

The Search for Negotiated Peace

David S. Patterson

I might best begin this talk with a confession, which is that I first became interested in the subject of my book more than 35 years ago. I then published an article on the relationship between President Woodrow Wilson and private citizens who were imploring him to try to mediate the Great War during the period of American neutrality (August 1914-April 1917). My piece looked at Wilson's handling of citizen activists' requests for personal interviews and his responses to their entreaties for neutral mediation of the war. It was in essence a study in executive leadership. Wilson, I suggested among other things, skillfully handled these peace seekers.

After a long hiatus, which involved other research interests and professional responsibilities, I recently revisited this relationship, but instead of Wilson my primary focus became the citizen activists. What I had, I knew from preparation of my earlier piece, was a really good story – and a largely untold one, too – and my challenge was to bring it all together in an intelligible narrative. When I dusted off my well-yellowed notes, which had somehow miraculously survived, I was pleasantly surprised by the extensive research I had already done. After delving into more archives, extensive reading in the history of women, a field which has exploded over the past generation, and a lot of writing, the result is this book.

In the introduction, I call the book “a genuine hybrid account;” that is, it is women's history but also partly mixed gender history as the main theme, and within that framework it is also part American and part European (or transatlantic), and part peace and part diplomatic, and a prominent secondary theme is Woodrow Wilson. The hybrid

structure was not a conscious decision, but a direct by-product of my storyline, which I early decided should include not just the mediation advocates' programs presented to governments, but also what the various political leaders were saying confidentially about mediation prospects and, for the belligerents, their real war aims in the inner sanctums of their ministries.

As I got into my story, I became particularly interested in the unique life experiences that motivated American and European citizens to make peace and international reform their major concerns. In other words, what makes for a peace activist? Many of us may get disturbed over specific wars. We may grouse to our friends, write an occasional letter to members of Congress, support "peace" candidates for President, and perhaps even join a demonstration. But few of us, I suspect, get consumed by it, and we don't call ourselves "activists."

By any definition, however, the main characters in my book were "activists," and in the course of my narrative I tried to incorporate the direct as well as subtle influences that pushed them toward peace action. For the American and European women attracted to the cause, for instance, I suggest a very rough social profile. Most of them came of age in the late 19th century when young women began to attend college in much larger numbers. Many of these women pursued professional careers and were unmarried or, if married, had supportive husbands and no small children. They were thus freer than men with family responsibilities to risk their jobs by engaging in unpopular causes, including peace. In addition, many of them, as reformers and social workers helping disadvantaged immigrants and poor people in the urban slums and settlement houses, broadened their

commitment to social justice to include international peace. And many had strong religious backgrounds, which were a stimulus to good works.

For the most part, though, I don't promote any overarching theory to explain their common involvement in the peace cause; but as they enter the story, I provide mini-biographical portraits of more than a dozen of the women activists (e.g., Rosika Schwimmer, Fanny Garrison Villard, Lillian Wald, Jane Addams, Aletta Jacobs, Emily Balch, Crystal Eastman, Rebecca Shelley, Lella Secor, Helena Swanwick, Kathleen Courtney, Maude Royden, and Emily Hobhouse) – and a half dozen men, too (e.g., Louis Lochner, David Starr Jordan, Henry Ford, George Foster Peabody, Oswald Garrison Villard, Charles Trevelyan, Ferdinand Leipnik) – and the diverse influences in each case that pushed them forward on their journey toward peace action.

So, what is the story? Well, the citizens' movement for mediation of the World War took many twists and turns and new directions between the late summer of 1914 and early 1917. It begins with the futile efforts of pre-war peace advocates to have any measurable impact on the war descending on the European continent and the essential paralysis of the existing peace movement in Europe.

But at the same time, some concerned citizens in the United States, who were chafing under the conservative and confused peace groups, were considering possible peace strategies. Less than a month into the European war, for instance, the social worker Lillian Wald who hated militarism and war, the pacifist Fanny Garrison Villard, and other New York City feminists organized a women's peace march down Fifth Avenue. Soon prominent liberals and social reformers were participating in a series of meetings to discuss the issues arising out of the maelstrom at Wald's Henry Street

Settlement in lower Manhattan. The Henry Street participants focused on the prospects for successful mediation to stop the enormous casualties and human misery in Europe and examined needed international reforms that might change the nature and shape of the postwar world. Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House settlement in Chicago 25 years earlier, emerged as a key figure in this effort. And as the best known woman in America, she drew on a wide network of sympathetic reformers and intellectuals.

Some European women were simultaneously playing important roles in the emerging women's peace movement. Leading European and American feminists, especially the social workers and suffragists among them, were in fact already well connected before 1914. A prime example was the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), which had been founded a decade earlier. In the pages of its monthly magazine and at its biennial conferences prior to the European war, suffragists in the international alliance had also discussed other women's issues, such as temperance and prostitution. And particularly the Europeans among them also increasingly worried about the escalating Anglo-German naval race, colonial crises, tightening rival alliance systems, and the upsurge of nationalist violence in the Balkans, all of which portended ceaseless conflict and perhaps even major war in Europe. Indeed, the suffragists in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance formed an international community, and the suffrage alliance became an educational laboratory for suffrage reformers beginning to explore the transnational dimensions of the relationship between feminist issues on the one hand, and militarism and war on the other. Their peace advocacy was in fact a blend of older, pre-war perceptions and newer ones arising out of the cataclysmic World War experience.

When the European war erupted, the fiery Hungarian pacifist Rosika Schwimmer resigned her position as a suffrage alliance press secretary and came to the United States to promote her plan for neutral mediation. She was joined by the well-known British militant suffragette Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, who wanted to expose Americans to the international reform program of the Union of Democratic Control. (Prominent antiwar Liberals in Britain had founded the Union of Democratic Control at the onset of the war, and the UDC became the most important British group advocating a negotiated peace.) The two women gave impassioned talks to American women's groups in the East and Middle West about the horrors of the war, women's "maternal instinct" as a powerful rationale for their active participation in the peace movement, the importance of searching for ways to end the conflict, and the liberal principles required for an enduring peace settlement.

I look at the "maternal instinct" rhetoric, which is the idea that women because of their child-bearing and child-rearing roles are naturally more peace-loving than men. Women peace activists articulated widespread assumptions at that time that women were different from men, particularly in being less aggressive and more altruistic, nurturing, and committed to the worth of human life. Maternalist thinking had permeated Victorian society as an argument for women's special province in fostering peace in domestic life, and the women activists extended the notion to international politics. The "maternal instinct," if valid at all, is probably more sociological than biological in origin, but the notion of a nurturing feminine sex in the World War I era was directly relevant to the life experiences of most women, who were still largely tied to the home but were beginning

to become more involved in public issues. And it would continue to play an important role in the message of women's peace groups long after that conflict.

Responding to Schwimmer's and Pethick-Lawrence's appeals, American women eager for action created the Woman's Peace Party in January 1915, with Addams as its head. Many parts of this group's program anticipated the internationalist principles espoused in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points three years later. The mediation proponents also began to circulate a plan urging the neutral governments of the United States and Europe to establish a conference for continuous mediation that would regularly advance suggestions for peace terms to both warring sides as well as serve as a clearing house for belligerents' possible peace feelers.

In Europe, Aletta Jacobs, leader of the Dutch suffrage movement and an international alliance officer, was, like Addams, the best known woman in her country. Shocked by the escalating war and supported by many colleagues in Holland and other alliance women in Germany and Britain, she issued invitations to women's groups abroad to attend a four-day congress at The Hague in the spring of 1915 for discussions on international reform, including prospects for neutral mediation. The congress attracted over 1,100 women (the great majority of whom were Dutch), including forty-seven American women and impressive delegations from almost all the European neutrals and most European warring nations (except France, Russia, and Serbia). The belligerent governments imposed measures restricting attendance of women from their countries – Britain, for example, closed the English Channel to passenger traffic so that 180 Britons who had signed up for the congress could not get there. In consequence, only two British women who had reached Holland before the closure and Pethick-Lawrence who came

with the Americans managed to attend the meeting. The Hague conferees passed resolutions along the lines of the Woman's Peace Party platform that called for a "new diplomacy" consisting of democratic control over foreign policies and other liberal principles for international reform. They also asked neutral nations to establish an official conference that would both circulate its own peace suggestions to both belligerent sides and invite their responses and other offers. Most daringly, at Schwimmer's urging they appointed two groups of women to present the Hague resolutions to the European governments and engage them in discussions about peace prospects.

With a few exceptions, the many European prime ministers and foreign ministers with whom the women envoys talked gave them their honest, though mostly skeptical, views on mediation. Both envoy groups also had several interviews with Holland's political leaders, who showed positive signs of movement on the peace question, and the Swedish Government also showed interest. Given the enormity of the hostilities involving many nations, Germany's military domination of much of the continent, and seemingly solid public support on both belligerent sides for their war efforts, the effect of the women's private diplomacy in Europe was like writing with a stick in water. They had made a start, however, and served as a small conduit for possible future peace communications between the two belligerent sides.

Increasingly, European neutral governments – and the peace proponents too – looked to the United States for leadership on mediation, and the story turns to the interaction of the mediation proponents with Wilson and his closest advisers on prospects for a negotiated peace. I treat Wilson's background, including his foreign policy inexperience and his first thoughts on peace and mediation. Wilson had initially refused

to see private citizens who were interested in mediation. In the summer of 1915, however, he relented and began to meet with citizens activists from neutral nations. These included three women peacemakers – Addams, Emily Balch, who was another American recruit to the cause, and Aletta Jacobs. (Exemplifying the increasing interest of European neutrals in U.S. leadership on international mediation, the Dutch government had sent Jacobs to the United States as a private emissary to inquire about Wilson’s thoughts on the subject.) The president’s dignified demeanor at these meetings, his willingness to consider their neutral conference plan, and his candid explanations for his inaction on mediation temporarily mollified the activists.

Despite Wilson’s insistence that the time for peace talks was premature, the mediation movement continued to gain momentum. One of the many people calling on Wilson in late 1915 was the automobile magnate Henry Ford, who urged the president’s appointment of a governmental commission to participate in a neutral conference for mediation. When Wilson demurred, Ford announced that he had hired an ocean liner to take America citizens to demonstrate for peace in Europe and to convene there an unofficial conference of neutrals composed of respected European and American private citizens; the hope was that neutral governments would later give the conference their official sanction. Schwimmer, supported by the young peace activist Louis Lochner and others, had gained the financial support of the automaker, who had recently denounced the World War and declared that he would do “anything in his power to prevent murderous, wasteful war in America and the whole world.” Ford claimed that his peace ship would “get the boys out of their trenches and back to their homes by Christmas Day.”

I have some fun in this section of the book in offering psychological and cultural explanations for Ford's erratic "pacifism." In the end, his sensational publicity for his peace ship obscured the avowed serious purpose of the unofficial conference. Although newspapers at the time emphasized the multiple personality conflicts among the American and European citizens involved in Ford's venture, I focus mostly on the faulty organizational design, poor communication, and ineffective leadership that plagued the undertaking from the start. And despite the difficulties, the unofficial neutral conference was established in Europe, and one of its members, the Hungarian Ferdinand Leipnik, actually managed to meet both with German and British diplomats and ultimately with Wilson to discuss mediation strategy.

Indeed, in addition to much back-and-forth correspondence, during the period of U.S. neutrality the peace people would meet face-to-face with Woodrow Wilson more than 20 times, and I conclude that the citizen activists had some impact, both positively and negatively, on him. On the positive side, they helped to sustain his interest in mediation and his hopes that a well-timed offer of his good offices for mediation might succeed. The peace advocates also played a role in shaping his thoughts on international reform. When he saw Addams in January 1916, for instance, he drew out from his desk the resolutions of the women's Hague congress, which she had given him six months earlier. Addams noticed that they seemed to have been much handled and read, and Wilson remarked to her, "You see I have studied these resolutions. I consider them by far the best formulation which up to the moment has been put out by anybody."

But Wilson's relationship with the pacifists was never entirely comfortable; and much as he shared their idealistic foreign policy aspirations, he was not in tune with their

specific programs. Wilson repeatedly raised objections to a conference of neutrals for mediation and intimated that he would likely offer his good offices alone. For the activists, however, the joint conference format embodied their belief in international cooperation, and only gradually did they also come to promote the prospect of the President's independent mediation. A more serious impediment was the pacifists' head-on resistance to the Wilson administration's military preparedness program and their strong opposition to the possibility of war with Mexico in mid-1916, both of which induced negative reactions. Following Pancho Villa's violent attacks on American citizens as well as a confrontation between U.S. and Mexican troops, Wilson went to considerable lengths to avoid full-scale military intervention in Mexico, and citizens' antiwar appeals clearly moved him; but he still kept his distance. The American Union Against Militarism, an antiwar group that had spearheaded the anti-preparedness movement, established an unofficial commission of respected U.S. and Mexican private citizens in Washington to gather facts about the Mexican crisis for the President's consideration. (The commission was a bilateral prototype of the multilateral neutral conference that had been created in Europe for the World War.) When Wilson heard about this unofficial commission, he blurted out, "Keep them away... Don't let them come near me. I won't see them. Those pacifists make me feel warlike." The cause of the President's outburst was his mounting annoyance over the pacifists' recent attacks on his preparedness program and his awareness that they were more idealistic on foreign policy questions. Once he had made up his mind on issues, he could be unyielding in his disdain for outside advice.

Wilson would remain open to evidence of peace sentiment in the belligerent nations, however, and in this regard his chief aide Colonel House, who was constantly trying to stir the president's ambition to become the world's peacemaker, the antiwar British Liberals in the Union of Democratic Control who were sending him letters and their publications arguing for peace parleys, and the pacifists – all of them – provided a steady stream of information and advice that encouraged Wilson to believe, much too optimistically it turned out, that his bold public initiatives for mediation, which he launched in December 1916-January 1917, might succeed. They all argued that Germany's more moderate civilian leadership was still in control – as late as mid-January 1917, for instance, House told his mentor, “the [German] Government is completely in the hands of the liberals” – when the military party had actually gained the upper hand. This woeful misreading of the situation doomed mediation prospects, and Germany's introduction of all-out submarine warfare in February 1917 threatened war with the United States. Wilson would soon reject a pacifists' plan for a league of armed neutrals confined to resisting German U-boat attacks on the seas, which was arguably a realistic alternative to full-scale war and the sending American troops to the European battlefields. (Unbeknownst to the peace leaders, he had rejected a proposal from the northern European governments two months earlier to join a league of neutrals in defense of their common neutral rights.) And once he decided on war, he would mercilessly excoriate the pacifists who resisted U.S. military involvement.

In conclusion, I can provide two brief thoughts. The first is that historians should view Wilsonian diplomacy not just from the top down, which would include the input of Colonel House and the secretaries of state and, to a lesser degree, Wilson's private

secretary Joseph Tumulty and his cabinet officers, but also from the bottom up, or as the ongoing interaction between the President and various citizens and groups. In my book I argue that the pacifistic liberals' many interactions with the president provide a wider – and more complete – perspective of the many contacts of an active chief executive and their possible impact, negatively as well as positively, on him.

The second is the woman angle. Some people reading my account before publication commented that men seemed to be prominently involved too and thus questioned my emphasis on women. In my view, they're not entirely wrong, but my argument is that the mixed gender element almost always followed women's initiatives. In the conclusion of my book, I quickly review all the women's peace initiatives between 1914 and 1917, and then drive the point home in a one-sentence paragraph. (I should mention that most of the paragraphs in my book are fairly lengthy, so a single sentence one should stand out.) It reads: "If all these women, supported by many others of their sex, had not been actively involved, it is very likely that the peace and mediation movements would have developed much more slowly and hesitatingly." (p. 332) Thus "women's activism" in the book's subtitle is supposed to connote the feminist reformers as the consistent engine of fresh initiatives and new directions, while the "citizen diplomacy" part of the subtitle suggests the involvement of private citizens, men as well as women, who had direct contacts with diplomats and political leaders on the question of a possible negotiated end to the war.