
'Never Has There Been a Greater Need for Pooled Intelligence': Maintaining International Solidarity in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1939-1946

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This article examines how the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) maintained international solidarity during the Second World War through their *Pool of Opinion* initiative. The *Pool* questionnaire united WILPF national sections from Allied, neutral, and occupied territories to develop collective positions on peace issues, including world organisation, economic planning, and migration.

The advent of war created tension within the WILPF by pitting its core aims against one another: peace and freedom. Choosing peace appeared to be not resisting Nazism while advocating for freedom seemed to require supporting the war. Despite this fundamental dilemma, the WILPF sustained meaningful international collaboration throughout the conflict.

Drawing on previously unexamined newspapers, reports, and correspondence from the British Section (WIL), this article analyses membership debates, early war collaboration efforts, and the development of the *Pool of Opinion* to challenge the prevailing view that 1939-1946 represented a period of organisational inaction or decline for the WILPF.

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‘Never Has There Been a Greater Need for Pooled Intelligence’: Maintaining International Solidarity in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1939–1946

Emily Chambers

The Women’s International League (WIL) was the British Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), a non-profit organisation founded in April 1915 during the International Congress of Women held at The Hague. Over a thousand female delegates from neutral, Allied and Central Powers countries met to establish the League’s twin goals: peace and freedom. This made it one of the major international women’s organisations of the early twentieth century alongside the International Council of Women and the International Alliance of Women. The League brought together members from different countries who believed women had a unique role in peacekeeping. During the First World War, they adopted the motto ‘Live Dangerously’ as an intellectual call to arms rather than inciting aggression or violent behaviour. For them, this meant finding the courage to pursue peace when everyone else was coerced, misled, or eager to choose violence.¹

The WILPF’s approach represented feminist pacifism – a political ideology connecting women’s solidarity across national boundaries to the pursuit of peace. This ideology was based on the conviction that women’s shared experiences of marginalisation united them in opposition to war and militarism. This feminist pacifism was founded on the belief that peace was more than the absence of war; rather, it required social change towards economic, social and political justice.² They argued that gender inequality and social injustice directly fuelled conflict due to the idea that ‘Might is Right’. This idea was ‘impressed on the minds of children by the way women are treated because they are physically weaker than men’. Women, the WIL recognised, were shut out of ‘government’ and ‘all sorts of professions and privileges not because they are less good or less wise than men, but because they are not so [physically] strong’. Crucially, they understood this extended to the relationship between ‘big nations’ and ‘small nations’. The same notion applied to international relations, where the winner was not necessarily the one in the right, but simply the strongest.³ Thus, they felt peace and freedom were intertwined. In their view, gender equality was a prerequisite for peace.

¹ LSE, WILPF/2009/19/1, ‘Why the Women of the Nations Met in War-Time’, 1916, p. 1.

² Berenice Carroll, ‘Feminism and Pacifism: Historical and Theoretical Connections’ in *Women and Peace: Theoretical, Historical and Practical Perspectives*, ed. by Ruth Pierson (Kent: Croom Helm, 1987).

³ LSE, WILPF/2009/19/1, ‘Why the Women of the Nations Met in War-Time’, 1916, p. 1.

For the first two and a half decades following its founding, the WILPF successfully pursued the complementary goals of peace and freedom through international cooperation and advocacy. However, the outbreak of the Second World War seemed to pit peace against freedom, exacerbating old fractures and creating new ones not only between the WIL and WILPF but also within the WIL itself. It seemed that choosing peace meant, in effect, not resisting Nazism, whilst advocating for freedom meant supporting the war. After often heated deliberation, the WIL decided to remain officially pacifist. This was not because they had chosen peace over freedom but because they understood pacifism as requiring fundamental social transformation rather than merely the absence of war.

The apparent tension between peace and freedom during the Second World War has shaped historians' understanding of the WILPF's wartime activities. Indeed, the apparent conflict between the values of peace and freedom and the League's decision to remain officially pacifist has led to historiographical misconceptions. Historians often portray the Second World War and the immediate post-war period as a 'dead zone' in the WILPF's history. For example, Rupp has argued that the movement 'nearly screeched to a halt in 1939', not re-forming until the late 1940s.⁴ Similarly, Jo Vellacott and Sarah Hellawell identified the 'crisis points' as 1929–31 and 1935, respectively, when the WILPF deteriorated socially, economically, and politically under the pressure caused by the rise of fascism and communism.⁵ Some historians have suggested that wartime pacifism may have been misguided compared to their earlier 'progressive' work. For example, Gottlieb characterises pacifists as 'awakening' to reality when they became pro-war, thereby implying those who remained pacifists were somehow uninformed or 'asleep' to reality. Ceadel and Overy similarly portray wartime pacifists as politically detached, 'resigned to war', and merely 'following their faith'.⁶

Rather than accepting this characterisation of wartime pacifism as retreat or resignation, this article argues for a reassessment of the WIL's wartime activities. Specifically, it challenges these interpretations, arguing that the WIL's wartime pacifism, though privileged, remained active, politically significant, and historically important. Using the *Pool of Opinion* case study – a questionnaire connecting national sections' views on peace issues, such as world organisation, human rights, economic planning,

⁴ Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 47.

⁵ Jo Vellacott, 'Feminism as if All People Mattered: Working to Remove the Cause of War, 1919–1929', *Contemporary European History*, 10.3 (2001), pp. 275–394 (p. 392); Sarah Hellawell, 'Feminism, Pacifism and Internationalism: The Women's International League, 1915–1935' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Northumbria, 2017), pp. 156, 305.

⁶ Martin Ceadel, 'A Legitimate Peace Movement: The Case of Britain, 1918–1945' in *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*, ed. by Peter Brock and Thomas Socknat (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 134–148 (pp. 141, 143); Richard Overy, *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931–1945* (London: Penguin, 2021), p. 649.

and denazification – this article demonstrates how the WILPF maintained international work despite the physical barriers caused by war.⁷ By examining their effort to strengthen international solidarity through ‘pooled intelligence’, this article reveals how the WIL continued their international work during the war years.

The argument proceeds in three stages. First, it provides context on the WIL after the outbreak of war, exploring membership statistics and how the British Section remained committed to the peace cause. Second, it addresses the first phase of the WIL’s war work, which served as the precursor to the *Pool of Opinion*, revealing how this remained an international endeavour. Finally, it addresses the impact of the *Pool of Opinion* and how this shaped and reflected the WILPF’s discussion at the 1946 International Congress. Through analysis of the WIL, this article reveals how international solidarity was maintained in the League during the war.

‘Not Fashioned for Fairweather Folk’: Preserving the Pacifist Identity During Total War

The outbreak of war in 1939 presented the WIL with an ideological challenge, as tensions between peace and freedom were developing.⁸ The growing proximity of the German offensive in 1940 troubled the WIL, with prominent members clashing over the organisation’s core purpose.⁹ Some WILPF members argued that the Nazi regime posed such a threat that military victory was the only path to preserving democracy. Others contended that supporting military action would compromise the League’s core mission of guiding humanity towards permanent peace. They felt abandoning pacifist principles during war would undermine the credibility of the peace movement.

This ideological clash was most apparent in the debate between prominent WIL members Dr Hilda Clark and Kathleen Innes. Clark argued that it had ‘become impossible to look to any other way of saving such progress as our democracy had made towards its ideals except through the overthrow of the forces battling against us’.¹⁰ Innes countered that ‘to forsake [our principles] in support of this or any war [...] would be a serious setback to the coming of the day when war will be abolished. What respect could anyone have for a peace movement that abandoned its principles when war came?’¹¹ For Innes, military victory would only address fascism materially, not morally, since totalitarian ideologies

⁷ LSE, WILPF/3/4, ‘Circular Letters’, No.2, 1943, p. 1; LSE, WILPF/3/4, ‘Circular Letters’, *Appendix A*, No.2, 1943, pp. 1–4.

⁸ LSE, WILPF/2009.15.5.1, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, January 1938, p. 1.

⁹ Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012 [2014 edition]), p. 100.

¹⁰ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, June 1940, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

would regenerate unless their underlying causes were addressed through structural social change.¹²

The WIL's decision to remain officially pacifist reflected the WILPF members' privileged position that both enabled and constrained their wartime work. Their ability to maintain pacifist principles whilst others faced occupation, persecution, or direct military engagement highlighted their class and national advantages. As Leila Rupp has explained, the League was predominantly home to white upper- and middle-class women, and European and American women dominated its leadership.¹³ This privilege was both a strategic asset and a limitation. It provided them with the safety and resources to undertake long-term planning that others could not, yet it also constrained their ability to speak for those directly under fascist rule. Nevertheless, this privileged position enabled many members to support the war effort personally through relief work whilst maintaining their commitment to permanent peace within the WILPF.¹⁴

Rather than weakening the organisation, this principled stance proved successful. By 1943, the WIL had not only recovered but exceeded its pre-war membership levels, with new branches established during the war.¹⁵ This organisational growth reflected the WIL's successful navigation of the peace-versus-freedom dilemma and positioned them to undertake substantial war work focused on post-war planning.¹⁶ For the WIL, a 'new social order' represented a systematic approach to post-war reconstruction – the rebuilding of political, economic, and social structures in ways that would address the root causes of conflict and prevent future wars through structural changes to society.¹⁷ This work was developed in two phases.

'Social Changes Under War Conditions': Early Attempts at Pooled Intelligence

The first phase of the WIL's war work was focused on critically analysing the impacts of war, both positive and negative. This work was most notably evident in their published study, *Social Changes Under War Conditions* (1941–2). This study was a collaboration with

¹² BL, Mic.C.819, July 1940, p. 3.

¹³ Rupp, pp. 69, 57.

¹⁴ Kathryn Harvey, "'Driven by War into Politics!': A Feminist Biography of Kathleen Innes" (unpublished thesis, University of Alberta, 1995), p. 170.

¹⁵ Emily Chambers, 'Forging Positive Peace: The British Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1934–1946' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Kent, 2023), pp. 40, 112–115.

¹⁶ Chambers, p. 41; BL, Mic.C.819, December 1941, p. 4.

¹⁷ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, October and November 1940, p. 1.

American WILPF members and highlighted eleven fundamental societal changes that had occurred since 1939. The goal was for the League to develop an international (or rather Western) image of the impact of war. This was arguably a precursor to the *Pool of Opinion*.¹⁸ The shared intelligence it gathered was used to inform the new social order by recording the 'losses' and 'benefits' of war. The study was a clear example of continuing international work.

For the WIL, internationalism meant maintaining active cooperation and communication across national boundaries despite wartime barriers and this formed the foundation of their peace work. However, this approach already revealed the structural constraints that would characterise their wartime solidarity. For example, cooperation remained confined to privileged Western sections, specifically Britain, the USA, and those in exile in these countries, with the resources and safety to continue operations. Nevertheless, it sustained discussions on policies surrounding the importance of human rights, economic planning, worldwide social security and training in International Mindedness – hoping to create a generation of people who could run international governments and organisations with empathy and peaceful principles in mind.¹⁹ This showed a commitment to internationalism and peace, despite the geographical constraints. It also provided information that could be discussed when war allowed all national sections of the WILPF to meet again.

Social Changes recognised that the totality of war – the money, human resources and energy which governments committed to the conflict – should be replicated to bring about peace. The WIL expanded its understanding through guest lectures, including one delivered by economist Honor Croome, who explained that post-war reconstruction should require government planning. Her reasoning was that the conflict had meant all resources, as far as practicable, had been transferred from individual needs to the government and the war effort 'whether by conscription, requisition, taxation or borrowing'. Consequently, Parliament had become responsible for supplying necessities after the war. Croome explained that the Allied Purchasing Commission and Military Health Services, designed for war, could be repurposed to distribute food and medical care post-war.²⁰ She explained to the WIL that they had an opportunity to hold the government accountable for building a better social economy. Her key question was: if the government had proved they could transform society for war, why not for peace?

¹⁸ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, November 1941, p. 1.

¹⁹ LSE, WILPF/3/3, 'Circular Letters', No.2, 1942, p. 4.

²⁰ BL, Mic.C.819, June 1940, p. 1.

The WIL expanded on this. They recognised that local authorities and voluntary bodies had arranged 'communal feeding' for evacuees, reducing pressure on host households. Centres providing affordable midday meals were set up in evacuation and bombed areas. The WIL interpreted this growth in communal dining as a shift in English cultural habits that, if continued post-war, could help working-class mothers and children.²¹ This information would inform the post-war policies and recommendations the WIL could make to the government, and demonstrates that the WIL's privileged position enabled them to observe and theorise about social changes affecting working-class communities.

Yet in consequence, as observers, they remained somewhat removed from the experiences of those most affected by wartime hardship. Though this was perhaps the point. WILPF members did relief work outside of the League; for example, during the war, Dr Hilda Clark and Edith Pye helped house orphaned child refugees fleeing from the Spanish Civil War and Jewish children.²² Yet, within the WIL, their work was dedicated to peaceful post-war planning, focused on how to shape national and international politics for the better. This was something the WILPF had always felt passionately about, feeling that the movement was one of international politics and diplomacy rather than a charity.²³ In this sense, their privilege ensured members had a dedicated intellectual space, protected from the war and the growing domestic and moral demands on women.²⁴

Overall, this systematic analysis of wartime social changes represented a sophisticated approach to policy development that went far beyond simple opposition to war. It enabled the WIL to remain active during the early war years by continuing to engage in peace work through the study. The collection of evidence on state intervention during the war gave them the power to lobby governments to implement social welfare, proving that the state could provide it both nationally and internationally.²⁵ The WILPF's international communication and connection demonstrated solidarity even during the war and this was developed further in their second phase of wartime work, which extended beyond Anglo-American collaboration towards a more concrete plan for post-war reconstruction.

²¹ BL, Mic.C.819, November 1941, p. 1.

²² Rose Holmes, 'A Moral Business: British Quaker work with Refugees from Fascism, 1933–39', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2013), pp. 77–8.

²³ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, May-June 1945, p. 4; WILPF/4/1, 'Annual Council Meeting of the WILPF, March 1939'.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ WILPF, Xth International Congress, pp. 136–138.

'A Pattern of Life for Children Yet Unborn': The *Pool of Opinion* and Post-War Reconstruction

The second phase of the WIL's wartime work (1943–6) shifted from social analysis toward more concrete post-war policies. In early 1944, WIL leaders sensed a change in the international sphere. Harris reflected in her New Year's speech that 'in all human probability this new year [...] will see a pattern of life set for our children and our children's children yet unborn'.²⁶ Calling it a 'moment of hope, not certainty', she referenced the United Nations' launch and urged a renewed effort for a fairer world.²⁷ This perceived historical turning point motivated the WIL to turn toward more international and impactful approaches.

Just as the WILPF had hoped the League of Nations would provide the machinery for lasting peace in 1919, now with more scepticism, they wanted the UN to aid in establishing a just and lasting peace. Their experience with the League of Nations taught them the importance of having feminist pacifists working with an international body from its inception.²⁸ Considering this, along with the success of the *Social Changes* report, the WILPF sought to pool intelligence.

The *Pool of Opinion* represented an effort to maintain international solidarity and prepare for post-war reconstruction through coordinated policy development. It achieved this through a questionnaire that posed twelve questions about world organisation, international law and human rights, economic planning, migration and refugees, and denazification.²⁹ It was organised by WILPF leaders Gertrude Baer (German Section) and Emily Balch (USA Section), and it reached all accessible national sections. Throughout late 1943 and 1944, local WIL branches discussed the questions at meetings and the Executive Committee drafted formal answers that reflected the general or majority views. These were submitted as official British Section responses and the WIL received answers from other sections for further discussion, thereby preparing for the uncertain but inevitable International Congress.³⁰

At the 1946 Congress, the questionnaire's impact became clear as delegates reflected on its success in achieving multiple strategic objectives. Delegates explained that the questionnaire was an attempt to 'keep living contact with sections where this was possible, to lead members to think on problems of importance to our common

²⁶ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, January 1944, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, November 1939.

²⁹ LSE, WILPF/3/4, 'Circular Letters', *Appendix A*, No.2, 1943, pp. 1–4.

³⁰ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, October 1944, p. 1.

international work, and to bring such questions into clear focus by systematic discussion'.³¹ The *Pool* succeeded in three crucial ways: maintaining international ties despite wartime isolation, generating discussion on essential post-war reconstruction issues, and ensuring these conversations involved grassroots members rather than only leadership.

However, the *Pool's* success in achieving its objectives could mask problems within the WILPF's approach to international solidarity. Drawing on Carol Cohn's analysis of how seemingly neutral language can reinforce existing hierarchies, the *Pool's* rhetoric of 'pooled intelligence' functioned to give authority to a selective form of knowledge gathering that often maintained rather than challenged established power relations.³² The issue was not that the questionnaire excluded women from decision-making – it was designed by and for women's organisations – but rather that it failed to interrogate which women's voices constituted legitimate 'intelligence' and whose experiences remained silenced, regardless of intention.³³ The WIL's responses to the *Pool of Opinion* demonstrate this contradiction: whilst the questionnaire successfully maintained international connections and facilitated policy development, it also revealed how the WILPF could reproduce the very exclusions they sought to challenge. This is evident in their approach to world governance, refugees, and economic policy.

Indeed, examining world organisation reveals the WIL's understanding of international governance and the ability to learn from past failures. Specifically, the *Pool's* second question asked what kind of world organisation the WILPF wanted – a World State based on Swiss or American federal systems, a revived League of Nations, a World Federation based on the Culbertson Plan, or something else?³⁴ The British Section favoured the World Federation, although they were concerned about the potential for national rivalry between federations and the lack of representation of people at the international executive level. These concerns demonstrated their analytical approach to international governance. They supported the concept whilst identifying specific structural problems that needed addressing. These concerns were justified considering the Culbertson Plan structure. The structure would divide the world into eleven regions: France, Germany, Poland, Turkey, Russia, China, Japan, Britain, the United States, India,

³¹ WILPF, *Xth International Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at Luxembourg* (The International Headquarters: Geneva, 1946), p. 40.

³² Carol Cohn, 'Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defence Intellectuals', *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12.4 (1987), 687–718, pp. 690, 708.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 711–12, 715–17.

³⁴ WILPF, *Xth International Congress*, p. 1.

and Malaysia.³⁵ However, Britain and the USA were represented twice as they would be placed in control of India and Malaysia and would have an American and British president for at least 12 years, regardless of elections.³⁶ The WIL feared that this significant lack of representation, particularly in the Executive, would fail to prevent war and rivalries. They believed the lessons learnt from the League of Nations should be applied to a World Federation as they recognised the UN had the potential to achieve permanent peace.

The *Pool's* effectiveness became evident in how it shaped the 1946 Congress discussions and resolutions. During the 1946 Congress, Kathleen Innes built upon it by giving a speech on the political and economic situation. Innes stated that the WILPF needed to succeed in convincing States to give up national sovereignty in favour of an 'Impartial Tribunal' and a form of World Government. Having analysed the Culbertson Plan, the WIL, through Innes, were able to express concerns about reproducing national rivalries in a World Federation.³⁷ The wider WILPF agreed with this, passing a resolution declaring support for a 'Democratic International Organisation of the World' but also urging the 'United Nations Assembly to protest and oppose all bilateral arrangements, spheres of influence and special Big Power divisions which jeopardise the effective functioning of the United Nations'.³⁸ This demonstrated how the *Pool's* analysis during wartime enabled more sophisticated policy development and unified knowledge when the sections could finally meet. Yet the irony remained that their critique of 'Big Power divisions' did not prevent the WILPF from struggling with western sections like Britain and the USA being overrepresented in the League, with little input from the national sections of the very regions that they sought to protect.³⁹

The WIL's approach to the *Pool's* refugee questions reflected this, revealing both the WILPF's progressive thinking and the limitations of their privileged position. Specifically, questions nine and ten addressed refugees and 'minorities'. The WIL emphasised autonomy, stating that refugees should be allowed to choose whether to return home or to a new location (though returning home should be encouraged). This would be organised through an Intergovernmental Committee.⁴⁰ The WIL advocated

³⁵ These regions were Pan-American, British, Latin European, Germanic, Middle European, Middle Eastern, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian (autonomous under 'the trusteeship' of the United States), Indian (autonomous under the 'trusteeship' of Britain). See UMN, Radio Station KUOM, 'Is the Culbertson Plan a Solution for Post-War Problems?', *Special Bulletin*, no.48, p16022; Ely Culbertson, *Total Peace: What Makes Wars and How to Organize Peace* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1943), p. 242.

³⁶ Culbertson, *Total Peace*, pp. 243, 258, 248.

³⁷ WILPF, *Xth International Congress*, p. 137.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 196–7.

³⁹ WILPF, *Xth International Congress*, p. 137.

⁴⁰ LSE, WILPF/3/6 'Circular Letters', No.1, 1945, pp. 11,12.

for UN-funded food, housing and relocation.⁴¹ They expressed that whilst they felt self-determination was attractive, it was not feasible for all groups. Instead, they argued for cultural autonomy and representation within political federations as a more immediate action to protect human rights. The British Section also considered the concept of world citizenship. They recognised that national citizenship should remain standard but felt that those who had lost their nation might become world citizens, hoping eventually that everyone would become both world and national citizens.⁴²

The WIL's refugee policy discussions occurred against the backdrop of their awareness of the Holocaust, yet revealed how their privileged position sometimes enabled them to speak for others rather than amplify marginalised voices directly. The WILPF had been aware of the growing antisemitism within and beyond Germany since 1915.⁴³ In 1935, the WIL's monthly newssheet declared that 'the worst tragedy in the world today is to have been born into a Jewish family in Germany'.⁴⁴ The WIL agreed that Germany was 'disregarding elementary human rights' and regularly reported on this injustice throughout the mid-1930s.⁴⁵ As Michael Fleming has explained, from 9 July 1942, the BBC began to report to the British public that in Poland, the Gestapo were killing people en masse with bullets, grenades, and mobile gas chambers.⁴⁶ Although news of Germany's order for mass extermination of the Jews was not officially announced to the broader British Government until the end of that year, the WILPF appeared aware, at least in part, of the specific targeting of Jews.⁴⁷ Their response demonstrated how their approach to 'pooled intelligence' could become a form of appropriation rather than amplification.

The League commented in their international circular letter on the recent news of the killings in Poland, expressing indignation. They admitted this was 'emotional and unconstructive' but felt such anger was necessary as the 'barometer of man's conscience' and 'his moral strength'.⁴⁸ They concluded that 'he who loses his sense of just indignation loses his inner capacity of sifting right from wrong and becomes a victim to moral and mental petrification'. The central argument of the letter appeared to urge members to remain indignant and avoid becoming desensitised by the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ LSE, WILPF/3/4, 'Circular Letters', No.3, 1943, p. 3.

⁴⁴ BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, January 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Hellawell, 'Feminism, Pacifism and Internationalism'; Julie Gottlieb, 'The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning': British Feminist, Pacifism and the Politics of Appeasement', *Women's History Review*, 23.3 (2014), pp. 441–462 (p. 445).

⁴⁶ Michael Fleming, 'Knowledge in Britain of the Holocaust During the Second World War', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Britain and the Holocaust*, ed. by Tom Lawson and Andy Pearce (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 115–133 (p. 119).

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 119.

⁴⁸ LSE, WILPF/3/3, 'Circular Letters', No.3–4, 1942, p. 4.

mounting tales of suffering.⁴⁹ However, to do this, Jewish suffering was mobilised to reinforce 'the spirit of Zurich' – their 1919 congress known as a momentous event of national collaboration and moral strength. This approach revealed the problematic aspects of privileged pacifism – the ability to transform others' suffering into moral lessons for the WILPF's own cause.

The document continued:

The majority has always spoken for the minority, the strong for the weak. At our Zurich Congress in May 1919 representatives of the victor nations denounced the Treaties as carrying the germ of new wars. Representatives of the defeated peoples kept silent. Our work against anti-semitism was carried on by Christian not Jewish co-workers. Any number of instances to illustrate this practice of ours could be added. And this practice must stand. Our voice will reach those who cannot raise their own. We who are free to work for freedom will continue to be the keepers of those who are silenced in exile, enslaved in labour camps or killed by torture – wherever they are, whatever their race, their creed or their nationality.⁵⁰

This statement encapsulated both the possibilities and the dangers of privileged pacifism. Whilst recognising responsibility for fighting injustice, the WILPF simultaneously maintained the silence of those most affected.

This resulted in mixed outcomes at the 1946 Congress. The discussions translated into concrete policy positions that shaped the WILPF's post-war advocacy. Delegates passed a resolution that stated 'displaced persons in camps' needed maximum freedom and opportunities for paid work in an effort to abolish forced labour. The delegates also called for the United Nations to initiate an 'International Conference on Migration' to organise provisions regarding 'the stateless, passports, visas, exit and entrance permits'. Again, the *Pool* opened discussions about policies that could work to help refugees and showed a clear continuity between wartime planning and post-war implementation.

Finally, turning to the economic question, the WIL demonstrated their ability to connect domestic and international issues through an analytical framework. Questions five and six of the *Pool of Opinion* dealt with economic planning and imperialism. The WIL advocated for women's employment and representation throughout government, emphasising social security and re-orienting economies away from profit and toward meeting human needs. They called for an end to imperialism and India's immediate self-government. They proposed that there should be an 'International Supervisory Body' to help all states achieve self-governance and establish fair economic distribution, though they did not specify the structure of this supervisory body.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The outcomes of the 1946 Congress validated the *Pool's* approach to economic and imperial questions. At the Congress, delegates reaffirmed the WILPF's commitment to colonial independence. The sections of Belgium, France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia presented a 'minimum programme' which argued that financial domination by cartels and other private organisations needed to be fought to build a peaceful economy. It was accepted by Congress, and resolutions were agreed that urged the UN to establish international cooperation through community control of raw materials.⁵¹ This aligned with the WIL's response about a 'Supervisory Body' that prioritised human needs and fair distribution, demonstrating how the *Pool* provided foundations for post-war discussion and enabled more efficient policy development.⁵² Yet the absence of voices from colonised regions in the discussions about decolonisation revealed a fundamental contradiction at the heart of their international solidarity work.

The *Pool of Opinion's* success lay not just in policy outcomes but in its method of maintaining international solidarity during wartime isolation. Indeed, it provided the foundation for post-war discussion, freeing time to devise practical plans and consider the perspectives of those who had been cut off by the conflict. Understanding the widespread desires of WILPF members before the Congress helped them identify areas of unity. This enabled them to present a unified image to the UN and other external groups through their resolutions (despite the fact that within WILPF there had always been starkly different views and fractures).⁵³ Nevertheless, this 'pooled intelligence' remained fundamentally constrained by the social position of its participants. It gathered intelligence from sections that shared similar class, racial, and national advantages, shaping not only what questions were asked but how solutions were conceived.

Conclusion

Overall, this article has challenged the historiographical characterisation of the WILPF as inactive during the Second World War and instead revealed a sophisticated organisation that maintained international solidarity. Although initially troubled by the war's outbreak, the WIL remained committed to pacifism not because they opposed freedom, but because they sought to preserve a space for discussing peace and freedom during wartime. This choice led to the WIL's growth in membership and laid the foundation for two phases of war work. The first phase was a small-scale attempt at pooled intelligence, focused on

⁵¹ WILPF, *Xth International Congress*, pp. 207–8.

⁵² BL, Mic.C.819, *WIL Monthly Newssheet*, November 1943, p. 2.

⁵³ Translated, *WILPF, Xth International Congress*, p. 17.

understanding the war's impact. The second phase expanded this through the *Pool of Opinion*, connecting more national sections to establish concrete post-war reconstruction policies, including proposals for world government, and provisions for 'displaced people'. The impact of the questionnaire upon the 1946 Congress was profound. It enabled delegates to produce agreed-upon resolutions that they could present to the United Nations to shape a free and more peaceful future.

This analysis has also revealed the significant limitations of privileged pacifism. While this privilege was a strategic asset that allowed the WILPF to preserve space for peace work when others could not, it also constrained their ability to truly represent those most affected by the conflict. Specifically, the *Pool of Opinion* succeeded in maintaining international solidarity among like-minded sections. Yet it also revealed how 'pooled intelligence' could become a form of selective knowledge gathering that reinforced existing power structures rather than challenging them. Whilst recognising the role of 'majorities' or 'victors' in causing injustice and acknowledging their responsibility in healing such damage was groundbreaking, the maintenance of silent or silenced victims hollowed the WILPF's act.⁵⁴ The exclusion of non-Western and non-white voices was problematic. Additionally, the appropriation of others' suffering for organisational purposes demonstrated that even progressive international organisations could at times reproduce the inequalities they sought to challenge. Analysis of the WILPF therefore raises the question: how can organisations maintain the space for peace work during conflict, while not reproducing the structural inequalities they seek to fight?

Nevertheless, the WIL's wartime work remains historically significant for demonstrating how international solidarity could be maintained during periods of war through 'pooled intelligence'. The benefit was a better prepared peace movement for post-war opportunities to create peace – evidence perhaps that in times of conflict, 'never has there been a greater need for pooled intelligence'.

⁵⁴ WILPF/3/3, No.3–4.

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