9

'A new kind of patriotism'?[1] British women in international politics

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS have outlined the diverse contexts in which reformulations of patriotism and citizenship emerged. The feminist movement produced arguments based on 'separate spheres' ideologies which held that women's contribution to the public sphere would bring an increased recognition of humanity in international relations. In contrast, peace workers such as Priscilla Peckover based their arguments on how a full understanding of pacifism would lead to a revision of what was understood by the 'best interests' of the nation. The methods of organisation used by Priscilla Peckover, Ellen Robinson and the IAPA were arguably more collaborative than those of the Peace Society, because they managed to work with people and organisations with whom they had political or ideological differences. This chapter considers the issues involved in collaborative organisation in greater depth, with reference to the International Council of Women (ICW). The ICW was founded in 1888, and was intended to provide a point of international contact and focus for the feminist movement. It grew steadily across the globe and continues to function today, maintaining a formalised structure built upon the model established in its early years.

Even in its first decades, however, patriotisms and nationalisms intruded on the ICW in unexpected and often counter-productive ways. For example, the International Council of Women found that some potential members were hostile to the prospect of organising internationally. In 1890, Millicent Garrett Fawcett put it to the secretary of the ICW that the British and US women's movements could have nothing to learn from one another. When the issue of peace work was raised at the 1899 Congress it was widely accepted as a worthwhile principle, yet when the ICW tried to transform argument into practical work, it met with considerable opposition and inertia at national levels. In addition to disputes over if and how such work could be practical, member

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Councils tended to prioritise other issues, such as domestic politics, over foreign concerns. Particularly during periods of international conflict, National Councils fell back on conventional constructions of patriotism and (often temporarily) withdrew from international peace work. The ICW had great difficulty deciding how best to campaign for women's interests in an international context.

The ICW was originally conceived of in 1882, and thus preceded by a number of years the growth in international women's organisations that took place in the early twentieth century. It was undeniably important in the development of an international movement for women's rights, and in 1899 became the first international women's association to identify itself with the peace movement. Here, the focus is on the formative years of the Council, and how it established strategies for international work. Central to its methods were broad principles of peace and arbitration, and the means by which these principles were adhered to are discussed to illustrate the conflicts that were inherent in international feminist organisation.

The ICW was originally intended to be an international suffrage association. The idea came from the US suffragist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, during a tour of Europe in 1882. She put the idea to a meeting of suffragists in Liverpool in 1883, who passed a resolution agreeing 'that union is strength and that the time has come when women all over the world should unite in the just demand for their political enfranchisement'.[2] Committees were appointed for centres in the US (with three members), London (ten members, including some of the most prominent names of the women's movement[3]), Manchester (sixteen members, again including many well-known names[4]), Bristol (three members), Scotland (three members, Priscilla Bright McLaren, Elizabeth Pease Nichol and Eliza Wigham), Ireland (two members, Isabella Tod and Anna Haslam) and finally, France (four members). This meeting created the circumstances for domination of the Council by British suffragists, in particular the radical suffragist wing of the women's movement, which has been explored by Sandra Stanley Holton. Holton suggests that moderate suffragists such as Lydia Becker were sceptical of the proposal and even envious of Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's leadership. She argues that the radical suffragists, and Ursula Bright in particular, may have gone along with Stanton's idea as a means of achieving prominence over the moderates.[5]

The momentum of the 1883 meeting was soon lost, however. Perhaps this is unsurprising for a movement that purported to be international

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but contained only forty-one individuals from five nations (three if England, Scotland and Ireland are counted as the UK). The Council at this stage provides a clear example of how the term 'international' was often applied to any group comprised of more than one nation, without necessarily taking account of the distinct methods of working that an association of many different nationalities would require. The US National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) attempted to develop the movement by inviting the European members to its 1884 annual meeting. Not surprisingly, very few could attend, although many wrote to express their sympathy.[6] Little was done to publicise the movement internationally or to consider how it could be more effectively organised. The US and British suffragists were using methods based on facilitating *national* organisation, rather than applying new methods that might draw nations together, and thus the Committee was inactive until it was resurrected by US suffragists in 1887.

May Wright Sewall (1844–1920) had, as secretary of the NWSA in 1884, witnessed the first attempt to set up an international movement, and it was she who proposed a second attempt in anticipation of the fortieth anniversary of the conference for women's rights at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.[7] During the debate on her resolution, it became clear that the NWSA was firmly split into two groups: older activists who wanted to limit the international meeting to those who advocated women's suffrage; and younger women who wanted to extend the plan to include women working for 'all lines of human progress'. The younger members won the argument on the grounds that 'many organizations of women still holding aloof from suffrage allowed their very existence to the changes in public opinion, and in law wrought by the suffragists' and 'that in many countries the ballot is not recognized as an instrument of legitimate power in the hands of either men or women'. These principles, decided as they were by one body of US suffragists, formed the basis of the inaugural meeting of the International Council of Women, which took place – again in the USA – the following year.[8]

In the process of organising this convention, and after contacting over one hundred US women's organisations, Sewall became convinced that a change in direction was necessary, and that:

> what was needed . . . was to bring them [women] together under conditions which would show them that however different in traditions, in wealth, social position and in religious and political opinions they might be, they were all *equally* related to larger interests; that indeed the likenesses existing among the most different classes of women were larger than the differences among the same classes.[9]

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Thus, the congress was designed so as to convince women that they were essentially the same, and to provide them with common ground in order to ensure the success of the meeting. This, Sewall has argued, became the 'dominating idea', and as Stanton and Anthony recognised, it was Sewall who then pressed the case for a permanent International and (US) National Council of Women.[10]

The British presence in Washington was influenced primarily by national considerations, involving, firstly, the changing nature of the suffrage movement, and secondly, the scandal occasioned by the citing of Sir Charles Dilke as third party in a divorce case. In 1888, the same year as the ICW Congress, the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage (CCNSWS) split into radical and moderate factions as the result of a disagreement over the constitution of the Society. Under the radicals' new rules, all Central Committee decisions were binding on the regional Committees, and any organisation that had women's suffrage as one of its aims, rather than its primary aim, could affiliate to the Society. This would in effect have allowed Women's Liberal Federation branches to affiliate to the CCNSWS, a proposal to which Conservative and Liberal Unionist suffragists were vehemently opposed. The drive for the new rules was led by Mrs Frank Morrison and Leonard Courtney, and was supported by many of the IAPA women discussed in chapters 7 and 8, including Laura Ormiston Chant and Florence Balgarnie. Indeed, Balgarnie became secretary to the new society, which was renamed the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage (CNSWS). Simultaneously, however, a moderate minority led by Millicent Fawcett and Lydia Becker seceded to re-convene the CCNSWS based on the old rules. The regional suffrage Committees were split in their affiliations, with some refusing to affiliate to either of the central Committees, which remained separate until they re-united in 1900.[11]

Perhaps more important than these divisions over the suffrage was the social purity aspect of the women's movement. It was this, combined with the autonomy of the regional suffrage Committees (as established under the 'old rules') that affected Helen Taylor's decision not to attend the Washington Congress. Taylor had been booked and advertised to speak, and was also expected to address a Senate Committee on women's suffrage with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Yet the still autonomous Newcastle National Society for Women's Suffrage had nominated Dilke's sister-in-law, May Ashton Dilke, as a delegate to the Congress. On hearing this, and understanding that under the existing rules she had no power of veto, Taylor refused to attend the Congress

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in any capacity. For Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, organisers of the Congress, this was a considerable blow. No amount of pleading or cajoling could change Taylor's mind. Stanton wrote to her shortly before the Congress, 'Do you think the sainted John Stuart Mill if pledged to go to a great International Congress would have declined at the last minute because Sir Charles Dilke was to be there? On the contrary would he not have felt it more imperative to do his best to see that England was grandly represented.' She continued, 'You are extensively advertized & you cannot in honor now decline.'[12] Yet Taylor did not attend.

Laura Ormiston Chant, who with Alice Cliff Scatcherd and May Ashton Dilke, was one of the few British delegates to go to Washington in 1888, noted later that her position at the Congress had been severely curtailed by the moderates in the CCNSWS. She was initially invited to attend the Washington Congress as the CCNSWS delegate. However, the Manchester, Belfast, Bristol and Birmingham Committees objected to any delegates being sent to Washington, and at a CCNSWS meeting the decision to send delegates was rescinded on the motion of Helen Taylor. Chant went instead as a delegate for the radical Edinburgh Society on the suggestion of Priscilla Bright McLaren. When asked on her arrival why she was not representing her local Committee, she replied that 'the women of the Edinburgh National Society were enthusiastic and strong enough to do what the Central Committee were unable to do'.[13] Thus, divisions at the national level directly hampered the international work of British feminists.

Consequently, and perhaps predictably, the Congress was dominated by women from the USA, although there was some representation of European women and a sole participant from beyond North America and Europe, Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati, who presented a paper on 'The Women of India'.[14] The one hundred women who presented papers came from only seven different nations. Following a Committee on Organisation, consisting of as many international members as the Congress could muster, it was agreed to formally constitute a National and International Council. Only one member, Alice Scatcherd, dissented from the proposal to form an international council and supported a national body only.[15] Most histories of the ICW begin with this 1888 conference, although Leila Rupp acknowledges the importance of the 1882 meeting. Despite the fact that there was no active body in existence between 1882 and 1888, the longevity of the idea in the minds of Stanton, Anthony and Sewall is a testament to their commitment to the concept of international organisation.[16]

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The ICW constitution, as decided by the Congress in 1888, began as follows:

> We, women of all Nations, sincerely believing that the best good of humanity will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and of the State, do hereby band ourselves in a confederation of workers to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law: DO UNTO OTHERS AS YE WOULD THAT THEY SHOULD DO UNTO YOU.[17]

This focus on the 'best good of humanity' resembles the feminist redefinition of patriotism discussed in previous chapters, in which women's interests were argued to be allied to humanity as a whole rather than the nation. The ICW took the practical implications of these arguments to their logical conclusion, however, in its focus on unity between women of different nations. The rejection of women's suffrage as a campaign issue led to something of a vacuum in terms of the ICW's aims, and as a result, the stated aims were ambiguously defined as the establishment of greater communication between women's organisations and the consideration of questions related to 'the welfare of the commonwealth and the family'.[18]

This equivocation was largely because the ICW intended to be open to women's organisations of any political or ideological perspective. The general policy of the International Council held that it was:

> organized in the interest of no one propaganda, and [has] no power over its auxiliaries beyond that of suggestion and sympathy; *therefore*, no National council voting to become auxiliary . . . shall thereby render itself liable to be interfered with in respect to its complete organic unity, independence or method of work, or shall be committed to any principle or method . . . beyond compliance with the terms of this constitution.[19]

In practice, however, the Council lacked focus in its aims and politics, and therefore attracted few prominent feminists. Some of the National Councils, particularly the British branch, even tried to exclude suffragists from international meetings, and as a result the blandness and ambiguity of the ICW's aims was not seriously challenged.

At the 1888 Congress, Fawcett was elected in her absence to the presidency of the new ICW by the US members of the nomination committee, on the grounds that she had written to the Congress on behalf of the National Vigilance Association expressing her 'warm sympathy' and conviction that 'by intercommunication of the two nations, much

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mutual assistance can be given'.[20] Sewall put this appointment in writing to Fawcett, and after a considerable delay received the reply that Fawcett would not have time to undertake the duties of president. It was agreed between Frances Willard, the temperance advocate, and May Wright Sewall that the most important work of the US National Council was to establish at least one National Council of Women (NCW) abroad, so that the US branch would no longer be *de facto* the International Council. With this in mind, Willard began a correspondence with Fawcett and received what she took to be an agreement that Fawcett would begin organising a British Council and reconsider accepting the presidency of the ICW.

The US National Council received an invitation to an international women's congress in Paris in July 1889, and used this opportunity to promote the Council idea, with May Wright Sewall presenting a paper on the issue.[21] However, the congress resulted in the foundation of a Conseil International Permanente des Femmes which, crucially, was not a French National Council of Women and did not affiliate with the ICW. Sewall's trip to Europe had another motive though, as she arranged a meeting with Fawcett in a final attempt to persuade her to accept the presidency. Although there were many prominent British feminists who had shown an interest in the ICW, none of these appear to have been approached by Sewall, who insisted that Fawcett should be president. Fawcett was young, but not a 'New Woman', and she had some degree of acceptability within the establishment. Yet Fawcett proved highly resistant to joining the ICW, and at her meeting with Sewall in the summer of 1890, Fawcett finally admitted that she did not believe that conditions in Britain were 'ripe for federating the existing organizations of women'. Further, to Sewall's 'utter disappointment', Fawcett said that she felt it 'quite impossible that English and American women should have anything in common, the conditions of their lives and the purposes of their respective societies being so different'.[22]

The first triennial meeting of the US NCW in 1891 officially recognised that it was still, in effect, also the ICW, as no other National Councils had yet been formed. It had been planned to hold the first quinquennial congress of the ICW in London in 1893, on the assumption that a British NCW would by then be established. This was now accepted to be impossible, and the 1893 meeting was moved to Chicago, where it could be held in conjunction with the World's Exposition. In 1892, a preliminary address was issued for the Chicago Congress that called on women from all nations to communicate with the ICW, and, if possible, to attend the Congress. This address increased the

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international character of the work to some degree, as correspondence was established with small numbers of women in Central and South America, Asia and Australasia. The 126 women's organisations represented in Chicago came from sixteen different countries, which was a substantial improvement on the 1888 meeting. But the most active nation in the Chicago Women's Congress, aside of course from the US, was in fact England, which sent no less than thirty delegates, including Laura Ormiston Chant, Jane Cobden Unwin, Lady Henry Somerset, Mrs Bedford Fenwick and Florence Fenwick Miller.[23] Also present was Lady Aberdeen, who was representing Irish women's work at the World's Fair, and spoke briefly at the ICW meeting to represent the Society for Promoting the Return of Women to all Local Governing Bodies, the Women's Liberal Federation of Scotland, and the Women's Franchise League of England.

At the close of the Congress, when the time came to elect new officers, the names of Lady Henry Somerset and Lady Aberdeen were put forward for the presidency. It was still seen to be essential to establish a British NCW, so that the next congress could be held in London. Lady Aberdeen was elected by a slim margin, and although she knew little about the constitution or aims of the Council, she accepted the post after some correspondence with Rachel Foster Avery, the ICW's secretary.[24] Lady Aberdeen's appointment altered the face of the ICW, as in her politics she trod a fine line between Whiggery and Gladstonian Liberalism, rather than feminism as such. A prominent feminist like Lady Henry Somerset would have made an effective president, but as her record in the temperance movement showed, her commitment to women's suffrage and her autocratic methods of working may have worked to the detriment of the ICW's long-term development. In contrast, Lady Aberdeen had a recent history of conciliation in her work as president of the Women's Liberal Federation, which had split over the issue of women's suffrage. Despite working for some years to keep the WLF united, a minority of members who believed that the WLF should support anti-suffrage Liberals withdrew in 1892 to found the Women's National Liberal Association. Lady Aberdeen worked to keep the suffragist WLF loyal to the Liberal party, and to minimise its desire to use the suffrage as a test question for Liberal parliamentary candidates.[25] She brought these diplomatic skills to her presidency of the ICW, recognising that its success depended on the establishment of as many National Councils as possible and the adoption of a moderate programme that would minimise dissent. Her three terms of presidency (she headed the ICW from 1893 to 1899, 1904 to 1920 and 1922 to 1936)

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saw the ICW transformed from the suffragist project of Sewall, Stanton and Anthony into a much more wide-ranging, if perhaps also less controversial, forum that was embraced by women across North America and Western Europe.[26]

The presidency gave Lady Aberdeen the responsibility for the organisation of the 1899 Congress in London. This was effectively the inauguration of the ICW as an international movement, yet Lady Aberdeen's absence from Britain during the run-up to the Congress (she and her husband were based in Canada from 1893) meant that there were considerable problems in organising a NCW for Great Britain. Lady Aberdeen decided that the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) should become the National Council, rather than any 'newer body which might be formed for the purpose', but she experienced considerable difficulties in persuading the NUWW Committee to reorganise itself into Britain's NCW.[27] The National Union of Women Workers was a loose federation of charitable and social purity groups that held annual conferences across the UK. Lady Aberdeen's 1888 conference on 'Women's Work' in Scotland had provided the blueprint for the subsequent NUWW conferences, which began in 1889. The conferences were effectively a meeting point for regional groups, and it was not until 1895 that a national governing body was officially established. The NUWW's suitability as a National Council lay in its role as an umbrella group for a large number of affiliated regional societies, and the fact that Lady Aberdeen had long-standing connections with it. Yet its Committee could see no reason why it should subordinate itself to the ICW, and before agreeing to organise the 1899 Congress it demanded full power to decide both the subjects for discussion and the speakers. It was still arguing this point and requesting that the ICW's constitution be altered accordingly into the summer of 1897.[28] The NUWW's concerns seemed to be based on how the potentially divisive issue of women's suffrage was to be addressed, and their desire to ban from the Congress any discussion of marriage, divorce or 'New Woman ideas'. The NUWW supported a limited women's franchise only, and as a result of conflicts with the National Society for Women's Suffrage, the latter subsequently withdrew as an affiliated member of the NUWW.[29] The conflicts between the NUWW and other British feminists, as well as its disputes with the ICW, were the principal reasons for the postponement of the Congress from its original schedule of summer 1898 to one year later, in July 1899.[30] As late as 1897 the NUWW and ICW could not agree the terms for federation as a National Council, until in October the NUWW's Central Committee decided to form the National Council of Women

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of Great Britain and Ireland (NCWGBI) themselves, rather than waiting to reach agreement with the regional groups. The ICW approved this proposal in early 1898.[31]

During the 1890s the NUWW was dominated by moderate reformers and contained few leading feminists. As Florence Fenwick Miller remarked during the NUWW's transferral to NCW status in 1898, its Committee had only one nonconformist member, Mrs Alfred Booth, and the Council was from the outset acknowledged to be 'essentially a Christian organisation'.[32] However, the separate sub-committee that made the arrangements for the 1899 Congress included not only NUWW Committee members such as Mrs Louise Creighton, wife of the Bishop of London, and Mrs Alfred Booth, but also socialists Margaret MacDonald of the Independent Labour Party and Dora Montefiore of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). MacDonald was a NUWW member, but as Hannam and Hunt note, divisions within socialist politics between the ILP and SDF strongly influenced the involvement of socialist women at this time.[33] While women from a wide range of political organisations attended the 1899 Congress, they did not become involved in the ICW or NCWGBI's work in the longer term. Instead, the NCWGBI continued the NUWW's focus on philanthropy and social, rather than political, reform. Arbitration was not on the NCWGBI's list of suggested topics for the 1899 Congress, and it appears to have been only reluctantly accepted by them for inclusion. It was not until 1908 that the NCWGBI began to concern itself with questions of peace, arbitration and international affairs.[34]

However, the importance of the 1899 Congress should not be underestimated, as it effectively set the standard and style for ICW meetings until the mid-twentieth century. Lady Aberdeen's influence was significant in this respect, as she was also the main organising force in the ICW until her final retirement from the presidency in 1936. By the time of the 1899 Congress there were nine nations officially affiliated to the ICW: the USA, Canada, Britain and Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands.[35] In addition, the 1899 Congress included women from twenty-eight countries. Each of the nine NCWs presented a report on its work to date, as did women from Finland, Belgium, Italy, Russia, France, Norway, India, South Africa, Argentina, Palestine and Persia. The inclusion of South Africa on this list is highly significant given the absence of South African delegates from the 1899 Hague Peace Congress, and the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer war just months after the ICW and Hague Congresses. The ICW Congress was dominated by a large demonstration in support of peace

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and arbitration, and the Standing Committee on this issue that was set up as a result was the first to be formally established by the ICW.[36]

Leila Rupp has discussed how the ICW emphasised its internationalism at Council meetings by focusing upon the national characteristics of each nation present. The focus was from the outset placed upon the complementarity of nationalism and internationalism. Yet as Rupp has emphasised, these terms held intensely different meanings for women newly freed from – or indeed, still under – regimes of imperialist domination than they did for those from countries where national self-determination could be taken for granted. Where there was conflict, it was more likely to be over the role of national identities in the Council than the meanings or uses of internationalist ideas.[37] Unlike later organisations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the ICW was not formed specifically with the pursuit of peace on its agenda, but rather, during its founding years (1888–99), women's love of peace was assumed, and their work for other causes such as education and the suffrage was expected to form their sphere of practical work. Hannam and Hunt note the irony that the issues the ICW was concerned with – social reform, the family, maternity and childcare – were very similar to those that the early twentieth-century Socialist Women's International and its British section focused upon. Yet socialist women rarely engaged with questions of pacifism and internationalism in the 1890s, and even in the years leading up to the First World War, there were few attempts to consider the implications of internationalism for socialist feminist politics.[38] Non-socialist feminist organisations such as the ICW assumed a connection between women and peace that drew on maternalist ideas as well as constructions of innate sexual difference, but there was a stronger emphasis in the ICW on relational feminism, or women's relationships to others, than on equal rights feminism or abstract ideas of equality.

The assumption of a 'natural' relationship between women and peace meant that the ICW, through its resolutions and its Standing Committee, did not actually expect its members to undertake political work for peace, but instead to co-exist in peaceful co-operation while they pursued their different aims. This is shown in an early statement issued by Sewall before the founding congress of 1888, which was disseminated widely across Europe on her visit the following year. It argued that there should be more National Councils because:

> Women have never yet united in large numbers save for good purposes; it is safe to predict that they never will. Their isolation from one

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> another is in the interest of brute force; their combination means a dominance of peace and spiritual power, the purification, the protection and coronation of the home; the home is the shrine for whose sacred sake all that is good and true on earth exists.[39]

This was in many ways a radical statement. Sewall's focus on women's isolation from one another was an area of concern for many feminists. She implicitly equated brute force with men and masculinity, and although her argument rested on assumptions of biological determinism, her analysis of warfare as a factor that divided women and prevented equality – between nations, as well as between men and women – was in some ways an astute criticism. The conflation of women's nature with pacifist ideals was an argument used by many feminists, but Sewall's statement was distinctive in that it identified an external factor, 'brute force', which was opposed to and, crucially, responsible for women's lack of access to power. However, Sewall's insight in this statement belied the conservatism that became evident within the Council by the end of the 1890s.

In the opening address by Lady Aberdeen at the 1899 Congress, when she had been ICW president for six years, there was an immediate emphasis on the importance of patriotism and national identity. '[W]hat we desire', she said, is 'that our National Councils may in very truth be *national* in character.'[40] At the special meeting on peace and arbitration, the resolution proposed and carried by the meeting was: 'That the International Council of Women . . . take steps in every country to further and advance, by every means in their power, the movement towards International Arbitration.' In support of the motion, there were addresses by women including May Wright Sewall, Ellen Robinson, Mme Selenka of Germany, Mme Waszklewicz von Schilfgaarde of the Netherlands and Marya Chéliga of France.[41] (Robinson attended as a delegate of the International Peace Bureau, who had been contacted by the ICW and invited to send a woman speaker.)

While the latter four women were highly active in the peace movement and the International Peace Bureau, it was the addresses by Aberdeen and Sewall that gave greatest insight into the reasons why the ICW had concerned itself with peace. Aberdeen, having drawn upon the commonplace argument that women generally suffered more from war than did men, went on to suggest that: 'We women of this day are learning a new kind of patriotism – we are learning to covet for our countries that they shall emulate one another as to which can do the most for the good of the world, and as to which can do the most to maintain the peace of the world.' This 'new kind of patriotism' was a response to the 'narrow

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patriotism' of the past, which 'women have done much to keep alive' by 'exalting their own country at the expense of others'. Now, she said,

> bound together in national and international ties by the 'Golden Rule' [Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you], we should glory in a newer and fuller and more beautiful patriotism, which lacks nothing of the force of the old, but which transforms it . . . whilst giving it at the same time a worldwide field for the exercise of its new found power.

Aberdeen asserted a patriotism that was based on humanity, yet also assumed that women would 'give to [their] own country [their] heart's first and truest devotion'.[42] Internationalism in the ICW may have meant the recognition of women's common humanity, but it always came second to nationalism.

May Wright Sewall's support of the peace resolution gave greater consideration to the international aspect of the Council's work. She proposed a peace banner, inscribed with the symbols of all the National Councils, which would 'become ultimately the recognised international banner under which all nations of the world shall assemble, feeling that they have never come under the best inspiration of their own respective flags, until, with their own colours, the banner of peace is unfurled'.[43] The role of peace, according to Sewall, was to motivate national feeling as the consequence of a secure (peaceful) international situation.

The ICW aimed to attract as much attention as possible in the international press, and thus it was no surprise that the celebrated novelist Bertha von Suttner was invited to address its 1899 peace meeting. Germany had formed a NCW in 1897, but Austria, France and Switzerland had organised nothing by 1899. Suttner was consulted by Lady Aberdeen regarding which European peace women should be invited to the meeting, and Britain's NCW even proposed Suttner for the presidency of the ICW.[44] It appears that Suttner refused the offer of nomination, and in the event, she was unable even to attend the ICW meeting. It took place in London over the same dates as the Hague Peace Conference, which Suttner was attending as a press correspondent. At the last minute, she was prevented from travelling to London due to health problems, and her paper had to be read to the meeting by Mrs W. P. Byles. Suttner's paper summarised the progress being made at the Hague, and ended with the hope that:

> The women who, from all parts of the world, have come to this Congress, will . . . zealously and unanimously join in the work for peace, for they are the courageous representatives of right, freedom and ethical

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> progress. But I wish that the words which are spoken in this hall may reach our sisters outside, and that all mothers and wives – be they feminists or not, be they members of peace societies or not – may be roused to the duty of the present time.[45]

While Suttner recognised that women did not constitute a single unified force, she nonetheless suggested that those present had a duty to bring their skills to bear on the wider world. Her comments were remarkable for two further reasons. Most obviously, she made an early use of the term 'feminism', which suggests that she believed the ICW to be specifically feminist. Secondly, she raised the issue of sisterhood, and while referring to women collectively as 'sisters' in a rhetoric sense, relied on real rather than imagined familial relationships in arguing that the women who had a duty to work for peace were in fact mothers and wives, rather than women as individuals in their own right.

The Congress passed the peace resolution unanimously, and much enthusiasm was expressed for the potential contribution that the ICW women could make to the promotion of peace. Yet subsequent events showed that they had been overly optimistic. The chairmanship of the Committee was placed in the hands of the British NCW, and Lady Aberdeen (who was replaced as ICW president at this Congress by May Wright Sewall) was elected as the chair of the Peace Committee. Her involvement in it was short-lived, however, as the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer war, combined with her husband's role in government, led her to resign in 1900. It was the responsibility of the British NCW to find a replacement, so Mrs Alfred Booth was appointed. However, she resigned for similar reasons in 1901, and incredibly, the NCW Executive was unable to find a replacement.

It seems to have been impossible for the Council to find any Executive members who were prepared to promote peace during the Anglo-Boer war. For women who were located outside the peace movement and the various liberal and socialist anti-war movements, patriotism was defined as loyalty to the nation, rather than the alternative formulations discussed throughout this book. It was left to May Wright Sewall, as ICW President, to take up the Peace Committee's work. She apparently found that 'the wars that were then going forward in three continents involving nations in which there were affiliated Councils, made it apparently impossible' to undertake any peace work. These difficulties led to a greater awareness of the problems of recruiting politically active women who might subsequently find that their duties in respect of the Peace Committee clashed with other commitments, particularly, as Sewall put it, with 'her personal interests or the personal interests of the men of her family'. It

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was concluded that although women from politically active families were 'of vast value' to the ICW in other ways, Sewall 'had found it impossible that they should be useful' in regard to peace and arbitration campaigns. The failure to find a replacement chair for the Peace and Arbitration Committee meant that it remained without a leader, 'and [was] consequently practically non-existent' for three years, until May Wright Sewall resigned the ICW presidency and took up the chairmanship.[46]

Despite these very practical problems, the rhetorical commitment to 'peace' and women's 'natural' relationship to it remained. Lady Aberdeen and Bertha von Suttner spoke again on the question of peace at the 1904 ICW meeting, and May Wright Sewall pointedly referred to her mission to keep the National Councils actively supporting the peace resolution. The result of the 1899 resolution, she told the 1904 Universal Peace Congress, 'was what may be called an educational campaign participated in with greater or less sincerity and zeal by the different national organizations within the International Council'.[47] Sewall's approach, of all the Executive officers and National Councils, was perhaps the most internationalist. In 1909 she was still attempting to draw others into her vision of what could be achieved by international work between women, and commented, in a retrospective study of the work done between 1899 and 1904, that 'The National Councils had not yet come into an understanding of what is meant by International [*sic*] coöperation.' They were, she noted, failing to unite with other National Councils when circumstances demanded. This failure would appear to be a consequence of the ICW's focus on international and national organisation in combination. Any effort towards international work had to originate from the International Council, as the National Councils were each focused upon their internal work. Sewall's approach to the method and form of working did not change, however. She still aimed to prove that the 'necessary condition of the further progress of civilization' was the evolution of 'a peaceful method for settling national differences which shall be compatible with national dignity'.[48] The emphasis continued to be on further entrenching national identity, albeit making it perhaps less militaristic, rather than creating strategies that would encourage international identity or affiliation.

Another factor inhibiting peace work was the presence of an active international peace movement. Lady Battersea, president of the NCW of Britain, replied to Sewall's request for NCW reports on peace work that: 'we think it better for ourselves to leave the organization of demonstrations to the various Peace societies which are established and actively working among us'.[49] This response was to some degree a result of the moderate nature of the British NCW, but it also illustrates the awkward

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position in which all the National Councils were placed when asked to implement a resolution of international scale in a national context. Two National Councils (Argentina and Switzerland) refused to involve themselves in peace work because they believed this would mean implicit criticism of women in other nations who were affiliated to the ICW. But the majority of responding Councils (eight in total) argued that while they were in general sympathy with 'the cause of Peace', they saw little useful work that could be undertaken. Very few of the National Councils were working with, or through, the established peace movement. Their members typically had limited experience and knowledge of the peace movement, and little interest in working within it. Yet, as the popularity of the 1899 peace resolution showed, they did share a generalised commitment to a state of peace, which, while based mainly on rhetoric, nonetheless offered an analysis of war in gendered terms.

The ICW relied almost entirely upon rhetorical devices which linked cultural constructions of 'women' to abstract ideals of peace, including concepts of spiritual or moral 'inner peace'. Related to this was the problem that international organising was generally of an abstract nature. It had no visible boundaries or permanent location, and relied upon identifiable core members and organisations to create the sense of an imagined international community. Its work was not helped by its initial attempts to change its president and therefore its headquarters every five years. It quickly found that the only way for the Council to progress was to have a long-term president steering its direction, and this was one of the main reasons why Lady Aberdeen was repeatedly re-elected to the presidency. International meetings provided a sense of achievement and connection, though the primary ties between ICW members remained national in basis. It is also possible that patriotism (as it is conventionally defined) hindered international work. The ICW held internationalism as an ideal, but it also tied individuals closely to their own national identity and origins. For women working for social or political change within their own nations, an international movement was in some ways superfluous, because the issues under debate were mainly domestic questions such as education or employment, which were highly culturally specific. Therefore it was difficult for members to feel that they had a stake in the work of women of other nations. They were not working for an internationally located goal, such as the promotion of arbitration or the resolution of conflict. Shortly after the 1899 ICW Congress, Teresa Wilson, Lady Aberdeen's corresponding secretary, initiated a discussion with the International Peace Bureau and suggested that the ICW might

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make it possible for internationally organised societies to federate with the ICW in the same way as the National Councils. The idea came to nothing, but the possibility briefly existed for an organisation that combined national and international methods of work.[50]

Although the ICW provided a space in which international organisation could be imagined, it was limited in its impact upon feminism in Britain. By the late 1890s it had been transformed from its origins as a radical suffragist movement into a social reform organisation. As a result, the internationalism that formed part of the feminist politics of some Victorian women did not find a means for expression within the ICW. It was restricted both by its internal dynamics and the logistical problems of working internationally. However, despite its conservatism and the emphasis that was placed on homogeneity, it did offer a formal arena within which British feminists could work to establish international networks.

Notes

1 Lady Aberdeen (ed.), *The International Congress of Women of 1899: Report of Transactions of the Second Quinquennial Meeting, held in London, July 1899* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. 217.

2 May Wright Sewall, *Genesis of the ICW and the Story of its Growth, 1888–1893* (privately published, ICW, 1914), p. 2; National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), *Report of the International Council of Women assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association, Washington, DC, US of America, March 25 to April 1, 1888* (Washington, DC: Rufus H. Darby, 1888), pp. 9–10.

3 Clementia Taylor, Margaret Bright Lucas, Helen Taylor, Henrietta Müller, Caroline Ashurst Biggs, Charles and Laura McLaren, Eliza Orme, Rebecca Moore and Harriet Stanton Blatch. Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 2.

4 These included Jacob and Ursula Bright, Mr and Mrs J. P. Thomasson, Margaret E. Parker, Mrs Oliver Scatcherd, Walter and Eva McLaren and Lydia Becker.

5 Holton, *Suffrage Days*, p. 65; Sandra Stanley Holton, 'To educate women into rebellion: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the creation of a transatlantic network of radical suffragists', *American History Review*, 99 (1994), p. 1125; Sandra Stanley Holton, 'From anti-slavery to suffragette militancy: the Bright circle, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the British women's movement', in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), pp. 213–33.

6 Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 3.

7 International Council of Women, *Women in a Changing World: the Dynamic Story of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 123; Michael A. Lutzker, 'May Wright Sewall', in Josephson (ed.), *BDMPL*, pp. 875–6.

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8 Sewall, *Genesis*, pp. 6–7; see also Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 15–22.

9 Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 10. Emphasis added.

10 *Ibid*.

11 Other IAPA members who were prominent in the formation of the 'new rules' society included: Mary Costelloe, Jane Holah, Margaret Bright Lucas, Florence Fenwick Miller, Henrietta Müller, Eliza Orme, Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst, Annie Peppercorn, Ellen Sickert, Hannah Whitall Smith, E. M. Southey and Mrs Wates. Those who re-established the 'old rules' society, the CCNSWS, included Louisa Bigg, Isabella Ford, Anna Swanwick and Isabella Tod. *WSJ* (1 January 1889), pp. 4, 8–14; Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women*, pp. 132–3; Holton, *Suffrage Days*, chapters 3 and 4; Ramelson, *Petticoat Rebellion*, pp. 94–6.

12 Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Helen Taylor, 6 March 1888, sheet no. 251, vol. 13, Mill-Taylor Collection, London School of Economics and Political Science, London.

13 *WSJ* (1 January 1889), p. 12. See also Holton, *Suffrage Days*, pp. 64–5, 74–5; Holton, 'From anti-slavery to suffrage militancy', p. 227.

14 Burton, *Burdens of History*, pp. 118, 120; Antoinette Burton, 'Colonial encounters in late-Victorian England: Pandita Ramabai at Cheltenham and Wantage, 1883–6', *Feminist Review*, 49 (Spring 1995), pp. 29–49.

15 Sewall, *Genesis*, pp. 15–16, 39; NWSA, *Report of the ICW*, pp. 30, 449.

16 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 15; Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 53; ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, p. 14.

17 ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, p. 329; Maria Ogilvie Gordon, *Histories of Affiliated National Councils, 1888–1938* (privately published by the ICW, 1938), p. 14.

18 ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, p. 329.

19 Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 19. Emphasis in original.

20 Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Annette Bear to the ICW, in NWSA, *Report of the ICW*, p. 290.

21 This congress was attended by many of the radical suffragists who had been involved in the original idea for an international organisation in 1882. They included: Jacob and Ursula Bright, Walter and Eva McLaren, James Stansfeld, Elizabeth Blackwell, Florence Balgarnie, Mrs Ashton Dilke, Emilie Ashurst Venturi, Henrietta Müller, Sarah Sheldon Amos, Josephine Butler and Monica Mangan and Hodgson Pratt of the IAPA. *Actes du Congrès International des Œuvres et Institutions Féminines* (Paris: Bibliothèque des *Annales Économiques*, 1890), pp. 529–30.

22 Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 37. First two quotations from Sewall, third credited to Fawcett. Rubinstein notes that the latter quotation has 'the authentic ring' of Fawcett, and cites a remark made three years later by the American temperance campaigner Frances Willard, that she believed Fawcett 'considers America to be on some other planet, . . . she evidently looks upon the Republic across the water through the wrong end of her telescope – if indeed she ever look [*sic*] at all'. Fawcett later chaired a suffrage meeting at the ICW's 1899 Congress in London, but otherwise she kept a distance from the work of the ICW. Rubinstein notes that, although she accepted the presidency of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1904, Fawcett was for much

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of her life indifferent to international work. The only exception appeared to be where it explicitly concerned the campaign for the vote. Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women*, pp. 76, 137, 202–3.

23 May Wright Sewall (ed.), *The World's Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Resumé* (Chicago and New York: Rand, McNally and Company, 1894), pp. 20, 23, 33, 395; Sewall, *Genesis*, pp. 49–53, 60.

24 Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *We Twa: Reminiscences of Lord and Lady Aberdeen* (London: W. Collins and Co., 1925), p. 295.

25 Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, pp. 57–65; *Woman's Herald* (14 May 1892), p. 8.

26 Doris French, *Ishbel and the Empire: A Biography of Lady Aberdeen* (Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1988); Marjorie Pentland, *A Bonnie Fechter: The Life of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Marchioness of Aberdeen* (London: Batsford, 1952); *Concord* (22 June 1892), pp. 103–8; ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, pp. 126–7; Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 15; Sewall (ed.) *World's Congress*, p. 19.

27 Lady Aberdeen, *The Canadian Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 1893–1898*, ed. John Saywell, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1960), p. 205; ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, pp. 19, 219.

28 *Woman's Signal* (3 November 1898), p. 280; Gordon, *Histories*, p. 69; Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 109; ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, pp. 221–5; National Union of Women Workers (NUWW) Minute Book, 7 October [1897] and 11 March 1898, National Council of Women of Great Britain (hereafter NCWGB), London Metropolitan Archives, London.

29 NUWW Minute Book, 20 January 1897, 7 April 1897, 5 May [1898], NCWGB; French, *Ishbel and the Empire*, p. 193.

30 ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, p. 20.

31 Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 88.

32 *Woman's Signal* (3 November 1898), p. 280.

33 Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, pp. 170, 174–5; Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 18.

34 Gordon, *Histories*, p. 69; Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 109; ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, pp. 221–5; NUWW Minute Book, 7 October [1897] and 11 March 1898, NCWGB.

35 Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, pp. 11–12.

36 ICW, *Women in a Changing World*, pp. 21, 23.

37 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 122, 129.

38 Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women*, pp. 171, 181, 196.

39 Sewall, *Genesis*, p. 43.

40 Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 46. Emphasis in original.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 217–18.

43 Sewall in *ibid.*, p. 235.

44 Lady Aberdeen to Bertha von Suttner, 27 April 1899, File 102, Box 13; Teresa Wilson to Bertha von Suttner, 28 March 1899, Box 21, Bertha von Suttner Correspondence, Fried-Suttner Papers, International Peace Movement, League of Nations Archives, United Nations Library, Geneva, Switzerland.

45 Suttner in Aberdeen, *Report of Transactions*, p. 230.

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46 May Wright Sewall (ed.), *The International Council of Women from 1899 to 1904: Report of Transactions, Berlin, June 1904* (Boston, USA: by the author, 1909), pp. 75, 200–1.

47 Sewall in Universal Peace Congress, *Official Report of the Thirteenth Universal Peace Congress, held at Boston, Massachusetts, USA, October 3rd to 8th, 1904* (Boston: the Peace Congress Committee, 1904), 132; Maria Ogilvie Gordon, *The International Council of Women and the Meetings of the International Congress of Women in Berlin, 1904* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen Free Press, n.d. [1904]), pp. 6–7.

48 Sewall, *ICW from 1899 to 1904*, pp. 43–4, 75.

49 *Ibid*., p. 71.

50 Teresa Wilson to Élie Ducommun, n.d., and 29 May 1899, Élie Ducommun to Teresa Wilson, 6 May 1899, Frederic Bajer to Élie Ducommun, 16 January 1899, Document 6, Box 231, IPB.

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