–51; Rupp, “Constructing internationalism”, 1574.
radical during their first decades, though they became more conservative as time went on. In the German case it should also be noted that the organization worked under legal restrictions until 1908, when German women were allowed to officially join political organizations.

Lady Ishbel Marjoribanks Gordon, the Countess of Aberdeen, held a central position in the transfer of ideas and the practical shaping of several of these organizations. She was the president of the ICW from 1893 to 1936 (with two short breaks) and of the Canadian organization during its first years, from 1893 to 1898. Before moving to Canada, she had arranged the first Women’s Conference in Britain in 1888, which was followed by annual Women’s Conferences that turned into the British CCC in 1891. She also attended the first meetings of the CCC. After the need for national councils was stressed at the Chicago meeting, she sent her secretary, Theresa Wilson, on an organizing mission to northern Europe in 1895 and 1896. One influential woman thus played an active part in several of the formative actions of the organizations I am considering.

While there were similarities and connections between these organizations, there were also several striking differences. A comparison between organizations in such different countries as Canada, Germany, England, and Sweden is thus a problematic task. It becomes even more difficult since the Swedish organization differed quite significantly in its organizational structure. However, it is too easy to fall back on the notion that “everything is different”. One unifying advantage to a comparative study is the fact that the Canadian, English, and German organizations all belonged to a “central organization” that the Swedish organization was also in contact with: the ICW. The organizations therefore had access to common advice regarding how to organize, and their delegates had the possibility of attending the same ICW congresses. The framework the organizations acted within could thus be regarded as similar, even if the practical outcome of their efforts was deci-

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sively shaped by very different national contexts and organizational traditions.

This historical study is also blessed with the existence of rather well-preserved archives and similarities in the organizations’ bookkeeping methods. The sources used for this study are the minutes of the executive committees, the statutes of the organizations, and their financial reports, together with some correspondence. Executive committee minutes exist for all the organizations during their first decade despite the fact that the German and British archives suffered from the ravages of both World Wars. Financial reports and accounts books were less often handed down for posterity. Sometimes, financial reports were hidden away, attached to the minutes, perhaps a sign that, even at the time, women were more interested in saving documents on activities and programs than those related to funding. The Swedish case is exceptional, with a continuous series of financial reports and account books, as well as minutes and correspondence. While the Canadian sources on finances are good, it is much harder to find similar financial reports or account books for the early period of the British and German organizations. For a comparison of the financial work during the initial decades, years with financial reports from as many organizations as possible have been chosen. All accounts are presented in real value calculated by a GDP deflator (base 1913) and transferred into US dollars at the contemporary rate of currency.\(^\text{17}\)

Letters have the advantage of capturing not only the formal economy of the organizations, but also the informal economy, together with more explicit references to strategies and normative statements about money. Unfortunately, correspondence is not available for all the organizations. Admittedly, there are methodological problems with this comparison, both because of the inconvenience of missing sources and differences in how the organizations’ files were kept. To account for such gaps, I have focused on if, and how, money was mentioned in the minutes of the executive committees of the chosen organizations and the financial reports. More scattered hints of money in other sources, such as correspondence, though not available for all of the organizations, are used as examples to underline the findings in the executive minutes.

“Money, money, money…”

Organizations mobilizing middle- and upper-class members would presumably possess specialized resources useful for the organization. These could include knowledge, access to important networks, or the personal financial resources of members that allowed them to do unpaid work for the organization or to support it financially. It is easy to imagine well-dressed women doing needlework for bazaars and opening their own purses for the cause. However, the former required organized fundraising and people willing to buy the needlework to support the cause. The latter required women who controlled their own incomes, or husbands and male relatives who did not oppose their choice of donation. More public ways of raising money, such as collection boxes, are less likely since the public sphere, especially the streets, was not considered a decent place for a bourgeois woman. But the possibility of securing donations also depended on the ability to “frame” and define the problem in order to mobilize rich supporters, together with external factors such as whether the national financial situation and income distribution permitted supporters to have any spare means.\(^{18}\) Below we will see how the different national organizations managed to raise money and whether they had explicit strategies for fundraising.

Sweden: FBA

The Swedish Fredrika Bremer Association managed to achieve a higher income rate than the other organizations studied, and to secure the means for their future needs as well (see Table 1). From the very beginning, financial matters—how to increase incomes or cut expenses—were discussed at more or less every meeting of the committee board. A special financial committee was established as early as 1886, but this did not alter the frequency of financial discussions by the board.\(^ {19}\) Despite the fact that donations could be expected to be particularly important as a source of income for “bourgeois” organizations, Table 1 shows that the Swedish organization depended on membership fees initially. The membership fee was rather high, around US $3, which indicates that the target group consisted mainly of middle- and upper-class women. However, the fee was not increased until the 1920s, which means that over time, and with rising wages, the target group should

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\(^{18}\) About “framing” and the importance of the cultural context, see Dieter Rucht, “The Impact of National Context on Social Movement Structures,” in Doug McAdam, ed., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing, Structures and Cultural Framings* (New York 1996), 202.

\(^{19}\) If nothing else is specified, the sections on the Swedish Fredrika Bremer Association in this article are based on Pernilla Jonsson and Silke Neunsinger, *Gendered Money: Organising and Resources in the First Wave Bourgeois and Socialist Women’s Movements in Sweden* (forthcoming).
Table 1: Incomes and assets of the Fredrika Bremer Association and the National Councils of Great Britain, Canada, and Germany 1885–1924, in per cent and US$ in real value (base 1913)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Membership Fees</th>
<th>Printings &amp; press</th>
<th>Bureau</th>
<th>Donations</th>
<th>State subsidies</th>
<th>Interests</th>
<th>Total incomes (US$)</th>
<th>Total assets after debts (US$)</th>
<th>Assets free of use (%)</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1885/87</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9,700</td>
<td>7,600</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>10,400</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899/00</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>13,700</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913/15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>23,300</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923/24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15,000*</td>
<td>26,300</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923/24</td>
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<td>1893</td>
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<td>73</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>490</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899/00</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913/15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>400</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914/15</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,000 (n)</td>
<td>5,200 (n)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0*** (n)</td>
<td>43 (n)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Includes income from a lottery to be used for education, which was to be dispersed over several years.
** = The GDP deflator used is an approximation, based on GDP in current prices available for the years 1890, 1900, 1910, and 1926. For the source GDP statistics see also M. C. Urquhart et al., Historical Statistics of Canada (Cambridge 1965); Map, data & governmental information centre, http://stauffer.queensu.ca/webdoc/ssdc/cdbknew/HistoricalMacroEconomicData/index.htm (14 August 2006).
*** = 21,900 Reichmark in nominal value; the exchange rate is a result of the German hyperinflation.
(n) = Nominal value since GDP is not available for Germany 1914–1924.

Note: Exchange rates are as follows: US $1 = Canadian $1 until 1914; in 1923 US $1 = Canadian $1.02; from 1885/87: US $1 = 3.78 SEK; from 1891/93: US $1 = 3.76 SEK = £0.21; from 1899/00: US $1 = 4.22 Mark; from 1913/15: US $1 = 3.80 SEK = £0.21 = 4.57 Mark; from 1923/24: US $1 = 3.75 SEK = £0.22 = 4.26 x 10^-12.


Sources:
have broadened. In addition to annual membership fees, the organization also had lifetime membership fees. Even though these really should be regarded as a kind of donation, they are included in the membership fees in Table 1 because it is not possible to separate different kinds of memberships in all the organizations examined. Initially, lifetime memberships could be substantial. They contributed a third of the income of membership fees during the first years, but this decreased to just a small percentage of the income after a decade. To be able to expand its activities and secure continuity, the FBA consolidated lifetime membership fees and first year membership fees to save for future needs. However, during the first years, “loans” were taken from these funds to cover annual expenses. Since the activities of the organization expanded more than the annual income allowed, an increase of the membership fee as opposed to intensified mobilization was frequently discussed. Apparently, the board regarded higher membership fees as risky and prioritized its effort to mobilize more women.

As shown in Table 1, bequests, donations, and fundraising increased in importance over time. The more established the organization became, the more bequests it received. A large share of the bequests and donations emanated from people close to the committee board and earlier boards. Only in one case, as far as the minutes show, was the opportunity to get donations mentioned in relation to a controversial political position taken by the organization. In this case, Sophie Adlersparre pointed out that the FBA’s journal *Dagny* had received donations because of its radical position on sexual morals and used this as an argument to maintain, not jettison, that controversial position. In relation to the other European organizations, it seems that the Swedish organization was rather successful in getting bequests and donations; this might be the result of its organizational structure. The FBA was not an umbrella organization, mainly taking care of administration and political actions; instead, it also carried out the kind of philanthropic and practical work that the member organizations of the national councils had on their agendas. Most large bequests were earmarked for this philanthropic work and for scholarships and education. Where the organization had difficulties was in getting support for the daily work at the office and for propaganda. The result was a tremendous rise in earmarked assets that left the Swedish organization with fewer means that could be used freely than most of the other organizations studied.

Table 1 also shows that one way to deal with the cost of the daily work of the organization was to sell journals and printed matter or charge a fee from people visiting the advice bureau. Journals and printed matter cost more or less the same to produce as the revenues they brought in, but the advice bureau and

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20 National Archives of Sweden (hereafter NA), *Fredrika Bremer förbundet* (hereafter FBA), *Dagny* and the association *Dagny* archive (vol. 2), Correspondence from Sophie Adlersparre to Dr. Gustaf Sjöberg, 10 November 1887.
office involved higher costs, which we will return to below. To keep the daily work going, other sources of income had to be found. In the early 20th century, income from interest was the solution, as were state subsidies from the 1920s on. Both these revenues appear to have been rather unusual in comparison to the other organizations studied (see Table 1).

Loans to women from the FBA were successfully set up to give a good return on the organization’s assets and at the same time serve “a good purpose”. In 1889 the organization decided to give loans to women for activities that helped them earn a living and become self-supporting. This lending business could be interpreted as a variant of loan funds for the poor which were common in Sweden and some other European countries during the 19th century. These were regarded as a way to give people otherwise excluded from the financial market a chance to obtain small loans, and in this way help themselves out of poverty. They were, in essence, a form of microcredit, a concept also used in the German Letteverein. Unlike other loan funds and saving banks in Sweden at the time, the organization did not demand mortgages in real estate, bonds, or shares as security. Instead the FBA gave loans against a personal guarantee, where two or more persons had to guarantee the loan. Women got loans for education, to become nurses, teachers, gardeners, or physicians, or to start up their own small businesses. The size of the loans granted ranged from about US $50 to $1,000, at an interest rate of between 4 ½ and 6 per cent. The lending business was lively until World War I, when for some years it was closed, with no new loans offered due to lack of funds. After the war the interest in women’s loans appears to have ceased, but until then, these loans gave the organization a good return on its funds, and a high share of income from interest. Money was also held in bank accounts, bonds, shares, and, over time, real estate as well. The bonds were actively managed to obtain a high interest rate, but inflation eroded these assets in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

State subsidies to the FBA were also available, and they can be seen as a precursor to the “Swedish Model” and its corporatism that we usually asso-

21 NA, the FBA head archive, Minutes, 16 February 1889 § 3. (“Bestämdes, på hemställan från kassaförvaltaren att förbundets medel må utlånas till förlags- och lånesökande qvinna mot betryggande säkerhet; i de fall då kassaförvaltaren jemte två dertill utsedda personer ... Revisionssekreterare Rothlieb och fru S. Whitlock utsågs att jemte kassaförvaltaren pröfva de lånesökandes säkerhet.”)
24 Lilja, Marknad och hushåll, 145 Table 6.8; Finanskommittén, Underdånigt Betänkande Angående Sveriges Ekonomiska och Finansiella Utveckling Under åren 1834–1860 (Stockholm 1863), 77–78.
ciate with the 1930s. As early as the first decades of the 20th century, the FBA could draw upon opportunities arising from the development in Swedish society of the corporative cooperation between the state and associations. State subsidies were mainly given to organizations doing social, educational (bildningsverksamhet), or nationalistic work. The FBA received subsidies for the first time in 1906 to support the printing and distribution of its journal. Later on, the organization got subsidies to attend international congresses and to educate women in such areas as domestic science and horticulture. Activities defined as political were not supposed to receive subsidies. However, through close contact with government ministries and hard negotiations, the FBA even managed to get support for its daily work at the office in 1921, despite the fact that many of its activities were classified as political. Improved possibilities of obtaining state subsidies saved the organization from cuts during the financial hardships of World War I, and the years of high inflation that followed. Another way to secure money in these harsh years was through lotteries, with concessions from the government. At first, the board did not regard lotteries as an appropriate way to raise money for moral reasons, but members changed their minds during the harsh economic situation of the late 1910s when there were few alternatives. By using lotteries, the organization’s fundraising also targeted the broader masses outside its own class. With these new avenues for income that drew on sources beyond its own class and sex demographics, the Swedish organization could continue along with “business as usual”.

Great Britain: NCWGB

Financial statements were frequent in the minutes of the NCWGB, although actual financial strategies and norms were less evident in the British sources than in the Swedish ones. The British organization had less annual income and was not as well funded as the Swedish organization (see Table 1). Even if the archival sources are more scarce for the British organization, it is evident that it managed to obtain a large increase in income during the first decade of its activity, though not to the same extent as the Swedish organization. It also had the advantage of being freer to use its assets according to the will of the board.

In the British organization donations never became a dominating source of income. Instead, as Table 1 shows, between three-fourths and one-half of the income came from membership fees. On the other hand, a lot of the activ-

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26 For the NCWGB, account books and financial reports for 1891–93, 1899, and 1916–1924 are studied.
ities on the local level, such as organizing congresses, depended to a great deal on donations that are not evident in the records of the central organization.

The annual membership fee was around US $2 or more.\textsuperscript{27} For the organization’s individual members this must have been a rather heavy burden, but the main target group was philanthropic associations and different women’s organizations. This arrangement, with an unlimited fee ranging upwards, makes it impossible to differentiate between annual membership fees and lifetime membership, which should be regarded as a kind of donation. However, after a few years the subscription fees were altered to target the number of members in the affiliated associations, rather than the generosity of the members.\textsuperscript{28} Since membership fees were the main source of income, recurrent appeals for mobilizing women and discussion of how to get the affiliated associations to pay their fees appeared in the minutes. The restructuring of the CCC into a national organization in 1895 could also be interpreted as an attempt to intensify mobilization through the establishment of local councils.\textsuperscript{29} Two reasons to join the organization were the annual conference and the quarterly journal of the organization that was free to members.\textsuperscript{30} The other and more substantial journal of the organization, \textit{The Englishwomen’s Yearbook and Directory}, required a separate subscription of something less than US $2 annually.\textsuperscript{31}

Donations provided one fifth to one third of the income, as is shown in Table 1, and they did not increase over time. It is obvious that the British organization, as well as the Swedish one, had difficulties attracting donors for its work, which was mainly of an administrative and political nature.\textsuperscript{32} Instead, there were repeated requests for the affiliated associations to contribute with an extra dime, collections for special purposes, and fundraising through such initiatives as fairs and the sale of badges. Moreover, members of the Executive Committee contributed with money from their own purses, but from what can be discerned from the minutes, these were quite modest

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “Conference of Women’s Workers Proof, Nov. 1891”; Minutes, 20 June 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{28} LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 3 December 1894. The new subscription fee was around US $1 per 25 members in the affiliated association.
\item \textsuperscript{29} LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, for example, 4 January 1893, 3 December 1894, 23 April 1895, and 12 July 1898.
\item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{The Threefold Cord}, edited by Miss Emily Janes. LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “Conference of Women’s Workers Proof, Nov. 1891,” and 20 January 1897, paragraph (d).
\item \textsuperscript{31} LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “Conference of Women’s Workers Proof, Nov. 1891,” Second Annual Report 1893 and invitation to members meeting, 20 June 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{32} LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, for example, 23 April 1895, 14 October 1896, 22 April, 13 July, 12 October 1897, and 13 July 1905; Minutes of the Financial Committee, 1916–1924.
\end{itemize}
amounts. The informal exchange of money, like payments with private means for expenses never filed in the account books, could of course have been extensive. What is interesting, however, is that at least on some occasions the decision of committee members to contribute with private means was mentioned in the minutes. Also, the donations of physical space and salaries during the first years were accounted for in the financial reports. The assets of the organization were held in a bank account, and later on, in bonds as well, which gave the British organization a very modest income from interest.

Germany: BDF

The German organization initially had lower incomes than most of the other organizations, but it caught up quite well in the 1910s (see Table 1). However, economic difficulties during World War I and in the early 1920s hit the organization extremely hard, leaving the German women with nearly no means of support, and a far worse financial situation than the other organizations studied.

The minutes of the first years of the German organization do not show as many financial statements, other than the balance in hand, as did those of the Swedish and British organizations. On the income side it had the highest share of income from membership fees, as shown in Table 1. Compared to the other women’s organizations examined, the membership fee was high, and the BDF had only organizations as subscribers. From the very beginning of its organizational life, the affiliated associations of the BDF contributed with membership fees in relation to their voting power or the number of delegates to the annual congress, which came to about US $5 per vote. In 1898 the contribution from the 56 affiliated associations was primarily US $5 each, but a few contributed up to ten times more. A proposal for membership fees related to the size of the affiliated organizations was often discussed at the congresses, and this was agreed on at the 1900 meeting. This reform resulted in a new flow of funds to the accounts; however, the democratic and financial effects of this decision remained under discussion as the reform

33 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, for example, 13 July 1897, paragraph “Employment of women subcommittee”.
35 Financial matters are mentioned somewhat more often from 1899 onwards. LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Minutes (Protokolle der Vorstanssitzungen) 1895–1905.
36 LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, 235–01 2592, Correspondence from Auguste Schmidt, Berlin 27 April 1894, and Financial reports (Finanzberichte), Telefon-ruf no. 2439 München, 10 September 1898 (301/20).
37 LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Minutes of the General assembly (Generalvers- sammlung Protokolle) 1900–1906. Dölle, Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes, 110–112.
affected not only the cash flow, but also the politics of the organization in the 1910s. In 1908, when German women got the legal right to join political organizations, large conservative organizations became members of the BDF. With their many members, they attained a large financial and political ascendency, and the politics of the German organization became more conservative. Financial resources, in other words, did shape the politics of the organization in a significant manner.

Either the organization did not manage to frame its goals in such a way as to attract wealthy saviours, or it did not enter private contributions in its records. As shown in Table 1, money from donations was very low compared to the other organizations, amounting to just a few per cent of the total income. The sale of printed matter provided some income. Like the Swedish organization, the BDF invested in bonds, especially in the good years of the 1910s. It also had some capital in a bank account that returned quite a good income. However, the hyperinflation in Germany in the early 1920s made these assets worthless and circumscribed the organization’s possibilities to do politics in a meaningful way in this decade.

Canada: NCWC

The total income of the Canadian organization was low compared to the other organizations, and the rise in its income was also slower (see Table 1). The reason, which we will return to when considering spending, appears to have been that donations covered even more of the income than was recorded in the account books and financial reports of the organization. During the first years, paying from one’s private purse seems to have been such a matter of course for the board that these donations were not even officially noted in the account books. Hence, the formal economy of the organization was just a small part of its actual economy, with ongoing aid part of an informal economy sustaining the NCWC.

Also, even in terms of formal finances, the Canadian organization was more heavily dependant on donations than the other national organizations. The NCWC was the only organization in this study that followed the proposed pattern of “bourgeois” movements being funded predominantly by donations. Donations accounted for somewhere between almost 50 per cent and four fifths of the organization’s annual income (see Table 1). In contrast, in the other organizations, donations were the second or third greatest source of income. Moreover, the Canadian organization was the only other organi-

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38 These included the religious women’s organization Deutsch-Evangelischen Frauenbund and the housewives’ organization Reichsverband Landwirtschaftlicher Hausfrauenverein.


zation besides the FBA to increase its share of donations and bequests over time.

Membership fees contributed about a fourth or less of the income in the years studied, except for at the turn of the century, as seen in the 1900 report (see Table 1). If what actually should be regarded as true membership fees are separated out, they were less than a tenth of the income. Instead, lifetime membership and patron fees dominated during the first decade. Their share diminished over time, but not by much. Even in the 1920s, half of the membership fees came from patron fees and lifetime membership fees.\(^{41}\) As with other organizations, the sale of printed matter became an important income source for the NCWC, but it was not discussed in the minutes until 1897, and income from print sales was not filed in the account books until after 1900.\(^{42}\) Actually, there were amazingly few discussions about money or financial matters in the minutes during the first decade. Only scattered discussions on how to get local councils to pay their fees or proposals to have proportional fees can be discovered in the archival records for the first years of the NCWC.\(^{43}\) More frequent discussions of funding did take place in the late 1890s, with the organization’s balance now in the red.

“\textit{In the rich woman’s world}”?\(^{44}\)

Even though the target group of these organizations was middle- and upper-class women, few managed to secure their major income from donations and bequests. The Canadian organization was the exception, but over time, the Swedish one also managed to increase donations to a substantial share of its income. Instead, the organizations’ primary need was for the mass mobilization of subscribing members. Fundraising campaigns, such as bazaars, fairs, and the sale of badges, were less frequent. More common was fundraising through the sale of printed matter and tickets to lectures, or through interest on accounts. Organizations’ funds were to a large extent raised in the semi-public sphere of philanthropic and women’s organizations. The target group included women and, to a lesser extent, men of their own class, but not necessarily those with access to, and decision making power over, substantial means. This might be a result of the difficulties that umbrella organizations had in mobilizing donors for their administrative and lobbying functions. In comparison, the Swedish centralized national organization managed to secure more financial aid from supporting individuals, as well as from the state, but

\(^{41}\) National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), the National Council of Women (hereafter NCWC), Account books 1893–1900; NCWC Year Books 1922–23.

\(^{42}\) NAC, the NCWC, Account books 1893–1903; Minutes of the Executive Committee, 26 March 1897.

\(^{43}\) NAC, the NCWC, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 3 March 1896, 26 March 1897, and 8 December 1897.
these funds were to a large extent earmarked for its philanthropic work rather than for administration and political actions. In the other countries, philanthropic work was instead undertaken by the member organizations of the national councils. With state subsidies and income from lotteries, the Swedish organization’s fundraising went beyond its own group of supporting “bourgeois” women and men. However, the possibility of raising money and securing important allies outside the organization might depend on how radical the organization’s positions were, and how they managed to frame them for non-members.

Access to monetary resources based on a country’s income distribution could also be one reason for the differences in income. A poorer population and a smaller middle class might increase the importance of mobilizing members to contribute to the organization through membership fees rather than donations. In 1900 Sweden was a relatively poor country in the periphery of Europe, while the national income per capita was somewhat higher in Germany and Canada, and the highest in Britain. A decade later, the situation was nearly the same, with the difference now that the per capita income in Canada exceeded that of the other countries. Hence, with more or less the same income structure, the Swedish and German women should have had less financial means than their sisters in Britain and Canada. Nevertheless, they managed to mobilize more, or about the same resources as the other organizations, despite the differences in population. This suggests that there is no clear-cut relationship between national income and the means or income structure of these women’s organizations.

The decision to spend

In more recent scholarship inspired by resource mobilization theory, the strategies associated with the use of resources have been emphasized, rather than merely the amounts mobilized. If the annual income is not used or in-
vested for future funds, such underspending could be interpreted as a strategy of not fully utilizing the possibilities of action.\textsuperscript{46} “Cheeseparing” as a financial strategy has been noticed in studies of German and Swiss women’s movements, as well as socialist women’s organizations.\textsuperscript{47} Not just the share of resources spent, but also how they were spent ought to be considered. The creation of permanent funds to produce reliable yearly cash flows appears to characterize long-lived organizations.\textsuperscript{48} The share of resources invested in mobilizing new members and the nature of recruitment tactics affected the future of the organization. The decision to have a paid staff and thus a more professional organization could be critical. Organized aggressive lobbying with petitions to legislative bodies and individual politicians was one highly successful strategy to secure one’s goals.\textsuperscript{49} We need, therefore, to explore how the different national organizations used their money, with special attention to strategies of mobilization and the development of professionalism within the organization.

Sweden: FBA

Table 2 shows a rather stable pattern in the amount spent in the Swedish organization during the years studied. According to the account books, the organization spent on average over 90 per cent of its income, with several years of overspending even in the first decades.\textsuperscript{50} In the late 1910s the expenses exceeded the annual income or the accounts showed a zero result. The consequence was eroded funds. The situation was solved, as was shown above, by large bequests, lotteries, and state subsidies in the early 1920s. Hence, over time the FBA expanded the work of the organization or kept it on more or less the same level year after year. During the years of overspending during the 1910s, the executive committee either did not manage to cut costs or did not want to cut down on the activities—a quite expansive strategy, and far from “cheeseparing”.

The expansive financial strategy of the FBA might have been the consequence of the heavy fixed costs for the office and bureau (see Table 2). During the first months of its existence, the organization was able to borrow the premises of another organization, in which some of the members of the

\textsuperscript{46} Banaszak, \textit{Why Movements Succeed or Fail}, 73–80.
\textsuperscript{48} Anne M. Boylan, \textit{The Origins of Women’s Activism} (Chapel Hill; London 2002), 178.
\textsuperscript{49} Banaszak, \textit{Why Movements Succeed or Fail}, 132–157.
\textsuperscript{50} NA, the FBA head archive, annual reports and general ledgers, 1885–1925.
board were active. However, soon it rented two rooms and a kitchen in the centre of Stockholm, the capital city. The first annual report stated that the clerk who was employed got “in relation to the assiduous task, a trifling salary”. One year later, the organization had several employees on an annual basis—an editor, three clerks, and two clerk assistants at the office. The salary of the head of the office was around US $900 in the 1880s and the two assistants were paid about US $400 each. Even the baroness Sophie Adlersparre—one of the organization’s founders, editor of its journal, and a widow—stated that she needed a salary to live on. She got around US $360 annually, which she shared with her co-editor. A rather good remuneration was also given for articles in the FBA’s journal and to lecturers. It was thus possible for a few people to make a living working for “the Woman Question”.

Full-time organizers and activists allowed the FBA to lobby on a professional basis. Early on, the FBA was able to get representatives on government committees, and it became an organization to which proposed legislative measures were referred for consideration. Already in November 1885 two representatives of the organization were the first women on a Swedish legislative committee. Especially from the early 1900s, the work to put an issue on the agenda was well developed. The minutes of the organization give evidence of contacts with the press and cabinet ministers on different questions and of the writing of petitions. These lobbying activities intensified in the 1910s.

Because the FBA had its own premises, the cost of meetings was kept down, as Table 2 shows. However, it should be noted that only public meetings, social gatherings, and annual meetings were charged to the meeting account. Board meetings and costs in relation to campaigning to recruit new members were referred to as general expenses in the records. Hence, these costs are also included under the heading of “Office, bureau & salaries” in Table 2, and the costs for meetings and travel were very low.

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51 *Tidskrift för Hemmet* 6 (1885) attachment, the FBA Annual Report 1885 (Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundets Berättelse för första året af dess verksamhet 1885), 4.

52 NA, the FBA head archive, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 27 January §3; Minutes of the Committee Board, 5 May 1886 §7.

53 Leijonhufvud (1923), 70; The Royal Library in Stockholm (hereafter KB), The Esselde Collection, Ia7a:1, Correspondence from Sophie Adlersparre to Ellen Fries, 3 October 1883; NA, FBA head archive, general ledgers 1885–1888, *Dagny*.

54 Other Swedish women’s organizations also covered travel costs and payment for campaigning. The suffrage movement had, after the initial years, paid agitators, but it was not unusual to combine speeches in several different organizations to get “enough” means. From 1902–1904, the first years of the Swedish suffrage organization, campaigning seems to have been paid from the President’s own purse, but from 1907 the account books show expenses for travel and remuneration, and these expenses grew rapidly during the following years. Bertil Björkenlid, *Kvinnokrav i manssamhälle: rösträttskvinnorna och deras metoder som opinionsbildare och påtryckargrupp i Sverige 1902–21* (Uppsala 1982), 111–13 and 126–128.
Table 2: Expenses of the Fredrika Bremer Association and the National Councils of Great Britain, Canada, and Germany 1885–1924, in per cent and US$ in real value (base 1913)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Office, bureau, &amp; salaries</th>
<th>Meeting &amp; travel costs</th>
<th>Printings &amp; press</th>
<th>Interest &amp; taxes</th>
<th>Total expenditures (US$)</th>
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<tr>
<td>FBA</td>
<td>1885/87</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5,900</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1891/93</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6,400</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1899/00</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6,800</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1913/15</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1923/24</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCWGB</td>
<td>1891/93</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1899/00</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1923/24</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCWC</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1899/00</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>600</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1913/15</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2,700</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDF</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1914/15</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,100 (n)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0* (n)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

* = 17,200 Reich Mark in nominal value; the exchange rate is a result of the German hyper-inflation.
(n) = nominal value since GDP is not available for Germany 1914–1924.

Note:
Exchange rates are as follows: US $1=Canadian $1 until 1914; in 1923 US $1=Canadian $1.02; from 1885/87: US $1=3.78SEK; from 1891/93: US $1=3.76SEK=£0.21; in 1896: US $1=4.22Mark; from 1899/00: US $1=3.78SEK=0.21£; from 1913/15: US $1=3.80SEK=£0.21=4.57Mark; from 1923/24: US $1=3.75SEK=£0.22=4.26x10^{12}

Sources:
The FBA: NA, FBA head archive, Annual reports, general ledgers and account books 1885–1924.
The NCWGB: LMA, NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee 1891–1900, Minutes of the Financial Committee 1916–1924.
The NCWC: NAC, Annual reports of the NCWC, and NCWC account books 1893–1903.
The BDF: LAB, Helene Lange Archive, BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte) 1896, 1914–1924.
As is shown in Table 2, the outlay for the journal and printed matter was as important as that for the office and the advice bureau. During the initial years, the expenses for both were about the same. Over time, the share for printed matter fell, while the share for the office increased. The journal of the organization, Dagny (later on called Hertha) also used the premises of the office. The journal was central, both as a printed “meeting place” for the “women’s cause,” and in terms of the political work of the organization. Articles were reprinted and distributed to members of Parliament and to larger newspapers. Though the journal was important, its cost was debated constantly. The organization published other things, such as pamphlets, but these bore their own cost.

In contrast to the other organizations, the FBA also had outlays for interest because of the real estate the organization had received as bequests. The properties were used as a rural domestic school (Rimforsa) and a horticulture school (Apelryd). To run, renovate, and expand these properties, the FBA had to take out loans with interest from its own funds, banks, and private donors.  

Great Britain: NCWGB

After the initial decades, the British organization spent more or less the same amount as the other organizations (see Table 2). There are no continuous series of account books left, but during the first decade about 90 per cent of the annual income was spent. During the 1920s the organization had high annual deficits. Hence, in common with the Swedish organization, the NCWGB appears to have had rather expansive spending patterns.

During the initial years after its establishment, the fixed costs of the NCWGB were low. The first office was in Emanuel Hospital in London, but no costs were noted for this. When the hospital was sold in 1892, a temporary office was offered by Miss Younghusband, the editor of the periodical Work and Leisure, and this was accepted without any financial comments in the minutes. A donation covered the costs of a periodical, rent for the office, postage, and the travel of the secretary for three years. The donation and the outlays for the office were noted in the financial reports for the period 1891 to 1893. However, during these years there is no evidence that the founder of the organization and travelling secretary, Miss Emily Janes, or the clerk, Miss Edith Maskell, received more than a reimbursement for their expenses.

55 RA, the FBA head archive, Minutes, for example, 25–26 November §6 1921; Minutes of the Executive Committee, 20 September 1922 §2, and 4 October §1.
56 This observation is based on the NCWGB’s financial reports 1891–93, 1899, and 1916–1924.
57 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 1891–1900; Minutes of the Financial Committee, 1916–1924.
58 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 28 March 1892, and 3 December 1894.
In the leaflet handed out at the Liverpool Conference 1891, it was stated that “The ‘C.C.C.’ does not propose to collect or to administer any sum of money beyond what will be required for Postage, Printing, Clerical expenses, and possibly the travelling charges of an organising Secretary.” The statement could be interpreted as an indication that the committee was uncertain whether an office with paid staff was, at that time, an accepted way of using the funds raised for the organization.

Soon, however, a wish for a proper office with an advice bureau was expressed. The funds of the organization were, however, insufficient for this, and in late 1893 the treasurer reported that the funds were now “entirely exhausted”. Financial problems were experienced in the following years as well, and the treasurer urged that the financial situation be put on the agenda.

In 1895 the organization took a firmer grip on its finances. It reorganized into a more formal national organization with paid staff—the secretary, Miss Janes, and an assistant clerk. Their salaries were around US $1,300 and $425 respectively, somewhat above that of their Swedish colleagues. The outlays for salaries increased during the following years, with a rise in salaries, new employees in the office, and an employed lecturer on a fixed salary. A new rented premise was found in 1896. The result, as Table 2 shows, was that the share spent on the office rose and exceeded that of the other organizations at the turn of the century. The decision about what and how to prioritize may have paid off. In the words of one historian of the NCWGB, in the late 1910s the organization had “firmly established its position as a pressure group and deputations were being received increasingly by Ministries and Departments.”

As can be seen in Table 2, before the administration became more professional, the outlays for meetings and travels were by far the most significant of the budget expenses. The meetings of the Executive Committee and the committee board were held either at the office or in the private luxurious homes of the women in the committees. Member meetings were held at fancy hotels or halls but private premises were sometimes offered to keep the costs low. Since the organizing of the annual conference was decentralized,

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59 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “Conference of Women’s Workers Proof, Nov. 1891”.
60 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “First Member Meeting,” 20 June 1892.
61 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, “Second Annual Report”, 1893.
62 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, for example, 23 June 1894 and 12 July 1898.
63 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 29 January 1895, 30 October 1896, 20 January 1897, 13 July 1897, and 21 January 1898.
65 LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee 1891–1907; for the example of keeping costs low, see 12 October 1905.
administration and travel costs were the main burdens on the central organization’s account. During the initial years, the secretary and travelling lecturer, Miss Janes, journeyed all over England and Scotland to visit associations, particularly to support the local organizing of the annual conference. The local organizers had to cover the costs of the annual conference by fundraising and through the sale of tickets to the lectures and discussions. They appeared to have managed to do this most of the time, but when a deficit was at hand, the central organization covered unpaid bills.\footnote{LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 29 May 1894.}

Over time costs for printing rose and made up a larger share of the expenses (see Table 2). However, there was an ongoing discussion about who should bear the costs for the reports from the annual conferences, which were expensive to print. The British organization had to raise the price for the reports to cover printing, yet it also had to cut costs by restricting the size of the conference speeches that were published.\footnote{LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, for example, 21 February 1893, 26 April 1893, 29 May 1894, 12 July 1898, and 13 July 1905.} This also meant that the committee gained more power to decide whose opinions should be printed.

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**Germany: BDF**

In the German organization, few of the treasurer’s reports from the first decades are left. The only existing financial reports of the BDF, from 1895 and from the mid 1910s, indicate a strategy of saving rather than spending.\footnote{LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte) 1896 (Telefon-Ruf No. 1652, München 23 September 1897), 1914–1924.} Capital was accumulated, but if there was any special purpose for the money it is not evident from the minutes. The organization’s fixed costs seem to be rather low. The BDF does not appear to have made any use of paid labour in offices until after the turn of the century.\footnote{LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Minutes 1895–1905.} After that the expenses rose, as is shown in Table 2. In the early 1910s two secretaries and some clerks or typists were employed.\footnote{LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte) 1910–14. See also Dölle, *Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes*, 112–113.} In the 1920s the German organization had three offices and bureaus: in Hamburg, Mannheim, and Berlin. This high fixed cost became a difficult burden to bear, especially in years when general assembly meetings also had to be paid for. In addition, the hyperinflation not only made daily living for the Germans hard, it also eroded the financial resources of all kinds of women’s organizations. The bonds that the BDF had invested its surplus in during the 1910s decreased in value, and finding new income was a difficult task. The consequences were evident in the financial report for 1925–27 when the treasurer stated:

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\footnote{LMA, the NCWGB, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 29 May 1894.}

\footnote{LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Minutes 1895–1905.}

\footnote{LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte) 1910–14. See also Dölle, *Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes*, 112–113.}
Even worse is, which is a matter of fact, that we are without all means and I cannot imagine what we will be able to live from, the 1st of January and during the early spring, since we usually have to wait for the membership fees to drop in.

In short, I can tell you the reason for this bad [financial] result. We get annually somewhat over RM 13,000 in membership fees and our three offices cost annually about RM 11,000. If you then consider the rising outlays for committee board meetings and congresses, it is obvious that it is impossible to undertake the commitments of the BDF.

The German organization managed to continue its work, but the financial reports from the following year bear witness to “extreme thrift” and heavy cuts in spending, particularly for the three offices; they also show higher membership fees as well as bank loans. The outcome was financial penury, supporting Gilla Dölle’s argument that financial problems led to the decreased activity of the German women’s movement during the Weimar Republic.

Canada: NCWC

The Canadian organization, like the German one, appears to have had a strategy of saving rather than spending. However, both income and expenses were low, as is shown in Table 2. The low income and expenses, together with the absence of discussions of economy during the first years, could be explained by the fact that the NCWC managed to run its business anyway. Expenditures were low, with no fixed costs in the first years: there were no salaries or rent. Nonetheless, compared to the political actions undertaken during these years, as indicated in the minutes, the costs must have been much higher. One example of this is the extensive travelling undertaken in 1894 in order to set up new local councils. During the period from August to November, members of the Executive Committee travelled about 9,000 km, without any travel expenses being noted. Only outlays of $16

71 LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte), 1 October 1925 to 30 September 1927. (“Noch schlimmer, als das ist, ist die Tatsache, dass wir jetz ohne alle Mittel sind und ich mich nicht vorstellen kann, von was wir bis um 1. Januar, dem frühesten Termin, und dem wir Mitgliederbeiträge nach unsere bisherigen Erfahrungen erwarten dürfen, leben sollen.Den grund zu diesem schlimmen Ergebnis kann ich Ihnen kurz sagen. Wir nehmen ein an Mitgliederbeiträgen im Jahr etwas über RM 13.000 und unsere drei Geschäftst tellen kosten uns im Jahr etwas RM 11.000. Rechnen Sie hierzu noch die grossen Ausgaben, die uns durch die Vorstandssitzungen und Tagungen erwachsen, so ist es klar, dass wir von unserm Einnahmen unmöglich die Ausgabe des Bundes betreiben können.”, my translation)
72 LAB, Helene Lange Archive, the BDF, Financial reports (Finanzberichte), 1 October 1927 to 30 September 1928. (“[A]ller grösster Sparsamkeit”, my translation).
73 Dölle, Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes, 221.
74 NAC, NCWC, account books 1893–1903, and Annual Reports of the NCWC 1913–15 and 1923.
for fares to committee meetings in Ottawa are evident in the account book.\(^{75}\)

A probable explanation is that the costs were covered by private means, indicating the organization’s strategy of recruiting upper-class women who were able to choose how to spend their money and time. A prominent donor was of course Lady Aberdeen.\(^{76}\)

However, not even the Canadian organization could run simply on the largesse of the private purses of its board members. This could not be a reliable source for sustainable development of the NCWC. The first signs of the executive taking the financial state of the organization and the revenues seriously were indicated in 1896, when the account books showed red figures. However, the first explicit plan for strengthening the economy of the NCWC had to wait until 1898, when Lady Aberdeen left her commission as president. At the same time, a financial committee was created, and a discussion was held about establishing a more professional administration. Until then, Lady Aberdeen’s home had been used as an office. Payments for stenography and typewriting were noted in the account books for the first time in 1897 and, the year after, a fund guaranteed by Lady Aberdeen was established to meet future rents for an office and a paid secretary. However, the NWCW’s goal of having a well-funded office of its own was not fulfilled until the late 1920s.\(^{77}\)

With a more professional administration for the organization, costs rose. As is shown in Table 2, the share of outlays for the office increased, but in real value they were still much lower than for the British and Swedish organizations. In 1913 the total annual cost of the salaries for the Canadian organization was still more or less the same as the salary for the editor of the Swedish journal. As an umbrella organization, the NCWC gained numerical strength from large member organizations, and more women were thus “available for the essential dog-work of lobbying—persuading friends, writing letters, visiting officials…”\(^{78}\) However, the amateur administration could not support extensive lobbying and communication activity in the long run. During the first decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the work of the organization became more professional, and a “properly funded head office” finally came into being. A foundation fund based on donations made the national office possible. Thus, only from the 1920s onwards did the organization have a systematic and sophisticated network for lobbying, with stricter control of the priorities for action.\(^{79}\) Ironically, this was also a period when the NCWC’s

\(^{75}\) NAC, the NCWC, Executive Minutes, 6 December 1894; Account book 1894. From the minutes it can be seen that members of the Executive Committee visited Montreal, Vancouver, Victoria, the province of Alberta, West Algoma, Yarmouth, and Halifax in 1894.

\(^{76}\) See, for example, Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision*, 79 and 84ff.

\(^{77}\) NAC, the NCWC archive, Executive Committee, Minutes 3 March 1896, 26 March 1897, and 16 May 1898.


influence declined somewhat as suffrage victories in most provinces and a decline of the reform movement in general led to a less powerful liberal women’s movement.

An empty purse as a strategy?

During the initial years of each organization, the decision to spend varied significantly, although after some decades of action, patterns of spending grew similar. From the start, the Swedish organization spent a large share of its funds on an office with hired staff, a development that also came rather early in the British organization. The other organizations did not establish more professional offices until the first decade of the 20th century. The Canadian and German organizations, at least in the years covered by financial reports, also underspent on their budgets; this may be interpreted as a strategy of not fully utilizing the possibilities for political action. While it is difficult to conclude whether this was the case, it appears that a higher rate of spending might have facilitated the development of more extensive lobbying at different legislative levels. However, by the early 1920s, the organizations spent on average two thirds of their income on their offices and bureaus, with less variation between the organizations.

A high proportion of economic resources invested in premises and personnel probably meant there was less possibility of travelling and organizing. The first minutes of both the British and Canadian organizations show extensive travelling in order to mobilize new members during the first years. Similarly, in the German and Swedish organizations, securing new members was an important focus of their work. In the Swedish organization, printed matter, and especially the journal, was also a strategy of mobilization: it was an effective way to draw in new members and secure the loyalty of existing members. In the 1920s all the organizations studied spent around a fifth of their income on their journals, pamphlets, or yearbooks. High fixed costs could, however, hamper the organization when funds ceased to exist, as in the German case in the 1920s, and with higher costs, and the value of the funds eroded, there was no choice left for the organization but to reduce its activities and limit its goals.

The concept of money

The equation of the women’s movement with money may seem unlikely to us, but what happens when we examine the relationship of one to the other? Perhaps not surprisingly, money and financial strategies were discussed recurrently in the minutes of the women’s organizations examined here. Given

how frequently these topics were discussed, it is striking that financial matters have left few traces in the historiography of the women’s movement. Money was a concept and a problem dealt with repeatedly by the politically active upper- and middle-class woman, and these organizations all had to put this issue on the agenda at different times. Financial resources, and how to get them, were discussed at more or less every meeting of the committee board of the Swedish Fredrika Bremer Association, as well as within the National Council of Great Britain and its forerunners. There is less evidence of this, at least during the first years, in the Canadian and German organizations. These organizations also took longer to set up special financial committees. However, the issue of funding became more visible over time, especially as financial difficulties and increasing fixed costs created problems for these women’s organizations.

Could it be that, in some organizations, money was not a pressing issue? When groups had enough funds to keep running, perhaps there was nothing to argue about. The Canadian organization had fewer monetary resources, but also fewer expenses than the other organizations during the first decade. This organization was also more dependent on donations; it had an income structure similar to that described by Lee Ann Banaszak for the American suffrage movement. In contrast, the German and British organizations were highly dependent on membership fees and proportional contributions from their member organizations. The same pattern, with a high share of membership fees, has been shown in studies of other European emancipatory women’s organizations, while European “non-feminist” patriotic women’s organizations managed to attract large donations. The Swedish organization seems to have chosen a middle way. It had more varied financial means than the other organizations, rather high incomes from membership fees, and over time, bequests and state subsidies became its main sources of income.

However, differences in incomes are not clear-cut matters revealed only through official account books. For example, the members of the Canadian board display a different attitude towards finances and bookkeeping. Lady Aberdeen seemed, in the case of both the NCWC and the ICW, not to have separated her private funds from those of the organizations—at least not very strictly. In the other organizations as well, private means from members of the board were used to cover special expenses, with the significant difference that these transactions were then mentioned in the minutes and account books. Another example was the local efforts of councils, which raised funds

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82 Dölle, *Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes*, 100. About the Swiss suffrage movement, see Banaszak, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail*, 73.
83 Rupp, “Constructing internationalism,” 1577.
for particular actions, though these left no traces in the national, official account books.

The view of women’s paid work seems to have been crucial for discussions about finances on the board. Obviously, if one has employed staff, one must make arrangements to make sure that the funding for this year, and the next, will be available. When there was staff, there was more effort put into mobilizing resources; such initiatives were in turn recorded in minutes and account books. The central offices were the nodes of the organizations. Besides administration, the staff created propaganda and conducted organizing and political work, targeting, for example, the press and Parliament. Moreover, the Swedish and British organizations also gave advice to women on legal and educational matters, and ran employment agencies for women. High expenses for the office could then be regarded as both mobilizing and lobbying, as a way to maintain both human capital and skills in the organization. The existence of paid full-time organizers, lecturers, and the full-time employment of some of the founders was evident in Sweden from the beginning and in the National Council of Britain after a couple of years. These organizations did not underspend their budgets to the same degree as the others, which could indicate a more astute tactical use of resources. Around 1910 the same developments were seen in the Canadian and German organizations. Why then were the expenses and budgets so different?

An exhaustive answer is not possible based on the sources; however, it does appear that possibilities for women to serve the organization for free were dependent on whether husbands or male relatives could afford to give them economic support. This meant that their voluntary work could not compete with what were regarded as their duties at home, or possibly in a professional career. If we focus on the women on the board and their relationship to men, there are some significant features that stand out.

The women on the boards in Sweden, Britain, and Germany were not as likely to be married as were their Canadian sisters. About half of them were married, and some were widows. On the first board of the NCWC, all of the women were married, and until the 1920s very few unmarried women sat on the board. As Naomi Griffiths concludes, it was not only the middle class that ran the council network, it was also the middle-aged. Thus, young children did

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84 We have not studied this for Sweden, but Gilla Dölle has shown that for German bourgeois women this unpaid work in organizations was seen as an outspoken duty. A change of attitude on this question appeared in Germany when higher education and professional employment opened up for women. This change also caused conflicts between members of the younger, skilled generation used to earning their own living, who pled for monetary remuneration, and the older generation, which regarded the younger as greedy. Dölle, Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes, 27f, 51, and 66.

85 NAC, the NCWC Yearbooks 1894–1921, committee members. Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women, 68–73 and 312–15; Mary Beacock Fryer, Emily Stowe: Doctor and Suffragist (Toronto 1990), 113.
not limit the amount of time available for volunteer activities. Hence, this stratum of Canadian women had enough means and spare time to carry out extensive philanthropic work and lobbying activities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

On the other hand, it seems to have been impossible for many of the middle-class women in the Swedish Fredrika Bremer Association to work without pay, which is not so surprising since few had a male breadwinner to depend on. This could be one of the reasons why the organization’s finances were discussed in the Swedish organization from the very beginning and for the very explicit statements that, without offering a salary, it was not possible to get the “right” people to work for “the Woman Question.” Also, with a small middle class and a highly rural population, the norm of the male breadwinner was rather poorly developed in Swedish society before 1930.

Can a gendered concept of money be identified in these particular cases? Normative statements that indicate moral or political principles about money have been hard to find in the minutes. However, I would propose that a key indicator is the way in which money and discussions of financial matters were expressed and debated in the different minutes. Money and paid staff were discussed by the women on the boards of the Swedish and British organizations, while the Canadian and German women seem to have been less inclined to engage in this discussion. Gilla Dölle has also shown that, for German bourgeois women, unpaid work in organizations was seen as an unspoken duty. A change of attitude in this question appeared in Germany when higher

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education and professional employment opened up for women. This change also caused conflicts between a younger, skilled generation of activists used to earning their own living, who pled for monetary remuneration, and the older generation of women activists, who regarded the younger group as greedy.\(^88\)

To conclude that money was openly discussed in the 1880s in Sweden and Britain is, however, going too far. Even in the Swedish organization, paid labour was discussed in oblique ways during the first years. It was mentioned only in passing, as with the comment by one board member that: "in relation to the assiduous task, a trifling salary [was given]".\(^89\) In the correspondence and minutes of the Swedish FBA, statements about “decent” ways to collect money were made, without special reference to gender, though these were sometimes articulated in personal letters. In one such letter, founder Sophie Adlersparre notes “Nor do I share the feeling of false shame, which captures some of us ladies at the thought of suggesting to our friends a small sum of money for idealistic purposes…”\(^90\)

No explicit normative statements were made about the handling of money, but money did seem to have a distinctly masculine connection. On the first Swedish board, a man held the post of treasurer, which also was the case in some early American and German women’s organizations, even if this was not the case in the BDF.\(^91\) Men acting as treasurers or advisors were probably a product of differential access to education and experience in financial matters. In the Swedish organization, however, it might also have been a question of legitimacy. In the minutes, it is evident that some of the women had their own experience of running a business; they put forward proposals and took responsibility for financial matters and investments.\(^92\) In the first annual report, the male treasurer remarked on the financial skills of the female head of the office, who had “with ardour and competence conducted the position as bookkeeper and treasurer”.\(^93\)

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Money was thus implicated in the daily actions of all the women’s movements studied, even if it left somewhat differing concrete traces in the archival sources. The nature and visibility of financial discussions, and the organiza-

\(^88\) Dölle, *Die (un)heimliche Macht des Geldes*, 27f, 51, 66, and 227f.

\(^89\) *Tidskrift för Hemmet* 6 (1885) attachment; NA, FBA Annual Report 1885 (Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundets Berättelse för första året af dess verksamhet 1885), 4.

\(^90\) KB, the Esselde Collection, Ia7a:1, Correspondence from Sophie Adlersparre to Ellen Fries, 3 October 1883, my translation. See also Jonsson and Neunsinger, *Gendered Money*.


\(^92\) For the importance of business women in the early women’s organizations in the US, see Boylan, *The Origins of Women’s Activism*, 174 and 188–189.

\(^93\) *Tidskrift för Hemmet* 6 (1885) attachment; NA, FBA Annual Report 1885 (Fredrika-Bremer-Förbundets Berättelse för första året af dess verksamhet 1885), 22. (“med nit och skicklighet skött befattningen som bokförare och kassör”, my translation and emphasis).
tion’s acceptance of paid labour, had direct consequences for organizations’ political work. An acceptance of money as a “decent” concept, and an acceptance of the need for professionalized lobbying and paid organizing had an impact both on the viability of the organization and on its ability to place its issues effectively on the national political agenda.

The fact that funding worked out differently in different national contexts indicates that money is not simply a universal or undifferentiated concept. There is more to it than that. The notion of money differed in relation to whether women were working for the organization, whether they were self-supporting or not, whether the male breadwinner concept was completely accepted in the particular country, whether external conditions were good or not (i.e. in Germany, the organization could not control the inflationary crises after the war), and whether there were more upper-class donors or not (i.e. in Canada, the NCWC initially was run on the largesse of the private purses of Lady Aberdeen). This says to me that culture, gender relations, class, and material conditions shaped how money was seen and used by these women’s movements.


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