

## Chapter 12

# The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War: The International Congress of Women at The Hague 1915

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Congress of Women developed a roadmap for enduring peace. The women passed 20 resolutions including five resolutions which were “Principles of a Permanent Peace.” Theirs was a gendered response to a gendered war. The Congress was a bold and brave initiative. The war was not halted. But neither were the women in their quest for peace. This is their story.*

### **A CONGRESS TO END THE WAR**

The International Congress of Women was the major peace initiative of its day. The stakes were high, the odds were low. During the blood-letting of World War 1 (1914-1918), over a thousand women joined together to stop the war. The women came from neutral countries, from belligerent countries of both the Entente and the Central Powers, and from invaded Belgium. These women put their differences - and safety - aside and assembled at The Hague in 1915 (28 April to 1 May).

The Congress developed a road map for enduring peace. The women passed twenty resolutions of which five were “Principles of a Permanent Peace”. Theirs was a gendered response to a gendered war. “We women ... protest against the madness and the horror of war, involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life and the destruction of so much that humanity has labored through centuries to build up”.

They declared that the Congress “protests vehemently against the odious wrongs of which women are the victims in time of war”. The Congress was conducted in English, French and German, yet they spoke with a united voice. Theirs was a voice of sanity flickering in a maelstrom of insanity.

Envoys were selected to carry their resolutions to “the rulers of the belligerent and neutral nations of Europe and to the President of the United States”. In the months that followed, these envoys of the Congress crisscrossed war-torn Europe pleading with political leaders to halt the madness.

The Congress was a bold and brave initiative. The war was not stopped. But neither were the women halted in their quest for peace. The voices of Congress participants have been mostly lost for a century. This is their story, revealing their hopes and fears, their aspirations, frustrations, and proposed solutions, told where possible in their own words and contextualized with other contemporaneous voices. This account includes the text of the twenty resolutions of the Congress.

## **When the War Came**

The International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) was due to hold its eighth international conference in June 1915 in Berlin. It could have been a global high-water mark of the suffragette movement. In a wholly unrelated event, Gavrilo Princip (1894-1918) assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, Duchess Sophie von Hohenberg on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Preljević & Spahić, 2015). It was a rash action which precipitated Europe into the deadliest war the world has ever known. The outbreak of war on 28 July 1914 led the German Union for Women’s Suffrage to withdraw their hosting of the upcoming IWSA Berlin conference.

The assassination of two minor dignitaries of the Austro-Hungarian Empire might have been relegated to a tiny footnote of world history. Instead, it quickly cascaded the world into an unprecedented conflagration. There had long been preparation for war, most countries of Europe had standing armies, and most had conscription. Most nations cherished derring-do narratives of military adventures. Public statues of military generals populated public spaces. There were interlocking military treaties amongst the countries of Europe. Some cherished aspirations of territorial expansion. And there were politicians who were ready to commit their nations to war, whether for personal aggrandizement, out of righteous indignation, or out of sheer lack of comprehension of what a twentieth century industrial war might entail. The motivations can be contested and speculated upon. What is certain is that, state by state, it was men, not women, who committed their nations to war.

On both sides there was public enthusiasm for the war. This was especially so at the beginning. That enthusiasm waned as the war dragged on, as news trickled back from the front, and as awareness grew of the ghastly cost in wounded and dead.

Whether Entente or Central Power, the soldiers at the front lines had a miserable time. The German soldier Eric Remarque (1898-1970) wrote of the front-line experience:

*it has to stop, it has to stop - perhaps we'll get through it all ... Nobody would believe that there could still be human beings in this churned up wilderness ... it's the French ... A whole line of them is wiped out by the machine-gun near us ... We are not fighting, we are defending ourselves from annihilation ... but you have to turn around and go back into the terror ... if we don't destroy them they will destroy us. (Remarque, 1929, pp.80-83)*

As an eighteen-year-old German, Remarque was sent to the Western Front, he was wounded, and he survived the war.

An Australian soldier, R H Starke, wrote from France: “I can assure you it’s a Hell on Earth here... ‘Can a man escape certain death?’ ... there is no thinking; it’s a matter of life or death ... Our wounded

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comrades at home was another awful sight to see. I must not say any more or this will be censored” (Starke, 1915). It is unclear whether Starke survived.

### **A Switch From Votes to Peace**

Mobilization for suffrage had united women from around the world in common cause. By the outbreak of the Great War, women were organized for action, advocacy, protest, and international cooperation - albeit to achieve the vote.

When war broke out and the German women withdrew from hosting a suffrage conference in Berlin, the Dutch suffragists stepped in to create an alternative event. A Congress of Women could address the new pressing and immediate challenge of the day, war, using the international network of the International Suffrage Alliance. As a delegate Emily Hobhouse observed: “The International Suffrage Alliance had not in vain been training women for years from all parts of the world to know and work with each other” (in IWCPP, 1915. p.x). The common thrust for international women’s suffrage was thwarted by the outbreak of war but it was re-channeled, by the immediacy of the moment, into a thrust for permanent peace.

Dr Aletta Jacobs (1854-1929), the president of the Dutch National Society for Women Suffrage (Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht) took the initiative to switch direction from conference for women’s votes to a congress for peace. To Jacobs “belongs the honour of concentrating and shaping the ardent yearning of women of all lands for peace and justice ... Gifted alike with wisdom and practical power, she knew not only how to seize the psychological moment, pregnant with living desire, but also how to concentrate and organize the deep but scattered forces at her command” (Hobhouse in IWCPP, 1915. p.x).

The Congress was organized at short notice by the group of Dutch women, led by Jacobs. The funding for the Congress was guaranteed by women from the Netherlands (neutral in the conflict), Germany (Central Powers bloc) and Britain (Entente bloc).

### **Futile and Premature?**

The idea of a women’s peace congress was not universally welcomed, neither by governments, the press, by men, by women, nor even by suffragettes. But opposition can be a blessing in disguise and generate free publicity. Various groups campaigned against the Congress, and most of the press publicity for the Congress was critical and negative.

Attempts by the Women’s Political Social Union (WPSU) in London to scuttle the Congress brought the Congress to the attention of many. The first mentions in the Australian press of the Congress were generated by a cable headed “Peace Congress: Mrs Pankhurst protests” (Turner, 1915). The prominent British suffragette, Emmeline Pankhurst, declared: “the Women’s Social and Political Union objection to the attendance of English-women and expressed strong disapproval of their presence”. “Speaking for the Union, Mrs. Pankhurst said that it is unthinkable that Englishwomen should meet Germans when the latter’s relatives are murdering British people on the high seas and have committed such awful horrors in Belgium” (Turner, 1915). The account continued

*There should be no talk of Peace until the aggressor has been made to bite the dust ... Is there a woman with warm blood coursing through her veins who can think of Peace ... Fortunately ... in England stand men of iron will whose ears will not be open to resolutions for Peace ... from Peace Congresses at the Hague ... until England’s dead have been avenged. (Turner, 1915)*

Repeating the sentiments of the WSPU, one newspaper announced “Futile and Premature. An ‘Unthinkable’ Conference” (Northern Herald, 1915). Another newspaper stated “Intercourse with Germans unthinkable. Suffragette leader objects to Peace Congress” (Daily Mercury, 1915). One headlined “Mrs. Pankhurst’s Patriotism” (West Australian, 1915), while another “International Peace Congress. Women object to British representation” (Barrier Miner, 1915).

The war split the loyalties of many and that included the suffragette Pankhurst family. The mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, championed the prosecution of the war, while her suffragette daughter, Sylvia Pankhurst, was announced as a member of the British committee organizing the Congress (e.g. Barrier Miner, 1915). Sylvia was a Congress delegate but was refused a passport to travel by the Home Office. Another of Emmeline’s suffragette daughters, Adela Pankhurst, was in Australia where she was campaigning for peace with the Women’s Peace Army which promptly adopted “in toto” the platform of the Congress at the Hague (The Woman Voter, 1915).

The French women declined to attend. Jules Siegfried (1848-1922), president of the National Council of Women in France explained:

*For the first time perhaps a Peace Congress has been held without France taking part. We feel the gravity of this abstention, because of the unanimity with which our women’s societies and suffragists declared that they could not participate in an international Congress, nor accept the program proposed ... No time for peace ... It is with astonishment that we find in your program the idea of an armistice ... Fight to the death. Until then France and the women of France will not speak of peace ... United at this moment with those who fight and die the women of France cannot associate themselves with an idea of peace. (The Weekly Times, 1915)*

Several newspapers ran near identical accounts: “The feminist organizations in Paris have denounced the proposed Women’s Peace Congress at The Hague. They look upon it as a German propagandist effort” (Sydney Morning Herald, 1915; The Mercury, 1915). Alonso writes that “Missing, however, were many women from France” (in Addams, Balch, & Hamilton, 2003, p.xvii). The record shows that no women from France attended (IWCPP, 1915).

## **Impediments to Attending**

The countries represented at the Congress (twelve) and the numbers that attended (over one thousand) are a measure of who actually managed to travel to The Hague in the midst of war; they are not a measure of relative support. The women faced challenges including the prevailing jingoism, transportation challenges, closed frontiers, refusal of passports, and the vagaries of delivery and censorship of mail.

The British Government frustrated the efforts of the British delegates from attending The Hague. Fifty one British societies appointed delegates to the Congress (IWCPP, 1915, pp.245-7). It was reported that “the Home Office refused passports to 180 English delegates, finally the Home Office granted 24 permits. It considered that it was undesirable to hold a large political meeting so close to the seat of war” (The Age, 1915).

The next impediment for the British delegates was transport across the Channel: “No transport available” reported multiple newspapers (e.g. Maryborough Chronicle, 1915). “An official British notification has been made at Amsterdam that all shipping from Holland to the United Kingdom is temporarily

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suspended, though it is hoped to shortly resume a limited service. No explanation is given” (Clarence and Richmond Examiner, 1915). Shipping was cancelled “from April 21st till after the close of the Congress” (IWCPP, 1915, p.239).

If the women had ever imagined that the British government might facilitate their passage, or at least offer no impediment, such hopes were dashed. Ultimately of 180 starters, just 3 British delegates made it to the Congress - two because they arrived early and one because she travelled directly from the USA.

From each country, the delegates had the extra challenges of travel in wartime to contend with and overcome - or not. From Finland: “Conditions which we are unable to control make it impossible for us to be present, but although absent in body, we are with you in spirit” (IWCPP, 1915, p.238). From the USA, Belva Lockwood (1830-1917) declared that “It will soon be found that killing people does not make nations great” and she regretted that she lacked “sufficient health and strength” for the journey (IWCPP, 1915, p.228).

From the antipodes, Emily Dobson (1842-1934), vice-president of the International Council of Women wrote:

*I regret that Tasmania cannot be represented as I have only received the programme this morning [21 April]. The long distance between Australia and Europe so often hinders our cooperation. In the hope that the resolutions on the programme may be passed and heartily supporting them. (IWCPP, 1915, pp.180-1)*

Of the twenty-one countries with registered delegates only twelve countries were ultimately represented in person. The nine countries with registered delegates that failed to attend were: Armenia, Brazil, India, France, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and Switzerland (IWCPP, 1915).

## **Who Came?**

Women from twelve countries came together over four days (28 April-1 May) at The Hague in 1915 in a bold effort to avert the looming catastrophe of war and to reinstate peace.

The International Congress of Women was attended by over a thousand women from the Netherlands along with 136 women from a further eleven countries: USA (N=47), Germany (N=28), Sweden (N=16), Norway (N=12), Hungary (N=10), Austria (N=6), Denmark (N=6), Belgium (N=5), Great Britain (N=3), Canada (N=2), and Italy (N=1) (IWCPP, 1915) (Figure 1).

The languages of the Congress were: English, French and German. For evening public meetings, Dutch was added to this trio of languages, and this boosted the total numbers involved, variously reported as 1,500 and 2,000 (IWCPP, 1915).

On the basis that she was from a neutral and distant country, Jane Addams (1860-1935), the chairperson of the then newly formed USA Woman’s Peace Party, was invited by the Dutch organizing committee to be President of the Congress. This was despite Addams having had no role in initiating nor organizing the Congress.

In her address as president of the Congress, Jane Addams forewarned delegates at the outset that “Our protest may be feeble but the world progresses ... only in proportion to the more energy exerted by the men and women living in it”. She told delegates that “war is too great a price to pay”. Addams identified that attending the Congress was “an act of heroism”, she spoke of the “suprême difficultés” confronted

*Figure 1. The International Congress of Women, The Hague, 1915*



and praised the women who had “bravely taken the risk” of travelling and attending. She spoke of their shared vision of “an international organization which shall make war impossible because good-will and just dealing between nations shall have found an ordered method of expression” (IWCPP, 1915, p.20).

### **Why They Came?**

The testimony of delegates reveals the clarity with which the unfolding calamity was viewed. A German delegate, pacifist and women’s rights campaigner, Lida Gustava Heymann, reflected that:

*It seems ludicrous that there is one woman in the world presumptuous enough to believe that an international women’s congress could end this maddest of all wars. What did we intend then? I hear our opponents ask. To protest the useless destruction of the highest fruits of civilization. To protest the mad national hatred. To protest the war and all its accompaniment. To protest not only with words, but with deeds; and this Congress was a deed. (in Addams, Balch, & Hamilton, 1915, p.144-5)*

Despite the reflections of Heymann, there appears to be no evidence that the women of the Congress saw themselves engaged only in a protest. The Congress drew from the suffragette movement and, while there was indeed an element of protest, the thrust of the suffragette movement was always to achieve the vote for women, rather than to protest its denial. It is fair for us to believe that the Congress women believed, at the time, that sanity could prevail and that a state of peaceful coexistence could be restored to their world - if only the right formula could be found. The Congress was always more than a protest

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- it was a quest for peace. Yes, the women of the Congress can be dismissed as naive, but was it then, and is it now, naive to believe that sanity might prevail over insanity, peace over war, love over hate, that life is worthier of our embrace than war?

### **An All-Women Event**

The Congress was a gendered event - a women's initiative. Attendees could be Individuals or representatives of organizations - and an organization could appoint two delegates. There appears to have been no corresponding male initiative.

On behalf of the Polish delegation, Dr Sofia Daszynska-Golinska (1866-1934) from Galicia, lamented that "The war is being waged principally on our territory ... turning prosperous regions into a desert ... sowing devastation, misery and hunger, and leaving behind ashes and ruins" (IWCPP, 1915, p.232).

Dr Aletta Jacobs told the delegates:

*We women judge war differently from men ... Men consider ... its economic results ... and ... the extension of power and so forth. But what is material loss to us women, in comparison to the number of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons who march out to war never to return ... and the grief, the pain and misery ... We know only too well that whatever may be gained by a war, it is not worth the bloodshed and the tears, the cruel sufferings, the wasted lives, the agony and despair it has caused. (IWCPP, 1915, p.6)*

The English suffragist Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926) stated that

*the women of the world must come to that world's aid ... to avert the threatened unparalleled disaster ... Though fraught with hope and of untold value in the general learning of opinion ... national ... organizations were inadequate unless they could find international expression and urge immediate action ... and that women ... had a special note to strike. (IWCPP, 1915, p. ix)*

Hobhouse declared that "the Women's Congress unfurled the white flag of Peace and - despite ridicule, disdain, opposition and disbelief - held it aloft before a blood-stained world ... it is a solemn duty to protest against the further extermination of the youth of Europe ... Their lives rather than their deaths are needed for the service of their countries and the world" (IWCPP, 1915, p.xi).

### **The Conduct of the Congress**

According to Jean Addams: "Proceedings were conducted with the greatest goodwill throughout, and the accompanying resolutions were passed at the business sessions" (Addams et al., 1915, p.148).

The press was generally unfavorable in their reportage and this rankled with delegates. An American delegate, Emily Balch (1867-1961), observed:

*A very curious thing has been the attitude of most of the press representatives who were present. Most of them apparently had been sent to get an amusing story of an international peace gathering of women — 'base and silly' enough to try to meet in war time — breaking up in quarrel. Day by day they went away with faces long with disappointment. 'Nothing doing to-day, but something worthwhile may happen to-morrow.' In England the Congress was reported to be managed in the interest of Germany; in*

*Germany the delegates were threatened with social boycott for attending a pro-British meeting; and in many countries the meetings were reported to have been either practically unattended or to have closed in a row. Nothing could be further from the truth than all these stories. The largest hall in The Hague was needed for the meetings, over two thousand often being present; and, difficult as it is to conduct business with so mixed and differing a constituency, with different languages, different rules of parliamentary procedure, and divergent views, Miss Addams and the other officials carried on orderly and effective sessions, marked by the most active will for unity that I have ever felt in an assemblage. (Balch in Addams et al., 1915, p.15)*

The women were proud that their event was conducted in a spirit of civility. One delegate wrote that:

*What stands out most strongly among all my impressions of those thrilling and strained days at The Hague is the sense of the wonder of the beautiful spirit of the brave, self-controlled women who dared ridicule and every sort of difficulty to express a passionate human sympathy, not inconsistent with patriotism, but transcending it. (Balch in Addams et al., 1915, pp.14-15)*

Although emotions were running high, the women focused on their common cause. A delegate reported that:

*The sessions were heavily fraught with emotion, it could not be otherwise, but the emotion found little expression in words. When it did, it was on a high and noble plane. There was something profoundly stirring and inexpressibly inspiring in the attitude of these women, many of them so deeply stricken, so closely bound to the cause of their country as they understand it, yet so full of faith in the will for good of their technical enemies and so united in their common purpose to find the principles on which permanent relations of international friendship and cooperation can ultimately be established. (Balch in Addams et al., 1915, p.15)*

Despite delegates being drawn from both sides of the raging conflict as well as concerned neutrals, within the Congress, cooperation rather than conflict was the order of the day. As a delegate reported:

*There was not one clash or even danger of a clash over national differences; on every hand was the same moving consciousness of the development of a new spirit which is growing in the midst of the war as the roots of the wheat grow under the drifts and tempests of winter. (Balch in Addams et al., 1915, p.16)*

## **The Women's Recipe for Peace**

The Congress developed a recipe for peace comprising twenty agreed resolutions (IWCPP, 1915, pp.35-41). The focus was how to restore peace and how to maintain it. Off the agenda was the apportioning of blame and how to conduct the war.

In these heady times, the optimistically titled 'International Women's Committee of Permanent Peace' (IWCPP) was formed and the proceedings of the 1915 Congress, including the 20 resolutions, were published under the imprint of the IWCPP, Amsterdam.



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A German delegate reflected:

*But what did the Congress give to those of us who took part in it? ... The days in The Hague gave me an answer to the question. ... Where are the women? They were here! United in energetic protest, penetrated with warm humanity, inspired by one thought - to do their duty as wives and mothers, to protect life, to fight against national hatred, to guard civilization, to further justice - justice not only for their own country, but for all countries of the world. The days in The Hague gave fresh courage for new activity. (Heymann in Addams et al., 1915, p.144)*

Table 1. The 20 resolutions of the International Congress of Women, The Hague, 1915

The 20 Resolutions of the International Congress of Women, The Hague, 1915	
I. WOMEN AND WAR	
1	Protest: We women, in International Congress assembled, protest against the madness and the horror of war, involving as it does a reckless sacrifice of human life and the destruction of so much that humanity has laboured through centuries to build up.
2	Women's Sufferings in War: This International Congress of Women opposes the assumption that women can be protected under the conditions of modern warfare. It protests vehemently against the odious wrongs of which women are the victims in time of war, and especially against the horrible violation of women which attends all war.
II. ACTION TOWARDS PEACE	
3	<p>The Peace Settlement. This International Congress of Women of different nations, classes, creeds and parties is united in expressing sympathy with the suffering of all, whatever their nationality, who are fighting for their country or labouring under the burden of war.</p> <p>Since the mass of the people in each of the countries now at war believe themselves to be fighting, not as aggressors but in self-defence and for their national existence, there can be no irreconcilable differences between them, and their common ideals afford a basis upon which a magnanimous and honourable peace might be established. The Congress therefore urges the Governments of the world to put an end to this bloodshed, and to begin peace negotiations. It demands that the peace which follows shall be permanent and therefore based on principles of justice, including those laid down in the resolutions adopted by this Congress, namely: That no territory should be transferred without the consent of the men and women in it, and that the right of conquest should not be recognized.</p> <p>That autonomy and a democratic parliament should not be refused to any people.</p> <p>That the Governments of all nations should come to an agreement to refer future international disputes to arbitration or conciliation and to bring social, moral and economic pressure to bear upon any country which resorts to arms.</p> <p>That foreign politics should be subject to democratic control.</p> <p>That women should be granted equal political rights with men.</p>
4	Continuous Mediation. This International Congress of Women resolves to ask the neutral countries to take immediate steps to create a conference of neutral nations which shall without delay offer continuous mediation. The Conference shall invite suggestions for settlement from each of the belligerent nations and in any case shall submit to all of them simultaneously, reasonable proposals as a basis of peace.
III. PRINCIPLES OF A PERMANENT PEACE	
5	Respect for Nationality. This International Congress of Women, recognizing the right of the people to self-government, affirms that there should be no transference of territory without the consent of the men and women residing therein, and urges that autonomy and a democratic parliament should not be refused to any people. (NOTE. The Congress declared by vote that it interpreted "no transference of territory without the consent of the men and women in it" to imply that the right of conquest was not to be recognized.)
6	Arbitration and Conciliation. This International Congress of Women, believing that war is the negation of progress and civilisation, urges the governments of all nations to come to an agreement to refer future international disputes to arbitration and conciliation.
7	International Pressure. This International Congress of Women urges the governments of all nations to come to an agreement to unite in bringing social, moral and economic pressure to bear upon any country, which resorts to arms instead of referring its case to arbitration or conciliation.

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*Table 1. Continued*

<b>The 20 Resolutions of the International Congress of Women, The Hague, 1915</b>	
<b>8</b>	Democratic Control of Foreign Policy. Since war is commonly brought about not by the mass of the people, who do not desire it, but by groups representing particular interests, this International Congress of Women urges that Foreign Politics shall be subject to Democratic Control; and declares that it can only recognise as democratic a system which includes the equal representation of men and women.
<b>9</b>	The Enfranchisement of Women. 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.
<b>IV. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</b>	
<b>10</b>	Third Hague Conference. This International Congress of Women urges that a third Hague Conference be convened immediately after the war.
<b>11</b>	International Organization. This International Congress of Women urges that the organization of the Society of Nations should be further developed on the basis of a constructive peace, and that it should include: a. As a development of the Hague Court of Arbitration, a permanent International Court of Justice to settle questions or differences of a justiciable character, such as arise on the interpretation of treaty rights or of the law of nations. b. As a development of the constructive work of the Hague Conference, a permanent International Conference holding regular meetings in which women should take part, to deal not with the rules of warfare but with practical proposals for further International Cooperation among the States. This Conference should be so constituted that it could formulate and enforce those principles of justice equity and good-will in accordance with which the struggles of subject communities could be more fully recognized and the interests and rights not only of the great Powers and small Nations but also those of weaker countries and primitive peoples gradually adjusted under an enlightened international public opinion. This International Conference shall appoint: A permanent Council of Conciliation and Investigation for the settlement of international differences arising from economic competition, expanding commerce, increasing population and changes in social and political standards.
<b>12</b>	General Disarmament. The International Congress of Women, advocating universal disarmament and realizing that it can only be secured by international agreement, urges, as a step to this end, that all countries should, by such an international agreement, take over the manufacture of arms and munitions of war and should control all international traffic in the same. It sees in the private profits accruing from the great armament factories a powerful hindrance to the abolition of war.
<b>13</b>	Commerce and Investments. a. The International Congress of Women urges that in all countries there shall be liberty of commerce, that the seas shall be free and the trade routes open on equal terms to the shipping of all nations. b. Inasmuch as the investment by capitalists of one country in the resources of another and the claims arising therefrom are a fertile source of international complications, this International Congress of Women urges the widest possible acceptance of the principle that such investments shall be made at the risk of the investor, without claim to the official protection of his government.
<b>14</b>	National Foreign Policy. a. This International Congress of Women demands that all secret treaties shall be void and that for the ratification of future treaties, the participation of at least the legislature of every government shall be necessary. b. This International Congress of Women recommends that National Commissions be created, and International Conferences convened for the scientific study and elaboration of the principles and conditions of permanent peace, which might contribute to the development of an International Federation. These Commissions and Conferences should be recognized by the Governments and should include women in their deliberations.
<b>15</b>	Women in National and International Politics. This International Congress of Women declares it to be essential, both nationally and internationally to put into practice the principle that women should share all civil and political rights and responsibilities on the same terms as men.
<b>V. THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN</b>	
<b>16</b>	This International Congress of Women urges the necessity of so directing the education of children that their thoughts and desires may be directed towards the ideal of constructive peace.
<b>VI. WOMEN and the PEACE SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE</b>	
<b>17</b>	This International Congress of Women urges, that in the interests of lasting peace and civilisation the Conference which shall frame the Peace settlement after the war should pass a resolution affirming the need in all countries of extending the parliamentary franchise to women.
<b>18</b>	This International Congress of Women urges that representatives of the people should take part in the conference that shall frame the peace settlement after the war, and claims that amongst them women should be included.

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Table 1. Continued

The 20 Resolutions of the International Congress of Women, The Hague, 1915	
	VII. ACTION TO BE TAKEN
19	Women's Voice in the Peace Settlement. This International Congress of Women resolves that an international meeting of women shall be held in the same place and at the same time as the Conference of the Powers which shall frame the terms of the peace settlement after the war for the purpose of presenting practical proposals to that Conference.
20	Envoys to the Governments. In order to urge the Governments of the world to put an end to this bloodshed and to establish a just and lasting peace, this International Congress of Women delegates envoys to carry the message expressed in the Congress Resolutions to the rulers of the belligerent and neutral nations of Europe and to the President of the United States. These Envoys shall be women of both neutral and belligerent nations, appointed by the International Committee of this Congress. They shall report the result of their missions to the International Women's Committee for Constructive Peace as a basis for further action.

### What They Did Next

A total of eleven envoys were nominated (as per Resolution #20). In small groups they crisscrossed war-torn Europe to present the twenty resolutions of the Congress to Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers. They travelled to fourteen capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Copenhagen, The Hague, Vienna, Budapest, Berne, Stockholm, Christiania (now Oslo), Petrograd (later Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg), Vienna and Washington (IWCPP, 1915; *The Woman Voter*, 1916b).

The eleven envoys were from Britain (x2), Germany (x2), Netherlands (x2), USA (x2), Hungary (x1), Italy (x1) and Sweden (x1). (IWCPP, 1915), after the tour of the capitals of Europe, the President of the Congress, Jane Addams in then neutral USA, told an audience at Carnegie Hall, New York, that: “we heard everywhere that this war was an old man’s war; that the young men who were dying, the young men who were doing the fighting, were not the men who wanted the war; that somewhere in church and state, somewhere in the high places of society, the elderly people, the middle-aged people, had established themselves and had convinced themselves that this was a righteous war, that this war must be fought out, and the young men must do the fighting ... it has released the old men from all restraining influences, and has let them loose upon the world ... by their appeals to hate, intolerance and revenge” (in Lachlander, 1915).

A Congress delegate from USA, Madeline Doty, visited Germany right after the Congress. She reported: “I pinned my little American flag and my Hague Congress Peace Badge on the lapel of my coat”. She reported that

*While the [German] Government rejoiced at the submission of its Socialist men, the women grew active. Organizing a party of their own, they fight bravely. Last autumn, Rosa Luxembourg dashed into the street, and addressed a regiment of soldiers. ‘Don’t go to war - don’t shoot your brothers,’ she cried. For this offence she was sent to prison for a year. Today she lies in solitary confinement. But her suffering only inspires the others. In March, 750 women walked to the Reichstag ... they shouted ‘We will have no more war. We will have peace.’ Quickly the police dispersed them, and the order went forth that no newspaper should print one word of the protest. Still the women work on. (Doty, 1915)*

In neutral Sweden:

*A 'Peace Sunday' has been held in 340 of the larger towns and villages of Sweden, at which the Peace resolutions of the Hague International Women's Congress was adopted ... The women urged the Government of Sweden to consider the question of what could be done to bring about a speedy peace ... meetings ... were attended by over 91,000 women. (The Worker, 1915)*

In Melbourne, Australia, the suffragette Adela Pankhurst, of the Women's Peace Army, was criticized for supporting the resolutions of the International Congress, for promoting her "extraordinary views and her erroneous deductions", and for being "pro German?" (The Register, 1915). The president of the Women's Peace Army, Vida Goldstein, presided over a conference in Melbourne to consider a request for support from UK Congress delegate, Emily Hobhouse, the secretary of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace. "The Women's Peace Army ... began the day after war was declared, had put forward almost identical proposals advanced by those advanced by The Hague, Congress, and when the platform of the Congress arrived here it was adopted in toto ... Since then the Women's Peace Army has held many public meetings, hall meetings, and open-air meetings, for the purpose of furthering the principles agreed upon at the Hague" (The Woman Voter, 1915).

## **Attitudes to Peace in 1915**

The apologists for war were many and the proponents of peace were few. There was a great asymmetry of power between the men who wielded political power and made the decisions and the women of the Congress who were cloistered well outside the corridors of power.

American politician Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) was critical of "professional peace enthusiasts in America". "He anathematizes the American women who recently in Europe were crying at the Hague International Congress of Women's Societies for peace without justice or redress, while simultaneously Germany was slaughtering American women on the high seas" (The Advertiser, 1915).

British writer George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) expressed views congruent with the Congress. He wrote that:

*All this talk of exacting conditions of peace is absolute nonsense ... They will all have to capitulate, and it is now plain that 'decisive battles of the world' are things of the past. If our civilian publicists had a scrap of pluck or our diplomatists an atom of capacity, we would be within three months of the end. (Shaw, 1915)*

British science fiction writer H G Wells (1866-1946) saw things differently to Shaw arguing that:

*This war must end in the complete smashing of the German State organization for aggression ... Now we have set our hands to this job it would be the most pitiful, shameful, and disastrous thing conceivable to let the diplomatists patch up an inconclusive peace. Let us see the thing through. (Wells, 1915)*

The French writer, Anatole France (1844-1924), likewise had no appetite for a negotiated peace:

*It is criminal to cry for peace and criminal to desire it, until we have reduced to nothingness the forces of oppression ... Until this is done, we must only talk through the mouths of our guns. So many heroes must not have died in vain. (The Sun, 1915)*

## ***The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War***

There were a multitude of feminine responses to war. The schoolgirls of Clyde College in Melbourne got busy knitting - many were daughters of farming families and they had wool available throughout the war. They started with scarves and as they gained skill and confidence they progressed to socks - and they knitted thousands of socks which were shipped to soldiers at the front and to displaced war refugees through the Red Cross (Paull, 2017).

In theatres of war there were the few women who cut their hair and enlisted as men. One such woman, Maria Bochkareva in Russia joined the Imperial Russian Army and later raised the first all-women battalion of the war (Stoff, 2006).

## **The Legacy**

The Congress of Women did not stop the war. There is no suggestion that it shortened the war. The envoys were received with politeness but their advocacy for the twenty resolutions was to no avail. Amidst the prevailing climate of jingoism, popular enthusiasm for war, naivety, and military momentum of 1915 there was little or no appetite for peace nor good will to all. There was a voice in the wilderness.

As the war dragged on, the prevailing headwinds against peace advocacy only strengthened. A peace campaigner from Queensland, Australia opined that:

*Nothing good can come of waiting for a better season; it is ten times more difficult to speak against militarism than it was a year ago ... the stream of militarism will go on rolling through the ages unless folk are determined enough to give up waiting for seasonable times and safe pitches. (The Woman Voter, 1916a)*

The American industrialist Henry Ford (1863-1947) was willing to continue his support of the Congress:

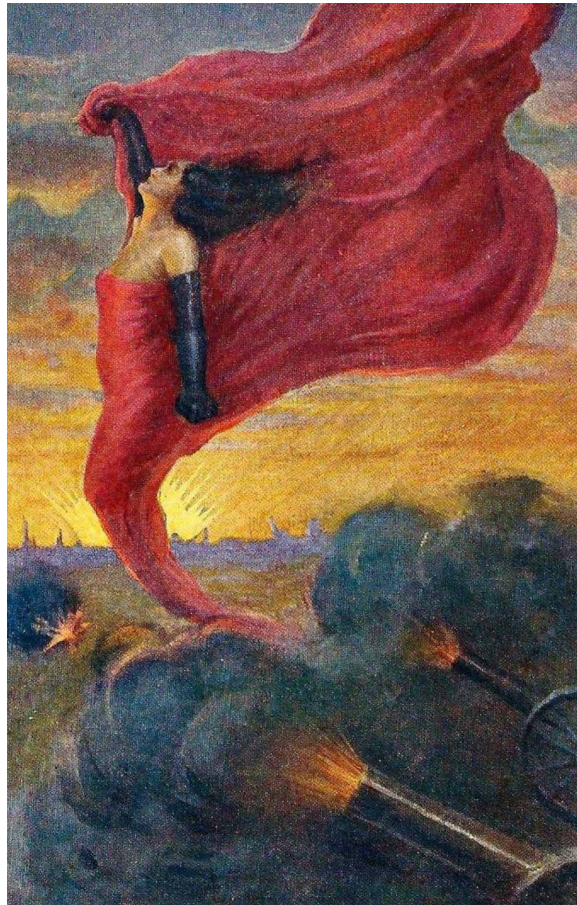
*The work he started last year in conjunction with the Women's Peace Congress at The Hague, which work would ultimately bring Europe to its senses and stop the war. His opinion was that "the people themselves and the men fighting are too content to let their rulers do the thinking." (The Evening Telegraph, 1916)*

When the women of the Congress returned to their home countries they met with some antagonism. Several of the German attendees were briefly imprisoned. The sole Italian delegate, Rosa Genoni (1867-1954), drew police attention in Milan for circulating a peace petition (Bussey & Tims, 1980). Of the neutral countries represented at the Congress, four of them (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden) remained neutral for the duration of the war, and two of them (Italy and USA) later joined the war on the side of the Entente Powers (on 23 May 1915 and 6 April 1917 respectively).

Figure 2 shows the Guerra alla Guerra (War on War) postcard by Ernesto Genoni distributed by Rosa Genoni, the sole Italian delegate at The International Congress of Women, The Hague 1915.

In 1919 when the terms of the peace were negotiated in Versailles, neither the women of the Congress nor any other women participated (contrary to Resolution #19). It has long been observed that old men make war and send young men to die. This peace of 1919 was an extension of that process and, like the war, was crafted by old men. The women of the 1919 Congress met at Zurich and submitted their own proposals, but again to no avail. Delegates were shocked at the visible toll that hunger and the privations of war had taken on delegates returning from defeated countries. The 1919 Congress of Women

*Figure 2. Guerra alla Guerra (War on War) postcard by Ernesto Genoni*



denounced the harsh conditions imposed on the vanquished which they presciently warned “can only lead to future wars” (in Bussey & Tims, 1980, p.31).

As history shows, the voice of the Congress did not prevail, and the feared catastrophe materialized. What began as a Congress to avert an imminent catastrophe evolved into an enduring entity, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

The recipe for peace developed by the 1915 Congress remains untested to this day. Although there have been occasional outbreaks of peace in the ensuing century, wars continue, and military expenditure grows.

The International Women’s Committee of Permanent Peace (IWCPP) became the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1919, and it persists to this day. Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. Emily Balch was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. Rosa Manus (1881-1942), the secretary of the organizing committee of the Congress, died in a Nazi concentration camp in WW2 (Bussey & Tims, 1980).

Women’s suffrage (Resolution #9) gained momentum during and after the war, with women gaining the vote in many further countries, including, for example, in Russia (1917), Germany (1918), Britain (1918), the Netherlands (1919), Sweden (1919), USA (1920), and Switzerland (1971) (NZMC&H, 2016).



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Resolution #11 was realized with the founding of the League of Nations (1920-1946) followed by the United Nations (1945-) and the Permanent Court of International Justice (1920-1946) followed by the International Court of Justice (1945-). Resolution #12 called for general disarmament. A century on, this call continues to fall on deaf ears.

The international secretariat of WILPF located in Geneva. The organization has consultative status with the United Nations. WILPF has held regular conferences over the past century, at intervals of several years. WILPF's holy grail of a permanent peace is yet to find a home in realpolitik, and even an impermanent peace remains elusive

## **CONCLUSION**

### **What Now?**

The British writer Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, once explained to me that "the trouble with reality is that it lacks a good narrative structure". It would be sweet to report that the Women's Peace Congress of 1915 conformed to some three-act narrative structure. The actors faced serious challenges and brought together women of many countries at a time of great need and under circumstances of great difficulty. In their quest for a sane resolution the women hammered out a peace plan. The denouement of an enduring peace would be compelling. But that is counterfactual. Yes, they came together, yes, they hammered out a peace plan, but peace did not ensue. There was no tidy denouement, no narrative closure for this innovative peace initiative. The conflict instead ran its bloody course for a further three and a half years. In the century since the Congress, a fragile peace has sometimes prevailed, punctuated with further wars, great and small, and with no end of conflict in sight.

Nevertheless, the women of 1915 were rightly proud of their event. A Congress delegate from Britain, denied a passport, Harriet Newcomb (1854-1942), secretary of the British Dominions Woman Suffrage Union, wrote that "the Women's international Congress will shine out in history as the guiding star of constructive peace" (Woman Voter, 1915).

Civil society associations and community groups are by now generally in a state of demise and often populated with a cohort of ageing adherents (e.g. Stevenson, 2009). Despite this tendency, WILPF has now a century of activity to look back on, a century of regular Congresses, often triennial (Archives Department, 2003). The centennial Congress returned to The Hague. On this occasion in 2015, the venue was the Peace Palace in contrast to the auditorium of the Zoological Gardens in 1915. This time there were 277 attendees compared to over 1,000 in 1915. This time there were 36 countries represented compared to 12 countries in 1915 (IWCPP, 1915; WILPF, 2016).

The Hague Congress created the International Women's Committee of Permanent Peace (IWCPP). The Report of the Congress was published by the IWCPP. By the beginning of 1916 the British Section had changed its name to the 'Women's International League' (WIL) (The Woman Voter, 1916a). The name 'Women's International League for Peace and Freedom' was adopted at the Second Congress held at Zurich in 1919. The ungainly acronym, WILPF, has persisted to this day. No 'Men's International League for Peace and Freedom' (MILPF) has been spawned from the original and nor has a gender-inclusive 'International League for Peace and Freedom' evolved.

The Women of The Hague 1915 were contrarians for peace. At a time of popular fervour for the war, these women risked life, limb and liberty to travel to the Congress. They acted in defiance of govern-

ments. They variously endured the ridicule of the press, the approbation of their peers, and subversion of their travel plans. Despite these impedimenta, they articulated their prescription for peace and carried it to the top echelons of power. Their quest was to no avail. Their candle for peace was gutted by the prevailing winds of the times. The war was not stopped. The war was not shortened. The war was not contained; two countries represented at the Congress (Italy and USA) joined the war after the Congress.

A full century has now elapsed since the Women's Congress at the Hague. In that time, there has not been a generation that has not known war. Permanent peace appears as intangible now as then. Nevertheless, for WILPF and their century-long pursuit of the elusive peace, what choice do they have, and indeed do we all have, but to be optimistic for the future, optimistic that the vision of those brave and bold women of 1915 will somehow, sometime, prevail?

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