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"TO LEAVE UNTRIED NO METHOD": WOMEN PEACE ACTIVISTS THEN AND NOW

8 MAY '15

Column by Shelley Anderson

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which saw its establishment at the International Congress of Women of 1915, WILPF organized the conference "Women's Power to Stop War" in The Hague from 27-29 April. As a partner of WILPF, WPP actively participated in the Conference, amongst others by facilitating a panel discussion on "A Transformative WPS Agenda: Using a Masculinities Perspective to Challenge Militarism". In this column, Shelley Anderson reflects on 100 years of women's organizing for peace, sharing the stories of the visionary group of women coming together in 1915 and how these women can be an inspiration for the women's peace movement now, and for in the future.

COLUMN

Column: To Achieve a Violence-Free World, Men Have to Be on Board

15 APR '15 On the occasion 5th anniversary of WPP's pioneering 2009-2010 Training of Trainers Cycle "Overcoming Violence: Exploring Masculinities, Violence and Peace", WPP interviewed ToT alumni Paulo Baleinakorodawa about his work for gender equality and redefining masculinities in the Pacific region. In this

Peace activists seldom stop to celebrate. There are many reasons for this. The victories we make (and never forget there are victories, large and small) sometimes seem small when compared to the deeply rooted injustices that are being challenged.

But we need to celebrate, to remember our accomplishments, to renew ourselves. And for three days this April, in The Hague (the Netherlands), that is exactly what approximately 1,000 women from 80 countries did. The occasion was the 100th anniversary of the world's oldest women's peace organization, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Nobel Laureates spoke alongside women who had never traveled to an international conference before; researchers and grassroots activists exchanged ideas; men who challenge patriarchal norms listened to the sophisticated analyses of survivors of patriarchal violence. Information was shared, networks fostered, and commitments were made. Over 40 civil society organizations had worked with WILPF to organize this conference. The conference's title said it all: "Women's Power to Stop War: Uniting a Global Movement". And throughout the 27th to 29th of April, 2015, a visionary group of women peace activists were remembered.

The Past

April, 1915: it took great effort for the 1,130 women activists to meet at the International Congress of Women in The Hague. Their governments denied them passports, threatened to jail them—the British government suspended ferry service in the North Sea to prevent these "blundering Englishwomen", these "Pro-Hun Peacettes", as they were labelled in the media, from attending.

But still they came, from 12 different countries. Many of these countries were at war with one another. During the Congress, in neighboring Belgium, the second battle of Ypres raged. Chemical weapons were used for the first time on the Western Front during this battle. At its end, over 120,000 men would be dead.

Women had tried to stop the slaughter. Bertha von Suttner (whose 1889 anti-war novel Lay Down Your Arms (Die Waffen nieder!) has been called "the only disarmament best seller in history") (1) and others had been warning of an approaching war

column, Paulo explains his dedication to a violence-free world and why it is important to get men on board. He elaborates on the need to open spaces for men to listen to women activists, highlighting the added value of facilitating a cross-gender dialogue within his trainings.

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Together for Transformation: Training of Trainers for the MENA Region

2 APR '15 Last week, WPP, together with ABAAD, brought together 16 men and women peacemakers from various organizations based in the Middle East and North Africa region, for the first training week of the MENA regional

in Europe. Her efforts earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905, the first woman to be so recognized. In 1891 she founded the Permanent International Peace Bureau, which continues today as the International Peace Bureau.

One month before World War 1 began, delegates from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) delivered a Manifesto to all European embassies, and the British Foreign Office, in London. This Manifesto called on governments "to leave untried no method of conciliation or arbitration for arranging international differences which may help to avert deluging half the civilized world in blood."

In 1915, as in 2015, women's peace activism was closely linked to feminist organizing. The annual IWSA conference had been planned for Berlin (Germany) that June. After war erupted, German IWSA members said reluctantly that they could no longer hold the conference in their country. The prominent feminist Dr. Aletta Jacobs of the Dutch national suffrage movement then wrote to other national feminists, offering to host the conference in the neutral Netherlands. Jacobs, like many women peace activist today, believed that feminism and pacifism were inextricably linked.

And, just as today, feminists were not of one mind about peace issues. Immediately after war was declared, influential feminists like Emmeline Pankhurst began mobilizing women for the war effort. Women marched in recruitment drives, fundraised for ambulances and armaments, and volunteered as medical personnel, clerks, ambulance drivers and more. Some saw this as an opportunity to prove women's equality; for others nationalism proved stronger than feminist internationalism.

In terms of the 1915 conference, there were fears of being seen as too radical, of diluting the effort to gain the vote for women by demanding a stop to the war. Participants who wanted to attend the 1915 International Congress of Women were asked to agree beforehand to two principles. The first was that international disputes should be settled by peaceful means; the second that the vote should be extended to women. (2) These women did have a sense of history in the making. The US feminist leader Carrie Chapman Catt wrote, in greeting to the Congress: "I predict that

Training of Trainers Cycle "Together for Transformation: Gender-sensitive Nonviolence for Sustainable Peace". With many discussions on active nonviolence and UNSCR 1325, and sharing personal experiences around peace and security, the training week proved to be an inspiring and empowering experience for the participants and the trainers involved.

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CSW 59: Raising Voices for a Transformative Agenda

9 MAR '15 WPP is gearing up for the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. With increasing uncertainties regarding political

your gathering will pass into history as the beginning of a great international woman's movement...which will make its demand for the abolition of war so insistent, so impelling, that nations will be forced to heed its call." (Other documents from the Congress, including the final manifesto, are on-line at www.peacepalacelibrary.nl)

The 1915 women's congress in The Hague ended with a prescient manifesto of 20 demands. Reading these demands sent shivers down my back. It is an astonishing document that clearly outlined concrete steps to end the conflict and to ensure peace. It was printed in English, French and German and sent to European government leaders and to the US Congress. Copies were sent to prime ministers throughout Europe; in Germany alone, hundreds of copies were sent to politicians, prominent citizens, and civic organizations.

This document demanded a permanent international court of justice; "democratic control of foreign policy"; a delinking of business interests with political institutions; a permanent international conference with regular meetings to further international co-operation; a Society of Nations where member states could settle disputes nonviolently; and for general disarmament.

The women demanded women's equal participation in all of these proposals. Number 9 of the document stated: "Since the combined influence of the women of all countries is one of the strongest forces for the prevention of war, and since women can only have full responsibility and effective influence when they have equal political rights with men, this International Congress of Women demands their political enfranchisement."

The International Congress of Women further elected a group of five women who would spend the next few months lobbying foreign ministers and the heads of state of nearly every country in Europe. They had a private audience with the Pope. They spoke with US President Woodrow Wilson, who incorporated some of the Congress's demands in his famous Fourteen Points policy. Wilson became an influential supporter of the League of Nations, predecessor of today's United Nations—both of which the women foresaw in their demand for a Society of Nations.

will, it is crucial to voice women's needs and demanding gender equality during the CSW. WPP will be joining the discussions through a series of parallel events aimed at sharing the insights gathered from the WPP network over the years. In this blog we explore what is on the agenda for the upcoming CSW, and the topics we most look forward to addressing.

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The Future

This is only a sliver of the history of women's peace activism. But what about the future? Activists at the 2015 international conference articulated many issues: increasing militarism, including the militarization of civilian police; destructive new weapons like drones and automated robots; multinational companies influence and control over governments; the short sighted defining of peace and security in purely military terms; the shrinking public space for women's voices in the face of 'the war against terrorism'. Some of these issues, such as the arms trade, the women of 1915 would have been familiar with. Others, like the opportunities and dangers social media and cyberspace offer, would have been unimaginable to them.

I think a woman peace activist from 1915 would be astonished at the coalitions today's peace activists are building. She would not have expected to see environmentalists and indigenous leaders at a peace conference. She would cheer the fact women Nobel Laureates from Liberia, Northern Ireland, Iran and the USA addressed the conference. UN Security Council 1325 would give her hope. She would be pleased with the women and men using a masculinities approach to advance the transformative Women, Peace and Security agenda, recognizing men as partners in the struggle for gender equality and inclusive peace. Such networking and defining of common ground are important characteristics of modern peacebuilding. Most of all, she would understand the need to celebrate women's vision and determination—and then the need to get back to work.

Footnotes

(1) from Cora Weiss in "Where is Bertha Now that We Need Her?", in *The Life of Bertha von Suttner and Her Legacy for Women Peacemakers Today*, co-publication of International Fellowship of Reconciliation and International Peace Bureau, Geneva, 2005.

(2) For more on the history of the 1915 Congress see A. Wiltshire's *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War*, Pandora Press, London, 1985. For biographies of 25 British feminist peace activists who later helped


form WILPF, see [These Dangerous Women: WILPF women working in partnership: 100 years working to ensure women's voices are heard in peace building](#), WILPF-UK, 2015.
www.wilpf.org.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shelley Anderson has worked in peace movements for over 30 years. She was one of the founders of the Women Peacemakers Program in 1997, which at the time was the Women, Peace & Security program of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). She was the IFOR WPP Program Officer until 2007.



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