'The women of the whole world form . . . a unity': feminist journals and peace questions¹

THROUGH THE DEBATES on physical force, many women active in the feminist movement were drawn to consider wider issues of military conflict and war. Such well-known feminists as Josephine Butler, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Lydia Becker, Caroline Ashurst Biggs (editor of the *Englishwoman's Review* from 1871 to 1889) and Henrietta Müller (editor of the *Women's Penny Paper* from 1888 to 1892) intervened in debates about the role of the armed forces and the utility of warfare. These women held widely differing perspectives, and Fawcett in particular emerged as a supporter of imperialism and armed intervention. But Butler, Becker and many other feminists opposed war in principle and in practice. Rather than selecting individuals to study here, this chapter discusses the approaches which four feminist journals – the *Englishwoman's Review*, the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, the *Women's Penny Paper* and the *Woman's Signal* – took towards pacifism and internationalism. The journals provide a history of feminist debates and disagreements over the role of force in this period: debates on peace and war occurred in relation to a number of different campaigns, including for example the movement for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and within a range of organisations, such as the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF), the British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA), the Moral Reform Union (MRU) and the International Council of Women. The journals used here provided media within which the peace question could be discussed in relation to these diverse campaigns and societies. An examination of each shows how these fragmented approaches to peace questions could come to form part of a wider analysis of the connections between women's subordination and the sanctioning of physical force.

The feminist journals discussed here catered for a variety of political perspectives and all included coverage of international issues affecting

women. The *Englishwoman's Review* took a 'classic "bourgeois" constitutional feminist' position, although under the editorship of Caroline Ashurst Biggs radical liberal ideas and concerns were often introduced. Each issue contained a few long articles and a great quantity of short notices of feminist activities and events, and the journal's main function therefore tended to be as 'a current awareness bulletin'.² The *Women's Suffrage Journal* (WSJ) was the first specialised British suffrage periodical, although it also covered many other contemporary feminist issues, such as the campaign for married women's right to own property. Its most important influence was that of its editor, Lydia Becker, and throughout its lifespan the WSJ closely reflected her radical liberal and internationalist interests. The *Women's Penny Paper* exhibited a more '[l]ively and uncompromising feminism' than either the *Review* or the WSJ, and Doughan and Sanchez have characterised it as 'the most vigorous feminist paper of its time'.³ It contained information and debates on a wide range of feminist campaigns, as well as biographical interviews with leading feminists, and constitutes an invaluable resource for the historian of the Victorian women's movement. The *Woman's Signal* was likewise concerned with a much broader range of feminist topics than the *Review* or the WSJ. Its editor, Florence Fenwick Miller, gave considerable space to issues such as women's suffrage, education, employment, involvement in local government, domestic violence, and new developments such as the founding of the British National Council of Women (NCW). She was a prominent voice calling for a feminist influence on any social or political question that could be argued to affect women.⁴

A comparison of these journals is unfair in some respects. The *Review* ran for much longer than the period we are concerned with here, while the WSJ ran for twenty years from 1870, ceasing publication on the death of Lydia Becker in 1890, only a short time after the *Women's Penny Paper* was launched. The *Penny Paper* was transformed after just three years into the *Woman's Herald*, and after a further four years, during which it declined in popularity, it was taken up by Florence Fenwick Miller as the *Woman's Signal*. The *Signal* was thus the product of a later era than the WSJ or the *Penny Paper*, and the discussion of its content reflects this.

The Englishwoman's Review, 1866–1910

The *Englishwoman's Review* developed as a successor to the first British feminist journal, the *English Woman's Journal*, and was initially edited by Jessie Boucherett. Caroline Ashurst Biggs (1840–89) took over in January

1871, editing the journal until her death. Boucherett again spent a brief spell editing the *Review*, until Helen Blackburn and Antoinette Mackenzie took over the editorship in June 1890. The background of the *Review* and its close ties with both the Langham Place Circle and the *English Woman's Journal* made it a relatively moderate publication in feminist terms, focused as it was around campaigns such as the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, women's suffrage, improved access to education, and the reform of the married women's property laws. Its editors were influential in directing the politics and scope of the journal, and in relation to questions of peace it is easy to see the different editorial policies at work.

During the period when it was edited by Caroline Ashurst Biggs, the *Review* regularly covered not only general issues of peace and anti-militarism, but the work of women's peace organisations. Biggs came from a large family of radicals: she was the granddaughter of the Owenite Unitarian lawyer, W. H. Ashurst, and her mother, Matilda Ashurst Biggs, had been brought up to be independent, adopting her father's feminism and attending the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention. As Kathryn Gleadle has shown, the Ashursts formed part of a prominent network of 'radical Unitarians' who shared advanced feminist and republican views.⁵ This background undoubtedly influenced Caroline Ashurst Biggs: she corresponded with the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini at the age of seven, signed the first suffrage petition in 1866 and became one of the most active advocates of women's suffrage during the 1870s and 1880s. She was prominent in the campaign for the return of women as Poor Law guardians and the election of women onto School Boards. As editor of the *Englishwoman's Review* from 1871 to 1889, she introduced radical liberal ideas into what was, for the most part, a bourgeois feminist paper.⁶

Under Biggs's editorship the *Review* demonstrated an interest in peace that was lacking in the work of her predecessor, Jessie Boucherett, and was also notably absent from the approach of her successors. With Biggs as editor, the *Review* contained frequent articles on abstract questions of peace and war, as well as regular reports of women's peace activities. Under the guidance of Blackburn and Mackenzie, a more jingoistic approach was adopted, in which lip service was paid to the importance of questions of international peace and the prevention of war, but outspoken support was given to imperialist expansion, notably in the case of the second Anglo-Boer war. The *Review* reported The Hague Peace Conference of 1899 in positive tones, but on the outbreak of war later in the year placed its support firmly behind the Government, and denounced 'pro-Boers'.⁷

The pacifist arguments drawn upon during Caroline Ashurst Biggs's editorship were piecemeal and often divergent in their politics. They were broadly focused around representations of women as inherently peace-loving, and assumed a higher moral nature for women that supported the feminist argument for their greater involvement in public life. In April 1871, an extract from the *Examiner* was published in the *Review*, which argued, in terms reminiscent of Mill, that as the main object of society shifted from being based on war to being based on industry, women 'would necessarily become equal with men in social importance'.⁸ 'Woman' had greater scope in industry than in war. The *Examiner* argued that:

By emancipating women we should liberate a great peace-loving power, and enormously strengthen the pacific tendency of commerce. If, in addition, women obtained the political influence given to wealth or labour, the security of peace would be increased. In war, they have everything to lose, nothing to gain.⁹

Women, it was argued, were inclined towards peace not only in international political relations, but also in international (free) trade, as their emancipation would 'strengthen the pacific tendency of commerce'.¹⁰

Arguments of sexual difference were developed when a review of *Conversations on War and General Culture* noted that the author, Sir Arthur Helps, advanced the view that there were 'souls masculine and souls feminine'.¹¹ Biggs used the review to clarify her position on sexual difference, noting 'the feminine souls are not always women nor the masculine souls men'.¹² She argued that femininity and masculinity could be attached to individual souls, and therefore sexual difference might be moral or psychical in nature. In her contention that imagined sexual differences do not necessarily assign the feminine qualities to women and the masculine ones to men, she implied that these differences were not biological in basis. Yet arguments of essential sexual difference were still in common use. In a report of a meeting of the Women's Peace and Arbitration Auxiliary of the Peace Society (discussed in chapter 4), Biggs reintroduced these ideas by commenting: 'We believe that one great effect of the recognition of the right of women to co-operate with men in political life will be that the horrors of war will in a great measure be averted, and its sufferings alleviated.'¹³ The presence of women in public life was thus argued to morally improve the policies that would be pursued, to the benefit of not only the nation, but also the international community.

In May 1878, the *Review* carried an anonymous article on 'The Peacemakers'. Making similar assumptions to Biggs about female nature, it

argued that women's 'direct' interest in the maintenance of peace and their exclusion from the franchise served 'to weaken proportionately the hands of the Peace party in England'. The article discussed a recent pamphlet issued by Maria Tayler, a member of the Women's Peace and Arbitration Auxiliary. Tayler focused upon the economic effects of war on both working- and middle-class women, and concluded that 'Women are injured morally and physically by the vice and immorality which is found [to be] inseparable from the military system in time of peace as well as war.' The *Review's* article took issue with those who disagreed that 'women are almost unanimously against war', and concluded with the suffragist argument that 'the Peace party in the country would have received a larger augmentation of force if women had equally with men possessed the authority of citizens to elect their governor'.¹⁴ Such ideas were characteristic of Caroline Ashurst Biggs, not least in the implicit connection that was drawn between the Liberals in the 1870s as the party of 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform' and women as political reformers.

Among these arguments that sexual difference affected individual politics – a case which was put by both pro- and anti-suffragists – were gendered ideas regarding what was biological in basis. Women were viewed as less susceptible to moral corruption and therefore somehow more pacific, and men were seen as possessing greater intellect and physical strength. However, the boundaries of what was assumed to be biological, moral or intellectual were always hazy. Despite efforts by Mill and many others to show that gender differences were more likely to be social or cultural in basis than biological, discourses of sexual difference were so prominent during this period that the women's movement increasingly relied upon and developed arguments of this nature in order to deal effectively with its critics.

The death of Caroline Ashurst Biggs in 1889 effectively ended the coverage of peace issues in the *Review*. After this date, discussions of peace were rare and conducted in relation to specific wars, in particular the Anglo-Boer war of 1899 to 1902. Blackburn and Mackenzie, as editors, reproduced in the *Review* similar imperialist attitudes to those put forward by Millicent Fawcett, denying that British forces in South Africa were guilty of any wrongdoing in their management of the concentration camps, and labelling all those who protested against the war 'pro-Boers'. In a series of articles by Maude A. Biggs, Caroline's younger sister, it was argued: 'Even those who disapprove of the war, as war, can hardly disapprove of the efforts made to soften its horrors and sufferings.' A philanthropic approach to the war was emphasised to the exclusion of all other perspectives, clearly illustrated by Biggs's argument that

'South Africa, like the poor, is always with us'.¹⁵ Britain's involvement in the war was justified on the grounds that its 'democratic' influence was required in the South African republics, and that its charity was the only means by which the Afrikaners could become a 'civilised' society. This argument also served to justify the involvement of middle-class British women in the war effort, as they could reproduce patriotic, imperialist ideas of their own unique 'moral burden', just as they did in undertaking philanthropic reforms at home.

The content of the *Englishwoman's Review* over the 1870–1902 period showed just how closely editorial policy depended on individual politics. These women drew their principles from established traditions such as liberalism and radicalism, yet each editor drew upon different elements of these, and this was reflected in the content of the journal. Biggs's radical liberal feminism was prominent in her issues of the *Review*, particularly when contrasted with Blackburn and Mackenzie's jingoistic imperialism. The matter of editorial policy is an important factor to bear in mind given that the other journals in question here were continuously produced by single individuals, and therefore the effects of editorial differences are not visible.

The Women's Suffrage Journal, 1870–90

The influence of a prominent and active editor can perhaps be seen most clearly in the example of the *Women's Suffrage Journal*. Lydia Becker founded and edited the paper from 1870 until her death in 1890, and although a number of other feminists regularly contributed to the journal – including Biggs and Blackburn – on Becker's death it was decided that no one was able to take up the task of continuing it. The *WSJ* was primarily concerned with the campaign for women's suffrage, although it did reflect Becker's interests in its coverage of other feminist issues, such as the work of the Married Women's Property Committee, campaigns for women's education, issues of crime and the law, and the international progress of the women's movement. Its content demonstrated Becker's commitment to international co-operation and her Cobdenite radicalism, particularly with regard to free trade and European liberation movements. These issues dominated her approach to questions of peace, and in addition to the theoretical debates about the physical force objection discussed above, the *WSJ* contained many anti-war arguments in relation to specific conflicts. Becker's responses to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, the Bosnian conflict of 1876, and the Anglo-Boer war of 1878 were particularly strongly expressed.

Becker took the Franco-Prussian war as an example of the fate of nations when governed by dynastic, undemocratic forces. The war occurred within months of the launch of the *WSJ*, and the editorial response to it was one of detailed and wholehearted condemnation. Implicit in much of Becker's criticism was the argument that Prussia was exploiting its own people, and that a more representative government was required in order to end oppression within the state, as well as to put a stop to war with other nations. Becker was more detailed in her arguments than was Biggs in the *Review*, as she explicitly supported national liberation movements and refused to condemn war as a means of conflict resolution. 'War', she wrote, 'should be the last resort after negotiation and arbitration have failed.' She criticised not only the 'dynastic' forces which were causing working men to die on behalf of a quarrel that was between governments, but also the treatment of women in war:

if our sympathies are aroused on behalf of the masses of Frenchmen plunged into war . . . what must they be for the nations of French and German women on whom the burden and the misery of war falls in an equal or even greater measure than on men, and who are denied the right to a voice in deciding whether it shall or shall not be laid upon them . . . [L]et the feminine *plébiscite* be appealed to as having a right to be heard, and who can doubt that the unanimous vote . . . from princess to peasant, would be given for peace between peoples and reunion in homes.¹⁶

In arguing that women would not vote for war, Becker used ideas of sexual difference – and to some extent, of class interest – to support her main argument about the importance of individual rights.

These sexual difference debates echo the discussions in the *English-woman's Review*, although Becker framed her arguments in terms of contemporary notions of 'race' and social Darwinism, which illustrated even more clearly the idea that women's 'innate' love of peace could attach itself to artificially constructed bodies such as nations:

We believe that the combative instinct, that which fights for fighting's sake, or from mere love of conquest, is much more strongly developed in the male than in the female sex. We also believe that the instinct which fights for that which it holds dear is more strongly developed in the female sex than in the male . . . We believe that in the face of a foreign foe the women of a nation would be inspired with the most determined and self-devoted spirit.¹⁷

Becker argued that women had a place within the imperial nation, and presented them as having a 'natural', 'instinctive' role as patriotic defenders of the nation. Implicitly, she drew a contrast between men's

supposed love of an abstract concept ('conquest'), and women's emphasis upon their relationships with others, to indicate that it was relationalism that could be of greatest service to the nation.

Becker presented the sexual difference debate in more overtly political terms than Biggs, although her arguments still rested on familial and biological imagery. Women, Becker argued, have a 'self-devoted' spirit that is concerned with protection and defence, rather than aggression. In this, she allied herself with non-absolutist peace activists who had been arguing throughout the nineteenth century that they considered defensive wars to be justifiable. Her contention that women's wars, if there were such things, would be defensive was one way of arguing that women would be more peaceable in international conflict than men.

In claiming that women, by virtue of their instincts and their social conditioning, would alter the conduct of war, Becker concluded that ultimately 'The women's vote would put an end to offensive war.' Again using assumptions of biologically-based sexual difference, she argued that: 'War is an essentially masculine pursuit. Women do not as a rule seek to quench their differences in blood. *Fighting is not natural to them.*' The male sex is the combative sex throughout the animate world.' Becker's ideas of sexual difference did not extend to Biggs's claim that women could be 'a great peace-loving power', but they were based on similar principles, in that the foundation of both arguments was that women's vote would put an end to war. Women's 'self-devotion', as Becker termed it, was the crucial factor in their fighting instinct.¹⁸ They were by 'nature' defensive, and it was only as exceptions to the rule that they would seek out combat.

As her response to other conflicts showed, Becker was careful to keep closely to the argument that the suffrage was essential for women. In her ideas about women's political representation, she brought her concern with logic and rationality to bear on their exclusion from political power where questions of life and death were concerned. In response to fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1876, she stated that:

We claim for our sex a share in the moral responsibility for the action of our country . . . [The British government's policy] is to be determined by the mind and heart of the nation at large, on broad principles of justice and humanity which can be understood [*sic*] of the people, and in this judgement women have a right and duty to bear their part, which they cannot abdicate nor men deny.¹⁹

In applying concepts of justice, humanity and morality to an international stage, Becker argued that women's absence from national and

international politics did not mean that they were not culpable for the actions of their governments.

When peace or war hung in the balance in South Africa in 1878, Becker wrote that: ‘An unnecessary war is a national crime. Shall women be dragged into this crime against their consent? A war involves heavy and grinding taxation . . . A war means bereavement and misery.’²⁰ There was an even greater need to obtain the suffrage for women if Britain was to be drawn into a state of war. She argued that military conflicts could in many cases be prevented by means of negotiation and arbitration, that the extension of the franchise furthered democracy, and that democracies would be more peaceable and just than nations with a limited franchise.

Becker’s radicalism blended liberal feminism with Cobdenite ideas of free trade and the European democratic pacifism which supported wars of national liberation. This strand of pacifism had developed during the mid-nineteenth century and from 1867 was represented by the republican nationalist peace organisation, the International League of Peace and Liberty, which was based in Switzerland and linked to the Workmen’s Peace Association (WPA) in Britain and, from 1880, the IAPA. However, Becker maintained a distance from these organisations, developing her ideas in the exclusively feminist context of the *WSJ*. Although this journal was intended to function as a single-issue paper, it did of course include discussions of wider debates within the feminist movement. In contrast, Henrietta Müller’s *Women’s Penny Paper* was founded in order to provide an open forum for feminist debate which was distanced from specific campaigns, including the peace movement.

The Women’s Penny Paper, 1888–90

The *Women’s Penny Paper* (WPP) ran for just over two years, from October 1888 to January 1891, when its title changed to the *Woman’s Herald*. It was edited by Miss Henrietta Müller (c. 1851–1906) under the pseudonym Helena Temple, until April 1892, at which point it was handed over to the Women’s Liberal Federation. It was explicitly feminist in its politics and featured an immense variety of feminist concerns, including temperance, the suffrage campaign, Liberal politics, the sexual double standard, the employment of children, rescue work and the bastardy laws. Every issue included a long biographical interview with a well-known woman, and during the two years for which the *Penny Paper* ran, it featured such diverse personalities as Priscilla Bright McLaren, Annie Besant, Pandita Ramabai and Emmeline Pankhurst, among many others.

Henrietta Müller was a member of the younger breed of women whom Judith Walkowitz has termed a 'transitional generation', which was already enjoying the benefits won by the women's movement of the 1860s and 1870s, but was also committed to working for more concrete gains. Müller, the daughter of a German businessman and sister of Eva Müller (who married Walter McLaren), perhaps epitomised the image of the 'Glorified Spinster', the woman possessing an independent income who chose not to marry. She studied at Girton under Emily Davies, and was the first woman to be elected onto the London School Board. She was active in a wide range of feminist campaigns: the National Society for Women's Suffrage, the Personal Rights Association, the National Vigilance Association, and the Society for the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians. After handing the *Woman's Herald* over to the WLF in 1892, she travelled to India to pursue her interest in theosophy.²¹

Müller was motivated to found the *Women's Penny Paper* after her resignation from the Men and Women's Club, where she had felt frustrated at the intellectual intimidation of women members by the more educated and experienced men members.²² Initially intending to found a women-only discussion group, she instead produced the *Penny Paper*. Her rationale for starting a newspaper rather than a discussion group was largely based on her dissatisfaction with the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, which she dismissed as 'a little monthly leaflet, not worthy the name of a newspaper'. She intended the *Penny Paper* to be as independent as possible, giving women 'a newspaper of their own through which to voice their thoughts', and ultimately aiming to 'further the emancipation of women in every direction and in every land'.²³

Although the *Penny Paper* did not pursue an explicitly pacifist policy, most of its issues carried items on peace and the women's peace movement. There were often editorial comments, arguing that 'It is time that peace-lovers should speak out boldly and loud enough to be heard.' One of Müller's early *WPP* editorials emphatically opposed the military action in the Sudan. She acknowledged that there could be 'righteous' wars, but that this was not one of them, because 'the great authorities on the Soudan [*sic*] . . . maintain that not only is peace possible, but that it is the only right and reasonable course'.²⁴ Henrietta Müller's personal politics clearly encompassed pacifism, and not from the British perspective alone. She was keen to include the communications and work of European pacifist women, particularly Marie Deraismes and Virginie Griess-Traut, and supported the efforts for peace by working men in Italy.²⁵ In an early paper to the Men and Women's Club, she had drawn attention to the importance of reorganising society around criteria of

'moral strength' rather than physical power and force.²⁶ She was instrumental in a trans-organisational peace meeting in early 1889, at which Walter McLaren acknowledged that their interests lay in proving that 'the vast majority of wars can be avoided'. McLaren's focus was on the principle of non-intervention and the need for a court of arbitration. He concluded that: 'The time is coming when the Parliamentary Franchise will be given to women. They will have a crime on their shoulders if they do not try to check the war spirit.'²⁷

The pacifist arguments that emerged within the pages of the *Penny Paper* were distinct from the resolutely Christian work of the Peace Society, and independent of the International Arbitration and Peace Association, an organisation to which Müller's editorial approach, like that of Becker, was perhaps closer in terms of politics. The *Penny Paper* outlined a vision of peace that was based upon moral righteousness and transnational justice, a liberal feminism that recognised the need for balance in, and a degree of regulation of, international affairs. Yet the *Penny Paper* also rested on fundamental arguments of moral and intellectual sexual difference, particularly the principle that women's contribution to government, if they were enfranchised, would vastly improve political life on both a national and an international scale. In a report on the 1889 peace congress in Paris, Müller wrote: 'If provocation [to war] come at all . . . it can only arise in those countries where true progress has scarcely begun, and womanly influence has never permeated political life.' This approach echoes the arguments of Ellen Robinson, although Robinson was careful never to make women's suffrage an issue in pacifist circles. The *Penny Paper* gave frequent reports of Robinson's work for peace, often including extracts from her lectures.²⁸

In November 1889, the *Penny Paper* included a critique of a newly-established peace society, the 'Christian Union for promoting International Concord'. Twenty-nine men, Müller informed readers, constituted the Union's Executive Committee, and yet, she remarked, 'How a Society can style itself a Christian *Union*, (?) [*sic*] or hope to succeed as such, when it deliberately ignores one half of Christendom, passes comprehension. No section of the community is more interested in the maintenance of peace than are women.' Müller astutely concluded: 'We must strongly urge women to withhold pecuniary support from any society which excludes them, but not their purses, from the management.'²⁹ The issue of women being expected to help fund societies that accorded them no executive power is one that recurs in the late nineteenth-century feminist movement. At this stage, the Peace

Society had been calling for and accepting donations from women for over seventy years, and yet, as Müller was probably aware, it refused to accord them any official role or recognition.

The tensions between the peace movement and early forms of pacifist feminism were put squarely before the readers of the *Women's Penny Paper*. The London Universal Peace Congress of 1890 was criticised by Henrietta Müller for its neglect of the pacific power of women. She wrote: 'One looked in vain among the large attendance of delegates from various Peace Societies for the faces of women . . . [T]he Congress should this week pass a resolution in favour of more women delegates and more women speakers.' In response, the *Penny Paper* received a letter the following week from Louisa Bigg, a suffragist and secretary of the Luton branch of the IAPA, pointing out that there were 'at least 50 or 60 of us [women], of various nationalities, and speeches were delivered by [a number of women]'.³⁰ Müller's point is nonetheless important in emphasising the paradox into which women working for peace fell during this period. The peace movement, undervalued and overlooked as it was, desperately needed supporters in influential political positions, which inevitably meant *men*. The need to court prestigious supporters far outweighed the desire to hold the moral high ground by obtaining the support of women, and indeed, giving women a high profile even risked increasing the ridicule with which many peace societies were met. They were already dismissed as utopian, unrealistic and impractical. The inclusion of numbers of the new 'platform women' in their meetings could only diminish the movement in the eyes of its critics.

In 1891, the *Women's Penny Paper* changed its name to the *Woman's Herald*. A year later, Müller transferred the journal to the ownership of the Women's Liberal Federation, and in 1893, it became jointly owned by the Women's Liberal Federation and the World Women's Christian Temperance Union (WWCTU). Müller's term as editor had seen the *Women's Penny Paper* report the work of British women's peace associations in a feminist context, and disseminate information about 'crusading' European women's peace movements. In addition, the principle of arbitration was repeatedly promoted. However, in pursuing this course, Müller's *Penny Paper* served to emphasise the shortcomings in feminist thought where questions of peace were concerned. On the one hand, Müller put forward the feminist argument that women had a significant role to play in the peace movement. On the other, she had to acknowledge that the peace movement was male-dominated for very practical reasons. Müller could write about the 'pacific power of women', but she rarely moved beyond the rhetoric to ask what women could

actually do to promote peace on national and international levels. We can see how these debates developed during the 1890s through a study of the content of the *Woman’s Signal*.

The *Woman’s Signal*, 1895–99

In January 1894, the WWCTU and its president, Lady Henry Somerset, re-launched the *Woman’s Herald* as the *Woman’s Signal*. It failed to attract subscriptions, however, and within less than two years was running at a loss. It was taken over in September 1895 by the established feminist journalist Florence Fenwick Miller, who made an agreement with Lady Henry Somerset to include in the *Signal* any WWCTU news she submitted. Fenwick Miller’s project to make the *Signal* into a financially independent paper was soon realised, as it became the voice of *fin de siècle* feminism.

Florence Fenwick Miller (1854–1935) was another member of the ‘transitional generation’. She had become involved in the women’s movement at the age of eighteen, trained in medicine at the University of Edinburgh only two years after Sophia Jex-Blake had forced this institution to accept women as students, and was elected onto the London School Board at the age of twenty-two. On her marriage she changed her title from ‘Miss’ to ‘Mrs’, but refused to change her name, a choice that caused some controversy on the School Board, as Patricia Hollis has noted.³¹ Fenwick Miller stood down from the Board in 1885 as financial pressures forced her to turn to full-time lecturing and journalism. She was a ‘platform woman’, highly skilled in public debating and lecturing, and by 1895 had built up a considerable reputation as a journalist and public speaker. One London journalist noted how ‘I have seen men grow visibly paler as she dissected – or rather vivisected – their halting arguments with her pitiless logic; she would leave nothing but shreds behind’.³²

Barbara Caine has contrasted Fenwick Miller’s *Signal* with the contemporary *Shafts*, arguing that in the context of the 1890s the *Signal* was relatively unfashionable, perhaps even outdated. It did indeed struggle with the concept of the ‘New Woman’ during the late 1890s, as Caine has discussed, and maintained strong links with mid-Victorian feminism. It dealt with new issues, such as rational dress and cycling clubs, but it is arguable whether, as Caine suggests, it really ‘could not take on board with any ease any wholesale recasting of feminine behaviour or morals’.³³ Fenwick Miller focused upon change through legal and political channels rather than through social behaviour, but she had also

been instrumental in modifying accepted feminine behaviour through her refusal to take her husband's name. Fenwick Miller's feminism was strongly influenced by the mid-Victorian phase of the movement, but she was nonetheless forward thinking in her politics. She was committed to neo-Malthusianism as a result of her medical training, declared herself an agnostic, and ran the *Signal* with astute business sense. She was, for her generation, a radical and independent thinker.

The anti-militarist feminism that emerges from the pages of the *Signal* shows a sympathy with the pragmatic pacifism of the IAPA, but also some arguments against war which can be identified as distinctively feminist. Fenwick Miller paid regular tribute to the work of Hodgson Pratt of the IAPA and William Randal Cremer, the anti-suffragist leader of the Workmen's Peace Association (renamed the International Arbitration League in 1888). She published in the *Signal* news of the Universal Peace Congresses and pacifist articles from diverse sources, including *War or Brotherhood?*, the peace journal of the Society of Friends.³⁴ The progress of the Anglo-American Arbitration treaty of 1898 received detailed coverage in the *Signal*, as did the work of the International Council of Women (ICW) and the embryonic National Council of Women. Yet Fenwick Miller as editor avoided outspokenly pacifist arguments, instead condemning militarism and blending her critiques of war with feminist ideas.

Ideas of progress were connected to arguments for arbitration. For example, in a report on the arbitration treaty between Britain and the USA, Fenwick Miller argued that progress was inherent in partnership, as 'combined, we serve to show the more backward nations in which militarism still holds a primary place, that women can advance not only without disadvantage but with benefit to the community'. These ideas led to the development of arguments about sisterhood, with Fenwick Miller arguing that its emergence was due to women overcoming the 'backwardness' of military societies. As civilisation progressed, the 'sense of a sisterhood of women must make for peace and for union throughout the world'. The idea that women the world over had common interests, and that their influence would be pacific, suggests that Fenwick Miller conceptualised feminism in international terms. In response to the progress of the ICW, she wrote that 'there is more international feeling between the women of the world at present than between any section of men. The women of the whole world form, in a way, a unity'.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, these ideas of international sisterhood tended towards essentialism. Statements such as 'We all rejoice in any onward step made by the women of any part of the world!' reflected the optimism

of the ICW, but glossed over the difficulties and divisions encountered when trying to make it work in a practical sense.³⁶ Characteristically for feminist arguments of this period, Fenwick Miller assumed that women's interests were homogeneous, that their interests would not conflict with one another, and that advancement meant the same things for different women.

Fenwick Miller began to develop an anti-militarist, almost pacifist line of argument based on broadly humanitarian beliefs that physical force was not necessary, and combined this with a feminism based on ideas that women's common oppression could be overcome by their social, political and economic advancement. For example, in an editorial on the conquest by the British at Khartoum in 1898, Fenwick Miller argued that there was 'little reason for any great glorification' of such a victory. The numbers killed and wounded were far greater on the side of the native people, which showed 'that the conquest was preposterously unequal, and [should] justly [prevent] . . . any display of national vanity.'³⁷ Her broad critiques of imperialism and sympathy for wars of national liberation brought her much closer to the IAPA's pacifism than the absolutism of the Peace Society. Fenwick Miller also forged links with women working for peace, though less with the work of Ellen Robinson than with the feminist campaign that was being carried out on a smaller scale by the Manchester Women's Peace Association (MWPA). The MWPA had its origins in the suffragist movement of 1870s Manchester, and for the most part operated separately from the peace movement. Fenwick Miller's interest in its work emphasised her commitment to specifically feminist rather than pacifist politics.³⁸

Fenwick Miller decided to discontinue the *Signal* months before the outbreak of the second Anglo-Boer war, but her editorials up to this date clearly demonstrated an interest in gendered peace arguments. The explicit connection she made between the moral character of the nation and its treatment of women formed part of a trend that can be identified throughout the Victorian women's movement.

The language and arguments used in the four journals discussed here can be seen to develop over the thirty-year period of study, with Biggs's and Becker's radical liberal politics giving way to what we would today recognise as a more feminist discourse. Biggs and the *Review* drew on a wide range of ideas, including that of Cobdenite free trade, but it was Becker's *Women's Suffrage Journal* that was clearly closest to Cobden's radicalism. Neither journal developed critiques of empire as such, although both opposed imperial wars, for example, the Franco-Prussian

war and the Anglo-Boer conflict of 1878. Predominantly, however, the discourses employed were those of nationalism and internationalism, which were compatible with Cobdenite ideas of free trade but could not accommodate the possibility of power differentials between nations.

Müller's *Women's Penny Paper* and Fenwick Miller's *Woman's Signal* infused these earlier Cobdenite ideas with a heightened awareness of the consequences of power and the use of force, and evaluated their importance for the feminist movement. Ideas of justice and moral righteousness began to be applied to the imperial and international arenas, as Müller and Fenwick Miller became critical of the use of physical force between combatants who were unequal in strength. As a result, Fenwick Miller in particular argued that women's moral righteousness, which was intended to counterbalance men's use of physical force, made all women into an equal, unified sisterhood. Thus, to some extent she politicised the internationalist ideas and simultaneously exaggerated the sexual difference arguments that had developed during the 1860s and 1870s.

An analysis of these journals shows that peace questions frequently appeared in feminist arguments and campaigns, although on the surface they may have appeared only tangentially relevant. Issues such as women's employment, a major strand of the feminist movement of the 1860s and 1870s, were linked with peace by Biggs in the *Review*, to show that women's involvement in industry would incline them towards free trade. Peace was linked with the Liberal party and the Women's Liberal Associations by Biggs and Müller, and of course with the suffrage movement through debates on the physical force objection. Becker in particular linked the suffrage and peace questions to wider issues of the importance of democracy and national representation.

In all four journals, issues of pacifism, nationalism, imperialism and internationalism were hotly debated. Campaigns such as women's suffrage were linked to wider arguments on the importance of national representation and influence for women, and how this intersected with their potential role in the empire and the nation. There was limited consensus over whether nationalism could be compatible with feminism, and where there was potential conflict – for example in Fenwick Miller's arguments on internationalism – the national interest was redefined to coincide with the feminist interest in the imagined international arena. Women's emancipation was only possible in a 'civilised' society, and 'civilisation' was only to be achieved through peace and justice. The connections between anti-militarism, peace and feminism were therefore easy for many Victorian feminists to make.

Notes

- 1 *Woman's Signal* (21 January 1897), p. 40.
- 2 David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals, 1855–1984: An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p. 3.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 5 Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831–51* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 40–1.
- 6 E. F. Richards (ed.), *Mazzini's Letters: To an English Family, 1844–54*, vol. 1 (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1920), p. 72; *Englishwoman's Review of Social and Industrial Questions* (Review) (14 September 1889), pp. 386–7; Eugene L. Rasor, 'Matilda Ashurst Biggs', in Joseph O. Baylen and Norbert J. Gossman (eds) *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals (BDMBR)*, vol. 2 (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), p. 60.
- 7 *Review* (15 July 1899), p. 169.
- 8 *Ibid.* (April 1871), p. 110.
- 9 *The Examiner*, quoted in *ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Arthur Helps, *Conversations on War and General Culture* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1871), p. 72.
- 12 *Review* (July 1871), p. 191.
- 13 *Ibid.* (15 June 1876), p. 272; (15 September 1876), p. 411.
- 14 *Ibid.* (15 May 1878), pp. 207, 211.
- 15 *Ibid.* (15 October 1900), p. 228; (15 July 1901), p. 155.
- 16 *WSJ* (1 September 1870), p. 69. Emphasis in original.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 70. Emphasis added.
- 19 *Ibid.* (1 August 1876), p. 112.
- 20 *Ibid.* (1 February 1878), p. 22.
- 21 Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 141; Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 100; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 27–31, 40–6; Doughan and Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals*, p. 13.
- 22 Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 27–31, 40–6.
- 23 *Women's Penny Paper* (WPP) (28 November 1891), p. 916.
- 24 *Ibid.* (29 December 1888), p. 4.
- 25 *Ibid.* (26 January 1889), p. 4; (5 January 1889), p. 3. For more on Marie Deraismes and Virginie Griess-Traut, see Patrick Kay Bidelman, 'Marie Desraismes', in Harold Josephson (ed.-in-chief) *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Peace Leaders (BDMPL)* (London: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 208; Stephen C. Hause with Anne R. Kenney, *Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 8; Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 179–85, 273.
- 26 Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 151–2.

- 27 WPP (2 March 1889), p. 6.
- 28 *Ibid.* (29 June 1889), p. 6; (2 November 1889), p. 18; (10 May 1890), p. 338.
- 29 *Ibid.* (2 November 1889), p. 21. Emphasis in original.
- 30 *Ibid.* (19 July 1890), p. 462; (26 July 1890), p. 476. For more on Bigg, see Lewis (ed.), *Before the Vote was Won*, pp. 366–9.
- 31 Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 91; see also Catriona Blake, *The Charge of the Parasols: Women's Entry to the Medical Profession* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), part 3; Rosemary T. VanArdse, 'Florence Fenwick Miller, feminism and the *Woman's Signal*, 1895–1899' (Tacoma, Wash.: University of Puget Sound, 1979), unpublished paper, Fawcett Library, London, p. 6; Rosemary T. VanArdse, 'Victorian periodicals yield their secrets: Florence Fenwick Miller's three campaigns for the London School Board' (Tacoma, Wash.: University of Puget Sound, 1980–85?), unpublished paper, Fawcett Library, London.
- 32 Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p. 91.
- 33 Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 140.
- 34 *Woman's Signal* (2 September 1897), p. 149; (7 October 1897), p. 229; (21 April 1898), p. 246; (22 September 1898), p. 183.
- 35 *Ibid.* (21 January 1897), p. 40.
- 36 *Ibid.* (14 July 1898), p. 441.
- 37 *Ibid.* (22 September 1898), p. 184.
- 38 *Ibid.* (27 October 1898), p. 271. For a discussion of the formation of the MWPA, see Heloise Brown, "'The gentle process of womanly sympathies'? The founding of the Manchester Women's Peace Association', *Women's History Notebooks*, 8:1 (Summer 2001), pp. 21–30.