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Making a Difference: The History and  
Memory of 'Women Strike for Peace',  
1961-1990

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**Jon Coburn**

PhD

2015



Making a Difference: The History and  
Memory of 'Women Strike for Peace',  
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**Jon Coburn**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
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Faculty of Arts, Design and Social Sciences

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## **Abstract**

The women's antinuclear protest group Women Strike for Peace (WSP) formed a visible part of the US peace movement during the Cold War, recording several successes and receiving a positive historical assessment for its maternal, respectable image. This study provides a revised history of WSP, querying the identity of the group in order to produce a more comprehensive and problematic historical narrative. It is the first study to examine WSP from its founding in 1961 through to the closure of its National Office in 1990. The thesis examines key events in the group's history and challenges established historical understandings of the group, positing that existing perceptions offer an image of uniformity that overlooks the differing experiences of WSP activists and the complexity of their memories.

This study draws on aspects of memory theory to inform its examination of WSP's historical record. It contends that social influences and personal identity had a significant impact on the way in which former members recalled their experiences, while assessing the relationship between collective and individual identity within WSP. By placing the group into the changing cultural and societal environment of Cold War America, this thesis is the first to demonstrate the importance of contextual background to understanding the development of WSP activists' memory and identity. Whereas existing examinations of Women Strike for Peace apply its maternal image to the entirety of its history, this study finds such interpretations of identity and historical understanding to be static and argues that the transformation in activist identities informed changing perceptions of the group's past successes.

The thesis makes extensive use of branch records and the recollections of individuals recorded through oral interviews and memoirs to query established understandings of WSP. It finds that the desire of leading figures to project a moderate, maternal image resulted in the establishment of a framework within which WSP activists understood their identity and activism. This framework resulted in an historical narrative that overlooks the diversity within the group, the tensions between members that emerged over issues such as hierarchical structure, civil disobedience, and feminist activism, and the regional disparity of the national organisation. The perspectives of leading figures have often been consulted to the detriment of grassroots voices that can offer a more complex, contentious depiction of WSP's history. Accounting for the construction of WSP's history, memory, and identity, this thesis challenges our view of the experience of peace activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States.



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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Research Ethics Committee on 18/12/2012.

**I declare the word count of this thesis is 87,298 words.**

**Name:**

**Signature:**



## **Introduction: History, Memory, and Women Strike for Peace**

In the introduction to her defining study of the antinuclear activist group Women Strike for Peace (WSP), Amy Swerdlow made her aims clear. “I recognize that my purpose was not only to add the story of WSP to the historical record, but also to make certain that the middle-aged women of WSP are recognized as significant actors.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout her academic life, the former WSP leader lamented the “historical amnesia” afforded the organisation and, from the outset of her book, she presented the group as “ignored or misrepresented” in the histories produced by “male movement leaders and historians of the social movements of the 1960s.”<sup>2</sup> Swerdlow’s attitude mirrored that of her fellow WSP activists (or WSPers) who wished to express their belief that the organisation had made a significant contribution to the United States peace movement. Another leading figure, former National Coordinator Ethel Taylor, published an anecdotal account of WSP’s history in 1998, framing her memoir around the emphatic assertion, “we made a difference!”<sup>3</sup> Promoting the significant impact of WSP, former activists collectively developed a narrative for their organisation’s history that emphasised its cohesion, creativity, and success.

Women Strike for Peace emerged in the fall of 1961 as a vehicle for women across the US to call for global disarmament, with a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons seen as the first step towards that end. Frustrated with the perceived failings of contemporary peace groups such as the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Dagmar Wilson, a children’s illustrator and peace activist from Washington, D.C., contacted female acquaintances and suggested staging their own demonstration.<sup>4</sup> They sent an appeal to known activists and called on women to “strike for peace” on 1 November 1961. Thousands came out in support, organising various activities in cities across the country. The “strike” met with positive press and public reception and the

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace Versus HUAC,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Autumn 1982): 493; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ethel Taylor, *We Made a Difference: My Personal Journey with Women Strike for Peace* (Philadelphia: Camino Books, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 57.

original participants unanimously agreed to continue their efforts, using variations of the “Women Strike for Peace” moniker to identify themselves. The group became renowned for their image as concerned housewives and mothers, couching their critique of militarism in tones acceptable to the tense climate of Cold War politics.<sup>5</sup> Following the passing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, the organisation broadened its scope to campaign for myriad peace and social justice issues. It became a visible part of the anti-Vietnam War movement during the late 1960s, supported the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, and was involved in resurgent antinuclear activism during the 1980s. Though the group’s National Office closed in 1990, the commitment of some individual activists and local branches ensured that WSP retained a presence into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The recollections of WSP activists frequently spoke to the robust identity of their organisation, with their individual reflections coalescing to produce a narrative that sought to mark the group as distinct and exceptional among its peers.<sup>6</sup> Although it exhibited similarities with other organisations, WSPers drew boundaries between their group and its contemporaries, such as SANE, WILPF, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).<sup>7</sup> They depicted their group as distinct, exceptional, and more successful than its peers, advancing unique “organisational identity claims” to foster a collective identity between individual members.<sup>8</sup> WSP members emphasised their political neutrality and the lack of activist experience held by participants prior to the foundation of their group.<sup>9</sup> They depicted WSP as a harmonious, cohesive unit of like-minded women, united by the desire to protect the health and wellbeing of the world’s children.<sup>10</sup> Activists recalled WSP’s loose system of coordination, with its lack of formal structure and absence of leaders, as a distinctive feature and a forerunner to later groups that adopted similar organisational strategies. Swerdlow dedicated a chapter of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 106.

<sup>7</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 164; “Eleanor Garst to Ruth Pinkson re: History of WSP for 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>8</sup> Jo Reger, ““Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities: Variations in a Women’s Movement Organization,” *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Winter 2001): 85-110; David A. Whetten, “Albert and Whetten Revisited: Strengthening the Concept of Organizational Identity,” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (September 2006): 220.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson interview, 5 April 1989, ARS.0056; Amy Swerdlow, ““Pure Milk, Not Poison’: Women Strike for Peace and the Test Ban Treaty of 1963,” in *Rocking the Ship of State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics*, eds. Adrienne Harries and Ynestra King (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 227; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, x.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvi; Wilson interview, 5 April 1989, ARS.0056.

*Women Strike for Peace* to a discussion of the method of “nonorganization” adopted by members, reinforcing the notion that WSP worked well due to its fostering of a community that developed strong bonds between its participants.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, most accounts reflect positively on the experience of working in WSP and emphasised the significant impact the group made politically and socially while transforming the lives of its members.<sup>12</sup>

These depictions, though revealing, mask a complicated and fragmented story. The organisation’s internal dynamics, ideology, and the practices of its members suggest that WSP’s experience was not all that dissimilar from other groups. The impression that they were politically inexperienced housewives veiled the substantial experience of political activism and community organising many WSPers brought to the group’s formation. The influence enjoyed by key decision-makers throughout the organisation’s history contrasts with the repeated claim that WSP was a “nonorganization” with a non-hierarchical structure in which women were “all leaders.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the story of WSP’s national organisation often stands at odds with the experiences of local activists. Archival records note frequent instances of disagreement and heated arguments over strategy, policy, and identity, undermining portrayals of WSP’s harmonious environment. The attitudes of WSPers on the west coast of the United States conflicted markedly with the views of members in the east and branches separated themselves from the national organisation by adopting different titles, such as Women for Peace (WFP). Moreover, existing depictions of Women Strike for Peace adopt a narrative that rigidly places it in the historical context of early 1960s test ban protests and late 1960s anti-war activism, neglecting later developments and causes championed by members.<sup>14</sup>

This thesis provides a revised history of WSP by extending the scope of analysis beyond the 1960s and 1970s for the first time, providing the first examination of the group’s 1980s experience up to the closure of its National Office in 1990. Informed by branch archives and the recollections of activists, it interrogates three

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<sup>11</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 70-96.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, x; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso, “Review,” review of *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s*, by Amy Swerdlow, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 5 (December 1994): 1773-1774.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace: Neutrality, the Test Ban, and the Freeze* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 54.



aspects of WSP's history. First, it examines the historical assessments of WSP activists through the theoretical lens of memory studies to analyse the reciprocal relationship between memory and identity. It challenges understandings of the past advanced by former members by contextualising the organisation's activities and highlights the impact of contemporary circumstances on the development of activists' identity and memory. As such, it assesses the way in which the historical image of WSP came to be created by those involved in its activities. Second, the thesis questions established understandings of Women Strike for Peace, depicting key moments of transition in the group's history while demonstrating the ranging and conflicting attitudes of its members and assessing the level of activists' engagement with the social movements of the Cold War United States. In doing so, it shows the organisation as a diverse, multifaceted, layered, and fragmented institution. Third, the dissertation engages with members' notions of success and draws on voices both within and outside Women Strike for Peace to examine the extent to which the group "made a difference." These assessments were informed, not only by perceptions of WSP's substantive achievements, but by the extent to which the organisation had a significant influence on the lives of its activists. This thesis makes a unique contribution to knowledge by providing the first study to address the influence of memory and identity on the history of Women Strike for Peace, therefore filling a significant gap in the historiography of 20<sup>th</sup> century peace activism.

### **The Historiography of Women Strike for Peace**

Swerdlow's original polemic on the historical amnesia displayed towards WSP arose at a time when many scholars acknowledged a dearth of material concerning the history of women's peace activism. Sybil Oldfield wrote in 1989 that, despite their important contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century peace movement, women were "hardly heard" within pacifist discourse as history circles continued to ignore their influence.<sup>15</sup> In 1993, esteemed peace historian Harriet Hyman Alonso framed her expansive study of the women's peace movement with the proclamation that it represented "the introductory overview" that had not been available to her when teaching courses on

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<sup>15</sup> Sybil Oldfield, *Women Against the Iron Fist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1989), i.

the subject.<sup>16</sup> Introductions to studies of women's peace activism frequently invoke this sense of historical neglect. Yet the phenomenon continues, extending beyond US history. British academic Jill Liddington wrote several pieces in the 1980s and early 1990s decrying the lack of knowledge "about the story of the magnificent fight" by earlier generations of women's peace activists, lamenting that "there was no one accessible account" to which an interested party could turn.<sup>17</sup> Though neglect is certainly not limited to the history of any one specific women's peace organisation, a 2011 master's thesis by Laura Dane Bridgewater supported the claim that a particularly virulent "amnesia" exists towards Women Strike for Peace.<sup>18</sup>

References to WSP in secondary literature often praise the actions of its members, but do not provide great detail of its history beyond describing its place within a wider context of peace activism. Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield mentioned WSP several times throughout *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*, but did not expand on the organisation's character.<sup>19</sup> Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan depicted the group's actions in a favourable light, but did not provide extended detail of the group's inner workings.<sup>20</sup> Tom Wells also praised the "dogged women of Women Strike for Peace" in his overview of the anti-Vietnam War movement, but provided little further exposition of the group's activities.<sup>21</sup> Works on the antinuclear campaign by Milton Katz, Gerard DeGroot and Lawrence S. Wittner, among others, refer to Women Strike for Peace as an integral part of the movement without providing the type of organisational analysis afforded groups such as SANE.<sup>22</sup> Dedicated studies of women's peace organisations also tend

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<sup>16</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace As a Woman's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Jill Liddington, "The Women's Peace Crusade: The History of a Forgotten Campaign," in *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (London: Virago Press, 1983), 198; Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain Since 1820* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Dane Bridgewater, "Caught Between Cold War Conservatives and Radical Feminists: The Fading of Women Strike for Peace from American Memory" (MA diss., Lehigh University, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (London: University of California Press, 1994), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Gerard J. DeGroot, *The Bomb: A Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Milton S. Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, 1957-1985* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970 (Vol. 2 of The Struggle Against the Bomb)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present (Vol. 3 of The Struggle*

to focus on the historic WILPF or on specific instances of protest, such as the Greenham Common peace camp.<sup>23</sup>

This lack of interest prompted WSP activists to take it upon themselves to record their stories. The organisation funded and distributed several commemorative publications during the 1970s to raise awareness of its achievements.<sup>24</sup> During the 1980s activists became involved in oral history projects, created several historical exhibitions, and sourced materials for various archival collections and museums in order to publicise their stories.<sup>25</sup> Following the closure of the National Office, former members drew on their recollections to produce memoirs and offer articles for collections that discussed their experience in Women Strike for Peace.<sup>26</sup> The suite of memoirs, oral recollections, and other ephemera that emerged from WSPers remains a significant source of historiographical information relating to the organisation.

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*Against the Bomb*) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); Linda K. Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Sasha Roseneil, *Disarming Patriarchy: Feminism and Political Action at Greenham* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995); Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*; Sasha Roseneil, *Common Women Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham* (London: Cassell, 2000); Mima Cataldo et al., *The Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> "Memo: Special Commemorative Issue, 1970," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace, 1962-2000; "Journal of Women Strike for Peace Commemorating Eighteen Years of Conscientious Concern for the Future of the World's Children," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History; Shingo Shibata ed., *Phoenix: Letters and Documents of Alice Herz* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner B.V., 1976).

<sup>25</sup> "Women's Peace Oral History Project," *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Collection ARS.0056*, Stanford University Archive of Recorded Sound; "Missoula Women for Peace Oral History Project," OH 389, Archives & Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, The University of Montana-Missoula.

<sup>26</sup> Judith Porter Adams ed., *Peacework: Oral Histories of Women Peace Activists* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); Alice Sachs Hamburg, *Grass Roots: From Prairie to Politics: The Autobiography of Alice Sachs Hamburg* (Berkeley: Creative Arts Books Company, 2001); Lorraine Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard: My Life In and Out of Jazz Time* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2006); Taylor, *We Made a Difference*; Dagmar Wilson, "Tainting the Antinuclear Movement: HUAC and the irrepressible Women Strike for Peace," in *The Price of Dissent: Testimonies to Political Repression in America*, eds. Bud Schultz and Ruth Schultz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 278-288; Barbara Bick, *Walking the Precipice: Witness to the Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2009); Pat Cody and Fred Cody, *Cody's Books: The Life and Times of a Berkeley Bookstore, 1956-1977* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992); Judy Kaplan and Linn Shapiro eds., *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom eds., *Bella Abzug: How One Tough Broad from the Bronx Fought Jim Crow and Joe McCarthy, Pissed Off Jimmy Carter, Battled for the Rights of Women and Workers, Rallied Against War and for the Planet, and Shook Up Politics Along the Way* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007); James W. Clinton ed., *The Loyal Opposition: Americans in North Vietnam, 1965-1972* (Niwot, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1995).

Amy Swerdlow's academic career became key to the organisation's historical record. Leaving her position in the group to pursue a PhD in women's history, Swerdlow directed her efforts to highlighting WSP's significant place in the peace movement.<sup>27</sup> She also intended to engage with detractors, particularly those within the second-wave feminist movement, who had criticised the group's propensity to advance an identity of domesticity and maternalism as a justification for their political agency.<sup>28</sup> Achieving a doctorate for her history of the group's test ban activism, Swerdlow published several articles on Women Strike for Peace throughout her career before her authoritative account of the group's history emerged in 1993.<sup>29</sup> *Women Strike for Peace* highlighted various successful endeavours while noting the empowering affect WSP had on the people involved. Gender history professor Lisa M. Fine labelled Swerdlow's work an "important corrective to much of the 'misinformation' currently circulating in the popular culture," while Gloria Steinem asserted that "no historian, activist, or self-respecting woman should be without" the book.<sup>30</sup>

Interest in the organisation increased markedly following the publication of Swerdlow's book and scholars have continued to place WSP in the historical context of which it was a part. Amy Schneidhorst's extensive work on women's activism in Chicago demonstrates WSP's influence on women activists and the grassroots peace and justice movements they led. Schneidhorst has made exhaustive use of oral history and organisational sources to shed light on the political ideologies underpinning WSP, the context of Old Left and Popular Front activism that WSPers emerged from, and their relationship to "younger" activists during the 1960s.<sup>31</sup> Andrea Estepa also made significant contributions to understandings of Women Strike for Peace, demonstrating

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<sup>27</sup> "Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979.

<sup>28</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 233-243.

<sup>29</sup> Amy Swerdlow, "The Politics of Motherhood: The Case of Women Strike for Peace and the Test Ban Treaty," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1984); Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol"; Swerdlow, "'Pure Milk, Not Poison'"; Amy Swerdlow, "'Not My Son, Not Your Son, Not Their Sons': Mothers Against the Vietnam Draft," in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, eds. Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 159-170; Amy Swerdlow, "Ella Tulin: Fully Empowered," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 88-106; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa M. Fine, "Review," review of *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s*, by Amy Swerdlow, *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 35 (Spring 1995): 360-362; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, cover page.

<sup>31</sup> Amy C. Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World: Popular Front Women's Struggle for Peace and Justice in Chicago During the 1960s* (New York: Continuum, 2011); Amy Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women': Women's Peace Activism and Social Justice in Chicago, 1960-1975," *Peace & Change*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (July 2001): 374-390.

its ideological links to radical groups of the 1960s and the transforming identities of activists.<sup>32</sup> Concern with the experience of individual activists also rose following Swerdlow's work. Alice Herz and Margaret Russell have received some dedicated study, while works on Bella Abzug, though predominantly involving her law work and years in the United States Congress, have nevertheless discussed her relationship to Women Strike for Peace.<sup>33</sup> Various studies use the experience of WSP activists to inform broader research topics. For example, Mary Hershberger, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, and Jessica M. Frazier used WSP's relationship with North Vietnamese women to discuss transnational activism in various terms.<sup>34</sup> Adam Rome referenced Women Strike for Peace in relation to environmental activism, while Velma García-Gorena linked WSPers to instances of maternal activism within the Mexican antinuclear movement.<sup>35</sup>

Although recent studies have added to the group's historiography, Swerdlow's work remains highly influential and is frequently cited as the "foundation" to analysis of WSP.<sup>36</sup> The former WSPer's academic credentials are noteworthy. She earned her PhD from Rutgers University having previously completed her MA under the tutorship of pioneering women's historian Gerda Lerner at Sarah Lawrence College,

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," (PhD diss., Rutgers University, May 2012); Andrea Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and 'the Movement,' 1967-73," in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. Stephanie Gilmore (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 84-112.

<sup>33</sup> Cheyney Ryan, "The One Who Burns Herself for Peace," in *Bringing Peace Home: Feminism, Violence and Nature*, eds. Karen J. Warren and Duane L. Cady (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 16-32; Ian McKay, "Margaret Ells Russell, Women Strike for Peace, and the Global Politics of 'Intelligent Compassion,' 1961-1965," in *Worth Fighting For: Canada's Tradition of War Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror*, eds. Lara Campbell et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 119-134; Leandra Zarnow, "The Legal Origins of 'The Personal is Political': Bella Abzug and Sexual Politics in Cold War America," in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Organizations, and Feminism, 1945-1985*, eds. Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline Castledine (New York: Routledge, 2011), 28-46; Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug, 1920-1976: Political Passions, Women's Rights, and Congressional Battles* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam: American Peace Activists and the War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Jessica M. Frazier, "Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam: The Interactions of Women Strike for Peace, the Vietnamese Women's Union, and the Women's Union of Liberation, 1965-1968," *Peace and Change*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (July 2012): 339-365; Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals On the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism During the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (September 2003): 525-554; Velma García-Gorena, *Mothers and the Mexican Antinuclear Power Movement* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off, Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 4; Wesley G. Phelps, "Women's Pentagon Action: The Persistence of Radicalism and Direct-Action Civil Disobedience in the Age of Reagan," *Peace and Change*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (July 2014): 342.

New York. She later became Professor of History and Director of the Graduate Program in Women's History at Sarah Lawrence. Meticulous archival research and interviews contributed to *Women Strike for Peace* and Swerdlow argued from the outset that she represented an objective historical voice. She declared her book "not the work of a participant observer. It is true that in the 1960s and early 1970s I was an active participant in WSP, but I was not a conscious or systematic observer. My research and analysis for this book were undertaken twenty years later."<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Swerdlow's former position within WSP naturally informed her insight, meaning that impressions of the organisation necessarily draw on participant-observation of the group's past.<sup>38</sup> She was a founding member of WSP in New York, participated in its first demonstration in November 1961, and travelled around the world as a representative of the group, embarking on high profile trips to Geneva, Hanoi, and Cuba during the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> She served as editor for the national newsletter, *Memo*, and often edited the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut newsletter single-handedly, the production being described "as if it were speaking for the entire WSP."<sup>40</sup> She also worked as the press officer for New York Women Strike for Peace and, as a point of contact for both WSP members and the nation's media, Swerdlow put herself in a unique position to write the history of the movement from an insider's perspective. Participant-observation can provide a "rich experiential context" allowing an author to "become aware of incongruous or unexplained facts" and "sensitive to their possible implications and connections with other observed facts."<sup>41</sup> However, such involvement with the organisation under study can also result in some subjectivity. In the introduction to *Women Strike for Peace*, Swerdlow openly declared her love for the group, stating that she considered her "time in WSP among the happiest and most exhilarating of my life."<sup>42</sup> Such sentiment appears throughout her account and references to her involvement in WSP activities alternate between

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<sup>37</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>39</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck eds., *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 260.

<sup>41</sup> Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation: A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and its Relations to the Policy Process* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1975), xii-xiii; Howard Becker and Blanche Greer, "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison," *Human Organization*, 16, No.3 (1957): 28-32.

<sup>42</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 9.

first-person and third-person perspectives.<sup>43</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso's review of Swerdlow's book labelled it a "memoir/history," while others challenged the "heroic" and "favourable treatment" she gave the organisation.<sup>44</sup>

Swerdlow's positive assessment of WSP parallels other laudatory appraisals offered by those involved in social movement organisations of the 1960s. Discussing the reunion of SNCC activists in 1988, Cheryl Lynn Greenburg noted the adulation participants afforded the organisation's past efforts while they downplayed the "bitterest of fights" endured.<sup>45</sup> Nancy Janovicek likewise observed that cynicism towards memory assumes "that the narrators are always too nostalgic about the 1960s and are always aggrandising their own participation in events."<sup>46</sup> However, the influence WSP activists' had on the construction of their group's historical record makes study of their reflections particularly revealing. An examination of the influences guiding these recollections, especially when members' interpretations conflict with archival records, presents new understandings of the history, memory, and identity of Women Strike for Peace.

## **The Identity of Women Strike for Peace**

Several recent studies have reassessed historical perceptions of Women Strike for Peace by highlighting the intricacies of the group's identity. Amy Schneidhorst reflected on WSPers' maternal identity by considering its use as a tactical tool necessary to craft the group's cohesive image.<sup>47</sup> Lawrence Wittner, while conceding that WSPers took "their maternal responsibilities quite seriously," argued that the "reality" behind the group's image "was far more complex." Members of the organisation were better educated than the majority of women in the United States, while all the leading figures had activist experience.<sup>48</sup> Andrea Estepa, in her 2012 PhD

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>44</sup> Alonso, "Review," 1773-1774; Terry Anderson, "Review: Women and Peace," *American Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 123-125.

<sup>45</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenburg ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy Janovicek, "'If You'd Told me You Wanted to Talk About the '60s, I Wouldn't Have Called You Back': Reflections on Collective Memory and the Practice of Oral History," in *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*, eds. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 185-200.

<sup>47</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*; Schneidhorst, "'Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women'."

<sup>48</sup> Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 252.

thesis, argued that WSP formed an integral part of the American New Left, assessing the radical ideologies inherent in some activists' rhetoric and as a force that motivated some campaigns.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile Jessica M. Frazier considered WSP's manipulation of maternal identities, seeing in the group's transnational activism political acumen often absent in other accounts.<sup>50</sup>

This thesis contributes to these existing studies, but develops the inquiry further to investigate how and why common depictions of WSP developed, while explaining the impact WSPers' identities had on the construction of narratives surrounding their organisation. Although existing studies provide differing perspectives on the identities of WSP activists, none have investigated the links between members and the development of historical image.

The complexity of WSP's identity presents some illuminating avenues of research. Activists invested a lot of themselves in their organisation. To paraphrase the thoughts of women's peace activist scholar Cynthia Cockburn, activists' attitudes towards their group suggest that Women Strike for Peace was not just something they did, but something they were.<sup>51</sup> Women projected their own views and attitudes onto WSP while drawing on the experience of the group to inform their understanding of themselves. From the foundation of the group through to the closing of its National Office in 1990, WSP activists displayed a vested interest in how the group appeared. Many linked their life stories to their experience as a part of WSP. Former National Coordinator Ethel Taylor's memoir depicted her life through reference to the group's activities, advocating the group's impact on her life by stating that WSP "sustains me. Outside of my family and my friends, WSP to me is the most important entity."<sup>52</sup> Such proclamations exemplify the descriptions of activist identity found throughout studies of "new social movements."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980."

<sup>50</sup> Frazier, "Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam," 339-365.

<sup>51</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand, War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Nancy Whittier, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements," in *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*, eds. David S. Meyer et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 289-307; Hank Johnston, Enrique Laraña, and Joseph R. Gusfield, "Identities, Grievances, and New Social Movements," in *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3-35; William A. Gamson, "Social Psychology of



Yet the identity of Women Strike for Peace remains difficult to define. Despite frequent references to the organisation's activities, studies seem conflicted over how best to describe its members. Alonso's authoritative *Peace as a Women's Issue* notes that the initial appeal of Women Strike for Peace lay in its projection of an image of "respectable, middle-class, middle-aged peace ladies in white gloves and flowered hats."<sup>54</sup> However, she later argues that WSP made groups such as WILPF "seem staid," holding an appeal for "younger, budding feminists" due to their radical actions and "contagious sense of humour."<sup>55</sup> Alonso subsequently observed that younger members of the women's liberation movement felt "put off by the middle-class WSPers."<sup>56</sup> These changing assessments are representative of the fraught relationship WSP developed with the feminist movement. Yet accounts continue to offer varied perspectives on the group's identity. Former members offered conflicting representations of themselves, particularly when discussing their backgrounds prior to joining WSP. Though the conclusion to Amy Swerdlow's book acknowledged that WSP members were not the "political neophytes" they often claimed to be, some continued to assert their prior political naivety.<sup>57</sup>

Women Strike for Peace unquestionably contributed to a number of political and social campaigns. In describing WSP, Professor Ian McKay observed the various ways it has been analysed:

As a forerunner of radical separatist feminism in the US, a continuation of conventional "motherist ideology," a movement that fatally weakened McCarthyism, a vintage example of the spontaneity of "the Sixties," an early version of environmental activism, and a moment in the career of Congresswoman Bella Abzug – all interpretations that shed some light on its history.<sup>58</sup>

People initially flocked to the group in 1961 to protest weapons testing and call for nuclear disarmament specifically, though calls for a stronger UN role in global politics also demonstrated the liberal-internationalist inclination of early appeals. Similarly, WSP's demand for reduced US involvement in places such as Vietnam, Cuba, and

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Collective Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-76; Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989); Vera Taylor and Nancy E. Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, 104-129.

<sup>54</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, 204.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 211, 215.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 231.

<sup>57</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 233.

<sup>58</sup> McKay, "Margaret Ells Russell," 119-120.

Central America presented it as an anti-imperial organisation. Its enthusiastic campaign to ban “War Toys” showed concern for the prevalence of violence and militaristic attitudes within society. Although WSP’s official position stated its single-issue concern for nuclear disarmament, WSPers can, therefore, justifiably be labelled as activists concerned with peace generally. Yet describing WSP as strictly a peace activist organisation risks overlooking the welfare and social justice campaigns its members championed throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. WSPers committed themselves to “Feed the Cities” and “Women Organized for a Sane Approach to Drug Abuse.”<sup>59</sup> The organisation’s environmental activism during the 1970s further complicates the historical record. WSP’s complicated relationship with the women’s liberation movement prevents a simple explanation of the group’s priorities as a gender-based movement. It is clear, however, that many in Women Strike for Peace made significant contributions to women’s rights campaigns and received plaudits for their participation.<sup>60</sup> Historical accounts can rightfully depict WSPers as environmental activists, as part of the feminist movement, and as significant contributors to the peace and disarmament movements. These definitions, however, are wholly dependent on the historical context within which the group is being discussed. Aligning WSP with any one movement inadequately illustrates the broader history and character of the organisation.

Recent developments in studies of organisational identity provide some insight into the character of Women Strike for Peace. Political sociologists Kristin A. Goss and Michael T. Heaney, considering the range of campaign issues WSP encompassed during its life, identify the group as part of a broader “anti-violence” movement.<sup>61</sup> A similar analysis may arise from Goss, Heaney, and Fabio Rojas’ understanding of “hybrid activism.”<sup>62</sup> They explain that a hybrid is “an organisation where identity is comprised of two of more types that would not normally be expected to go together.” Discussing the dynamic involved in “Organizing Women *as* Women,” Goss and

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<sup>59</sup> SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 97A-061, Box 1, Feed the Cities; UCB WFP Archives, 11-24, Women Organized for a Sane Approach to Drug Abuse, 1990.

<sup>60</sup> Barbara J. Love ed., *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 3, 277, 453.

<sup>61</sup> Kristin A. Goss and Michael T. Heaney, “Organizing Women *as* Women: Hybridity and Grassroots Collective Action in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 2010): 28.

<sup>62</sup> Michael T. Heaney and Fabio Rojas, *Party in the Street: The Antiwar Movement and the Democratic Party After 9/11* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael T. Heaney and Fabio Rojas, “Hybrid Activism: Social Movement Mobilization in a Multimovement Environment,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (January 2014): 1047-1103.

Heaney argue persuasively that “in gender politics, hybridity typically refers to the combining of maternalism and egalitarianism.”<sup>63</sup> Heaney and Rojas further developed the idea of hybrid activism by explaining that actors may only “have tenuous or conditional attachments to an identity.”<sup>64</sup> Groups can allow “different sets of beliefs and meanings” to produce “multiple frames” among members, ultimately creating internal tensions and disagreements.<sup>65</sup> Collectively, these theories of group and individual dynamics explain the varying identities of WSP activists and the problems the group faced during its history.

Discussion of identity must also allow for the change in attitudes that occur over time. Ann Ferguson argues that “the self is constantly in flux, made up as it is of a collection of aspects that change relative to the social context in which a person finds herself.”<sup>66</sup> Beth Dixon too writes on identity with reference to the changing circumstances affecting an individual.<sup>67</sup> These natural changes to self-identity also impact on the manner in which individuals recall their past experiences. Alessandro Portelli argues that the helpfulness of oral narratives rests “not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ effort to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives.”<sup>68</sup> Historian David Thelen quotes Jean Piaget and B. Inhelder in proclaiming identity’s impact on memory: “If we change the way we think about the world we automatically update memories to reflect our new understanding.”<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon is particularly relevant to understandings of the collective identity of activist groups who are engaged in continual dialogue with contemporary social contexts.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Goss and Heaney, “Organizing Women as Women,” 29.

<sup>64</sup> Heaney and Rojas, *Party in the Street*, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Goss and Heaney, “Organizing Women as Women,” 29.

<sup>66</sup> Ann Ferguson cited in Beth Dixon, “Gender and the Problem of Personal Identity,” *The Personality Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Supplement: Studies in Personalist Philosophy, Proceedings of the Conference on Persons (Spring 1992): 260; Ann Ferguson, “A Feminist-Aspect Theory of the Self,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 13 (1987): 339-356.

<sup>67</sup> Dixon, “Gender and the Problem of Personal Identity,” 259-263.

<sup>68</sup> Gail Hershatter, *The Gender of Memory: Rural Women and China’s Collective Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 22.

<sup>69</sup> David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 75, No. 4 (March 1989): 1120.

<sup>70</sup> K. Jill Kiecolt, “Self-Change in Social Movements,” in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, eds. Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert W. White (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 110-131; Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement,” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, 157.

Assessing WSP based solely on the context of its activities during the 1960s therefore risks abridging its history. This thesis explores the entire duration of the organisation's history to reveal the impact contemporary circumstances had on members' reflections of the past.<sup>71</sup> As the perception of their identity changed from 1961 to 1990, so too did their historical viewpoints. Women Strike for Peace traversed transformative periods in American social history, surviving from the beginning of the 1960s through the rise of the women's liberation movement, the resurgence of American conservatism, and increased nuclear fears in the 1980s before witnessing the end of the Cold War. Naturally, WSP underwent substantial changes during its 30 year existence. But its period of activism also had an impact on the identity of members and, consequently, on their historical understanding. This thesis contributes to recent interest in WSP's identity, but expands on existing studies to consider the manner in which the complex and changing identity of WSPers affected historical depictions of the organisation.

In analysing WSP's complex identity this thesis necessarily deals with the issue of representation. As a group ostensibly devoid of leadership, members often questioned who spoke for and best represented their organisation. As these conversations show much of the internal organisational dynamics of Women Strike for Peace they also reveal further problems in accurately describing the group's character. The diverse attitudes of its members allow historians to label certain women as being representative of WSP as a whole. For example, historical descriptions often cite Bella Abzug as a fundamental part of WSP, yet her personality and political views unsettled other activists.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Alice Herz, though seemingly an archetypal member of the organisation, often receives little acknowledgement for her role in WSP despite her unprecedented self-immolation in 1965.<sup>73</sup> With participation granted to whoever wished to join, WSP held diverse opinions on political and personal issues. Pacifist attitudes wavered throughout the group, even among leading figures. Some, such as Dagmar Wilson, were staunch in their pacifist beliefs, whereas others adamantly denied such sentiments and openly supported violent revolutionary movements, exclaiming that they would "pick up a gun to fight for my child, if

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<sup>71</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980."

<sup>72</sup> "Guide to the Seattle Women Act for Peace Records," University Libraries, University of Washington, Seattle.

<sup>73</sup> Ryan, "The One Who Burns Herself for Peace," 16-32.

necessary.”<sup>74</sup> By referencing the differing attitudes of WSP members, this thesis shows the instability of historical representation and provides a more comprehensive and complex overview of the group’s collective identity.

Analysis of the disparate geographical composition of WSP also allows insight into the organisation’s varied identity. In 2000, Byron A. Miller argued that scholars neglected the “geographic variations in resources, political opportunities, place-specific characteristics, and spatial interactions” that affected the mobilisation of social movements. With specific reference to the peace movement in different parts of Boston, Miller highlighted “place-specific conditions” and “place-specific strategies” adopted by Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaigners.<sup>75</sup> Only through analysis of local area activism and the variations in approach, he argued, can understandings of a national organisation become comprehensive. Harriet Alonso supported this view, arguing that “we come to know and understand major leaders” through broad histories of organisations, but “we are not as familiar with the rank and file of organisations” unless studies consider activities at a local level.<sup>76</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, Professor of History at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, also highlighted the importance of studying local elements of peace movements, “as civil rights historians have been doing for two decades.”<sup>77</sup>

An engagement with local and regional activism is particularly relevant for Women Strike for Peace. Although a national organisation, WSP prided itself on decentralised coordination and local activists’ ability to manage their own affairs. Local communities had their own WSP founders and leaders, used their own distinctive logos, and developed their own strategies and campaigns. Amy Schneidhorst, in focusing on women’s activism in the Chicago, provides a prescient example of the benefits of such studies. Yet most historical depictions have attempted to discuss the group’s experiences in a national sense. For example, even the titles of Swerdlow and Taylor’s works downplay the geographical variances of the

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<sup>74</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056; Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>75</sup> Byron A. Miller, *Geography and Social Movements: Comparing Antinuclear Activism in the Boston Area* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 1, 4, 6, 167.

<sup>76</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso, “Book Reviews,” *Peace and Change*, Vol. 38, 3 (July 2013): 357-358; Harriet Hyman Alonso, “Dissension in the Ranks: The New York Branch of WILPF vs. the National Board, 1914-1955,” *Peace and Change*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Special Issue: Women and War (1996): 337-342.

<sup>77</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, “A Merger of Movements: Peace and Civil Rights Activism in Postwar Miami,” *Peace and Change*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 2010): 258.

organisation. Taylor dismissed any notion of regional differences with the comment, “but what’s in a name? We were all dedicated to the same cause.”<sup>78</sup> Both used the national moniker “Women Strike for Peace” to describe the organisation, but this label represented those working on the east coast more than those in other areas of the United States. From the group’s inception, Midwestern and west coast activists dropped the word “strike” and referred to themselves as Women for Peace or Women Act for Peace. Some appraisals note the existence of this dynamic, with Andrea Estepa in particular noting how activists experienced a different reception to their work in different parts of the US.<sup>79</sup>

While the scope of this thesis prevents a detailed investigation of local activities, it does deliver an overview of the regional dynamics involved with organising Women Strike for Peace. This provides a more nuanced synopsis of the group’s history than currently exists and demonstrates issues relating to representation. It also highlights the way in which geographical distinctions manifested themselves in the identity and memory of activists. Branches exhibited different strategies and priorities depending on their location. These differing experiences impacted on the way activists recalled their time in WSP, with some demonstrating affiliation to their local branch rather than the national organisation.<sup>80</sup>

Many former members’ commentaries on Women Strike for Peace assess the extent to which the group “made a difference.” Themes of success and significance are an important part of historical descriptions of WSP. This thesis is, therefore, obliged to engage with arguments relating to social movement success in order to reveal aspects of WSPers identity and perspectives on their past. William Gamson’s ground-breaking work concerning pre-World War II social activism provides an insightful paradigm within which to query notions of success.<sup>81</sup> Gamson identified two outcomes to represent a social protest movement’s impact; the achievement of goals (or “advantages”) as outlined by the challenging group; and the acceptance of that group as legitimate spokespeople for their constituency by the antagonist.<sup>82</sup> This framework merits success on the extent to which these criteria have been fulfilled,

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<sup>78</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, x.

<sup>79</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 309.

<sup>80</sup> Duckles interview, 22 November 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>81</sup> William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, Ill: The Dorsey Press, 1975).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

though Gamson allowed scope to credit groups with only partially achieving these benchmarks. The coding also takes into account the necessity of studying the perceptions of three groups of people: the social group itself; the antagonist; and historians studying the context.<sup>83</sup> Only by using the shared opinions of these three groups, Gamson believed, can a reliable measure of success arise. Though some social scientists dispute the conclusions drawn from the study itself, they generally accept the soundness of the method of coding used to define and measure success.<sup>84</sup>

Although the historiography relating to WSP offers favourable reflections of the group's activities, it contests some of the perceptions of success advanced by its members. Political historians covering the test ban debate reduce the role played by social activists in securing the treaty's passage in 1963.<sup>85</sup> Likewise historiography of the anti-Vietnam War movement and antinuclear protest often debates the extent to which peace activists achieved their aims.<sup>86</sup> Scholarly attitudes of women's roles among the peace movement also contest the glowing reflections of WSP activists. Sara Evans and Barrie Thorne famously discussed the "ultimate indignity" of work among the male-dominated peace movement during the Vietnam War, while Heather Marie Stur recently wrote about the war's reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes.<sup>87</sup>

Gamson's coding provides a useful framework, but there remain difficulties in adequately measuring the impact of any particular social movement. Though Jeffrey W. Knopf advocated a social movement's impact "simply because it existed," his conclusion faces scrutiny from those who have sought to evidence perceived gains.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>84</sup> William A. Gamson, "Reflection on the Strategy of Social Protest," *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (1989): 458; Jack Goldstone, "The Weakness of Organization: A New Look at Gamson's Strategy of Social Protest," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 5 (March 1980): 1017-1042.

<sup>85</sup> P. Terrence Hopmann, *The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 15; David Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma: 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 172, 175, 184; Glenn T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 300; Robert A. Divine, *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 109.

<sup>86</sup> Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1997); DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 323, 326.

<sup>87</sup> Barrie Thorne, "Women in the Draft Resistance Movement: A Case Study of Sex Roles and Social Movements," *Sex Roles*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1975): 179-195; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey W. Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation: The Impact of Protest on US Arms Control Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 157.

Melvin Small, attempting to judge the impact of peace protesters on the American government, evaluated the difficulty in measuring the impact of any social movement on decision makers.<sup>89</sup> He quoted the work of James N. Rosenau on public opinion and foreign policy to demonstrate “the complexity of this problem,” noting the identification of “three strata of the public, sixteen kinds of opinion makers, and ten channels of communication that could become the components of a formal model.”<sup>90</sup> Joshua W. Busby, Associate Professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, also believed that influence on policymakers was difficult to gauge. “Sometimes weak actors may get what they want not because they were influential but because their demands were consistent with what governing parties wanted.”<sup>91</sup>

Analyses of “new social movements” have broadened these definitions of success to consider the impact an activist organisation has on the cultivation of collective identity for its own members. As Alberto Melucci wrote in 1989, “if what movements do to construct a sense of ‘we’ is not considered accessory or residual” but an actual aim of the movement, “then our understanding of concepts such as efficacy and success is correspondingly modified.”<sup>92</sup> William Gamson concurs with this assessment, arguing that the “construction of a collective identity is the most central task of ‘new’ social movements,” particularly for New Left groups in the civil rights and women’s movements. In this sense, the transformative impact of belonging to an organisation such as Women Strike for Peace marked success in itself.<sup>93</sup> Recent studies advance this line of reasoning. K. Jill Kiecolt suggests that “a task of all social movements’ is to get participants to incorporate the movement’s collective identity into their self-definition.”<sup>94</sup> As such, the cultivation of strong bonds between individuals and groups in Women Strike for Peace is an important measure of the organisation’s success. James M. Jasper, in *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*, further problematizes the issue by noting that “emotional inspiration” can provide as much motivation for activism as

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<sup>89</sup> Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 1-5.

<sup>90</sup> James N. Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1961).

<sup>91</sup> Joshua W. Busby, *Moral Movements and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>92</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 74.

<sup>93</sup> Gamson, “Social Psychology of Collective Action,” 56-60.

<sup>94</sup> K. Jill Kiecolt, “Self-Change in Social Movements,” 110.



specific goals relating to substantive political achievements. “People may even protest without thinking they can win,” he argues.<sup>95</sup>

Any assessment of WSP’s success may prove difficult to measure, but an analysis of the perception of activists draws further insight into how members wished others to perceive their group. Activists who saw the organisation as a vehicle for feminist activism defined their organisation’s successes through reference to the transformative impact Women Strike for Peace had on the feminist sensibilities of its members. Amy Swerdlow, consistently working from a feminist standpoint, argued that women found “to their surprise” that they could develop their talents in Women Strike for Peace and move beyond the previously limiting realm of domestic life.<sup>96</sup> Ethel Taylor, on the other hand, wrote that WSP “made a difference” as an antinuclear activist group, advocating its significance among the peace movement while continuing to appeal for more members to join the cause.<sup>97</sup> Through engagement with differing perspectives of success, this thesis reveals diverse attitudes and identities exhibited by WSP activists throughout the life of the organisation. It also demonstrates the various, often conflicting, perspectives of members, problematizing understandings of the group’s membership while complicating existing historical depictions of the organisation.

## **Methodology and Memory**

Stories are of vital importance to the production of organisational identity. Kiecolt argues that “probably the most common source of identity work is narrative,” as when social movement participants tell “stories about themselves,” they “wittingly or unwittingly direct attention to particular aspects of their and others’ self-concepts.”<sup>98</sup> Robert Wuthnow observes that “people in groups do not simply tell stories – they become their stories.”<sup>99</sup> The telling and retelling of stories by activists has a significant impact on the creation and subsequent reinforcing of collective identity and group image. According to social movement theorists Debra Friedman and Doug

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<sup>95</sup> James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>96</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 155.

<sup>98</sup> Kiecolt, “Self-Change in Social Movements,” 121.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support groups and America’s New Quest for Community* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 301.

McAdam, such battles for “control of the group’s image” are often vital for its “survival chances.”<sup>100</sup> Jeffrey Olick notes that movements are “concerned, even...obsessed” with extolling stories and narratives in order to secure knowledge of their exploits with a wider audience.<sup>101</sup> Stories told by activists reveal how they saw their organisation and how they wished it to be received by a wider audience. Using memory studies, this thesis examines the historical productions of WSP activists in order to produce a clearer understanding of the organisation’s history, memory, and identity.

WSP activists used various methods to advance the history of their organisation and this thesis draws on a number of salient historical productions. It uses the memoirs and autobiographies of several leading figures to ascertain their experiences in WSP and their attitudes towards the organisation. These writings contributed to the public history of Women Strike for Peace and provide evidence of the image WSPers wished to publicise. National Coordinator Ethel Taylor, San Francisco leader Alice Hamburg, New York WSPer Lorraine Gordon, and National Secretary Barbara Bick wrote memoirs and autobiographies that discussed, with differing emphasis, their involvement in Women Strike for Peace. The writings of other members, Bella Abzug, Alice Herz, Pat Cody, and Elise Boulding among them, also provided insight into the workings of the group. In order to provide an accurate assessment of the history and identity of Women Strike for Peace, this study aggregates the individual productions of WSP members to note points of contention and conflict in memories of the organisation. Doing so leads to validation of certain events while also revealing common themes present throughout memory of the organisation.

This thesis also draws on historical understandings dispersed internally by WSP members. By invoking the past through speeches to national and local meetings and with the production of commemorative journals, WSP created an insular narrative of the past that informed the identities of its members. Anniversary celebrations served as mnemonic devices to frame activists’ historical perspectives, highlighting key events and successes that members drew on to understand the group’s character. These productions show the historical understanding WSP activists circulated among

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<sup>100</sup> Friedman and McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism,” 166.

<sup>101</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 3-4.

themselves and allow this thesis to make an unprecedented examination of the group's folklore.

In aiming to produce a more comprehensive assessment of WSP, this study endeavours to highlight the attitudes of those not covered in existing historical works. While they present valuable insight into the group's history, the memoirs, autobiographies, and historical productions of WSP emerged from the organisation's "key women."<sup>102</sup> Leading figures naturally exercised considerable influence, but relying on these documents alone creates a problem of representation. As such, this study makes use of a wealth of private correspondence among activists found in WSP's archives. The letters found prove crucial to indicating the private attitudes held by WSP's grassroots members, while more public complaints also exhibit an alternative vision of the group's cohesion. Additionally, the research uses materials from local branch archives in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Seattle, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. The extensive archival material reveals the inner workings of WSP's local branches while also allowing comparative analysis to be made of the attitudes, functions, and campaigns of different regional bases for the first time. The official records within these archives allow the study to calibrate the memories of WSPers and observe whether established understandings conform to official records.

As an examination of WSP history with reference to the attitudes and memories of its members, this study would have benefitted from conducting interviews with former WSP activists. Unfortunately, owing to the age of the organisation, the vast majority of former WSPers are now deceased. A surviving member was reached, but owing to other commitments they were unable to be interviewed. As the organisation refrained from keeping membership lists, the search for other former activists proved unsuccessful. However, while the unavailability of former WSPers prevented this study from conducting oral interviews, activists engaged enthusiastically with oral history projects during their lives. A number gave extensive interviews as part of the Women's Peace Oral History Project, run by Judith Porter Adams during the 1980s. The project recorded numerous women's peace activists from WSP and WILPF, later publishing the transcripts of some of the

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<sup>102</sup> "1973 Progress Report on Women Strike for Peace Research," SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, Research on WSP by Amy Swerdlow.

interviews, and provides a rich collection of personal memories. The University of Montana-Missoula also produced recordings with local activists of Missoula Women for Peace. These interviews provide significant insight into attitudes and experiences of WSP activists and, while acknowledging that some limitations arise from this approach, they have proven invaluable to the research carried out here. This study is able to combine historical understandings produced by WSP members of varying prominence, from various locations, made at various times to provide a more comprehensive assessment of WSP's history, memory, and identity.

The use of personal reflections to inform historical studies has distinguished precedence and has particular salience for studies of activists, as encouraged by historian Margo Perkins. In *Autobiography as Activism* she argues that the act of producing a memoir has value in itself and that critical analysis of an individual's writing allows insight into the attitudes of those involved in a movement.<sup>103</sup> Lindsey Dodd similarly defended the "long pedigree" of using first-person narratives in historical research.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, some drawbacks to using such sources should be highlighted. In *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, a study that makes exhaustive use of the autobiographies of former child workers, Jane Humphries acknowledges the various weaknesses and pitfalls of using memoirs as sources of historical fact. She cites small sample sizes, conscious manipulation of the past, and the possible "failures of memory."<sup>105</sup> However, Humphries' work provides a robust defence of such studies.<sup>106</sup> As she reflects, "many of the alleged weaknesses of memoirs are irrelevant when they are used not as eyewitness accounts of external events but as a source of information about their own author's experience."<sup>107</sup> Martha Solomon uses the autobiographies of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Anna Howard Shaw to argue that "the writing of an autobiography is not simply a recording of recollections," but "an attempt to formulate and convey the significance and value

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<sup>103</sup> Margo V. Perkins, *Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Dodd, "'Small Fish, Big Pond,'" 39; Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 129; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 137.

<sup>105</sup> Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

one perceives in one's life.”<sup>108</sup> William L. Howarth labelled the works of significant social movement activists “oratorical autobiographies,” asserting that “they are characterized by a desire to show one's life as in some way an idealized pattern of human behaviour.”<sup>109</sup> The inherently subjective nature of memoirs presents an opportunity for salient analysis of WSP when they are taken as evidence of personal attitudes towards the past.

Understandings drawn out from memory studies are central to the research method. A rich taxonomy exists to describe forms of recollection. For example, while semantic memory deals with learned knowledge, episodic memory describes an individual's recollection of particular events and incidents (episodes).<sup>110</sup> This study concerns itself predominantly with the concept of “autobiographical memory” and its relationship to historical accounts of a social group. Using the definition of Professor of Psychology William F. Brewer, autobiographical memory refers to “memory for information related to the self” and includes the personal memory of specific episodes in a person's life, the knowledge of autobiographical facts, and generic memories of personal experiences.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, autobiographical memory relates to individual memory and the agency of single participants in the production of historical accounts.

The benefits of such an approach for this study of WSP come through the indelible link between autobiographical memory and notions of personal identity. A psychological study by Williams, Conway, and Cohen explains that a “bidirectional” – or reciprocal - relationship exists between memory and identity, with a person's knowledge of themselves informing an understanding of their own past experiences. Simultaneously, recognising the manner of historical experience serves to inform an individual's sense of their morality, personality, and identity.<sup>112</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt noted

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<sup>108</sup> Martha Solomon, “Autobiographies as Rhetorical Narratives: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Anna Howard Shaw as ‘New Women’,” *Communication Studies*, Vol. 42, Part 4 (1991): 354.

<sup>109</sup> Solomon, “Autobiographies as Rhetorical Narratives,” 354; William L. Howarth, “Some Principles of Autobiography,” *New Literary History*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Changing Views of Character (Winter 1974): 363-381.

<sup>110</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 83; Charles P. Thompson et al., *Autobiographical Memory: Remembering What and Remembering When* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 1-3; Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>111</sup> William F. Brewer, “What Is Autobiographical Memory?” in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 26; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 86.

<sup>112</sup> Helen L. Williams et al., “Autobiographical Memory,” in *Memory in the Real World*, eds. Gillian Cohen and Martin A. Conway (Hove: Psychology Press, 2008), 63.

the “vital” role memory played in informing an individuals’ identity.<sup>113</sup> Memory theorists Lynn Abrams and John A. Robinson both explained that a respondent providing a recollection “is directly or indirectly telling us something about him or himself.”<sup>114</sup> “Life memories,” as such, “tell us something about remembering and about the rememberer.”<sup>115</sup> These works suggest that analysing the form, content, and context of the recollections produced by members of Women Strike for Peace reveals unexamined insight into the identity of activists. Aggregating and comparing these stories produces a more comprehensive and complicated story of the organisation.

This method of analysis also provides insight into the social influences at play within WSP. As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan argue, a person’s memory is unavoidably “fashioned by the social bonds of that individual’s life.”<sup>116</sup> Joan Tumblety finds that the impact of such influences on the testimony of individuals was “inevitable,” while Lynn Abrams asserts that historians can never be sure whether the narratives offered by individuals are actually expressions of a “collective consciousness.”<sup>117</sup> Bridget Fowler, meanwhile, contends that:

One cannot in fact think about the events of one’s past without discoursing upon them. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle...the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other.<sup>118</sup>

This study analyses the extent to which social dynamics created “cultural scripts” that informed WSPers’ recollections.<sup>119</sup> Oral historian Lindsey Dodd defined cultural scripts as “recognizable, standardized reworkings of the past,” essentially an accepted mode of discussing a shared history.<sup>120</sup> Gary Alan Fine notes that for a particular incident to become folklore it needs “to be usable,” and relate to “experiences that at

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<sup>113</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 40.

<sup>114</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 33.

<sup>115</sup> John A. Robinson, “Autobiographical Memory: A Historical Prologue,” in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 19.

<sup>116</sup> Winter and Sivan, “Setting the Framework,” 6-39.

<sup>117</sup> Joan Tumblety ed., *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 10; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 96-98.

<sup>118</sup> Bridget Fowler, “Collective Memory and Forgetting: Components for a Study of Obituaries,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (2005): 55.

<sup>119</sup> See also Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting,” in *Social Forces*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (March 2010): 1103-112.

<sup>120</sup> Lindsey Dodd, “‘Small Fish, Big Pond’: Using a Single Oral History Narrative to Reveal Broader Social Change,” in *Memory and History*, 37.

least a significant proportion of the group's members have in common.”<sup>121</sup> Assessing the form of WSPers' recollections and the presence and influence of cultural scripts reveals how perceptions were framed around a desirable historical image.

The dynamics of group conformity also provide illuminating points of analysis. In his work on history and memory, Geoffrey Cubitt outlines that familiarity with a group's attitudes towards its past “is part of what is involved in becoming, in the fullest sense, a member of the group in question.”<sup>122</sup> James Fentress and Chris Whickham, writing in *Social Memory*, observed the “supply and demand” requirements on memory. In order to “survive beyond the immediate present,” reflections must “fit” the desired image of a group.<sup>123</sup> In this sense the attitudes displayed by WSP activists towards their past developed through interaction with their fellow members. Cubitt succinctly explains that practical considerations often influence the manner with which recollections are transmitted. Rather than constructing an accurate historical record, members of a group “may find it more important to develop an account of things that is coherent, or that commands general assent within the group, or that minimises friction, or that enhances self-esteem, or that legitimises certain claims or structures.”<sup>124</sup>

Additionally, as identity changes, so too does memory. The passage of time and the shifting social and cultural environment in which memories are transmitted naturally influences their form. As sociologist and historian Jeffrey Olick explained the idea of “presentism,” memory and images are produced “in the present for present purposes,” and therefore assume an understandable alteration due to “the structure of interests and needs of the present.”<sup>125</sup>

This study also acknowledges the presence of “silence” in activists' recollections, observing its relevance to understanding the production of memory and historical accounts. Much work on the subject relates to the influence of trauma and past suffering on individuals' reluctance to discuss particular life events.<sup>126</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>122</sup> Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 135.

<sup>123</sup> James Fentress and Chris Whickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 202.

<sup>124</sup> Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 130.

<sup>125</sup> Jeffrey Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 8.

<sup>126</sup> Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives In Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence,*

Paul Ricoeur writes on the relationship between remembering and “forgetting,” explaining that certain historical events are “overly remembered” at the expense of others.<sup>127</sup> This thesis investigates how the absence of recollections served to shape a particular narrative of Women Strike for Peace. In one sense, silence can reflect hegemony. A crucial argument made throughout Sue Campbell’s work highlighted “the importance of paying attention to those whose voices have been silenced or whose pasts have been written for them by the dominant and powerful.”<sup>128</sup> Examining the attitudes and recollections of actors who have, thus far, remained muted in WSP history provides useful insight into the relationships and dynamics that governed the organisation. But reluctance to discuss particular events may also suggest intent to gloss over periods that members felt unrepresentative of their organisation or themselves.<sup>129</sup> The presence of silences, analysis of where they occur, and a discussion of why they appear adds much to understandings of WSP’s historical image. It reveals currently overlooked events in the group’s past while suggesting that a desired and “appropriate” representation of the organisation existed in the minds of WSPers.

The relationship between gender and memory provides an additional aspect of this study. Several projects have touched upon gender differences in the reproduction of memory, but have yet to offer adequate conclusions. For example, a 1997 study found that men outperformed women on visuospatial tasks, whereas women evidenced better skills in verbal fluency and episodic memory tasks. Though a 2013 project found similar conclusions, neither could adequately explain the reasons behind the differences.<sup>130</sup> A 15-year study into diaries and autobiographical memory conducted by Kansas State University observed that “female superiority in event dating was consistent across studies,” but was reluctant to identify specific causes.

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*Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

<sup>127</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>128</sup> Koggel and Jacobson eds., *Our Faithfulness to the Past*, xv.

<sup>129</sup> Vered Vinitsky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (March 2010): 1103-1122.

<sup>130</sup> Franz Pauls et al., “Gender Differences in Episodic Memory and Visual Working Memory Including the Effects of Age,” *Memory*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (2013): 857-874; Agneta Herlitz et al., “Gender Differences in Episodic Memory,” *Memory & Cognition*, Vol. 26, No. 6 (1997): 801-811.



Gender socialisation, its authors suggested, may have contributed to performances, with female participants often responsible as “event daters” in their everyday lives.<sup>131</sup>

Differing social experiences between men and women appears to have an effect on the framing and transmission of memory. Professor of Gender History Lynn Abrams asserted that “there is no evidence from memory tests that women and men have different memory functions,” but that “gendered socialization” may explain the contrasts in recollections.<sup>132</sup> Beth Dixon, in a study of gender and identity, argues that the significant role gender plays in the establishment of an individual’s identity within society necessarily impacted the perspective a respondent placed on past events.<sup>133</sup> Ely and McCabe note gender differences in the recollections of conversations. In their study, women recounted speech verbatim with more frequency than their male counterparts, who seemed content to project the general subject of discussion. This suggests a differing perspective on the importance of the content and meaning of social interactions in memory.<sup>134</sup> Deborah Tannen draws explicit dichotomies in the use of speech to recollect past events between the genders. In *You Just Don’t Understand!*, a work focusing on gendered differences in communication styles, Tannen asserts that men’s history will depict competition, whereas women are far more likely to paint favourable images of community and mutual cooperation.<sup>135</sup> Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame has written extensively on women’s depictions of the past, noting the frequent use of plural prefixes “we” and “one” as substitutes for the individualistic “I” seen more prominently in men’s recollections.<sup>136</sup> The implication is that women are more inclined to recognise the contribution of others, that the history of communal activity is more worthwhile than an individual account, and that conversations are recollected with clarity.

The prevalence of certain themes within women’s recollections also indicates a gender difference. Luisa Passerini, who has written extensively on the methodological

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<sup>131</sup> Thompson et al., *Autobiographical Memory*, 157-160.

<sup>132</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 91.

<sup>133</sup> Dixon, “Gender and the Problem of Personal Identity,” 259-263.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Ely and Melissa McCabe, “Gender Differences in Memories for Speech,” in *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Volume IV – Gender and Memory*, eds. Selma Leydesdorff et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26.

<sup>135</sup> Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (London: Virago, 1991), 91.

<sup>136</sup> Fentress and Whickham, *Social Memory*, 142; Selma Leydesdorff et al. eds., *International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories: Volume IV – Gender and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 2.

implications of oral history, feels it important to recognise the sense of irreverence and rebellion that women's groups include when recollecting particular instances of activism.<sup>137</sup> While rebellion represented a major theme in the histories presented by her subjects, however, Passerini sometimes questions the authenticity of their rebellious position. Examining the contrast in given perspectives, she noted that "irreverence is a narrative stereotype which does not so much point to real behaviour as project affirmations of identity" and that the use of such a narrative tool was largely "symbolic."<sup>138</sup> Fentress and Whickham, discussing Passerini's work, agree that women's memories depict groups working on the margins of society and celebrating their position as outsiders.<sup>139</sup>

Studies considering gender differences in the transmission of memory generally acknowledge that the field lacks robust conclusions at present. Reports remain "speculative," prefacing their findings with the caveat that "additional research" is necessary while recognising the "destabilizing" impact that research into the subject could have.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, an investigation into the history of Women Strike for Peace can draw on some of the informative findings relating to the formulation and transmission of memory to explain particular impressions of past events.

The research for this thesis considers the risks involved with critiquing personal recollections for historical analysis. Feminist scholar and memory theorist Sue Campbell warned of the consequences of labelling an individual's recollection as "false," arguing that "memory, self, and person are historically braided concepts" to the extent that undermining the recollections of an individual could entail an attack on their "selfhood and personhood."<sup>141</sup> The notion of "interpretive authority," as discussed by Katherine Borland, also has salience. In appraising an anecdote recounted by her grandmother, Borland explained that her own feminist standpoint had imposed a political rendering onto the story with which the narrator emphatically

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<sup>137</sup> Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-28.

<sup>139</sup> Fentress and Whickham, *Social Memory*, 142.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 137; Thompson et al., *Autobiographical Memory*, 160; Lelya Elena Troncoso Pérez and Isabel Piper Shafir, "Gender and Memory: Critical and Feminist Articulations," *Athenea Digital*, 15 (1) (March 2015): 65.

<sup>141</sup> Sue Campbell, "Women, False Memory, and Personal Identity," *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Spring 1997): 51-82; Sue Campbell, *Our Faithfulness to the Past*, eds. Christine M. Koggel and Rockney Jacobsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), xvii.

disagreed. She acknowledged having unwittingly constructed “a second-level narrative” from her source material, “based upon, but at the same time reshaping” the narrative originally expressed.<sup>142</sup> While making clear that her reading did not “betray” the “original narrative,” Borland nevertheless accepted the care required in reassessing the significance of particular memories, explaining that interpretations of personal accounts “if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborators’ carefully constructed sense of self.”<sup>143</sup> Oral historian Lindsey Dodd provided further elucidation of this risk. She argued that, unless scholars were aware of the multiple facets and interactions at play between memory, identity, and the individual, “using this kind of source could be dangerous, not just in terms of misinterpreted data, but because of the impact it has on the lives” of respondents.<sup>144</sup>

This thesis intends to explain the presence and significance of “distortion” in history and memory of Women Strike for Peace. Utilising this concept as an analytical framework allows further understanding of the identity of WSP activists through a study of the historical depictions they presented. But this does not suggest that WSPers consciously engaged in the duplicitous manipulation of their historical record, or that the histories they produced constitute polemics. Memory scholar and feminist writer Sue Campbell invoked the phrase “faithfulness to the past” to advance her idea of “good remembering,” suggesting that recollections should be held up to a standard of accuracy and integrity reflective of the “ethical responsibility” of rememberers.<sup>145</sup> But this study accepts that “memory distortion” is an unavoidable phenomenon, indicative of the many influences on the coding and transmission of recollections. Professor of Philosophy Eric Schwitzgebel has published numerous essays in recent years questioning the accuracy of individual reflection, with particular critiques of visual perception and introspection.<sup>146</sup> He finds distortions of conscious experience to

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<sup>142</sup> Katherine Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (London: Routledge, 1991), 63.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>144</sup> Dodd, “‘Small Fish, Big Pond,’” 47.

<sup>145</sup> Sue Campbell, “Our Faithfulness to the Past: Reconstructing Memory Value,” in *Our Faithfulness to the Past*, 30-31.

<sup>146</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel, “How Well Do We Know Our Own Conscious Experience? The Case of Visual Imagery,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 9 (2002): 35-53; Eric Schwitzgebel, “The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection,” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (April 2008): 245-273; Eric Schwitzgebel, “The Problem of Known Illusion and the Resemblance of Experience to Reality,” *Philosophy of Science*, 81 (2014): 954-960; Eric Schwitzgebel, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

be natural and inescapable and concludes that limits to a person's explanative powers inherently restrict their ability to describe their experiences. Such phenomenon should be considered in evaluations of individuals' perspectives on their past experience.<sup>147</sup>

Historian Lisa Tetrault provides a persuasive analysis of distortion within group contexts, arguing that a particular version of events, "once dominant," can serve to influence the recollections of individuals within a group until a cohesive "myth" develops to explain the past.<sup>148</sup> However, she challenges the negative connotations of such a term, arguing that "myth in this context does not mean, as it does in popular use, a falsity. Rather, myth means a venerated and celebrated story used to give meaning to the world."<sup>149</sup> Cultural historian Michael Kammen further warns against exposing memory to value-based judgements. Some instances of discrepancy "are quite properly regarded with a cynical eye, and may be considered, for convenience, negative (i.e., self-serving) instances of memory distortion," but, he contends, others may represent positive moves towards a "democratizing outcome" or the "necessary readjustment of value systems that are out of synch."<sup>150</sup> Kammen finds that "description and explanation serve us in more satisfactory ways than cynicism about bad faith or evil intent on the part of dominant elites."<sup>151</sup> Observing WSP members as "social actors," this thesis speaks to Jeffrey Olick's work in attempting "to understand the ways in which, and reasons for which, images of the past change or remain the same."<sup>152</sup> Measuring the extent and form of these shifts sheds new insight into the identity of WSP activists and their place in contemporary social movements.

The thesis consists of six chapters weaving the story of Women Strike for Peace into an examination of the construction of its history. The first two chapters look at the establishment of the organisation's folklores as the group developed in its early years. Chapter one considers the group's founding in 1961 and the way in which memory of the period depicts the actions of its original members. The chapter problematizes

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<sup>147</sup> Russel T. Hurlburt and Eric Schwitzgebel, *Describing Inner Experience?: Proponent Meets Skeptic* (London: The MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>148</sup> Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Michael Kammen, "Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History," in *Memory Distortion*, ed. Daniel L. Shacter (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 329-330.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 3-8.

existing understandings by placing WSP within the context of rising American concern with nuclear weapons during the 1950s. Although recollections of the period claim WSP formed on the initiative of politically inexperienced housewives and mothers, this chapter examines the activist backgrounds of those involved, the various precursors to WSP's first demonstration, and their self-representation as unique critics of government policy. Chapter two continues the story, focusing on the development of the organisation in the years immediately preceding its first demonstration. It pays particular attention to the folklores and myths, established in this early period, which informed depictions of the group in later years, such as its leaderless, structureless organisational format. With an overview of WSP's 1962 encounter with the House Un-American Activities Committee and the ratification of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, the chapter shows the importance of this period to WSP's historical depiction.

Chapters three and four analyse WSP's involvement in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Much discussion of this period reflects favourably on the organisation, but these two chapters demonstrate the complexity of the experience. Chapter three considers the diversity of experience felt by WSPers during the course of their anti-war work, paying particular attention to the immolation of WSP activist Alice Herz and the furore surrounding WSP's meeting with Vietnamese women in 1965. Historical accounts present a unified vision of Women Strike for Peace that suits the desired image of the group's leadership. This chapter, however, demonstrates the potential for alternative narratives. Chapter four continues this analysis by progressing WSP's story to the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, exploring the chagrin of activists as the Vietnam War continued. Despite the group's best efforts to end the war, tensions built within the organisation, provoking widespread disaffection among activists. The stress of continued anti-war work caused friction between women, disputes between chapters, and conflict between regions as the loose organisational strategy employed by WSP caused myriad problems. In highlighting this aspect of the organisation's history, this chapter queries current the reasons for existing understandings.

The final two chapters examine the changing identity of WSP activists and the way in which historical understanding became informed by contemporary circumstances. Chapter five considers the contested relationship between Women Strike for Peace and feminism as it developed in the 1970s. As WSP started to

consider its past, it reframed its identity and experience through its encounters with the women's liberation movement. Although WSP adopted an ambiguous stance on feminist campaign issues, this chapter sees activists' fresh affirmation of Bella Abzug as indicative of the realignment in its own identity. The chapter also considers the nature of debate concerning the appropriate place of maternal identity in women's organising. Chapter six then examines the group amidst the return of antinuclear activism in the 1980s. It shows that WSPers reflected on their past experiences with reference to the contemporary fortunes of the peace movement and their optimism towards future endeavours. Although they were unable to prevent WSP from diminishing as a group, this chapter demonstrates the ongoing commitment expressed by WSPers, even as their National Office closed in 1990.



## **1. “The Women Seemed to Have Emerged From Nowhere”: Origin Myths and the Roots of Women Strike for Peace**

On a warm September night in 1961, six women met in the Georgetown house of Dagmar Wilson, a self-described “mere housewife” and mother of three.<sup>1</sup> The few friends sat in Wilson’s comfortable living room and talked of atomic war. They were worried, indignant, and angry. Atmospheric nuclear testing had contaminated milk supplies, resulting in the accumulation of radioactive compounds in the bones of American children. The nuclear arms race threatened global destruction, simply because world leaders could not settle their differences through reasoned conversation. Worse, the peace movement’s passive response seemed woefully inadequate. The housewives assembled in Wilson’s house were not political activists, but they decided to make a bold, unpopular stand, calling on women to stage a nationwide, one day “strike for peace.”<sup>2</sup> Contacting friends through “informal female networks, by word of mouth” and through “Christmas card” lists, the Washington women rallied support for their apolitical appeal to spare the world’s children from radioactive fallout and the fear of nuclear apocalypse.<sup>3</sup> They believed that mothers had a natural role to protect and nurture life and mobilised women who also felt a “special responsibility” to campaign for peace.<sup>4</sup> The organisers downplayed any political motivations, levelling equal blame at the governments of both the US and USSR. On 1 November 1961, six weeks after the initial call for action, an estimated 50,000 housewives and mothers took to the streets in 60 cities across the United States.

So goes the established story of the founding of Women Strike for Peace, a tale that provided activists with a shared historical reference to frame the organisation’s character.<sup>5</sup> In her work on the memory of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention on women’s rights, Lisa Tetrault explains that such origin stories “work to legitimate and unify the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; “11/1/1961 Original Call for WISP,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 1, Documents Describing WSP History; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 19; “Dagmar Wilson,” in *Peacework*, 1962-199; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, cover page.

<sup>3</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> “11/1/1961 Original Call for WISP,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 1, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>5</sup> Amy Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 496; “History of WSP by Barbara Drageaux, Portland WILPF Newsletter, 1994,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994; “Women – Strike for Peace, Fact Sheet, 1 January 1962,” CHM WFP Archives, 11-13, Lens S, Women for Peace (Strike); “Neighbors,” *Loudoun Times-Mirror*, 12 November 1987, AU WSP Archives, Box 2, Leadership, 1975, 1979, 1982-1987, 1990-1998, n.d.



messy contingencies of political struggle.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, organisational theorist David A. Whetten argues that the identity developed by a group often emerges from the “distinctive set of organizing principles authored by formative organizational leaders,” with the intentions of founding members proving crucial to the development of a unified group mentality.<sup>7</sup> Because of its importance in crafting a distinguishable image and identity, the way in which activists retell founding stories offers an insight into how they imagine the organisation they work for.

This is certainly true of Women Strike for Peace. Imbued throughout the founding tale of WSP are allusions to aspects that members took pride in identifying with.<sup>8</sup> The story of WSP’s 1961 formation, from the “exploratory meeting” of 21 September to the first public demonstration on 1 November, was often invoked in the organisation’s later years when activists felt the group needed to reaffirm its identity or boost its morale.<sup>9</sup> The first meeting in Dagmar Wilson’s living room showed WSP activists as a lone voice speaking out against violence on behalf of the world’s children, acting solely on their maternal concerns and without prior political or activist experience. The 1 November strike established WSP’s propensity for spontaneous, radical acts of dissent in spite of a prevailing consensus that frowned upon their brand of activism. WSP’s founding story separated it from other groups and allowed activists to craft a vision of theirs as unique, unexpected, and without precedent.

By emphasising desirable aspects of the past, retellings of foundation stories often neglect details that conflict with an established narrative, becoming more “myth” than history.<sup>10</sup> Tetrault argues “an origins story, once dominant, promotes the forgetting of struggles within the struggle, the debates and rivalries within the movement itself. Eventually, several competing narratives give way to a dominant collective memory, and having won, that story appears to tell itself, being self-evidently true.”<sup>11</sup> This same distortion appeared in the recollections of WSP activists as they held to a version of events that masked the more complex context surrounding the organisation’s founding. Far from the apolitical body they claimed to represent, WSP’s founders possessed years

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<sup>6</sup> Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Whetten, “Albert and Whetten Revisited,” 224-225.

<sup>8</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, x.

<sup>9</sup> “Journal of Women Strike for Peace Commemorating Eighteen Years of Conscientious Concern for the Future of the World’s Children,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>10</sup> Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

of experience leading peace, labour, and civil rights campaigns throughout the United States. Though identifying primarily as “housewives and mothers,” the cosmopolitan backgrounds of the first WSP members showed links to international pacifist networks and ongoing work in myriad social justice organisations, complicating the impression of WSP in its founding story. The version of events exalted by the group’s members, one which became established in historical works, therefore provides useful insight into the way in which activists framed their history to construct a particular narrative of their experience.<sup>12</sup> By assessing the complex background to WSP’s founding, this chapter highlights several key problems in established understandings of the organisation’s beginnings.

### **Women’s Antinuclear Protests Pre-1961**

In the second chapter of her profile of Women Strike for Peace, Amy Swerdlow chronicled the extensive efforts of women’s peace activists in the United States, placing WSP’s actions into a contextual history which, she claimed, activists had no prior knowledge of.<sup>13</sup> “The WSPers,” she explained, “would have been astounded to learn that they were following in the steps of millions of their foremothers who had, for over a century, petitioned, lobbied, and demonstrated against America’s major wars and military interventions.”<sup>14</sup> Intriguingly, Swerdlow’s overview did not document the antinuclear activism conducted by women in the years immediately preceding WSP’s formation. Her narrative of the late 1950s described women’s return to domesticity in the face of “ridicule and calumny” from “promoters of the new family ideology.”<sup>15</sup> Though she noted that WSPers “had been concerned about the bomb for many years,” the former leader explained that they had “followed the advice of baby experts” such as Benjamin Spock and Jerome Frank who “counselled mothers of young children to forgo full-time employment outside the home.”<sup>16</sup> By discussing the “prelude” to Women Strike for Peace with reference to women’s domestic responsibility, Amy Swerdlow allowed her study to depict the group’s first action as “something absurd.”<sup>17</sup> The formation of WSP appears incongruous with the historical context in this account,

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<sup>12</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 1; Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 252.

<sup>13</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 27-48.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 40-41.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

creating the impression that the organisation raised its moral opposition to nuclear weapons at a time of little public concern for the hazards of nuclear war. “The women seemed to have emerged from nowhere,” Swerdlow wrote.<sup>18</sup> Her assessment reflected the attitudes of many activists involved in the group’s founding. Philadelphia WSPer Ethel Taylor believed that, given contemporary events and attitudes, WSP embarked on an “unpopular” protest.<sup>19</sup>

The development of intercontinental ballistic missiles in the 1950s served to solidify traditional gendered notions of women’s domestic role. Nuclear arsenals threatened the continental United States in an unprecedented manner. The government responded with a civil defence program that called on the public to “prepare your home and your family against attack,” asserting that responsibility for defence rested “squarely on you.”<sup>20</sup> “Family fallout shelters” became a crucial part of a “triple line of defence.”<sup>21</sup> As housewives, it fell on women to prepare the home for attack. The government warned that “unless you, a responsible American woman, take action you are gambling with the safety of your family, and your country.”<sup>22</sup> Leaflets, such as “Grandma’s Pantry,” encouraged women to ensure they had sufficient stocks of food, water, and medical supplies in their homes, suggesting they make defence preparations a part of everyday chores.<sup>23</sup> Defence figures warned that only a well-maintained home could provide adequate shelter from attack. Katherine Howard of the Federal Civil Defence Administration suggested that preparing the home for war was “merely a prudent extension” of women’s maternal responsibilities.<sup>24</sup> Leo A. Hoegh, Director of the Office of Civil and Defence Mobilization, urged women to “recognize and foster civil defence action.”<sup>25</sup> Several works have since noted the effect civil defence had on gender roles, with Elaine Tyler May’s influential *Homeward Bound* explaining that as

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<sup>18</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 494.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, cover page.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Jacobs, *The Dragon’s Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 64-65.

<sup>21</sup> Winzola McLendon, “Nuclear War Is But an Error or Whim Away,” *The Washington Post*, 27 September 1960, B3.

<sup>22</sup> Laura McEnaney, “Atomic Age Motherhood: Maternalism and Militarism in the 1950s,” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, eds. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherrow de Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 452.

<sup>23</sup> Dee Garrison, “‘Our Skirts Gave them Courage’: The Civil Defense Protest Movement in New York City, 1955-1961,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 206.

<sup>24</sup> McEnaney, “Atomic Age Motherhood,” 449.

<sup>25</sup> McLendon, “Nuclear War Is But an Error or Whim Away.”

“experts called upon women to embrace domesticity in service to the nation” many responded in kind.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to their public image, the women who would form WSP did not subscribe to this notion of domesticity. Instead, they emerged as participants of an increasingly robust peace movement that began reclaiming its pre-war strength on the back of rising public fears over atmospheric nuclear testing. Although opposition to nuclear weapons remained somewhat muted following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear testing saw public qualms rise significantly in the middle of the 1950s. The ill-fated 1954 Castle Bravo nuclear test showered radioactive fallout over the Pacific Ocean and caused the death of a Japanese fisherman. The test became a watershed for peace activists as they galvanised into a cohesive antinuclear movement. Twenty million people subsequently signed a petition calling for a nuclear test ban.<sup>27</sup> New peace organisations formed, such as SANE, the Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA), and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), while historic groups such as the War Resister’s League (WRL), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and WILPF emerged from their post-war malaise to recruit new members.<sup>28</sup> By 1960 the annual Aldermaston Peace March in the UK saw 100,000 people participate, the *Boston Globe* reporting that “only the coronation in 1953 or VE Day in 1945 saw greater crowds around Nelson’s Column.”<sup>29</sup>

Many organisations within the movement remained male-dominated, but women began to develop criticisms of nuclear weapons based on their own experiences. Laura McEnaney argues that the “same maternalist-domestic ideology” used by the government to encourage civil defence efforts allowed mothers to become politicised against war.<sup>30</sup> Turning civil defence justifications on their head, women highlighted the hypocrisy of being asked to take responsibility for the protection of their children while arms build-ups threatened the existence of mankind. Evoking the maternal arguments of earlier women’s peace protests, they pointed out that radioactive fallout from weapons

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<sup>26</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 91-102; Jacobs, *The Dragon’s Tail*, 65; Dee Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon: Why Civil Defense Never Worked* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Garrison, ““Our Skirts Gave them Courage””; McEnaney, “Atomic Age Motherhood.”

<sup>27</sup> Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, 3; David Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma: 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 64.

<sup>28</sup> Wittner, *One World or None*, 40-42.

<sup>29</sup> Don Cook, “100,000 Fill Trafalgar Square to Protest Nuclear Weapons,” *Boston Globe*, 19 April 1960, 8.

<sup>30</sup> McEnaney, “Atomic Age Motherhood,” 453.

tests, particularly compounds of Strontium-90 and Iodine-131, caused a disproportionate health risk for children as it contaminated milk supplies. The presence of middle-class women, dressed in coats, high-heels, and clutching handbags, became a common sight at peace demonstrations and vigils.<sup>31</sup>

Pacifist arguments based on maternal concern appeared in the rhetoric of many women's peace activists. In March 1959, Dorothy Hutchinson, the future leader of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the United States, held a fast at the headquarters of the Atomic Energy Commission. She wrote a report of her experience, titling it "How a Mother spent Mother's Day far from her children – for the sake of all children."<sup>32</sup> In July 1960, a group of Canadians formed Voice of Women (VOW) to oppose nuclear weapons "in the cause of a universal motherhood."<sup>33</sup>

Nowhere did women most publicly express their aversion to the nuclear age than during New York City's annual "Operation Alert" civil defence drills. Protest occurred from the first drill in 1955, with famed Catholic pacifist Dorothy Day and the WRL each claiming credit for organising resistance.<sup>34</sup> In April 1959, Mary Sharmat and Janice Smith, unacquainted young mothers from the city, engaged in independent but simultaneous and identical protests against the drill. Leaving home with their children to "intentionally break the law," Sharmat and Smith refused to take cover for the required 15 minutes of the drill, explaining that they did not "believe" in civil defence and that they refused to raise their children "to go underground."<sup>35</sup> The young mothers, respectably dressed and pushing baby strollers, received a positive reception. The following year, Sharmat and Smith united to organise more than 1,000 people to resist the drill, 500 "well-groomed mothers and children" among them. Sharmat recalled, "our skirts gave them courage. We loaned out extra babies to bachelors who had the

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<sup>31</sup> John Wicklein, "Quakers in Times Sq. Easter Vigil Pray for Peace," *New York Times*, 1 April 1961, 1.

<sup>32</sup> David Hostetter, "House Guest of the AEC: Dorothy Hutchinson, the 1958 Fast at the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Domestication of Protest," *Peace and Change*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 2009): 134.

<sup>33</sup> Marie Hammond-Callaghan, "Bridging and Breaching Cold War Divides: Transnational Peace Building, State Surveillance, and the Voice of Women," in *Worth Fighting For: Canada's Tradition of War Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror*, eds. Lara Campbell et al. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 135; Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>34</sup> Scott H. Bennet, *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 207-216.

<sup>35</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 94-95.

misfortune to be childless.”<sup>36</sup> Jim Peck, a radical activist, described it as “the biggest civil disobedience peace action [ever] to take place in the United States.”<sup>37</sup>

Awareness of this existing context of women’s maternal antinuclear protests complicates the perception that WSP was an “absurd,” “unpopular,” and unique demonstration. Sharmat and Smith’s Operation Alert protests in particular presaged Women Strike for Peace and displayed unmistakable similarities to the tactics, rhetoric, and image later appropriated by WSP’s founders. Foreshadowing WSP’s later concerns for a “respectable” public image, Sharmat described picking out her outfit for her demonstration, taking care to appear respectable and dignified so as to offset any potential criticism for her civil disobedience. A member of SANE, she recalled feeling frustrated with the lack of the group’s urgency as many members declined her invitation to join her protest.<sup>38</sup> Sharmat called local newspapers to whip up publicity prior to her protest, finding the perfect method to convey her maternal fears by bringing her young son, Jimmy, with her.<sup>39</sup> Dee Garrison argued that “the women’s most brilliant innovation was their reliance on the image of protective motherhood to win public notice and support.”<sup>40</sup> The similarities between the Operation Alert demonstrations and WSP even caused the FBI to comment on Sharmat’s possible influence on the group’s formation.<sup>41</sup> Through the use of maternal rhetoric and image, the visible presence of children at the protests, and stress on making a non-political stand, Smith and Sharmat were able to “transform non-violent direct action, once the province of a small band of radicals, into an effective weapon of ridicule used by angry mothers to discredit the nuclear policies of the militarist state” some time prior to WSP’s first demonstration.<sup>42</sup>

Acknowledging the involvement of future WSP activists in antinuclear campaigns prior to 1961 also complicates the perception that they possessed no political activist experience prior to the group’s foundation. Ethel Taylor, in her memoir *We Made a Difference*, wrote of her life as an apolitical housewife in the years preceding

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>38</sup> “Mary Sharmat’s Statement Regarding Her Civil Defense Protest,” *PBS: American Experience: The Race for the Superbomb*. Accessed 3 November 2015.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/filmmore/reference/primary/sharmat.html>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Garrison, ““Our Skirts Gave them Courage’,” 215.

<sup>41</sup> “RE: General Strike for Peace, New York Committee,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566, Vol. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 115.

her leading role in WSP.<sup>43</sup> Dagmar Wilson claimed to have “never been in any way politically active before in my whole life.”<sup>44</sup> But the women who would become WSP’s most influential participants were well-informed and experienced in political activism by 1961. Many became politicised as children. Amy Swerdlow and Ruth Pinkson, for example, proudly noted their “red diaper” childhood and the political education they received from their communist parents.<sup>45</sup> Others developed an early sense of pacifism and social justice through their exposure to Jewish and Quaker religious communities.<sup>46</sup> Some women were pioneers for women’s rights, occupying leading positions in union and labour organisations during the depression.<sup>47</sup> Having been involved in pacifist and social justice campaigns both pre and post-WWII, these women seamlessly redirected their efforts to pursue a nuclear weapons test ban. They frequently lobbied Congress over American militarism throughout the 1950s. A number occupied leadership positions in WILPF.<sup>48</sup> Many of SANE’s local branches were formed by future WSP leaders who then served on the national board and executive committee.<sup>49</sup> Several worked for Adlai Stevenson’s presidential bid solely due to his opposition towards a test ban.<sup>50</sup> Some attended the Oslo conference on nuclear disarmament in the summer before WSP was founded.<sup>51</sup> From biographies, histories, and the testimony of activists themselves, a picture emerges of the substantial work performed by WSP members in peace and disarmament activities in the years leading up to 1961. Far from emerging “from nowhere,” Women Strike for Peace marshalled the talents and energies of experienced women peace activists already involved in a vibrant US peace and disarmament movement.

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, “Tainting the Antinuclear Movement,” 284.

<sup>45</sup> Swerdlow, “A Child of the Old, Old Left,” 249-256; Pinkson, “The Life and Times of an Elderly Red Diaper Baby,” 231-236.

<sup>46</sup> “Cora Weiss,” in *Peacework*, 37-46; Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*; “Elise Boulding,” in *Peacework*, 185-192; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 1; Melissa R. Klapper, “Those by Whose Side We Have Labored’: American Jewish Women and the Peace Movement between the Wars,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (December 2010): 636-658; Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace: American Jewish Women’s Activism, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> “Madeline Duckles,” in *Peacework*, 159-166; Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>48</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1965, ARS.0056; “Frannie: A Profile of Frances W. Herring,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-27, Frannie: A Profile of Frances Herring, 43-45; “Photo,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-35, Oslo Conference on Nuclear Weapons, 1961 May.

## **The First Meeting**

Antinuclear protests became a frequent sight as tensions between the superpowers increased throughout 1961. In April, the Easter Walk for Peace saw 300 people march 87 blocks through Manhattan, enduring rain and “slashing gusts” to deliver appeals for disarmament to the Soviet and United States missions to the United Nations.<sup>52</sup> President Kennedy’s public exhortations for a “peace race” encouraged activists. Frances Herring recalled that his stance “gave us something positive to work on,” while others felt that the President’s famed “Sword of Damocles” speech to the UN that warned of the threat of nuclear arms “was frankly an appeal to the people; if you want us to stop, then stop us.”<sup>53</sup> Historian Amy Schneidhorst notes that the presence of women on peace marches “rose substantially” throughout the year, until they comprised nearly half of all walkers in the Chicago area. This “high turn-out of women foreshadowed the women’s peace groups” that followed.<sup>54</sup> When the USSR announced its intention to resume atmospheric nuclear testing after a three-year moratorium, women across the United States were primed to respond to an appeal for a peace “strike.”

The first “exploratory meeting” of WSP took place in Dagmar Wilson’s living room in September 1961 and the tale of the gathering quickly assumed a fundamental place in the group’s founding myth. WSPers across the country frequently invoked the story of six close friends, “mere housewives” from Washington, D.C. who, though unacquainted with peace activism, determined that “it was time for women to speak out.”<sup>55</sup> The myth perfectly encapsulated the image WSP wished to appropriate, affirming its constituency as a close group of wholesome mothers concerned only for their children’s wellbeing. The meeting’s modest setting juxtaposed the later success of Women Strike for Peace.<sup>56</sup>

Amidst WSP’s founding emerged the legendary figure of Dagmar Wilson. Born in New York in January 1916, Wilson grew up in Europe. Her father, Cesar Searchinger, worked as a foreign correspondent for CBS radio based in Germany before moving to the UK, where Wilson attended a “progressive school” and followed her

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<sup>52</sup> “Pacifists March 87 Blocks Here,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1961, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1965, ARS.0056; “Speech for Kay Johnson’s Luncheon, 1-4-65,” SHSW WSP Archives, 2-12, Dagmar Wilson Speech Notes.

<sup>54</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> “Journal of Women Strike for Peace Commemorating Eighteen Years of Conscientious Concern for the Future of the World’s Children,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>56</sup> “Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace, 1962-2000, 1.



classmates by running “toward dissent against traditional ways of doing things.”<sup>57</sup> She developed an “upper-class British accent,” granting her an air of calm grace and respectability that proved helpful when she began speaking publicly on behalf of WSP.<sup>58</sup> Wilson attended the Slade School of Fine Art in London before moving back to the United States with her husband, Christopher, just prior to World War II. First living on a Missouri farm, they moved to New York for work before finally settling in Washington, D.C. Christopher, though a trained child psychologist, found himself working for the British Embassy as a commercial attaché while Dagmar pursued a much-loved artistic career, first as a teacher and graphic artist, and then as an illustrator of children’s books. When she started WSP, she was a mother to three daughters, Sally, Clare, and Jessica.

Her self-description as a “mere housewife” disguised Dagmar Wilson’s lifelong exposure to politics and pacifist ideas. Though not activists, Wilson’s parents and grandparents had direct involvement in the women’s suffrage movement. Betty Gram Swing, a militant American suffragist, was her mother’s best friend.<sup>59</sup> Dagmar’s concern for peace began in childhood and she later explained being brought up “as a pacifist.”<sup>60</sup> Her father in particular proved an important influence on Wilson’s political sensibilities. Cesar Searchinger was a naturalised American citizen from Germany and possessed an impressive intellect. Mastering the English language within a year of his arrival in the United States, Searchinger worked as a journalist for the *New York Post* and authored a commended book that explored the practicalities of peace in Europe.<sup>61</sup> His work allowed Dagmar to encounter high-level political ideas from an early age and she reflected that she had often “heard journalists talk in her house.”<sup>62</sup> Cesar Searchinger’s weekly radio broadcasts for CBS, a forerunner to Edward R. Murrow’s show “Hear It Now,” presented intense and informative broadcasts intended to educate the American public on international news, politics, and culture. He often covered “political events” such as the visit of Mahatma Ghandi to London and allowed his daughter unique access to such occurrences. Ghandi’s visit in particular “made a deep impression” on a young Dagmar Wilson. As a 16-year-old, she recalled being impressed

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Dudman, “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace,” *Washington Post Potomac*, 13 April 1966, SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-11, Biographical Data on Dagmar Wilson.

<sup>58</sup> McKay, “Margaret Ells Russell,” 121.

<sup>59</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Cesar Searchinger, *The Way Out of War* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940).

<sup>62</sup> Dudman, “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace.”

with his “principles for peace.”<sup>63</sup> Throughout her life she remained proud of an English essay she wrote about the occasion, “because I showed so much interest” in Ghandi’s pacifist ideas. Her husband’s job with the British Embassy ensured that she continued to have first-hand exposure to current international politics in her adult life.<sup>64</sup>

Wilson’s claim that she lacked any activist experience also masked the extensive campaigning she engaged in prior to WSP’s founding.<sup>65</sup> As her children entered school she became involved in the PTA, founding the Action Committee for School Libraries that, under her leadership, brought about the promotion of a library school program. Wilson also actively participated in the Children’s Book Guild, arranging a two-week book fair each year with the help of *The Washington Post*. She found herself in demand as a speaker and giver of “Chalk Talks” in local schools and neighbourhoods.<sup>66</sup> Outside of education, Wilson became increasingly involved in political activism and worked for the campaign for “Home Rule” in D.C. before her pacifist beliefs directed her towards the antinuclear movement.<sup>67</sup> As atmospheric nuclear testing became a public issue in the late 1950s, Wilson asserted her opinions in the national press. She wrote to *The Washington Post* in 1959 to express her concerns for the “disturbing” state of the debate over nuclear weapons testing.<sup>68</sup> She joined SANE when the group founded in 1957 and, although she did not rise to a position of leadership, Wilson served as secretary for the local D.C. branch and took part in lobby initiatives.<sup>69</sup>

The first stirrings of what would become Women Strike for Peace emerged through Wilson’s involvement in SANE. That group’s controversial efforts to expel communist sympathisers from its ranks alienated many of its members, including many future WSPers. It reaffirmed Wilson’s belief that the leadership of existing peace groups lacked the inclusivity and urgency she felt necessary in the current climate.<sup>70</sup> In 1961 she grouped together several of her female SANE colleagues and approached Executive Director Sanford Gottlieb to propose taking a more robust stand on fallout in milk, but Gottlieb felt reluctant to support the women’s concerns. Bertrand Russell’s arrest following a protest in London in September compounded the consternation already

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<sup>63</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, “Tainting the Antinuclear Movement,” 284.

<sup>66</sup> “Dagmar Wilson, Biographical Summary,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-11, Biographical Data on Dagmar Wilson; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>67</sup> Dudman, “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace.”

<sup>68</sup> Dagmar Wilson, “Radiation Exposure,” *The Washington Post*, 16 May 1959, 10.

<sup>69</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>70</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace* 16-18; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

provoked by the recent resumption of Russian weapons tests. Wilson felt that Russell's act of civil disobedience seemed "an unnecessary thing for a man of his stature, his reputation, and his wisdom to have to do." It made her "realize that we were in a desperate situation" and proved "the last straw."<sup>71</sup> She called a SANE director but, failing to encourage the organisation into making a show of support, she recalled pondering her frustrations by the phone. "I thought, I thought, I thought."<sup>72</sup> Wishing to deviate from the sluggish activities of other organisations, Wilson decided to gauge the level of interest in a one-off women's demonstration by hosting a meeting at her house.

Accounts of the meeting often described the founders of WSP as six close friends, but the women who participated in the first meeting were not so well-acquainted.<sup>73</sup> In correspondence with Amy Swerdlow in 1981, Wilson revealed that, rather than using her "Christmas card list," as claimed elsewhere, she received "all the names to call for the meeting" from her close friend and SANE colleague Margaret Russell, someone Wilson described as "much more politically active than I."<sup>74</sup> Russell sourced the majority of the meeting's participants from SANE, including Folly Fodor and Mary Chandler, while asking others to contact any activist they felt could aid the cause. Folly Fodor sent a call out to Quakers in the Philadelphia area, culminating in the attendance of influential peace activist and leader of the AFSC Lawrence Scott. Scott, in turn, asked Jeanne Bagby to attend. Eleanor Garst responded to a specific invite from Russell.<sup>75</sup>

Wilson confided in Swerdlow years later that, prior to the meeting, she had only met Margaret Russell, Folly Fodor, and Mary Chandler.<sup>76</sup> The remaining women connected solely through activist networks. Strengthening the view that Wilson intended to found WSP with experienced activists, the "exploratory meeting" also had Mary Sharmat in attendance, fresh from her much publicised efforts organising the

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<sup>71</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Sidney Lens, *Unrepentant Radical: An American Activist's Account of Five Turbulent Decades* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980), 292.

<sup>74</sup> "Dagmar Wilson's corrections for Amy Swerdlow's Draft Dissertation," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow's Dissertation with Dagmar's Biographical Corrections 1981; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.056.

<sup>75</sup> "Dagmar Wilson's corrections for Amy Swerdlow's Draft Dissertation," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow's Dissertation with Dagmar's Biographical Corrections 1981.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Operation Alert protests.<sup>77</sup> Donna Allen, another influential member of SANE, was unable to participate that night, but having been asked to attend, she considered herself a founding member.<sup>78</sup> Ten people attended the meeting in all, out of around 17 that were invited.<sup>79</sup> But only six were ever referred to as founders; Dagmar Wilson, Margaret Russell, Eleanor Garst, Jeanne Bagby, Mary Chandler, and Folly Fodor.<sup>80</sup>

The experience of those who attended the first meeting meant that WSP possessed substantial expertise from its outset. Most of the women belonged to “half a dozen of the usual organisations,” including WILPF, SANE, the League of Women Voters, and the United Nations Association.<sup>81</sup> Originally from California, Folly Fodor joined SANE on arriving in D.C. when her husband began working for the US Labour Department. A professional artist, Fodor travelled extensively across Europe in her youth and had previously formed an “antinuclear mothers’ group” following the birth of her daughter in 1956.<sup>82</sup> She was described as one of the more “politically oriented of the first group.”<sup>83</sup> Mary Chandler also worked for SANE and, heavily pregnant at the time of WSP’s founding, utilised her leadership skills to become an international representative of the group over the next ten years.<sup>84</sup> Jeanne Bagby had committed herself to various activist causes throughout her life. An “early hippie,” Bagby displayed her solidarity for civil rights causes by living in integrated areas, while also railing against “man’s threat to the natural environment” and the use of pesticides. Amy Swerdlow noted that Jeanne Bagby had long been “active in foreign policy dissent and

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<sup>77</sup> “Women for Peace Exploratory Meeting, 21 September 1961,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Treaty.

<sup>78</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>79</sup> “Letter from Folly Fodor to Loraine Flox, 27 December 1961,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Nov 1, 1961 Strike, Media Coverage, Aftermath, Org Corr; “Women for Peace Exploratory Meeting, 21 September 1961,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Treaty.

<sup>80</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 19; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.; “RE: Janice Holland Peace Awards, 21 September 1962, at the Presidential Arms Hotel,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 1, Literature – 1962, 1822 Mass Ave NW Wash D.C.

<sup>81</sup> “Women’s Strike for Peace (WSFP),” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA – FBI Files: 100-39566, Vol. 1, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 63-65; “Letter from Folly Fodor to Loraine Flox, 27 December 1961,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Nov 1, 1961 Strike, Media Coverage, Aftermath, Org Corr.

<sup>83</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.

<sup>84</sup> “4/29/67, New Orleans, Louisiana,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA – FBI Files: 100-39566, Vol. 18, 3; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.

other social justice causes” prior to her involvement in WSP.<sup>85</sup> She became “naturally” interested in nuclear disarmament and the issue of radiation.<sup>86</sup>

Of the “six founders,” Margaret Russell and Eleanor Garst appeared the most politically active. Russell played an instrumental role in getting the organisation off the ground, utilising her contacts within activist networks to bring the first WSPers together. A Canadian national with an illustrious past as an academic researcher, Russell participated in the Halifax Co-Operative Society, promoting grassroots liberal democracy, before a “world tour” between 1936 and 1937 led her to adopt “an increasingly critical anti-war view of international affairs.” She married in her late forties before settling in Washington, D.C. She began serving on the local SANE executive soon after. In a detailed history of Margaret Russell, Ian McKay described her as “a seasoned political historian long fascinated with empire, democracy, and grassroots mobilization.” Contrasting the image that WSPers advanced in their origins myth, McKay claimed that Russell never succumbed to domesticity or the “ideology of motherism,” and never “wavered in her life-long reverence” of and public campaigning for liberal rights and freedoms. She became an integral organising figure for WSP, ultimately in charge “of all arrangements” for the group’s first march.<sup>87</sup>

Eleanor Garst, like Margaret Russell, brought a lifetime of political activist experience to Women Strike for Peace. “A pacifist at the age of ten,” Garst actively opposed World War II with her then husband Merritt. Following her divorce she undertook executive roles for many organisations, including the American Association for the United Nations, the United World Federalists, the International Centre, the Race Relations Council, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Garst also founded the Los Angeles branch of SANE before moving to D.C. and joining the branch there. She incessantly wrote letters to members of Congress and organisations such as the AEC throughout the 1950s, lamenting their inability to curb the arms race.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 65.

<sup>86</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 65.

<sup>87</sup> McKay, “Margaret Ells Russell,” 119-134; “Issues for Discussion No. 5, 22 October 1963,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-10, Ephemera; “Information: Women’s March for Peace, Nov 1. 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 1, Literature – 1961, 1413 29<sup>th</sup> St NW & 7616 14<sup>th</sup> St NE Wash D.C.; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 65.

<sup>88</sup> “Letter from Lewis Strauss to Eleanor Garst, 19 June 1958,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 1-1, General Correspondence, 1958-1962.

As a self-educated woman, Eleanor Garst took pride in researching and producing her own pacifist and anti-draft materials and wrote articles for the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Reporter*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*.<sup>89</sup> She drafted the initial call that arose out of the September meeting and took credit for writing much of the “essential methodology” that influenced WSP’s stance. In fact, Garst sought the major credit for forming WSP. Having tried to start her own antinuclear protest action a month earlier, she claimed that she “was able to suggest to a handful of Washington women at Dagmar Wilson’s that it might be possible to stage a one-day protest action.”<sup>90</sup>

Minutes of the September meeting were not taken, but discussions led to the drafting of a letter that called for “every woman to join in a Women’s Strike for Peace – and to get her friends and neighbours to do likewise.”<sup>91</sup> Sent to contacts throughout the US, the Washington founders concisely expressed the ideas motivating their one day “strike” while casting an image of themselves they felt would encourage interest in the action. The letter’s tenets became WSP’s founding image. It focused on individual responsibility by declaring “we’re not asking anyone to sign anything, join anything. Details in your town are up to you.” The appeal also humanised the Cold War and women’s ability to contribute to peace, saying that “every individual has learned techniques for resolving human differences. Can governments do less? Government is us.” Finally, WSP’s founders expressed their belief that “it is the special responsibility of women – who bear the children and nurture the race – to demand for their families a better future than sudden death.” They alluded to a traditional, stereotypical, and socially-acceptable image of women’s domestic role, invoking an identity of inexperienced housewives by claiming to be “appalled at our own audacity, for we’re just ordinary people, not experts.”<sup>92</sup> The call aimed to achieve the support of a broad base of women within the US and confirmed the image the Washington founders wished their action to assume. The call became a key part of WSP’s founding myth. Ian McKay described it as a “remarkable letter.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 59-63.

<sup>90</sup> “Eleanor Garst,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, Leadership, 1975, 1979, 1982-1987, 1990-1998, N.D.; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.

<sup>91</sup> “Draft of Letter (for individual salvation and signature and note if desired) to Accompany Leaflet, 22 September 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>92</sup> Lens, *Unrepentant Radical*, 292.

<sup>93</sup> McKay, “Margaret Ells Russell,” 123.

## **Regional Founding Stories**

The Washington organisers sent their appeal to known activists throughout the US. The backgrounds of those who received the letter demonstrate this. In New York, Ruth Gage-Colby, an internationally respected peace activist and accredited correspondent at the United Nations, received an invite, as did Valerie Delacorte, a wealthy philanthropist and civil defence opponent. Ethel Taylor, a leader of SANE and WILPF in Philadelphia, responded to the appeal while Edith Villastrigo, a friend of Dagmar Wilson's in SANE, joined in Washington, D.C. Janet Neuman, a director of WILPF who assisted in the resettlement of Jewish German refugees during World War II, also contributed to the first few weeks of planning.<sup>94</sup> San Francisco Women for Peace founder Alice Hamburg described the initial formation of WSP using an interesting turn of phrase. She suggested that known activists "were asked to start a group" in their areas, contrasting the impression that the founders issued a generic call for participants.<sup>95</sup> Some claimed that Wilson intended WSP to be an "outgrowth of SANE" that utilised the skills of women activists known to the founders.<sup>96</sup> Even those who responded to WSP's call as "housewives" acknowledged their existing commitments to community activist organisations such as the Emma Lazarus foundation.<sup>97</sup>

Stories describing the founding of Women Strike for Peace often focus solely on events in the capital, but while the D.C. women's influence naturally deserves attention, the Washington-centric narrative of WSP's birth leaves no regional context for the interest the strike received nationally. Although WSP's founding story suggests the D.C. women encouraged previously apolitical housewives to act, their appeal resonated most strongly among existing women's peace networks. In fact, owing to their ongoing efforts, many local leaders had cause to claim that they had already "founded" local iterations of the organisation before it became a national phenomenon.<sup>98</sup> Many across the country had already engaged in activities that later became the hallmark of Women

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<sup>94</sup> "Janet N. Neuman: Peace Activist," *The Washington Post*, 26 March 1992, C4; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 5, 189.

<sup>95</sup> Hamburg, *Grass Roots*, 172.

<sup>96</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>97</sup> "Letter from Faye Charness to Margaret Russell, 9 October 1961," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 6, 1961; "Letter from Marion P. Bassett to Dagmar Wilson, 24 October 1961," SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 1-1, General Correspondence, 1958-1962.

<sup>98</sup> "Alice Hamburg Introducing Madeline Duckles at AFSC Program 'Two Lifetimes of Peace Work,' 10/27/2000," UCB WFP Archives, 17-19, Duckles, Madeline, and Duckles, Vincent, 1985, n.d.; "Hazel's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration, 6/23/83," UCB WFP Archives, 17-22, Grossman, Hazel, and Grossman, Aubrey, 1967-2000.

Strike for Peace.<sup>99</sup> In Portland, OR, Carol Urner had already marshalled 200 women into a “non-organisation” that called on each individual to act as a “human dynamo.” By the time Dagmar Wilson called the first meeting together in Washington, D.C., Urner’s group met the governor of Oregon, telegraphed their senators, and wrote to Congress. Such was her influence that newspaper clippings of her success were passed around Wilson’s living room on 21 September. Her efforts left a glowing impression on Eleanor Garst in particular, who became enamoured with her style of grassroots organising. Even the name of Urner’s group, “Women for Peace,” suggests that it was a “precursor and a model” for Women Strike for Peace that simply became absorbed into the national actions sparked in Washington.<sup>100</sup>

A thriving environment of peace activism existed in all of the areas most responsive to WSP’s initial call. In San Francisco, Dr. Frances Herring received the “strike for peace” appeal. A stalwart member of WILPF, Herring had considerable influence among the peace movement in the Bay Area. After completing her PhD, she wrote a report in 1958 on “The Development and Control of the Nuclear Industry in California” for the Bureau of Public Administration in Davis.<sup>101</sup> WILPF subsequently made Herring a leading spokesperson and she developed a close friendship with revered disarmament figures Linus and Ava Pauling. Her expertise earned her an invitation to the Conference of Sixty Scientists Against the Spread of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Norway, in 1961. In the summer prior to WSP’s formation, Frances Herring wrote to friends that a burgeoning “communication network” of women’s peace activists existed in San Francisco Bay that, she hoped, would soon coalesce into a formidable campaign group.<sup>102</sup> The women Herring brought together to form the local WSP affiliate were not only experienced peace activists, but close friends.<sup>103</sup> Alice Hamburg and Hazel Grossman, also members of WILPF, first worked together to protest against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) on the steps of the San Francisco City

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<sup>99</sup> “Letter from Marion P. Bassett to Dagmar Wilson, 24 October 1961,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 1-1 General Correspondence, 1958-1962.

<sup>100</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 2, 4; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 62-63; Kathy Robinson, “Alliance for Nuclear Accountability Award to Carol Urner on 5 April 2011,” Women’s Action for New Directions. Accessed 3 November 2015.  
[www.wand.org](http://www.wand.org)

<sup>101</sup> “Frannie: A Profile of Frances W. Herring,” UCB WFP Archives, UCB WFP Archives, 17-27, Frannie: A Profile of Frances Herring, 43-45; “Photo,” UCB WSP Archives, 18-35, Oslo Conference on Nuclear Weapons, 1961 May.

<sup>102</sup> “Letter from Frances Herring to Philip Noel-Howard, 17 July 1961,” UCB WSP Archives, 18-35, Oslo Conference on Nuclear Weapons, 1961 May.

<sup>103</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056.



Hall on “Black Friday,” 13 May 1960.<sup>104</sup> The protest foreshadowed WSP’s later encounters with HUAC. Madeline Duckles, a long-time member of the AFSC and another influential member of WILPF, joined them.<sup>105</sup>

In Los Angeles, Mary Clarke and Kay Hardman utilised their activist experience to bring people together for WSP.<sup>106</sup> These women benefitted from an upsurge in grassroots liberal political activism that emerged in California during the 1950s, as highlighted by Jonathan Bell.<sup>107</sup> Respondents to the strike appeal in Los Angeles could readily engage with an existing middle-class leftist element that “mirrored the growth of New Left activism in universities.”<sup>108</sup> Such activists had already carried “scathing” attacks on American militarism, saw the Cold War “as a distraction,” and found popular support for “respect for cultural differences in foreign policy.”<sup>109</sup> Rather than engaging inactive women in Los Angeles, the D.C. women simply interacted with these existing networks.<sup>110</sup>

The women who would become Chicago Women for Peace collaborated in various campaigns during the late 1950s, with the Hyde Park neighbourhood a frequent scene for peace marches. Shirley Lens, the area’s future leader, worked in WILPF and is described as a “publicly positioned” radical who, after controversially resisting the Broyles Loyalty Oath for the Chicago Teacher’s Union in 1955, courted the media’s attention. She made activist connections around the world, travelling with her husband and fellow labour and peace activist Sidney. Figures like Lillian Hayward and Mimi Harris also drew on their earlier endeavours to benefit WFP in Chicago. After receiving

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<sup>104</sup> “Hazel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration, 6/23/83,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-22, Grossman, Hazel, and Grossman, Aubrey, 1967-2000; “Fire Houses Douse 200 S.F. Rioters,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1960.

<sup>105</sup> “Alice Hamburg Introducing Madeline Duckles at AFSC Program ‘Two Lifetimes of Peace Work,’ 10/27/2000,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-19, Duckles, Madeline, and Duckles, Vincent, 1985, n.d.

<sup>106</sup> “Letter from Janet Stevenson to Margaret Russell, 12 October 1961,” WSP Archives, A3, Box 6, 1961; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 24; Robbie Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream: Communism; Anticommunism, and the U.S. Peace Movement, 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 166.

<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Bell, “Social Democracy and the Rise of the Democratic Party in California, 1950-1964,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (June 2006): 497-524.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 514.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 524.

<sup>110</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 24.

the message from the Washington women, they ensured women in the city were well prepared for public actions.<sup>111</sup>

Several branches formed in the weeks following WSP's 1 November strike, but also marshalled experienced activists. Seattle Women Act for Peace (SWAP) began on 16 November to coincide with President Kennedy's visit to the University of Washington-Seattle. Anci Koppel, SWAP's leader, taught French in her native Vienna before moving to Seattle with her husband, businessman Charles Koppel. The depression "laid the foundation" for her interest in politics. She joined the peace movement before the Hiroshima bombing turned her onto nuclear issues.<sup>112</sup> Thorun Robel introduced herself to activism at a pacifist demonstration against fascism before World War II, intervening in a struggle between a police officer and a fellow student. "On impulse," Robel "whacked the policeman with her purse and was immediately arrested." Both Koppel and Robel came under intense scrutiny during the McCarthy era for their Communist Party affiliations. Between them they possessed the skill and experience to ensure that SWAP became a staple of the Seattle peace scene well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A short distance away, Mabel Proctor ensured that Tacoma Women for Peace also contributed to activities in Washington State.<sup>113</sup> She supported WSP having been "actively engaged in peace groups for twenty three years," mainly with the United World Federalists. She proudly stated being "one of the women who voted first the year women first had the right to vote."<sup>114</sup>

It is, perhaps, little surprise that WSP's appeal resonated most strongly in areas with close affiliation to the US nuclear weapons program. In San Francisco, WFP rallied those concerned with the nearby Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the University of California-Berkeley, both of which conducted research for the military.<sup>115</sup> In Washington State, the Hanford Nuclear Reactor and nuclear-equipped

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<sup>111</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 6-20; "Women Join Today in Plea Against War," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 November 1961, 3; "Reds Fire Massive Bomb: Estimate at 30-50 Megatons by AEC," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 October 1961, 1; Lens, *Unrepentant Radical*, 180-200, 292-293.

<sup>112</sup> "Biographical Notes, 31 August 1981," UWS SWAP Archives, 1-36, Speeches and Writings, 1955-Feb 1982.

<sup>113</sup> "Thorun Ingibjorg Johannson Robel," UWS SWAP Archives, 2-34, Robel, Thorun; Susan Paynter, "Can Brigade Still Acting Up in Behalf of World Peace," *Seattle Times*, 26 January 1998, B1; "A Fond Farewell, Thorun Johannsson-Robel," UWS SWAP Archives, 2-34, Robel, Thorun.

<sup>114</sup> "Letter from Mabel Proctor to Trudi Young, 22 September 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1967-1970.

<sup>115</sup> Robert E. Ficken, "Grand Coulee and Hanford: The Atomic Bomb and the Development of the Columbia River," in *The Atomic West*, eds. Bruce Hevly and John W. Findlay (London: University of Washington Press, 1998), 21-38; Gregg Herken, "The University of California, the Federal Weapons

Trident submarines stationed around Puget Sound brought the nuclear age close to home, while Chicago Women for Peace directed scorn at University of California for its involvement with the Manhattan Project.<sup>116</sup>

By engaging with existing networks to build its initial membership WSP mirrored the early stages of many social activist groups, but acknowledging this in this case reveals an undervalued aspect of the group's historical image.<sup>117</sup> Highlighting the backgrounds to the founding of local branches does not necessarily dispel the notion that WSP mobilised previously inactive "housewives" around the country, yet it does suggest that the group's founding myth paid insufficient attention to the groundswell of women's peace activism throughout the United States. Additionally, a focus on events in Washington, D.C. overlooks the way in which activists recalled WSP's founding with reference to their own branches. In San Antonio, for example, a group of women who joined WSP in 1970 acknowledged the beginnings of the national organisation, but also commemorated their own founding. "About fifty women gathered together to discuss the Indochina War and its destructive consequences," they recalled, and "from this meeting sprang Women for Peace."<sup>118</sup>

### **Crafting an Image**

The first public appeals made by WSP described the group of women involved as inclusive, internationalist, and symbolic of all women, but the first WSPers represented a narrow cross section of US society. Every contributor to the first meeting could consider themselves affluent relative to the rest of the population and respondents around the country certainly came from the American upper-middle class. Many of the first WSPers achieved "sufficient security" financially to pursue full-time careers as anti-war activists, a common characteristic representative of the typical WSPer.<sup>119</sup> The affluence of WSP activists resembled the backgrounds of women involved in other

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Labs, and the Founding of the Atomic West," in *The Atomic West*, eds. Bruce Hevly and John W. Findlay (London: University of Washington Press, 1998), 119-135; Daniel Pope, "Antinuclear Activism in the Pacific Northwest: WPPSS and Its Enemies," in *The Atomic West*, eds. Bruce Hevly and John W. Findlay (London: University of Washington Press, 1998), 236-254; Hamburg, *Grass Roots*, 172-174.

<sup>116</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Friedman and McAdam, "Collective Identity and Activism," 161-163.

<sup>118</sup> "Example of Mailer Sent to Trudi Young from San Antonio Women for Peace, 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Texas (1970).

<sup>119</sup> McKay, "Margaret Ells Russell," 121.

women's peace organisations, such as WILPF.<sup>120</sup> Historian Melissa Klapper described the lives of women's peace activists as more closely resembling "that of the executive director of a modern-day NGO" than of that "the simple middle-class housewife."<sup>121</sup> Although publicly exhibiting a neutral attitude to politics, WSP's first members harboured strong liberal values and traditionally voted for Democratic candidates. Several came from staunch communist or socialist backgrounds. Others, such as Folly Fodor and Ruth Pinkson, had previously organised for Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace in 1948.<sup>122</sup> Rarely, if ever, did WSP members express fondness for Republican Party figures.<sup>123</sup>

Additionally, there was little diversity in terms of race and a predominantly white membership represented WSP throughout its life. Coretta Scott King consistently attended WSP events during the 1960s, but an inability to attract more women of colour caused significant problems.<sup>124</sup> Members often recognised the difficulty they had in recruiting minority women. Nevertheless, a substantial number of WSP's founding members were either first or second-generation immigrants from western or eastern Europe. Women Strike for Peace did not use religious allusions to frame its protest, but the majority of its members were influenced by the social justice and pacifist teachings of their Quaker and Jewish upbringings, something traditionally prevalent in women's peace groups.<sup>125</sup>

Later recollections and the material that emerged from the first meeting show that the participants fully understood the necessity to craft an image that would rouse the wider public. With the combined experience of their shared activist pasts, WSP's founders possessed considerable political acumen. They were media-savvy and, aware of the need for a consumable public image, began crafting rhetoric and identifying tropes that would forever be associated with the organisation. Dagmar Wilson initially offered suggestions for actions under a banner of "women for peace," but "everyone

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<sup>120</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, 194.

<sup>121</sup> Melissa R. Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*, 105.

<sup>122</sup> Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol," 512; Pinkson, "The Life and Times of an Early Red Diaper Baby," 233.

<sup>123</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>124</sup> "My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson," UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 3; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 27-28; "Keynote address given by Dagmar Wilson to the National Conference of Women Strike for Peace in Chicago (Evanston) Illinois, 9 November 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1968, Winnetka IL.

<sup>125</sup> Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*; Klapper, "Those by Whose Side We Have Labored," 636-658; Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, 22-24.

groaned.” “What we need,” Eleanor Garst recalled commenting, “is something that will jar people out of their lethargy.”<sup>126</sup> Public meetings and marches seemed too staid and failed to inspire. The idea of a strike, the action that became the hallmark of WSP, arose not from the founders themselves but from the AFSC’s Lawrence Scott. Heavily influenced by the Greensboro sit-ins of the previous year, Scott suggested that a “strike” may have some appeal without alienating the public.<sup>127</sup> Participants initially felt reluctant to advocate a strike, feeling that the term was “so negative.” But the meeting soon rallied behind the idea as attendees sensed the “dramatic impact and the media potential of such an action.”<sup>128</sup>

Direct action tactics were a rare but growing feature of social activism in the period. In addition to the protests of civil rights activists, the newly-established Committee for Nonviolent Action also publicised the use of demonstrations and marches, marking the 12th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing with a demonstration outside of the atomic testing grounds in Nevada. Such protests had a notable influence on WSP’s founding members. Swerdlow explained that the CNVA created “a model for direction action by ordinary citizens in opposition to nuclear testing that would be followed by WSP.”<sup>129</sup>

The idea of holding a strike had no connotations for WSP’s critique of the arms race. Although some of the founders and many respondents had experience of labour organising during the Depression, the notion of a strike found favour purely because of its performative impact. It related solely to the idea that women could, for one day, demonstrate their importance by refusing to play their expected role in a society complicit in nuclear brinksmanship. Amy Swerdlow explained that there existed “a good deal of insensitivity to class differences and economic inequalities” from WSP’s leaders and argued that “class was totally overlooked by all of us.”<sup>130</sup> The strike intended to empower those who took part while highlighting the role of women in American society.

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<sup>126</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 17.

<sup>127</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 6.

<sup>128</sup> “History of WSP by Barbara Drageaux, Portland WILPF Newsletter, 1994,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>129</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 43.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

The call served to exaggerate the group's maternal sensibilities in order to appeal to a mass constituency of American women and deflect any potential criticism of the group's politics. Drafted by Garst, WSP's appeal foregrounded the domestic role and maternal outlook of Women Strike for Peace, likening conflict between capitalism and communism to that experienced by "husbands and wives, parents and children."<sup>131</sup> Activists certainly identified themselves as mothers, but many WSPers nevertheless "adopted a maternal or feminine image with a constituency in mind, whether to impress political leaders and traditional women or to create a collective identity as women."<sup>132</sup> Testimony of several activists in their later years confirm this supposition, as they "hoped that our conventional attire would allow women, seeing us on television or reading about us in the news, to identify with us, despite the fact that we were engaged in actions that might seem a tad unorthodox."<sup>133</sup> Dagmar Wilson reflected that "we were educated, you know, we were literate," and held down professional roles, but opted to speak "much more out of our everyday experiences" in order to evoke moral outrage at the threat to life.<sup>134</sup>

WSP also attempted to craft a founding image that veiled activists' links to existing peace groups. Its founders' belief in the obsolescence of existing peace organisations provided motivation. By the late 1950s, some felt that the historic Women's International League for Peace and Freedom had an "inability to attract younger women," and, while admiring the commitment of its "grey-haired stalwarts," many nevertheless saw WILPF as outdated, treating it "with mixed respect and amusement."<sup>135</sup> A similar distaste for SANE also manifested itself in WSP's outlook. SANE appeared "unwilling to move in the direction its women members wished it to go," while the purge of communist members that occurred in 1960 soured attitudes towards its leadership.<sup>136</sup> People joining Women Strike for Peace in its first few weeks expressed a general mood of displeasure at the overly hierarchical, listless, outdated organisations they currently belonged to.

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<sup>131</sup> "Eleanor Garst – Draft of Letter to Accompany Leaflet, 22 September 1961," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>132</sup> Schneidhorst, "Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women," 379-380.

<sup>133</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 34-35.

<sup>134</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>135</sup> "Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?" SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 29.

<sup>136</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056; "Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?" SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.

Forming in direct response to the perceived inadequacies of peer organisations, the founders of WSP acknowledged the necessity to publicly separate the group from other existing campaigns. They recognised that it needed to appear new and dynamic if it hoped to exploit the inadequacies of other groups and encourage activists to join in their action. In a letter to SANE's National Executive Homer Jack, Kay Hardman spoke of WSP's belief that older groups were destined to fail. She claimed that SANE "may be in the tradition of the unfortunate groups, whose purpose was so politically limited, philosophically narrow and expediently-based that a change in the political balance of power in the world caused immediate death."<sup>137</sup> In comparison, Hardman emphasised the ways in which WSP considered itself unmatched, suggesting that there were "deeper divisions" between the two groups than those she outlined. During discussions at the 21 September meeting, planners clearly wished to give themselves a unique presence. Eleanor Garst summarised a discussion that took place as planning reached its conclusion. "So far it doesn't sound very dramatic, or very different from what the Friends an SANE and the WIL do. How can we get across that it is very different?"<sup>138</sup> The idea to call WSP's 1 November activities a "strike for peace" arose from this desire, as did essential identifying features of the group, such as its non-hierarchical structure.

The crafting of WSP's image is perhaps best exemplified by the manner in which Dagmar Wilson became the group's figurehead. Wilson could certainly take credit for having initially agitated for WSP's formation and her actions remain central to the history and memory of the group. Ethel Taylor called her "the mother of it all" and insisted that from the group's inception, "Dagmar was our leader."<sup>139</sup> Frances Herring spoke of her "amazement" for the work Wilson did in bringing WSP together.<sup>140</sup> Activists across the US identified chiefly with Wilson, venerated her opinion on the issues they faced, and sought to include her name on any literature or letters used in their campaigns. Her personal image and attitude perfectly framed the moderate, apolitical, maternal protest sought by the Washington founders. Although the organisation strongly distanced itself from any notion of hierarchy and governance in its

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<sup>137</sup> "Letter from Kay Hardman to Homer Jack, 6 January 1963," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, British Peace Groups.

<sup>138</sup> "Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?" SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 6.

<sup>139</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 155.

<sup>140</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056.

first decade of activity, Wilson was undoubtedly its leader. She herself later recognised becoming a “mythical” figure to others within WSP.<sup>141</sup>

Yet recollections of WSP’s formation neglect the process the founders went through to select an appropriate figure to head their protest. Initially reluctant to develop any leadership to govern the strike, the Washington women eventually buckled to the demands of media and potential members that “there should be a spokesman. Someone who’s colorful, good copy.”<sup>142</sup> Dagmar Wilson’s consummate shyness originally ruled her out of leadership. She feared the possible “jail, loss of income, and ostracism” that such a position could bring. But, intriguingly, none of the other founders offered an image conducive to WSP’s stance. Folly Fodor’s feminism was too overt, Jeanne Bagby appeared too much of a “hippie,” and Margaret Russell was deemed to have too “masculine” an appearance.<sup>143</sup> Eleanor Garst, an ideal candidate based on her political convictions and leadership potential, felt her status as an unmarried, twice-divorced woman in contemporary American society would detract from the group’s manifesto. Wilson appeared the most wholesome of the Washington founders and “came closest to fulfilling the late fifties/early sixties ideal of nuclear family wife and mother.”<sup>144</sup> Garst called her “ideal: with a handsome husband, three pretty daughters, a house in the ‘right’ area, Georgetown.” Wilson remained reluctant. She disliked the spotlight, confiding “I’m scared to death of having to speak.” The others reassured her that she had “something vital to say. You’re photogenic, with a good voice and manner. What more do you need?” “Confidence!” she retorted.<sup>145</sup> After “some sleepless nights” and with an absence of a comparable alternative, Wilson decided, reluctantly, to accept the responsibility. Her “selection” as the face of WSP reinforces the notion that the group’s image was carefully crafted from its foundation and, therefore, complicates the established perspectives evident in the history and memory of the group.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968.

<sup>142</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 11-13.

<sup>143</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 65.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 11-13.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



## The First Strike

WSP's founders set the date of the strike as 1 November, giving themselves only six weeks to prepare. In other parts of the country women received letters in early October, leaving even less time to gather support and plan their activities. In D.C., organisers held an initial rally in a small community centre a week before their planned demonstration. In other parts of the country, women sent out swathes of correspondence, but they had little evidence to suggest their efforts had attracted substantial interest. Eleanor Garst wrote of the D.C. women's "panic" over the "possibly weak response."<sup>147</sup> Several spoke of the many "sleepless nights" they endured in the lead up to the march, finally reconciling that "If I find myself out on the street alone on 1 November, I may be a fool – but at least I'll be a fool trying."<sup>148</sup> The night before she took to the streets, Garst penned "an open letter to the world's women." In a final bid to publicise the march, she tied her children's Halloween experience into the context of nuclear war. "Is this all I have to give my children and yours?" she asked, "a bit of sweets and a faint hope that their world will be intact tomorrow?"<sup>149</sup> Fearing a negative reception to the next day's demonstration, she signed off by saying "tomorrow I will walk with the women who Strike for Peace. It's unladylike, undignified, unbecoming. So is radioactive death for the planet."<sup>150</sup>

The organisers need not have shown such nerves, as thousands emerged the following day in support of the "Women's Strike for Peace." Many took part in demonstrations and marches, while others visited local government officials and spoke out in support of President Kennedy's "peace race." The news media endorsed the maternal image and domestic identity of participants, showing surprise at the apparent spontaneity of the event while reporting on the respectable, joyful, and overtly feminine activities. *The Washington Post* spoke of "some 500 school girls, Government workers, mothers and grandmothers together with a score of children, half a dozen men and a Collie named 'Candy.'"<sup>151</sup> Women pushing baby strollers cemented the perception that

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> "Halloween 1961 – An Open Letter to the World's Women, Eleanor Garst, 31 October 1961," SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 1-1, General Correspondence, 1958-1962.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Marie Smith, "500 Women Picket for Peace," *The Washington Post*, 2 November 1961, D1; "2,000 in L.A. Join Women's Peace Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 November 1961, B1; "Women Stage Peace Strike Thruout U.S." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 November 1961, 4; "300 Women Protest Here Against Nuclear Testing," *New York Times*, 2 November 1961, 5; "Thousands of Women Join in Plea for Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 November 1961, B3.

WSP was an organisation of “folksy,” politically inexperienced mothers.<sup>152</sup> Many recollections speak to the occasion, rather than the actions involved, noting that women spent “their all on new hats and a fur coat, wanting so badly to impress the world.”<sup>153</sup> Delighted with the response, leading WSP figures immediately began spinning the day into a central part of the organisation’s folklore; the perfect display of the irreverent, respectable, and feminine critique of the nuclear arms race that came to epitomise Women Strike for Peace.

As with many of the details surrounding WSP’s first few months, the narrative describing the group’s first demonstration served to increase its reputation. For example, the number of those who marched was frequently inflated to boost WSP’s significance in historical productions.<sup>154</sup> Initial reports struggled to gauge the number of people involved. Even organisers of the day’s events exclaimed their astonishment with the turnout, telling their contacts that, “response everywhere far exceeded expectation.”<sup>155</sup> Eventually WSPers settled on an oft-quoted figure; 50,000 women in 60 cities, a statistic Amy Swerdlow used to frame her study.<sup>156</sup> But WSPers often embellished this number in later recollections. A “highlights of WSP history” list from 1980 claimed that “100,000 women from 60 cities came out of their kitchens and jobs to demand ‘END THE ARMS RACE – NOT THE HUMAN RACE,’ and WSP was born.”<sup>157</sup> In 1965 Dagmar Wilson claimed that, actually, “half a million mothers” poured into the streets for the marches.<sup>158</sup> Still further escalation occurred in a 1997 retrospective of WSP history, as Seattle Women Act for Peace claimed that the “national strike brought out one million women.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Swerdlow, “The Politics of Motherhood,” 2, 250.

<sup>153</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>154</sup> “Report to Women Around the United States of America, on the Women’s Strike for Peace, November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct-Dec 1961; “Women for Peace, Chicago Area,” UCB WSP Archives, 1-19, WSP National and Other Cities Beginnings; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>155</sup> “Report to Women Around the United States of America, on the Women’s Strike for Peace, November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct – Dec 1961; “Women for Peace, Chicago Area,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-19, WSP National and Other Cities Beginnings.

<sup>156</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 15; Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 493; “Women Strike for Peace KPFK Commentary, May 1969,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 2, Literature – 1969, 2140 P St NW Washington, D.C.

<sup>157</sup> “Highlights of WSP History,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>158</sup> “Speech for Kay Johnson’s Luncheon, 1-4-65,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-12, Dagmar Wilson Speech Notes.

<sup>159</sup> “Jan 1997 Anci’s Words at the Occasion of SWAP’s 36<sup>th</sup>,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-39, Speeches and Writing – Misc, April 1990-1998, n.d.; “Report to Women Around the United States of America, on the Women’s Strike for Peace, November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct – Dec 1961.

Embellishment of the turnout for the first demonstration was not incongruous with the group's use of membership figures to inflate its successes. Though publicly claiming hundreds of thousands of active members, in private WSP often reversed the logic, saying WSPers "were only a few thousand in the peace movement" in order to make its influence on government appear all the more remarkable.<sup>160</sup> Yet there is a suggestion that the figure of 50,000 was itself an overestimation of the strike's turnout. Through her research, Swerdlow "tallied the highest numbers I can find reported by the strike organisers," but "even with this most generous method of estimation," she could only arrive at a figure "no higher than twelve thousand."<sup>161</sup> Intriguingly though, she consigned her true findings only to the footnotes of her work while referring to the total of 50,000 in her descriptions of the strike. Swerdlow explained, candidly, that "the number fifty thousand became part of the founding legend of WSP," but she did not directly query the accuracy of this total.<sup>162</sup>

WSPers' believed that the success of their initial demonstration suggested that they had gathered the support of American housewives for an inherently good cause through their appeal and image. But, as social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow explains, the presence of a grievance alone is not sufficient to trigger collective action.<sup>163</sup> The attitude of most observers served to highlight the skilful planning of the group's experienced organisers. WSP's centring of a moral argument against nuclear weapons testing through an emphasis on the protection of children turned the day's actions into a "human interest story" and led many to "become immediately involved."<sup>164</sup> Its "third-camp stance," denouncing both the US and the USSR, proved popular to those who wanted to tackle the existence of nuclear weapons, rather than advance a political agenda.<sup>165</sup> WSP also shrewdly balanced its position on feminism by creating a female-only space for protest while publicly distancing itself from notions that it wished to upset the established social order.<sup>166</sup> Finally, the group's insistence that it did not wish to organise members, but instead provide "a vehicle for individual effort," enticed many who had become disillusioned with "the dogma and discipline

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<sup>160</sup> "Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace, 1962-2000, 1.

<sup>161</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 247<sup>n</sup>1.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*; Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb*, 534<sup>n</sup>35.

<sup>163</sup> Sidney Tarrow, "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meanings through Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, 177.

<sup>164</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 21; Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>165</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 11.

<sup>166</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 125.

required by sectarian groups.”<sup>167</sup> Each of these tenets, central to WSP’s formation, arose from the deft political perception held by the group’s founding members.

But the group’s evident similarity to other organisations and its place within a wider context of ongoing peace activism suggests that there was nothing particularly new about the 1 November strike for peace. WSP’s appeal for participatory democracy certainly preceded the same celebrated plea made by Students for a Democratic Society in 1962, but its call for spontaneous protest and decentralised organisation reflected the direct action tactics of contemporary groups such as the CNVA.<sup>168</sup> Its campaign against nuclear weapons testing, and even the specifics of warnings over milk supplies and an appeal on behalf of American children, reflected similar campaigns produced by SANE in previous years. Likewise, suggestions that WSP developed a uniquely moderate, feminine, middle-class image must recognise the similar constituency and rhetoric professed by WILPF and SANE, two groups WSP desperately wished to distance itself from.<sup>169</sup> As such there are further explanations for the particular support Women Strike for Peace received at this specific time.

The useful contacts boasted by WSP’s experienced founders provided one particular advantage over other contemporaries.<sup>170</sup> The involvement of figures like Janet Neuman and Donna Allen brought the eager support of journalists such as Art Hoppe of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *London Observer* correspondent Joyce Eggington, and *Guardian* journalist Sophia Wyatt.<sup>171</sup> Their positions allowed reports and editorials of the demonstrations to reach a large audience, providing WSP with much positive publicity. Frances Herring and Ruth Gage-Colby, meanwhile, informed government contacts around the world of WSP’s plans, including the British MP Anne Kerr and future Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant. Gage-Colby used her affiliations to deliver a speech to the United Nations in which she extolled the virtues of Women Strike for Peace. Embellishing the group’s influence somewhat, Gage-Colby

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<sup>167</sup> “Women – Strike for Peace, Fact Sheet, 1 January 1962,” CHM WFP Archives, 11-13, Lens S, Women for Peace (Strike); Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 14, 18; “Mothers Plan to March,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1961, D1; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 13.

<sup>168</sup> McKay, “Margaret Ells Russell,” 123.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace: Neutrality, the Test Ban, and the Freeze* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 117.

<sup>170</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 18; Sophia Wyatt, “One Day Strike for Peace,” *The Guardian*, 4 December 1961, 6; “Letter from Joyce Eggington to Dagmar Wilson, 9 November 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 6, 1961; Hamburg, *Grass Roots*, 172.

affirmed that she sought “to expand round the world the marvellous grass roots movement Women Strike for Peace begun by Dagmar Wilson of Washington and already spread to the major American cities and London, Paris, Moscow, Delhi and Tokyo to name but a few cities abroad.”<sup>172</sup> Frances Herring later spoke of her embarrassment at the way in which Gage-Colby reported on the organisation, “because it was so glowing that I felt it was very misrepresentative of our strength.”<sup>173</sup> Acknowledging the connections boasted by early organisers suggests that WSP prospered because its founders were a uniquely talented and energetic group of activists possessing the skills, experience, and benefits necessary to succeed. To downplay their earlier contributions and describe only their professed image as apolitical housewives with a “folksy” appeal vastly undervalues the talents of WSP’s first activists.<sup>174</sup>

A further explanation suggests that the march’s success rested simply on the unexpectedly fortuitous timing of the strike, a factor almost entirely out of the control of the day’s organisers. Circulating their appeal after the USSR had unilaterally broken the moratorium on weapons testing allowed WSP to benefit from a global context of increased international tension that earlier protests perhaps lacked. But further events that occurred in the weeks between the meeting on 21 September and the planned 1 November strike gave additional relevance to WSP’s stand. The crisis over the Berlin Wall that began in the summer escalated considerably. Arguments over access to East Berlin in the final week of October 1961 led to a tense stand-off between American and Russian tanks.<sup>175</sup> Newspapers continued to publish editorials on the crisis the day WSP marched.<sup>176</sup>

Arguably the most important factor in the coverage afforded WSP was a Russian nuclear test that occurred just two days before the strike. On 30 October, the USSR tested the 50 megaton “Tsar Bomba.” Creating the largest man-made explosion in history, the test galvanised worldwide revulsion to nuclear weapons testing and provoked widespread support for a test ban. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, a stalwart critic of nuclear weapons, expressed “grave concern” and reaffirmed his belief in a test ban, saying that “obviously some kind of formal agreement or treaty is

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<sup>172</sup> “Ruth Gage-Colby Address to United Nations, New York City, 12 December 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 6, 1961.

<sup>173</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1965, ARS.0056.

<sup>174</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 23.

<sup>175</sup> Ellen Lentz, “Mood Is Tense Along the Berlin Wall,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1961, E5; “Soviet Tanks Quit Berlin Wall; U.S. Follows Suit, Tension Eases,” *Boston Globe*, 29 October 1961, 61.

<sup>176</sup> Roscoe Drummond, “The Chance We Must Take In Berlin,” *Boston Globe*, 1 November 1961, 8.

necessary to stop nuclear tests.”<sup>177</sup> The UK, the third party to ongoing treaty negotiations, offered its firm commitment to a test ban and denounced the explosion to the UN as “a crime against humanity.”<sup>178</sup> Fears grew with the possibility that the test’s fallout could affect American citizens from Washington State to the Great Lakes.<sup>179</sup> Public protest followed on 31 October. The day before WSP’s strike, hundreds took to the streets around the world to voice their opposition to nuclear testing.<sup>180</sup> Protesters, SANE members among them, invoked the threat to children while picketing the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C.<sup>181</sup> Children and expectant mothers were encouraged to attend marches in London.<sup>182</sup> A protester threw a brick through a window of the Soviet Mission to the UN in New York, “painted with a skull and crossbones on one side, the legend ‘for my unborn’ on the side and ‘50 MG’ on its edge.”<sup>183</sup>

The Tsar Bomba test, more than any other event, allowed WSP’s strike to be explained within the context of a surge in public and political opposition towards nuclear weapons testing, grounding the group’s actions in the protests that had occurred just the day before.<sup>184</sup> *The Washington Post* reported that WSP “followed the pattern of previous outburst against the Soviet tests of the last two months.”<sup>185</sup> The strike was not even the only reported incident of women’s peace protest on 1 November. Anne Stadler, executive secretary of the Platform of Peace from Seattle, reportedly “stole a march” on WSP by delivering a plea for the cessation of nuclear testing to the Russian Embassy before their demonstrations. Accompanied by SANE’s Sanford Gottlieb, Stadler even secured a meeting with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, and utilised the same maternal rhetoric espoused by WSPers who marched later.<sup>186</sup> Demonstrating on 1 November, a date selected entirely arbitrarily by WSP’s Washington founders, proved unexpectedly fortuitous in galvanising public and media support for the group’s protest.

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<sup>177</sup> Julius Duscha, “West Denounces Soviet Blast; Protest Rallies Held in Europe,” *The Washington Post*, 31 October 1961, A8.

<sup>178</sup> William Fulton, “Ridicules Reds as Show-Offs in U.N. Debate,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 November 1961, 3; Sam Pope Brewer, “Britain Urges Firm Test Ban,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1961, 16.

<sup>179</sup> “Russian Fall-Out Drifting Over U.S.,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1961, 16; “Fallout Rain May Hit Oregon Today; U.S. Told There’s No Need for Alarm,” *Boston Globe*, 28 October 1961, 3.

<sup>180</sup> “Protests Against Super-Bomb Staged in Several Countries,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1961, A12.

<sup>181</sup> “100 Picket Red Embassy To Protest Bomb Tests,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1961, A12.

<sup>182</sup> “Arrests Near Embassy: Demonstration Against Bomb,” *The Guardian*, 31 October 1961, 2.

<sup>183</sup> “Brick Marked ‘50 MG’ Strikes Soviet Mission,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1961, 16.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*; “Women Join Today in Plea Against War,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 November 1961, 3.

<sup>185</sup> “Protests Against Super-Bomb Staged in Several Countries,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1961, A12.

<sup>186</sup> Marie Smith, “Takes Peace Plea to the Soviets,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 1 November 1961, D1.

## **WSP's Founding Myth and the Memory of Activists**

WSP's famous image and identity clearly emerged from the tactical considerations of the group's founding members, but efforts to maintain this image historically resulted in complications and confusions in the memory of activists. Allusions to members' prior disengagement with political issues and the reduction of the contemporary context of peace activism faced particular problems. To make a nuanced critique of the arms race, WSP's founders foregrounded the group's identity with members' maternal and domestic roles to argue that protection and nurturance of children required them to speak out against nuclear weapons. They felt that the image of "housewives and mothers" would create the impression that members were "inexperienced" in political activism, granting their protest legitimacy and authenticity while shielding WSPers from critics of their actions. But this identity did not necessarily exist in the way WSP's founders claimed. As both Joanne Meyerowitz and Stephanie Coontz have observed, the perception that the 1950s heralded a strictly domestic and apolitical prescription for American housewives often arises from a misreading or nostalgic assessment of the period.<sup>187</sup> Melissa Klapper referred to the "simple middle-class housewife" as a "mythological creature."<sup>188</sup>

The two roles of "housewife and mother" and political activist are certainly not mutually exclusive. Maternal justifications inspired many social campaigns of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly among the peace movement. However, WSPers sought to affirm the founding myth of Women Strike for Peace by separating the two identities, producing several contradictions within their own pronouncements. Even after leaving WSP, activists continued to claim that they were politically inexperienced before joining the organisation. In Ethel Taylor's *We Made a Difference* she spoke of her life as a housewife uninvolved with political campaigns while simultaneously acknowledging her influential and energetic commitment to groups such as WILPF,

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<sup>187</sup> Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (March 1993): 1455-1482; Joanne Meyerowitz ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic, 2000); See also, Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (September 1998): 581-606.

<sup>188</sup> Klapper, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace*, 105.

SANE, and the American Jewish Congress.<sup>189</sup> Dagmar Wilson once described both her disinterest in politics and her lifelong commitment to pacifism within the same interview.<sup>190</sup>

WSP's attempts to distance itself from contemporary groups also fed into recollections. WSPers depicted themselves as a group of "daring dissenters," somewhat lessening the significance of the existing peace movement and raising their involvement in "helping to create the climate of opinion" that resulted in international treaties.<sup>191</sup> On the 20th anniversary of WSP's first strike, Eleanor Garst further separated WSP's protest from the activities of other contemporary groups. Of WSP activists, she wrote that "today, the tactics they chose seem routine; but in 1961 they were startling."<sup>192</sup> Amy Swerdlow described the attitudes many WSPers expressed in the group's formative period, claiming that "we saw ourselves as new."<sup>193</sup> She frequently distinguished between WSP and groups that shared many ideological and historical traits, such as Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>194</sup>

Attempts to reconcile the claims that WSPers were politically inexperienced with the evidence of their past activities caused notable problems in historical accounts of the organisation. Amy Swerdlow, for example, provided substantial background information of the Washington founders, noting their involvement in peace and social justice campaigns before the formation of WSP. But while acknowledging that "the women who founded WSP, appearances to the contrary, were not political neophytes," Swerdlow also spoke to the organisation's founding myths.<sup>195</sup> Discussing the "prelude" to the group's first strike, she claimed that "less than half of those who participated in WSP had already joined a peace or civil rights group."<sup>196</sup> She wrote that "none of the strike organizers and very few of the women who joined them" had familiarity with the peace movement's history.<sup>197</sup> This view reflected the adamant pronouncements of other

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<sup>189</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvi.

<sup>190</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>191</sup> "Resume of Two Decades of Women Strike for Peace Actions," AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>192</sup> "Eleanor Garst to Ruth Pinkson re: History of WSP for 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>193</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, 233.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 27.



WSP members. The desire of WSPers to reinforce their group's founding myths produced evident problems in the history and memory of the group's formation.<sup>198</sup>

One explanation for the simultaneous acknowledgment and dismissal of previous experience suggests that WSPers made a clear distinction between political *activism* and political *awareness* while recalling their peace work. Although involved in various endeavours, women depicted themselves as merely aware of issues prior to WSP, rather than active campaigners. Claiming that prior experience represented only awareness elevated the importance of Women Strike for Peace, as it suggested that it was the first organisation that excited women enough to become actively involved in peace work. Contemporaneously, it may have been the case that women were simply not sure what counted as political activism. Famed social and political activist Bella Abzug, an early participant in WSP, expressed frustrations that members in the early 1960s seemed unable to accept that the work they did constituted activism.<sup>199</sup> Yet even in later recollections there appeared some confusion. An interviewer in 1985 asked East Bay WFP activist Rose Dellamonica what the difference was between those that had an awareness of political issues and those that acted on their concerns, but she could not provide an answer.<sup>200</sup> Amy Swerdlow too appeared hazy on the distinction. Speaking about her family, she asserted “none of my children are politically active,” while revealing that all her children had participated in antinuclear demonstrations or organised political groups.<sup>201</sup>

It is unlikely that involvement in groups such as WILPF and SANE produced political awareness without making women politically active. Likewise, describing WSPers' prior knowledge of peace issues as mere “awareness” severely undervalues their activities before joining Women Strike for Peace. Nevertheless, the decision to publicly state opposition to weapons testing through involvement in a mass protest appeared a significant and empowering one for many who became WSPers. Women Strike for Peace did not simply move women from a position of “awareness” to “activism,” but from arguably “safer” forms of protest, such as letter-writing and lobbying, to direct action. As Bert Klandermans observed in *The Social Psychology of Protest*, “to become a participant in movement activities requires more than being a

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 21, 22.

<sup>199</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 61.

<sup>200</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>201</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

sympathizer.” Of the various levels of interest an individual can evince towards a campaign, the act of joining a demonstration is a significant one that many often retreat from. Whereas “signing a petition is so modest an activity,” to take part in WSP’s first strike was “more demanding” and “obviously” a “major step even among sympathizers.”<sup>202</sup> WSP famously made efforts to ensure that its protests were “a first” for many who participated. Leaders saw it as a vehicle for those who wished to protest but had never felt comfortable to do so publicly.<sup>203</sup> Some of the pronouncements of those willing to take part in the group’s first strike certainly intimated that to do so was a significant step.<sup>204</sup> This transformation was significant for WSP members and the organisation’s role in the process therefore retained an understandably important place in the life stories of activists.

Another explanation suggests that activists simply lacked historical knowledge of the women’s peace movement. Throughout *Women Strike for Peace*, Amy Swerdlow not only suggested that substantial differences between WSP and other groups existed, but also claimed that activists themselves were oblivious to prior instances of women’s protest. She used this trope to suggest that members possessed no political activist experience, had not been influenced by other organisations, and, accordingly, that WSP alone had politicised those who joined. Other groups, therefore, had little influence. She provided several examples to support her claim, among them the suggestion that WSP’s use of “identical arguments” to earlier protesters was done unknowingly.<sup>205</sup> Swerdlow concluded her assessment of this phenomenon by asserting that a “lack of knowledge about history” was a “handicap” that prevented WSPers from connecting with the long heritage of women’s peace activism.<sup>206</sup>

The claim that WSP lacked historical consciousness is intriguing as members, in fact, frequently invoked the history of women’s activism in their protests. Just prior to the HUAC hearings in 1962, 35 WSPers intended to place a wreath at the statues of pioneering women’s rights activists Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony. The wreath read “to the brave women who made America listen. We too

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<sup>202</sup> Bert Klandermans, *The Social Psychology of Protest* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 64-65.

<sup>203</sup> “Cora Weiss,” in *Peacework*, 42.

<sup>204</sup> “Elise Boulding, ‘Who Are These Women?: A Progress Report on a Study of the Women Strike for Peace,’ 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 8.

<sup>205</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 28.

<sup>206</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Charles Chatfield, “At the Hands of Historians: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era,” *Peace and Change*, Vol. 29, No. 3&4 (July 2004): 486.

shall be heard” and attempted to “identify WSP symbolically with the women in America’s past who had been persecuted and reviled for their political militancy and who had triumphed.”<sup>207</sup> At the second national conference in June 1963, WSPers made comparisons between themselves and the abolitionist “antislavery women” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>208</sup> In the same month, Ruth Gage-Colby wrote in the *New World Review* that “people seem to think that the Women Strike for Peace movement is something new under the sun.” Wishing to correct public perceptions, she wrote that “women from the beginning of time have hated war and longed for peace.”<sup>209</sup>

Beyond this recognition of their place in history, many WSPers had direct experience of peace and social justice activism stretching back before World War II. A substantial amount of interest arose from women involved with WILPF, a group supposedly blessed with history and tradition in comparison to Women Strike for Peace.<sup>210</sup> These women brought with them a keen awareness of women’s peace history. Several future WSP activists had actually been a part of the history Swerdlow claimed they were unaware of. The leading role Mary Sharmat played in WSP’s first few months complicates perceptions that WSP lacked awareness of earlier women’s peace efforts, while Dagmar Wilson often publicly acknowledged being influenced by earlier groups. In December 1961, she wrote to female members of the UK’s Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, thanking them “for having started a movement which was largely responsible for the birth of the Women Strike for Peace here.”<sup>211</sup>

Swerdlow’s own lamenting of the group’s dismissal of peace history was perhaps more representative of her own personal sensibilities than an appraisal of most WSPer’s historical knowledge. Explaining WSP’s historical consciousness, she retold one instance of her “ignorance” that continued to cause her “shame and pain.”<sup>212</sup> Meeting revered WILPF activist Gertrude Baer in 1962, Swerdlow opined that she had not given her “the respect and admiration I have since come to feel for her important role in women’s peace history.” Initially dismissing Baer as “an opinionated old woman,” Swerdlow’s later studies enlightened her to such events as the 1915

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<sup>207</sup> Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 108.

<sup>208</sup> “LA WSP thoughts regarding the ‘statement of purpose’ to be discussed at Champaign-Urbana,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1963, Champaign IL.

<sup>209</sup> Ruth Gage-Colby, “Women Strike for Peace,” *New World Review* (June 1963): 5.

<sup>210</sup> Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 49.

<sup>211</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to Mrs. L. John Collins, 14 December 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 6, 1961.

<sup>212</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 9.

International Congress of Women at the Hague and WILPF's 1932 Geneva conference, in which Baer played a significant role. Coming to learn a wealth of history previously unknown to her, she grieved that WSP originally "regarded history as irrelevant."<sup>213</sup> But, by speaking in such personal tones, Swerdlow appeared primarily to chastise herself for her own naivety. This contrition further emerged through her oral interview with Judith Porter Adams in 1985, during which she frequently asserted her belief that a "sense of history is very important" for activists.<sup>214</sup> This certainly problematizes the separation WSPers expressed feeling from existing peace movements.

Yet a fuller understanding of WSP's founding myth must acknowledge the modesty with which activists referred to their past, a feature of many recollections. Judith Porter Adams recognised that the people she interviewed often claimed that they "didn't do that much" while recommending other participants who had more influence.<sup>215</sup> Amy Swerdlow also observed an absence of self-promotion in her interviews with former activists, noting that "the lack of personal aggrandizement and lack of opportunism is incredible."<sup>216</sup> Dagmar Wilson frequently received acclaim for the modesty and reticence with which she held her place in the group's history.<sup>217</sup> These attitudes suggest that individual experiences mattered less than the activities of the organisation as a whole. Women Strike for Peace was an instrumental part of its members' lives, to the extent that that activism preceding 1961 held less relevance to their life stories than later campaigns. In recounting their past, therefore, WSPers claimed to have been comparatively inactive or apolitical to their later selves. The contemporary peace movement, in their view, was much improved after WSP organised, influencing how activists recalled the context of the group's founding. Inaccuracies in historical accounts did not necessarily arise from conscious manipulation of the past, but were instead influenced by the affinity WSPers felt towards their group. The feeling that it had a significant impact, both on the peace movement and on their own lives, saw WSPers alter their recollections in a way that

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>214</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>215</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>216</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>217</sup> "Letter from Leona Grant to Dagmar Wilson, 10 December 1964," SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-7, Correspondence of Dagmar Wilson 1961-1964; "Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?" SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 12-13.

inflated WSP's significance, contributing to the perceptions displayed in the group's founding myth.

WSP's founders claimed that their group embodied certain characteristics out of a desire to craft an image conducive to their protest. Through early pronouncements and calls for participants emerged a maternal image that downplayed the political and activist pasts of organisers and veiled their involvement with other groups in peace movement. These characteristics became instilled in a founding story whose significance for activists transcended the initial tactical considerations its founders addressed, becoming a founding myth that informed the identity of activists and framed their future recollections of Women Strike for Peace. WSP's founding myth consequently served to mask several significant details of the group's formation. Clearly, the group occupied a significant place in the life of its activists, empowering them to act on their concerns. But recollections intending to highlight the organisation's importance neglect the context of WSP's founding. A distinct group of experienced activists came together within WSP and, though certainly seeing themselves as housewives and mothers, their image nevertheless concealed their possession of vital skills that allowed their organisation to prosper. While the backgrounds of these women are more well-known now, contradictions in recollections caused considerable problems for the history and memory of Women Strike for Peace. These conflicts prefigured the disputes and troubles that WSP would experience throughout its life as activists attempted to stay true to the group's founding values.

## **2. “Make Way, They're Coming!”: Nonorganization and the First Successes, 1961-1963**

The 1 November demonstrations brought overwhelming praise for Women Strike for Peace. News reporters exclaimed that “you couldn’t want better” than the goals sought by the group, while politicians began rallying to WSP’s cause.<sup>1</sup> Officials, heeding the demands of the peace strikers, wrote to President Kennedy and praised the “outstanding women in this area” for their “sincerity, their dedication to this purpose.”<sup>2</sup> WSP had inspired an array of activities. In Washington, D.C., they picketed the White House and the Russian Embassy; in Philadelphia, activists called their senators to a challenging question and answer session in a city courtroom; Chicago Women for Peace marched through the city; San Francisco strikers confronted elected officials; and hundreds visited the governor of California in Sacramento. Subsequent newsletters and correspondence expressed a desire to maintain the momentum sparked by the first demonstration’s mobilisation of activists. One participant in Los Angeles wrote to Margaret Russell to explain that they “want the Women's Strike for Peace to continue.”<sup>3</sup> In order to do so, it needed to progress from a one-day strike into a functioning organisation.

From its first march until the end of 1963, Women Strike for Peace achieved many of its objectives. Following the initial strike, WSPers organised another well-received and highly-publicised demonstration in Washington, D.C. that drew thousands to the capital and received a public endorsement from President Kennedy. WSP flew peace activists to Geneva to confront test ban negotiators directly and irreverently faced down a potentially ruinous challenge from the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1962. The ratification of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in September 1963 capped their efforts. The treaty not only validated the activists’ work, but allowed WSPers to extol the memory of their experiences with a narrative of success.

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<sup>1</sup> “Women's Peace Strikers Urged to Drop Stand on Disarmament,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 November 1961, B5; Dagmar Wilson, “Tainting the Antinuclear Movement: HUAC and the irrepressible Women Strike for Peace,” 285.

<sup>2</sup> “Letter from Councilman Robert V. McKeen to President Kennedy, 24 November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct – Dec 1961; “Letter from Councilman John J. Dunn to President Kennedy, 6 November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct – Dec 1961; “Letter from Alvin R. Leonard, M.D., Director of Public Health to President Kennedy, 1 November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct – Dec 1961.

<sup>3</sup> “Letter from Lucy Adelman to Margaret Russell, 12 November 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 1, Beginnings LA WISP 1961.

But as WSPers attempted to instil the values of its one-off strike into a sustained organisational effort, they encountered numerous problems. The informal, uncoordinated organising strategy the group adopted did not function as smoothly as often claimed, while numerous grassroots voices called for a more rigorous structural framework to stymie the growth of an informal leadership clique. Demanding their autonomy, decentralised regional hubs began to develop contrasting attitudes to those of the national organisation and branches in other parts of the country. Although it remained united over its single-issue concern for disarmament, WSP left its position on specific policies unclear and failed to resolve confusion over its formal take on other social justice concerns. The sense that WSP activists embraced a common memory of the period can be problematized when considering the competing opinions that arose over these issues. Disagreements over the group's self-proclaimed successes are particularly revealing. Established narratives describing the success of WSP's encounter with HUAC and its influence on the passage of the Partial Test Ban Treaty can be augmented considerably by examining these conflicting recollections.

### **“Organizing a ‘Nonorganization’”**

WSP's founders had no intention to continue their activities beyond the 1 November strike, appearing reluctant to assume responsibility for the coordination of further actions.<sup>4</sup> Planners had not considered what sort of an organisation would manifest in the strike's aftermath. As an organiser of the first activities in San Francisco, Frances Herring recalled that the idea to develop the “Women's Peace Strike” into an organisation emerged “almost as a side-effect” of the day.<sup>5</sup> The decentralised organisational system proved popular, delegating authority to local activists and allowing open participation without requiring people to register or commit to future actions. Sensing that they had developed momentum, participants wished to “continue on the same loosely-knit basis,” only “on a national scale.”<sup>6</sup> Los Angeles members affirmed that “groups get so involved in tinkering with the machinery” they lose sight of their purpose. “Let us communicate and even coordinate,” they argued, “but let us never

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<sup>4</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 18.

<sup>5</sup> “Expanded Version of the Talk Given November 16, 1986 at the WSP and WILPF 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, by Frances Herring,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-26, Herring, Frances, 1991-1993.

<sup>6</sup> “Letter from Lucy Adelman to Margaret Russell, 12 November 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 1, Beginnings LA WISP 1961.

‘corporate.’”<sup>7</sup> Reacting to the hierarchies of SANE and WILPF that women perceived “as a roadblock” to action, they wished to distance and distinguish Women Strike for Peace from other groups.<sup>8</sup>

WSPers expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of attention paid by nuclear strategists to the voices of individual Americans and proclaimed the desirability of participatory democracy as a tool to include the public in the antinuclear debate. By advancing such a view in 1961, WSP preceded the same appeal made by SDS in the 1962 Port Huron Statement. Its views, argues Estepa, “would have fit comfortably” within that text.<sup>9</sup> The group attempted to extend this belief into its manner of organising, adopting a non-hierarchical, consensus-based structure that valued individual attitudes. Amy Swerdlow referenced the comments of SDS member Micky Flacks, who believed that “WSP’s ‘unorganization’ format, developed in 1961 and 1962, played a key role in shaping the later anti-war movement and the women’s liberation movement. ‘It was never given enough credit for this,’ she stated in a 1980 interview.”<sup>10</sup>

Swerdlow observed that WSP grew “around the same time” as other anti-hierarchical organisations, but explained that WSP was “exceptional.” While it “shared with SDS and SNCC the belief” in “a new participatory political format,” she contrasted Women Strike for Peace with those groups who “made much of their named and acclaimed leaders.”<sup>11</sup> “The women of WSP,” Swerdlow argued, “unlike the young men in SDS, gloried in their ‘outsider’ standing.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the group took its cues from existing civil rights organisations such as SNCC, which was founded a year earlier. WSPers responded to the successful use of direct actions tactics adopted by the Greensboro sit-in activists and were inspired by the rising presence of organisations advocating citizen participation.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, though members predominantly acquired experience through involvement with SANE and WILPF, WSP was informed

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<sup>7</sup> “Los Angeles WSP Statement at Ann Arbor Conference, 9-10 June 1962,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI.

<sup>8</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day in the Capitol,” 495.

<sup>9</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 6.

<sup>10</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 52.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 237.

<sup>13</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 6.



by the example of civil rights activists while engaging with New Left ideas of organising.

Such was the disdain for hierarchical structure that women struggled to define exactly how WSP operated, refusing to describe themselves as members or as a part of an organisation.<sup>14</sup> Instead, many described it as a movement.<sup>15</sup> An attempt to publicise its composition as unique and desirable emerged in a commemorative journal to mark WSP's 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary. "WSP is a grassroots movement," the journal explained, "we are not an organisation."<sup>16</sup> Throughout her life, Dagmar Wilson maintained that her actions had sparked a movement, reasserting her view that WSP was a "peace movement activated by women" in a 1989 interview.<sup>17</sup> Other leaders concurred.<sup>18</sup> But women's peace historian Harriet Hyman Alonso criticised the use of this term. Rather than a movement itself, she asserted that WSP represented "one organisation" acting within "a long-lived movement whose roots reach back to the abolitionists."<sup>19</sup> In subsequent years, the term "nonorganization" became a trademark term, deployed as a chapter title by Amy Swerdlow that discussed the group's efforts to coordinate.<sup>20</sup> The terminology remains problematic, but shows that WSP activists were reluctant to consider themselves as part of an organisation.

In every case, members spoke assuredly and favourably about their unorganised efforts and mocked claims that WSP was coordinated.<sup>21</sup> But such comments mask the basic structures that started to develop almost immediately after the 1 November strike. The maintenance of efforts beyond the first demonstration necessitated some coordination and, while appearing spontaneous, most of WSP's activities arose from

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<sup>14</sup> "Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Trudi Young, 9 November 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>15</sup> United States Congress House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement (Women Strike for Peace and Certain Other Groups): Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Seventh Congress, Second Session, December 11-13 1962, Including Index* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 2148.

<sup>16</sup> "Journal of Women Strike for Peace Commemorating Eighteen Years of Conscientious Concern for the Future of the World's Children," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>18</sup> "To the Editor," *Loudoun Times-Mirror*, 15 November 1979; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>19</sup> Alonso, "Review," 1773-1774.

<sup>20</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 70-96.

<sup>21</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2074, 2902; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 111; Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 172.

meticulous, laborious, and collaborative planning efforts.<sup>22</sup> The issue was made clear by Berkeley, Marin, San Francisco, and Oakland Women for Peace branches:

While denying any formal organisation we are steadily and rapidly becoming interconnected not only in the public mind but concretely by systems of “key persons,” national newsletters, common demonstrations, etc. For us to continue to overlook the responsibilities of national organization is to build a dangerously precarious house of cards.<sup>23</sup>

In the absence of national direction, local activists implemented their own conceptions of “nonorganization.”<sup>24</sup> By 8 November, East Bay WFP had adopted a “minimum effective structure,” comprising a coordinating committee with representatives.<sup>25</sup> Although it they did not adopt the plan, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut branches cooperated to propose an area structure involving selected representatives and a Central Coordinating Committee.<sup>26</sup> San Francisco adopted its own version.<sup>27</sup> Research committees dedicated to issues such as disarmament, radiation, and political action became instrumental to WSP’s activities.<sup>28</sup>

In the first few months, participants spoke out in favour of more organisation, not less. Some withdrew, believing that “as long as WSP refuses to consider itself an organisation, I don’t think there is much room for improvement.”<sup>29</sup> Others asked whether it was actually possible to resign from a group that had no membership. Complaints arose from indecisiveness, arbitrary decisions, and general confusion surrounding WSP’s functions.<sup>30</sup> Coordinating committees took shape to help organisers “avoid the stress” reported by others, while East Bay WFP stated that their “loosely organized structure has often been difficult and frequently distressing.”<sup>31</sup> While WSPers noted that “no mass defections” occurred as a result of organisational malaise, the prevailing view that WSP functioned as a nonorganization, and that its membership

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<sup>22</sup> “Women: San Francisco – November 1 1961: Meeting, 30 October 1961 – Agenda,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-1, Beginnings, 1961 Oct.-Dec.

<sup>23</sup> “Dear Marin Women for Peace, 15 May 1962,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-24, Office Files – General, 1962.

<sup>24</sup> “Women’s Strike for Peace,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Nov 1, 1961 Strike, Media Coverage, Aftermath, Org Corr.

<sup>25</sup> “Women for Peace, 8 November 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 18-1, East Bay WFP Berkeley Office Records, Oct-Dec 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> “San Francisco Women Acting for Peace, Proposed Standing Committees,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1962, San Francisco and East Bay WFP Memos, Minutes, Finances.

<sup>28</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 81; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>29</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “Plans for Bay Area Information Committees, 17 April 1962,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1962, San Francisco and East Bay WFP Memos, Minutes, Finances.

readily bought into the idea of a structureless network, seems reliant on the voices of those who were comfortable with such a system, often key women. Those unhappy with nonorganization appear less represented.<sup>32</sup>

WSPers are often described as having disdain for leadership, with the group's attitude often framed around the public quip that participants were "all leaders."<sup>33</sup> But, in the absence of formal hierarchy, an informal leadership clique assumed a rising level of influence in the weeks following 1 November. Dagmar Wilson's stature grew in particular. With uncertainty surrounding her appropriate title, rather than her accepted status, she explained that:

People like to call me leader. I regard it as more a term of endearment or, shall we say, an honorary title...I think we were all kind of groping for what to call me, largely because the press wanted an answer to this...we knew I wasn't the president...But I think I better just assume the honorary title, although I have no special function.<sup>34</sup>

The titles assumed by some activists, such as "chairman" or "coordinator" generally implied their duty as a point of communication, rather than describing the job performed or suggesting a position of power. For example, Blanche Posner's ostensible role as "Office Committee Chairman" did not entail any formal responsibility in that role.<sup>35</sup> Dagmar Wilson was the exception. Her modesty and shyness yielded an inherent dislike for the term "leader" and a reluctance to accept the importance of her role in WSP, but other members had no doubt about her status. Delegates gave her a standing ovation as the first national conference drew to a close.<sup>36</sup> The public also recognised her as the leader. After she could not attend a scheduled function for the Peace Forum in early 1962, WSP offered "an able substitute" in her place. The response offered a ringing endorsement of Wilson's stature, saying "frankly, we do not think there is a real substitute for you."<sup>37</sup> A cult of personality began to surround Wilson as activists and the public saw her as the embodiment of WSP.

Historically, WSPers openly accepted direction from influential members. In many cases, younger, inexperienced women were content to allow the older, more

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<sup>32</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2190.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 2188.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 2134.

<sup>36</sup> "My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson," UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor MI, 1962.

<sup>37</sup> "Letter from Theodora Peck to Dagmar Wilson, 23 March 1962," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, D. Wilson Files – National Guardian (1962, 1963).

experienced members to coordinate activities. Most local bases recognised some women as the “leaders” in their area.<sup>38</sup> Los Angeles WISP’s own literature referred to Mary Clarke as a “west coast leader of Women Strike for Peace,” while Shirley Lens took on a similar standing in Chicago. It is perhaps no surprise that women such as Mary Clarke, Madeline Duckles, Anci Koppel, Shirley Lens, and Ethel Taylor have since been labelled “key women.” They possessed exceptional activist experience and were looked upon by newcomers as icons of the peace movement.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the term “key women” frequently appears in descriptions of the group as a terminological substitute for “leader,” with Amy Swerdlow justifying its use by stating that it was “a WSP term.”<sup>40</sup> Intriguingly, stated opposition to leadership arose from fears that an “invisible secret leadership” would make “secret decisions,” rather than indicating concerns over hierarchy itself. In this sense, WSPers actually offered indictments of the kind of informal leadership fostered by Women Strike for Peace.<sup>41</sup>

The loose system of organising was effective in some respects. Decentralising authority provided more autonomy for local community groups and made it easy for women across the US to start affiliated branches in their own areas. This proved crucial for the growth of the organisation. Surprisingly, given that the impetus for the 1 November strike came from women on the east coast, west coast branches provided more support. Of the 60 communities reported to have held demonstrations, 21 came from California.<sup>42</sup> The day’s largest demonstration took place in Los Angeles.<sup>43</sup> Groups set up in the San Francisco Bay Area developed a reputation as the best organised, adapting to WSP’s ideal for loose organisation and setting an example that other branches followed.<sup>44</sup> The dynamism and mystique of smaller local branches spontaneously forming around the country created interest. Many clamoured to join the

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<sup>38</sup> “American Women Report on Meeting with Vietnamese,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 3, Trip to Djakarta 1965.

<sup>39</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056; “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962.

<sup>40</sup> “1973 Progress Report on Women Strike for Peace Research,” SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, Research on WSP by Amy Swerdlow.

<sup>41</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 75.

<sup>42</sup> “Report to Women Around the United States of America, on the Women's Strike for Peace, November 1961,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 1, Literature – 1961.

<sup>43</sup> Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> “Women for Peace San Gabriel Valley Section, 20 November 1961,” UCB WSP Archives, 1-19, WSP National and Other Cities Beginnings.

new “movement” and some of the most committed and reliable regional branches only formed in the weeks following the initial demonstrations.<sup>45</sup>

Local activism had a ready appeal for potential WSP members. In the absence of a formal hierarchy of leadership, new members found that they could speak up within their communities about issues that concerned them.<sup>46</sup> Branches had no need to source national statements and resolutions on local issues. Likewise, individuals could freely adopt an attitude to peace work that differed from their peers. Los Angeles WISP became an “influential, active, more radical chapter” than its counterparts.<sup>47</sup> Seattle Women Act for Peace described its operations as having “complete autonomy” from any national commitment, saying it intended to “coordinate its efforts with national Women Strike for Peace,” rather than take direction from it. Some branches relied on the presence of community concern towards local nuclear-related issues in order to raise awareness for WSP’s national campaign. East Bay WFP, headquartered on the campus of University of California-Berkeley, raised frequent opposition to the institution’s complicity in weapons research. Other branches in the Bay Area used the proximity of the Livermore nuclear weapons facility and military plans to weaponise Angel Island to grow their group.<sup>48</sup> In Seattle, SWAP built support for their opposition to the Bangor nuclear submarine port, denouncing the city’s status as the “front yard of the Trident Base.”<sup>49</sup> The organisation depended on such local community demonstrations to maintain its national visibility. The ability of local branches to remain autonomous and responsible for their own campaigns proved highly effective in this respect.

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<sup>45</sup> “Historical Data, Issued June 1990, 19 July 1991,” UWS WSP Archives, 1-1, Historical Features; “Fond Memories of Ruth Pool – Anci Koppel,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-37, Speeches and Writings – Misc, Sept 1982 – Mar 1990.

<sup>46</sup> “Letter from Joanna Vasling, Oct 23, 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, RE National Coordinator Proposal 1963.

<sup>47</sup> Kathleen L Endres, “LA WISP,” in *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>48</sup> “San Francisco Women for Peace, August 1983,” UCB WFP Archives, 9-26, University of California Nuclear Weapons Labs Conversion Project and Livermore Action Group 1983; “Dear Peacemaker, 5 February 1987,” UCB WFP Archives, 11-1, Missouri Campaign, 1987; “Resolution Adopted by San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 10 February 1969,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-23, Bay Area Coalition, Save Angel Island Campaign.

<sup>49</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to President Jimmy Carter, 9 March 1977,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-6, General Correspondence, 1967-1977; “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mr. Cooney, 10 November 1979,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-7, General Correspondence, 1978-1979; “Letter from Mrs. Bobby Mercer to KIRO Editorial Opinion, 11 November 1979,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-7, General Correspondence, 1978-1979; “Trident is a First-Strike Weapon! Bangor Is Not Just ‘Another Base,’” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-6, Trident Protests (May 22<sup>nd</sup>), 1978; UWS SWAP Archives, 2-20, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action – Trident Campaign, 1994-1999.

But local autonomy caused significant problems for national cohesion in WSP's first few months. Although a founding premise held that loose connection between branches was desirable, some members felt separated from their peers in other parts of the country, and especially from the national body. Northwest Suburban Women for Peace referred to the main regional branch in Chicago as its "parent organisation," with this branch in turn considering itself an "affiliate" of national Women Strike for Peace.<sup>50</sup> Seattle women emphasised their responsibility to peace efforts in the Pacific Northwest over national efforts.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, perhaps owing to geography, members of SWAP appeared to feel more loyalty towards their counterparts along the west coast.<sup>52</sup> A sense of belonging to the national organisation did exist and members of Seattle Women Act for Peace were seen as equals, valued and admired for their dedication. However, in reciprocating that they felt "an integral part" of WSP, Seattle activists lamented that we are living far away from you."<sup>53</sup>

These pronouncements, correspondence, and decisions betrayed the sense of isolation and estrangement from the national organisation, manifested most clearly in branches' early decision to divert from the national moniker.<sup>54</sup> The use of the word "strike" notably separated east coast branches from their counterparts around the US. Branches in the east followed the example set by the Washington, D.C. founders and referred to themselves as "Women Strike for Peace," but others, not wishing to confuse their peace protest with class struggle, felt allusions to a strike "too militant" for the image they wanted to express.<sup>55</sup> Those in the Midwest dropped the word and identified simply as "Women for Peace." Most branches in California also decided against the use of "strike." The Seattle branch stood out among its peers, choosing to function as "Seattle Women Act for Peace." The experience of San Francisco women perhaps best exemplifies internal debate over the name. On publicising their 1 November march, participants opted to call themselves "San Francisco Women Act Together for Peace."

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<sup>50</sup> "Mount Prospect Women Set for Fashion Show," *The Daily Herald*, Wednesday 8 May 1985, 4-Section 2; "Making Peace," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 6, Ambler Branch Activities.

<sup>51</sup> "Seattle Women Act for Peace – Our Second Year, 1963," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-12, Women Strike for Peace, 1963-1997, n.d.

<sup>52</sup> "Letter from Rosina Woodhouse to Gladys Farber, 8 June 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 3, Mary Clarke Trip to Djakarta, 1965.

<sup>53</sup> "Agenda Items for Nov. 29 East Coast Phila. Conference Via D.C., Nov. 20 1990," UWS SWAP Archives, 1-17, General Correspondence, Jan 1990 – Aug 1991.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 154-155.

<sup>55</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968; *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2189.

“San Francisco Women Acting for Peace” also adorned letterheads and press releases in the weeks that followed. Various adaptations of the name appeared over the next few years before the branch settled on “Women for Peace.” The name remained from 1963.<sup>56</sup> The national organisation itself flirted with a name change throughout 1962. Out of a desire to become an internationally recognised organisation, key women attempted to enter “Women's International Strike for Peace” into the group’s lexicon. Dagmar Wilson felt that acronym WISP “is a beautiful word, much better than WSP.”<sup>57</sup> Although some, such as Los Angeles branch, continued to use the name by referring to itself as WISP and its members as WISPers, it never achieved general use and faded as a term shortly after 1962.

Some WSP members dismissed any notion that differing names affected cohesion. Writing in 1998, Philadelphia founder and former national coordinator Ethel Taylor downplayed any tensions over the group’s title, asking “what’s in a name? We were all dedicated to the same cause.”<sup>58</sup> For others, particularly those who had previous activist experience, “strike” took on deeper meaning. Ruth Gage Colby, well-respected as a pacifist leader by many WSP members prior to November 1961, recalled her attitude to the organisation on hearing of its existence:

When I saw Dagmar Wilson's ad saying, “Women Strike for Peace” I said to myself, “This is different.” If the ad had said Women for Peace, I'd have said, “God bless the ladies,” and paid no further attention. But the word “strike” struck a chord with me.<sup>59</sup>

The differences in branch names also created practical difficulties in coordination. SWAP, for example, needed to constantly remind the public that “Seattle Women Act for Peace is a branch of Women Strike for Peace.” Their business cards and policy statements had to make clear that they were affiliated organisations. In the absence of a national effort united under a common name, public confusion sometimes arose over coordination.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Women! Act Together for Peace! November 1 1961,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-1 Beginnings, 1961 Oct.-Dec; “San Francisco Women Acting for Peace, Statement of Precedents, Draft,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1962 San Francisco and East Bay WFP Memos, Minutes, Finances.

<sup>57</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2190.

<sup>58</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, x.

<sup>59</sup> Midge Decter, “The Peace Ladies,” *Harper's Magazine*, March 1963.

<sup>60</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Irene Wall, April 1982”; “Letter from Anci Koppel to Ted Koppel, 28 October 1982”; “Letter from Anci Koppel to Senate State Government Committee, 23 February 1982,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-10, General Correspondence, Oct 1981 – Dec 1982; “Seattle Women Act for Peace Business Card,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-1, Historical Features; “Position Statement Pert. Air

Historically, the organisation continues to be referred to as “Women Strike for Peace,” despite the majority of branches dropping “strike” from their titles. Reference to the organisation as “Strike for Peace” on a national scale is, therefore, somewhat problematic. Amy Swerdlow’s work took on a national focus, but its title cemented a particular name of the organisation many felt uncomfortable with. Several pieces of national conference literature referred to the organisation as “Women Strike for Peace and Women for Peace,” suggesting that the organisation needed to accommodate the differing views of its members.<sup>61</sup> While no overt animosity towards the name was apparent, attempts to change the national organisation’s title from “Women Strike for Peace” to “Women for Peace” continued through the mid-1980s.<sup>62</sup> In the same way that labelling WSP an “organisation” and calling its activists “members” came with caveats, it is problematic to refer to the group exclusively as Women Strike for Peace.<sup>63</sup>

Further evidence of regional variance appeared in the logos created by branches. Although an emblem identifying the national organisation existed, those across the country chose to create and display their own designs. The results showed huge variation. Chicago WFP generally went without a logo, simply printing its name on press releases and letterheads, but sometimes used a stylised logo depicting a mother holding a bag decorated with the branch name while cradling a sleeping child in her arms.<sup>64</sup> A similar image emerged from Philadelphia WSP. Members reproduced a drawing based on a sculpture by Ethel Taylor, depicting a mother, arms raised aloft, holding her child. It was used for letters and press releases. Seattle used three different emblems interchangeably; one depicting Seattle’s city skyline; another simpler design comprising the branch name with a peace dove and two hands – one black, one white – reaching up; a third simply shows four doves in unison.<sup>65</sup> San Francisco WFP illustrated women and children on a march, with placards making out the name “Women for

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Strike on Libya, 15 April 1986,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-37, Speeches and Writings – Misc, Sept 1982 – Mar 1990.

<sup>61</sup> “Draft Agenda for Second Annual National Conference of Women Strike for Peace and Women for Peace,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1963, Champaign IL.

<sup>62</sup> “Women Strike for Peace Annual National Conference, Saturday 1 October 1982,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1982, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>63</sup> “Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Trudi Young, 9 November 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>64</sup> “Bulletin, May 1965,” CHM WFP Archives, 8-12, WFP Bulletin 1965 Feb-Nov.

<sup>65</sup> “Dear Sisters, 3-27-81,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-9, General Correspondence, 1981. “Unsigned letter to Anci Koppel, 7 October 1975,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-6, General Correspondence, 1967-1977; “Historical Data, Issued June 1990, 19 July 1991,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-1, Historical Features.



Peace.”<sup>66</sup> Across the water in East Bay, women used an entirely different logo, a swooping dove framing the faces of three women of different races.<sup>67</sup> Los Angeles designed a simple blue circle with “WSP” stylistically wrapped around itself. The logos employed by local branches showed no connection to each other or to the national organisation and, when taken together, produced a somewhat confused public image.

These geographical divisions also appeared in the recollections of former activists. Many made mention of their regional affiliations before explaining their belonging to a national organisation, making clear that they identified with their locality. Rose Dellamonica explained that she was a part of East Bay Women for Peace, which was simply “affiliated with WSP.” While discussing the history of her group in 1992, Seattle branch leader Anci Koppel referred to WSP and SWAP as if two separate organisations.<sup>68</sup> This complicates attempts to reconcile the narrative of the national organisation with the unique stories of local branches. Seattle Women Act for Peace had their first demonstration on 16 November when President Kennedy spoke at the centennial celebration of the University of Washington. This made for some confusion when describing the organisation's history. Anci Koppel had to explain that WSP “began on 1 November 1961,” while clarifying that the local iteration to which she belonged started two weeks later.<sup>69</sup> San Antonio WFP, joining in 1970, offered a similar story, describing the founding of their local branch separately from the beginnings of the national organisation.<sup>70</sup>

## **The First National Conference**

Women Strike for Peace followed its first demonstration with a number of effective protests in 1962, including a well-publicised march in Washington, D.C. and a celebrated trip to test ban negotiations in Geneva that considerably increased its

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<sup>66</sup> “10 October 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 3, 2-67 San Francisco WFP Support National WSP Demonstration at Pentagon.

<sup>67</sup> “Dear Friends, 28 July 1979,” UCB WFP Archives, 15-33, WFP East Bay – Flyers, notes and Correspondence, 1970-1979.

<sup>68</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056; “Letter by Anci Koppel, 1992,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-34, Speeches and Writings re WSP History, 1992, 1995, 2.

<sup>69</sup> “Historical Data, Issued June 1990, 19 July 1991,” UWS WSP Archives, 1-1, Historical Features; “Fond Memories of Ruth Pool – Anci Koppel,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-37, Speeches and Writings – Misc, Sept 1982 – Mar 1990.

<sup>70</sup> “Example of Mailer Sent to Trudi Young from San Antonio Women for Peace, 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Texas (1970).

stature.<sup>71</sup> Yet organisational problems persisted. By the summer, members across the country desired a national meeting to discuss various issues that had arisen in the previous eight months. Owing to the suspicion of formal structure, even the idea of a national conference sounded “so square” to Eleanor Garst.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, at the invitation of women in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 82 women from 12 states met on 9 June 1962, for WSP’s first national conference. Many were meeting for the first time and exchanged tales of their various campaigns and organising methods. Some expressed shock at the experiences of others. Groups outside of Northern California could not believe that WSPers there had been subject to red-baiting attempts. Meanwhile, women from Philadelphia recounted being heckled by “some Birch [Society]-type characters.”<sup>73</sup> But conversations largely reinforced the sentiment that WSP had received a “remarkably good” response for its efforts. A report of the conference stated, “my advice to smart political types of every hue is ‘make way, they’re coming!’”<sup>74</sup> While savouring the positive appraisals of WSP’s work, the conference intended to formalise and clarify various organisational and policy ambiguities. From the outset, participants realised that the conference itself required structure if any value were to emerge from it.<sup>75</sup>

Key decisions relating to WSP’s organisation emerged from the first national conference. A proposed structure, drafted by Midwestern women, involved a national steering committee of 12 individuals selected from 12 areas across the country. These representatives would now be points of contact for their area, allowing the national organisation to maintain close contact and, to an extent, coordinate their efforts. If a branch had an idea for an activity it would be raised with WSPers across the country through this communication network. Individuals could then decide, based on their own enthusiasm for the project, whether to take part or avoid involvement and wish the

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<sup>71</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 35-36, 192-198; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 70-84; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 21-24.

<sup>72</sup> “Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962, 8.

<sup>73</sup> “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor MI, 1962, 2.

<sup>74</sup> “Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962, 8; “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 7.

<sup>75</sup> “Report on the National Conference, June 8-10,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI.

others “good luck.”<sup>76</sup> Elsa Knight Thompson, reporting on proceedings for San Francisco WFP, explained that the conference allowed WSP to take “the first faltering steps” towards becoming a national organisation. But many other problems were left unresolved. The ability of branches to involve themselves in whichever activity they deemed suitable provided the desired maximum level of local autonomy, but also created an amorphous body, one without a cohesive ideology or attitude towards important issues.

WSP’s organisers believed that the absence of formal structure would prevent long discussions over organisational bureaucracy, but the first national conference took so much time to discuss aspects of structure that practical and ideological questions were left unanswered. A substantial majority wished to broaden the group’s boundaries and form close affiliations with international peace organisations, requiring WSP presence at every major international conference related to the issue of disarmament. But the absence of a leadership hierarchy or recognised national positions on issues led to questions of representation. Several people asked who “will represent the group and how they are to be selected, what limitations, if any, are to be placed on individuals, whether or not there is a clear policy regarding who pays travelling expenses in these instances.”<sup>77</sup> An especially pointed question emerged from Bay Area women who advised that “it was not clear how not being even a national organisation we are so certainly an international one.”<sup>78</sup> The debate did not reach a conclusion. Left unresolved, these uncertainties developed into significant problems by the end of the decade.

Another more pressing issue related to WSP’s support for the civil rights movement. Though many women worked tirelessly for civil rights before and during their time in Women Strike for Peace, the first national conference demonstrated the organisation’s reluctance to initiate protests for racial equality.<sup>79</sup> During the opening session of the conference it emerged that four African-American women had been refused admittance to the conference. Participants learned that the women, part of the

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<sup>76</sup> “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor MI, 1962, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>78</sup> “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2007), 120; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 65.

Independent Negro Committee to Ban the Bomb and End Segregation, were prevented from taking part in a WSP march in Detroit due to their belief that the group should merge the two issues of racial equality and peace. The white members of Detroit WFP, in observance with the group's desire not to fight "two battles at once," banned the women's "desegregation placards" on the grounds that they obscured WSP's single-issue appeal for nuclear disarmament.<sup>80</sup> Due to her experiences of racism, one of the complainants exhorted to the conference that "if the next hundred years are going to be like the last, we don't care whether there is peace or not" and implored WSP to recognise the urgency of civil rights campaigns. The statement hit Elsa Knight Thompson "like a physical blow."<sup>81</sup> The complaint "proved a divisive issue" as those on either side of the argument stood their ground.<sup>82</sup> It was eventually agreed that while WSP welcomed "minority group individuals" into their ranks, its cause "should not be diluted or obscured by other objectives being stated."<sup>83</sup> Disarmament remained the group's priority.

The grievance did not exclusively stem from conflict with Detroit WFP, but followed a run-in with the national organisation. On advertising the trip to the Geneva Disarmament Convention in March 1962, New York WSPer Edith Ziefert sent out an advert stating that "local communities are encouraged to raise funds to send their own representatives." The circular included a note urging participation and emphasised "that Women Strike for Peace is not a membership grouping." The Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb reached out, wishing to "see the women's peace movement strengthened and broadened" with the inclusion of their representatives. Their request was denied. WSP coordinators did not wish to send more than 50 women in the delegation and, allegedly, "didn't want to 'overbalance' the group with Negroes." The Committee implored Dagmar Wilson to allow more representatives to attend, even under separate cover. However, though WSP explicitly wished to represent an open and inclusive movement of women, the limit of 50 remained in place.

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<sup>80</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 90; "Expanded Version of the Talk Given November 16 1986 at the WSP and WILPF 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, by Frances Herring," UCB WFP Archives, 17-26, Herring, Frances, 1991-1993.

<sup>81</sup> "My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson," UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056; "Expanded Version of the Talk Given November 16 1986 at the WSP and WILPF 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, by Frances Herring," UCB WFP Archives, 17-26, Herring, Frances, 1991-1993.

<sup>83</sup> "My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson," UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 3.

The group demonstrated an unwillingness to “dilute” their campaign by including an appeal to civil rights in their plea, even tacitly.<sup>84</sup>

The national conference attempted to placate these grievances. After lengthy discussions, it seated the Detroit women and issued a national policy statement that gave WSP’s support for the civil rights movement. But the statement did not allow members to march for civil rights under the banner of “Women Strike for Peace.” The issue was not so much about race as whether WSP should expand its campaign to advocate more causes than just peace. “Most women” wanted WSP to remain a single-issue organisation and the national body did not begin to marry issues of racism, poverty, and militarism until later in the decade.<sup>85</sup> Yet dissatisfaction with this stance led several local branches to adopt their own, more robust declarations.<sup>86</sup> Regions started to display differing levels of concern for civil rights causes. East Bay WFP became a reliable ally of civil rights activists in Oakland while Los Angeles women, expressing “grave concern over the situation in Birmingham, Alabama,” issued a decisive statement in May 1963 that called on “all women working for peace to dedicate themselves to the struggle of the Negro people for freedom.”<sup>87</sup> Barbara Bick, an editor of *Memo*, recalled WSPers helping out in various campaigns for racial equality, particularly in San Francisco. She said that Washington, D.C. WSP “participated in every level of the Poor People’s Campaign,” except for “decision making at the top.”<sup>88</sup> The branch worked “officially” with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the area.<sup>89</sup> Individuals also displayed varying attitudes towards civil rights activism. While Barbara Deming, a feminist-pacifist leader and writer, “served as a prod to the WSP conscience” on the issue, Dagmar Wilson remained insistent that “WSP remain a single-issue movement.”<sup>90</sup>

WSP’s response to the Detroit women compounded the image of the group as a fundamentally white community and foreshadowed continuing problems of cultivating an inclusive, diverse membership. Coretta Scott King represented Women Strike for

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<sup>84</sup> “Letter from Representatives of the Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb, Detroit, to Dagmar Wilson, 24 March 1962,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-7, Correspondence of Dagmar Wilson 1961-1964.

<sup>85</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 91; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 53-56.

<sup>86</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> “From Women Strike for Peace an Appeal to Negro Women,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 1, 1961-1963.

<sup>88</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 128.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 309.

<sup>90</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 92.

Peace on a number of campaigns and women of colour, though “few in number,” nevertheless displayed as much commitment and influence in the group as their grassroots peers.<sup>91</sup> But having worked fastidiously for civil rights issues before joining WSP, Ethel Taylor often found it difficult to attract African American women as they were more concerned with tackling violence in their own neighbourhoods.<sup>92</sup> Dagmar Wilson offered a similar appraisal, acknowledging the unique hardships faced by mothers in the African-American community while noting that “we hardly speak a common language.”<sup>93</sup>

The problems WSP faced echoed similar difficulties endemic within the peace and civil rights movements.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the issue of race rarely appeared in the recollections of WSP activists beyond an explanation of the group’s ineffective efforts to recruit women of colour. Members seldom reflected on WSP’s unclear attitude towards civil rights activism, how this stance fostered division and disagreement, and how it affected the group’s place in the wider movement. WSP’s attempts to remain a single-issue organisation governed its public stance on several issues and even when it adopted a broader critique of violence in American society towards the end of the decade it never directly tackled the issue of racial equality. This, naturally, affects considerations of the group’s place within the New Left. Amy Swerdlow perceptively observed that WSP activists “rejected any concept or tactic they thought to be too radical to be understood by the so-called average woman,” and believed that “they were not violating their moral principles” by doing so.<sup>95</sup> But WSP’s attitude towards racial equality highlights the multifaceted nature of the group and the divisive consequences of its reluctance to move beyond a single-issue focus on disarmament.

In the aftermath of its 1962 national conference, WSP adopted a national policy document that sought to pull together its disparate parts. A “Statement of Principles,” also known as the “Ann Arbor Statement,” superseded the various policy documents

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<sup>91</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 22.

<sup>92</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>93</sup> “Keynote address given by Dagmar Wilson to the National Conference of Women Strike for Peace in Chicago (Evanston) Illinois, November 9 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1968, Winnetka IL.

<sup>94</sup> Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements in the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); Vincent J. Intondi, *African Americans Against the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>95</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 121-122.

local branches had drafted for themselves.<sup>96</sup> It underlined the notion that WSP did not have strict organisational requirements, cherishing “the right” and accepting “the responsibility of the individual in a democratic society to influence the course of government.”<sup>97</sup> Arguably the most important outcome of the conference was the declaration that WSP was “open to all women.” Much deliberation considered its phrasing. Northern California women, seemingly the only group subjected to red-baiting, wanted a stance that embraced all political persuasions, but the strongest argument emerged in a statement from Los Angeles members. “We do not question one another about our religious beliefs or other matters of personal conscience. How can we justify political interrogation? What difference does it make?”<sup>98</sup> Attendees eventually became confident that “all meant all,” and cemented their position in a second line that read “we are women of all races, creeds and political persuasions.”<sup>99</sup> The Ann Arbor Statement reflected WSP’s general attitudes without offering guidance on specific issues. Importantly, the stance assured that a purge of suspected communist members would never take place.

### **Anticommunism and the HUAC Hearings**

Government scrutiny and red-baiting provided a strong test to WSP’s inclusive conference position in the months following its adoption. Members of Women Strike for Peace caught the attention of intelligence agencies towards the end of 1961, but the FBI had information on organisers and coordinators dating back to the 1940s. Wishing to determine the level of communist influence over the new organisation, reports noted the earlier communist affiliations of several founding members. While the CIA only sporadically scrutinised Women Strike for Peace, the FBI, in contrast, gathered 49 volumes of reports over the next ten years.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “San Francisco Women Acting for Peace, Statement of Precedents, Draft,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1962 San Francisco and East Bay WFP Memos, Minutes, Finances.

<sup>97</sup> “Ann Arbor Statement, First National Conference, June 1962,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI.

<sup>98</sup> “Los Angeles WSP Statement at Ann Arbor Conference, 9-10 June 1962,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI.

<sup>99</sup> “My Personal Impressions of the Ann Arbor Conference – Elsa Knight Thompson,” UCB WFP Archives, 3-28, First National Conference, Ann Arbor, MI, 1962, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Wilson, “Tainting the Antinuclear Movement,” 279; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 101; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 73-77.

Surveillance began before WSP's first demonstration and agents started submitting information ranging from bank account details to the license plates of participants.<sup>101</sup> The fact that women had "allegedly entertained guests that spoke Russian, sang Russian songs and did Russian dances" seemed relevant.<sup>102</sup> Information on family members also appeared in records. The FBI declared knowledge that Blanche Posner's son, Richard, "graduated from Harvard Law School in June 1962, and is presently employed as a law clerk for US Supreme Court Justice William Brennan."<sup>103</sup> Disturbingly for WSP members, informants infiltrated meetings of the group's leadership. Comparison of FBI files and WSP's Steering Committee meeting minutes confirms the presence of an informant at a 22 February 1967 gathering of core activists.<sup>104</sup>

Although many WSPers had previous and ongoing affiliations with the CPUSA, communism never influenced the direction of the organisation and links established by the FBI ranged in severity from ominous to feverish.<sup>105</sup> Some reports appeared sinister. One suggested that Communist Party members had posed as a non-existent Baltimore branch of Women Strike for Peace "as a cover for their activities" in the area.<sup>106</sup> Some reports embellished their findings in order to heighten connections. A report on Los Angeles leader Mary Clarke asserted that her decision to leave the Communist Party in 1955 "was a difficult one for her to make," a judgment that contrasted other accounts of her withdrawal.<sup>107</sup> Some attempts were even more tenuous, sometimes linking WSP to a communist front through several degrees of separation. A report on Los Angeles WISP in 1962 raised suspicions about the high quality imprint of their literature. "This material," the report advised, "did not originate from a 'grass roots' effort on behalf of

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<sup>101</sup> "Airtel SAC Philadelphia, 10/26/61," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 1; AU WSP Archives Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 3 (1).

<sup>102</sup> "SAC, San Francisco, 7 May 1962," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 2.

<sup>103</sup> "SAC, WFO, 12/13/62," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 3 (1).

<sup>104</sup> While it is unlikely that "key women" would furnish information to the FBI, comparing the meeting's minutes and FBI reports suggests that any of the following could have been an informant: Alice Alt, Betty North, Edith Villastrigo, Martha Hersh, Ginny Freeman, Folly Fodor, Lynda Stein, Martha Dudley, Ella Tulin, Thelma DuVinage, Donna Allen, Helen Corning, Richi Orchin, and Ana Reyler. "Steering Committee Meeting, 22 February 1967," SCPC WSP Archives, A1 Box 1, Minutes of Steering Committee 1965-1970; "The Spring Mobilization for Peace: Information Concerning, 21 March 1967," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 17 (1).

<sup>105</sup> Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 165, 221<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> "Picketing of Baltimore, Maryland, Main Post Office, 24 October 1962"; "Memorandum from SAC, Baltimore, 13 November 1962," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 3 (2).

<sup>107</sup> SA Raymond B. Howe, 12 April 1963," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 4 (1), 5; Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 166.



peace but rather suggests the possibility of large foreign national interest possibly Soviet in origin.”<sup>108</sup>

Ultimately, FBI agents reported finding little evidence to suggest infiltration by communist figures. Concluding their investigations at the beginning of 1963, they recommended ceasing surveillance of Women Strike for Peace. In fact, agents explained that the CPUSA actively implored its members to avoid interfering with WSP’s activities.<sup>109</sup> However, the Bureau directed field agents to continue surveillance, justifying its decision by claiming that the “past and present CP members in positions of control and influence” warranted further examination.<sup>110</sup> Disregarding the recommendations of its local offices, the FBI continued its investigation. Records show surveillance of WSP continued until at least 1970.<sup>111</sup>

Rather than dwelling on the impudence of surveillance agencies, WSPers instead used the experience as an opportunity to demonstrate their irreverence towards the authorities. With typical humour, they insisted that the threat of being reported for their actions largely unfazed them and mocked the manner in which agents conducted themselves. A skit, written and performed by members of SWAP, poked fun at the authorities, suggesting that a “formal invitation” be sent to the FBI for the group’s next meeting as “they’ll come anyway.”<sup>112</sup> Far from hiding what they were doing, activists sought to publicly declare their views as much as possible. A clergyman once confronted Esther Newill and, taking issue with her stance, claimed, “I’m going to tell people what you’re doing.” Newill shot back, “Good! That’s what I’m trying to do! I want people to know about our activities!” Much of this humour derived from WSP’s view that, if the authorities wished to find out what the group believed, all they had to do was “attend our marches and read our literature!”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> “Los Angeles, California, 14 March 1962,” AU WSP Archives, Box 22, FOIA FBI Files – 1962 (1).

<sup>109</sup> “Memorandum from SAC, Cincinnati, 4/16/63,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566, Vol. 4 (1); “Cincinnati, Ohio, 16 April 1963,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 4 (1); “Report from SAC, San Francisco, 4/19/63,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 4 (1), 7; “TV Comments of CP, USA Leaders Regarding WSP,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566 Vol. 4 (1); Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 164.

<sup>110</sup> “SAC, Philadelphia, 16 May 1963”; “SAC, San Francisco, 6 May 1963”; “SAC, New York, 4/26/63,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566, Vol. 5; AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566, Vol. 4 (2).

<sup>111</sup> Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 170-171.

<sup>112</sup> “A Bird’s Eye View of a SWAP Meeting,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-35, Speeches and Writings – Skits, 1989, n.d., 3.

<sup>113</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Newill interview, 23 February 1980, ARS.0056.

Nevertheless, suspicion that some WSPers were not who they claimed to be bred paranoia. A 24-hour vigil in the early 1970s required that two activists always occupied a position in front of the White House. Ethel Taylor recalled her stint and explained that she shared time with a member she did not necessarily trust, explaining that “my partner was a woman some of us suspected of being a government agent.”<sup>114</sup> Suspicions were largely kept silent by the decree in the Statement of Principles that prevented the questioning of fellow WSPers about their political backgrounds. Eleanor Garst, drafting her history of Women Strike for Peace in 1968, explained that “sometimes two WSP’s would wonder whether another was actually a member of the FBI or CIA – or even a double agent in the best spy tradition. But this was speculation, not to be repeated nor allowed to influence relationships with any woman who would work for peace.”<sup>115</sup> Yet Taylor conceded in her memoir that she felt disturbed by the level of infiltration shown in FBI documents. She wrote that her “breath caught in my throat” while reading simple, “even innocuous” accounts in her file. Some reports detailed events she attended and, worryingly, she “had known everybody at that meeting. Or thought I did. I still do not know who the informant was.”<sup>116</sup>

The Ann Arbor conference made it clear that political interrogation of members would not occur within WSP and former activists took pride in extolling the group's disdain for questioning political sensibilities.<sup>117</sup> Yet FBI records reveal substantial differences in the attitudes of members from different branches as activists interpreted the national position in their own way. Californian groups generally took a relaxed approach. The FBI noted the assessment of Southern California activist Esther Jackson that, where political affiliation rested, “we don't ask. We never ask. If there are communists, they haven't taken over.”<sup>118</sup> New York groups took the same stance. But the agency felt it had an ally in Chicago’s Shirley Lens. The “guiding force” behind WFP efforts in the city received a glowing endorsement:

Because of her personality and anti-communist stand, [Lens] has prevented the Communist Party from becoming effective in the Chicago area. Lens...has appeared to be spending more time in trying to keep CP

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<sup>114</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> “Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962.

<sup>116</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 30.

<sup>117</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>118</sup> “Communist Infiltration, Women's Strike for Peace, 2/1/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566, Vol. 13 (1), 17.

members out of the group than in working for the objective of the group, which is peace.<sup>119</sup>

In her expansive study of activism in the Chicago area, Amy Schneidhorst notes the presence of the “anti-Stalinist” Lens within “a group of procommunist politically minded WSP women.” The Chicago leader, wife of well-known labour and social justice activist Sidney Lens, had considerable disagreements with her fellow members as a result.<sup>120</sup> Ruth Dear, a similarly influential figure during Chicago WFP’s formative period, fell out with Lens and left the group in autumn 1963 due to their constant political conflicts.<sup>121</sup> The differing response to WSP’s appeal for inclusivity points to a more fragmented constituency within the organisation than often claimed.

The group found itself subject to another, more public government investigation towards the end of 1962. In December, just weeks after WSP celebrated its first anniversary, 14 members of the US peace movement received subpoenas from the House Un-American Activities Committee. Several members of WSP, including Dagmar Wilson, were among them.<sup>122</sup> The hearing intended to expose the extent of communist infiltration in the peace movement generally, but Women Strike for Peace was the main focus. What followed became a central part of the group’s folklore. Over three days of hearings from 11 to 13 December, individual WSP members politely mocked and ridiculed representatives of the committee who had intended to score a soft victory. The witnesses’ performance at the hearings, reproduced in the media by gleeful news reporters, cemented the group’s position as a force of respectable, polite, witty mothers. Some remarks became legendary among WSP members and the portrayal of the group as unorganised and open to all stayed in the memory of activists.

WSPers had encountered HUAC before, albeit in different circumstances. Alice Hamburg and Hazel Grossman’s first campaign together saw them protest against the Committee in San Francisco.<sup>123</sup> Anci Koppel, Thorun Robel, and Ruth Pinkson endured investigations into their husbands during the 1950s.<sup>124</sup> Members were abundantly aware

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<sup>119</sup> “Communist Infiltration, Women for Peace Chicago Area, 1/22/65,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566, Vol. 10, 11.

<sup>120</sup> Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 221<sup>n</sup>8.

<sup>121</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 68, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 497; *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2043.

<sup>123</sup> “Hazel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration, 6/23/83,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-22, Grossman, Hazel, and Grossman, Aubrey, 1967-2000.

<sup>124</sup> Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; “Thorun Ingibjorg Johannson Robel,” UWS SWAP Archives, 2-34, Robel, Thorun; “Biographical Notes, 31 August 1981,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-36, Speeches and Writings, 1955-Feb 1982.

that, even if the hearings could not present satisfactory evidence linking WSP to the Communist Party, the accusation alone could taint the organisation and result in its downfall. WSPers knew of SANE's earlier experience. In 1960, Senator Thomas Dodd, chair of the Senate Internal Security Committee, charged that communists had infiltrated the organisation. Though no evidence ever arose to support this claim, SANE's leadership panicked and embarked on a purge, demoralising members and causing significant damage to the organisation.<sup>125</sup> The incident proved instrumental to the formation of WSP.

The subpoenas presented the first test of WSP's Statement of Principles and challenged activists' to prove their commitment to the organisation's inclusive stance. They responded with a united show of support. The group affirmed that the hearings represented an attack on the whole peace movement. Aware that HUAC intended to "smear and frighten" WSP's membership, activists went on the offensive. In a show of defiance, around 100 women contacted the Chairman of HUAC, Francis Walter, asking him to subpoena them as well.<sup>126</sup> California WSPer Carrie Yoffe Taylor symbolised WSP's siege mentality. "If Dagmar Wilson is a communist," she wrote, "so am I." Taylor addressed her letter to Walter, President Kennedy, and Representative John W. McCormack, but sent a copy to Dagmar Wilson with a handwritten message. "I'm sending you this rather blurry fourth carbon because I want you to know that you're not alone."<sup>127</sup> Other peace organisations rallied around WSP. Although some had personally experienced a HUAC investigation before, the subpoenaed members embraced their upcoming showdown.

The hearings came to symbolise the irreverent approach WSP activists took towards their peace work as witnesses ridiculed the lines of inquiry designed to stoke suspicion. Blanche Posner could not help but laugh at an accusation that she had worn "a coloured paper daisy" to identify herself as a member of Women Strike for Peace.<sup>128</sup> She apologised for her "giggled" reply, explaining that "it sounds like such a far cry from communism it is impossible not to be amused." In one instance the committee produced ominous evidence that Ruth Meyers had signed a Communist Party nominating position while living in Brooklyn. "Are you the Ruth Meyers who executed

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<sup>125</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 54-55.

<sup>126</sup> Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol," 501.

<sup>127</sup> "Letter from Carrie Yoffe Taylor to Dagmar Wilson, 1962," SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-7, Correspondence of Dagmar Wilson 1961-1964.

<sup>128</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2085, 2136.

that petition?” inquired Counsel Nittle. Myers duly informed the hearings that it was not her, joking that her husband “could never get me to move to Brooklyn.” Her response to the mistaken identity drew raucous laughter from the gallery. Compounding the committee’s embarrassment, Meyers continued, “perhaps, sir, I shouldn’t have accepted that subpoena if there are so many people by the name of Ruth Meyers.”<sup>129</sup> Even the women’s attorneys indulged in the occasion, lightly ribbing the Committee for its calamitous performance.<sup>130</sup> The confident display delighted those who came to see the hearings. Blanche Posner reportedly lectured “the committee members as though they were recalcitrant boys at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx, where she had taught.”<sup>131</sup> Dagmar Wilson’s appearance drew particular praise from journalists. She treated Nittle “exactly as if he were a rather trying dinner partner.”<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the ripostes of those on the stand, mocking yet entirely well-mannered, left Subcommittee Chairman Clyde Doyle exasperated. Wilson later explained that the accused simply “ridiculed away” the charges against them.<sup>133</sup>

Though acknowledging their trepidation in facing the committee, subpoenaed WSPers were actually rather pleased that they had an opportunity to speak publicly about their work.<sup>134</sup> “A couple of hours with HUAC,” Wilson remarked, “was worth years of psychotherapy. Instead of punching pillows I was able to unravel the misconceptions, to put things in their place.”<sup>135</sup> The experience allowed WSPers to clarify their attitudes towards structure and organisation. Ruth Meyers downplayed the group’s rigidity by elucidating that “Women Strike for Peace has no membership.” She added, “if I have gone to other communities, it has never been as a representative for anything except a point of view, and my own point of view.”<sup>136</sup> Iris Freed’s testimony also affirmed the “fluid” nature of WSP’s structure. Counsel Nittle struggled to understand, asking “if a group has no organisation and has no members, how in the world does it function?” Freed’s reply became renowned. “It is quite remarkable.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 2101; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 113.

<sup>130</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2085.

<sup>131</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 502.

<sup>132</sup> Mary McGrory, “Nobody Controls Anybody,” *Washington Evening Star*, 14 December 1962, 1; Russell Baker, “Observer,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1965, 6; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>133</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2092, 2120, 2171.

<sup>134</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2095-2096.

Sometimes I wonder myself.”<sup>137</sup> Connecticut activist Anne Mackenzie captured many women’s beliefs. Accepting that a Central Coordinating Committee existed, Mackenzie informed Alfred Nittle that it was “something that you have given great stature to and made it sound almost as important as a congressional committee. In Connecticut, we don’t take it very seriously. Perhaps we should.”<sup>138</sup> Lyla Hoffman attempted to explain that her influence in WSP did not mean that she had an appointed position, nor that policy was directed to women from an executive.<sup>139</sup> In testimony, the WSPers claimed that the organisational structure existing on paper did not occur in practice. Repeated references to the HUAC hearings in literature, speeches, and in memory after the event further served to reinforce these strongly held perceptions of WSP’s functions and ideology.

The hearings also provided an opportunity for WSP members to present the image of their organisation to the nation’s public. They took the chance with aplomb, embodying “the WSP image of outraged moral motherhood.”<sup>140</sup> Most women described themselves as “housewives,” in some cases marrying their two beloved identities: “housewife...and peacemaker.”<sup>141</sup> While defiant, witnesses remained utterly polite and courteous in their response to questioning. Miriam Chesman, the last witness on the second day of the hearings, perfectly channelled the image of demure motherhood to highlight the questionable legitimacy of the committee. Donald Bruce, frustrated with Chesman’s testimony, found himself chastised after pressing her for clarity in her responses. “You know, I haven’t much experience with this sort of thing and you will have to be patient with me.”<sup>142</sup> Dagmar Wilson offered pacifying tones and attempted to remove the fervour from the Committee’s questioning. She offered conciliation towards Nittle while explaining he had made his supporting evidence “sound terribly dramatic.”<sup>143</sup>

Reports during and following the hearings suggested a unanimous victory for WSP, but later attempts to qualify and question the success of the encounter emerged

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 2132.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 2140.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 2104.

<sup>140</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 112.

<sup>141</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2103.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 2173.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 2190.

from several sources.<sup>144</sup> Stephen Whitfield and Walter Goodman, for example, argued that HUAC was already weakened and in decline by the time WSPers confronted the committee. Goodman expressed particular distaste for some aspects of their performance.<sup>145</sup> In typically modest tones Dagmar Wilson suggested that the committee treated WSP with “gloved hands...we were ever lucky.” She inferred that the group might have come off worse had the hearings taken place earlier, during more fervent communist hysteria.<sup>146</sup>

Amy Swerdlow disagreed. She acknowledged that “cold war hysteria had abated somewhat,” but insisted that HUAC still represented “the awesome power of an agency of the state.” It could still ruin lives.<sup>147</sup> Eric Bentley, a theatre critic turning his attentions to the history of the Committee, contended that Women Strike for Peace had dealt such a blow that it could be referred to as “the fall of HUAC’s bastille.”<sup>148</sup> WSP’s triumph became a centrepiece of members’ recollections in later years. Some described it as “our greatest achievement.”<sup>149</sup> The memory of the affair embodied everything activists wished to promote about their group, such as the respectability of its members, the moral authority of its stance, and its irreverence towards authority. Swerdlow’s article, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” evocatively reproduced the atmosphere and emotions of the hearings using personal observations from the hearing room.<sup>150</sup> Her article displays the entire episode as a community experience, depicting the response of WSP members nationwide. It expressed the humour of the occasion while painting Women Strike for Peace as a plucky underdog, striking a blow against an archaic and sinister government committee.<sup>151</sup> The HUAC hearing’s significance to former activists provides a unique place to examine the various tropes evident in recollections of members.

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<sup>144</sup> Joseph Hearst, “3 Defy Probe of Red Role in Peace ‘Strike’,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 December 1962, 3; “Women Defiant’ Oust Shouter at U.S. Red Probe,” *Boston Globe*, 12 December 1962, 16; Elsie Carper, “Tearful ‘Peace’ Witness Calles Queries ‘Stones’,” *The Washington Post*, 13 December 1962, A2; Russell Baker, “Congressional Probers Find Out Women Are Best Left In Peace,” *The Gazette and Daily*, 20 December 1962; Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 174-175.

<sup>145</sup> Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (London: The History Book Club, 1969), 442; See also, Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 159-178.

<sup>146</sup> Wilson, “Tainting the Antinuclear Movement,” 283-286.

<sup>147</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol,” 498.

<sup>148</sup> Eric Bentley, *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 951.

<sup>149</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>150</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 113.

<sup>151</sup> Swerdlow, “Ladies’ Day at the Capitol.”

WSP received a “shot in the arm” as a result of members’ performances against HUAC, but the rhetoric employed by women to face down their accusers did not entirely satisfy. The hearings raised some questions surrounding WSP’s attitude towards its core issues. Of the ten WSPers who took the stand, only Lyla Hoffman and Dagmar Wilson openly embraced the concept of open membership endorsed at June’s national conference. Others, when questioned, readily fell back on their Fifth Amendment rights. Blanche Posner invoked the constitutional privilege 45 times. Elsie Neidenberg, the fourth WSP activist to take the stand, invoked her Fifth Amendment rights 23 times to avoid answering any questions beyond her personal details. In total, seven WSP witnesses used the Fifth Amendment 142 times over the three days to avoid discussing subjects.<sup>152</sup> While the thrust of questioning from the committee revolved around the group’s mysterious organisational functions, the readiness of witnesses to refuse to answer on core issues caused some concern. Some in New York expressed annoyance in closed meetings. They felt the witnesses “should not have acted as though Women's Strike for Peace had something to hide,” particularly after the Ann Arbor conference had decreed the group's attitude towards political affiliations.<sup>153</sup>

WSP’s resolve to remain an inclusive organisation, while appearing noble, resulted in a fractured and ambiguous identity. This was neatly summarised by WSP member and feminist activist Barbara Deming, who expressed her apprehensions over the HUAC encounter in a public “Letter to WISP.”<sup>154</sup> Written in the months following the hearings, Deming emphatically determined the heightened strength of WSP, declaring that “a move intended to make us doubt ourselves and each other served in fact to sharpen our sense of why we are acting and to bind us more closely together.” However, she expressed concern over “whether or not the stance we take is clear.”<sup>155</sup> Deming especially questioned the group’s attitude towards unilateral disarmament. In an earlier meeting with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., members of WSP scoffed at the suggestion that they supported such a position. Deming wished to test this stance:

Suppose an attack upon us by the Soviet Union... would we be in favour of retaliation? To spell it out: would we at that point be in favour of

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<sup>152</sup> Blanche Posner pleaded 45 times, Ruth Meyers once, Lyla Hoffman did not use the Fifth Amendment, Elsie Neidenberg pleaded 23 times, Sylvia Contente 16, Iris Freed 19 times, Anna Mackenzie chose not to plead the Fifth Amendment, Jean Brancanto invoked the privilege 16 times, Miriam Chesman 22 times, and Dagmar Wilson did not plead. *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2047-2187.

<sup>153</sup> “NY D,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 4 (2), 89.

<sup>154</sup> Barbara Deming, “Letter to WISP,” *Liberation*, April 1963.

<sup>155</sup> Deming, “Letter to WISP.”



slaughtering children? It is hard for me to imagine any woman in our movement...giving any answer but “No.” Yet if that *is* our answer, then we are unilateralists.

Deming questioned the strength of WSP’s opposition and, citing the Ann Arbor Statement, asked if a more accurate reflection of the group’s attitude was that “we take a resolute stand” but that the government could “count us as temporarily willing, if it just can't be helped.”<sup>156</sup> The reluctance to clarify the specifics of its position troubled WSP throughout its existence, whether it concerned its stance on civil disobedience, pacifism, or the efficacy of arms control treaties.<sup>157</sup> Some argued the benefits of such ambiguity towards peace work far outweighed the necessity for cohesion. In contrast, Barbara Deming suggested that, by failing to define its positions, WSP had become a confused organisation.

Deming's article succinctly captured the crux of WSP’s organisational tensions. The HUAC hearing provided the group with a notable success and remains a revered event in the history and memory of WSP. But practical questions that emerged in its aftermath demonstrated the fractured and uncertain identity that Women Strike for Peace had developed while also highlighting the differing views activists took towards their organisation.<sup>158</sup> Open to all, the group allowed women to enter freely and discover a community of like-minded activists. Key women attempted to keep WSP as inclusive as possible to attract the largest number of participants. Cohesion of its disparate parts grew from a common purpose and, although campaigns varied, the overall goal of nuclear disarmament provided a unifying cause. Assessing its first years, Dagmar Wilson observed that WSP “started with a rather simple issue. That is, to say a single-minded issue.”<sup>159</sup> But as the group entered 1963, the general goals of peace and disarmament gave way to conflicts over specifics. Activists grew concerned at the willingness of the HUAC testifiers to fall back on the Fifth Amendment, rather than confidently declaring their political position. Questions were raised over whether a partial test ban treaty could satisfy WSP’s aims, or whether the group needed to demand a comprehensive agreement. Grassroots members had doubts over representation and

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid; “Ethel Taylor, 18 January,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-040, Box 2, National Conference 1978 SALT I; “Results of Two Discussion on Policy and Agenda for Second National WSP Conference at Urbana, Reconstructed from Notes Take by G Blum and A Swerdlow,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1963, Champaign-Urbana IL.

<sup>158</sup> Deming, “Letter to WISP.”

<sup>159</sup> “Keynote Address Given by Dagmar Wilson to the National Conference of Women Strike for Peace in Chicago (Evanston) Illinois, 9 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1968, Winnetka IL, 2.

wondered whether their local autonomy prevented women from representing the whole organisation without querying their stance with other branches first. At the same time, they asked whether allowing individual autonomy prevented WSP from having a consistent doctrine. WSP's experience points to a noted contradiction in social movement activism – that by remaining as inclusive as possible, organisations harbour many competing attitudes and “behavioural prescriptions,” ultimately fostering conflict and actually limiting the appeal to “potential participants.”<sup>160</sup>

### **The Partial Test Ban Treaty**

In the summer of 1963 WSPers looked back on a two-year period of successful activism. A picket of the White House in January 1962 brought the approval of President Kennedy, who publicly acknowledged that their message had been “received.”<sup>161</sup> In March, 50 representatives of the women's peace movement arrived in Geneva to voice their concerns to the Conference of the Seventeen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. Dagmar Wilson confronted US diplomat Arthur Dean and the Soviet UN Security Council representative Valerian Zorin “like a schoolmistress.” Women embarked on silent marches and vigils, “which was quite an achievement for us chatterboxes,” Wilson said.<sup>162</sup> Later that year, they organised an exchange with counterparts in the Soviet women's peace movement and continued to build relationships with peace organisations around the globe. Members formed a productive partnership with the British MP and disarmament proponent Anne Kerr, inviting her to stage a picket in front of the White House to coincide with talks between President Kennedy and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan.<sup>163</sup> In August, groups around the country commemorated the bombing of Hiroshima. A documentary, narrated by San Francisco WFP's Frances Herring, gave a month-by-month account of all activity undertaken in the area, highlighting the on-going attempts of activists to raise public awareness and lobby their elected representatives.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Friedman and McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism,” 164.

<sup>161</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “President Responds to Pickets for Peace,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1962, 1.

<sup>162</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>163</sup> “Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962, 6.

<sup>164</sup> *Women Strike for Peace*. 1962. Alice Richards, Harvey Richards, with narration from Frances Herring; “Women Strike for Peace Script,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 4, West Coast Film Script.

Campaigning provided WSPers with much experience, not least in dealing with the media. From the initial demonstrations on 1 November, the group could count on the approval and support of various local journalists. San Francisco news reporter Art Hoppe became an admirer, as did Russell Baker from the *New York Times*. Mary McGrory consistently wrote articles praising WSP's resistance to patriarchal authority. Activism became a lesson in image management. Members took care to present themselves appropriately, dressing themselves in an image they felt could secure the most support. They attended to their media profile at all times, recognising the need to keep themselves in the public eye. Eleanor Garst particularly noted the necessity. Following a demonstration in front of the White House in April 1962, she observed that "WSP's were surprised to find that after being big news for five months, they were now, to the *Associated Press* and *The Washington Post*, 'some women who picketed.' They felt like Cinderella when the clock struck 12 – back to the kitchen!"<sup>165</sup>

Following months of fraught deliberations, the US Congress finally ratified the Partial Test Ban Treaty in September 1963, banning nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater. WSP felt its efforts entitled members to celebrate the achievement. Ethel Taylor wrote to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to express "that self-congratulations are in order for everyone who worked to build up the climate of opinion that helped to make the Nuclear Test Ban possible. She claimed that "many senators have, in fact, referred to the influence of the 'Mother's Vote' as a factor in shaping their decision to vote for the treaty."<sup>166</sup> Dagmar Wilson was certain that the treaty marked a milestone for the organisation.<sup>167</sup> WSP activists felt assured of their impact on proceedings, but remained realistic about the agreement itself. Testing could, after all, continue underground with few impediments. Amy Swerdlow and Miriam Kelber, the editors of the Women Strike for Peace Newsletter, told readers to remain vigilant towards weapons testing. The treaty simply meant "a change of locale for the arms race, rather than a major reversal. It also means a continuing threat of radioactive contamination."

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<sup>165</sup> "Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four," SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962, 5.

<sup>166</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 81.

<sup>167</sup> Kathleen L. Endres, "NY Peaceletter," in *Women's Periodicals in the United States*, eds. Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996): 259; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 125.

Despite the confidence of its members, the impact WSP had on the outcome of test ban negotiations remains contentious. In *Domestic Society and International Cooperation*, nuclear historian Jeffrey Knopf argues that the impetus for a test ban did not come from the signatories of the treaty itself, but from India, Japan, and the vocal pressure of peace activists. The test ban movement, he contends, changed the atmosphere within which negotiations were conducted, arguing that activism was important “simply because it existed.”<sup>168</sup> But this claim requires examination. Though generally praising the intentions of activists, much historical opinion actually repudiates the influence of public opinion on negotiations. Robert Kleidman credits the test ban movement with raising public awareness of fallout and the perils of radiation, but argues that “substantive achievements proved modest.”<sup>169</sup> Lawrence Wittner suggested that the fate of the test ban campaign rested squarely on the fortunes of international politics. He observed that “historians, at least, have been less impressed with the influence of internal dynamics than with the impact of world events.”<sup>170</sup>

Much of the historiography of the test ban negotiations considers the role of key governmental figures and, specifically, influential characters in the Kennedy Administration including Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Jerome Weisner, and Glenn T. Seaborg. Contrary to depictions in the memory of WSP activists that theirs was an “unpopular protest,” many diplomats supported efforts towards a test ban.<sup>171</sup> Praise also extends to the efforts of Kennedy's predecessors President Eisenhower and President Truman, as well as instrumental disarmament advisors Harold Stassen, Bernard Baruch, Dean Acheson, and David Lilienthal. Nikita Khrushchev has also garnered significant credit for his manoeuvres towards a test ban. According to Vyacheslav Molotov, Khrushchev “literally dragged” the USSR to agreement of the treaty. Glenn Seaborg noted that the Russian Premier “became increasingly a responsible world leader” after the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. David Tal, a historian of US disarmament policy, argues that Khrushchev's prerogative to sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty concerned the timing of the offer, rather than the terms of the treaty. As such, focus surrounds the international context and national

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<sup>168</sup> Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation*, 157.

<sup>169</sup> Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace*, 89.

<sup>170</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, “Review,” review of *Organizing for Peace: Neutrality, the test Ban, and the Freeze*, by Robert Kleidman, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (October 1994): 1419-1420.

<sup>171</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xi; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 3.

security considerations, with circumstances simply becoming favourable for a ban by mid-1963. “Agreement was possible,” Tal contends, “only when the time was ripe.”<sup>172</sup>

The personal contribution of President Kennedy often receives considerable praise. Kennedy advocated for a nuclear test ban while a senator, believing an agreement to be a useful precursor for a broader conversation on disarmament. He possessed a strong conviction that the fallout from atmospheric tests caused undue harm. Discussing a recent test with his science advisor, Kennedy held a poignant exchange:

“What happened to the radioactive fallout?” the president asked. “It was washed out of the clouds by the rain,” his adviser answered. Kennedy looked out of the window. “You mean, it's in the rain out there?” “Yes,” replied Weisner, who would remember: “He looked out the window, looked very sad, and didn't say a word for several minutes.”<sup>173</sup>

Though the president received criticism for emboldening the Soviet Union to break the existing moratorium on tests, he remained stubbornly reluctant to reciprocate, wishing to demonstrate his commitment to a ban. Even when deciding to resume US testing Kennedy initially intended to exclude atmospheric trials.<sup>174</sup> His speech to the American University on 10 June 1963 is heralded as the defining moment in negotiations towards a test ban. The speech, calling for renewed efforts towards peace and disarmament, received plaudits in the USSR. On 2 July, Khrushchev reciprocated with a speech in which, “for the first time,” he publicly approved of an agreement.<sup>175</sup> Following an “endgame negotiation” in Moscow, the parties signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty on 5 August, just two months after Kennedy's ground-breaking speech. The signing of the treaty “became the crowning achievement of Kennedy's brief time in office.”<sup>176</sup> Theodore Sorensen, special counsel to the president, wrote that “no other accomplishment in the White House gave Kennedy greater satisfaction.”<sup>177</sup> Glenn Seaborg went further. Had Kennedy served a second term in office, Seaborg writes, he would have made improved relations with Russia his principal concern. “It is logical,”

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<sup>172</sup> Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma*, 169-170; Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*; Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban*; Hopmann, *The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts*.

<sup>173</sup> Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma*, 172.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 184; Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban*, 68.

<sup>175</sup> Hopmann, *The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts*, 18-20.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Gregg Herken, *Counsels of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 185.

believed Seaborg, “that a comprehensive test ban would have been the centrepiece of his efforts.”<sup>178</sup>

When historians assess the significance of peace activists to the treaty’s passage it is generally based on the perceived diplomatic influence wielded. In this sense, the most influential peace organisation in the period was the one WSP members left behind. Between 1961 and 1963, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy proved highly effective in encouraging test ban negotiations. While demonstrations and publicity campaigns attempted to win over the public, only SANE leader Norman Cousins can claim to have personally and directly intervened in the deliberations themselves. He had become a prominent and celebrated disarmament advocate following the atomic bombing of Japan and editorialised for the *Saturday Review* that the advent of nuclear weapons necessitated the creation of a world government. Cousins worked throughout the 1950s on various causes, aiding the victims of the Hiroshima bombings and supporting the political endeavours of Adlai Stevenson and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru before helping to establish SANE in 1957. The USSR thought favourably of the disarmament activist. In early 1963, he was asked by Dean Rusk to meet with Premier Khrushchev. That April, Cousins met with the Russian Premier and advised him that Kennedy “was acting in good faith and genuinely wanted” a test ban treaty.<sup>179</sup>

Norman Cousins’ persuasive performance paid dividends. Khrushchev felt betrayed over the renegeing of prior agreements, but Cousins convinced him that earlier disputes constituted “an honest misunderstanding” and that the USSR could trust President Kennedy. The premier relented, but informed Cousins that “the next move” needed to be made by his American counterpart. Returning home, the SANE leader advised Kennedy to take a “breathtaking new approach” towards ending the Cold War, proposing that he make “the most important single speech” of his presidency at the American University on 10 June. Cousins’ wrote the initial draft of the widely heralded speech and proved the catalyst for that summer’s successful negotiations. SANE maintained pressure on Congress to ratify the treaty and, possessing Cousins’ deeper

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<sup>178</sup> Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban*, 298.

<sup>179</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, “Norman Cousins and the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963,” *Arms Control Today* (December 2012): 34-36; Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 81-86; Jacobs, *The Dragon’s Tail*, 4.

understanding of the debate, adapted its approach to target key officials.<sup>180</sup> Cousins worked feverishly behind the scenes and formed the Citizens Committee for a Nuclear Test Ban in order to stimulate ratification in the US Senate. His unrelenting efforts paid off. The treaty was signed by a vote of 80-19, “the largest vote in favour of arms control” since 1922.<sup>181</sup>

Cousins received widespread praise from the US government. Glenn Seaborg announced that the meeting with Khrushchev “helped to make history.”<sup>182</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. suggested that the idea for a breakthrough speech would not have emerged from State Department. Kennedy sent Cousins his personal appreciation while claiming that “your initiative with the group was essential.”<sup>183</sup> As a symbol of his personal gratitude, Kennedy presented Cousins with one of the original signed copies of the treaty.<sup>184</sup> Cousins’ important role in the test ban negotiations has also been recognised historically. Lawrence Wittner wrote that the president trusted SANE’s leader with “extraordinary tasks – things usually left to seasoned diplomats” and suggested that his historical example had broader implications. “Cousins’ importance in securing this treaty,” Wittner argued, “should serve as a reminder that although diplomats are crucial to the negotiation of treaties, citizen activism can also play a significant role in initiating them and bringing them to fruition.” Notably, the political influence wielded by Cousins was actually magnified by his position as a social movement leader.<sup>185</sup>

Women Strike for Peace did not wield as much diplomatic influence as other comparable groups. While WSPers received praise for their position as political “outsiders,” a key goal of their test ban activities was to persuade influential government officials.<sup>186</sup> The group organised an “uninterrupted stream” of consultations with various congressional representatives, scientific bodies, government agencies and presidential advisers during the test ban campaign, but never managed to meet with

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<sup>180</sup> “Summary of Ad Hoc Committee Meeting, 1 May 1963,” SCPC SANE Archives, Series A, Box 8, Ad Hoc Committee on the Test Ban, 1963, 3; “The Nuclear Test Ban Talks: A Report of Addresses by Dr. Hans Bethe,” SCPC SANE Archives, Series B, Box 51, Correspondence and Related Papers, 1961-1962, Test Ban Statement, Responses.

<sup>181</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 86.

<sup>182</sup> Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban*, 207.

<sup>183</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 909.

<sup>184</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 86; Wittner, “Norman Cousins and the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963,” 36.

<sup>185</sup> Wittner, “Norman Cousins and the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963,” 36.

<sup>186</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 143; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 237.

President Kennedy directly.<sup>187</sup> The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom arguably had more access to government figures. Dorothy Hutchinson, President of the US section of WILPF, met with President Kennedy in May 1962. A report of the 20 minute discussion explained that “the president's attitude toward the group was friendly and gracious. His comments were candid, and the delegation felt the discussion was fruitful.”<sup>188</sup> Hutchinson's meeting with the president suggests that WILPF possessed more influence over policymakers than those in WSP. Despite numerous requests, WSP members never met personally with any president except Jimmy Carter. Historian Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones notes that, in judging WSP's effectiveness, “one must allow” for the group's inability “to gain access to the policy-making inner circle.”<sup>189</sup>

### **Claiming Success**

WSP claimed that its success lay in bringing “even-handed common sense” to the test ban debate.<sup>190</sup> Members credited themselves with having affected public opinion through moral appeals and a basic desire to spare the lives of children. But this strategy was not unique to WSP. Previous involvement with SANE led activists to adopt similar strategies and rhetorical traits while in WSP. Several comparisons can be made between the two group's campaigns. SANE made radioactive fallout and ensuing health hazards a priority campaign issue before WSP formed. An advert featuring famed paediatrician Dr. Spock made the public aware that “Dr. Spock is worried” about the effects nuclear weapons testing was having on the nation's children. This advert, though advancing a paternal rather than maternal concern for children, nevertheless saw echoes in the subsequent campaigns and rhetoric of Women Strike for Peace.<sup>191</sup> The committee publicised the presence of Strontium-90 in American milk supplies in an identical manner to WSP. Posters assigned toxic imagery to prominently displayed milk bottles. Additionally, WSP's claim to represent a uniquely respectable face of the peace

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<sup>187</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>188</sup> “Delegation Sees President John F. Kennedy on Behalf of the Friends Witness for World Order, 1 May 1962.” SCPC SANE Archives, Box 49, Corres. & Related Papers, 1961-1962: Resumption of Soviet Union Tests, 1962.

<sup>189</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences: Women and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy, 1917-1994* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 134.

<sup>190</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 23; “Keynote Address by Ethel Taylor at WSP National Conference, Chicago, Illinois, October 1973,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1973, Chicago IL, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace*, 117.



movement also mirrored SANE's public image. WSP, while claiming to represent all mothers around the world, appealed to a base of white, affluent, middle-class, women. SANE had adopted the image of respectable, elitist members of society with its founding in 1957.<sup>192</sup> Likewise many other peace activists and organisations recognised that appearing moderate and approachable would allow the public to voluntarily accept their rhetoric without antagonism.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore contention surrounds the efficacy of moral appeals in marshalling public support for political treaties. WSPers hailed their ability to employ morally loaded rhetoric during their demonstrations, but many felt repulsed by this attitude towards the delicately balanced negotiations. President Dwight Eisenhower, for example, "regretted" the necessary rhetorical exercises, believing the issue to be so dangerous and complex that this manner of public debate could "distort" the subject. Robert A. Divine noted that Eisenhower preferred to make the debate factual in its entirety. He also argued that Adlai Stevenson's 1956 presidential bid, in which he made testing a moral, public matter, disgusted Eisenhower, ironically inhibiting an "opportune moment" to press for a test ban in the autumn of that year.<sup>194</sup> Even figures publicly opposed to the test ban felt that moral judgements clouded the issue. Hans Bethe, a leader of the post-war scientists' movement against the nuclear arms race, "objected to the emotional appeal and moralistic tone" of some antinuclear campaigns.<sup>195</sup>

WSPers also claimed that their ability to provoke public support for a test ban and their persistence in raising the awareness of radiation hazards influenced the campaign. But public opinion had, at best, a complex and inconsistent effect on the fortunes of test ban negotiations. On the outpouring of public support that followed the August signing of the treaty, President Kennedy opined that he would have more adamantly pursued terms for a comprehensive test ban had he known the depth of popular approval.<sup>196</sup> It was, however, constantly reiterated that "only military aspects be considered" when deliberating the resumption of atmospheric testing.<sup>197</sup> The US government simply required that public opinion support it in any direction it took.

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<sup>192</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 61.

<sup>193</sup> Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 20, 42, 115; "San Antonio, Texas, 7 December 1965," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 13 (2).

<sup>194</sup> Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, 87, 100, 102, 111.

<sup>195</sup> Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace*, 100.

<sup>196</sup> Herken, *Counsels of War*, 186.

<sup>197</sup> Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma*, 189.

Though a known proponent of the test ban, WSP actually received calls from the government asking them to support the president's wish to resume testing in April 1962.<sup>198</sup>

WSP's ability to mould public opinion is equally uncertain. Members engaged in much enthusiastic campaigning and caught the public eye extensively throughout 1962 and 1963. Media reporting consistently approved of the group's efforts. Yet polling data for the period suggests that WSP had little effect on attitudes. Public sentiments towards a weapons test ban varied hugely throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. Eugene Rosi, in an extensive study of public attitudes, showed that "numerous and wide fluctuations of opinion occurred."<sup>199</sup> Generally, shifts in opinion followed either governmental actions or Cold War events. Tensions over the Berlin Wall in mid-1961, followed by the Soviet resumption of tests, resulted in widespread support for a new round of government testing. On Kennedy's renewed efforts towards a test ban in 1963 opinion shifted so that a majority approved a Partial Test Ban Treaty by August. Rosi also observed that, even when educated on the dangers of fallout, concerns over radiation did not govern people's attitudes towards a test ban. Security concerns, foreign policy issues, and the guidance of both government and nongovernmental experts shaped opinion. "No panic over fallout was registered. Security concerns apparently outweighed humanitarian concerns...A large majority of the populace therefore seemed willing to take the risks involved in continuing American tests rather than cease them without an agreement."<sup>200</sup> The main thrust of WSP's campaign – certainly the rhetoric used – did not appear to affect the results of Rosi's study.

WSPers relied on a number of pronouncements to endorse their test ban activities and make their case as influential actors. The organisation did receive credit from journalistic figures such as I. F. Stone. UN Security General U Thant also received Dagmar Wilson, Helen Frumin, and Lorraine Gordon to thank them for their group's efforts.<sup>201</sup> Other famous statements in support of WSP are more contentious. In a statement widely referenced by Amy Swerdlow, Dagmar Wilson, and many other leading WSPers, Kennedy's Science Advisor Jerome Weisner reportedly gave "the

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<sup>198</sup> "Eleanor Garst Draft Chapter Four," SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962, 2.

<sup>199</sup> Eugene J. Rosi, "Mass and Attentive Opinion on Nuclear Weapons Tests and Fallout, 1954-1963" *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 2 (1965): 281.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 292-295.

<sup>201</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 12, 94.

major credit for moving Kennedy, not to arms controllers inside the government, but to Women Strike for Peace, SANE, and Linus Pauling.”<sup>202</sup> But this quote did not come directly from Weisner. It originally appeared in a 1970 *Science* article discussing the role of universities in weapons research. Andrew Hamilton's piece did not quote Weisner, nor did it consider the history of the test ban movement in any depth.<sup>203</sup> Likewise the pronouncement from Kennedy that he had seen WSP's march and “considered their message received” was prompted by a press conference in which he was asked directly about the demonstration. Madeline Duckles claimed that Kennedy wrote a letter on the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty “saying that it was largely to the women's credit that that was passed.” But these statements, cited as evidence of impact by WSP activists, were neither directly attributed to their source, nor offered without prompting.

In order to fully extrapolate WSPers' belief in their success, an assessment of the group's effectiveness must consider other aspects. Though historical opinion contends that WSP had a limited influence on the outcome of the treaty itself, the nature of activists' claims suggests that they did not necessarily determine success in substantive achievements, but in the development of an identity and community within which women could organise. Joining WSP was a transformative experience. Amy Swerdlow recalled her attitude when speaking of her confrontation with Valerian Zorin in Geneva:

I remember that particular confrontation with a representative of Soviet power as one of the most significant moments of my life, not because I influenced Zorin – I certainly did not – but because in speaking truth to power, I experienced a moment of freedom from my own feelings of powerlessness as a woman and a citizen.<sup>204</sup>

The organisation's ability to provide its members with a sense of worth was far more significant than the treaty itself. WSPers discuss the development of the group's “nonorganization,” the inclusion of participants, and its irreverent encounters with authority as equally significant to the passing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty. Imbuing recollections with these events was not just a rhetorical trait, but a cultural practice. It informed the identity of members. As such, the signing of the treaty allowed WSPers to frame their accounts of the period with a substantive success, but the treaty alone does

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 12; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xi; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>203</sup> Andrew Hamilton, “M.I.T.: March 4 Revisited Amid Political Turmoil,” *Science*, Vol. 167 (13 March 1970): 1476. For an example of this source being used to discuss WSP's success, see Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream*, 177.

<sup>204</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 195.

not explain why activists considered their group significant. Assessments of WSP's success must, therefore, consider the experience of involvement in the organisation.

Commitment to WSP was exemplified by the manner in which the group continued in the aftermath of the Partial Test Ban Treaty. Much criticism of the 1963 treaty considers its adverse impact on the antinuclear movement, as it placated popular demand for a ban on atmospheric testing while allowing underground testing and arms build-ups to continue unabated. The antinuclear movement was "deprived of its chosen issue" before its goals had been achieved.<sup>205</sup> Wittner claims that "much of the public and part of the movement soon believed – as SANE's Homer Jack later complained – 'that peace broke out with the test ban!'" Paul Boyer too cites the ratification of the treaty as the start of a period of "apathy" among antinuclear organisations who felt they had achieved their aims.<sup>206</sup> He wrote that "the sudden fading of the nuclear-weapons issue after September 1963, whether as an activist cause, a cultural motif, or the topic of public discourse, is striking indeed."<sup>207</sup>

WSPers reflected positively on the first two years of their organisation's life, with some justification. It had grown from a one-day action into a fully-fledged member of the peace movement, mobilising women around the country, organising campaigns, and securing considerable successes. Incidents such as the HUAC hearings became key points of reference as members understood themselves within a context of "nonorganization," open membership, and irreverent action. Attitudes towards the test ban campaign and WSP's role in its passing further served to instil activists with a shared memory. But analysis of this period demonstrates some problems with existing attitudes towards the group's history. Myriad problems emerged out of WSP's complex organisational setup, causing notable strains among women who offered differing views of the perfect "nonorganization." Regional tensions and local autonomy caused further division, producing difficulties for those who have considered WSP's history, memory, and identity as nationally cohesive. While still cited as the group's most successful period, analysis of contemporary opinion and competing views shows that WSP's HUAC performance and involvement in the test ban movement remains contentious.

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<sup>205</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 52.

<sup>206</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Nuclear Threat Ignored: How and Why the Campaign Against the Bomb Disintegrated in the Late 1960s," in *1968: The World Transformed*, eds. Caroline Fink et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 447.

<sup>207</sup> Paul Boyer, "From Activism to Apathy: The American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963-1980," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (March 1984): 824.

Most importantly, the established image of Women Strike for Peace meant that any incidents that did not conform to the perception of WSP as a cohesive yet unorganised group of respectable, irreverent mothers, were reduced in historical relevance. Owing to the ambiguous nature of WSP's stance, actions of members that were deemed to be at odds with the desired image of the organisation occurred with more frequency as the organisation continued beyond its initial intent.

### **3. “A Not So Funny Thing”: Alice Herz, the Jakarta Meeting, and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, 1963-1967**

It is, perhaps, a historical irony that on the day Women Strike for Peace first publicly protested, deliberations within the Kennedy administration created the conditions that would occupy WSPers for the next 12 years. On 1 November 1961, General Maxwell Taylor advised the dispatch of US marines to support the government of South Vietnam. Acknowledging the various risks of such a move, Taylor emphasised that “there can be no action so convincing of US seriousness of purpose.” The Taylor-Rostow report affirmed that “a bare token, however, will not suffice; it must have a significant value,” and recommended a substantial increase in American military presence.<sup>1</sup> The report set in motion the inexorable creep of US involvement in Vietnam, culminating in a controversial and unpopular conflict that sparked the most significant anti-war protests in American history.

As it became aware of American military intervention in South East Asia, Women Strike for Peace diverted its antinuclear efforts towards what became a long, arduous, and fractious period of anti-war protest. Involvement in the anti-war movement secured WSP’s positive historical legacy. Tom Wells spoke highly of the busy and “dogged” WSPers “in perpetual motion against the war.”<sup>2</sup> WSP is simultaneously praised for the promptness of its public opposition. DeBenedetti and Chatfield noted WSP’s protests occurred even before the “scattered” group of anti-war protesters coalesced into a “movement” against the Vietnam War. Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan agree.<sup>3</sup> WSPers themselves reflected fondly on their experiences. Participation in the anti-war movement offered a huge source of pride for members who pointed out their responsibility for a number of large demonstrations and unprecedented feats.<sup>4</sup> WSPers were the first to demonstrate at the Pentagon, the first to oppose the use of napalm, and the first members of the peace movement to travel to Hanoi during the war.

Yet the experience of activists during the Vietnam War was not universally shared and individual attitudes towards WSP’s anti-war activities in the mid-to-late

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<sup>1</sup> Frederik Logevall, *The Origins of the Vietnam War* (Essex: Pearson, 2001), 113; “Maxwell Taylor Recommends the Dispatch of U.S. Forces, 1961,” in *Major Problems in the History of the Vietnam War*, ed. Robert J. McMahon (Boston: Wadsworth, 2008), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Wells, *The War Within*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 85; Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 11.

1960s perfectly demonstrated the layers that existed within the organisation. Though producing a uniform historical narrative, experiences of the period varied among women in the organisation and established narratives of WSP's activities in the period do not represent the numbers that took issue with the development of the organisation's stance. The work and attitudes of key women differed substantially from casual activists. Grassroots members were sometimes forced to accept the choices made by leading figures, complicating descriptions that suggest WSP allowed individual conscience and made decisions by consensus. Some struggled to accept the rationale of those who decided to depart from the group's traditional image of respectability and its disdain for civil disobedience.<sup>5</sup> Often, the manner with which certain incidents are revered or downplayed in the memory of Women Strike for Peace depends on how well the event conforms to the group's respectable, "ordinary" image. But this is not always the case, particularly during the Vietnam War. In some instances the more radical acts are, curiously, emphasised in the narrative of WSP's protests. Memory of the period is, therefore, problematic. To provide a comprehensive overview of Women Strike for Peace in this period the history of the group must take into account the varying experience of its members.

### **"Early" Concern**

With the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, public concern towards nuclear weapons began to fade.<sup>6</sup> Though Women Strike for Peace continued its energetic protests against the NATO Multilateral Fleet, it struggled to remain relevant, a problem afflicting many of those who had so vigorously opposed nuclear weapons testing.<sup>7</sup> Sensing that the group had more work to do, Dagmar Wilson wrote to her fellow activists in late 1964 to urge their continued participation.<sup>8</sup> Yet even WSP's de facto leader began to scale back her activities. Her secretary described Wilson as "temporarily 'retired' from the WSP scene."<sup>9</sup> A regional meeting held between eastern branches and Los Angeles WSP discussed the organisation's continuing relevance. Participants

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<sup>5</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980."

<sup>6</sup> Paul Boyer, "From Activism to Apathy," 821-844.

<sup>7</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 87-92.

<sup>8</sup> "Letter from Dagmar Wilson to WSPs, 1 November 1964," SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts.

<sup>9</sup> "Reply to Mrs. Harold J. Stein from Dorothy Maund, Secretary to Dagmar Wilson, 6 February 1964," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 1, D. Wilson Files – Invitations to Speak etc. (1964).

addressed “sluggish participation” and noted on record that many members expressed “general tired feelings.”<sup>10</sup> Not all branches experienced such malaise, however. While New York and Philadelphia endured “contracted” operations as a result of a lack of finance, Los Angeles was “continuing well.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Women Strike for Peace lacked the ability to sustain public interest in its original campaign.

A running joke among WSP members held that “a not-so-funny thing happened on the way to disarmament...Vietnam.” It became the working title of Ethel Taylor’s memoir and was eventually used as the heading for a chapter on WSP’s Vietnam War activism in Swerdlow’s *Women Strike for Peace*.<sup>12</sup> The quip encapsulated the perceived attitude of most in Women Strike for Peace that the war was an unwanted distraction from their antinuclear activities. “We were sidetracked,” Ethel Taylor declared “even though we knew that while the war was going on, the nuclear arms race would continue, we had to make a choice on what issue we would deal with immediately.”<sup>13</sup> But rather than causing a distraction, opposition to the Vietnam War instilled the peace movement with renewed vigour and took WSP to new heights. Former members universally pointed to their opposition of the Vietnam War as a site of hugely successful and rewarding work. Historians of WSP, including Swerdlow, Estepa, Schneidhorst, and Alonso also provide positive synopses of the organisation’s activities among the anti-war movement. WSP certainly achieved a great deal in the period, marching on the Pentagon and the White House, boycotting and blockading companies manufacturing war materials, and engaging in draft resistance initiatives. Activists served an important role as visible and respected participants within coalitions, with Women Strike for Peace in demand for its ability to “produce bodies” for marches.<sup>14</sup> Dagmar Wilson boasted that WSP had upped its membership to 500,000, while other organisations spoke glowingly of their cooperation with Women Strike for Peace.<sup>15</sup> Opposition to the Vietnam War ultimately became the group’s most important campaign. Speaking to the 1965 national conference, Barbara Bick believed that the three years’ experience

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<sup>10</sup> “Topics, Comments, Decisions of the East Regional Meeting (plus L.A.) of WSP, 1964, Philadelphia, Nov. 8, 9,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1964, Winnetka IL.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 125-142.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>15</sup> “Women March Briefly At White House,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 November 1968, 6; “Letter from C. Clark Kissinger to Dagmar Wilson, 5 June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Jan-Aug.



opposing nuclear weapons “has been, in a sense, a training school preparing our women for the present national crisis.”<sup>16</sup>

Individual WSPers had publicly agitated against American involvement in Indochina since the signing of the Geneva Accords in 1954, albeit not as representatives of Women Strike for Peace.<sup>17</sup> Still, the actions of local branches in California allowed the organisation to assume an historical legacy as one of the first critics of the war.<sup>18</sup> Even as a test ban treaty continued to elude negotiators in March 1963, a state-wide California conference warned that tensions in Vietnam were at an “extremely critical phase,” urging members “now is the time to mobilize.”<sup>19</sup> In October 1963, Peninsula Women for Peace made a statement saying that “as American women we are shocked and ashamed that our government is supporting militarily and financially the regime which is perpetrating these atrocities.”<sup>20</sup> By the end of the year San Francisco WFP denounced Madame Nhu, the de facto First Lady of South Vietnam. Members called for the “withdrawal of all US aid to the Diem Government” and expressed their “shame” that American participation had exacerbated “terrible events.”<sup>21</sup> Wilson later took pride in these actions, asserting that her group’s members “were the first people to take to the streets protesting the Vietnam War.”<sup>22</sup>

Given general understandings that vigorous opposition to the Vietnam War began in 1965, some WSPers certainly protested early.<sup>23</sup> But activities in California did not represent the opinion of huge numbers of WSP activists. Esther Newill argued that women on the east coast in particular seemed stubbornly reluctant to broach opposition to the Vietnam War for several years. She claimed that a “culture of silence” pervaded discussion in New York and that she felt “almost gagged” from voicing her opposition in the city. Newill actually accused WSP’s leaders of shouting down early suggestions

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<sup>16</sup> “Issues for Discussion – Pre-Conference, Scheduled for 21-24 October 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1965, San Francisco CA, 4.

<sup>17</sup> “Letter from Senator James H. Duff to Ethel Taylor, 24 May 1954,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, Ethel Taylor – Congressional Correspondence (1951-1972).

<sup>18</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 85; Mitchell Hall, *Because of Their Faith*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> “California WFP/WSP Statewide Conference, 10-11 March 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1963 Early WFP Activity Against Vietnam War.

<sup>20</sup> “Statement from Peninsula Women for Peace, 31 October 1963,” UCB WFP Archives B3, Box 1, Other CA Area Offices Literature.

<sup>21</sup> “S.F. Women for Peace to Confront Madame Nhu, 28 October 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 2, 1963, Early WFP Activity Against Vietnam War.

<sup>22</sup> “Artist Paints Rural, Forgotten Loudoun,” *Loudoun Times-Mirror*, 12 November 1987, Section D.

<sup>23</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 102.

to oppose the war.<sup>24</sup> Though offering a rather conspiratorial assessment of WSP's leadership, Newill's explanation is supported by evidence from the period. Margaret Russell, displaying solidarity with those in the region having travelled extensively around Asia in her youth, used her skills as an archivist to produce a "comprehensive information kit, heavy with citations of the Congressional Record and newspaper sources, about the war."<sup>25</sup> She wished to circulate the information throughout WSP in order to galvanise early opposition to American involvement in South East Asia. But the kit drew scorn from members reluctant to address the issue at that stage. In October 1963, influential Portland WSPer Carol Urner wished to "dissent strongly" from Russell's proposal, feeling both that it would show WSP as a partisan organisation and that further discussion needed to take place before the group decided on its policy.<sup>26</sup> Key women exercised caution. Often more politicised than they let on, they did not wish to commit to protesting the war until they felt the "typical American housewife" exhibited awareness of the issue.<sup>27</sup>

Women Strike for Peace did not issue a national policy statement outlining its opposition to the Vietnam War until October 1965, seven months after the start of Operation Rolling Thunder, over a year following the Gulf of Tonkin incident and a full two years since WSP activists first began protesting against American presence in the region.<sup>28</sup> This was despite motions at earlier national conferences that urged the organisation to adopt a position on Vietnam.<sup>29</sup> In claiming that their organisation was an early opponent of the war, WSPers appropriated the efforts of a handful of activists to describe the whole, discounting the substantial resistance that emerged from key women opposed to taking such a decision so early.

### **The Immolation of Alice Herz**

It took the startling action of one member to bring WSP's focus squarely on the Vietnam War. On 16 March 1965, Alice Herz was making copies of a protest flier using

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<sup>24</sup> Newill interview, 23 February 1980, ARS.0056.

<sup>25</sup> McKay, "Margaret Ells Russell," 128.

<sup>26</sup> "Issues for Discussion No.5, 22 October 1963," SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-10, Ephemera.

<sup>27</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> "Position Paper," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1965, San Francisco CA.

<sup>29</sup> "Draft Agenda for Second Annual National Conference of Women Strike for Peace and Women for Peace, Champaign, Illinois," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1963, Champaign IL; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 129.

the equipment at Wayne State University, where she used to teach. A founding member of Detroit Women for Peace, Herz had expressed concern over military involvement in Vietnam for some time. Leaving the building she realised that she had left the original copy of her flier on the copier machine. She panicked, fearing that the flier would be discovered, that someone would alert the authorities, and that her planned protest would be interrupted by the police before she could act on it. Herz left the university campus and made her way through Detroit, eventually stopping outside of Federal's Department Store on the corner of Oakman and Grand River. She doused herself with flammable cleaning fluid and, at around 9pm, set herself afire. To passing motorists the fire appeared to have come from the front of the store but, realising that someone was in the midst of the scorching flames, several people leapt from their cars, tearing off their jackets and covering the body in an attempt to put out the fire. Unaware of her intentions to die, Richard Boddy, Stephen Burke and his two sons had only temporarily spared the protester's life. After ten days in hospital she died from her burns. Alice Herz became the first American to martyr herself in protest of the Vietnam War.<sup>30</sup>

Born in Hamburg on 25 May 1882, Alice Herz was an archetypal peace activist. She became involved in the peace movement in her native Germany at a young age and joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1916, just a year after it formed. Tragedy struck in her family life when both her husband, Paul, a chemical engineering PhD, and her son, Konrad, died in the space of a week in 1928. She never remarried and raised Helga, her only daughter, alone. Gifted with exceptional intellect and engaged with politics and pacifism, Herz foresaw the dangers of National Socialism as Hitler came to power in the early 1930s. She fled to France in 1933 after Helga enrolled for study at the University of Grenoble. It proved a relief for Herz who, though not practicing the faith, had a Jewish heritage. After the invasion of France in 1940, both Alice and Helga Herz found themselves in an internment camp for German nationals. The experience instilled a sense of social justice in both Alice and her daughter, while witnessing World War Two at first hand strengthened their commitment to pacifism. They arrived in the United States in 1942 and settled in Detroit in January 1943.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hayes B. Jacobs, "The Martyrdom of Alice Herz," *FACT Magazine* (July-August 1965): 11.

<sup>31</sup> Jacobs, "The Martyrdom of Alice Herz"; Spencer C. Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social and Military History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 483-484; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 130-132.

Alice Herz demonstrated a passion for teaching and education throughout her life. After her son became blind, she taught herself braille in order to better his education and her communication with him. She became so proficient that, following her son's early death in 1928, Herz decided to teach other children how to read and speak in braille. "That was the kind of woman she was," explained a colleague.<sup>32</sup> On arriving in the United States, Herz began teaching German at Wayne State University in Detroit. Her proficiency in language was further evidenced by her fluency in Esperanto, the artificially constructed auxiliary language designed to boost international understanding between different cultures. Internationalism was a particularly important part of her life.<sup>33</sup> While in the United States Herz wrote freelance articles for German, Swiss, and American publications, and maintained correspondence with peace workers across the globe.<sup>34</sup> Well-wishers from all over the world celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and 150 people attended a party in her honour. Herz herself was reluctant to attend, feeling "too busy for parties" because of her activist commitments.<sup>35</sup> Her friendship with Japanese pacifist and Hosei University Professor Shingo Shibata is particularly noteworthy. Their correspondence stretched over 12 years and, although never meeting in person, Prof. Shibata edited and published a collection of letters and documents on her death, fittingly titled *Phoenix*.<sup>36</sup>

Herz's lifelong commitment to pacifism saw her engage in activities for both SANE and WILPF in the years prior to WSP's formation. She also expressed equal concern for the Civil Rights movement and forced her way into Cobo Hall in 1963 to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver an early version of his "I Have a Dream" speech.<sup>37</sup> Her ceaseless campaigning yielded a sizeable file with the Detroit police department's "Subversive Squad." A sergeant described her commitment in favourable terms:

I've seen her around for years...she was just a pacifist. You know, always out on the march whenever someone – anyone – was demonstrating against war. She was what I'd call a go-er. I don't think she ever missed a meeting of any of those peace organisations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Letter to Daughter Explains Why Woman Set Self Afire," *The Detroit News*, 18 March 1965.

<sup>33</sup> Shibata ed., *Phoenix*, 171-173.

<sup>34</sup> "From Detroit Women for Peace," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>35</sup> "Letter from Lucy Haessler to Amy Swerdlow, 25 March 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

<sup>36</sup> Shibata ed. *Phoenix*.

<sup>37</sup> Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobs, "The Martyrdom of Alice Herz," 12.

Although her status as a social activist was well known to the authorities, Herz was never arrested for her work.<sup>39</sup>

Her experience in community organising made Alice Herz well-placed to become a founding member of Detroit Women for Peace. She took a great deal of pride in the newly established organisation, writing to Prof. Shibata that “we have organized a Women’s Peace Campaign. November 1<sup>st</sup> was our start and we had a response beyond expectation.”<sup>40</sup> Later news clippings depicted her meeting the Mayor with her daughter. An annotated photograph of the experience sent to Shibata explained that she was, “on the right side, the smallest person.”<sup>41</sup> Herz delighted in the freshness WSP provided for the peace movement, contrasting it to WILPF by declaring that it had, “cleared the way towards genuine peace. We cannot go back to the old, damaging way.”<sup>42</sup> She was present at many early rallies and national conferences, appeared invariably on the attendance lists for committee meetings, and served as a contact point for Detroit WFP. A letter sent to Washington, D.C. WSP just a year prior to her death affirmed Herz’s enthusiasm for the organisation. She proclaimed her excitement for WSP’s future, saying “how I regret not to be 28 years old, but 82!”<sup>43</sup> Though juggling commitments with myriad other organisations, Herz emphasised that “no more peace group seems to me more indispensable than WSP.”<sup>44</sup>

The flier copied by Herz before her death was her suicide note, drafted in the days prior to the immolation to explain her motives. She addressed her note to U Thant and the United Nations while calling for the public to “awake and take action,” pointing out that ultimate responsibility for the Vietnam War rested with American citizens:

With the help of THE COLLOSAL LIE your President, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, J.F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson, have deceived and misguided you...you have allowed your lawmakers in Congress to appropriate billions of dollars for an Arsenal of Destruction...Yours is the responsibility to decide.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 131.

<sup>41</sup> “Letter from Alice Herz to Mr. and Mrs. Shingo Shibata, 12 December 1961,” ACC 92A-119, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>42</sup> “Letter from Alice Herz to Belle Schulz, 5 February 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>43</sup> “Letter from Alice Herz to Washington D.C. WSP, 19 February 1964,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, Comments on MEMO (1963-1969).

<sup>44</sup> “Letter from Alice Herz to Washington, D.C., WSP, 4 February 1964,” SCPC WSP Archives A3, Box 4, Michigan 1964-1966.

<sup>45</sup> “Alice Herz Suicide Note,” in *Phoenix*, 3-4.

The note encapsulated the central tenets of WSP's Statement of Principles, calling for United Nations assistance and the direct involvement of the public to end American militarism. Displaying her own sense of internationalism, she claimed solidarity with the Vietnamese people through her immolation, making herself heard by choosing "the flaming death of the Buddhists." A letter to her daughter implored that she "did this not out of despair, but out of hope for mankind."<sup>46</sup>

But the shock value of such an evocative act of martyrdom primarily sought to move the US government. As Johnson urged Congress to adopt the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the build-up of the American military presence in South East Asia quietly continued. On 2 March 1965, just two weeks prior to Herz's immolation, the Operation Rolling Thunder bombing campaign began in earnest. Taylor Branch argues, Herz "could not believe that an American President who so eloquently endorsed the cause of Selma since then could withstand a jolting appeal to stop an incipient war."<sup>47</sup>

Surprisingly, the immolation and death of Alice Herz elicited a muted response from the media and public. Although reporting to a national audience, newspapers gave brief and factual summaries of the incident and the possible motivations of the participant. Her actions warranted no editorials or long, meaningful discussions of American policy.<sup>48</sup> Herz's colleagues bemoaned the meagre reaction. WILPF activist Mary Phillips lamented that "comparatively few people will know of her sacrifice" and criticised *Chicago's American* for "using only 1 column inch to report the death."<sup>49</sup> On the eighth anniversary of her death, Herz's close friend and fellow WSPer Lucy Haessler ruminated that "at the time, and especially in retrospect as well, I am afraid that it did not have the impact Alice hoped for." The executor of the first immolation in the western world "sank invisibly among freakish news squibs."<sup>50</sup>

In so fiercely exhibiting her attitude towards the war, the nature of Herz's action arguably allowed her stance to be dismissed as people questioned the mental state of the

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<sup>46</sup> Jacobs, "The Martyrdom of Alice Herz," 15.

<sup>47</sup> Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> "Detroit Woman, 82, Is Dead Of Burns in 'Policy Protest'," *New York Times*, 27 March 1965, 2; "Detroit Widow Sets Self Afire In Viet Protest," *The Washington Post*, 18 March 1965, A18; "Detroit 'Human Torch' Protests Viet Policy," *Boston Globe*, 18 March 1965, 13; "Widow Burns Self in Viet War Protest," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 March 1965, A2; "Viet Protest Burns Fatal to Woman," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 1965, 6; "Detroit Widow Tries 'Buddhist' Fire Death," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 March 1965, 10.

<sup>49</sup> "Letter from Mary Phillips to Shingo Shibata, 28 March 1965," in *Phoenix*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> "Letter from Lucy Haessler to Amy Swerdlow, 25 March 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

deceased. Though never publicly expressed, journalists in private appeared to believe that Herz had been motivated by mental illness. While researching a well-received article on Herz's martyrdom, the journalist Hayes B. Jacobs reflected on the varying attitudes of his colleagues towards the incident. "I'm sure you'll find she was a nut'... 'Senile dementia, undoubtedly'... 'at least temporarily deranged.'" He felt compelled to ask Helga Herz about her mother's mental state.<sup>51</sup> Friends fervently defend Alice Herz against such charges. Speaking at her memorial, Ruth Gage-Colby maintained that "in an insane society, Alice sought to make a completely sane testimony" and that she "was not a fanatic, nor a propagandist, but a sincere and intelligent lady."<sup>52</sup> The pastor of the first Unitarian Universalist Church, of which Herz was a member, avowed that "this is not the work of a crackpot."<sup>53</sup>

Women Strike for Peace responded in an equally problematic manner. Privately, the immediate reaction was one of profound shock and sadness. Family and friends had no prior indication of her plans to martyr herself. Visiting on 15 March, Lucy Haessler found Herz "in a state of great agitation, saying she could not be interrupted, she had a big piece of work to do that she must finish." Haessler assumed it involved a piece of writing and "so was not worried" by her being "preoccupied."<sup>54</sup> Helga Herz, despite sharing a house with her mother, only became aware of the incident after hearing the news from WSP colleagues. Members of Women Strike for Peace were deeply moved and sympathies arrived immediately. Inundated with gifts, Detroit WFP urged well-wishers to instead divert their money to the creation of a care fund for Alice's recovery.<sup>55</sup> WSPers nationwide voiced their admiration and support, Los Angeles WISP sending a message to Herz while she was in hospital stating that her "courage and love of humanity is engraved in our hearts."<sup>56</sup> Other peace groups mirrored the reaction. Mary Phillips from WILPF explained that her group "were all deeply moved by this supreme sacrifice by this great woman."<sup>57</sup>

In contrast, WSP's public response showed efforts to distance the organisation from Herz's actions. Though sympathetic, the group struggled to reconcile the inherent

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<sup>51</sup> Jacobs, "The Martyrdom of Alice Herz," 12.

<sup>52</sup> "Tribute by Ruth Gage-Colby to Alice Herz at the Memorial, 4 April 1965, Detroit," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz; Shibata ed. *Phoenix*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> "Detroit Widow Sets Self Afire In Viet Protest," *The Washington Post*, 18 March 1965, A18.

<sup>54</sup> "Letter from Lucy Haessler to Amy Swerdlow, 25 March 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

<sup>55</sup> "From Detroit Women for Peace," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

<sup>56</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 131.

<sup>57</sup> "Letter from Mary Phillips to Shingo Shibata, 28 March 1965," in *Phoenix*, 8.

violence of her immolation with their desired stance as moderate American housewives. Detroit WFP issued a statement emphasising that they considered Herz's immolation to be the act of an "individual." The press release even included some paraphrasing of Herz's statement, altering the wording of the suicide note to make her death appear "illuminating," rather than the more violent "flaming" that Herz herself described.<sup>58</sup> While Detroit WFP carried placards reflecting that "Alice Herz is With Us" on a 20 March demonstration, founder Lillian Lerman publicly stated that it was "difficult to understand how she could have done this."<sup>59</sup> While the group set up a care fund in the hope of raising money to treat Herz in the aftermath of her immolation, requests that *Memo* publish a dedicated memorial issue to Herz did not succeed.<sup>60</sup> Lucy Haessler, a close friend and fellow member of Detroit WFP, hoped that a fellow WSPer would underwrite the publication of a biography, but nothing materialised.<sup>61</sup>

The immolation of another American peace activist concerned with the war subsequently overshadowed Alice Herz's death. Eight months later, on 2 November, Norman Morrison drove from his house in Baltimore to Arlington. Carrying his 1-year-old daughter, Emily, he wandered around the outside of the Pentagon for around 45 minutes, before finally settling in a spot by a retaining wall on the South-East side of the building. The Quaker seminarian poured a jug of kerosene on himself and set himself ablaze. Flames shot nine feet into the air. Although witnesses could not agree whether he had set his daughter down before or during his immolation, Emily was miraculously unhurt. Bystanders attempted to beat the flames down, suffering severe burns in the process, but Morrison died two minutes after an ambulance arrived at the scene. His widow received a letter from her husband the following day, mailed during the drive to Arlington. Morrison asked for forgiveness, but claimed that American bombing in Vietnam compelled him to act.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "18 March 1965 Press Release, Lucy Haessler," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>59</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 182.

<sup>60</sup> "Letter from Lucy Haessler to Amy Swerdlow, 25 March 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

<sup>61</sup> "Letter from Lucy Haessler to Dorothy, 7 May 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *The Living and the Dead: Robert McNamara and Five Lives of a Lost War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 190-235; Anne Morrison Welsh, *Held in the Light: Norman Morrison's Sacrifice for Peace and his Family's Journey of Healing* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 129-130; Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 1-4, 61-62, 132-133.



The press was replete with stories of Norman Morrison in the days following his death. His young family became the subject of newspaper reports as photos of his wife and young children adorned human interest stories that appeared in the immediate aftermath. Curiosity in Morrison's life abounded. In-depth editorials questioned his actions and discussed the US presence in Vietnam.<sup>63</sup> The immolation seemed to influence further acts. When 22-year-old Roger LaPorte set fire to himself outside the Dag Hammarskjold Library of the UN Plaza in New York one week later, immolation appeared to be a temporary craze among the peace movement and the American public generally.<sup>64</sup> Police requested asbestos gloves and fire-fighting equipment out of fear that immolations would become a frequent protest action.<sup>65</sup> News stories mentioned cases of people attempting immolations throughout the country.<sup>66</sup> The apparent influence achieved by Norman Morrison's death stood in sharp contrast to the indifference that followed the immolation of Alice Herz just eight months prior.

A number of reasons offer themselves to explain the disparity in attention and the gender of Herz and Morrison certainly deserves consideration. As a women's peace protester there appear to have been residual societal expectations on the way Herz should have conducted her activism. Dorothy Day, a well-respected peace activist, denounced acts of immolation under the tenets of nonviolent protest. To Day, nonviolence should "be an essentially undramatic affair," avoiding any attempt at "self-publication" by appealing to the "prosaic and ordinary" lives of most members of the public.<sup>67</sup> Women's peace activists, wishing to appeal to moderates through respectable protest, certainly appeared to have had more scrutiny of the particular manner of their protests. Penelope Adams Moon, for example, framed her study of the expectations on women's peace activists with an introduction focusing on the reaction to Alice Herz's

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<sup>63</sup> "War Critic Burns Himself to Death Outside the Pentagon," *New York Times*, 3 November 1965, 1; "Pacifist, Tot in Arms, Dies by Fire Outside Pentagon," *Boston Globe*, 3 November 1965, 1; Donald Bremner, "His Life Was One Long Protest Against Killing," *Boston Globe*, 7 November 1965, 49; "Colleagues Stunned by Quaker's Self-Immolation," *New York Times*, 4 November 1965, 5; "Hate of War Led to Fiery Death," *Boston Globe*, 4 November 1965, 12.

<sup>64</sup> John Corry, "Pacifist Who Set Himself Afire at the U.N. Dies," *New York Times*, 11 November 1965, 4; "War Protest Takes Life of Human Torch," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 November 1965, B6; DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 130.

<sup>65</sup> "Police at U.N. Get Equipment to Block Immolation Suicides," *New York Times*, 15 November 1965, 5; Bud Collins, "Hershey's Secret Weapon: Asbestos Draft Cards," *Boston Globe*, 27 November 1967, 11.

<sup>66</sup> "Mother Burns Self in Protest," *Boston Globe*, 12 November 1965, 14; "Coed Dies After Setting Self Afire," *Boston Globe*, 25 November 1965, 54; "Student Denies Attempting to Kill Self in the Capital," *New York Times*, 12 April 1966, 4; "Pumps Gas on Head and Sets Himself Afire," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 November 1965, C8.

<sup>67</sup> Ryan, "The One Who Burns Herself for Peace," 18, 22.

death.<sup>68</sup> Whether this had a discernible effect on the reporting of Herz's death is less clear. With the availability of only a small amount of media reports that discussed the immolation, Tiffany Hamelin Cabrera accepts that "one can only speculate" whether differing responses emerged for reasons of gender.<sup>69</sup> Cheyney Ryan rightfully acknowledged the context of sexism faced by women in the peace movement, but argued that it is not fully explanative of the differing responses to Herz and Morrison's deaths.<sup>70</sup>

The age and family lives of Herz and Morrison appear a more determining factor in media responses to their deaths. Herz was a widowed 82-year-old with an adult daughter. Norman Morrison in contrast, was only 31, a young father who had left behind a young family. The story of his death presented an added hook that a baby, present at the event, now faced growing up without a father. With a photogenic widow and three small children, the media followed the family as they attended Morrison's memorial, and stories about Emily Morrison continued into her adulthood.<sup>71</sup> While Morrison's immolation resulted in the publication of innumerable photographs of his family, images of Alice Herz and her daughter remain difficult to find. No follow up stories emerged asking how her family and friends considered her actions, and certainly not in the same manner that many of Morrison's friends were offered the chance to voice their opinion.<sup>72</sup>

The timing of Herz's action may also have been too premature to warrant the substantial news coverage afforded Morrison's later death. On the day of Herz's immolation, 16 March 1965, the US had only just started military action in Vietnam in earnest, with Operation Rolling Thunder beginning on 2 March. Public opposition to military policy in South East Asia had not yet coalesced into general anti-war sentiment. Intervention increased massively over the summer, with numbers rising from 23,300 "advisers" in early 1965, to 81,400 troops in July, with 184,300 stationed in Vietnam by

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<sup>68</sup> Penelope Adams Moon, "'We Aren't Playing That Passive Role Any Longer': American Women's Protest of the Vietnam War," in *Restaging War in the Western World: Noncombatant Experiences, 1890-Today*, eds. Martje Abbenhuis and Sara Buttsworth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 151-152.

<sup>69</sup> Tiffany Hamelin Cabrera, "Dying for Peace: Self-Immolation During the Vietnam War, 1963-1972," (PhD Diss., Howard University, 2014), 136.

<sup>70</sup> Ryan, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Donald Bremner, "His Life Was One Long Protest Against Killing," *Boston Globe*, 7 November 1965, 49; Paul Hendrickson, "Daughter of the Flames," *The Washington Post*, 2 December 1985, C1.

<sup>72</sup> "Colleagues Stunned by Quaker's Self-Immolation," *New York Times*, 4 November 1965, 5; John Corry, "Death of a Quaker: His Friends See a Lesson," *New York Times*, 7 November 1965, 2.

December.<sup>73</sup> In November the news media brought multiple stories of innocent casualties involved in American bombing raids. It was one such story, reported in I.F. Stone's *Weekly* that drove Morrison to commit his act.<sup>74</sup> News reports suggest that sentiment was not wholly in favour of Morrison's action, with protest against the war still considered undesirable to many in the United States. But public knowledge of the war appeared more prevalent at the time of Morrison's death in November 1965 than it had been when Alice Herz committed her immolation in March. The media, therefore, had a context within which it could frame Morrison's act that had not existed previously.

Arguably the most influential factor rests with the location of each act of protest. Alice Herz had originally intended to commit her immolation on the campus of Wayne State University on 18 March in an attempt to rouse student interest in politics and the Vietnam War. After accidentally leaving her protest note she panicked and instead chose to commit her act outside an inauspicious department store later that day.<sup>75</sup> There was little connection between the message of her protest and the location she committed her act. This differs significantly from the death of Norman Morrison. While Alice Herz may have attempted to bring the war home, Morrison brought it to the door of the US military. It quickly emerged that the immolation occurred directly outside the office window of Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara. While not witnessing the event itself, McNamara saw the following commotion of ambulances, paramedics, and shocked bystanders. Anne Morrison Welsh, Norman's widow, later downplayed the idea that her husband had known where McNamara's office was, calling it "synchronicity or coincidence."<sup>76</sup> But the event had a profound impact on the Secretary of Defence. In a 1995 book McNamara claimed Morrison's death "was a tragedy not only for his family but also for me," writing that, by "bottling up" his emotions in the aftermath, "the episode created tension at home."<sup>77</sup> Offered the chance for further reflection in the documentary *The Fog of War*, McNamara spoke emotively about Morrison's death, but he declined to answer further questions on the topic when pressed

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<sup>73</sup> Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 321.

<sup>74</sup> Morrison Welsh, *Held in the Light*, 26; "A Priest Tells How Our Bombers Destroyed His Village," *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, Vol. 13, No. 36 (1 November 1965), 3.

<sup>75</sup> Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 120.

<sup>76</sup> Hendrickson, *The Living and the Dead*, 194.

<sup>77</sup> McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 216.

about the impact it had on his own family.<sup>78</sup> In an extensive study of the Secretary of Defence, Paul Hendricksen claimed that Morrison's death sparked the "shattering" of McNamara, hereafter altering his attitude towards the Vietnam War.<sup>79</sup> His later recollections of the incident indicated that the trauma weighed heavy on his conscience and he would proudly cite the fact that Anne Morrison Welsh had offered him her personal forgiveness for her husband's death.<sup>80</sup>

Given the circumstances of each act of immolation it seems understandable that Norman Morrison's protest elicited more contemporary interest, but none of these factors provide a particularly satisfying explanation for the lack of historical interest in Alice Herz. Hendrickson noted that immolation in the United States achieved such interest due to its performance outside of the cultural context of Buddhism in Asia. Justifying the attention Norman Morrison's death received, he suggested that, "this burning seemed vastly different. For one thing, it occurred in our own civilization."<sup>81</sup> Yet this does not explain why Alice Herz, as the first such American martyr, remains relatively hidden. Cheyney Ryan poignantly assessed his own thoughts on the issue, finding that "though surprising, my ignorance is apparently not exceptional." Ryan spoke of the apparent "invisibility" of Alice Herz in historical works, declaring it both "perplexing" and "disturbing" that she did not receive the same attention provided to Norman Morrison.<sup>82</sup> Recognition of Herz's life and death is certainly increasing. The German government, under an initiative to honour those affected by the rise of National Socialism in the country, named a park in Berlin "Alice Herz Platz" in 2003 in recognition of her lifelong pacifist activism. But historical works, even those working chronologically, allow Morrison's death to receive lengthy discussions first before an acknowledgement is made that "a Detroit Quaker had taken her life" some months earlier.<sup>83</sup>

Considering the circumstances and mixed reactions to Herz's death by historians and the media, it may be unfair to specifically highlight WSP's problematic response. WILPF, another organisation that benefitted from Herz's involvement, also struggled to

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<sup>78</sup> *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, Errol Morris (dir.), Sony Pictures Classics, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Hendrickson, *The Living and the Dead*, 197.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 190.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>82</sup> Ryan, "The One Who Burns Herself for Peace," 16-17.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*; Zaroulis and Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 1-4; Mitchell Hall, *Because of Their Faith*, 4; Wells, *The War Within*, 48, 58.

deal with the event and “backed away” from memorialising her death.<sup>84</sup> But the scarcity of reference to Alice Herz within the history and memory of Women Strike for Peace is particularly perplexing given the multitude of benefits her immolation provided for the group. The manner of her death played a huge role in heightening WSP’s international reputation, something sought after for many years. Women’s peace organisations from around the world declared their support of Women Strike for Peace and “hundreds of thousands” identified with the group “in Africa, Asia, East and West Europe.”<sup>85</sup> One organisation declared that WSPers were “the conscience of America.”<sup>86</sup> Organisations in Asia seemed especially touched. Owing to her lengthy correspondence with Shingo Shibata, the immolation and death of Alice Herz caught the attention of many women’s groups in Japan. The New Japan Women’s Association, speaking “as wives and as mothers,” declared their “firm determination” to stand “in cooperation with members of Women Strike for Peace.” They had read of Herz’s exploits in their newsletter and wished to share their condolences with her daughter.<sup>87</sup>

Most significantly, Herz’s death brought substantial support from the public of Vietnam. Choosing to act in solidarity with Buddhist monks in the country, Herz’s immolation lost nothing in translation. She became a revered and legendary figure, particularly in North Vietnam. To honour her deed the country held a silent vigil following the reports of her death. Schoolchildren composed poems in her memory while others wrote and sang songs detailing her lifelong commitment to peace. The government renamed a street “Rue Herz” in the heart of Hanoi.<sup>88</sup> The reverence shown towards Herz yielded a dedicated memorial to her life and death in the Ho Chi Minh Revolutionary Museum, her photo displayed within a candle-lit shrine to her memory. Some of this response may perhaps reflect the opportunism and endeavour of the North Vietnamese government to secure a propaganda victory over the United States. Ho Chi Minh claimed the “support of the US people” in an interview with British journalist Felix Greene, citing the sacrifice of those who had “set fire to themselves in protest

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<sup>84</sup> “Letter from Lucy Haessler to Amy Swerdlow, 25 March 1973,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-051, Box 6, Alice Herz.

<sup>85</sup> “Issues for Discussion – Pre Conference, scheduled for Oct 21-24, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference - 1965, San Francisco CA, 4.

<sup>86</sup> “Letter from Keiko Takizawa to Women Strike for Peace, undated,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>87</sup> “Letter from New Japan Women’s Association to Dagmar Wilson,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, Alice Herz.

<sup>88</sup> Hershberger, *Travelling to Vietnam*, 25.

against United States' acts.”<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, Alice Herz and, by extension, the group associated with her, was held in high esteem by North Vietnamese citizens. Her actions allowed Women Strike for Peace to undertake one of the most daring and effective activities in the group's history.

### **The Jakarta Meeting**

In May 1965, the Soviet Union held a celebration marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. Prominent New York WSPer Lorraine Gordon and Southern California Coordinator and Los Angeles WISP leader Mary Clarke attended the celebration as invited guests. Clarke recalled that “the Soviet Women's Committee designated Women Strike for Peace as ‘peace heroines’” and deliberately selected the two WSPers to be representatives of the whole group.<sup>90</sup> However, an ulterior motive pervaded their acceptance of the invitation. Women Strike for Peace had tried to acquire contact with peace groups working out of North and South Vietnam for some time. Spying an opportunity while in Russia, Clarke and Gordon sought out the newly established embassy for the National Liberation Front in an attempt to secure permission to travel to Hanoi.

After a two hour meeting with embassy officials, the NLF mission remained “sceptical” of the women's intentions and reluctant to accept passage into North Vietnam. Lorraine Gordon believed that the WSPers' appearance as “middle-class American women” and “mothers” eventually won over the officials, but WSP's association with Alice Herz brought substantial influence.<sup>91</sup> A week following the initial meeting, embassy staff informed the two WSPers that a group of women in North Vietnam had offered to sponsor their trip. They were reportedly “delighted and excited over the proposal” of meeting with Women Strike for Peace members and a contingent flew to Moscow to meet with Clarke and Gordon before inviting them to travel immediately to Hanoi for further discussions. Mary Clarke later relayed that the North Vietnamese women “were aware of the WISP woman in Michigan who had set herself on fire.”<sup>92</sup> Mary Hershberger argues that the fact that “Herz had belonged to the same organisation that these women came from prompted a warm response from the

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<sup>89</sup> “Ho Interviewed...: Raps LBJ, But Silent On Cong Aid,” *The Boston Globe*, 19 December 1965, 8.

<sup>90</sup> “Mary Clarke,” in *The Loyal Opposition*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Gordon, *Alive At the Village Vanguard*, 154.

<sup>92</sup> “Mary Leona Clarke,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-015, Djakarta 1965.

Vietnamese.”<sup>93</sup> On arriving in Hanoi a dozen women, bearing flowers, met Mary Clarke and Lorraine Gordon and the two experienced V.I.P. treatment throughout their stay.<sup>94</sup>

The trip to Hanoi became one of the most significant acts undertaken by WSPers during its history and activists reflected on it with pride. Clarke and Gordon demonstrated unique daring and courage in their expedition. Aware that traveling to Hanoi during wartime risked government suspicion, they did not inform their friends, WSP colleagues, or even their families of their trip. But their unprecedented journey saw them witness first-hand the consequences of US bombing raids in North Vietnam. The personal experience of the war elevated their awareness of the issue, granted them legitimacy in their views towards the war, and galvanised their opposition to the American government. Clarke and Gordon spent time with amputees, orphaned children, and victims of bombings and met with North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. The scale of the achievement is perhaps best represented by the attempts made by others to claim the prize of being the “first” to Hanoi. Michael Myerson of the United States Peace Council, for example, proudly stated that he “was a member of the first group of Americans to visit North Vietnam during the war” in August 1965.<sup>95</sup> While Myerson was mistaken, it demonstrates the reverence held to the feat by members of the peace movement. Conversely, it proves that some of WSP’s achievements remained unknown during the group’s lifetime.

Meeting with peace groups in North Vietnam, Clarke and Gordon were able to plan a subsequent, larger conference for July 1965. With the help of Pham Van Dong, Women Strike for Peace intended to meet with women’s peace activists from North and South Vietnam in Jakarta, Indonesia, a neutral location accessible to all involved. Having kept their exploits entirely secret from WSPers, Dagmar Wilson broke “the most incredible news!”<sup>96</sup> Urging the hasty approval of the meeting, Wilson implored that members “send as much as you can, and more, immediately. Spread the word.” Such excitement abounded among key women. The Washington, D.C. Steering Committee expressed their support, noting that many outside of WSP had “expressed

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<sup>93</sup> Hershberger, *Travelling to Vietnam*, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 193.

<sup>95</sup> “Michael Myerson,” in *The Loyal Opposition*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to Friends, 20 June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 5, Jakarta Meeting With Vietnamese Women A First July 1965.

great enthusiasm” for the project.<sup>97</sup> Mary Clarke passionately endorsed the meeting to her fellow WSPers in California.

The reaction from grassroots members was less favourable. Women Strike for Peace had encountered risks from foreign adventures before. As early as 1962 the group met with peace activists from the Soviet Union and travelled to Moscow as part of their anti-nuclear efforts. Those excursions, while precarious, had always been lawful. Travel to Hanoi was not, and news of two members going to Vietnam without consulting the rest of the group caused consternation. Grassroot activists expressed concern over the legality of the proposed meeting. Mary Hershberger explains that “it went far, perhaps too far, some felt, beyond the heretofore daring travel to Moscow. The image of American citizens traveling to Vietnam...called up a mixture of cultural and political taboos that included treason.”<sup>98</sup> Members found their reservations shared by Francis McNamara, staff director for HUAC, who felt the trip violated the Logan Act. Lyndon Johnson too expressed concern to Walt Rostow, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs.<sup>99</sup> Amy Swerdlow acknowledged that “hesitations” emerged, suggesting that a number of women felt WSP’s credibility as an “independent peace group” would be jeopardised as it moved into “the pro-Communist camp.”<sup>100</sup> Members felt that the selection of representatives should be given prudent thought. Some felt the feat of meeting personally with representatives of North Vietnam and the NLF surpassed the abilities of their own organisation. They suggested that people outside of WSP with “greater access to our government” should be given the opportunity to travel.<sup>101</sup>

The main source of concern for WSP activists arose from the planning of the meeting. Key women enthusiastically supported the trip and pressed for the rapid consent of branches, leading others to feel “rushed” into making a decision.<sup>102</sup> The lack of consultation, the secretive nature of Clarke and Gordon’s initial trip, and the pursuit

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<sup>97</sup> “Concerning the Jakarta Meeting, July 14-19,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 5, Jakarta Meeting With Vietnamese Women A First July 1965.

<sup>98</sup> Hershberger, *Travelling to Vietnam*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 5, 101.

<sup>100</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 216.

<sup>101</sup> “Memo Concerning the Jakarta Proposal from Ann Arbor Women for Peace, June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 91A-113 Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July.

<sup>102</sup> “Letter from Margaret Russell to WSP Steering Committee and Other National Contacts, 17 June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July; “Concerning the Jakarta Meeting, July 14-18,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July, 2.



of quick decisions drew derision. Many grassroots members voiced their disgust with what they perceived to be a catastrophic failure in the group's decision making process. Ann Arbor Women for Peace posed numerous questions to WSP's Central Coordinating Committee, exclaiming their disappointment at "the absence of realistic planning."<sup>103</sup> Some prominent figures added their voices to these concerns. Madeleine Duckles from East Bay WFP recalled that the hurried decision meant that the Jakarta Meeting "did not represent" the number of members WSP "would like to have represented."<sup>104</sup> Ethel Taylor, "frankly," felt "no enthusiasm" for the project.<sup>105</sup> Carolyn Marks noted a "split feeling" among members of WSP's National Steering Committee and claimed that she did not feel "at all empowered to push it with the way the ladies feel."<sup>106</sup> An open letter from Queens, NY, concisely depicted the mood:

It is too bad that out of so momentous an opportunity...a breakdown of communication has come about. In the short but proud history of WSP no previous project has demanded more careful examination, more objective questioning among ourselves...immediately there was an act of short-sighted expediency which denigrated one of WSP aims and thus sapped our strength.<sup>107</sup>

Without the explicit consensus of members the meeting would "represent WSP as a nadir of effective representation." In a damning denouncement of WSP's leadership, the letter signed off by declaring that "this action...was imposed rather than decided."<sup>108</sup> Women Strike for Peace had not achieved the consensus emphasised as the cornerstone of its organisation.

Despite calls urging its postponement, key figures pressed ahead with plans for the Jakarta Meeting seemingly unperturbed, though regional splits began to emerge.<sup>109</sup> Approval of the trip came quickly and broadly from members in California. With a sense of separation and autonomy from national and east coast WSP, west coast groups felt more confident in participants' abilities to represent and speak only for themselves,

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<sup>103</sup> "Memo Concerning the Jakarta Proposal from Ann Arbor Women for Peace, June 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 91A-113 Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July.

<sup>104</sup> Duckles interview, 22 November 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>105</sup> "Letter from Carolyn Marks to Margaret Russell, 18 June 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Jan-Aug.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> "Letter from E. Elkind to WSPers, 4 July 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> "Letter from Beatrice Aron to WSPers, 5 July 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, Acc 92A-113, Box 5, Jakarta MTG With Vietnamese Women a First 1965 July.

not the organisation.<sup>110</sup> They did not feel troubled by the pace of planning. Chicago Women for Peace, in contrast, held particular reservations over the selection of candidates. Activists “felt that the nomination process was not democratic” and concern grew that WSP would only be represented by coastal groups. Sentiment was that “precious funds were used to hold international meetings for a select few.”<sup>111</sup> Even within the branch the meeting raised disagreements. The selection of Shirley Lens to travel was only ever “tentative.” With access to her own funds, Lens was not dependent on the group’s fund-raising initiatives, allowing her the freedom to take part in activities otherwise off limits to other members. Her selection rankled Chicago WFPers, with colleagues reportedly calling her “‘arrogant’ and ‘not representative’ of their organisation.”<sup>112</sup> The Jakarta Meeting, according to one member, “tore a big hole” in the group.<sup>113</sup>

Of equal note is the manner in which these concerns were snubbed and subsequently quashed by WSP’s key women. Dissatisfaction with the planning for Jakarta emerged from grassroots figures across the United States. At the 1965 national conference in October, Alice Hamburg, a founding member of East Bay WFP dismissed members’ grievances as “bickering” and “nit picking.” Despite Hamburg acknowledging the disregard shown towards WSP’s core concepts by leading figures, she wished to “soft-pedal” any difference of opinion:

So the delegations were not chosen democratically; the majority did not have a chance to express itself on the project in general...some chosen were not grounded in WSP history and philosophy...nothing much was lost...we have no time for this.<sup>114</sup>

Despite this attitude, a Steering Committee meeting on 2 December 1965 reiterated that “consensus means general agreement...all those who operate outside this framework do so as an individual and not in the name of WSP.”<sup>115</sup> The manner with which decisions had been taken and criticism suppressed demonstrates an instance in which consensus had been almost entirely overlooked.

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<sup>110</sup> “Southern California WSP RE: International Conferences and Visits, National Conference, 6-9 June 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1963, Champaign IL.

<sup>111</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 77.

<sup>112</sup> “Airtel 6/30/65,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 12 (2).

<sup>113</sup> “To National Consultative Committee from Lynda Stein, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>114</sup> “Issues for Discussion – Pre-Conference, scheduled for Oct. 21-24, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1 Box 3, National Conference – 1965, San Francisco CA, 1.

<sup>115</sup> “Steering Committee, 12-2-65,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, Minutes of Steering Committee 1965-1970.

The Jakarta Meeting, from the initial engagement by Mary Clarke and Lorraine Gordon in Moscow through to the selection of women to embark on the trip, presents an opportunity to assess the inner-workings of WSP. The affair demonstrates that decisions for large-scale and public activities were often made by key women without adequate consultation with grassroots members. When concerns were raised, as they were substantially throughout mid-1965, the higher echelons of the organisation still moved on with their plans. Descriptions of Women Strike for Peace often state that women could choose not to engage in activities they were not comfortable with. The Jakarta Meeting, however, did not allow individual WSP members to take their own position. It contrasts the traditional perception of Women Strike for Peace.

Despite receiving only tentative backing, the Jakarta Meeting is remembered as an overwhelming success.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the meeting produced many benefits for WSP. Though categorically denying that the event represented a conference, WSP members indulged in a diplomatic display with their Vietnamese peers. The Jakarta Meeting produced similar opportunities to the 1962 trip to the Geneva disarmament conference which allowed Women Strike for Peace to engage in a limited form of citizen diplomacy.<sup>117</sup> Having already established contact with North Vietnam Premier Pham Van Dong, WSP members met with Nguyen Thi Binh while in Jakarta, a member of the National Liberation Front and later the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. She became a chief negotiator during the 1973 Paris Peace Accords and maintained contact with Women Strike for Peace for many years.<sup>118</sup> Several other participants became government officials.<sup>119</sup> While Mary Hershberger argues that WSP made clear that they did not represent “typical” American public opinion, Jessica M. Frazier suggests that the group made the most of their new acquaintances.<sup>120</sup> Frazier contends that WSP wished to act as “liaisons between the US government and North Vietnamese and NLF officials,” while claiming that they had “access to North Vietnamese and NLF officials whom the US government was ignoring.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 214-218.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 35-36, 192-198, 214-218; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 70-84; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 21-24.

<sup>118</sup> “Memo: Jan-Feb 1969, 2-5,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace, 1962-2000.

<sup>119</sup> Frazier, “Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam,” 358<sup>n</sup>1, 360-361<sup>n</sup>21.

<sup>120</sup> Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Frazier, “Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam,” 342.

The fractures caused by the Jakarta Meeting remained evident in the memory of the affair. Mary Clarke and Lorraine Gordon are often held to account for acting outside of WSP's organisational framework by initiating contact with the women from North Vietnam. Amy Swerdlow wrote that Clarke and Gordon "decided, on their own initiative" to seek out the Vietnamese representatives. Describing both as "experts in public relations," Swerdlow discerned that Clarke and Gordon did not wish to "implicate WSP in a meeting that it had not endorsed."<sup>122</sup> Mary Hershberger claims that the trip represented an unofficial undertaking absent of any directive from Women Strike for Peace, believing that "it was not an official WSP trip: it had come entirely at their personal initiative in Moscow."<sup>123</sup> While not necessarily apportioning blame to the WSPers, this narrative attempted to distance the organisation and, more importantly, the leaders of Women Strike for Peace, from the perceived wrongdoing of two individual activists.

This account differs markedly from the story as told by Clarke and Gordon. Both recall that they were pushed by key women in WSP to secure a meeting with the North Vietnamese before they left for Moscow. In her memoir, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*, Gordon recalls that a group of key women sensed an opportunity. Already having contacted a group of North Vietnamese peace activists, Women Strike for Peace wished Gordon and Clarke to try their luck, "let's stretch this visit a little further, we all now said. Let's see Mary and Lorraine can get to North Vietnam." Mary Clarke supported Gordon's perception, claiming that "before we left the States, we had been asked by Women Strike for Peace to make contact with the Vietnamese in Moscow in order to make arrangements for a conference."<sup>124</sup>

Significantly for the history of Women Strike for Peace, Amy Swerdlow's opposition to the trip led to some severe disagreements with her WSP colleagues. Of the affair Swerdlow recalled feeling that the meeting would be "isolating," "not necessary," and that since "the trip was about meeting women from the National Liberation Front," she "wasn't sure that that needed to be done."<sup>125</sup> Additionally she felt that travel to Indonesia was an "expensive thing" and disagreed with the manner that decisions had

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<sup>122</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 214-215.

<sup>123</sup> Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam*, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*, 152; "Mary Clarke," in *The Loyal Opposition*, 1.

<sup>125</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

been made.<sup>126</sup> Her disapproval brought her into conflict with key planners. She claimed that Mary Clarke “for years was angry with me.” The differing responses to the “Jakarta Problem” had an impact on Swerdlow’s research, bad blood hindering her ability to interview some women about their involvement with WSP.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, in *Women Strike for Peace*, the meeting with North Vietnamese women’s activists is used to demonstrate WSP’s ability to build trusting relationships with women around the world. It became a key part of the group’s successful story.

### **Successes, Civil Disobedience, and Varied Experiences**

On their return from the meeting, the Jakarta delegates embarked on extensive speaking tours, relaying their experiences to colleges, church organisations, and various other groups. Although US officials remained reluctant to meet and thereby endorse the excursion, the WSPers spoke in the British House of Commons as they made their way back from Indonesia. They became legitimate spokespeople for Vietnamese culture and with valid reason. Not only had they met Vietnamese women personally, but each delegate had invested considerable time in learning the history of the country and the ongoing conflict. Consequently, they grew in self-confidence. Women Strike for Peace emerged from Jakarta with internal divisions, but was embraced as a credible group within the peace movement. According to Frances Herring, a consistent supporter of the meeting, “the outreach of this Jakarta trip is greater than any previous project of Women Strike for Peace.”<sup>128</sup>

Having established relationships with the peace activists there, WSP cultivated their transnational ties and made further trips to North Vietnam during the war. In 1968 representatives of each group held a mock peace conference in Paris to discuss how best to end the war.<sup>129</sup> Vietnamese women also toured Canada at the invitation of Women Strike for Peace, while Jakarta delegates remained in close contact with Nguyen Thi Binh for many years.<sup>130</sup> WSP ran two notable operations with the help of their North Vietnamese colleagues. The Committee of Liaison, a joint effort arising from a 1969

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Hershberger, *Travelling to Vietnam*, 13.

<sup>129</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 35-39.

<sup>130</sup> “Madame Binh with SF WILPF/WFP 1992,” UCB WFP Archives, 15-21, SF WILPF – Activities, Correspondence, Campaigns, 1990-1998.

trip taken by Cora Weiss and Ethel Taylor, established a link between American POWs and their families in the United States and received much support from the relatives of servicemen in Vietnam<sup>131</sup> The Committee of Responsibility (COR) brought the victims of napalm attacks from Vietnam to the US for medical treatment and functioned in close cooperation with west coast WSP activists. Madeline Duckles, the Northern California Chair of the Committee, “met every one of those children” off the plane at Travis Air Force Base. Many children, orphaned by the war, were fostered and adopted by families in the United States with COR’s help. Documentary evidence of those injured by the war allowed Duckles to educate schoolchildren and church groups about the American military mission under the auspices of raising awareness of the committee.<sup>132</sup>

Women peace protesters certainly encountered difficulties during the Vietnam War. Female activists faced chauvinism from many quarters at the time. Mary King and Casey Hayden’s 1964 *Sex and Caste Memo* rose awareness of the “assumed subordination” of women in SNCC experienced through their personal relationships with male activists.<sup>133</sup> In *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans drew a link between the oppression of women in peace and social justice organisations and the rise of the women’s liberation movement in the late 1960s.<sup>134</sup> Barrie Thorne’s exposition of the draft resistance movement labelled draft work “the point of ultimate indignity” due to rampant sexism experienced by New Left women.<sup>135</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones asserts that “no critique of the war attained the status of a universal article of faith among American Women,” suggesting that women did not manage to form a cohesive mass in their efforts to protest the war.<sup>136</sup> But the Jakarta meeting allowed Women Strike for Peace to act internationally as women and mothers and demonstrate the validity and efficacy of their stance. Lorraine Gordon believed that WSP had shown “the world that women are capable of meeting together in spite of their countries killing each other...women can do what no governments can do.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>132</sup> Duckles interview, 22 November 1985, ARS.0056; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 222.

<sup>133</sup> Casey Hayden and Mary King, “A Movement Arises: Sex and Caste,” in *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>134</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*.

<sup>135</sup> Thorne, “Women in the Draft Resistance Movement,” 179-195.

<sup>136</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*, 153.

<sup>137</sup> “Letter from Southern California WSP to Ann Arbor WFP, June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 3, Trip to Djakarta, 1965; “Jakarta Meeting with Vietnamese Women, a First, July 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, B1, Box 3, Trip to Djakarta, 1965.

As members grew in confidence, Women Strike for Peace began asserting itself within the broader United States peace movement, adopting a unique, feminine, and maternal position on the war. A “Piece de Resistance” cookbook emerged from Los Angeles WISP, advancing their pacifist agenda to their desired audience of housewives and mothers.<sup>138</sup> In the midst of their activism members maintained their image. Cora Weiss for New York WSP offered “Paper Hats for Peace” for a march on the Selective Service Headquarters in 1967 with an advert that read “a lady just can’t be without. Vinylized, so it’s shiny like the fashions say, chic enough to suit the tastes and needs of women on the go.”<sup>139</sup> Women Strike for Peace often attempted to commandeer national holidays as well, calling on the public to send Mother’s Day cards to the White House urging that “this mother’s day we ask one gift – just send our sons home.”<sup>140</sup>

Consumer boycotts also provided a fruitful outlet for WSP. The boycotting of household goods such as Saran Wrap and Wonder Bread, products developed by corporations that also supplied military equipment, allowed activists to connect the war to the money spent on groceries. Without women’s purchasing power, WSP argued, the war could not continue. WFP in San Francisco and East Bay developed a particularly effective campaign against Dow Chemical.<sup>141</sup> Consumer boycotts were a natural expansion of earlier campaigns against the selling of “War Toys,” and fed into criticisms of the creeping militarisation of American society generally. Not all of WSP’s industry boycotts were received favourably, as the companies targeted, including several small stores, often felt aggrieved at being singled-out.<sup>142</sup> But consumer boycotts served a number of purposes. The campaigns allowed WSP to appeal to their preferred demographic, hurt the profits and public image of companies involved in producing material for war, and demonstrate that middle-class American housewives could effectively exercise their political agency to participate in public affairs.

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<sup>138</sup> Isaac West, “Performing Resistance in/from the Kitchen: The Practice of Maternal Pacifist Politics and LA WISP’s Cookbooks,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 30:3 (2007): 358-383.

<sup>139</sup> “To Steering Committees and Contacts, 18 July 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Steering Committee Notices, 1963-1967.

<sup>140</sup> “This Mother’s Day We Ask One Gift. Send Our Sons Home,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC92A-113, Box 2, This Mother’s Day We Ask One Gift, Send Our Sons Home.

<sup>141</sup> “Report of Interview Between Five Women for Peace and Dow Chemical Corp., 5 October 1968,” UCB WFP Archives, 4-38, Boycott of Dow Chemical; San Francisco and National, 1966-1968.

<sup>142</sup> “Letter from James Burke, Fanny Farmer Candy Shops Inc., to New York WSP, 13 May 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 2, 1966, 7 April Mother’s Day; “Letter from Kelly Westrom, Van Duyn Chocolate Shops Inc., to New York WSP, 9 May 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 2, 1966, 7 April Mother’s Day.

WSP's involvement in draft resistance efforts proved the most successful of its sustained campaigns during the Vietnam War. Draft work seemed a perfect fit for WSPers. Amy Swerdlow claimed that WSP's role in the resistance to the draft exemplified "women's age-old ability to carve out political space and power for themselves in a man's world by acting in the service of others."<sup>143</sup> In essence, WSPers accepted that their role was to provide support for draft resisters, but reconciled the potential marginalisation of this work by framing the issue through a maternal lens, adopting a seemingly natural position of protection and support in opposition to selective service.<sup>144</sup> Andrea Estepa writes in great depth about WSP's role as part of the draft resistance movement, arguing that it could offer an alternative for women who wanted to work towards draft resistance without accepting a marginal role. She writes that "while many of their activities were 'supportive' in nature, the women's peace groups were autonomous and set their own agenda." Much of this is owed to their identity as mothers.<sup>145</sup>

WSPers had a nuanced and insightful understanding of the Selective Service System. In attempting to share the culpability of draft resisters, WSP's National Consultative Committee drafted the "Women's Statement of Conscience" in 1967. Developed "at the same time and in the same political context" as a similar resolution by SDS, Swerdlow contended that "WSP avoided anything that smacked of left ideology" and contrasted with the SDS resolution that was "at least five times as long...more ideological, radical, and combative."<sup>146</sup> WSP's statement appeared to advanced a moral argument, rather than a political one, and summarised the range of attitudes held by mothers against the war. It argued, that "as Americans," their children had been "taught respect for the rights of others and to stand up for their belief in justice. They now refuse to violate these principles." Expressing their outrage "as mothers, sisters, sweethearts, wives," Women Strike for Peace affirmed its "moral responsibility to assist these brave young men," fully aware of any legal risks involved in such a stance.<sup>147</sup> Others exhibited clear knowledge of the racial and class overtones of the draft. Los Angeles WISP activist Valerie Sissons observed that those who escaped service "would be replaced by a poor or minority youth," while Berkeley and Oakland

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<sup>143</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 186.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 256.

<sup>146</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 164.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 177.



WFP published a pamphlet explaining that “the draftee for Vietnam is ‘young, often working-class, often black.’”<sup>148</sup>

By 1967, Women Strike for Peace considered itself a significant part of the anti-draft movement. On the west coast, branches from Los Angeles to Seattle engaged in draft work and attempted to create “cross-fertilization” of their campaigns to create nationally coordinated actions.<sup>149</sup> New York, Boston, and Chicago area activists also found themselves in fortuitous locations given the groundswell of draft resisters working for Chicago Area Draft Resistance (CADRE) and the Boston Draft Resistance Group (BDRG). Chelsea and South Bronx operations gained “footholds within the communities” of New York and took over responsibility “for the leg work, secretarial work and fund raising that is involved” in the Long Island Draft Information and Counselling Service.<sup>150</sup> When Palo Alto mother Evelyn Whitehorn made a legal challenge against the draft, Aubrey Grossman, the husband of San Francisco WFPer Hazel Grossman, represented her.<sup>151</sup>

Counselling provided the main source of work. New York groups organised several “End the Draft Caravans” to educate those who could potentially serve. The operation was carried out with much prudence. Volunteer counsellors were reminded that their purpose was not to politicise or encourage resistance, only to inform men of their rights under draft law. In this sense, WSP offered a moderate attitude to draft work. New York groups’ warned members that:

As you give out the literature, please remember that you must not say anything which can be construed as advice on draft dodging but you can encourage boys to explore their feelings about war, to seek more information about Vietnam, and to think more about their eventual role in relation to war and the Draft.<sup>152</sup>

Amy Swerdlow suggested that WSP members counselled as many as “100,000 men across class and race lines.”<sup>153</sup> Although some experienced harsh reactions from police and, in some instances, members indulged in acts of civil disobedience, Women Strike

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>149</sup> “Letter from Mary Clarke to Jean Shulman, 17 February 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 3, Antidraft Action.

<sup>150</sup> “Minutes: WSP Draft Counseling Service Workshop, 9 December 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113 Box 3, End the Draft Week 12-4-9-67.

<sup>151</sup> UCB WFP Archives, 5-7, Office Files: The Whitehorn Case, 1968.

<sup>152</sup> “Important Information and Warning to All Volunteers RE: End-the-Draft Caravans,” ACC 92A-113, Box 3, Antidraft Work.

<sup>153</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

for Peace generally confined itself to activities its members were more comfortable with.

The experience of Women Strike for Peace within the draft resistance movement differs substantially from the general belief that draft work was, for women, the point of “ultimate indignity.”<sup>154</sup> Far from feeling subjugated or repressed within the movement, WSPers developed a strong sense of pride in the support they offered. Draft resisters in turn welcomed the aid and support. But the position of Women Strike for Peace within the draft resistance movement differed from other women in substantial ways. Although the 1967 Statement of Conscience attempted to state complicity with draft resisters, Women Strike for Peace accepted that it provided support for resisters and members made conscious attempts to separate themselves from their younger peers. WSPers engaged with draft work specifically as “mothers,” rather than as “women.” The generational connotations of this stance should not be undervalued. During the December 1967, “End the Draft Week” WSP specifically asked its members to “participate as fully as possible in the ‘adult’ actions.”<sup>155</sup> Contributing as mothers allowed Women Strike for Peace to avoid many of the sexist overtones experienced by other women in the draft movement. Swerdlow notes that, on being described as “beautiful” by resisters, WSP members felt “little overt sexual vanity.”<sup>156</sup> WSP’s support was “typically parental” and something entirely different to the aid offered by other activists.<sup>157</sup> This aspect of WSP’s history develops the perceptions offered by Michael Foley and Ellen DuBois who suggest that women could indeed find space for themselves within some aspects of anti-draft work.<sup>158</sup>

WSP’s role as a support and supplementary part of the draft resistance movement led some to marginalise the efforts of WSPers, but even in a supportive capacity WSP’s impact extended beyond its initial contribution.<sup>159</sup> The unfailing support provided by WSPers allowed draft resisters to indulge in more radical acts where previously they could not rely on the support of their family and friends.<sup>160</sup> WSP’s attitude as “movement parents” provided much needed political credibility for

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<sup>154</sup> Thorne, “Women in the Draft Resistance Movement,” 180.

<sup>155</sup> “Letter from Irma Zigas to End the Draft Steering Committee, 10 November 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 3, End the Draft Week 12-4-9-67.

<sup>156</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 161.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>158</sup> Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 178-184.

<sup>159</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>160</sup> Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 163.

the peace movement generally.<sup>161</sup> Arguing against the perception that a “generational conflict” emerged between younger and older elements of the peace movement, Schneidhorst suggests that a “symbiotic” relationship existed, with the supportive community provided by Women Strike for Peace allowing younger, radical activists to take more risks.<sup>162</sup> WSPers often provided blankets and meals for protesters who were out all night and offered financial and moral support to those facing court cases and prison sentences.<sup>163</sup> Whether or not others saw them in a supplemental capacity, WSP women provided all they could, felt themselves an integral part of the movement, and believed wholeheartedly that they had contributed to ending the war. By providing parental encouragement and cooperation Women Strike for Peace also carved out a satisfying space for itself.<sup>164</sup>

Testament to their influence in the anti-war movement, various WSP activists experienced harassment and threats from ardent pro-war figures. East Bay WSPer Madeline Duckles received a threat from the Minutemen, telling her she had “the sight of a rifle” on “the back of your neck.”<sup>165</sup> In July 1968, Los Angeles WISP found their office “practically destroyed” after members of Americans for Counter-Revolutionary Action broke in overnight.<sup>166</sup> The intruders vandalised much of the office equipment, stole files and “peace jewellery,” and left death threats for WSPers including Dagmar Wilson, Mary Clarke, and Gail Eaby.<sup>167</sup> New York WSP found itself on the receiving end of a similar “invasion” in June 1970, after Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) occupied its office.<sup>168</sup> Six men forcefully took over the Broadway office, defaced posters, and commandeered the phones to inform callers that they had “liberated Women Strike for Peace to protest WSP’s opposition to the Vietnam War.” The invading members of YAF gave up their siege after a “tongue lashing from Bella

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<sup>161</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 117.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Zaroulis & Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 139.

<sup>164</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>165</sup> Duckles interview, 22 November 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>166</sup> “Letter from New York Women Strike for Peace to Attorney General Ramsey Clark, 24 July 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 10, Women Strike for Peace California – Correspondence, Literature.

<sup>167</sup> “LA WSP, 19 July 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 10, Women Strike for Peace California – Correspondence, Literature; “Yankee Crier; Remember Pearl Harbor; Remember the Pueblo,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 10, Women Strike for Peace California – Correspondence, Literature.

<sup>168</sup> “Alternative for Change: YAF Flyer by Phillip Abbot Luce,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-005, Box 1, WSP Office Invasion by YAF.

Abzug,” but the incident alarmed WSP members.<sup>169</sup> A statement after the incident noted that the “damage caused by the YAF invasion has aggravated the NY office’s already grave financial problems,” and exacerbated deep dissatisfaction with the seemingly apathetic response of the police.<sup>170</sup>

The reasoning for the action deserves note. YAF declared that there was “not anything personal” in their occupation of New York WSP’s office, but that they wished to speak out to “leftists” in the movement generally. A statement directed to WSP by YAF activists said that “maybe it isn’t you particular folks, but most of your side stubbornly and obnoxiously refuses to recognise that there is indeed another side to the story.”<sup>171</sup> Those involved saw Women Strike for Peace as valid representatives of the movement. The targeting of New York WSP suggests two things. First, that some figures felt that Women Strike for Peace characterised a leftist organisation. This is in spite of the group’s exhaustive attempts to appear inclusive, neutral, and single-issue. Second, the YAF invaders deemed New York WSP as symbolic of Women Strike for Peace nationally, despite the differences in politics and activities evidenced by branches throughout the country. The nuance and complexity of the organisation was, therefore, not apparent to the public.

Throughout its activity to 1967, Women Strike for Peace attempted to maintain its founding image of respectability and moderate protest, largely eschewing any recourse to engage in acts of civil disobedience or protest that could end in arrest. This also provided practical benefits for women who remained the principal guardians for their children. Lillian Hayward explained that her husband “would not have been able to handle the family without me,” while Cora Weiss also expressed reluctance to engage in acts that could lead her to serving jail time.<sup>172</sup> Even in instances that WSP provided babysitters and caregivers for mothers who found themselves in jail, WSPers remained opposed to acts of radicalism.<sup>173</sup> In her analysis of the group, Amy Schneidhorst explains that “even in supportive families, traditional gender roles that prescribed

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<sup>169</sup> “Letter from Jean Shulman to WSP activists,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-005, Box 1, WSP Office Invasion by YAF.

<sup>170</sup> “Letter from Police Commissioner H.R. Leary to Jean Shulman, 1 September 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-005, Box 1, WSP Office Invasion by YAF.

<sup>171</sup> “Left on Jean’s Desk by YAF,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 94A-005, Box 1, WSP Office Invasion by YAF.

<sup>172</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 119.

<sup>173</sup> “9 March 1967, Washington, D.C.,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 17 (1).

women care for the children and home insured that these women must limit their activities to lawful dissent.”<sup>174</sup>

This image of respectability permeated historical descriptions of Women Strike for Peace within the anti-war movement. Cora Weiss believed that WSP “played an ‘extremely important’ role in building the broad coalitions against the war, ‘because we were the reasonable voice.’”<sup>175</sup> But as activists became more firm in their criticism of the Vietnam War during 1967, they began advocating increasingly radical actions. Two of the most celebrated demonstrations organised by Women Strike for Peace present a more radical image of the organisation. In February 1967, WSP became the first peace group to demonstrate in front of the Pentagon. Thousands of women became involved in vigorous protest, forcing those inside to hastily close and lock the doors to those outside.<sup>176</sup> Unperturbed by this new development, women at the front of the crowd took off their heels and used them to bang against the closed doors.<sup>177</sup> The scene became renowned, the image burned into the group’s history. Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan suggested it was “such unladylike behaviour, unheard of in 1967 when women were supposed to be seen but not heard.”<sup>178</sup> Similarly passionate scenes overtook a WSP demonstration outside of the White House in September 1967. Having been refused permission to protest on the site outside, members were involved in scuffles with police. The press took multiple photographs of angry protesters and women being thrown to the ground, reporting under headlines described the “bloody melee.”<sup>179</sup>

Such actions were symptomatic of the rising radical sentiments of some WSPers in this period. A few doubted the possibility of compromising with the US government and suggested that the current American system could not be acceded to and had to be replaced. In a discussion with other activists, grassroots WSPer Judy Sugar voiced her disgust with contemporary political systems:

The idea of working with the Congress, I think the Congress represents the establishment. I think the establishment is war-like. So I think to go and ask

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<sup>174</sup> Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 119.

<sup>175</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 223.

<sup>176</sup> “2,500 Women Pacifists Storm Pentagon Door,” *Boston Globe*, 16 February 1967, 5; “Pentagon Bars Viet Pickets,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1967, A5; “Pentagon is Stormed by 2,500 Women,” *New York Times*, 16 February 1967, 4; “2,500 Women Storm Pentagon Over War,” *Washington Post*, 16 February 1967, A1.

<sup>177</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 135; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 153.

<sup>178</sup> Zaroulis & Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 103.

<sup>179</sup> “Cops, ‘Peace’ Women in Bloody Melee,” *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1967, B6.

Congress to do something is a waste of time. I think if you want to deal with Congress it has to be demanding. And I think we can't compromise.<sup>180</sup>

Responding to a suggestion that WSP form a women's political party, National Office secretary Sally Bortz scoffed that "if you form a political party you are acknowledging what I think is a phony belief – that the system works," adding that a party would make "this so-called democratic society legitimate and it is not."<sup>181</sup> Meanwhile, SWAP leader Anci Koppel voiced her support of civil disobedience. Extolling the aggressive actions of those who demonstrated at the Pentagon, she wrote to Jo Friedman, "WE HAVE TO THREATEN those that are responsible in the government – practically, physically threaten them. For this reason we here (SWAP) strongly feel that a civil disobedience is badly needed."<sup>182</sup> In a statement in 1968 she advocated tax resistance, stating she felt "guilty of aiding and abetting a genocidal war" through paying her taxes. "I see myself hurling napalm bombs on children, women, and the aged," she wrote, while observing that regular forms of dissent "are met with tear gas, mace, and clubbing."<sup>183</sup> Even Dagmar Wilson appeared to call for a domestic revolution.<sup>184</sup> Historian Andrea Estepa considered the sense that Women Strike for Peace became a more radicalised group during the course of the Vietnam War, using instances of tax resistance and aggressive demonstrations to argue that WSPers were more inclined to engage in subversive, anti-governmental campaigns.<sup>185</sup>

These historical incidents create problems for the notion that Women Strike for Peace strictly offered a "respectable" alternative within the peace movement. There is a clear difficulty in reconciling Alice Herz's immolation with a "respectable stance," for example. Likewise the rejection of government authority evidenced by the Jakarta Meeting and trips to North Vietnam seems incongruous to a narrative emphasising WSP's moderate approach. Some of the group's most celebrated protests involved acts of civil disobedience. Sit-ins and street performances resulted in the arrest of WSPers, some of whom, such as the 1973 "Washington Sixteen," became revered figures after

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<sup>180</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 23.

<sup>181</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 45.

<sup>182</sup> "Letter from Anci Koppel to Jo Friedman, 23 March 1967," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1967 Jan-June.

<sup>183</sup> "Anci Koppel Statement, 15 September 1968," UWS SWAP Archives, 2-3, American Peace Delegation to the Soviet Union.

<sup>184</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 268.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

their jail time.<sup>186</sup> Amy Swerdlow remembered growing more militant, recalling that “we got involved in civil disobedience, in sitting down in Congress and in front of trains carrying napalm. We chained ourselves to the White House, blocked ships, lay down on the street pretending to be dead Vietnamese.”<sup>187</sup>

Yet, in terms of constructing an appropriate history and memory of the period, to suggest that WSP uniformly embraced civil disobedience and a more radical outlook does not consider the views of many activists who felt deep displeasure with the direction the organisation appeared to take. While Estepa evocatively writes of Women Strike for Peace “taking the white gloves off” in this period, she recognises that the Pentagon demonstration and “specifically the action of shutting the Pentagon doors created a split in attitudes from WSP members between those who saw it as something to be proud of (‘we scared them!’), and those who felt it had irrevocably damaged their image.”<sup>188</sup> Steering Committee meetings were taken up by evaluations of the Pentagon demonstration, with many seeing it “negatively” as “too unorderly.”<sup>189</sup> Others suggested that “if the aim was to draw in more women, that kind of behaviour would not do it,” and that “it had alienated their neighbours.”<sup>190</sup> The WSPers’ complaints appeared prescient as newspapers recorded a loss of support for the marchers as a result of their “conduct.”<sup>191</sup>

For every perceived act of radicalism there can be found dissenting voices and appeals to maintain a respectable front. A substantial number of activists remained reluctant to get arrested or engage in civil disobedience. Despite the group having embarked on multiple trips to North Vietnam, many grassroots WSPers continued to balk at the prospect of draft card burnings.<sup>192</sup> At a WSP meeting held at Chevy Chase Library in Washington D.C., Folly Fodor became disturbed that “someone there early had turned the [American] flag upside down. The librarian was much upset and we must

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<sup>186</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 89.

<sup>187</sup> Nadine Brozan, “Women’s Group Began as One Day Protest 4,215 Days Ago,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1973, 52.

<sup>188</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 140-144.

<sup>189</sup> “Steering Committee Meeting Minutes, 22 February 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Minutes of Steering Committee – 1965-1970.

<sup>190</sup> “4 March 1967, Washington, D.C.,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 17 (1), 2; “22 February 1967, Washington, D.C.,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 17 (1), 2.

<sup>191</sup> “Strike three,” *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1967, A24.

<sup>192</sup> Zaroulis & Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 113.

see that nothing else is done wrong, or we could not use the library again.”<sup>193</sup> Speaking to a national conference Lyla Hoffman explained the role of Women Strike for Peace:

The role of WSP must be aimed at leading the millions of worried women and mothers...they will not follow us into demonstrations with students, nor into police vans. They will not join us in lying across railroad tracks. It is therefore our responsibility to devise new actions for suitable, ordinary, apolitical, ladylike, worried mothers.<sup>194</sup>

Respectability remained a central tenet of the organisation for many, particularly among the grassroots. The initial attraction of Women Strike for Peace rested in its appeal to moderate American housewives. Wavering from this stance caused dismay for many.

Following the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, Women Strike for Peace successfully transitioned from a close-knit, single-issue nuclear disarmament group to an energetic and industrious anti-war organisation acting across the United States and internationally. Its subsequent opposition to the Vietnam War renewed the energies of activists, further publicised the group’s stance, and became a significant feature of the group’s historical legacy. But experiences of the anti-war movement were neither ubiquitous nor constant. WSP did not adequately acknowledge the varying attitudes of individuals towards the activities it engaged in and the memory that surrounds figures such as Alice Herz illustrates the difficulty in producing a history of Women Strike for Peace that uniformly describes the image and actions of all its members. Likewise, the experience of WSP activists differed depending on whether a member was a “key woman” or a grassroots figure. Regions in particular felt huge disparities in their experiences. Questions abounded over the decision-making process and whether WSP could truly stick to its respectable, moderate stance. The history of WSP’s anti-Vietnam War activism, though often used to emphasise its tenets of respectability, individual action, and loose coordination, shows a far more varied experience.

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<sup>193</sup> “To SAC WFO (100-39566) from SA Philip H. Wilson, Oct 24 1966,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566, Vol. 15 (1).

<sup>194</sup> “Issues for Discussion – Pre-Conference, scheduled for Oct. 21-24, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1965, San Francisco CA, 3.





#### **4. “A Falling Off of Interest”: The Silence of WSP’s Decline, 1965-1973.**

In October 1968, 40 members of Washington D.C. Women Strike for Peace met to discuss various tensions afflicting their organisation.<sup>1</sup> Though members from outside D.C. did not attend, the participants of the Washington Retreat reflected sentiments expressed by activists throughout the country. WSPers began raising concerns over the practical functions of the organisation with more frequency after the Jakarta Meeting, recounting heated arguments and disputes between members while fearing for the group’s strength. Many started to question fundamental aspects of the organisation’s character. Some felt that WSP should represent a “multi-issue group” tackling “poverty, racism, war,” but others longed for a return to the single-issue campaign against nuclear weapons that grounded the group’s exhilarating early years. Still others questioned, “are we a militant group, are we a political group, are we an emotional group?”<sup>2</sup> Such introspection caused high-profile figures to consider closing the organisation. Folly Fodor observed that “it would be a shame to close shop. But I don’t think that because we have a mimeograph and a few reams of paper and an office that that’s a reason to continue either.”<sup>3</sup> Speaking in sombre tones, Dagmar Wilson displayed her own jaded feelings. Just two months later, she quietly gave up her leadership position and, though still identifying with WSP, withdrew from active participation in its affairs.

The Washington Retreat was not a national meeting, but its significance mirrored SNCC’s 1964 Waveland Retreat in its indication of the strained state of the organisation and its ranging discussions of identity.<sup>4</sup> Women Strike for Peace began to decline almost in unison with other social activist groups, albeit for different reasons.<sup>5</sup> However, while the fractures and discord of WSP’s peers, such as SNCC and SDS,

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<sup>1</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC’s Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 198-218; Cleveland Sellers, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 114-115, 143-145; Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 133-152; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>5</sup> Joe Street, “From Beloved Community to Imagined Community: SNCC’s Intellectual Transformation,” in *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s*, eds. Iwan Morgan and Philip Davies (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012), 116-135.

became defining aspects of their histories, the decline of Women Strike for Peace remains curiously absent from the history and memory of the group. Such is the belief in WSP's strength at this time that most assessments claim that the group only lost its *raison d'être* with the end of the Vietnam War. This suggests that, without the presence of a significant campaign to rail against, Women Strike for Peace could not rouse interest as it faded from prominence in the early 1970s.<sup>6</sup> This chapter contests that notion. It shows that, starting in 1965, engagement with the anti-war movement actually exacerbated the inexorable decline experienced by WSP. Wilson's 1968 exit followed several years of increasing unrest, disharmony, and unbearable stress as the organisation's informal structure buckled under the demanding obligations of the anti-Vietnam War movement. Numerous internal organisational problems cultivated a loss of enthusiasm and frequent disagreements among women, heightening geographical tensions, jealousies, and crucially, estrangement between grassroots activists and women in leadership positions.

The silence over this aspect of WSP's past tellingly highlights the way in which the memory of activists has produced a particular narrative that masks events that conflict with the image of WSP as a successful, harmonious group. WSPers did not discuss the fatigue, unrest, and tensions that afflicted the organisation, instead praising the nonorganizational framework that aggravated these problems. As Harriet Alonso's analysis of conflict between local and national WILPF activists shows, assessing the nature of WSP's decline provides vital insight into interpersonal dynamics and the attitudes of members towards their group.<sup>7</sup> Given the absence of history relating to WSP's late-1960s decline and discord, examining this period further illuminates how certain voices are undervalued in established narratives of the period.

### **"The Decline of the Demonstration"**

The decline of Women Strike for Peace appears entirely consistent with the problems faced by social movement organisations towards the end of the 1960s. Peace activists grew frustrated with their inability to end the war in Vietnam, while deteriorating race relations also troubled civil rights groups. Radicalism became prevalent and the

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<sup>6</sup> Wittner, "The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-1978," 436; Gordon, *Alive at the Village Vanguard*, 160; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 142.

<sup>7</sup> Alonso, "Dissension in the Ranks," 337-342.

willingness to engage in violent protest and civil disobedience caused fractures and breakups within many established organisations. The Black Panther Party emerged as SNCC deteriorated following its earlier highs, while the painful split endured by Students for a Democratic Society at its 1968 national conference produced the Weather Underground and future coordinators of the 1969 “Days of Rage.” Protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention erupted in violence and a brutal response from the Chicago police, with events later referred to as a “police riot.” But still the war continued. The presidency of Richard Nixon, elected ostensibly with the notion that he would implement his “secret plan” for peace in Vietnam, caused further anguish following his decision to secretly expand bombing into neighbouring Cambodia. The public’s trust in government eroded considerably as the Vietnam War continued.<sup>8</sup> When the 1973 Paris Peace Accords eventually concluded US intervention, activists appeared disillusioned, weary, and in search of alternative forms of personal fulfilment.<sup>9</sup> Journalists reported on dwindling turn outs and a lack of interest in marches and protests. Commentators observed “the decline of the demonstration.”<sup>10</sup>

For Women Strike for Peace, its frustrated efforts to end the war in Vietnam presented a stark contrast to the positive endeavours it had previously engaged in. The passage of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 seemed to endorse the group, proving to activists that they possessed the skills, commitment, and power to effect real change in American politics and society. Members looked forward to more victories, hoping that “bringing out our government’s wrongs on one issue would open Pandora’s Box on the many social and economic ills that troubled our nation.”<sup>11</sup> They believed that they could rouse public support for disarmament initiatives, but also that they exercised substantial influence over politicians and elected officials, both within the United States and internationally.<sup>12</sup> However, the scene changed markedly towards the end of the decade. Amy Swerdlow noted the change in mood, remarking that “in the beginning, Women Strike for Peace tried to cast itself as supporters of President Kennedy’s Peace Race.

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<sup>8</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 541; “Letter from Trudi Young to WSP Members, 29 May 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Wolfe, “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” in *Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine, and Other Stories, Sketches, and Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 111-147.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Valentine, “The Decline of the Demonstration,” *The Washington Post*, 14 July 1973, A18.

<sup>11</sup> “SWAP Statement to WSP Conference 1980,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-36, Speeches and Writings – Misc, 1955-Feb 1982.

<sup>12</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to WSPs, 1 November 1964,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-12, Dagmar Wilson Speech Notes.

Now, we were in opposition.”<sup>13</sup> Members felt especially sensitive to the perceived betrayal of President Johnson’s 1964 election campaign pledges. Some saw Johnson’s promises of peace as the realisation of the organisation’s goals and his subsequent escalation of the Vietnam War led WSPers to feel personally deceived for having supported the president’s candidacy.<sup>14</sup> Having believed his earlier promises, Dagmar Wilson asked the president “what are we to believe today?”<sup>15</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones argues that the Johnson administration appeared particularly dismissive of women’s peace protesters.<sup>16</sup> The shutting of the Pentagon’s doors to WSP’s 1967 demonstration provided a stark visual metaphor for the government’s rejection of the group’s pleas, while the image of WSPers beaten by police in front of the White House made for shocking news headlines.<sup>17</sup>

Some activists, like Donna Allen, became jaded with WSP’s inability to set the agenda. Having campaigned vigorously for Women Strike for Peace since its founding, Allen began to realise the “long process to change opinion” involved. Her initial belief that “it was only necessary to bring certain facts to the attention of those making decisions” faded.<sup>18</sup> Sensing that WSP’s anti-war work was ineffectual, Bernice Steele stated in 1968 that she had “given up hope that our Administration is going to change because we ask them to.”<sup>19</sup> Grassroots WSPers began to feel that “a gathering of 100 women outside the White House gates would be just another frustrating and impotent experience.” Others claimed that “they were tired of writing letters.”<sup>20</sup> A statement presented to WSP’s 1968 national conference from Betty Lankford and Ede Hallinan summarised the feelings of many, noting that “moods of frustration and defeatism

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<sup>13</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>14</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to WSPs, 1 November 1964,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-12, Dagmar Wilson Speech Notes; “Women for Peace Ask Senators’ Support to Oppose Viet War,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 1, Jan 5 1968 Javits-Kennedy.

<sup>15</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to President Lyndon Johnson, 25 March 1965,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-12, Dagmar Wilson Speech Notes.

<sup>16</sup> “Pentagon Is Stormed by 2,500 Women,” *New York Times*, 16 February 1967, 4; Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 140-144; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*, 164-165.

<sup>17</sup> “Women Fight Police Near White House,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1967, 1; James Yuenger, “Cops, ‘Peace’ Women in Bloody Melee,” *Chicago Tribune*, 21 September 1967, B6; Jack White, “Wild Melee at White House: Women for Peace At War,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 21 September 1967, A1.

<sup>18</sup> “To SAC, WFO (100-39566) from SA Joseph A. Connors Jr., 11/9/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 15 (1).

<sup>19</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 17.

<sup>20</sup> “To WSP Groups and Contacts, 25 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Steering Committee Notices – 1963-1967.

permeated many sections of WSP.”<sup>21</sup> Some started to express their resentment at the lack of public will. Aline Berman said she had “given up on the middle class,” believing “they are too stupid” to appeal to.<sup>22</sup> Even branches that had only recently become involved in Women Strike for Peace found “it terribly difficult” to maintain their enthusiasm. San Antonio Women for Peace, formed in 1970, wrote to the National Office explaining that “our approach is to try to educate the public to the issues involved in the war. In San Antonio, Texas, this is a real challenge, as the receptive and/or alert minds are few and far between.”<sup>23</sup>

Growing social unrest, witnessed throughout the United States and harrowingly exemplified by brutal police tactics towards protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, forced WSP to adopt a broader view on social injustice. A statement on “Crisis in American Cities” affirmed that “our foreign policies are an extension of our domestic policies.” As such WSP resolved to organise in opposition to “repressive ‘anti-riot,’ anti-labour, anti-peace legislation.”<sup>24</sup> But the scale of the task led members to feel overwhelmed. Dagmar Wilson reflected that “we are always sort of stopping the tide, we can’t get on with changing the conditions that produce the situations what we’re always up against.”<sup>25</sup> Jean Pfeiffer of Missoula Women for Peace described the difficulties of working as a smaller, isolated group in Montana. She explained that “it’s really hard to know where to put your energies,” as the larger issue of justice “has to do with corporate problems and race problems, lots of human rights activities, as well as international peace.”<sup>26</sup>

WSPers became increasingly involved in separate campaigns outside of their group, ultimately devoting more and more time to the activities of other organisations. Swerdlow recalled that other groups “always wanted the bodies that Women Strike for Peace could produce. We could send 2,000 people to New York on a train to any of the

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<sup>21</sup> “Letter from Betty Lankford and Ede Hallinan to WSP National Convention, 31 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec.

<sup>22</sup> “To SAC, WFO (100-39566) from SA Joseph A. Connors Jr., 11/9/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 15 (1).

<sup>23</sup> “Letter from Sue Oppenheimer to Trudi Young, 26 June 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Texas (1970).

<sup>24</sup> “WSP Statement on Crisis in American Cities,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-6, Draft Resistance, Bay Area Coalition.

<sup>25</sup> “Keynote Address Given by Dagmar Wilson to the National Conference of Women Strike for Peace in Chicago (Evanston) Illinois, 9 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1968, Winnetka IL.

<sup>26</sup> Pfeiffer interview, 4 March 2000, OH 389-03.

demonstrations.”<sup>27</sup> Branches also contributed to their own local coalition groups. SWAP and East Bay Women for Peace were particularly enthusiastic about engaging in activities with “the new women’s coalition to fight poverty, war, and repression.”<sup>28</sup> Rochester WSP raised money for the initiatives of resistance groups, local anti-war candidates, and the Catonsville Nine.”<sup>29</sup> WFP in San Francisco worked closely with Coretta Scott King and the SCLC “to effectively support the Poor People’s Campaign.”<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, key women moved between various organisations. Dagmar Wilson often spoke at rallies organised by SANE and SDS. Cora Weiss notably co-chaired the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, helping orchestrate its huge “Moratorium” demonstrations in Washington in October and November 1969.<sup>31</sup>

Though satisfying WSPers’ varying concerns, extensive involvement in the work of other groups caused activists to devote less time to Women Strike for Peace and ultimately scattered the group’s energies. Henrietta Levine from Rochester WSP recognised that “our local problem is that during the past year and particularly around the elections, WSP forces were dissipated.”<sup>32</sup> In October 1968, Edith Villastrigo remarked that “we haven’t played a role as Women Strike for Peace for almost a year, I think. We’ve just been supporting – running to this group, that group.”<sup>33</sup> The presence of larger, seemingly more effective, organisations substantially weakened the group. Large numbers of volunteers directed their energies to the Mobilization Committee, while the costs of keeping WSP involved in larger efforts seemed unequal compared to

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<sup>27</sup> “Madison Square Garden Rally to End the Vietnam War Now!” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 2, 1966 Dec 8 – SANE & WSP Rally Madison Square Garden; Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>28</sup> “For National WSP Conference – Boston, 19-23 May 1971,”UCB WFP Archives, 6-2, Office Files – National, 1971.

<sup>29</sup> “Letter from Henrietta Levine to Barbara Bick, 27 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec.

<sup>30</sup> “WSP Lobby for Poor People’s Campaign, 15-16 July 1968,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-1, Civil Rights-Social Welfare, 1968.

<sup>31</sup> “Letter from C. Clark Kissinger to Dagmar Wilson, 5 June 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Jan-Aug; “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to C. Clark Kissinger, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec; Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 223.

<sup>32</sup> “Letter from Henrietta Levine to Barbara Bick, 27 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec.

<sup>33</sup> “Washington WSP Retreat Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 25.

the burdens placed on its partners. Coalition work further weakened it.<sup>34</sup> Speaking of a demonstration in New York, one anonymous WSPer said that “while the Mobilization Committee had a surplus, WSP was broke.”<sup>35</sup> The National Office found that the group’s members “raise money for every cause but WSP.”<sup>36</sup> Generally, it seemed to key women that “we certainly weren’t part of the leadership anymore.”<sup>37</sup>

Coalition work did not just mean involvement in causes removed from the organisation’s founding purpose, but collaboration with groups of people not typically representative of WSP’s desired image. Amy Swerdlow noted that she harboured more cynicism towards the anti-war movement than she had towards the test ban movement. “Those young men in SDS,” she explained, were not like “that wonderful group of people” she encountered during the test ban campaign.<sup>38</sup> Tom Hayden and Jerry Rubin, for their part, felt equally disdainful towards Women Strike for Peace members.<sup>39</sup> “We’re going to be around a lot longer than Amy Swerdlow,” Hayden reportedly remarked, “and we don’t have to listen to what she has to say.”<sup>40</sup>

Internal correspondence shows that the issues facing WSP coalesced to leave women experiencing a crisis of identity. As rising doubt in the group’s abilities coincided with the broadening scope of social protest in the United States and involvement in vast coalitions, activists felt their organisation had lost its unique place within the peace movement. Without such a position they lacked an identifiable role, breeding disunity among the membership. New York WSPers Betty Lankford and Ede Hallinan wrote a statement opining that “when WSP was first started, its goals were clear.” Now, however, “a great diversity of opinion” existed within the group.<sup>41</sup> Involvement in broad coalitions led some to feel that WSP had become “engulfed” by other groups and campaigns unrepresentative of the group’s values and beliefs. In attempting to tackle different issues, they argued, “our own message has been

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<sup>34</sup> “Letter from Roz Buchalter and Shirley Margolin to NY CCC and North Shore Women for Peace, 22 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec; “4/29/67, New Orleans, Louisiana,” AU WSP Archives, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566 Vol. 18.

<sup>35</sup> “4/29/67, New Orleans, Louisiana,” AU WSP Archives, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566 Vol. 18.

<sup>36</sup> “Letter from Liaison Committee to Expanded NCC and Chapters, 18 February 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>37</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Letter from Betty Lankford and Ede Hallinan to WSP National Convention, 31 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec.



weakened,” leading to “a lack of continuing identity as Women Strike for Peace.”<sup>42</sup> Roz Buchalter and Shirley Margolin, another two activists from New York, hoped to provoke a national conversation by considering the stakes. “Unless we can talk out the problems of who we are, where we are, and where we go from here,” they wrote, “certainly more of our numbers will fall away.”<sup>43</sup>

Such attitudes dominated discussion at the 1968 Washington Retreat. Ella Tulin called for the organisation to reclaim a defined role and to establish “our own goal of what we really are,” but when Joanne Fairley, another participant, attempted to define one particular concern, the group quickly found itself “back to many issues.” Folly Fodor offered a broad campaign against “violence” in all its forms that would encapsulate WSPers varying endeavours; from the consumer boycott of military contractors Dow Chemical, to the “Feed the Cities” social justice and poverty campaigns. Such an expansive attitude, however, did not elicit favour from women who longed for a manageable and well-defined cause. Fairley gave the practical reason of not having “gobs of time” to devote to WSP.<sup>44</sup> The most important reservation clouding the thoughts of activists was that Women Strike for Peace had lost its standing within the anti-war movement. Lacking a single-issue explaining what Women Strike for Peace stood for, WSPers felt unable to move forward with the organisation’s campaigns.<sup>45</sup>

### **Fatigue and the “Retirement” of Dagmar Wilson**

Many women found that they simply could not continue to dedicate any more time to their peace activities. Anti-war activism required formidable dedication to cope with its rigorous demands. Amy Swerdlow explained in a 1987 interview that work “was so consuming; it took so much of your life.”<sup>46</sup> Though leaders lauded WSP’s ability to awaken previously apolitical women, grassroots figures found themselves unable to remain committed for long periods. As early as 1965 they began explaining to local organisers that they could not “continue to work” as intensely as they would have liked.

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<sup>42</sup> “Letter from Roz Buchalter and Shirley Margolin to NY CCC and North Shore Women for Peace, 22 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Oct-Dec.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

“This is a simple fact of life,” explained Hedy Turkenkopf.<sup>47</sup> Mary Chandler, a founding member in Washington D.C., returned “exhausted” from a trip to Moscow and claimed that “she was going to have to resign.”<sup>48</sup> Branches languished as affiliates could not attend meetings. In November 1965, two members of WSP in Long Beach, California, noted that their group “had not met in months” as their main organiser kept renegeing on promises to call a meeting.<sup>49</sup> Towards the end of the decade attendances to national conferences decreased from the group’s earlier peaks. A report from the 1969 conference suggested that its low turnout represented “a trend in WSP.”<sup>50</sup>

Much of the pressure did not necessarily arise from a decline in loyalty, but simply from the demands of private lives. Though WSPers had tactically accentuated their domestic identity in order to gain support for their protests, the strategy did not embellish their devotion towards their families. Domestic responsibilities inevitably had an impact on some members’ involvement in peace work. After several years of boundless commitment to WSP activity, many felt compelled to devote more time to their families. Responding to a mailer in April 1968, Olga Penn of Detroit Women for Peace gave an honest assessment of her branch’s situation. “We have more or less fallen apart,” she wrote, “Naomi is in a hospital with angina and I am rather shackled to a guy who has had 3 coronaries and has to be driven to and fro. My time is limited.”<sup>51</sup> She reassured her remaining WSP activists that her group would continue to “try our best, whatever you decide to do” and made a monetary contribution while promising that more would follow.<sup>52</sup> A blunt resignation came from Lynda Barrett, who left “chagrined” in order to travel to Europe with her husband for an “open-ended period of time to vacation and live.” Barrett nevertheless professed her love for the peace movement, adding that her experience within WSP had “been the most meaningful” of her life.<sup>53</sup> Vicki King, for some time an integral and undervalued part of WSP’s

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<sup>47</sup> “Letter from Hedy Turkenkopf to Lyla Hoffman, undated,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 2, Xmas Card Campaign Xmas Pilgrimage to D.C. 1965; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> “New Orleans, Louisiana, 4/29/67,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 18, 3.

<sup>49</sup> “Report of James R. Pace, 10/10/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 15 (1).

<sup>50</sup> “First Plenary Session, Friday Afternoon, October 17,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos - 1965-July 1970.

<sup>51</sup> “WSP mailer to NCC Representatives, 29 April 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>52</sup> “NCC Mailer, 29 April 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>53</sup> “Letter from Lynda Barrett to the NCC, 25 July 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

function as Secretary in the National Office, resigned from her position in 1970 as her husband's responsibilities in graduate school required them to move away from Washington D.C.<sup>54</sup>

The experience of WSP activists was certainly not unique. In discussing the challenge women faced in juggling “activism with expected gender roles in their families and communities,” Amy Schneidhorst recognises that this was not strictly “a woman’s problem.” She notes the affirmations provided by David Dellinger as he discussed the difficulties he faced in trying to limit his “activist duties” for the sake of his family.<sup>55</sup> What is intriguing in the case of Women Strike for Peace is that its activists later downplayed these instances in their recollections. Amy Swerdlow believed that “no families were torn apart that I know of,” while others spoke of the unwavering support their families provided them.<sup>56</sup> But there were notable examples of relationships suffering as women experienced family tensions. Offering a 1964 conference report in absentia, founding member Folly Fodor explained that the two weeks spent away from home campaigning on behalf of WSP in Europe had caused some friction between her and her husband. “It’s been made quite clear,” she wrote, “that I am to be the wife and mother for at least a couple of weeks.”<sup>57</sup> An FBI report suggested that Barbara Bick’s involvement in the peace movement had provoked “marital problems” as she felt her husband had become unsupportive of her efforts.<sup>58</sup> She explained to WSP that she could not devote such long hours staffing WSP’s National Office without receiving a wage to compensate her time.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, her strenuous activities ultimately resulted in a marital separation.

Dagmar Wilson became especially affected by her role as leader. Her modesty and reluctance to seek attention perhaps made her ill-suited to coping with the publicity,

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<sup>54</sup> “To NCC re: My Resignation, 14 April 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>55</sup> Schneidhorst, “‘Little Old Ladies and Dangerous Women,’” 385; David T. Dellinger, *From Yale to Jail: The Life Story of a Moral Dissenter* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvii, 150; Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>57</sup> “Lobby Report from Folly Fodor,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1964, Winnetka IL.

<sup>58</sup> “WSP IS-C, 10/19/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566 Vol. 15 (1).

<sup>59</sup> “Memo from Washington Steering Committee, MEMO Committee, National Office Committee to National Consultative Committee, 23 June 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970; “WSP IS-C, 10/19/66,” AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files - 100-39566 Vol. 15 (1).

eminence, and seemingly endless responsibilities afforded her position.<sup>60</sup> But her status as the figurehead of Women Strike for Peace thrust her, reluctantly, towards national celebrity. Faced with such commitments on her time Wilson struggled to sustain her zeal. She recalled that her closest co-workers “saw that I could not handle the ‘office’ work of WSP.”<sup>61</sup> Her household became an unofficial clearing house as those receiving WSP literature without a return address opted to send it to Wilson personally.<sup>62</sup> Apprehensions about making speeches intensified her severe anxieties over public speaking, as she later opined that the act “takes a tremendous lot out of me. I can’t do as many as I would like, because I can’t be sure of being good that many times.”<sup>63</sup> Even in later life Wilson reflected “feeling quite unqualified for the work” she performed.<sup>64</sup>

Her withdrawal at the end of 1968 appeared quite sudden. Only that April she had returned from a highly publicised trip to Hanoi with other WSP members.<sup>65</sup> But her troubles had been building privately for some time. In 1966, WSP’s leader gave a revealing interview to a local newspaper, the *Washington Post Potomac*, in which she decried the toll Women Strike for Peace had taken on the lives of her family. Wilson appeared nostalgic, reflecting on the days before there was a Women Strike for Peace as a time of quiet in her family. “We used to have a very smoothly running household,” she said. “It was very relaxed. Now it’s hit or miss all the time. Our standard of living has gone down.”<sup>66</sup> Wilson became aggrieved with the financial losses incurred by her inability to work.<sup>67</sup> Years later her attitude remained unchanged. In 1989 she recalled that her role in Women Strike for Peace was “hard on the family, no question about it.” Though her children had reacted to their mother’s activism with “initial excitement,” her various commitments ultimately proved “very disruptive” and took her “out of the

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<sup>60</sup> “Letter from Leona Grant to Dagmar Wilson, 10 December 1964,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-7, Correspondence of Dagmar Wilson 1961-1964; “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 12-13.

<sup>61</sup> “Corrections for Amy,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections, 1981.

<sup>62</sup> “Letter from Dr. Isidore Zifferstein to Dagmar Wilson, 15 June 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington, D.C., 1966-1969.

<sup>63</sup> Dudman, “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace.”

<sup>64</sup> “Corrections for Amy,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections, 1981.

<sup>65</sup> “Lady Pacifist Visits Hanoi Women,” *Boston Globe*, 13 April 1968, 3.

<sup>66</sup> “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-11, Biographical Data on Dagmar Wilson.

<sup>67</sup> “Corrections for Amy,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections, 1981.

family.”<sup>68</sup> She cared deeply about the impact and embarrassment her status as a vocal critique of the American government had on her husband’s role in the British Embassy. She recalled that his superior made veiled threats following WSP’s first march, with Christopher Wilson unfailingly defending his wife’s actions. The Commercial Counsellor retorted, in an “unprofessional and out of line” manner, that “Christopher would have a hard time finding another job at his age.”<sup>69</sup> Even acquaintances fell under scrutiny. Following WSP’s 1962 trip to the Soviet Union, security officers went so far as to “pursue enquiries” with Wilson’s “friends in England” over possible connections to subversive groups.<sup>70</sup>

The *Washington Post Potomac* interview provided a further revelation that contorts established understandings of Dagmar Wilson. It was certainly no secret that Wilson felt unwilling to prolong her status as WSP’s leader, as she had publicly expressed the hope that she could “stop being head of this” within a month of the group’s first march.<sup>71</sup> The 1966 interview, however, allowed Wilson to speak frankly and personally about her leadership and she took the opportunity to express her resentment at finding herself in a position of leadership. She felt that she had been forced to assume responsibility for the group as no one else seemed willing to “afford the risk” of “jail, loss of income, and ostracism.”<sup>72</sup> She asserted that she “would like to take my place in the ranks, but I’ve been propelled into the position of spokesman for the peace ladies.” Wilson expressed a feeling of injustice that, while plenty of other devoted women contributed just as much to WSP, “there is no substitute for the one person that people want to see and talk to.” She recognised her unique importance to the public image of Women Strike for Peace, acknowledging others felt it “a catastrophe” if she could not attend an event to represent WSP.<sup>73</sup> Tellingly, she let her

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<sup>68</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>69</sup> “Letter from Dagmar Wilson to Amy Swerdlow, 18 August 1981,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Connections 1981.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “Arms Race Opposed – Response Cheers Head of ‘Strike’,” *New York Times*, 22 November 1961, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1, Who Are These Women?” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 12-13.

<sup>73</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968.

measured demeanour slip briefly, explaining that “unfortunately – no, not unfortunately, but just the way things happened – I am the one the people want to see.”<sup>74</sup>

While the demands of WSP consumed her private life, her exposure as figurehead of the group exacerbated Wilson’s sense of aggravation. Having successfully faced down a HUAC investigation in 1962, she found herself subpoenaed again in 1964 along with fellow WSPer Donna Allen, and Russ Nixon, general manager of the *National Guardian*. The trio warranted HUAC’s suspicions for lobbying the government to provide a visa to Prof. Kaoru Yasi, a Japanese professor, pacifist, and opponent of nuclear weapons who had won the Lenin Peace Prize in 1958.<sup>75</sup> Refusing to testify unless the committee dropped its insistence on holding closed hearings, Wilson and her co-defendants were convicted of contempt of court and given suspended jail sentences.<sup>76</sup> Though WSPers rallied behind a “Defenders of Three Against HUAC” campaign, the case brought renewed disruption for Dagmar Wilson.<sup>77</sup> It interrupted attempts to revive her professional career and led her to feel that “any satisfaction of martyrdom has been far outweighed by inconvenience, wasted time and personal outrage.”<sup>78</sup>

WSP’s leader sought to better her situation towards the end of 1968. At the Washington Retreat she raised the prospect of her stepping down from the role, suggesting that WSP adopt a system of elected national leadership. If elected to one-year terms, she figured, perhaps others would eventually carry “as much weight as if she were the mythical Dagmar Wilson.”<sup>79</sup> But others continued to see her as an essential presence. They looked to her for advice, direction, and new ideas while, unfortunately for Wilson, nominating her as WSP’s representative to other causes.<sup>80</sup> Throughout the Washington Retreat her ideas elicited enthusiastic responses from the other attendees. Yet her proposal for elected leadership, a suggestion would have lessened the demands

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<sup>74</sup> “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-11, Biographical Data on Dagmar Wilson.

<sup>75</sup> “2 in Women’s Peace Unit and Editor Deny Contempt,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1965, 3.

<sup>76</sup> “3 Are Convicted in Contempt Case,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1965, 68.

<sup>77</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056; “Court Crowd Cheers 3 Held for Contempt,” *The Washington Post*, 9 January 1965, B3; “400 Honor 3 Defendants Cited by House Committee,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1965, 87.

<sup>78</sup> “Dagmar Wilson: Striking for Peace,” SHSW WSP Archives, MSS 433, 2-11, Biographical Data on Dagmar Wilson.

<sup>79</sup> “Washington WSP ‘Retreat’ Meeting at Folly Fodor’s, Saturday, 5 October 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Allen interview, 29 April 1989, ARS.0056.

on her time, drew a less favourable response from those still fearful of implementing a more regimented organisational structure.<sup>81</sup>

At the 1968 national conference, held just a month later, Wilson gave her clearest indication yet that she would leave the organisation. The leader's keynote had become a much-anticipated feature of national conferences, often exuding optimism and enthusiasm towards the group's exploits. Wilson's speech to the Winnetka delegation, reflecting her current mood, marked a drastic departure from the joyful tones of earlier conferences.<sup>82</sup> From the outset she candidly explained her struggle to remain upbeat about the group's fortunes. "You know, the 'keynote speech' business," she started, "it's supposed to be inspirational – and it has certain ingredients always, you know, you want to make everybody feel good." But owing to the plethora of problems facing WSP, Wilson confessed that "this year, quite honestly, it is different." She "couldn't somehow make up the kind of keynote speech" to motivate the group and reflect positively about the future.<sup>83</sup>

The keynote developed into a digressive and disjointed appraisal of Women Strike for Peace as its leader acknowledged that multiple causes deserved the group's attention, intimated at the broadening of WSP's platform, and demanded that activists become more disciplined and committed in their peace work. But Wilson's discussion of her state of mind betrayed her own exhaustion. She admitting being plagued by stress and told the audience that "I'm using SO damned much of my energy – and I've GOT to see more resulting from that expenditure of my energy, otherwise I simply cannot go on this kind of way." She emphasised "the kind of tension and anxiety" she faced on a daily basis and declared that "I can't keep this up for another twenty years if that's as long as I'm going to live."<sup>84</sup> Wilson used her speech to level an ultimatum at those in attendance. Either they had to redouble their efforts and achieve some significant progress, "or I've got to drop this for my hobby! And go back to something else that's

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<sup>81</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968, 4, 46.

<sup>82</sup> "Agenda – Women Strike for Peace/Women for Peace – National Conference 17-20 November 1966, Chicago," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, Report on National Conference 1967, SCPC WSP Archives, A1 Box 3, National Conference – 1966, Chicago IL; "National Conference Women Strike for Peace, Sept. 21, 1967 – Sept. 23, 1967, Washington D.C.," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1967, Washington D.C.

<sup>83</sup> "Keynote address given by Dagmar Wilson to the National Conference of Women Strike for Peace in Chicago (Evanston) Illinois, 9 November 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1968, Winnetka IL, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 2.

small enough for me to be able to live with.”<sup>85</sup> The conduct of fellow members served to exacerbate her distress. Towards the end of her keynote, Dagmar Wilson spoke plainly towards the WSP membership:

I really have to make a confession here today. The way we’ve been doing things, which has been so marvellous, and such a relief, is now to me becoming exactly the opposite – and it’s a terrible drain, and I know that I’m not going to be able to go on in this way.<sup>86</sup>

Wilson signed off with a further disheartening mark. “You can give your all if you really believe and have confidence in its effect. But you can’t give your all for something that isn’t producing really very much.”<sup>87</sup> The speech ultimately became akin to a letter of resignation. By November 1968, Wilson had asked others to replace her for pre-arranged engagements.<sup>88</sup> While remaining a part of Women Strike for Peace, the “mother” of the group quietly withdrew from active participation, with undisclosed “personal reasons” cited.<sup>89</sup> Evidently she became unable to “be very active these days,” with “her great vigour and abilities” seemingly worn after so long as head of Women Strike for Peace.<sup>90</sup>

The circumstances surrounding Wilson’s departure from the leadership of Women Strike for Peace reveal the pressures facing WSP activists at this time, however it remains a curiously overlooked facet of the group’s history. Dagmar Wilson remains inseparable from the history of WSP, even though her tenure as leader covered only seven of the 29 years the organisation was active. Acknowledgement of her pained departure is absent from the history and memory of Women Strike for Peace. The decision to withdraw from the organisation evidently arose from deeply personal issues and the reluctance of fellow WSPers to disclose further details of her departure perhaps owes more to the respect afforded their friend and colleague than a concerted effort to remain silent over the group’s decline while professing its successes. Nevertheless, it is revealing that the broader pressures on Women Strike for Peace activists that led to its fading stature are rarely discussed.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “Report on a Trip to the USSR, Representing Women Strike for Peace at Conference with Soviet Peace Committee – no.7-17, 1968, by Anci Koppel,” UWS SWAP Archives, 2-3, American Peace Delegation to the Soviet Union.

<sup>89</sup> Herbert H. Denton, “Inaugural Protesters Win Site,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, 4 January 1969, D4; “Women Use Chains In Antiwar Protest,” *The Washington Post*, 14 April 1971, B2.

<sup>90</sup> “Letter from Taylor Adams to Sally Bortz, 19 April 1969,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington, D.C. 1966-1969; “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mabel Proctor, 4 October 1970,” A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.



## **Fractured Unity and Regional Representation**

WSP's declining fortunes not only stemmed from increasing fatigue among its membership, but also from frictions caused by its loose structure. "Nonorganization" was certainly one of the most revered aspects of the group and remains a central identifying feature of WSP among commentators. Founding member Jeanne Bagby asserted that it was "the lifeblood of the movement," while Amy Swerdlow devoted a chapter of her book to describing the system.<sup>91</sup> The lack of formal structure, she argued, allowed women to demonstrate their latent ability to work together for a joint purpose. Several other WSPers agreed. Kay Hardman declared that WSP's approach to organising "is an advance in inter-human relations."<sup>92</sup> WSPers sought acclaim for their leaderless operations and felt that their positive example set the precedent for later organisations among the women's liberation movement.<sup>93</sup> Generally, the perspectives on relationships within WSP correlate with Deborah Tannen's investigation into memory transmission. WSPers' recollections clearly suggest a wish to foreground community as "the source of power" in their activities.<sup>94</sup> "While WSP never used the words 'beloved community,' as SNCC did," Swerdlow asserted, "a constant source of energy and empowerment was the community of women working together."<sup>95</sup>

Leading figures recognised that their recourse to informal structure caused some failings, but downplayed any tensions, choosing to parody difficult circumstances. National Secretary Sally Bortz revelled in the chaos it created, while Seattle Women Act for Peace wrote a skit that depicted, in jest, the conflicts that arose from a lack of coordination.<sup>96</sup> While Amy Swerdlow acknowledged that some disagreements emerged between women, she generally focused on the attitudes of leading figures within these arguments, claiming that they did not cause "mass defections" and did not appear to have a lasting effect on Women Strike for Peace.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 70-96.

<sup>92</sup> "Letter from Kay Hardman to Homer Jack, 6 January 1963," SCPC WSP Archives, SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-118, Box 1, British Peace Groups.

<sup>93</sup> Newill interview, 23 February 1980, ARS.0056.

<sup>94</sup> Tannen, *You Don't Understand*, 176-178.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>96</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968; "A Bird's Eye View of a SWAP Meeting," UWS SWAP Archives, 1-35, Speeches and Writings – Skits, 1989, n.d., 3.

<sup>97</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 77.

The established trend of downplaying these instances presents a deeper issue with regards to historical representation. While narratives project a sense of unanimity among the membership, many activists felt undervalued and suppressed. West coast groups felt unrepresented and dominated by eastern women. Grassroots activists felt unrepresented and subjugated by key women. The central problem emerges that couching the membership of Women Strike for Peace under one heading does not explain exactly which activists or groups are being referred to and undervalues the experiences of those whose voices remain uncovered. In both a geographic and hierarchical sense, observing the splits that developed in national unity shows that more nuance is needed when discussing WSP activists and their position with relation to the national organisation.

Nonorganization saw Women Strike for Peace ill-equipped to deal with the sustained efforts necessary to uphold its functions. Primarily, WSP struggled to attract new membership. Spontaneous protests, while attractive to those who could not commit to prolonged planning processes, meant WSP could not advertise future protests with enough time to attract potential members.<sup>98</sup> When interested parties wished to join WSP branches in their area, National Office staff could not be sure if any existed.<sup>99</sup> Central coordinators seemed unable to verify how many members, or even branches, operated under the auspices of Women Strike for Peace. In 1966 the National Office could only confirm that “there are 70 known WSP groups throughout the country.”<sup>100</sup> Additionally, WSP’s lack of formal structure allowed members to feel no responsibility for financial upkeep. Printing costs, postage, and mailing proved a burden, particularly for regular issues of *Memo*, while office space and staff also raised operating costs.<sup>101</sup> With no official membership or dues and no obligation for branches to pay retainers, WSP could not rely on a guaranteed influx of money to keep itself afloat. Instead, it remained “totally dependent upon contributions from individuals and groups.”<sup>102</sup> The National Office consistently recorded massive debts, issuing emergency appeals for cash with

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<sup>98</sup> “Letter from Lynda Barrett to Prudy Leib, 13 December 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington, D.C. 1966-1969.

<sup>99</sup> “Letter from Kay Johnson to Fon Vestal, 18 November 1964,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Florida (1964).

<sup>100</sup> “Letter from Lynda Stein to Mrs. Arthur S. Johnson, 27 April 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Other States.

<sup>101</sup> “Minutes of the National Consultative Committee Meeting, 17 January 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970; “Proposed Budget Given to Annual Conference, 8 June 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Financial Data.

<sup>102</sup> “Letter from Lynda Stein to Mrs. Arthur S. Johnson, 27 April 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – Other States.

increasing frequency towards the latter half of the 1960s and often claiming to be “within weeks” of closing if it failed to receive quick funds.<sup>103</sup>

Over the course of the decade, the absence of central coordination allowed local branches to drift apart. By the time it confronted the Vietnam War, Women Strike for Peace represented groups with radically divergent approaches. Andrea Estepa noted that East Bay WFP co-sponsored some community initiatives with the Black Panther Party in Oakland and raised money for its Free Breakfast for Children program, whereas New York WSPers seemed “very prissy and too peaceful and uninteresting.”<sup>104</sup> Differing local experiences with national organisations saw branches take alternative views on collaborative projects. Southern California WSP seemed willing to form an alliance with Students for a Democratic Society in 1965, whereas Washington WSPers felt reluctant to associate with a group so willing to engage in civil disobedience.<sup>105</sup> Simultaneously, branches in California opposed east coast members’ desire to collaborate with the CNVA. San Francisco WFP advised that they did not “have a great deal of confidence in the CNVA-West, which is of course our only direct experience with them.”<sup>106</sup> Women on the east coast largely kept WSP separate from other groups, but San Francisco activists formed the Women’s Peace Office in San Francisco with the local WILPF branch, sharing an office and enjoying a positive working relationship to coordinate various efforts in the area.<sup>107</sup> In Los Angeles, by contrast, Mary Clarke “was very anti-WILPF. She didn’t like the women down there.”<sup>108</sup> WSPers in Rochester developed a famously abrasive attitude towards other local groups, while their relationship with journalists sometimes embarrassed other WSP women. In fact

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<sup>103</sup> “Statement of Income and Expenses for the Year Ending 31 December 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1 Box 2, Financial Data.

“Statement of Income and Expenses for the Year Ending 30 April 1964”; “Statement of Income and Expenses for the Year Ending Dec. 31, 1964”; “Statement of Income and Expenditures for the Period 1 January to 30 September 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Financial Data; “Memo from Trudi Young/Joni Phillips, WSP National Office to Expanded NCC, 2 December 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>104</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 309.

<sup>105</sup> “Issues for Discussion – Pre-Conference, Scheduled for Oct 21-24, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1965, San Francisco CA.

<sup>106</sup> “Letter from Linda Fanning to Barbara Bick, 28 March 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3 Box 4, Branch File – CA (1965-1971); “Letter from Mary Clarke to Barbara Bick, undated,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3 Box 4, Branch File – CA (1965-1971); “Letter from Barbara Bick and Folly Fodor to National Consultative Committee, 24 March 1966,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3 Box 4, Branch File – CA (1965-1971).

<sup>107</sup> “25<sup>th</sup> Women for Peace Birthday Celebration, 16 November 1986,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 1, 1961-date 50 Oak St.

<sup>108</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056.

affiliated member Mary Grooms wrote to Amy Swerdlow to suggest that it may be “much better for them to create their own separate identity here,” since “they want to operate in quite a different fashion.”<sup>109</sup>

Branch estrangement brought with it splits and heated disagreements, even among those with a shared sense of isolation from the national body. Anci Koppel, of Seattle Women Act for Peace, had long-running issues with Mabel S. Proctor, the leader of Tacoma Women for Peace, situated just a few miles away. In 1967, after Koppel had advocated threatening physical harm towards elected officials, Proctor publicly voiced her differences.<sup>110</sup> The dispute became just one of a string of quarrels that emerged between Koppel and Proctor.<sup>111</sup> In planning a visit from Dagmar Wilson, SWAP and Tacoma WFP developed objectively minor differences over planning. Seattle women wanted a banner displayed at the airport on Wilson’s arrival, whereas Tacoma planned a quiet, low-key affair.<sup>112</sup> Koppel and Proctor’s clashing personalities escalated the disagreement until it became a public spat. SWAP’s leader accused her Tacoma counterpart of being jealous of her branch’s stature and suggested that Tacoma WFP should leave WSP over the incident.<sup>113</sup> Eventually Koppel apologised for “the happenings between Mabel and myself,” saying she was “truly sorry for my undiplomatic behaviour” and promising to keep her “pushy nature” in mind in future interactions.<sup>114</sup> SWAP and Tacoma WFP continued to hold grievances against one another.<sup>115</sup>

Internal correspondence shows that activists were not always as close as is often suggested. In taking umbrage with Rochester WSP’s vicious treatment of the press, Mary Grooms found that local WSPers “made it pretty clear that they don’t consider me a WSPer,” saying that “there are a few peace people in this town that, evidently, would

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<sup>109</sup> “Letter from Mary Grooms to Amy Swerdlow, 5 July 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-015, Box 2, Communism.

<sup>110</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Jo Friedman, 23 March 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1967 Jan-June; “Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to WSP, 31 May 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1967 Jan-June.

<sup>111</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mabel S. Proctor, 4 October 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mary Chandler, 5 October 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1967 July-Oct.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mabel S. Proctor, 4 October 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

like to murder me.”<sup>116</sup> Nonorganization also struggled to overcome the vast geographic distances between branches. Ethel Taylor dismissed the notion of regional differences with a clever quip, but East Bay Women for Peace spoke of their alienation from the national body, confessing that “we are distant in feeling as well as fact.”<sup>117</sup> Alice Hamburg wrote to Amy Swerdlow in support of her research efforts in 1985, but the hugely influential San Francisco WFP felt it necessary to remind the former *Memo* editor who she was. Hamburg explained that the two had met at a past conference and that she “also drove you across the bridge to Berkeley some years ago.”<sup>118</sup>

Attempts to cast a national narrative of Women Strike for Peace struggle to depict the sense of ambivalence local activists had towards national unity. Some branches resolutely committed to the upkeep of the national body, with Los Angeles WISP making regular contributions of up to \$100 per month to the National Office.<sup>119</sup> But their attitude did not reflect that of the majority of branches situated away from WSP’s north east hub. San Francisco WFP, for example, “felt for the longest time that they did not need” a National Office. In 1970, office secretary Vicki King expressed exasperation at the lack of local responses to a national meeting agenda.<sup>120</sup> Much of this ambivalence arose as local activists felt increasingly undervalued by national leaders. Even in the immediate aftermath of WSP’s founding a meeting noted that “local people haven’t been kept informed enough as to memos and proposals for national action.”<sup>121</sup> The trend worsened throughout the decade. Although a member of WSP’s National Coordinating Committee, Anci Koppel often felt left out of the decision-making process due to a lack of timely and appropriate updates from her east coast counterparts.<sup>122</sup> The issue became a rare point of accord between her and Mabel Proctor, as they considered that “communication from the National to its branches or groups has been woefully

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<sup>116</sup> “Letter from Mary Grooms to Amy Swerdlow, 5 July 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-015, Box 2, Communism.

<sup>117</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, x, 45; “Newsletter Item From East Bay WFP RE: NCC Meetings and WSP Member Groups, 6 July 1970,” A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings, 1968-1970.

<sup>118</sup> “Letter from Alice Hamburg to Amy Swerdlow, 7 October 1985,” UCB WFP Archives, 17-47, Swerdlow, Amy, 1985-1986.

<sup>119</sup> “Letter from Gail Eaby to Mary Clarke, 7 October 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 1, West Coast Tour 1967.

<sup>120</sup> “Memo from National Office to NCC, 7 May 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>121</sup> “9-27-62,” SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Other WSP Acts, 1961.

<sup>122</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Lynda Barrett, 7 April 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept.

neglected, especially with the groups outside of the east coast.”<sup>123</sup> In fact, by the time of her departure from WSP, several women in smaller branches did not even know what Dagmar Wilson looked like, nor had they met other key women who seemed to run the organisation.<sup>124</sup>

The local branch of WSP in Washington D.C. elicited some envy as it enjoyed privileges not accessible to other branches. Though separate from the national structure, a greater level of responsibility fell on the shoulders of branch staff in the nation’s capital as those in other parts of the country expected them to carry out suggested campaigns.<sup>125</sup> To exploit the Jakarta Meeting in 1965, for example, Southern California WSP members suggested that WSPers in the capital set up meetings “with Senators and Congressmen who have shown concern about our policy in Vietnam.” Without acknowledging D.C.’s own workload, the California women felt it reasonable to expect WSPers in the capital to arrange meetings with “Senators Morse, Gruening, Church, McGovern; Congressmen George E. Brown.”<sup>126</sup> But additional responsibility also afforded D.C. WSPers unexpected influence over national affairs. Regional figures recognised that “D.C. women are in effect national leaders as well as local activists.” In November 1968, Aline Berman expressed her fears that members working in the D.C. local office could “wield considerable influence” over national decisions, while, the year prior, National Office secretary Lynda Barrett faced questions over blurred lines of authority and the local branch’s significance. “We wonder just what the special significance of the Washington Steering Committee is,” asked Maryland WSPer Daryl Stewart. “Is it also a national steering committee? Where does the Washington Steering Committee end and the national structure of WSP begin?”<sup>127</sup>

Activists located in the north east of the United States typically enjoyed more influence than those located elsewhere. In the immediate aftermath of WSP’s formation the Washington women exercised significant authority over the rest of the organisation,

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<sup>123</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Mabel S. Proctor, 4 October 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>124</sup> “Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Dagmar Wilson, 18 October 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 1, West Coast Tour 1967.

<sup>125</sup> “Letter from the Liaison Committee to NCC Members, 23 June 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings, 1968-1970.

<sup>126</sup> “Letter from Tima Timash to WSP Members, 6 July 1965,” SCPC WPS Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Jan-Aug.

<sup>127</sup> “Problems of the National Office, As Related to Washington WSP and Solutions, 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History; “Letter from Daryl Stewart to Lynda Barrett and Washington WSP, 2 May 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington, D.C. 1966-1969.

implementing several of their ideas without consulting the rest of the group's members.<sup>128</sup> A strategy used by counselmen in the 1962 HUAC hearing saw the committee argue that women in New York essentially governed Women Strike for Peace, producing evidence to support their argument.<sup>129</sup> Former Riverdale WSPer Esther Newill corroborated a number of these claims. She suggested that women in New York and on the east coast in general attempted to sabotage debates involving large groups of grassroots WSPers in favour of their own proposals.<sup>130</sup> Amy Swerdlow also acknowledged that WSP's structure fostered regional tensions, observing that those in the Midwest "who thought of themselves as 'more grass roots'" resented coastal power blocks, while California WSPers felt that the "Northeast was favoured in decision-making."<sup>131</sup>

Regional divisions developed unimpeded throughout WSP's early years, to such an extent that its national body could no longer purport to offer adequate representation for its national constituency by the middle of the 1960s. WSP took pride in staging national demonstrations, but that was undermined somewhat when observing that several of its most high profile campaigns suffered from a lack of regional representation. The famed 1967 Pentagon protest comprised women "mostly from Philadelphia and New York," as did the White House confrontation later that year.<sup>132</sup> WSPers on the west coast felt unable to travel the distance necessary to take part in some of the organisation's most public national actions. In January 1968, WSP co-organised the highly publicised Jeanette Rankin Brigade (JRB) demonstration in the nation's capital. The organisation collaborated with several other women's peace groups, welfare activists, and Jeanette Rankin, the first woman elected to the US Congress and the only member of congress to vote against American entry into both World War I and World War II.<sup>133</sup> The demonstration drew national support for its attempts to build "a new broad-based women's anti-war coalition," but several WSP branches felt unable to participate. On hearing of WSP's plans, SWAP wrote to

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<sup>128</sup> "Eleanor Garst: Chapter 1: Who Are These Women?" SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch 1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts, 29; "Proposal Number Two: WISP??" SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 1, San Francisco Literature Undated.

<sup>129</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2134.

<sup>130</sup> Newill interview, 23 February 1980, ARS.0056.

<sup>131</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 75-77.

<sup>132</sup> "Pentagon Is Stormed by 2,500 Women," *New York Times*, 16 February 1967, 4; "Demonstrators for Peace Shout and Shove," *The Globe and Mail*, 21 September 1967, W4.

<sup>133</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 135-141; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure World*, 123-124; Rosen, "The Day They Buried Traditional Motherhood," 233-261.

coordinators informing them that “we cannot mobilize thousands or hundreds to go to D.C.”<sup>134</sup> In some instances WSP branches felt more comfortable organising demonstrations that remained exclusive to their own area. At a Mother’s Day protest in Greenwich Village in May 1969, NY WSP distributed leaflets citing the names of soldiers who had recently died in combat. The protest gained some visibility and managed to attract support from several celebrities. The branch, however, limited the action so that leaflets only named deceased soldiers from the Greater New York area.<sup>135</sup>

An inability to include adequate regional representation also plagued planning meetings, crucially affecting WSP’s operations and creating a decision-making process skewed in favour of those in the east.<sup>136</sup> Most national conferences and committee meetings took place in the east, leading Anci Koppel to lament the prohibitive costs of travel for those in the west. “If our next National is held in Chicago,” she reasoned, “the Westcoast women will have to spend approximately \$300 for air transportation.”<sup>137</sup> East Bay WFP noted that the representation it did manage to provide to national meetings did not adequately reflect the group’s work:

EBWFP has, because of the expense, tended to be unrepresented at these meetings, or has sent representatives who were going to be in the area anyway. This has often meant representation by otherwise relatively inactive members or members who were more active in other groups – which didn’t really increase our closeness with National.<sup>138</sup>

East Bay WFPer Vivian Raineri observed that “those who can afford to go are the ones who go, which leaves out new voices, new opinions, new strength. And it is essentially the same women who go year after year.”<sup>139</sup> National Secretary Barbara Bick criticised the lack of national representation.<sup>140</sup> She suggested, along with Anci Koppel, that members share the financial burden of conference attendance, with every attendee paying the same amount to build up a travel fund for “other women, i.e. from the South.” But such a system met with resistance from those “larger, more affluent urban

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<sup>134</sup> “Instructions to Local Coordinators from Jeanette Rankin Brigade,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Jeanette Rankin Brigade.

<sup>135</sup> “Women Strike for Peace to Protest for Mother’s Day Observation,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2

<sup>136</sup> “Memo from Liaison Committee to NCC, 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>137</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to NCC, 27 September 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>138</sup> “Newsletter Item from East Bay WFP REL NCC Meetings and WSP Members Groups, 6 July 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>139</sup> “Letter from Vivian Raineri to Henrietta Levine, 22 July 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

<sup>140</sup> “Letter from Barbara Bick to WSP National Steering Committee and Contact List, 30 September 1968,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-54, WSP National Conference, St Louis, 1968.



groups” who had convenient access to meetings.<sup>141</sup> In fact, New York WSPers believed that “in terms of their leadership and capability,” their branches were “entitled to more” representatives than other areas.<sup>142</sup>

Despite WSP’s key organisers recognising the detrimental impact of a lack of regional representation, nowhere did eastern dominance exert itself more openly than in the planning for national conferences. Though conference planning intended to rotate host cities in order to achieve “broad national representation,” in practice eastern and Midwestern cities tended to share responsibility for hosting.<sup>143</sup> New York WSPers frequently attempted to exercise authority by stubbornly vocalising their “preference” for conference locations in neighbouring areas and north eastern cities.<sup>144</sup> WSP branches in California, Oregon, and Washington State boasted large followings, but only two of the 14 national conferences held between 1962 and 1975 took place on the west coast; in San Francisco in 1965; and Santa Barbara in 1975.<sup>145</sup> Even these few instances brought derision from eastern women.

The decision to hold the 1965 conference in San Francisco resulted in debacle. Though San Francisco’s hosting was a nationally agreed consensus-decision, key women in the east began voicing their opposition as soon as the 1964 conference adjourned. Even in national meetings eastern leaders “keep expressing the wish that the conference” would be held somewhere other than “all the way out west.” San Francisco activists received no formal indication of any misgivings and worked feverishly throughout the year to confirm arrangements, book venues, and develop interest “throughout the state.”<sup>146</sup> Just a month before the start of the conference, D.C., New York, and Philadelphia representatives held a regional conference to discuss the event. The attendees voiced concern over the cost of travel, realising that “not more than one

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<sup>141</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to NCC, 27 September 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970; “Letter from Barbara Bick to WSP National Steering Committee and Contact List, 30 September 1968,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-54, WSP National Conference, St Louis, 1968; “Newsletter Item from East Bay WFP REL NCC Meetings and WSP Members Groups, 6 July 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>142</sup> “Memo from Henrietta Levine to Barbara Bick and Lynda Barrett, 15 December 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>143</sup> “Minutes of Planning Meeting for 1966 National Conference,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1966, Chicago IL.

<sup>144</sup> “Letter from Harriet M. Avery to Barbara Bick, 28 December 1967,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>145</sup> One in Michigan (1962), six in Illinois (1963, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1971, 1973), one in Washington D.C. (1967), one in Pennsylvania (1969), one in Wisconsin (1970), and two in New York (1974, 1975), SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3.

<sup>146</sup> “Special – Please Note, 9/1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 1, 1961-date 50 Oak St.

or two people from each area were willing to put up the money for the trip.”<sup>147</sup> Unresponsive to the same pleas made by western women, the eastern women worried that “important policy and action commitments” would arise with “such inadequate representation from areas that give a great deal of strength to the movement.”<sup>148</sup> They worried that conference proposals would therefore lack legitimacy and raised “concern that groups would not feel a commitment to policies and actions so arrived at.”<sup>149</sup>

Without conferring with any other WSP activists, the eastern regional conference contacted Chicago Women for Peace and asked them to host the national conference instead. When Chicago agreed, San Francisco received word that they had been stripped of responsibility for hosting. Bay Area women reacted with incredulity to the actions of the key women on the east coast. That same night they held their own regional meeting. East Bay and San Francisco WFP activists agreed that they “could not accept such a summary decision by just 3 groups, affecting months of anticipation and just approximately 5 weeks before the planned date.” They issued an “emergency” poll to determine the attitudes of WSPers from across the country. West coast activists maintained that they had paid substantial costs to travel “to three previous national conferences,” and countered eastern claims of adequate representation with their own reservations about national representation at the potential Chicago conference. Sensing that eastern women undervalued their input, they argued that they “also have contributions to make to the movement even if they do not represent as many people as the states east of the Mississippi.”<sup>150</sup>

The attempted usurpation of national consensus caused irreparable damage to relationships between women in the east and west. San Francisco eventually pressed ahead with the 1965 conference with substantial national support, running a productive event in which Women Strike for Peace formally adopted its national position paper in opposition to the Vietnam War. But Bay Area activists harboured “resentment” at both the time and “manner” of the proposed change.<sup>151</sup> Writing to support the Californian point of view, Mabel Proctor argued that the proposed change “would cause any group to hesitate about taking on a future National Conference job, lest the same thing happen

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

again.”<sup>152</sup> She further observed that actions of those in the north east would “reduce the unity we have gained nationally.”<sup>153</sup>

Problems of conference planning did not improve and a subsequent national conference in 1968 again saw eastern refusal to travel large distances hampering arrangements. In August, Barbara Bick began liaising with members of WSP’s National Coordinating Committee (NCC) to make arrangements. The committee expressed its intentions to focus on national representation, due to their observation that previous conferences had lacked such attendance. “We must not let fragmentation develop,” it affirmed. “This would be a negative contrast to our previous cohesion which did make an impact and did attract women to our movement.”<sup>154</sup> Kay Johnson offered to plan the event in Denver, Colorado, which had, in previous years, been “frequently suggested as a good middle of the country location.”<sup>155</sup> NCC members responded with “complete agreement” in favour of Denver. Eight prominent women from across the country concurred, among them Ethel Taylor from Philadelphia, Mary Clarke in Los Angeles, Anci Koppel in Seattle, and Jean Shulman from New York.<sup>156</sup> However, while clarifying the consensus, Barbara Bick “heard via the grapevine that there was some negative feeling about Denver from some New York women.”<sup>157</sup> Cora Weiss said “it’s too far and too soon and too expensive” to attend, while others in New York felt that “they won’t be able to get many to Denver” either.<sup>158</sup> Favour for the conference suddenly cooled. Two weeks after confirming Denver as the host city, Barbara Bick confirmed the NCC’s reversal of the “complete agreement” it had previously confirmed, explaining that “the WSP national conference will have to be postponed due to the inability of the NCC to achieve consensus.”<sup>159</sup> Delegates from D.C., Philadelphia, and New York met again to discuss the “political situation” that surrounded the arrangements and confirmed that members of Chicago and North Shore Women for

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<sup>152</sup> “Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Lynda Fanning, 26 September 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> “Letter from the Women of Southern California WSP Council, 25 September 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept.

<sup>155</sup> “Letter from Barbara Bick to NCC Members, 7 August 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>156</sup> “Letter from Barbara Bick to NCC Members, 23 August 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> “Letter from Ethel Taylor to Barbara Bick, 23 August 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept.

<sup>159</sup> “Memo from Barbara Bick to NCC Members, 4 September 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

Peace would once more host the conference in Illinois. Disputes over national conference planning add much to our understanding of the internal power dynamics and relationships between WSPers in different parts of the country, but it is additionally intriguing that these episodes are absent from the recollections of WSP activists and from the history of the organisation.

### **The Leadership of Key Women**

Nonorganization allowed the growth of an “entrenched leadership clique” that, by the end of the decade, tended to act on behalf of Women Strike for Peace without consulting the broader membership.<sup>160</sup> Unilaterally committing WSP to a coalition activity, Donna Allen maintained she had acted “in keeping with the national WSP directive” established at earlier conferences. She further explained that she did not “need the re-approval of policies.”<sup>161</sup> Detroit WFP offered Allen a simple but vitriolic response; “we’re disgusted.”<sup>162</sup> But WSP’s operations did not improve. A 1969 retreat attacked some WSPers’ sense of entitlement to “attend coalition meetings and commit WSP to actions without first consulting” other members.<sup>163</sup> By 1970 this power dynamic started to impact WSP’s ability to recruit new activists. Younger members spoke of “an ‘elitist’ group” that made them feel “excluded” from decision-making.<sup>164</sup> In a damning assessment of the organisation’s inclusiveness, newcomer Didi Halkin said “it was difficult for many of us to think of ourselves as part of a national movement,” claiming that key women had not “progressed beyond the ‘coffee Klatch’ syndrome.”<sup>165</sup>

WSP’s operations became problematic due to a fundamental contradiction its attitude towards demonstrations, specifically the conflict between WSPers’ reverence of spontaneous action and the necessity to make decisions by consensus. The spontaneity with which Women Strike for Peace embarked on their early demonstrations

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<sup>160</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 75.

<sup>161</sup> “Letter from Donna Allen to Women Strike for Peace, 15 November 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec.

<sup>162</sup> “Letter from Lynda Stein to the National Consultative Committee, 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>163</sup> “WSP Retreat, 27 September 1969,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, Minutes of Steering Committee – 1965-1970.

<sup>164</sup> “Letter from Didi Halkin to Trudi Young, 7 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

contributed to the organisation's enviable reputation within the US peace movement. The Vietnam War heightened the urgency of protest and obliged women to respond quickly to crises as they emerged.<sup>166</sup> But the breakdown of group unity during the course of the war meant that spontaneous decisions could not assume the formerly reliable consensus of members. Following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, several key women rushed to produce a statement endorsed by Women Strike for Peace, but recognised that "we just couldn't reach everybody" in time to guarantee that the statement represented a consensus view.<sup>167</sup> In other cases, women felt such urgency to act that they decided to speak on behalf of their groups, often just presuming other women's opinions. Responding to a proposal to hold a demonstration in South Vietnam, Mary Clarke explained "there isn't time to consult with some of the gals here in person, but I would say that our women would probably give approval." She gave an emphatic "YES" to the controversial plan on her group's behalf.<sup>168</sup>

Although key women are often referred to as the defining presence within Women Strike for Peace, their decisions increasingly contrasted with the wishes of grassroots activists as unity eroded.<sup>169</sup> After its 1961 demonstration Blanche Posner said that WSP did not need organisation as "we believe in the same thing."<sup>170</sup> In 1968, by contrast, National Secretary Sally Bortz noted that "what happens," in the National Office "is that people call in and say 'who the hell gave her permission to go ahead and do this or that or the other?'"<sup>171</sup> Lynda Stein observed that individuals ostensibly "acting in the name of WSP" were failing to provide appropriate representation, while New York WSPers cautioned that, without the maintenance of efficient communication, "our 'leaders' and our WSP groups will be marching to different music."<sup>172</sup> In its defence, the national body found itself in a difficult position. Even when acting cautiously and choosing not to offer an official stance, it received criticism. In late 1965 the National Office chose not to sponsor a march and offered a typically decentralised

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<sup>166</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, x; Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol," 494.

<sup>167</sup> "Letter from Ethel Taylor to Barbara Bick, 23 August 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept.

<sup>168</sup> "Letter from Mary Clarke to Barbara Bick, n.d.," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – CA (1965-1971).

<sup>169</sup> Alonso, "Review," 1774.

<sup>170</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 75.

<sup>171</sup> "Washington WSP 'Retreat' Meeting at Folly Fodor's, Saturday, 5 October 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Washington WSP Retreat – October 5 1968.

<sup>172</sup> "Letter from Lynda Stein to National Consultative Committee, 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970; "Unsigned letter to Lynda Stein, Donna Allen, National Consultative Committee, and 'Whoever,' 2 December 1965," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec.

response that directed activists to participate as individuals if they wished. Miriam Levin and Lena Pikser, having attended the march, argued that the large groundswell of support should have allowed WSP to formally sponsor it. They claimed its decision “did not reflect the desires of about 40 women who did march,” subsequently questioning why WSP had chosen to distance itself from the action. If its National Office could not appropriately gauge the sentiment of its activists, they asked, “what purpose does the WSP serve?”<sup>173</sup>

Qualms with WSP’s leaders grew as activists became increasingly jaded with the way in which leadership appeared off-limits to those without the time and money necessary to perform such functions. As Andrea Estepa observed, “women who had to work or could not afford to pay for childcare were less available to participate in WSP activities.”<sup>174</sup> Tacoma Women for Peace suggested that national conferences and other consultative meetings “should be held in the summer so that teachers and those vacationing might be able to attend.”<sup>175</sup> Chicago’s Shirley Lens, running Women for Peace around a full time teaching job, was in accord with such sentiments. Feeling dominated by established figures and without the freedoms that would allow them to become a part of the leadership, many grassroots figures felt compelled to depart from WSP. Amy Swerdlow recognised this trend:

So many women dropped out in terms of not being able to assume leadership roles, or women would be active at one point in their lives and then say, “OK, I have to go home now.” I’ve done that myself. I couldn’t go to some actions of some meetings that I had been at a month before and I just couldn’t keep doing that.<sup>176</sup>

This highlights an inherent difficulty in providing grassroots representation in the history and memory of Women Strike for Peace. Running an organisation staffed almost exclusively by volunteers, WSPers needed the financial and monetary resources necessary to maintain involvement. Those who possessed money and time therefore found they could attend more planning meetings than others without such assets, having more opportunity to voice their opinion and confer on crucial decisions affecting the operation of WSP. Vermont activist Virginia Naeve observed, “this made it less likely

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<sup>173</sup> “Letter from Miriam Levin and Lena Pikser to the Steering Committee of WSP Conference, 21 October 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec.

<sup>174</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 72.

<sup>175</sup> “Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Lynda Fanning, 26 September 1965,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 10, 1965 Sept-Dec.

<sup>176</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

that poor and working-class women could join in events on an equal footing.” Naeve even described the “aloofness” of her more affluent WSP peers to such issues.<sup>177</sup>

These problems led to a public spat between Washington D.C. WSPers Aline Berman and Barbara Bick. Berman fiercely criticised what she perceived to be the “undue influence” enjoyed by some simply due to their ability to commit more time to their peace work. She raised her concerns to the National Consultative Committee in November 1968:

Theoretically speaking, an employee makes no policy decisions or even major decisions on administrative procedures. In practice, however, any one person who works five days a week in our office wields considerable influence by virtue of that fact and can easily squelch the opinions of the opposition or dominate operations as a whole.<sup>178</sup>

Berman called for a reorganising and formalising of authority, especially in the capital. She noted that the waning commitment of activists exacerbated the problem, as a smaller presence of regular members offered insufficient challenges to domineering members imposing their ideas on the organisation.

Berman framed her complaint as a “study of issues” and did not wish her concerns to become a “hassle over personalities.”<sup>179</sup> However, she received a prickly response from National Secretary Barbara Bick who wrote of her “immense unhappiness and tremendous emotional turmoil” to the NCC. She felt the document, “which is purely and simply directed at me,” had distorted the picture of local WSP operations, making charges that “are almost unbelievable, especially coming from one of us.”<sup>180</sup> Bick passionately countered Berman’s claims, claiming that while the complainant had “set herself up as an expert on office reorganisation, she has had almost no experience doing local or national work and has obviously much less knowledge about what goes on” than the subject of her complaint. The National Consultative Committee evidently rejected Aline Berman’s claims, but, in the months

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<sup>177</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 72.

<sup>178</sup> “Problems of the National Office, As Related to Washington WSP and Solutions, 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> “Letter from Barbara Bick to the National Consultative Committee, 24 November 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

that followed, Bick felt her position as a paid member of staff had become untenable. She resigned as National Secretary.<sup>181</sup>

The fracturing of leadership and unity arising from the failures inherent in WSP's nonorganization was not unique among contemporary activist organisations. Subsequent women's liberation groups especially had to negotiate similar problems arising from their emphasis on leaderless operations. Jo Freeman identified the "Tyranny of Structureless" that afflicted feminist organisations using similar methods.<sup>182</sup> "Contrary to what we would like to believe," she wrote, "there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people of whatever nature that comes together for any length of time for any purpose will inevitably structure itself in some fashion."<sup>183</sup> Without referencing WSP directly, Freeman observed many of the traits that had come to govern the group's operation, notably the development of "elitism," the admiration and influence of particular figure, and, most presciently, the "impotence" that emerges when conflicts inevitably arise.<sup>184</sup> Carol Hanisch also wrote from her own experience about the "struggles over leadership" that developed in women's liberation groups, as well as the impracticality of consensus decision-making processes.<sup>185</sup> The phenomenon was not just limited to feminist organisations. Michael Foley considered the "tyranny of informality" that yielded to a "charisma-based" form of leadership governing power dynamics among draft resistance groups in the 1960s.<sup>186</sup>

But it is also apparent that a similar dynamic existed in the production of WSP's history and memory. Though several oral history projects document the experiences of women's peace activists, these have, through necessity, dealt particularly with the memories and recollections of leading and prominent women. Understanding that WSP never developed an official membership list and that activists' commitment to the

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<sup>181</sup> "Problems of the National Office, As Related to Washington WSP and Solutions, 1968," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History; "Letter from Sally Bortz to National Consultative Committee Reps, 24 January 1969," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – 1965-July 1970.

<sup>182</sup> Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1972): 1-6.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

<sup>185</sup> Carol Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," in *Leadership in Social Movements*, eds. Colin Barker et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 77-95.

<sup>186</sup> Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 186; See also Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1959); Elizabeth S. Clemens and Debra C. Minkoff, "Beyond the Iron Law: Rethinking the Place of Organizations in Social Movement Research," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 155-170.



organisation varied, former figures amongst the grassroots of WSP remain notoriously difficult to find.<sup>187</sup> Amy Swerdlow acknowledged this during her research, providing a motivation for her to cite the names of as many women as she could.<sup>188</sup> Still, established depictions of Women Strike for Peace display the actions and attitudes of key women as representative of the majority of activists. Examining the points of disagreement found throughout internal correspondence shows the problems of this approach.

### **The Tenure of Trudi Young**

Throughout its existence Women Strike for Peace employed the talents of volunteers to serve as the organisation's national secretary. Several women served in this role in the years after the 1961 strike, including Dagmar Wilson (with various assistants), Kay Johnson, Lynda Stein/Barrett, Barbara Bick, Sally Bortz, and Vicki King. In fact, WSP held serious discussions in 1963 about elevating Eleanor Garst into a position of official national leadership, but members' insistence that they remain an organisation of autonomous individuals shelved such plans.<sup>189</sup> Acting as a central communication point, the national secretary often experienced huge responsibility with little actual authority, often receiving ire from activists without much support for their work or subsequent solutions. Giving up the role in 1964, Kay Johnson offered a somewhat sarcastic advertisement for a successor:

She will need to do everything – know WSP, type well, including stencils, operate machinery (mimeograph and folding machines), photocopier, meet people, compose letters, reports, etc., file, be an editor, keep track of money, pay bills, etc., keep mailing lists, devise and improve methods for doing things, get along with people and organize the work of a non-organisation, work under pressure and not develop an ulcer, have an understanding family. Any applicants?<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Anne Spake, 25 May 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984; “Letter from Anci Koppel to Amy Swerdlow, 16 March 1994,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-21, General Correspondence, May 1993-1994; “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Orah, 29 May 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984; “Letter from Cora Weiss, April 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984.

<sup>188</sup> “Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979; “Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 9 February 1982,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections 1981.

<sup>189</sup> SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, RE National Coordinator Proposal, 1963.

<sup>190</sup> “A Personal Word,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1964, Winnetka IL.

After years of avoiding the issue, key women finally felt that myriad problems besetting Women Strike for Peace could be solved with formal leadership and, in May 1970, agreed to appoint a formal National Coordinator to act as “an organizer for the National Office.”<sup>191</sup> The committee wanted the new staff member to address three specific, yet ambitious tasks; to set up and coordinate demonstrations; to form a program to organise new groups and attract new members; and finally, to address the functions of WSP’s national structure, its relations to local groups, and how it interacted with the various regional bases of WSP support.<sup>192</sup> The decision signalled the intent to move the organisation from its previously informal mode of operation and to “develop a strong National Office which can represent WSP thinking, organise WSP groups, and coordinate WSP activities.”<sup>193</sup> One month later, Trudi Young joined Women Strike for Peace as its first official National Coordinator.

At 28 years old, Young was much younger than many of the WSP leadership, nevertheless she was considered an experienced, talented, and respected figure within the anti-war movement.<sup>194</sup> She directed the High School Regional Project for the AFSC, held acclaim as the first women draft counsellor and trainer to work for the Central Committee of Conscientious Objectors, and worked as national coordinator for the New Mobe in D.C. Young “was one of the prime movers” behind the March Against Death on 15 November 1970. Her husband, Ron, directed youth programs for the Fellowship of Reconciliation.<sup>195</sup>

Young set about her task with much enthusiasm, professing her love for Women Strike for Peace and her optimism for the organisation’s future.<sup>196</sup> She saw her priorities as reaffirming the sense of “community” that many felt had long since vanished and establishing a consistent flow of money from local offices to fund national actions.<sup>197</sup> This, Young hoped, would bring some unity to the organisation and foster stronger

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<sup>191</sup> “Letter from the Liaison Committee to NCC Members, 23 June 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Martin Weil, “War Protesters Plan New Offensive Feb. 21,” *The Washington Post*, 10 February 1970, A2; “March ‘Comply-In’ Mapped to Tie Up Draft Boards’ Work,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1970, 12; “Foes of War Elated at Antidraft Week,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1970, 28.

<sup>195</sup> “Letter from Joni Phillips to Lillian Fine, 1 February 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>196</sup> “Letter from Trudi Young to Carolyn Berger, 1 July 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>197</sup> “Letter from Didi Halkin to Trudi Young, 7 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

“national/chapter relationships.”<sup>198</sup> To demonstrate her affinity for the organisation, the new National Coordinator travelled to North Vietnam as a representative of WSP and visited west coast activists towards the end of 1970. It endeared her to leading figures in California and Washington State who threw their support behind Young’s initiatives.<sup>199</sup>

Despite her diligent efforts, Trudi Young saw her tenure as national coordinator beset by ambivalence. Her calls to receive more frequent financial donations from local branches actually saw them scale back their funding. Sacramento Women for Peace reduced its traditional \$100 annual contribution, feeling “that a \$50 contribution is a more realistic goal.”<sup>200</sup> Young sometimes worked without pay while exhorting to the NCC that “we are broke. Flat broke.”<sup>201</sup> She became more despondent as the momentum created at the 1970 national conference in Milwaukee dissipated when delegates returned to their branches.<sup>202</sup> “It’s very frustrating to sit in the National Office, charged with enthusiasm and excitement,” she wrote members in December, “and yet to have no money or support.”<sup>203</sup> The NCC responded with a series of “emergency meetings” involving Amy Swerdlow, Cora Weiss, Ethel Taylor, Jean Shulman, and Dorothy Forman, but offered no practical solutions or determined support for the work Young conducted.<sup>204</sup> She sent a caustic memo to NCC members on 15 March 1971, summarising the change in her attitude towards WSP. “It hasn’t got better. I should not, cannot, will not be alone in facing the crises, making the decisions and hearing the complaints and praises. I need your help.”<sup>205</sup>

Though ambivalence exasperated Trudi Young, the hostility displayed by some leading figures appeared spiteful. The NCC decided to move the location of its National

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<sup>198</sup> “Letter from Trudi Young to Jean Kovner, 20 April 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>199</sup> “Letter from Trudi Young to Shelby Grantham, 19 March 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>200</sup> “Letter from Emma Mar to National WISP, 16 March 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Branch File – CA (1965-1971).

<sup>201</sup> “Letter from Sylvia Price to Trudi Young, 3 March 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec; “Regional Conference-Interim Committee and Money! 2 December 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>202</sup> “Memo from Trudi Young/Joni Phillips and WSP National Office to Expanded NCC, 2 December 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> “Memo from Liaison Committee to Expanded NCC and Chapters, 18 February 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973; “Emergency Meeting in Philadelphia, 30 March 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>205</sup> “Memo from Trudi Young to Expanded NCC and Chapters, 15 March 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

Office from D.C. to New York in 1970 in order to physically demonstrate the separation of the D.C. branch from the organisation's national apparatus.<sup>206</sup> Tacoma WFP'er Mabel Proctor saw it simply as serving to suit the new National Coordinator's situation. She wrote a fierce letter to Young, stating "if, after nine years, we have seemingly thrown away" the advantages of having a headquarters in the capital "because somebody lived in New York, it makes no sense to me."<sup>207</sup> Proctor continued her diatribe, highlighting her many years of experience while railing against the newcomer's attempts to bring some coordination to Women Strike for Peace. Young, ever polite, explained her position, motivations, and aims while suggesting the two meet in person at the forthcoming national conference to talk in more depth.<sup>208</sup> Unmoved by the coordinator's overtures, Proctor criticised Young's use of the word "organisation" to describe WSP while denouncing the suggestion that elderly Tacoma activists use valuable funds to travel to Milwaukee.<sup>209</sup> Meanwhile, Shirley Lens attacked Young for leaving a Chicago regional meeting prematurely. Though Young had forewarned the Chicago leader of her obligation to return to New York before the conference ended, Lens voiced her displeasure that her branch had paid for Young's flight, only for her to depart early.<sup>210</sup> She wrote "it is not very inspirational when our National Coordinator leaves us when she considers that there was not enough enthusiasm to keep her in Chicago."<sup>211</sup> Young apologised and praised Chicago's efforts, but Lens, clearly annoyed at what she perceived as the national coordinator's lack of commitment, provided a sardonic postscript to her letter to emphasise her own dedication.<sup>212</sup> She noted that she had not written her response on WFP letterhead as "I just don't have time at home. This written on my lunch hour at work."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> "Letter from the Liaison Committee to NCC Members, 23 June 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 5, About National Coordinating Committee Meetings 1968-1970.

<sup>207</sup> "Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Trudi Young, 22 September 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>208</sup> "Letter from Trudi Young to Mabel Proctor, 28 October 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>209</sup> "Letter from Mabel S. Proctor to Trudi Young, 9 November 1970," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 4, Washington 1965, 1968-1970.

<sup>210</sup> "Letter from Sylvia Price to Trudi Young, 3 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar; "Letter from Shirley Lens to Trudi Young, 15 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> "Letter from Trudi Young to Sylvia Price, 3 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan - Mar; "Letter from Trudi Young to Shirley Lens, 5 May 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

<sup>213</sup> "Letter from Shirley Lens to Trudi Young, 15 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

Receiving little support from WSP's key women, activists on the east coast, or local branches around the country, Trudi Young confided in her friends that she wished to resign. "I sure don't want to take that step," she wrote Los Angeles WISPer Jean Kovner, "but if people really want a National Office they must be serious about maintaining it."<sup>214</sup> Her private correspondence with women on the west coast found Young speaking candidly, explaining her endurance of "shitty-difficult days of dilemma."<sup>215</sup> The beleaguered coordinator found support as west coast women attacked the apathy of east coast leaders. Kovner hoped that Young's threat "shakes up the other areas which have been neglectful." She added that she hoped "the gals" on the NCC "will react." "I hope they will, because we need you."<sup>216</sup> In Seattle, Anci Koppel, a stalwart supporter of Young's, thoroughly supported her complaints, stressing that "the women in the East have let you down." Koppel felt that "if you want to resign it may scare their pants off – it should and maybe this would bring them to their wits end and to action."<sup>217</sup>

Less than a year after assuming the leadership of Women Strike for Peace, Trudi Young resigned. Declining to inform the upper echelons of WSP of her decision, she instead forwarded her announcement directly to 70 branches and left to join Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam as co-director, remaining an active contributor to anti-war campaigns.<sup>218</sup> Young's resignation letter summarised the dynamics at play in Women Strike for Peace at this time, offering a damning verdict of her time as National Coordinator and of the personalities running the organisation:

The inter-personal harassment around every decision is devastating. I get daily calls about my immaturity, lack of organisation, political misjudgement. I get long analyses about so and so's background and emotional instability and therefore "don't take her seriously." The personal

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<sup>214</sup> "Letter from Trudi Young to Jean Kovner, 25 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>215</sup> "Letter from Trudi Young to Jean Kovner, 20 April 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

<sup>216</sup> "Letter from Jean Kovner to Trudi Young, 19 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Mar.

<sup>217</sup> "Telegraph from Anci Koppel to Trudi Young, 18 March 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Jan-Dec.

<sup>218</sup> "Letter from Bernice Crane to WSP Activists, 21 May 1971," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973; Richard Halloran, "30,000 Protesters Routed in Capital," *New York Times*, 3 May 1971, 1; William R. MacKaye, "Many Church Leaders Assail New Bombings," 23 December 1972, A6.

fighting and interplay take too much of my energy and time and I feel they indicate a basic lack of trust and a basic breakdown in group process.<sup>219</sup>

The announcement acknowledged the identity crisis afflicting WSPers and claimed it unfortunate that women felt it “harder to continue to relate to all levels of women.” But the source of Young’s “disillusion” rested squarely in the trust issues that existed among WSP members. She lamented the weight of “emotional hassles necessary to work in WSP” caused by “lack of trust, personal ego involvement, failure to organise the many new women.”<sup>220</sup> Young opined that the infighting between leading WSP figures led to the organisation “losing many of the ‘new’ women we’ve involved. At least twenty women have left WSP.”<sup>221</sup>

Young’s resignation badly damaged the reputation of Women Strike for Peace. Leading figures initially tried to keep knowledge of her departure from grassroots activists. When the membership at large finally became aware of her departure, key women suffered criticisms. Wendy Brienens wrote that “none of us at the local level were informed of the fact that Trudi Young, a woman with whom many of us have worked in the past, had tendered her resignation.” Her departure became likened to the recent “purging” of popular Chemical and Biological Weapons Clearing House Committee Chairman Dorothy Forman following disagreements with other committee members. Brienens wrote that she could no longer “continue to associate myself with a group of women whose leaders stoop to such levels.”<sup>222</sup> Didi Halkin, a dependable supporter of Young’s, felt that “personal animosities and petty jealousies were allowed to come before the general welfare of the group.”<sup>223</sup>

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the National Coordinator’s departure came through the shift in attitude towards formal coordination. The fiery nature of Young’s departure occasioned a re-evaluation of the entire structure by national leaders. They recognised “serious failure” in the way Women Strike for Peace coordinated its efforts, particularly among key women. “The experience of the year shows that the NCC failed almost completely to follow through in giving leadership and guidance to the coordinator and must take primary responsibility for the weaknesses

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<sup>219</sup> “Letter from Trudi Young to WSP Members, 1 May 1971,” UCB WFP Archives, 6-2, Office Files – National 1971.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> “Letter from Wendy Brienens to New York WSP Members, 20 September 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

<sup>223</sup> “Letter from Didi Halkin to Trudi Young, 7 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1971 Apr-Dec.

that prevailed.”<sup>224</sup> The group had “not been as effective” as it needed to be.<sup>225</sup> After several years of inexorable decline, members began to seriously consider the necessity of greater communication and central coordination for the first time. Bernice Crane observed that “the national office is an important bond to all the areas. The areas do look to national for leadership.”<sup>226</sup> As a result of Young’s criticisms the organisation fundamentally changed as it entered the 1970s. It appointed two full time staff to assist in the functions of the National Office. While that remained in New York, members decided to create a Legislative Office in Washington, D.C. specifically to oversee demonstration and lobby efforts in the capital. The NCC also conceded that it needed to consider its own position and the benefits of acting as a National Steering Committee.<sup>227</sup> In particular, the role of National Coordinator took on a greater importance. By popular demand, Philadelphia founder Ethel Taylor came to occupy the position of “National Coordinator and Spokeswoman.” Though Trudi Young had preceded her, Taylor’s popularity and stature within WSP allowed her to assume a legacy as WSP’s first official leader. She served for nearly 20 years, until WSP closed its D.C. office in 1990.

Young’s tenure as national coordinator remains an undocumented aspect of WSP’s history, but her experience illuminates the personal relationships and power dynamics that governed the group in this period. Her presence is entirely absent in *Women Strike for Peace*, despite Swerdlow’s participation in the NCC, the Liaison Committee, and the series of emergency meetings called to discuss Young’s complaints. Likewise, despite her position as the first National Coordinator of an organisation historically depicted as one without structure, Trudi Young appears in none of the oral history interviews provided by former members. Yet her resignation letter encapsulated the sentiments of many women within the organisation in the late 1960s. Written by someone with 11 months involvement at the top of Women Strike for Peace, the letter, along with the myriad pieces of correspondence between Young and other members, provides an illuminating insight into the distressing state of the organisation at this time.

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<sup>224</sup> “Letter from Bernice Crane to WSP Activists, 21 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>225</sup> “North Shore Women for Peace Report, 7 June 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>226</sup> “Letter from Bernice Crane to WSP Activists, 21 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>227</sup> “National Consultative Committee Meeting, 21-23 May 1971,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Meeting Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

WSPers saw in the consensus-oriented organising strategies of later women's liberation groups the influence of their own non-organisational strategies, but the well-publicised failings of such formats by feminist organisations must, therefore, also be juxtaposed with WSP's own struggles, which were unmistakably evident in this period. The importance of this aspect of the past was raised in an interview by influential San Francisco WFP activist Frances Herring. While compiling archival records, she spoke of finding "a disturbing letter written by Carol Urner of Portland." Herring noted that she was recording the letter "for the history, because I think it's important to see what my answer to her was." Urner's grievances suggested that "things were getting out of hand and that people were making decisions for a whole group and that they didn't like those decisions." Recognising the negative image such a letter produced, Herring nevertheless contended that "it was an interesting piece to pull out of the files to see part of the history of things that we struggled with."<sup>228</sup>

Women Strike for Peace formed an effective and visible part of the Vietnam anti-war movement, receiving plaudits from many of its coalition partners, praise from historians of the period, and drawing positive reflections from its former activists. But an entirely different narrative can be drawn that fills an important gap in historiography relating to WSP - specifically, how and why the group declined towards the end of the 1960s. A focus on disputes and unrest does not show Women Strike for Peace in a particularly flattering light, but it does highlight that significant silences exist in memory relating to the group. Giving succour to these silent voices places WSP into the context of increasing lassitude among contemporary activist groups generally. Recognition of this not only demonstrates the burdens on women's peace activists but serves to inform the currently unexplained phenomenon that made the group, to all appearances enjoying substantial successes, to suddenly vanish from public consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The downplaying of geographical tensions remains a curious feature of the history and memory of Women Strike for Peace and clearly complicates perceptions of its cohesion. West coast women developed an entirely different attitude towards the national organisation than their east coast counterparts, arising, somewhat understandably, from their sense of ill-treatment at the hands of WSPers who wished to assert their authority over the rest of the group. The ubiquity of personality clashes, jealousies, and trust issues that grew among women,

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<sup>228</sup> Herring interview, 1 June 1985, ARS.0056.



especially exacerbated as the leadership and grassroots activists became increasingly estranged throughout the 1960s, is another historically undervalued factor that contributed to WSP's decline. Existing narratives often reduce the presence of figures, such as Aline Berman and Trudi Young, who endured an altogether more negative experience. In the absence of their recollections, highlighting the internal correspondence and overlooked episodes displaying the chagrin of activists shows the anguish WSPers endured during this time.

## **5. “Basically Feminist”: A Seventies Revival and Changing Historical Perceptions, 1970-1980**

Assessing the condition of the peace movement following the end of the Vietnam War, historian Andrea Estepa offered a reflection on Women Strike for Peace. “Over the course of the 1960s WSP had achieved something remarkable: it had survived.”<sup>1</sup> But just barely. As the war drew to a close, the group risked becoming irrelevant. It had lost public influence, fostered disharmony among its declining membership, and lacked an identifiable cause. But the 1970s brought opportunities for renewal. Philadelphia founder Ethel Taylor became the group’s first official national leader and instilled unity, if not coordination, into the fractious national operation. Rising antinuclear concern among the public allowed WSP to return to the disarmament stand that marked its early successes and the organisation set about steadily rebuilding its influence and relevance within the peace movement.

While taking comfort in the familiarity of disarmament activism, the rise of the women’s liberation movement forced WSPers to address their group’s identity and its relationship to feminism. Confronted with pointed radical critiques of motherhood and domesticity, the group questioned the efficacy of the maternal identity that had previously informed its protests. Key women sensed an opportunity to recruit members, but recognised that Women Strike for Peace needed to make subtle changes to its traditional image in order to appeal to the new constituency of politicised women. It began to lower its emphasis on maternal rhetoric, speaking to “sisters” in the United States, and secured a notable presence at the 1977 National Women’s Conference. When speaking of their group, members invoked their place at the forefront of the “women’s movement” and claimed to have harboured feminist resolve since the founding of Women Strike for Peace. Intriguingly, they altered their historical perspectives to place the organisation squarely in the context of contemporary feminist fervour. Bella Abzug, a previously intolerable presence to many WSPers, became revered and achieved a central place in historical depictions of the group. Nevertheless, changes to the public and private identity of WSP did not necessary entail a commitment to feminist activism. While several key activists exhibited clear concern

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<sup>1</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 304.

for women's equality and reproductive rights, Women Strike for Peace adopted an ambiguous attitude towards feminist activism.

While little historical analysis of Women Strike for Peace extends beyond its experience in the anti-Vietnam War movement, the group's transition during the 1970s significantly influenced how activists came to see their group in its entirety. Examinations of WSP's involvement in the Test Ban and anti-war movements account for less than half of its history, but the 1970s became a crucial decade for the group's identity and historical image. The debates over motherhood, essentialism, and equality within feminism that occurred at this time continued to affect how Women Strike for Peace was perceived. Importantly, it is the context of this period that informed Amy Swerdlow's history of the organisation.<sup>2</sup> While the extent of WSP's prioritisation of feminist issues remains contested, the context of those debates informed the historical image of the group. By recognising this period in the organisation's history, this chapter shows how contemporary circumstances affected the identity of WSP activists and informed historical depictions of Women Strike for Peace, and, in doing so, fills a significant gap in historiography of the group.

### **Ethel Taylor and WSP's Antinuclear Revival**

While still grappling with myriad internal tensions at the start of the 1970s, members of Women Strike for Peace continued to rail against the Vietnam War. Activists conducted "sit-ins" in congressional offices, chained themselves to the gates of the White House, and formed a "ring" of women around the Capitol Building in 1972.<sup>3</sup> 100 women extended WSP's consumer boycott operations to perform a "die-in" outside the headquarters of the International Telephone and Telegraph Company (ITT), identifying as "a dead Vietnamese" or "a dead Cambodian" to highlight the company's complicity in weapons manufacturing.<sup>4</sup> WSP resented President Nixon for both his handling of the war and his attitude towards protesters. Harrowing displays of violence, notably the

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<sup>2</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 234.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 85-86; Robert Walters, "Housewives Stage War Chain-in," *The Evening Star*, 13 April 1971, A2; ACC 94A-005, Box 1, 13 April 1971 – WSP Women Chain Themselves to the White House Fence; "For Immediate Release – 11 May 1972," SCPC WSP Archives, 11 May 1972 – Sit-in In Carl Albert's Office.

<sup>4</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 332<sup>n</sup>57; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 79-89.

Kent State shootings, repulsed members.<sup>5</sup> They campaigned for the president's impeachment, denouncing his maintenance of the conflict, the spiralling costs involved, and the expansion of the war into Cambodia.<sup>6</sup> Bella Abzug used her new position within the United States Congress to table such a motion.<sup>7</sup> Though in disarray internally, the Vietnam War provided enough focus to keep WSP functioning in the short term.

WSPers celebrated the war's end, but their organisation faced an uncertain future. With branches "on the brink of breaking up," many travelled to the 1972 national conference "looking for a saving program," but returned disappointed that "they did not find" one.<sup>8</sup> The strain of prolonged anti-war work took its toll on the group's membership, as both grassroots activists and key women decided to reduce their commitments.<sup>9</sup> A number of branches affiliated with WSP decided to break away, with Rochester WSP and Missoula Women for Peace opting to join WILPF.<sup>10</sup> Members bemoaned the absence of Dagmar Wilson in particular. Though never formally designated as a national leader, Wilson's presence served as a "cohesive force," uniting the whole organisation.<sup>11</sup> Without her leadership, the fractures within Women Strike for Peace worsened.

Key women recognised the need for decisive change and, in 1974, looked to install a new national leader. They turned to the skills and dependable presence of another founding member, Philadelphia leader Ethel Taylor. Respected and well-liked by WSPers across the country, Taylor commanded substantial influence. She presided over many organisational meetings and delivered keynote addresses to national conferences throughout the 1960s. When WSP moved its national office from New

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<sup>5</sup> "East Bay Women for Peace: For Immediate Release," UCB WFP Archives, 6-6, Regional Conference, Santa Barbara, CA, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> "For Immediate Release – 11 May 1972," SCPC WSP Archives, 11 May 1972 – Sit-in In Carl Albert's Office; "Four More Years of Nixon? You Can't Afford It," AU WSP Archives, Box 10, Nixon Policy.

<sup>7</sup> "Testimony of Congresswoman Bella S. Abzug Before the Senate Rules Committee, 14 November 1973, on Confirmation of Gerald Ford as Vice President of the United States," SCPC WSP Archives, B2, Box 5, 1973, Beginning of Bay Area WFP Impeachment Nixon Campaign; "Arthur Sidden, "Expel 200 Women in Nixon Protest," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 January 1972, 5.

<sup>8</sup> "Women's Strike for Peace (WSP) National Conference, Santa Barbara, California, 8-11 December 1972," AU WSP Archives, Box 19, FOIA FBI Files – 100-39566 Vol. 7.

<sup>9</sup> "Letter from Mary Clark to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1974," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence.

<sup>10</sup> "Minutes: National Conference, Women Strike for Peace, 1974," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1974, New York NY; Various Members of Missoula Women for Peace interview, 28 February 2000, OH389-012; Taylor interview, 27 March 2000, OH389-08; Pfeiffer interview, 4 March 2000, OH389-03; Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, 232.

<sup>11</sup> "Letter from Jean Shulman, 3 July 1974," UCB WSP Archives, 7-2, Office Files – 1974, National; "Letter from Mary Clarke to Dagmar Wilson, 30 December 1978," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence.

York to Philadelphia in 1973, she acted as an unofficial national coordinator. Her efforts impressed many. Jean Shulman, a prominent WSP activist from New York City, proposed to branches that Taylor “be formally recognized” as the organisation’s “National Spokeswoman.” The proposal asserted that WSP needed an official leader and that Taylor could accrue the kind of universal admiration previously afforded Dagmar Wilson.<sup>12</sup> In July 1974, she assumed the title of “National Women Strike for Peace Spokeswoman and Coordinator.”<sup>13</sup> Ethel Taylor led Women Strike for Peace for over 15 years, until the national office closed in 1990.

The new leader inherited an unenviable task. Though acknowledging that WSP was “badly in need of reinvigoration and cohesive leadership,” Jean Shulman worried that the coronation of a new national leader could stimulate dissent.<sup>14</sup> In order to rebuild the organisation, Taylor would first need to win over members who, while admiring her personal qualities, questioned the practicalities of her new role. West coast groups in particular expressed misgivings. Seattle activists acknowledged the need to address WSP’s disorder, but requested clarification over whether an official leader would adversely affect local autonomy and consensus decision-making.<sup>15</sup> Berkeley groups asked whether the appointment of a national spokeswoman would set a damaging precedent. If Ethel Taylor did not receive a salary, Madeline Duckles mused, would a subsequent leader “be expected to function at her own expense? Do we then become a ‘rich women’s organisation’?”<sup>16</sup> Acknowledging her “sleazy response,” Duckles ultimately endorsed Ethel Taylor “if it’s not going to cost us anything.” Accruing sufficient endorsement from WSP’s grassroots, Jean Shulman dryly congratulated Taylor. She recommended “a good, well deserved rest” before she tackled “the ‘battle’ ahead. Lots of luck!”<sup>17</sup>

Taylor earnestly set about rejuvenating Women Strike for Peace. She immediately embarked on a trip to see west coast activists out of concern that “we were

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<sup>12</sup> “Letter from Jean Shulman, 3 July 1974.” UCB WFP Archives, 7-2, Office Files – 1974, National.

<sup>13</sup> “Letter from Jean Shulman to Ethel Taylor, 25 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Letter from Taimi Halonen, 17 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

<sup>16</sup> “Letter from Madeline Duckles, 22 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

<sup>17</sup> “Letter from Jean Shulman to Ethel Taylor, 25 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

becoming two separate groups” and hoped to restore accord between branches.<sup>18</sup> The trip offered an opportunity for activists to air their grievances. Many expressed isolation from the national organisation and activists on the east coast and Seattle members criticised the National Office. Taimi Halonen spoke “for a lot of others” by highlighting her group’s alienation from other branches and demanded improvements in national communication.<sup>19</sup> But Taylor, in turn, “was quite vocal” about the lack of response to national proposals forthcoming from regional bases. The meeting allowed members to clear the air and come to an understanding about the group’s future conduct. Taylor’s visit ended so positively that SWAP offered to host the next national conference.<sup>20</sup> Similar points received attention in Berkeley as women argued that they had “gotten very little benefit from the national office,” despite their reliability in providing monthly financial contributions.<sup>21</sup> But emphasis was placed on the redemption of harmonious relationships. Taylor saw “women I had been writing to but never met” and spent time with some “whom I hadn’t seen for years.” Cohesion quickly returned. Publishing a report of her trip, Taylor expressed that her “love affair” with WSP had grown deeper. “Flying across the country I was very conscious of the tremendous distance which separates us,” she wrote. But, after meeting “with all of our sisters,” she declared that “it is only physical distance which separates us – we are as close together as if we lived next door.”<sup>22</sup>

With the interest of members slowly renewing, Women Strike for Peace moved to consider its purpose. Ten years since the Partial Test Ban Treaty had deprived it of its founding cause, the 1973 Paris Peace Accords seemed to render irrelevant the group’s anti-Vietnam War stance. Further marches drew only “puzzled” looks from ambivalent bystanders who, “ever since peace was ‘declared’,” appeared “willing to believe it actually exists.”<sup>23</sup> WSPer Norma Spector recognised that peace activists appeared to be “floundering,” as if “walking on our knees.”<sup>24</sup> WSP continued to display concern for the

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<sup>18</sup> “My Trip to WSP and On the West Coast, Ethel Taylor,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 9, Philadelphia Women Strike for Peace.

<sup>19</sup> “Letter from Taimi Halonen, 17 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

<sup>20</sup> “Women Strike for Peace National Newsletter, 25 June 1976,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 96A-040, Box 2, Carter 1976 Election.

<sup>21</sup> “Letter from Madeline Duckles, 22 July 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 6, Ethel Taylor.

<sup>22</sup> “My Trip to WSP and On the West Coast, Ethel Taylor,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 9, Philadelphia Women Strike for Peace.

<sup>23</sup> Rose De Wolf, “New War Protest Is Attacked By Apathy,” *The Evening Bulletin*, 27 April 1973.

<sup>24</sup> “Norma Spector’s Remarks at NCC Meeting,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos 1970-1973.

people of South East Asia and warned against providing further military aid to South Vietnam in 1975. But “in view of the changed situation,” members planned for the future.<sup>25</sup> Taylor addressed a National Consultative Committee meeting in December 1973, explaining succinctly that “we cannot keep chanting ‘Out Now’ when as far as the American people are concerned we are out now.”<sup>26</sup>

The group’s dilemma reflected that of its contemporaries. Ron Young of the AFSC recalled that members looked inward at the close of the war, asking, “OK, now what do we do?”<sup>27</sup> But with WSPers feeling that the Vietnam War distracted them from their original intentions, a return to a campaign for nuclear disarmament made sense.<sup>28</sup> Ethel Taylor wrote to activists to celebrate the end of the Vietnam War and immediately called for a return to the nuclear issue. “WSP involvement in the war from the early years took us away from what we had organised for – an END TO THE ARMS RACE-NOT THE HUMAN RACE. Now we must get back to it.”<sup>29</sup> She reminded WSP activists that the nuclear arms race had accelerated throughout the Vietnam War. The 1974 national conference subsequently made disarmament a “chief priority.”<sup>30</sup>

Reviving public concern for disarmament, however, faced a number of difficulties at this time. First, commitment within the once vibrant antinuclear movement had dissipated considerably as a result of the Vietnam War. Lawrence S. Wittner observed that formerly imposing organisations such as SANE had “dwindled into tiny, marginal groups,” while the Canadian Voice of Women, a group that formed in 1960 and had close links to Women Strike for Peace, dropped the subject of nuclear arms from its agenda.<sup>31</sup> Second, the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) presented at least the illusion of political progress on disarmament. Détente between the US and the USSR also made

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<sup>25</sup> “Minutes of National Consultative Meeting, 12, 13 March New York,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos 1970-1973.

<sup>26</sup> “Ethel Taylor’s Address NCC 3/12/73,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos 1970-1973.

<sup>27</sup> Wittner, “The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-1978,” 440; Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 136-138.

<sup>28</sup> “Minutes of National Consultative Meeting, 12, 13 March New York,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos 1970-1973; “Special Commemorative Edition Memo, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace, 1962-2000.

<sup>29</sup> “Letter from Ethel Taylor to WSPers, 2 May 1975,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 9, Philadelphia Women Strike for Peace.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; “Minutes: National Conference, Women Strike for Peace, 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1974, New York NY.

<sup>31</sup> Wittner, “The Forgotten Years of the World Disarmament Movement, 1975-1978,” 436; Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb*, 114-115.

nuclear war appear less likely and calmed public fears. Third, public concern at this time fell squarely on domestic issues related to the economy and energy crises.<sup>32</sup> The 1973 Yom Kippur war and subsequent embargo of OPEC oil shipments increased petroleum prices by 400 percent. President Nixon argued that these issues represented “very real threats to the quality of life.”<sup>33</sup>

With its strength depleted, WSP recognised that it was unable to get disarmament back onto the public agenda or make the subject “more accessible to the average person on a personal level.”<sup>34</sup> Activists felt that even the term “disarmament” had become “an impersonal concept,” an old word that “doesn’t register with the impact it used to.”<sup>35</sup> Concluding a long examination into the subject, New York WSPer Shirley Margolin observed that while the organisation agreed “on Nuclear Disarmament as a chief priority” it disagreed on “how to publicize and implement it.”<sup>36</sup>

Fortuitously, WSP’s struggles to reassert its antinuclear priorities dovetailed with an upsurge of public concern for the environment. Environmentalism had a long history of adherents in the United States, traditionally manifesting itself as “conservation” or “preservation” of the American landscape, but growing slowly into a movement against pollution during the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Following a series of disasters in 1969, including the Santa Barbara channel oil spill and a large fire on the polluted Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, environmentalism became the zeitgeist of the early 1970s.<sup>38</sup> Journalists highlighted Los Angeles smog reports and the slow “death” of the Great Lakes while “Earth Day,” celebrated on 22 April 1970, brought together millions of concerned Americans as governmental figures from both parties clamoured to voice their support.<sup>39</sup> President Nixon, though personally unmoved by any environmental issues unrelated to the conservation of national parks, felt compelled to act. His 1970

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 236.

<sup>33</sup> Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 200; Jerome Price, *The Antinuclear Movement* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Minutes: National Conference, Women Strike for Peace, 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1974, New York NY.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Rome, “Give Earth a Chance”; Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962).

<sup>38</sup> Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 231; Jonathan H. Adler, “Fables of the Cuyahoga: Reconstructing a History of Environmental Protection,” *Fordham Environmental Law Journal*, Vol. XIV (2002): 90.

<sup>39</sup> Gene Marine, “Politics of the Environment,” *The Nation*, 26 January 1970; Raymond R. Coffey, “Teach-In On the Environment,” *The Nation*, 6 April 1970; Nicholas Lemann, “When the Earth Moved,” *New Yorker*, 15 April 2013.



State of the Union address included no less than 36 separate environmental initiatives, including the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).<sup>40</sup>

Scrutiny quickly fell on the nuclear energy industry as concerns over pollution fed the resurgence of the antinuclear movement. Government validation of nuclear energy stood in opposition to rising consternation over plant safety and various broadcasts and publications in 1974 highlighted the lax attitude of energy companies to such issues.<sup>41</sup> Exposed to these antinuclear concerns, environmentalists became anxious over nuclear weapons and started to develop interest in the peace movement.<sup>42</sup> For many new activists, protest against nuclear energy served to breed cynicism towards nuclear weapons and American militarism as a whole. Disarmament activist Prof. Frank Von Hippel recalled that, while he had existing concerns towards nuclear weapons, he did not become a disarmament activist until he “became involved” in opposing nuclear energy.<sup>43</sup>

Though it had never tackled environmental issues directly, WSP’s campaign against nuclear weapons historically displayed ecological awareness. Environmental historian Adam Rome describes Women Strike for Peace as a necessary part of 1960s environmental activism and argues that “the immediate goal” of WSP’s campaign for disarmament actually rested with the environmental effects of nuclear fallout.<sup>44</sup> Some WSPers conceded that their efforts against nuclear testing put them “in the forefront of the ecological fight.”<sup>45</sup> San Francisco and East Bay WFP had continual involvement in the “Save Angel Island Campaign” that opposed military and commercialised activities in San Francisco Bay while urging the preservation of Angel Island’s “primitively attractive environment.”<sup>46</sup> SWAP attacked the 1971 Amchitka Island nuclear weapons test by citing the AEC’s own admission that it would detrimentally impact local

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<sup>40</sup> Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon, 197-199*; J. Brooks Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000); Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 163; Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 30-31.

<sup>41</sup> Price, *The Antinuclear Movement*, 12; Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, 238.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Raymond Wellock, *Critical Masses: Opposition to Nuclear Power in California, 1958-1978* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 21; Price, *The Antinuclear Movement*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Wittner, “The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-1978,” 443.

<sup>44</sup> Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance,’” 536.

<sup>45</sup> “Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000.

<sup>46</sup> “Resolution Adopted by San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 10 February 1969,” UCB WFP Archives, 5-23, Bay Area Coalition, Save Angel Island Campaign.

wildlife.<sup>47</sup> Several individuals, including Shirley Lens, Nadine Vesel, Jeanne Bagby, and Bella Abzug, advocated environmental causes throughout their lives.<sup>48</sup> Dagmar Wilson became co-chairman of the Environmental Conservation Committee in her hometown of Loudoun County after leaving WSP and was involved with the Goose Creek Historic Preservation Society of Lincoln. Her later artwork expressed her concerns for the rural United States.<sup>49</sup>

WSPers saw the opportunity to regain relevance by attracting environmentalists to its group. Having flirted with environmentalism in earlier campaigns, the organisation felt well-placed to capitalise on the public's renewed interest in the subject. Helpfully for WSP, maternal and moral protest tactics served antinuclear protests well. With power companies directing public relations initiatives towards families and parents, protesters utilised their maternal image to voice their opposition to nuclear energy.<sup>50</sup> Reflecting WSP's earlier manipulation of civil defence rhetoric, Pacific Gas & Electric chose not to attack its opposition and "barely deigned to discredit them." The protesters, in turn, cogently challenged professional engineers supporting the plant.<sup>51</sup> A fellow male activist asserted that he "wouldn't want to be on the other side" against the protesters.<sup>52</sup> In his work on antinuclear activism in California, Thomas Raymond Wellock notes that maternal protesters broadened the appeal of the antinuclear movement by expanding its critique to include moral questions.<sup>53</sup>

Subtle changes emerged in the rhetoric of WSP campaigns that began to emphasise the ecological effects of nuclear weapons while criticising the nuclear industry generally.<sup>54</sup> Various celebrated environmentalists, including Dr. Barry

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<sup>47</sup> "Anci Koppel, 31 May 1971," UWS SWAP Archives, 2-18, Grassroots Assembly of Women, 1967-1973, n.d.; Michael Brown and John May, *The Greenpeace Story* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1989), 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> "Letter from Nadine Vesel to Keith, 5 October 1977," CHM WFP Archives, 7-10 WFP Correspondence 1977-1978; Bella Abzug, "Women and the Environment," *Women: Looking Beyond 2000*, Bella Abzug et al. (New York: United Nations, 1995), 33-37.

<sup>49</sup> "Project Grants for Individual Artists (Visual), SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 19, Commemorative Book 61-79, Proposition, Speeches; "Neighbors," Loudoun Times-Mirror, 12 November 1987, AU WSP Archives, Box 2, Leadership, 1975, 1979, 1982-1987, 1990-1998, n.d.

<sup>50</sup> "Nuclear Power for Mrs. Morris," CHM WFP Archives, 5-19, WFP Nuclear Power Pamphlets & Leaflets; Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 105.

<sup>51</sup> Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 105.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Wellock, *Critical Masses*, 154-155, 161; Wittner, "The Forgotten Years of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1975-1978," 446.

<sup>54</sup> "Minutes: National Conference, Women Strike for Peace, 1974," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1974, New York NY; "Man-Made Radiation Hazards, USA Map," CHM WFP Archives, 2-8, WFP Health and Radiation, 1978-1979; "Nuclear Threats to Human Survival," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-6, Trident Protests (May 22<sup>nd</sup>), 1978.

Commoner and Dr. Helen Caldicott, attended benefit functions held by the organisation.<sup>55</sup> WSPers even began criticising other groups that did not include an environmental critique in their protests. San Francisco WFP activist Hazel Grossman wrote to the National Centre to Slash Military Spending in April 1976, to praise their “People’s Peace Budget.” She voiced only one criticism, that “there is no mention in your peace budget of the word, ‘environment.’”<sup>56</sup>

Concern for the environment, however, did not lead WSP to fundamentally alter its principles. Nuclear disarmament remained its priority.<sup>57</sup> Instead, the organisation shrewdly capitalised on public concern to advance its own campaign. In 1970, Mary Clarke warned against becoming preoccupied with the “popular bandwagon and making ecology our main thrust.” She advised that WSP use and coordinate “other movements,” but reminded activists that peace was “our thing.”<sup>58</sup> This attitude manifested itself throughout WSP’s pronouncements in the 1970s. Voicing concern over the Hanford nuclear power plant in Washington State, Anci Koppel hoped a debate would mention that “80% of the Hanford nuclear output goes to the military.”<sup>59</sup> Chicago WFP made clear their attitude to the Calendar Editor of *Chicago Magazine*, confirming that its main concern “is to educate and mobilize the public to protest our massive military budget.”<sup>60</sup> Shirley Lens asked for support from the environmental Audubon Society but stressed that WSP’s attitude towards environmentalism simply restated its earlier critiques of the arms race “within the expansionist nuclear context.”<sup>61</sup> While the proliferation of nuclear power elicited criticism, the possibility that “the arms race might plunge us into a limited nuclear war” remained the priority.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> “Women for Peace Benefit Dinner, 1 June 1974,” CHM WFP Archives, 7-5, WFP Benefits 1979-1982; “Letter from Shirley Lens to Mr. Robert Johnston, 1 May 1974,” CHM WFP Archives, 7-9, WFP Correspondence 1969-1975; “Press Conference, 3 June 1977,” CHM WFP Archives, 8-8, WFP Press Releases 1971-1977.

<sup>56</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman to National Center to Slash Military Spending, 20 April 1976,” UCB WFP Archives, 7-24, Office Files – General, 1976.

<sup>57</sup> “Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000, 22.

<sup>58</sup> “Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000, 22.

<sup>59</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Ralph Nader, 25 June 1979,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-7, General Correspondence, 1978-1979.

<sup>60</sup> “Letter from Nadine Vesel to Calendar Editor, Chicago Magazine,” CHM WFP Archives, 7-9, WFP Correspondence 1969-1975.

<sup>61</sup> “Letter from Shirley Lens to Kankakee Area Chapter National Audubon Society, 6 December 1974,” CHM WFP Archives, 7-9, WFP Correspondence 1960-1975.

<sup>62</sup> “Letter from Nadine Vesel to Calendar Editor, Chicago Magazine,” CHM WFP Archives, 7-9, WFP Correspondence 1969-1975.

A return to its disarmament focus allowed Women Strike for Peace to regain some of its earlier influence and relevance. Mary Clarke excitedly wrote to the absent Dagmar Wilson to inform her of “a revival” in fortunes.<sup>63</sup> President Carter, elected on a pledge to pursue nuclear disarmament, personally endorsed the group for their continuing efforts and certainly appeared more approachable and accepting of the group’s views than his predecessors.<sup>64</sup> Although WSP developed a more critical view of the president as his term continued, Carter’s receptiveness of the group was appreciated. Following years of unsuccessful attempts to meet with policymakers, a delegation of WSP members finally had the opportunity to enter the Oval Office and convene with defence representatives face to face. The President’s pursuit of the group’s support for future arms limitation initiatives gave credence to the idea that Women Strike for Peace had regained an influential status as spokespeople for the disarmament movement.<sup>65</sup>

Examination of this period shows how WSP managed to transition from its anti-Vietnam War protests to focus on disarmament activism once more. Importantly, WSP’s attitude towards the environmental movement points to the malleability of the organisation’s identity. With its strength depleted, WSPers acknowledged their inability to cultivate public interest in their campaign for disarmament, a weakness that hampered its activism until the organisation’s denouement in 1990. But as the environmental movement rose, the organisation made subtle changes to its image and rhetoric to capitalise on the upsurge of public interest in nuclear issues. Though this period elicits few references in the recollections of WSP members, it reinforces the notion that activists adapted their image to suit the contemporary social and political climate.

## **Women Strike for Peace and Radical Feminism**

The 1970s saw WSP reassert itself as a disarmament group, but the rise of the women’s liberation movement in the same period led members to reconsider the way in which their organisation expressed its feminine identity. WSPers were aware of John F. Kennedy’s 1963 Presidential Commission on the Status of Women and had links to the

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<sup>63</sup> “Letter from Mary Clarke to Dagmar Wilson, 26 August 1977,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence.

<sup>64</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Wilson interview, 5 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>65</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 103-105.

1966 founding of the National Organisation of Women (NOW). But it was not until WSP's involvement with the Jeanette Rankin Brigade (JRB) in 1968 that the group became aware of radical feminist agitation.<sup>66</sup> On 15 January, a women's peace march, largely organised by Women Strike for Peace, drew thousands to Washington, D.C. to protest the continuing war in Vietnam. Working in conjunction with Jeanette Rankin, famed for her pacifism and as the first woman to serve in Congress, the JRB took four months of planning. A broad coalition of women "clad in black" demonstrated in the capital before convening for a "Congress of Women" to discuss the brutality of war, the neglect of domestic human needs, and future plans for the mobilisation of women towards peace efforts.<sup>67</sup>

Taking issue with what it perceived as the Brigade's reliance on maternal identity, the feminist group New York Radical Women (NYRW) confronted participants at the event's congress.<sup>68</sup> Arguing that peace activists had "condoned and even enforced the gender hierarchy in which men made war and women wept," they staged a mock burial of "traditional womanhood," using a dummy "complete with feminine getup," such as "blank face" and "blonde curls."<sup>69</sup> Though Amy Swerdlow argued that the petition produced by the JRB "was free of maternal rhetoric," Shulamith Firestone launched a public critique of the women's peace movement.<sup>70</sup> She wrote that the anti-war protesters came as "tearful and passive reactors," rather than as political agents.<sup>71</sup> Although making a broader attack on "the cultural icon of the stay-at-home mom," Women Strike for Peace was, as key organiser of the march, the focal point for feminist ire.<sup>72</sup> Ros Baxandall, present at the time, recalled several NYRW members arguing with Women Strike for Peace over the "proper relationship" between women's liberation and the peace movement.<sup>73</sup> Activists listened to "an incoherent rant against

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<sup>66</sup> John F. Kennedy Commission on Women – Founding of NOW Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 242.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 135-141.

<sup>68</sup> Rosen, "The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood," 233.

<sup>69</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" *Notes from the First Year: New York Radical Women* (June 1968): 18; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 138.

<sup>70</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 138; Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 312.

<sup>71</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" 18.

<sup>72</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 316.

<sup>73</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in American, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 57.

WSP” that seemed “bizarre, insulting, threatening, and strangely unsettling.”<sup>74</sup> It was the first exposure to radical, second-wave feminist thought for many activists and profoundly affected the group. Many in WSP considered themselves as “radical,” but found, to their surprise, that they were now rejected by the younger activists of the NYRW.<sup>75</sup> Amy Swerdlow later noted the event’s importance in sparking her initial interest in women’s history.<sup>76</sup>

The confrontation with radical feminists at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade was not the first time WSP had been criticised for its maternal image.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, its stance had a direct impact on the rise of radical feminism. The National Conference for New Politics, held in Chicago in June 1967, brought many influential participants of the New Left together with the purpose of nominating Martin Luther King and Benjamin Spock onto a third-party presidential ticket.<sup>78</sup> A number of WSP activists were present at the conference.<sup>79</sup> Delegates separated into myriad workshops to compose potential resolutions, with a women’s workshop comprising future radical feminists Jo Freeman and Shulamith Firestone. But the proposals made by the women’s workshop were rejected by the conference chair. He claimed that he had already accepted a resolution on women’s issues and that another one could not be submitted. This resolution, Freeman recalled, “had come from Women Strike for Peace, whose distinguished representatives had not attended our workshop.”<sup>80</sup> The proposal did not address grievances related to women’s equality, asking only that that women work to secure peace. Attempts to unify the two resolutions found WSP representatives standing firm, refusing to compromise and accepting only two of the workshop’s points. Freeman and Firestone were furious, feeling betrayed by the WSPers who seemed to overtly reject women’s equality by prioritising peace issues. The incident brought Women Strike for Peace into direct conflict with radical feminism’s most vociferous activists and the group’s dependence on an image of staid domesticity further “fuelled antagonism.” WSP’s version of events remains difficult to assess as documents relating to their

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<sup>74</sup> Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 203.

<sup>75</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 140.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 328-329.

<sup>78</sup> Some confusion surrounds the date of this event. Donna Allen claimed it took place over Labor Day weekend in September 1967; Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 307.

involvement show little insight.<sup>81</sup> But the National Conference for New Politics became “the last straw” and “the genesis” for the radical feminist movement.<sup>82</sup> Firestone subsequently set out to orchestrate opposition to WSP at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade demonstration.

WSP appeared an obvious focus for early second wave feminists who saw motherhood as the source of male oppression and “a target for transformation and re-evaluation.”<sup>83</sup> Its public appeal to domesticity and tactical use of staid feminine images in its protests brought derision from many second-wave feminists who only saw the group’s public face. During the Vietnam War, WSPers frequently exercised their agency as mothers. They once proclaimed that the “average woman” did not lobby or picket, but that “the average woman does worry.”<sup>84</sup> To many radical feminists, WSPers embodied the domestic oppression they sought to destroy.

Women’s peace protesters in general drew scorn for their “misplaced priorities.”<sup>85</sup> The 1968 Jeanette Rankin Brigade counter-demonstration, for example, opposed “all efforts to organize women around anything other than the oppression of women.”<sup>86</sup> Other criticisms in the early 1970s took direct issue with WSPer’s anti-war protest. A Toronto conference between North American women’s peace activists and delegates from Vietnam also drew criticism. Organisers of the 1971 event called it a “women’s liberation conference,” but others questioned this claim, noting that “women’s liberation was barely addressed.” Using the conference as an example, critics decried attempts to “turn the independent women’s movement into an adjunct to the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements.”<sup>87</sup> The publication of the radical feminist *Fourth World Manifesto* codified this critique. According to Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, the manifesto claimed that “women who remained committed to anti-war activism could be interpreted as having false consciousness.” Any women neglecting women’s liberation

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>82</sup> Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women’s Liberation*, eds. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 179; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 128; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 48-49.

<sup>83</sup> Reger, “Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities,” 85; Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> “For the Sake of Our Sons,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 92A-113, Box 2, Xmas Card Campaign Xmas Pilgrimage to D.C. 1965.

<sup>85</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 241; Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 201; Wu, *Radicals On the Road*, 231.

<sup>86</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 246.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 245.

in favour of anti-war appeals “constituted ‘dupes’ and ‘tools’ of the male Left.”<sup>88</sup> Trudi Young, WSP’s National Coordinator in 1971, also criticised the organisation’s handling of the conference, noting its “failure to organize the many new women who came turned on and left turned off to WSP.”<sup>89</sup>

From its first demonstration, Women Strike for Peace had in fact distanced itself from any notions that it wished to tackle gender inequality. Members had explicitly stated that once they had achieved their aim of ceasing nuclear weapons testing they would happily return to their “pots-and-pans and PTAs and all the duties and pleasures that we have since neglected.”<sup>90</sup> While railing against the prevailing “male logic” that had established nuclear brinkmanship, they assured their audience that “we are not striking against our husbands. It is my guess that we will make the soup that they will ladle out to the children on Wednesday.”<sup>91</sup> Historian Andrea Estepa notes that a critique of a “male military establishment” was only “implied” in this early period and never explicitly advanced as a plank within their campaigns.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, to suggest that WSP did not support efforts towards women’s liberation seems somewhat unfair and risks casting WSP as monolithic in its identity as a maternal peace organisation. As sociologist Jo Reger observed in the National Organisation of Women (NOW), conceptions of motherhood were not uniform in WSP.<sup>93</sup> While some saw it as a social status experienced by all women, others drew on their own circumstances as the parents and carers of children. To base criticism of the group’s attitude to women’s liberation based solely on its image neglects the political intellect of many of the group’s leading figures. Feminist thought did exist within Women Strike for Peace, even if only among a few influential individuals such as Donna Allen, Barbara Deming, Shirley Lens, and Bella Abzug. The “rhetorical descriptions of maternalist protesters” advanced by the group’s critics did not “accurately” reflect the WSPers who “rejected the idea that housework and childcare required all their time and money.”<sup>94</sup> Likewise, to emphasise the connections WSP

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<sup>88</sup> Wu, *Radicals On the Road*, 231; Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 245.

<sup>89</sup> “Letter from Trudi Young to Sisters, 1 May 1971,” UCB WFP Archives, 6-2, Office Files – National, 1971.

<sup>90</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 22.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Andrea Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 233.

<sup>93</sup> Reger, ““Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities,” 85-110.

<sup>94</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 316.



made between “motherhood, nonviolence, and mediation” overlooks the “constant construction and reconstruction” of womanhood activists engaged in to keep their protest relevant.<sup>95</sup> Ethel Taylor reflected in 1987, for example, that having observed the militarist foreign policy attitudes of Jeane Kirkpatrick and Margaret Thatcher she questioned her previously strong belief in the inherent peacefulness of women.<sup>96</sup>

Members’ downplaying of their feminist attitudes occurred out of a desire to maintain focus on their campaign against nuclear weapons and was not indicative of opposition to women’s advancement. Similarly, critiques underestimated the empowering effect of peace activism felt by those involved. From its outset, Women Strike for Peace endeavoured to connect individuals to create a community of like-minded women who could feel comfortable discussing their political outlook. WSPers praised their group’s efforts to this end. Women involved with WSP in Bergen County, New Jersey, evoked the sentiments of many of their peers when they declared that the most rewarding part of their experience was “having discovered one another.”<sup>97</sup> Within these safe environments, WSPers, for the first time, discussed their outlook, exchanged ideas, and grew an awareness of their political constituency and agency. In many cases they claimed that an appeal to housewives did not simply empower them to take part in a demonstration or add their name to a mailing list, but encouraged them to develop their skills and further their lives. Swerdlow spoke for many when she promoted the “the sense of personal empowerment” developed by members of WSP as well as the “transformations in consciousness” that took place.<sup>98</sup> Some key women determined that demonstrations organised by Women Strike for Peace had to capture women who had never acted politically before. An event “wasn’t successful if it wasn’t a first for lots of people,” Cora Weiss stated.<sup>99</sup> By the criteria of radical feminist group Redstockings these meetings constituted “consciousness-raising” events, with the “honest communicating among women” that occurred serving as a “revolutionary act.”<sup>100</sup>

The group provided an environment in which participants could demonstrate and develop latent talents otherwise ignored in male-dominated organisations. Andrea

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<sup>95</sup> Frazier, “Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam,” 342; Reger, “Motherhood and the Construction of Feminist Identities,” 93-107.

<sup>96</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>97</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 72.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>99</sup> “Cora Weiss,” in *Peacework*, 42.

<sup>100</sup> Redstockings, *Redstockings Manifesto* (New York: July 1969); Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010), 13-15.

Estepa notes the significance of Donna Allen's experience to argue this point. An accomplished economist, Allen often felt her skills had been overlooked by media organisations and potential employers. "In WSP, on the other hand, her unique expertise made her a sought after writer and speaker."<sup>101</sup> Frances Herring saw that, "through participation in the WSP movement" women who had previously identified only as housewives "found to their surprise" that they had numerous applicable talents.<sup>102</sup> In this sense, though not advancing a particularly overt message of women's liberation, Women Strike for Peace provided an empowering environment, even just for its own members.

Many advocate that the end result of female empowerment and political action justifies the perceptively "safe" referral to traditional gender identity often seen in women's political activist groups. Velma García-Gorena wrote that Mexican antinuclear group "Madres Veracruzanas" adopted an essentialist maternal image in order to symbolise its "disdain for Mexican politics in general and for authoritarianism in particular." Their identity maintained the image that they were "above politics," but was not "one-dimensional."<sup>103</sup> In terms echoing the role played by Women Strike for Peace, García-Gorena demonstrates that those involved in Madres Veracruzanas initially "lacked confidence in the public sphere," but following their involvement in the group, "they think nothing of confronting top government officials" and became spokespeople for their cause."<sup>104</sup> Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina also demonstrates this effect. Bearing witness to the "forced disappearance" of their children during the country's "Dirty War," the "legitimacy" of the Madres' maternal appeal "allowed at least symbolic refuge" from potential repression of their protest. María del Carmen Feijoó argues that a practical redefinition of the private and public sphere emerged from the Madres' style of protest, producing a "new feminist paradigm" that sustained "the need for a feminine perspective" in a world of masculine politics.<sup>105</sup>

Women's peace groups in the United States have also shown the virtues of advancing maternal identity. Several historians of WILPF argue that the group's

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<sup>101</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 305; Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>102</sup> "Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000.

<sup>103</sup> García-Gorena, *Mothers and the Mexican Antinuclear Power Movement*, 125, 131.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>105</sup> María del Carmen Feijoó, "The Challenge of Constructing Civilian Peace: Women and Democracy in Argentina," in *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Feminism and the Transition to Democracy*, ed. Jane S. Jacquette (Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 77-78.

organisational structure “remained feminist,” even during periods that it neglected the issue of women’s rights. Members recalled the “palpable” sense of sisterhood they experienced through their work. Even before the advent of second-wave feminism.<sup>106</sup> Historically, WILPF adopted maternal image as a staging point for making more pointed societal critiques. That trend continues today. Contemporary peace group Raging Grannies adopt the character of “maternal caring grannies” to undermine “assumptions about gender and age by playing with stereotypes and normative ideals.” Maternal image is used to create an initial public space for women to act. Activists then “intentionally manipulate” observers’ stereotypes. Traditional concepts of femininity are, therefore, “performed.”<sup>107</sup>

By advancing maternal traits and rhetoric into foreign policy discourse, WSP can be considered to have offered a feminist critique of international relations. Jo Anne Tickner, for example, argues that Hans Morgenthau’s “six principles of political realism” exhibit “a masculine bias.” Observing that his conceptions of international power “have significantly framed the way in which the majority of international relations scholars and practitioners in the West have thought about international politics,” Tickner explains that Morgenthau’s assumptions “are partial.” They “privilege masculinity” while failing to account for other dynamics in international relations, such as collaboration, that Tickner views as more feminine.<sup>108</sup> Carol Cohn, a scholar of gender in global politics, conflict, and security, observes a similar gender-bias in the language of international relations discourse.<sup>109</sup> Though explicitly disavowing any attempt on their part to disrupt the “established” order, WSPers’ criticisms of male military leaders and their plea for a more cooperative foreign policy outlook advocated an alternative, arguably more feminine, approach to international diplomacy.<sup>110</sup> In this sense, they offered a feminist analysis of international politics.

The radical feminist critique of motherhood, though voluble, did not last. By 1973, proponents of “cultural feminism” began proclaiming that differences did indeed

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<sup>106</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women’s Issue*, 261-262.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>108</sup> Jo Anne Tickner, *A Feminist Voyage Through International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5-18; Jo Anne Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>109</sup> Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” *Signs*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer 1987): 687-718; Carol Cohn and Ruth Jacobsen, “Women and Political Activism in the Face of War and Militarization,” in *Women and Wars*, ed. Carol Cohn (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 102-123.

<sup>110</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 17.

exist between men and women, emphasising that patriarchal culture had undervalued “women’s experiential history of preserving, rather than destroying the race.” This outlook granted a reprieve for WSP’s projection of maternal feminine identity.<sup>111</sup> Published in 1974, Jane Alpert’s *Mother Right* redeemed motherhood and claimed that it could empower women. Arguing against the “negative valuation of femininity,” she attempted to embrace the biological differences between men and women and believed that the “resumption of matriarchy” could save the planet. Barbara Deming, who often encouraged ideological debate within WSP, argued that Shulamith Firestone’s critique undervalued “the capacity to bear and nurture children,” as it gave women a “spiritual advantage, rather than a disadvantage.”<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, WSP could not help but take on board some of the criticisms levelled at it by the radical feminist movement. WSPer Evelyn Alloy reported that her encounters with women’s liberationists had extended “the boundaries of my thinking and understanding.”<sup>113</sup> Despite increasing defence of motherhood within cultural feminist circles, WSP began de-emphasizing its maternal identity in campaign literature. Members urged supporters to act as “women” rather than as “mothers.” An International Women’s Day march in 1975 urged that “women must strike” and “women must say.”<sup>114</sup> Pam Block, a WSP intern during the 1980s, noted this phenomenon in her article “Motherhood in WSP 1961-1973.” According to Block, the image of motherhood became a less successful tactical tool with the passage of time. She felt that Women Strike for Peace appropriately dropped their maternal emphasis as American women started to see themselves as more than just mothers.<sup>115</sup>

Comparisons between the group’s earlier campaigns and its later rhetoric show the significance of this change. Activists lowered the emphasis on maternal and moral arguments, instead challenging the size of the military budget while advocating the diversion of funds to solve domestic problems. Several WSP activists had already

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<sup>111</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 319, 330-331; Barbara Ryan, *Feminism and the Women’s Movement: Dynamics of Change in Social Movement Ideology and Activism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 55.

<sup>112</sup> Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 250-254; Jane Alpert, *Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory* (Pittsburgh: Know Inc. 1974).

<sup>113</sup> “Report on Planning Sessions for Revolutionary People’s Plenary Scheduled for 4-7 September,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>114</sup> “March International Women’s Day 1975,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 96A0949, Box 3, International Women’s Day Year 1975.

<sup>115</sup> “Pam Block, Motherhood in WSP, 1961-1973,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 12, National WSP Historical Material.

conducted research into “economic conversion” during the 1960s, but the disparity between military and domestic expenditure only became a key issue after the group encountered the women’s liberation movement.<sup>116</sup> Los Angeles WISP started to profess that Ruth Sivard’s work on “World Military and Social Expenditure” was the “kind of material” that it should use to inform its disarmament campaign.”<sup>117</sup> East Bay Women for Peace appealed directly to President Ford for the diversion of funds. They asked for the cancellation of the controversial B1-Bomber program, noting that the \$11.4 billion cost, “would bring most poor Americans above the poverty line.”<sup>118</sup> In a peculiar instance, Anci Koppel of SWAP actually consented to the presence of an existing nuclear fleet in Seattle, so long as the government scrapped future investment in a new fleet of Trident nuclear submarines. Koppel wrote to President Carter highlighting the potential \$30 billion cost while arguing that the base there already had Poseidon submarines “which can do the same job as Trident by refurbishing them.”<sup>119</sup>

### **The National Women’s Conference**

Much as it had done with the environmental movement, WSP saw the women’s liberation movement as an opportunity to attract new members and tried to capitalise on the rising numbers of newly politicised American women. A planning committee held prior to the 1970 national conference suggested that WSP attract delegates from outside the organisation, making the event “along the lines of a women’s conference” instead of a “strictly WSP conference.”<sup>120</sup> But consensus still held that WSP should not devote its energy towards the women’s liberation movement. While attempting to reach “many new women,” the conference would specifically try to attract women from the peace movement and adopt an agenda that attempted “to define direction for Women’s Strike, not a wide open women’s conference.”<sup>121</sup> As the movement grew in size, the appeal of direct engagement with feminist activists began to increase. Bella Abzug urged WSPers to become involved, arguing that the “heightened consciousness of millions of women

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<sup>116</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 87.

<sup>117</sup> “Letter from Mary Clarke to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1974,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-005, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence.

<sup>118</sup> “Letter from East Bay Women for Peace to President Ford,” SCPC WSP Archives, 01A-005, Box 9, East Bay Women for Peace.

<sup>119</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Jimmy Carter, 9 March 1977,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-6, General Correspondence, 1967-1977.

<sup>120</sup> “National Conference Planning Committee, 17 September 1970,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, Misc Minutes.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

provides a highly favourable environment in which WSP can operate.”<sup>122</sup> Along with then National Coordinator Rita Handman, Abzug pressed women to obtain a more open attitude towards women’s liberation. After all, “our goal is a broad-based movement of women.”<sup>123</sup>

Although attempting to recruit new members, WSP rarely tackled issues of sexism and gender inequality directly.<sup>124</sup> If individuals supported issues “such as reproductive rights, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and women’s rights,” they “generally depended” on other groups to tackle them.<sup>125</sup> Instead, Women Strike for Peace argued that “peace is a woman’s issue,” and attempted to mobilise the new generation of women’s liberation activists to consider issues of peace and disarmament on a par with their campaign for women’s equality. WSP’s involvement with International Women’s Year (IWY) and the subsequent 1977 National Women’s Conference provides an insightful example of this.

The 1977 National Women’s Conference, also known as the Houston Conference, arose out of IWY, which subsequently became the UN Decade of Women. The UN hosted a conference in Mexico City to promote global gender equality as part of its 1975 IWY activities, with delegates attending from all over the world. In the US, a National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, set up by President Ford, produced a 400 page document with 115 recommended government initiatives arising from the conference. While the commission drafted its report, Congresswoman Bella Abzug sponsored a bill to expand the remit of the National Commission to include a series of state conventions culminating in a National Women’s Conference. Succeeding Ford, President Carter reconstituted the National Commission in early 1977 with tutelage from his Assistant for Public Liaison Midge Costanza, an outspoken feminist. The new Commission adopted a more feminist approach and Abzug assumed the leadership as presiding officer, with Commissioners including Gloria Steinem, Ruth Abram, and Jean O’Leary. The conference itself took place over four days in November 1977, with 20,000 women descending on Houston. Speeches,

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<sup>122</sup> “Message from Bella Abzug to Women Strike for Peace National Conference, California, 9 December 1972,” SCPC WSP Archive, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1972, Santa Barbara CA.

<sup>123</sup> “Message to Women Strike for Peace National Conference, California, 9 December 1972,” UCB WFP Archives, 6-6, Regional Conference, Santa Barbara, CA, 1971; “Minutes of WSP National Conference 8-11 December 1972, Santa Barbara, California,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1972, Santa Barbara CA.

<sup>124</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 309.

<sup>125</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women’s Issue*, 232.

roundtables and discussion meetings resulted in *The Spirit of Houston*, a 26-plank national plan of action.<sup>126</sup> Little federal legislation resulted from the conference's recommendations. Doreen J. Mattingly and Jessica L. Nare claim that "perhaps the most significant impact" of the occasion was "in consciousness raising and networking."<sup>127</sup>

Women Strike for Peace achieved significant representation among events for the IWY. Bella Abzug became a globally revered feminist icon following a well-received speech to the conference in Mexico City.<sup>128</sup> Hazel Grossman travelled to East Berlin in August 1975 and contributed to the World Congress for IWY as a representative of San Francisco WFP. She managed to persuade the US Preparatory Committee to accept Women for Peace as a formal part of the committee.<sup>129</sup> Amy Swerdlow also served among the US delegation.<sup>130</sup> National Coordinator Ethel Taylor was appointed as a commissioner and, with Mary Clarke, Martha Baker, and Edith Villastrigo adding to the contingent, Women Strike for Peace had a noteworthy presence at the 1977 National Women's Conference.<sup>131</sup> Other peace activists also provided valuable contributions to the conference. WILPF member Dorothy Haener served as a Commissioner in the same capacity as Ethel Taylor.<sup>132</sup> But WSP activists felt the involvement of their representatives validated their work specifically. Much was made of the fact that Jimmy Carter personally endorsed Taylor's appointment, with San Francisco WFP informing its contacts that "President Carter recognized us when he appointed Ethel Taylor, National Coordinator of Women for Peace, to the US Committee of International Women's Year."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women's Conference – An Official Report to the President, the Congress, and the People of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

<sup>127</sup> Doreen J. Mattingly and Jessica L. Nare, "A Rainbow of Women': Diversity and Unity at the 1977 U.S. International Women's Year Conference," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer 2014), 88-112; Caroline Bird, *What Women Want: From the Official Report to the President, the Congress and the People of the United States* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 107-114; Lindsay Van Gelder, "Flashback: From Seneca Falls to Houston," *Ms*, 12, 3 (Spring 2002): 96-98; Erin M. Kempker, "Battling 'Big Sister' Government: Hoosier Women and the Politics of International Women's Year," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer 2012): 144-170.

<sup>128</sup> "Kaleidoscope: Tribune of International Women's Year," CHM WFP Archives, 5-11, WFP Women 1975.

<sup>129</sup> "Letter from Judith Joseph to Hazel Grossman, 1 August 1975," UCB WFP Archives, 7-22, World Congress for International Women's Year, 1975.

<sup>130</sup> "Geographical Index of the U.S. Delegation, World Congress for International Women's Year," UCB WFP Archives, 7-22, World Congress for International Women's Year, 1975.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 107-114.

<sup>132</sup> *The Spirit of Houston*, 243-49.

<sup>133</sup> "Dear Friend of Peace, Fall 1977," UCB WFP Archives, 15-9, Women's Peace Office – Activities and Campaigns, 1970-1979; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 107.

The event itself unashamedly endorsed the goals of the women's liberation movement. The conference opened with the arrival of runners carrying a torch from Seneca Falls to Houston, linking the 1977 conference to the historic 1848 convention on women's rights. Betty Friedan's announcement that she supported the Sexual Preference resolution – “the civil-rights-for lesbians plank” – threw aside her previously famous opposition “to aligning feminism with ‘the lavender menace.’”<sup>134</sup> The ERA also emerged as a top priority for the National Commission.<sup>135</sup> The conference adopted a resolution supporting the amendment's ratification with a huge majority and Lindsay Van Gelder later depicted the carnival atmosphere she found herself in, recalling “we conga-danced in the aisles” for the issue.<sup>136</sup> Many other feminist concerns were also addressed by the conference, including abortion rights, domestic abuse, poverty, and national healthcare.<sup>137</sup> Dominic Sandbrook and Bruce Shulman both argue that the 1977 women's conference marked “the crest of the feminist wave.”<sup>138</sup>

Concerns over nuclear disarmament and issues related to war and peace did not constitute a priority for the 1977 conference, despite the theme of “peace” being endorsed by the 1975 Mexico City Conference.<sup>139</sup> A session on peace and disarmament involving Congresswomen Pat Schroeder and disarmament activist Randall Forsberg only took place in an ad hoc format.<sup>140</sup> Its resolution in the National Plan of Action appeared within a broader section discussing women in foreign policy, international development, and human rights.<sup>141</sup> Some doubted whether the resolution “indicated a pledge of continued support for peace,” noting the fact that, out of a delegation of over 20,000, only 2,500 signed an anti-Neutron Bomb petition.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America's Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman & Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>135</sup> Mattingly and Nare, “‘A Rainbow of Women’” 90; Bird, *What Women Want*, 123.

<sup>136</sup> Van Gelder, “Flashback: From Seneca Falls to Houston,” 96.

<sup>137</sup> Bird, *What Women Want*, 123.

<sup>138</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad As Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 262; Schulman, *The Seventies*, 186.

<sup>139</sup> “Kaleidoscope: Tribune of International Women's Year,” CHM WFP Archives, 5-11, WFP Women 1975; Arvonne S. Fraser, “Becoming Human: The Origins and Development of Women's Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly*, 21.4 (1999): 894; *Sisters of '77*, Cynthia Salzman Mondell and Allen Mondell (2005).

<sup>140</sup> “National Women's Conference November 18-21, Houston, Tentative Agenda,” SCPC WSP Archives, D1, Box 5, Subject File: National Women's Conference (1977), 3; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 111.

<sup>141</sup> “Proposed National Plan of Action,” SCPC WSP Archives, D1, Box 6, National Women's Conference 1977; Bird, *What Women Want*.

<sup>142</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 111.



The WSP activists involved in IWY nevertheless decided to devote their energies towards advocating the minor resolutions on peace and disarmament, rather than the principal drive for federal legislation towards women's equality. Beginning in 1974 Women Strike for Peace expressed its intent to raise "the consciousness of women to the disarmament issue," rather than adopt feminist causes themselves.<sup>143</sup> The organisation made a "Women's Plea for Survival" its theme for International Women's Year and launched the campaign in 1975 by claiming it was WSP's contribution to the fight for women's equality and development.<sup>144</sup> Writing in her 1998 memoir, Ethel Taylor recalled that she "had not actually been involved, except peripherally, in the women's movement" prior to working for the National Women's Conference. But her belief that peace should occupy an important place in the International Women's Year program encouraged her participation. She devoted her energies towards making peace "a woman's issue."<sup>145</sup> To this extent, WSP activists prioritised their concern for peace over other issues at the National Women's Conference.

WSP's experience with IWY reflected its general activities within the women's liberation movement, in which the group focused on peace issues. Amy Swerdlow noted that WSP's primary motive in joining the Women's Strike for Equality in 1970, for example, "was to add to the women's rights agenda a call for the immediate withdrawal of all US forces from Southeast Asia."<sup>146</sup> Key women wished to encourage those in the women's liberation movement to prioritise antimilitarist efforts. In a 1975 op-ed to the *New York Times*, Ethel Taylor and Sandy Kravitz wrote that "it is exciting to see women emerging as a force" within the United States. But, they argued, if International Women's Year was to be successful, "it must signal the beginning of the total involvement of women" in the campaign for peace and disarmament.<sup>147</sup> The International Decade of Women was "the time to start" protesting.<sup>148</sup> WSP, within an environment of feminist campaigning for women's equality, maintained that its purpose was to agitate for peace and disarmament.

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<sup>143</sup> "Suggested Agenda for October 4, 5, and 6," UCB WSP Archives, 7-2, Office Files – National, 1974.

<sup>144</sup> "Minutes – East Coast WSP Conference, 24 January 1975," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, Regional Conferences; "Women's Plea for Survival," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 96A-040, Box 2, International Women's Year Coalition 1975.

<sup>145</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 111.

<sup>146</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 242.

<sup>147</sup> "Message to American Women – International Women's Year – 1975," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 96A-040, Box 2, International Women's Year Coalition 1975.

<sup>148</sup> "A Message to Ms./Miss/Mrs. Everywoman," AU WSP Archives, Box 17, Women and Peace, 1967-1971, 1977-1994.

Attendance at the National Women's Conference could suggest at least tacit approval for a particular and identifiable stance on women's rights. The conference, for example, advanced a concept of women's equality that directly contrasted the particular brand of conservative "anti-feminism" advanced by Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly had opposed the ERA since the early 1970s. She founded the conservative, pro-family interest group Eagle Forum in 1972, launched a national campaign in opposition to the ERA, and subsequently gained a reputation as the "sweetheart of the silent majority." Schlafly believed that the ERA would eradicate the protective legislation and exemptions that many women relied upon by stripping away gender-specific initiatives. She felt that women enjoyed a privileged position in American society and that the feminist movement sought to destroy it. She publicly disparaged the National Women's Conference Commission as "a front for radicals and lesbians." When the IWY received a \$5 million federal appropriation for its series of conferences, Schlafly felt that the government had directly funded the campaign for the ERA. She encouraged conservative pro-family and anti-ERA activists to disrupt the state conventions that were drafting resolutions and electing delegates for the 1977 national conference. While having only a marginal effect on the conference, Schlafly's efforts ensured that a substantial amount of anti-ERA campaigners were present as delegates in Houston. She also organised the Pro-Family Rally to be held in direct opposition to the conference itself, attracting some 20,000 participants to the Astro Arena in Houston to denounce the "lesbianism" and the "misfits and perverts" of the IWY they saw meeting on the other side of the city.<sup>149</sup>

In this sense, WSP's association with IWY would at least position it in opposition to the vitriolic conservative feminism of Phyllis Schlafly. Presence at a conference supporting abortion rights, public acceptance of lesbianism, and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment implied support for those measures, at least in the eyes of the public.<sup>150</sup> Ethel Taylor's position as a commissioner for the

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<sup>149</sup> Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 244-248; Seth Dowland, "'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda," *Church History*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 2009): 624-627; Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981); Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 260-262; Ronnee Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21-22; Judy Klemesrud, "Houston Hosts, If Not Toasts, Feminists," *New York Times*, 18 November 1977, 48; Marlene Cimon, "Phyllis Schlafly Heads for Houston," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 1977, H1.

<sup>150</sup> Meg O'Connor and Jon Margolis, "Women's Meet Backs Abortion and Gay Rights," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 November 1977, 3; Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 260.

conference made WSP's connection even more explicit. Yet it remains somewhat reductive to claim that all in attendance of the conference unanimously agreed with its views. Contrary to the criticisms of Phyllis Schlafly, the National Women's Conference did not become an anti-family rally. Many of the resolutions sought assistance for homemakers and widows.<sup>151</sup> There were a significant minority among the conference delegates who disagreed with aspects of the ERA and some pro-family delegates actually turned their back on the podium during the vote on gay rights. Federal advocacy of abortion also caused some friction.<sup>152</sup> Acknowledging WSP's apparently conservative attitudes concerning traditional gender roles and protection of their families, the support of key women towards issues such as abortion and gay rights may not have reflected the attitude of all activists.

That a number of respected feminist voices acted within Women Strike for Peace is evident. Judy Lerner started as a WSP activist in Westchester County before serving as an influential member of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), founding the Women of Westchester (WOW) in 1978, and chairing the New York affiliate of the Continuing Committee of the National Women's Conference at the appointment of Jimmy Carter.<sup>153</sup> Donna Allen helped found Women Strike for Peace after being involved in the League of Women Voters during the 1950s. She became one of the most revered feminist voices in the United States. Allen had an instrumental role in the famous Miss American Pageant protests in 1968, driving several activists to the event in Atlantic City after they found they had no way of transporting themselves.<sup>154</sup> She later founded the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press in 1972 and was heavily involved in the Women's Political Caucus, NOW, and the National Women's Party.<sup>155</sup> Though involved in Women Strike for Peace, Barbara Deming did not subscribe to the group's maternalist doctrine. She wrote many articles engaging with radical feminist ideas before founding "The Money for Women Fund" that offered grants to aspiring feminist writers. Amy Swerdlow too became heavily involved in the

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<sup>151</sup> "Home from Houston," *The Washington Post*, 27 November 1977, 74.

<sup>152</sup> Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly*, 246; Lorraine Davis, "Between Us: Our Big Chance," *Vogue*, Vol. 167, Iss. 11, November 1977, 140.

<sup>153</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 157; Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 277.

<sup>154</sup> Alice Echols, "Nothing Distant About It: Women's Liberation and Sixties Radicalism," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 149-151; Dana Densmore, "A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968," in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation*, eds. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 72; Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>155</sup> Wolfgang Saxon, "Donna Allen, 78, a Feminist and an Organizer," *New York Times*, 26 July 1999, B9; Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

women's liberation movement. She convinced WSP to become involved with the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality and first raised the prospect of the group's involvement in International Women's Year. In her role as Associate Director of Women's Studies at Sarah Lawrence, she introduced a resolution for women's studies at the National Women's Conference and became instrumental in founding Women's History Month.<sup>156</sup>

Yet assessments of WSP's feminist compulsions cannot rely on a handful of individuals to suggest the group's general opinion on matters relating to women's liberation. Andrea Estepa, for example, highlights that Bella Abzug, Donna Allen, and Shirley Lens "made the organisation more appealing" to potential newcomers from the feminist movement. But she also notes that these three women in particular "stood apart" from the rest of the organisation and "seemed like outliers among the founding generation of WSPers" because of their attitude towards women's equality.<sup>157</sup> Likewise WSP's presence at feminist events often arose from the initiative of particular individuals, rather than signifying official endorsement.<sup>158</sup>

In the absence of formal statements clarifying the group's stance on issues relating to women's liberation and sexuality, WSP's official attitude remains unclear. Several individuals did offer their own views on specific subjects while representing WSP. Dagmar Wilson, for example, hailed the development of birth control.<sup>159</sup> Nadine Vesel wrote that Chicago WFP "certainly" supported the ERA.<sup>160</sup> Bella Abzug's crusade for abortion rights, gay rights, and economic equality were well known.<sup>161</sup> However, formal statements offering guidance on key issues did not emerge from either local branches or the National Office. Considering the visibility of grassroots social justice campaigns, for example, the gay rights movement in San Francisco in the 1970s,

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<sup>156</sup> Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 453; "Letter from Mary Clarke to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1974," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Keynote address to Fifteenth Annual Women's History Month Conference" (Paper Presented at the Fifteenth Annual Women's History Month Conference, Sarah Lawrence College, New York, 1 March 2013).

<sup>157</sup> Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980," 307.

<sup>158</sup> "Minutes: National Conference, Women Strike for Peace, 1974," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1974, New York NY, 8; Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 453.

<sup>159</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>160</sup> "Letter from Nadine Vesel to Joyce Dinsmore, 19 October 1977," CHM WFP Archives, 7-10, WFP Correspondence 1977-1978.

<sup>161</sup> Myra Macpherson, "Bella Abzug, Champion of Women," *The Washington Post*, 2 April 1998, B1; "Bella Abzug," *The New York Times*, 1 April 1998, A22; Judy Klemesrud, "The Lesbian Issue and Women's Lib," *The New York Times*, 18 December 1970, 60.

references to such causes from branch staff are notable by their absence.<sup>162</sup> Little evidence emerges to suggest that members held in-depth discussions on the core aims of the women's liberation movement in committee meetings or at national conferences. The unpredictability of support offered for the ERA from other women's peace groups means that it is not certain that sympathetic views would have been held by all WSP activists.<sup>163</sup> With only a handful of comments coming from individual activists, it remains difficult to judge the stance Women Strike for Peace took towards the divisive goals of the women's liberation movement.

### **A Feminist History?**

The presence of a robust feminist movement evidently made Women Strike for Peace alter its image and rhetoric, if not its goals. Such a shift in identity occurred for many women, particularly those in the New Left, who attempted to retain "credentials as both a woman and a radical."<sup>164</sup> Even the feminist movement itself experienced significant changes in its ideology.<sup>165</sup> But the most profound impact for WSPers came in the way they began to see themselves in relation to the history of American women. Interest in women's history grew steadily in the 1970s, thanks largely to the work of Gerda Lerner, Professor of History at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Lerner's 1969 article, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," drew attention to the neglect of women that existed in history of the United States. She called for a reconsideration of the concept of historical "contribution" that would account for the heretofore neglected role of women. With her articles sparking passionate discussion among feminist scholars, Lerner founded the first graduate program in women's history with Joan Kelly in 1972. With Molly MacGregor, she ensured that the honouring of National Women's History Month became an annual event in the United States.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Jonathan Bell, "'To Strive for Economic and Social Justice': Welfare, Sexuality, and Liberal Politics in San Francisco in the 1960s," *Journal of Policy History*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2010): 193-225.

<sup>163</sup> Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts*, 10, 124

<sup>164</sup> Friedman and McAdam, "Collective Identity and Activism," 163.

<sup>165</sup> Nancy Whittier, *Feminist Generations: The Persistence of the Radical Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 239, 254-256.

<sup>166</sup> Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn 1969): 53-62; Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1/2 (Autumn 1975): 5-14; Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory: A Postscript to the 'Women and Power' Conference," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, *Women and Power: Dimensions of Women's Historical Experience* (Spring 1979): 216-227; Gerda Lerner, "U.S. Women's History: Past, Present, and Future," *Journal of Women's History*,

The rising interest in women's history coincided with blossoming nostalgia among WSP activists. As the group reached its tenth anniversary, it published a special commemorative issue of *Memo* to celebrate its history. Replete with testimonials from members, colleagues, and other peace organisations, the commemorative issue had the intention of "looking back on the 60s to succeed in the 70s." While "not blowing our own horn," it publicised WSP's various successful endeavours. The issue reinforced folklore of the group. Frances Herring reflected on the group's founding, describing "how long ago and far away it seems – that day when...more than 100,000 women" emerged for the first strike for peace.<sup>167</sup> Amy Swerdlow wrote the issue's introduction and emphasised the transition experienced by women from WSP's unassuming founding through to current events. "We've come a long way baby," she wrote, "but we have a long, long way to go!"<sup>168</sup>

The commemorative issue set a precedent for future plenary speeches, meetings, and conferences to ruminate on WSP's past. Mary Clarke's address to the 1972 national conference in Santa Barbara became notable. She offered a "moving" history of WSP, highlighting "its policies and achievements." Attendees, enamoured with the contents of the speech, duplicated the transcript for others to read.<sup>169</sup> Whereas keynote addresses of past conferences dealt with the contemporary situation of WSP among the peace movement, plenaries based on honouring the organisation's past became a key feature of future national conferences. Ethel Taylor summarised her perceptions on WSP history at the 1973 national conference, suggesting that current activists use past experience to inform their efforts.<sup>170</sup> Members staged reunions with former colleagues to reminisce and reflect on their shared history.<sup>171</sup> WSPers began to construct a collective memory of Women Strike for Peace, based primarily on the recollections of key women. These discussions of history not only reinforced particular perceptions of

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Vol. 16, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 10-27; Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 266-267.

<sup>167</sup> "Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000, 1-3.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> "Minutes of WSP National Conference, 8-11 December 1972, Santa Barbara, California," UCB WFP Archives, 6-13, Office Files – National Conference, Santa Barbara, 1972.

<sup>170</sup> "Keynote Address by Ethel Taylor at WSP National Conference, Chicago, Illinois, October 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1973, Chicago IL.

<sup>171</sup> "Card from Mary Clarke to Dagmar Wilson," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 11, Women Strike for Peace Friends Personal Correspondence.

WSP's past but allowed contemporary activists to develop their own sense of purpose from shared memories of the group.<sup>172</sup>

Comments on the organisation's history arose at a fragile time for Women Strike for Peace as it tried to reunite its membership following the disharmony and disarray of previous years. Speakers therefore attempted to derive significance and meaning from past events, highlighting the need for cohesion and urging activists to reflect positively on their history in order to inform their present identity. Mary Clarke explicitly sought to rediscover WSP's character from its memory of the past, explaining in her 1972 speech that "the reason I've gone into our past is: How can we know who we are until we know who we've been?"<sup>173</sup> Recollections coalesced around the virtues of WSP's organisational practices, valuing the group's particular method of protest. The 1970 commemorative journal had key women offer their reminiscences on specific campaigns that WSP had organised. These instances became known as the high points in WSP's history, frequently referred to in future reflections as evidence of the group's successful past. As newcomers to the group had little knowledge of its history prior to joining, their perception of the organisation's past became reliant on the impressions that lifelong activists gave them.<sup>174</sup> Depictions in the early 1970s created a vivid and robust folklore that had a significant impact on the way members of Women Strike for Peace would later recall their history.

Importantly, the context of feminist activism, women's liberation, and interest in women's history informed these recollections. Despite WSP's fractious history with feminism, a narrative emerged suggesting that the organisation had long served at the forefront of the movement for women's liberation. Mary Clarke's proclaimed that, the organisation had been part of the women's movement from its outset.<sup>175</sup> Others spread this version of events. Sarah Diamondstein of Westchester Women for Peace wrote to the *New York Times* in January 1978 to inform the public that WSP did not "have to turn out energies to the women's movement" following the end of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>172</sup> "Women Strike for Peace National Conference November 10-11 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1982, Berkeley CA.

<sup>173</sup> "National WSP Conference, Dec. 8-11, 1972, Santa Barbara, Calif. Remarks by Mary Clarke," UCB WFP Archives, 6-13, Office Files – National Conference, Santa Barbara, 1972.

<sup>174</sup> "Minutes of WSP National Conference, 8-11 December 1972, Santa Barbara, California," UCB WFP Archives, 6-13, Office Files – National Conference, Santa Barbara, 1972.

<sup>175</sup> "National WSP Conference, Dec. 8-11, 1972, Santa Barbara, Calif. Remarks by Mary Clarke," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1972, Santa Barbara CA.

“We were already in the women’s movement.”<sup>176</sup> By 1979 this narrative became codified in WSP’s history. The 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary journal, producing a commentary on the group’s activities between 1961 and 1979, declared that, despite its “white glove” image, a “fiercely” feminist rhetoric and outlook had always pervaded Women Strike for Peace.<sup>177</sup>

The retrospective assessment of Bella Abzug’s role in WSP provides an illuminating example of these changing perspectives. Abzug had fervent feminist compulsions throughout her life, once jesting that her “parents had the foresight to give birth to me in the year women got the vote.”<sup>178</sup> Her mother said of her daughter that she was a feminist from the day she was born. As a child, Abzug’s concern for social justice and women’s liberation displayed itself in the speeches she made in front of her father’s butcher shop.<sup>179</sup> Having been forbidden from reciting the mourning prayer after her father’s death, a tradition usually reserved for males, she defiantly attended her synagogue every day for a year to recite the prayer anyway.<sup>180</sup> Abzug graduated from Columbia Law School, where she edited the *Columbia Law Review*, to specialise in civil liberties, civil rights, and labour laws within her own practice. Noticing that union officials ignored her on account of her sex, she began wearing wide-brimmed hats to ensure she would attract attention, something that became a trademark for the rest of her life.<sup>181</sup> As a young attorney, Abzug involved herself in the defence of Willie McGee, a black man from Mississippi accused of raping a white woman with whom he had a consensual relationship. The case became a cause célèbre. Though McGee was ultimately executed, Abzug’s defence raised a considerable challenge to conventional understandings of Jim Crow sexual politics. According to gender scholar Leandra Zarnow, Abzug positioned herself as a “Left feminist” at a time most historians assume feminism did not exist.<sup>182</sup> Amy Swerdlow wrote that she “was a feminist long before the second wave emerged in the 1960s.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Sarah Diamondstein, “Women Still Strike for Peace,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1978, WC12.

<sup>177</sup> “WSP Commemorative Journal, 1961-1979,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>178</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 4.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, “Celebrating the Remarkable Life of Bella Abzug,” AU WSP Archives, Box 2, Leadership, 1975, 1979, 1982-1987, 1990-1998, n.d.

<sup>180</sup> Peter Dreier, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Social Justice Hall of Fame* (New York: Nation Books, 2012), 317.

<sup>181</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 62.

<sup>182</sup> Zarnow, “The Legal Origins of ‘The Personal Is Political’,” 28-29.

<sup>183</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 145.



Abzug enthusiastically joined WSP on seeing the demonstrations occur in New York on 1 November 1961, with the issue of nuclear proliferation coming as “an explosion in my mind.”<sup>184</sup> But many of her new colleagues immediately took a disliking to her. Norman Mailer once said of Abzug’s voice that she could “boil the fat off a taxicab driver’s neck,” and her loud tones and feisty put downs contrasted the generally staid and quiet membership of WSP on a fundamental, personal level.<sup>185</sup> Swerdlow recalled, “she was always yelling at us, and no one paid attention. They couldn’t stand her.”<sup>186</sup> WSP activists felt that Abzug did not embody the “correct” image the organisation wished to project. She was aware of this criticism. “They often said, ‘Don’t let her speak, because she represents something different than what we’re trying to portray.’ I was not reflective of the typical Women-Strike-for-Peacer.” Although Abzug had two young children in 1961, famed feminist writer Gloria Steinem alleged that Women Strike for Peace told her “she couldn’t represent them because she wasn’t motherly enough.”<sup>187</sup> Additionally, WSP’s arduous attempts to secure decisions by consensus were complicated further by Bella Abzug’s “self-absorbed sense, not just that she was right, but that there could be no other conceivable way of seeing matters.”<sup>188</sup> When she won elected office in 1970, Claire Reed recalled that many “kind of liked the idea she’s getting out of Women Strike. We don’t have to handle her anymore.”<sup>189</sup> The frequent disputes between Cora Weiss and Bella Abzug became something of an ongoing soap opera within WSP circles.<sup>190</sup> For her part, Abzug levelled her own criticisms at WSPers. She described WSP meetings as “frankly, crazy,” and suspected that some of the women had pretended “to know less about politics than they actually did,” feigning innocence to avoid having to voice their opinion.<sup>191</sup>

Much of the animosity towards Abzug stemmed from the strong feminist fervour she exhibited at a time WSP members only reluctantly broached the topic and she

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<sup>184</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 59.

<sup>185</sup> Laura Mansnerus, “Bella Abzug, 77, Congresswoman and a Founding Feminism, Is Dead,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1998, A1; “Bella Abzug,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1998, A22; Macpherson, “Bella Abzug, Champion of Women,” B1.

<sup>186</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 62.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>188</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 65.

<sup>189</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 87.

<sup>190</sup> “Unsigned letter to Cora Weiss, 20 May 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept; “Letter from Jean Shulman to Barbara Bick, n.d., 1968,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 11, 1968 Apr-Sept.

<sup>191</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 63; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 146.

recalled having difficulties because “I was a feminist. They were not.”<sup>192</sup> Abzug disliked the dependence Women Strike for Peace placed on moral appeals for peace, while WSPers, in turn, disliked Abzug’s willingness to become involved in the “dirty” world of mainstream politics. Her political fervour put her in an entirely separate “faction” from the majority of women who had joined Women Strike for Peace out of “moralistic persuasions.”<sup>193</sup> But a central part of Abzug’s plea called for WSPers to recognise their voice and exercise their political agency. She wanted women to “know what you’re talking about. You have to learn what it is.” She advised that “it’s okay to show your emotion and come in as a mother and as a woman to say this is going to hurt my children, but it’s not good enough.” This attitude brought suspicion from Dagmar Wilson, who was “always a little leery” of Abzug.<sup>194</sup> The fact that Abzug had come to WSP having become “accustomed to the concept of billable hours” exacerbated her frustrations with the group. “I made inroads into my earning capacity,” she recalled, “I spent all my extracurricular time as a volunteer like anybody else, but for me it was a sacrifice.”<sup>195</sup> Andrea Estepa believes that Abzug “felt her time was more valuable” than that of other WSPers. She exhibited notable animosity towards Women Strike for Peace because of her treatment and remained critical 20 years later.<sup>196</sup>

Outside of WSP, Bella Abzug became a revered public figure and a forceful, respected proponent of women’s liberation.<sup>197</sup> She toiled for the ERA throughout the 1960s, demanded women’s equality in all areas of public and political life, and remained in the public eye through involvement in events such as the National Conference for New Politics.<sup>198</sup> By the time she sought office in 1970, Abzug could count on the broad public support of her district’s voters. Barbara Streisand, just emerging as a celebrity figure in New York, appealed for votes on Abzug’s behalf, saying she was “happy to call Bella my friend and to work for her.”<sup>199</sup> As the first major electoral figure to canvas for their votes, the gay community became particularly

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<sup>192</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences*, 135.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 60; Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 86.

<sup>194</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 61, 86.

<sup>195</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 306; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 146.

<sup>196</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>197</sup> Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences*, 135.

<sup>198</sup> Joan Capuzzi, “Bella Abzug on Women, Government and More,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 April 1990, 24-M.

<sup>199</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 97.

enamoured with her campaign.<sup>200</sup> Feminist figures too sided with the candidate in an attempt to put a supportive figure into Congress. Her campaign slogan embodied her attitude and signalled her intentions; “This woman’s place is in the house, the House of Representatives.”<sup>201</sup>

Her energy did not wane once elected. On her first day in office she tabled a resolution calling for the end of the Vietnam War. She was the first to call for the impeachment of President Nixon in 1972.<sup>202</sup> She introduced the first gay rights bill to Congress in May 1974.<sup>203</sup> Abzug unfailingly made pointed remarks towards her male political peers. She derided Congress for its “impotence,” remarking that “it’s always a shock, I’m sure, to wake up one day and find out your impotent.”<sup>204</sup> But even within Congress she earned the respect of her peers. *US News and World Report* took a poll of Congressional Representatives in 1972 and found Abzug to be the third most influential member.<sup>205</sup> As the presiding officer for the National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year, Abzug garnered a warm and enthusiastic reception from women from around the world. The tribune of the IWY conference in Mexico City, 1975, concluded with a glowing testimonial:

You would have to have been sitting in on two weeks of tribune sessions to understand the warm and enthusiastic reception given to Mrs. Abzug on Tuesday... Gandhi felt that he had to run in order to keep up with his people, because he was their leader. We, the audience, were made to feel that we, too, were ahead of our leaders and that they had best run to catch up with us. Mrs. Abzug added to that feeling.<sup>206</sup>

Writing on her death in 1998, Myra Macpherson of *The Washington Post* claimed that Bella Abzug’s work for the women’s movement would prove her “major legacy.”<sup>207</sup> Former vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro put this legacy in evocative terms. “She didn’t knock lightly on the door. She didn’t even push it open or batter it down. She took it off the hinges forever!”<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 99; Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 109-110.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>202</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 331.

<sup>203</sup> Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 3.

<sup>204</sup> “Bella Abzug, 18 March 1973,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Consultative Committee Minutes and Memos – Aug 1970-1973.

<sup>205</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 110.

<sup>206</sup> “Kaleidoscope: Tribune of International Women’s Year,” CHM WFP Archives, 5-11, WFP Women 1975.

<sup>207</sup> Macpherson, “Bella Abzug, Champion of Women,” B1.

<sup>208</sup> Dreier, *The 100 Greatest Americans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, 319.

Women Strike for Peace did not endure a uniquely difficult relationship with Bella Abzug. She experienced personality clashes with colleagues throughout her life.<sup>209</sup> Despite personally selecting her to chair the governmental National Advisory Committee of Women in 1977, President Carter fired Abzug in 1979 for being too vocal a critic of his record on women's rights.<sup>210</sup> WSP's relationship with her, nevertheless, remains intriguing. As Bella Abzug's political stock started to rise, Women Strike for Peace began to claim her as one of their own. Disregarding their previous misgivings, WSPers across the country rallied to campaign for her election in 1970.<sup>211</sup> Activist Claire Reed noted the ease with which she could encourage support, recalling that "raising money for Bella was not that hard."<sup>212</sup> On her election Women Strike for Peace celebrated, declaring that, finally, they had "our own woman on the hill." A press release further claimed that the election validated WSP itself, declaring that Abzug's victory was "also an affirmation of the WSP program."<sup>213</sup> Bella Abzug quickly became a revered member. Her growing public stature correlated with the rising admiration of WSPers. Having previously struggled to encourage the organisation to listen to her, Abzug began delivering plenary speeches to WSP national conferences and, on occasions she could not attend meetings, delegates read statements she sent in absentia to gatherings that valued her comments.<sup>214</sup> In 1974, Women Strike for Peace made Abzug their "Woman of the Year."<sup>215</sup>

Intriguingly, the memory of Bella Abzug's involvement in Women Strike for Peace also began to change as a result of her rising public profile. Historical appraisals started to make more favourable assessments of her relationship with Women Strike for Peace in the period prior to her election. Depictions highlighted her role as "National Legislative Chairwoman of WSP" or her ten year service as "Political Action Director,"

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<sup>209</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 67.

<sup>210</sup> Burton I. Kaufman, *Presidential Profiles: The Carter Years* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 4-5; David Wood, "Abzug Vows Fight for Women's Rights," *Boston Globe*, 25 March 1979, 43; Susan Wood, "The Weddington Way: Can a Soft-Spoken, Tough-Minded Southern Lawyer Prevail on Women's Issues in the White House Where Midge Costanza and Bella Abzug Struck Out?" *The Washington Post*, 11 February 1979, SM6.

<sup>211</sup> Endres, "NY Peaceletter," 261.

<sup>212</sup> Braun Levine and Thom eds., *Bella Abzug*, 95.

<sup>213</sup> "Press Release, 70," SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, WSP Related Material About Bella Abzug.

<sup>214</sup> "Message to Women Strike for Peace National Conference, California, 9 December 1972," UCB WFP Archives, 6-6, Office Files – National Conference, Santa Barbara, 1972.

<sup>215</sup> "Bella: Our Woman of the Year," SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, WSP Related Material About Bella Abzug.

ignoring some WSPers' prior aversion to Abzug and the role she had.<sup>216</sup> Commentators used Abzug's activities in the 1970s to prove that WSP had not "faded away" at the end of the Vietnam War.<sup>217</sup> Testimonials referred to her as a founder of Women Strike for Peace, in which she assumed a comparable level of stature to Dagmar Wilson for her influence in constructing the organisation. Even archival collections relating to WSP describe the group with reference to Abzug's influence.<sup>218</sup> The reverence with which Abzug was held following her election to Congress in 1970 juxtaposes her 1960s experience. Whereas Women Strike for Peace received much favourable media coverage during the 1960s, Bella Abzug rarely featured in these stories until 1969.<sup>219</sup> Alan Levy, author of a comprehensive political history of Abzug's life, notes the "fatigued shakes of the head" that punctuate the memories of most WSP activists who encountered her.<sup>220</sup> Gloria Steinem made a particularly revealing comment, claiming that WSP's disdain for Bella Abzug actually "encouraged her feminism."<sup>221</sup>

The reappraisal of Abzug arose, according to Amy Swerdlow, directly out of the impact of the women's liberation movement on WSP's sensibilities. Recognising that Abzug "did not fit the WSP 'mother and housewife' image," Swerdlow wrote, "it was not until the second-wave of feminism legitimised self-assertive professional women" that Abzug became "recognized and admired" by WSP activists.<sup>222</sup> The reassessment of Bella Abzug's history within Women Strike for Peace exemplifies the changing attitude the group took towards feminism and women's liberation. Whereas earlier protest looked upon forceful voices for women's equality with an air of fear and suspicion, by the 1970s WSP activists were more open to the cause. By permeating the history of Women Strike for Peace with allusions to an ever-present desire for women's liberation,

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<sup>216</sup> "Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970," UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000, 21; Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 3; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*, 133.

<sup>217</sup> Nadine Brozan, "Chronicle: Looking Back at a Spontaneous Moment in the History of Women," *New York Times*, 6 December 1993, B7.

<sup>218</sup> Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 3; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*, 133; John J. Goldman, "Former N.Y. Rep. Bella Abzug Dies at 77," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 1998, A10; Laura Mansnerus, "Bella Abzug, 77, Congresswoman and a Founding Feminist, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 1 April 1998, A1; Claudia Levy, "Feminist, Congresswoman Bella Abzug Dies at 77," *The Washington Post*, 1 April 1998, B6; "Guide to the Seattle Women Act for Peace Records," University Libraries, University of Washington, Seattle. Accessed 10 May 2015.

[http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findingaids/view?docId=SWAP4073\\_1\\_4073\\_2.xml](http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findingaids/view?docId=SWAP4073_1_4073_2.xml)

<sup>219</sup> Based on an archival review of *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Boston Globe*, and the *Los Angeles Times* from 1960 to 1970, Bella Abzug appeared in articles concerning WSP activity only twice, both coming in the first half of 1969.

<sup>220</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 64.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>222</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 54.

WSP activists made subtle changes to their expressed identity that placed them among the popular rise of feminism, despite the organisation itself advancing an ambiguous stance towards feminist campaigns.

The nature of motherhood and domesticity remained a contentious issue for feminist scholars throughout the 1980s. A 1980 edited collection discussing the “Politics of Housework” opened with Ellen Malos’ emphatic assertion that “there will be no true liberation of women until we get rid of the assumption that it will always be women who do housework and look after children.”<sup>223</sup> An influential article by Redstockings member Pat Mainardi, originally published in 1970, continued to provoke debate over power dynamics between men and women within relationships.<sup>224</sup> Others, such as race and gender theorist bell hooks, offered nuanced defences of maternal identity by arguing that “many black women were saying, ‘We want to have more time to share with family, we want to leave the world of alienated work.’”<sup>225</sup>

The use of maternal image by women’s peace groups became a locus for these debates. Simone de Beauvoir, famed for her 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, echoed Betty Friedan’s earlier criticisms of Women Strike by Peace by declaring in 1983 that “women should desire peace as human beings, not as women.”<sup>226</sup> Micaela di Leonardo presented a cogent evaluation of the phenomena in a 1985 article. According to di Leonardo, organisations that evoke the image of the “Moral Mother” preclude any possibility for critical discussion over the relationship between gender and militarism.<sup>227</sup> She offered a ranging critique of maternal peace protest, arguing that it prevents women from having to “become feminists,” privileges a specifically heterosexual image of womanhood, and serves as a poor organising tool for continued activism that is particularly vulnerable to “empirically based counterarguments.”<sup>228</sup> Others came to the defence of the identity of motherhood. Expanding on an earlier article, Sara Ruddick’s 1989 book *Maternal Thinking* constructed a general account of “maternal practice”

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<sup>223</sup> Ellen Malos, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Housework*, ed. Ellen Malos (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 1.

<sup>224</sup> Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework,” *Ms.*, 2, 6 (May 1992): 40-41.

<sup>225</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 133-147. See also Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).

<sup>226</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953); Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 329.

<sup>227</sup> Micaela Di Leonardo, “Morals, Mothers, and Militarism: Antimilitarism and Feminist Theory,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Autumn 1985): 599-617.

<sup>228</sup> Di Leonardo, “Morals, Mothers, and Militarism,” 602, 612; Garcia-Gorena, *Mothers and the Mexican Antinuclear Power Movement*, 121-122.

based on her own experiences as a mother.<sup>229</sup> Ruddick defended the connection between maternalism and peaceful beliefs by arguing that the goals of motherhood in the form of “preservative love,” fostering children’s emotional growth, and developing “socialization for acceptance,” informed political attitudes.<sup>230</sup>

The context of these debates informed much of the work of Amy Swerdlow. Writing in the 1970s and 1980s, Swerdlow felt compelled to provide a robust defence of WSP’s maternal rhetoric with criticism in mind. She concluded her authoritative study of the organisation by stating that her evaluation of WSP was situated “in current debates among feminist scholars and activists regarding the relationship of traditional female culture to radical social change and to feminism,” and was “in the spirit of WSP as it was transformed in the early 1970s.” She asserted that “the question WSP asks of women’s history is, can an organisation that builds on traditional female culture, even when effective in achieving some reforms, actually contribute to world peace if, in stressing mothers’ role and rights, it reinforces female marginality?”<sup>231</sup> On publishing her history, Swerdlow believed that WSPers challenged “the gendered division of labor and power in the political culture of the Left as well as the Right.” But she also argued that activists possessed “little awareness of their contributions to sex-role stereotyping and female oppression.” Likewise activists “were not aware in their early years that they were fighting a battle of the sexes.”<sup>232</sup> WSP’s feminism was tangible, if unintentional.

Yet Swerdlow's opinion altered over time. Writing a research report for her initial study of Women Strike for Peace in 1973 she contended that WSP “was basically a feminist movement, though many of its present day leaders would deny this.”<sup>233</sup> Having completed her MA at Sarah Lawrence, she contributed a more emphatic opinion to WSP’s 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative journal six years later, claiming that “WSP

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<sup>229</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (London: The Women’s Press, 1989); Sara Ruddick, “Preservative Love and Military Destruction: Some Reflections on Mothering and Peace,” in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. Joyce Trebilcock (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983), 231-262; Jean Keller, “Rethinking Ruddick and the Ethnocentrism Critique of Maternal Thinking,” *Hypatia*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Fall 2010): 834-851.

<sup>230</sup> See also, Jodi York, “The Truth(s) About Women and Peace,” *Peace Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Special Issue: Women and War (1996): 323-329; Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Maternal Thinking and the Politics of War,” in *The Women and War Reader*, eds. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (London: New York University Press, 1998), 227-233.

<sup>231</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 234.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 233; Love, *Feminists Who Changed America*, 453.

<sup>233</sup> “Progress Report on Women Strike for Peace Research,” SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, Research on WSP by Amy Swerdlow.

policy throughout” the 1960s was “fiercely autonomist and feminist.”<sup>234</sup> Writing her history of WSP during the 1980s, she provided more nuance. A 1989 article, “‘Pure Milk, Not Poison’,” suggested that Women Strike for Peace had “accepted for itself a secondary, supportive, helping, and enabling role” among anti-war protesters, rather than engaging with attitudes towards women’s liberation. But, she argued, “there was more of an antimale element in WSP than one would have expected,” and some harboured “anger at men.”<sup>235</sup> While advertising the publication of her book towards the end of 1993 Swerdlow advanced a moderate depiction of WSP activists. “We were middle-class housewives working from Christmas card lists and church rosters...we were the lady next door, we were concerned about our children, not political power.”<sup>236</sup> Her changing attitude reflected the continued challenge of describing WSP’s feminist outlook with reference to the changing status of American motherhood. It also shows the difficulty of reconciling WSP’s ambiguous stance towards women’s liberation with some activists’ perceptions that they were, and always had been, feminist agitators.

Identifying as a feminist by no means obligated an individual to “participate in forms of collective action intended to realize equal rights for women.”<sup>237</sup> Yet it remains unclear whether WSP activists saw themselves as feminists or not. Ethel Taylor, for example, offered a clear assessment in her 1998 memoir. “In retrospect,” she wrote, “we were the harbingers of the women’s liberation movement. Our discussions were certainly consciousness-raising.”<sup>238</sup> This attitude was evocatively summarised by former member Naomi Goodman in 1994. She recalled, “there was a song at one of the later WSP gatherings which included words to the effect that we joined to help peace and found ourselves in the process. This has certainly been true.”<sup>239</sup> Dagmar Wilson disagreed. She proudly identified herself as a feminist, evoked her family’s close ties to suffrage activism, and declared that she would have taken part in the first-wave of women’s activism in the United States.<sup>240</sup> But she had a different perception of Women Strike for Peace. In 1989 she asserted that Women Strike for Peace was a “peace

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<sup>234</sup> “WSP Commemorative Journal, 1961-1979,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>235</sup> Swerdlow, “‘Pure Milk, Not Poison’,” 226.

<sup>236</sup> Nadine Brozan, “Chronicle: Looking Back at a Spontaneous Moment in the History of Women,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1993, B7.

<sup>237</sup> Friedman and McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism,” 166-167.

<sup>238</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 2.

<sup>239</sup> Naomi Goodman, “Review: Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s, by Amy Swerdlow,” *Fellowship* (July/August 1994): 27.

<sup>240</sup> Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056.



movement activated by women, not a women's movement, and there's a difference in that." Though affirming that WSP emerged out of ideas linked to women's liberation, she declared that, "we were not a feminist movement. We were simply women working for the good of humanity, and I still feel as though that is the best way for women to go."<sup>241</sup>

The prevailing discourse on Women Strike for Peace emphasises the group's involvement with the test ban campaign and activities among the anti-Vietnam War movement. As such it is rare to find historical discussions of WSP's activities beyond the early 1970s. In some notable aspects this skews the historical depiction of Women Strike for Peace. For example, although Ethel Taylor served as the organisation's official National Coordinator for over 15 years, only Dagmar Wilson is referred to as its leader. Crucially, many of the historical perceptions associated with Women Strike for Peace only emerged within the context of 1970s political fervour. WSP's reassertion of disarmament activism reversed its earlier status as a faded and irrelevant protest group and curtailed potential historical narratives depicting the organisation as a failure. History of WSP's experience in the 1960s is written with the knowledge that the group emerged from the end of the Vietnam War and secured future successes. Likewise the emergence of the women's liberation movement influenced an examination of WSP's identity as members questioned their role in debates over feminism and began shaping their recollections to suit the contemporary political climate. All of these factors, emerging only in the 1970s, bled into the consciousness and memory of WSP activists and served to inform later perceptions of Women Strike for Peace.

The 1970s holds crucial relevance for the work of Amy Swerdlow. Not only did her evaluation of WSP emerge "in the spirit of WSP as it was transformed in the early 1970s," but in the context of the organisation's attempts to construct a relevant historical narrative in the face of concerted attacks from feminist activists.<sup>242</sup> The dialogue between the two issues of maternalism and feminism has informed a lot of writing on the history of the organisation. Indeed, since most history of Women Strike for Peace relies on the work of Amy Swerdlow, it follows that most historical perceptions of the group have been borne out of arguments surrounding this debate. However, while the group is referred to for the maternal stance it adopted in the 1960s,

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 234.

WSP's activism beyond the end of the Vietnam War became less informed by motherhood. In fact the move away from a maternal position towards a more nuanced and pragmatic argument is arguably what allowed Women Strike for Peace to maintain historical credibility.<sup>243</sup> This change, occurring only after the end of the Vietnam War, certainly helped Women Strike for Peace to manoeuvre itself into a position of relevance within the antinuclear and environmental movements. WSP's search for renewal in the 1970s holds valuable insight into the construction of the group's history. As the organisation entered the 1980s, further historical events served to shape the group's perception of itself.

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<sup>243</sup> Levy, *The Political Life of Bella Abzug*, 67.



## **6. “We Made a Difference”: The Return of the Peace Movement and WSP’s Historical Legacy, 1980-1990**

In a 1987 interview for the Women’s Peace Oral History Project, Judith Porter Adams asked New York WSPer Ruth Pinkson whether she thought the causes she had devoted her life to would ever be resolved. The activist appeared downhearted, answering that, “having been involved for so many years, all my life, since being a kid and seeing so many things happen, I don’t think we’ll see that much change.”<sup>1</sup> Yet Pinkson's attitude was not entirely pessimistic. Women Strike for Peace, she said, could draw many positives from the general public’s attitude towards war and nuclear weapons in the 1980s. The WSPer suggested that the sentiments WSP had so vigorously advocated in earlier decades now appeared to be common sense. She saw “tremendous support” for non-interventionist and antinuclear policies, arguing that it was “tremendous progress” from earlier public attitudes. Looking towards the future, Pinkson observed that, although “things move slowly...it will be a better world for my grandchildren than I had inherited.” She concluded that “so many things are heartening.”<sup>2</sup>

Although its activities in the previous decade saw the organisation’s fortunes improve, Women Strike for Peace could not develop committed membership beyond that of its leadership as it entered the 1980s. Heightened Cold War tensions arising from the sabre-rattling of the Reagan administration sparked renewed efforts by the US peace movement to campaign for disarmament. WSP attempted to capitalise on the upsurge of activism, developing several initiatives that aimed to attract members. But its inability to modernise made WSP appear irrelevant. Instead, potential participants turned to newer women’s peace organisations and more professional alternatives. Failing to attract younger activists, WSP’s aging leadership accepted that it could not continue. The organisation closed its national headquarters in 1990.

As WSP’s 30-year campaign against nuclear weapons came to a close, activists hoped that future generations would learn of its contribution to the peace movement and eagerly supported initiatives tasked with recording the history of the organisation. WSPers seemed in little doubt of their historical relevance. Although the period was marked by a “Second Cold War” and heightened tensions between the US and the

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<sup>1</sup> Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

USSR, commentators sought to dispel myths surrounding America's nuclear weapons policy and the public seemed more alert to the hazards of nuclear war. Meanwhile, a new generation of women's peace activists embarked on their first protests, influenced by the noble examples set by their predecessors. These developments validated WSP's long struggle. The increasing prevalence of pacifist sensibilities among the public gave WSPers the opportunity to commemorate their legacy. Emboldened by the current mood, they positively reflected on their past. Even as their organisation declined they remained confident that they "made a difference."<sup>3</sup> Much as the cultural upheavals of the 1970s provided a context with which activists understood their own identities, the growing pervasiveness of disarmament attitudes in the 1980s informed how WSPers interpreted their success.

### **The Election of Reagan and Evaluating the Past**

President Carter's 1976 election pledge to pursue disarmament and human rights as foreign policy initiatives encouraged WSP activists who, though not necessarily considering Carter a "hero," felt that "his comprehensive view of the nuclear energy and nuclear weaponry issue is very close to our own." They realistically acknowledged the fragility of his electoral promises, but appreciated that "at least he's scared."<sup>4</sup> The president's start encouraged the group. Carter scrapped the development of the B-1 bomber and the neutron bomb in his first two years. He also brokered the momentous Camp David Accords peace agreement between Egypt and Israel and energetically pursued another round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) with the USSR.<sup>5</sup> James Patterson, in his acclaimed work of the period, noted that the "heartening" diplomatic victories secured by the president arose from his "Wilsonian internationalist and idealist" approach to foreign affairs.<sup>6</sup>

These early achievements, however, were later overshadowed. Carter's persistent admonishment of the Soviet Union's human rights record cooled Premier

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> "Letter from Helen Mills to Hazel Grossman, undated," UCB WFP Archives, 7-24, Office Files – General, 1976; "Letter from Helen Mills to Hazel Grossman, 9 April 1976," UCB WFP Archives, 7-30, Nuclear Weapons, 1976; "Women Strike for Peace National Newsletter, 25 June 1976," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 96A-040, Box 2, Carter 1976 Election.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; Strobe Talbot, *Endgame: The Inside Story of SALT II* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States From Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121.

Brezhnev's tolerance of détente. The USSR responded by developing the next generation of SS-20 missiles, capable of striking any target in Western Europe. The move rekindled Cold War tensions.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the Carter administration's inability to curtail "stagflation" and alleviate the continuing energy crisis cultivated a sense of the president's incompetence.<sup>8</sup> An address urging the American public to pro-actively address its "crisis of confidence" made many people feel that the president was "blaming them for the nation's problems," and became disparagingly referred to as his "malaise speech." By subsequently calling for the resignations of many of his top aides in response to the economic crisis, Carter appeared to have lost control of his administration.<sup>9</sup>

The rising conservative consensus which had developed amidst the political and social upheavals of the 1970s gained ground as dissatisfaction with President Carter increased. The apparent failure of liberal political values and the "inept" federal government contrasted conservative ideas that advocated a "revival of an old American mythology about the self-made man."<sup>10</sup> Conservative commentators appealed to "the frustrations of the age - the failure of government to assure economic stability, to provide social justice, to fulfil a sense of national purpose."<sup>11</sup> "Most of all," Americans felt that government efforts to revive the economy "would curtail opportunity."<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, hawkish interest groups, such as the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), capitalised on the perceived weakness of Carter's government to exert a growing influence on foreign policy discourse. The CPD was founded by Paul Nitze, an architect of US Cold War foreign policy since the 1950s, and, though a relatively small group, it boasted many "former participants" of the US policymaking elite. Members of the CPD had never accepted détente with the USSR and grew concerned with what they saw as America's "strategic disadvantage" and a "drift in US security policy."<sup>13</sup> The organisation worried that "the American public was either unaware or too complacent about this trend," and published deliberately pessimistic alternatives to the CIA's

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>8</sup> Peter N. Carrol, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 328.

<sup>9</sup> Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> Carrol, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 317-328.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 335.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 328, 335.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Wirls, *Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 22; Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, 107-108.

assessments of Soviet military capabilities in order to rouse anti-communist opinion.<sup>14</sup> Several anti-Soviet “Cold War Democrats” similarly turned against the Carter administration. Eugene Rostow, former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs under Lyndon Johnson, chaired the CPD and also served as head of Democrats for Reagan.<sup>15</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, who had previously worked for the election campaigns of Hubert Humphrey, also joined the CPD to express her anti-totalitarian views. Washington Senator Henry Jackson, a well-known Democratic hawk famed for accumulating huge defence contracts for his state, frequently spoke against the president’s SALT II negotiations.<sup>16</sup>

Carter responded to calls for a more combative foreign policy stance and, in view of the upcoming presidential election, “felt obliged to stiffen America’s Cold War posture.”<sup>17</sup> The president sanctioned the full development of the MX missile, “the most expensive weapons system ever conceived,” and approved a previously vetoed nuclear aircraft carrier.<sup>18</sup> Reacting to hawkish demands for raised defence spending, Carter resolved to increase the military budget by five percent in each of the next five years, two percent more than the figure suggested by his Republican opponent.<sup>19</sup> Pointedly, in July 1980, he signed the bellicose Presidential Decision Directive 59. The national security initiative represented a marked shift in the administration’s attitude towards nuclear war, showing its willingness to engage in a limited but “protracted” exchange. Crucially, it granted the US military first-strike capability.<sup>20</sup> Paul Warnke, the former head of the Atomic Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), denounced it as “apocalyptic nonsense.”<sup>21</sup> Several commentators observe that the policies later adopted by the Reagan Administration, though seemingly more hawkish, were simply a corollary to these Carter initiatives. CIA director Stansfield Turner suggested that they “laid the whole foundation for Reagan’s expansion of nuclear weapons, and war-

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<sup>14</sup> Wirls, *Buildup*, 22; Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, 108, 114.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 107; Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, “The Freeze Movement Versus Reagan,” *New Left Review*, Issue 137 (January-February 1983), 6; Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 341.

<sup>19</sup> Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 341; Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 124.

<sup>20</sup> Presidential Directive/NSC-59, 25 July 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 219.

fighting, and war-winning capabilities.” By 1980, James Patterson explained, Carter “was a hawk.”<sup>22</sup>

The administration’s “eleventh-hour cold war policies” did little to stymie criticisms of Carter’s “half-hearted” efforts to change course.<sup>23</sup> Although the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution in Iran towards the end of 1979 “justified” Carter’s growing militancy in foreign policy, the drawn out saga of the Iran hostage crisis exacerbated his problems.<sup>24</sup> Unable to secure the release of 52 American diplomats and citizens following 444 days of diplomatic wrangling, the calamitous failure of the Eagle Claw rescue mission concluded a ruinous affair. Paul Kengor, a scholar of American conservatism, wrote that the denouement of the hostage crisis “was not just another humiliation in a long line of US embarrassments; it was a microcosm of the stagnation and low morale that America faced. More than just an aborted rescue mission, this was a cry not just for a new leader but for a new paradigm.”<sup>25</sup>

The steady hardening of Carter’s stance left WSP feeling betrayed and the militarism of his later years in office alarmed the group.<sup>26</sup> It criticised the administration’s increased defence spending and reduced domestic budget.<sup>27</sup> Anci Koppel denounced the president’s motivations as “downright immoral.”<sup>28</sup> Others accused him of “nuclear insanity,” while the National Office released a statement in late 1979 declaring that he should not be returned to office at the following year’s presidential elections.<sup>29</sup> WSP remained divided over whether it should approve SALT II, an agreement for arms limitations that nevertheless allowed weapons production to continue for several years. Though some saw it as a “first step” towards disarmament, several others, including National Coordinator Ethel Taylor, felt that SALT II served to

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<sup>22</sup> Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 146.

<sup>23</sup> Wirls, *Buildup*, 27; Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 343.

<sup>24</sup> Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 341.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 57.

<sup>26</sup> “Response to President Carter’s Annapolis Speech, 7 June 1978, by Women Strike for Peace,” SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 3, Literature – 1978, 145 S 13<sup>th</sup> St Philadelphia PA.

<sup>27</sup> Kaufman, *Presidential Profiles*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> “Letter from Anci Koppel to Jimmy Carter, 14 June 1979,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-6, General Correspondence, 1967-1977.

<sup>29</sup> “Women’s Group Charges Administration With Nuclear Insanity, 21 August 1980”; “For Immediate Release, 13 December 1979,” SCPC WSP Archives, D1, Box 1, Literature 1979-1985.



endorse and codify the arms race.<sup>30</sup> Responding to the invasion of Afghanistan, WSP criticised both the Soviet military intervention and Carter's apparent "over-reaction" to events.<sup>31</sup> But as it bemoaned the President's militarism, the group acknowledged it could not offer any alternative solutions to the ongoing crises. Following the 1979 Iranian revolution and ensuing hostage crisis, the group offered a "Long Overdue Apology to the Iranian People" for decades of American intervention. But WSP also understood that "even the many Americans who have resented our government's solicitousness for the shah now feel trapped into 'getting tough' with Iran in order to vent feelings of helpless outrage." It admitted that "we have no ready solution to this impasse."<sup>32</sup> Dissatisfied with the choices on offer in the 1980 presidential election, the organisation withheld support for the president and refused to endorse any alternative candidate.

Having exploited the "social and cultural alienation...the economic dislocations...and anger over the decline of US global power," the ascendancy of the New Right culminated in the landslide election of their presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan.<sup>33</sup> The result alarmed WSP. Previously dispirited, it immediately assumed a sense of urgency. Two days after Carter's defeat, members put aside their reservations to SALT II and threw their weight behind it. Taylor sent a telegram to the outgoing president urging him to "act now" to pass the treaty while he still could.<sup>34</sup> Others implored defeated Senators to "use the remaining months of their term to achieve ratification" of the agreement.<sup>35</sup> The organisation admonished the openly militaristic attitudes of the new administration, foreseeing a "dangerous confrontational period" with the USSR that threatened nuclear holocaust. "Frankly," declared Taylor, "we are scared."<sup>36</sup> So began a long period of agitation against the Reagan administration.

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<sup>30</sup> "Ethel Taylor, 18 January," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-040, National Conference 1978 - SALT II.

<sup>31</sup> "Women Strike for Peace Policy Statement, February 1980," SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 3, Literature – 1980, 145 S 13<sup>th</sup> St Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>32</sup> "A Long Overdue Apology to the Iranian People," SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 3, Literature – 1980, 145 S 13<sup>th</sup> St Philadelphia PA; "Women Strike for Peace Policy Statement, February 1980," SCPC WSP Archives, A2, Box 3, Literature – 1980, 145 S 13<sup>th</sup> St Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam: The Politics of Protest in Massachusetts, 1974-1990* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 258; DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 303.

<sup>34</sup> "Women Strike for Peace Urges Carter to Move on SALT II," SCPC WSP Archives, D1, Box 1, Literature 1979-1985.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

The president's hawkish foreign policy rhetoric dovetailed with his desire to restore public confidence. Believing that pessimistic attitudes towards the recent past harmed the United States, he called for the public to "recapture our dreams, our pride in ourselves and our country" and "bring about a spiritual revival in America."<sup>37</sup> Reagan determined that volatile attitudes towards the 1960s inhibited such a revival and resolved to dispel any lingering doubts over the period's legacy. As a presidential candidate, he controversially declared that the Vietnam War represented "in truth, a noble cause" at the Chicago Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in August 1980.<sup>38</sup> Although this self-penned rhetorical flourish delighted the veterans present, it received a mixed reaction elsewhere. In the *Boston Globe*, Mary McGrory attacked Reagan for his choice of words, claiming that it revived the "poisonous enmity" of the war years. She claimed that he wanted to "rehabilitate" the legacy of the war in order to fight another one.<sup>39</sup>

Yet Reagan's attempts to re-evaluate the country's 1960s experience attracted support from large segments of the public who similarly continued to reflect on the recent past. Responses to the proposed design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial symbolised public divisions over the appropriate legacy of the Vietnam War.<sup>40</sup> Described by historian John Bodnar as "more an expression of grief and sorrow than a celebration of national unity," many felt the memorial represented the "political war waged here at home" rather than the sacrifice of Vietnam Veterans who deserved a more fitting tribute to their patriotism.<sup>41</sup> Journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak noted that Reagan's view of the period was widely shared by large segments of the American public.<sup>42</sup> Phillip Jenkins writes that, for many, conditions in the 1980s "were

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<sup>37</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 219-220.

<sup>38</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Speech at the VFW Convention, Chicago, IL, 18 August 1980," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum (RB80 30:00). Accessed 4 June 2015.  
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.18.80.html>

<sup>39</sup> Mary McGrory, "Viet Talk Hurting Reagan," *Boston Globe*, 24 August 1980, A7.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Abramson, "Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer 1996): 679-709; Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (September 1991): 376-420; Karal Ann Marling and Robert Silberman, "The Statue Near the Wall: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Art of Remembering," *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1987): 4-29;

<sup>41</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-12; Tom Carhart, "Insulting Vietnam Vets," *New York Times*, 24 October 1981, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Jack Mabley, "A Life-Death Matter: Nuclear 'Folly' Haunts Election," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 August 1980, 4; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Making Reagan 'Fail-Safe'," *The Washington Post*, 22 August 1980, A15; Joseph Kraft, "Reagan Shoots a Hole in His Defense Policy," *Boston Globe*, 21

bad, it seemed, because sixties values had let them get so bad.”<sup>43</sup> While some accounts cite the decade as a period of “Great Reconciliation” between 1960s liberalism and growing conservative attitudes, divisions remained throughout the 1980s, especially among past social movement activists.<sup>44</sup> Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden, former presidents of Students for a Democratic Society, eulogised the 1960s for having opened up political and cultural space.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, Peter Collier and David Horowitz, former co-editors of the radical magazine *Ramparts*, rejected the New Left and “shouted good riddance to *The Destructive Generation*.”<sup>46</sup>

Amidst this period of public self-reflection, Women Strike for Peace looked to record its own history. Although Eleanor Garst’s earlier attempts did not move beyond her first drafts, the initiative of Amy Swerdlow saw a renewal in WSPers’ interest in their history as a narrative explaining the group’s past began to emerge.<sup>47</sup> Swerdlow’s involvement in WSP began with the founding of New York Women Strike for Peace in 1961 and she remained an influential national figure throughout her time in the group.<sup>48</sup> Her influence and stature within the organisation led her to editing the national *Memo* from 1970 to 1973. However, WSP’s 1968 confrontation with radical feminists at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade demonstration profoundly affected her political outlook. With the feminist movement on the rise, Swerdlow became enamoured with women’s history and feminist thinking and expressed regret at her own lack of historical awareness. In 1972, she enrolled at Sarah Lawrence College on the pioneering MA program in women’s history and studied under the guidance of celebrated women’s historian Gerda

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August 1980, 19; Lou Cannon, “Reagan: ‘Peace Through Strength’,” *The Washington Post*, 19 August 1980, A1; UPI, “Powell: Reagan Is ‘Trying to Have It Both Ways’,” *The Washington Post*, 19 August 1980, A4.

<sup>43</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), x.

<sup>45</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 435; Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988), 501–507.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the Sixties* (New York: Summit Books, 1989); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 145.

<sup>47</sup> SHSW WSP Archives, M83-327, Working Papers for Ch1, 2, WSP Formation, Test Ban Efforts; Working Papers for Ch 3 on WISP, Jan 1962; Ch 3 Working Papers on Geneva Conference, Clippings, 1962; Ch 4 Working Papers on High Altitude Testing, Clippings, April 1962; Working Papers for Chapter 7, Test Ban Treaty, Initial Stand Against Vietnam War, Anti-Nuclear Dem in Netherlands, May 1964.

<sup>48</sup> Endres, “NY Peaceletter,” 258-264.

Lerner.<sup>49</sup> Women Strike for Peace became the topic of Swerdlow's MA dissertation, her PhD thesis, and continued to guide her research throughout her academic life.<sup>50</sup>

A surge in publications addressing the social movements of the 1960s spurred increased concern in how WSP would be represented historically. Swerdlow raised her own anxieties in a letter to WSPers. She felt that existing historical depictions of the organisation, even supposed “tributes,” misrepresented what she described as “WSP’s complex role and its significance in the peace and women’s movements.” Swerdlow highlighted recent pieces by Mary McGrory and Dave Dellinger as particularly troublesome.<sup>51</sup> Adding to her consternation was the fear that these types of work “will shape the memory and the consciousness of the next generations.” WSP could not, Swerdlow wrote, afford to be forgotten, nor have its activities “distorted” by historians. She made her purpose clear. “There is no doubt that we, in WSP, made history...now I think we must write it.”<sup>52</sup> Activists from around the country responded to Swerdlow's message by sending local branch records and offering their own recollections on past events. Her letter marked the beginning of a process that, in 1993, culminated in the publication of *Women Strike for Peace*.

Swerdlow's efforts signified only one of several historical initiatives that activists engaged with during the 1980s. Having developed a close relationship with WSP following the 1965 Jakarta meeting, the Vietnamese Women’s Association requested information to supplement a book and museum exhibition about the Vietnam War. WSPers set out to compile “posters, articles, photos” and various other materials.<sup>53</sup> Requests also came from “historical societies, universities and people engaged in Peace and Conflict Studies.” Such requests raised concerns that no written record of the organisation’s activities existed. Observing that their archival materials were in a “terrible disorder,” WSPers resolved to arrange their records and build an accurate and concise history of their experiences.<sup>54</sup> A project developed out of the Palo Alto branch

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<sup>49</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> “Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979.

<sup>51</sup> David T. Dellinger, *More Power Than We Know: The People’s Movement Toward Democracy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975); Mary McGrory, “Women’s Strike for Peace Finally Makes It,” *New York Post*, 8 March 1977, 24; “Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979.

<sup>52</sup> “Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79,” SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979.

<sup>53</sup> “Letter from Cora Weiss, April 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984.

<sup>54</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Cora Weiss, 29 January 1985,” UCB Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984; “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Anne Spake, 25 May, 1984,” UCB Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984.

of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom also sought to record the personal testimony of women's peace activists. Under the leadership of WILPF branch member and Stanford University teacher Judith Porter Adams, the Women's Peace Oral History Project conducted oral interviews with WILPF and WSP activists in the San Francisco Bay Area. The initiative soon expanded to become a ten-year long nationwide venture, involving 256 recordings of over 90 members of the women's peace movement.<sup>55</sup>

The eagerness of women to have their stories put on record ensured that initiatives involved many WSPers.<sup>56</sup> Understanding that capturing their history required materials from an array of past and present activists, leaders urged members to get in touch. In a 1984 newsletter, they implored "if you have flyers, newsletters or other mementos of the sixties and early seventies, please contact our office. We will need lots of help!"<sup>57</sup> Interviewees for the Women's Peace Oral History Project reflected modestly on their own involvement and often recommended that the project also contact other figures for their version of events.<sup>58</sup> Throughout her writing, Swerdlow made a conscious effort to "recognize the contributions of as many women as possible."<sup>59</sup> She asked WSPers to complete questionnaires to inform her research, making clear her belief that "the WSP story is not mine, but ours. Just as we worked together to make our history, I think we have to work together to write it."<sup>60</sup>

Although attempting to produce a broad and accurate account of the past, projects nevertheless developed limitations, as past and present leaders assumed responsibility for their output. Swerdlow often asked key figures to revise her work prior to its publication.<sup>61</sup> Dagmar Wilson had a particularly privileged position in this respect. While working on her PhD thesis, the contents of which would later make up

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<sup>55</sup> Adams ed., *Peacework*, 1-7; Jonathan Manton, "Celebrating 100 years of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom," *Stanford University Libraries*. Accessed 3 November 2015.

<http://library.stanford.edu/blogs/stanford-libraries-blog/2015/04/celebrating-100-years-womens-international-league-peace-and>

<sup>56</sup> "Women for Peace Newsletter," UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women's Association, 1984.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056; Wilson interview, 15 April 1989, ARS.0056; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Duckles interview, 22 November 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>59</sup> "Letter from Amy Swerdlow, 78/79," SCPC WSP Archives, A3, Box 13, 1974-1979; "Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 9 February 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow's Dissertation with Dagmar's Biographical Corrections 1981.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 31 July 1981," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 15, Women Strike for Peace History.

*Women Strike for Peace*, Swerdlow sent every chapter and other large extracts of her work to Wilson for feedback.<sup>62</sup> The academic requested “frank and honest” assessments. Wilson obliged, offering significant comments and edits on Swerdlow’s writing.<sup>63</sup> Wilson’s knowledge proved highly insightful due to her centrality to certain events, such as the organisation’s founding and WSP’s 1962 confrontation with the House Un-American Activities Committee. Nevertheless, Swerdlow often ceded to Wilson’s personal judgment and, on one occasion, apologised for a piece of writing that had not “given proper weight to the vulnerable position you were in.”<sup>64</sup> She further sought to reassure the former leader that she had a final say on her work. “Don’t worry,” Swerdlow wrote Wilson, “nothing will be published without you seeing it.”<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, branch leaders Hazel Grossman and Alice Hamburg, having headed the San Francisco Women’s Peace Office for many years, set about writing a history of women’s peace activities in the city.<sup>66</sup> National Coordinator Ethel Taylor began drafting her own anecdotal account of Women Strike for Peace. In Seattle, branch leader Anci Koppel enrolled on an oral history course at her local college, hoping to record interviews dedicated to SWAP’s history.<sup>67</sup> Alice Hamburg conducted interviewees for the Women’s Peace Oral History Project.<sup>68</sup>

Most efforts had to run under the initiative of contemporary leaders who represented the point of contact for past and present members. However, they often struggled to rouse responses from grassroots figures. Cora Weiss appealed for archival material to build a history of anti-Vietnam War activism, but her efforts largely involved correspondence with key women.<sup>69</sup> Hazel Grossman similarly argued that in order to compile an accurate history of WFP’s activities in San Francisco, “we will have

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<sup>62</sup> “Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 14 December 1981,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections 1981; “Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 9 February 1982,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Draft Chapters 1-5 = Amy Swerdlow’s Dissertation with Dagmar’s Biographical Corrections 1981.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> “Letter from Amy Swerdlow to Dagmar Wilson, 31 July 1981,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 15, Women Strike for Peace History.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Women’s Peace Office (WPO) History – The Peace Movement in Transition by Alice Hamburg,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-12, SF WILPF History by Alice Hamburg, 1985-1986.

<sup>67</sup> SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 4, MD (Draft of Ethel Taylor’s Book), 1996; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987; UWS SWAP Archives, 2-31, Oral History Class at Seattle Central Community College, 1979, n.d.

<sup>68</sup> Segal interview, 26 October 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>69</sup> “Letter from Cora Weiss, April 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984.

to depend at least in part on former chairs and officers.”<sup>70</sup> Leaders recognised that they had simply lost touch with former activists when they withdrew from the organisation and were, therefore, unable to solicit their stories. Some branches, for various administrative reasons, did not send their materials to be recorded, meaning their own unique accounts were lost. SWAP in particular was unrepresented in the histories, having no involvement with nationwide oral history projects or the collection of records from the Vietnam War era.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, few grassroots members, either past or present, added their own perspective to the rapidly building story of Women Strike for Peace.

### **The Return of the Peace Movement**

As WSPers began to record the past, developing events ensured that their stories attained contemporary relevance. Signalling a stark departure from the policy of détente that had characterised the previous decade, blunt rhetoric from officials within the Reagan administration reignited Cold War tensions.<sup>72</sup> Officials openly levelled accusations of duplicity and malevolence at the Kremlin.<sup>73</sup> Nuclear war appeared less “unthinkable” to members of the government.<sup>74</sup> The remarks of T.K. Jones, the Deputy Undersecretary of Defence for Strategic and Nuclear Forces, were especially troubling. In conversation with *Los Angeles Times* journalist Robert Scheer, Jones asserted that the public need not fear a war. To protect themselves from the effects of a nuclear exchange, he suggested people simply “dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors and then throw three feet of dirt on top. It’s the dirt that does it.” As if accepting the inevitability of a nuclear conflict, he reassured the public that “everybody is going to

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<sup>70</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Orah, 29 May 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984.

<sup>71</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman to Anne Spake, 25 May 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 1-8, Historical Information for Vietnam Women’s Association, 1984 “Letter from Anci Koppel to Amy Swerdlow, 16 March 1994,” UWS SWAP Archives, 1-21, General Correspondence, May 1993-1994.

<sup>72</sup> Frances B. McCrea and Gerald E. Markle, *Minutes to Midnight: Nuclear Weapons Protest in America* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 105.

<sup>73</sup> Kengor, *The Crusader*, 173; Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, 8 March 1983,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed 29 May 2015.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>

<sup>74</sup> Robert Scheer, “Bush Assails Carter Defense Strategy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 1980, B1; Wade Greene, “Rethinking the Unthinkable,” *New York Times*, 15 March 1981, SM12.

make it if there are enough shovels to go around.”<sup>75</sup> Even Reagan felt “somewhat chilled” by the comments of his staff.<sup>76</sup>

Disparate parts of the peace movement, having remained somewhat muted since the end of the Vietnam War, saw such sabre-rattling as a dangerous change in circumstances.<sup>77</sup> In late 1979 the AFSC organised a meeting of disarmament advocates to discuss arms control. Mobilization for Survival, Clergy and Laity Concerned, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation started to endorse a moratorium.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile Randall Forsberg, a young defence and disarmament researcher, became convinced that the peace movement should demonstrate greater unity and suggested that it coalesce around a single, achievable, and identifiable aim; a bilateral agreement between the US and USSR to halt the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Forsberg developed experience in peace research working for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in 1968 before founding the Institute for Defence and Disarmament Studies in 1974. Her experience led her to believe that the peace movement needed to appeal to a moderate base of support in a climate of rising conservatism and militarism. She stressed that “no major disarmament effort can succeed without the support of the majority of middle class, middle-of-the-road citizens.”<sup>79</sup> In 1979, she drafted a “Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race,” stressing previous arms limitation campaigns were either circumvented, or “too technical for the patience of the average person.” She made an uncomplicated, single-issue demand that both the US and the USSR freeze nuclear stockpiles at their current levels.<sup>80</sup>

“The Call” became widely popular and rallied peace activists into a Freeze movement.<sup>81</sup> With support from individuals, peace organisations, and major interest groups, the Freeze movement intended to build grassroots pressure through referenda

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<sup>75</sup> Garrison, *Bracing for Armageddon*, 168; Robert Scheer, *With Enough Shovels: Reagan, Bush, and Nuclear War* (New York: Random House, 1982), 18-26, 138-140; Morris Schwartz, “The Social-Psychological Dimension of the Arms Race,” in *Search for Sanity: The Politics of Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament*, eds. Paul Joseph and Simon Rosenblum (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 272; “The Dirt on T.K. Jones,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1982, A30.

<sup>76</sup> Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, 117.

<sup>77</sup> John Trinkl, “Struggles for Disarmament in the USA,” in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s*, eds. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1988), 51.

<sup>78</sup> Cockburn and Ridgeway, “The Freeze Movement Versus Reagan,” 6; Lawrence S. Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact,” *Arms Control Association*, 1. Accessed 7 June 2015. [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010\\_12/LookingBack](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_12/LookingBack)

<sup>79</sup> McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 97.

<sup>80</sup> Forsberg, Randall, *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race: Proposal for a Mutual US-Soviet Nuclear-Weapon Freeze* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1980).

<sup>81</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, 4.



and ballot initiatives at a local political level. It was hoped that these efforts would culminate in Congressional legislation forcing the president to offer a bilateral freeze agreement with the USSR.<sup>82</sup> Starting in November 1980, freeze resolutions started appearing on the election ballots of towns and cities across the United States. Victories started to mount. In western Massachusetts, 59 of 62 towns voted in favour of a freeze. In March 1982, 159 out of 180 Vermont town meetings backed the initiative. California peace groups brought together “professional political strategists and an enthusiastic grass roots” to ensure a freeze resolution appeared on the ballot in November 1982.<sup>83</sup> Senators Edward Kennedy and Mark Hatfield declared their support and, in March 1982, introduced a freeze resolution in Congress.<sup>84</sup> Freeze resolutions won in nine out of ten states, the District of Columbia and all but three of the local ballots they appeared on. The *New York Times* reported that voting on the resolution “constituted the largest referendum on a single issue in the nation’s history.”<sup>85</sup>

The movement mobilised vast swathes of the American population. It stimulated the energies of peace activists and, through its respectable and moderate stance, drew countless others to the campaign, swelling the ranks of the disarmament movement to levels not seen in the US since the test ban campaign of the early 1960s.<sup>86</sup> As McCrea and Markle surmise, the middle-class organising approach allowed “thousands of new recruits” to side with the peace movement.<sup>87</sup> A demonstration in New York on 12 June 1982, drew close to one million people into Central Park in support of the movement’s demands.<sup>88</sup> Reports of the gathering noted the widespread diversity of those in attendance. Bradford Martin wrote that “children and octogenarians...World War II veterans and Tibetans for World Peace” arrived in New York for the march.<sup>89</sup> The delight of participant Alex Willentz encapsulated the day’s sentiments, as he declared “there’s no way the leaders can ignore this now...it’s not just hippies and crazies

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<sup>82</sup> Trinkl, “Struggles for Disarmament in the USA,” 52.

<sup>83</sup> Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact,” 2; Cockburn and Ridgeway, “The Freeze Movement Versus Reagan,” 10-11.

<sup>84</sup> Edward M. Kennedy and Mark O. Hatfield, *Freeze!: How You Can Help Prevent Nuclear War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), xvii, 143; “Statement of Senator Edward Kennedy on Nuclear Freeze and Reductions Resolution, The American University – 19 March 1982,” AU WSP Archives, Box 10, Nuclear Freeze Campaign, 1981-1982.

<sup>85</sup> John Herbers, “Widespread Vote Urges Nuclear Freeze,” *New York Times*, 4 November 1982, A22.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Boyer, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2005), 390.

<sup>87</sup> McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 108.

<sup>88</sup> Figures vary from 750,000 to over one million - Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 330; Intondi, *African Americans Against the Bomb*, 103; Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition*, 176.

<sup>89</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, 3.

anymore. It's everybody."<sup>90</sup> Journalist Robert McFadden reported "a kaleidoscope of humanity" on the march, "young people and old, rich and poor, the famous, the forgotten and countless thousands in between."<sup>91</sup>

WSPers initially felt unconvinced that the freeze movement could elicit any substantial change. Ethel Taylor wrote to her colleagues to explain that, though the freeze initiative was "a marvellous tool," its results were not legally binding. She felt that Reagan had to accede to public will, and while the freeze movement busied itself introducing non-binding resolutions, the president would continue to exert his authority "unless we indulge in a primal scream."<sup>92</sup> Taylor's criticisms echoed the observations of others. Forsberg's determination to keep the freeze movement's demands moderate and bilateral limited its effectiveness. By advocating reciprocal measures, it could not support a campaign against the American MX missile as no comparable Soviet system existed. Supporters promised a "first step" in disarmament negotiations, but made no demands for a reduction in weapons stockpiles.<sup>93</sup> Seymour Melman, an influential activist in the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, probed the movement's aims. "What have we actually frozen?" he asked, observing that weapons stockpiles were "already adequate to destroy every Soviet city of 100,000 or more population forty times over." As no arms agreement in history had managed to reduce nuclear inventories up to this point, many remained sceptical of the freeze's potential.<sup>94</sup>

On seeing the movement's ability to mobilise members of the public, WSP changed tack, throwing its support behind Freeze resolutions. Leaders saw a chance to expand and meet the public's rising interest in peace activism.<sup>95</sup> The organisation dovetailed perfectly with the respectable image and inclusive rhetoric exhorted by Randall Forsberg. She desperately wished the antinuclear movement to keep its appeals "simple, straight-forward, effective and mutual," and warned against control "by a small cadre of leftist activists."<sup>96</sup> Robert Kleidman argues that she, rather acerbically, feared

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<sup>90</sup> Paul L. Montgomery, "Throngs Fill Manhattan to Protest Nuclear Weapons," *New York Times*, 13 June 1982, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Robert D. McFadden, "A Spectrum of Humanity Represented at the Rally," *New York Times*, 13 June 1982, 42.

<sup>92</sup> "Dear Sisters Newsletter, August 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, Women Strike for Peace 1981-1983.

<sup>93</sup> Trinkl, "Struggles for Disarmament in the USA," 55.

<sup>94</sup> Cockburn and Ridgeway, "The Freeze Movement Versus Reagan," 13.

<sup>95</sup> "Women Strike for Peace Annual National Conference, Saturday 1 October 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1982, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>96</sup> Forsberg, "Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race"; McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 103.

that the imposition of a “pacifist-vegetarian anti-corporate value system” would alienate centrist supporters “vital to a mainstream campaign.”<sup>97</sup> Women Strike for Peace fit Forsberg’s designs. Veteran activists began recommending that those interested in becoming a peace activist should contact Women Strike for Peace, since its open, moderate stance fit perfectly with the campaign.<sup>98</sup> As interest in WSP increased it became more visible in the mainstream press. The group came to be seen as senior figures within the peace movement and pioneers of disarmament activism.

WSP found most success with educational outreach projects. The group’s traditional view that an informed public was central to achieving nuclear disarmament reflected the intentions of the Freeze movement and fit perfectly with ongoing activities.<sup>99</sup> Pat Gross, a recent addition to WSP’s ranks, saw that “education and outreach is essential,” suggesting the group draw up “educational pamphlets on issues with which we have a concern.”<sup>100</sup> WSPers criticised the news media’s communication of Reagan’s military policy, suggesting it skewed debate through one-sided perspectives and a lack of transparency. East Bay WSPer Rose Dellamonica urged the public to “go beyond the commercial media, beyond radio and TV.”<sup>101</sup> Donna Allen suggested that “we’ll forever be walking in front of the White House” to little effect unless they did “something about mass media...we have to get this back in our hands.”<sup>102</sup> Projects tasked with educating the public, it was felt, would tackle misinformation while increasing the public’s awareness of Women Strike for Peace itself.<sup>103</sup>

The group made particular efforts to highlight the absurdity of strategists who saw nuclear war as a winnable event. Activists railed against secret initiatives that prepared the US to engage in limited nuclear war, such as National Security Decision Directive 32 and the Pentagon’s Five Year Defence Guidance Plan.<sup>104</sup> A 1980 article co-authored by Colin S. Gray, an advisory member to the ACDA, proved useful to

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<sup>97</sup> Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace*, 143.

<sup>98</sup> Colman McCarthy, “Mothers, Sons and America’s ‘War Fever,’” *The Washington Post*, 3 February 1980, H10.

<sup>99</sup> Wirls, *Buildup*, 72.

<sup>100</sup> “Minutes of Meeting: Women Strike for Peace Annual National Conference 11/10/83-11/13/83,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1983, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>102</sup> Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.

<sup>103</sup> “Minutes of Meeting: Women Strike for Peace Annual National Conference 11/10/83-11/13/83,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1983, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Halloran, “Pentagon Draws Up First Strategy For Fighting a Long Nuclear War,” *New York Times*, 30 May 1982, 1; Richard Halloran, “Weinberger Denies U.S. Plans for ‘Protracted’ War,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1982, A5; National Security Decision Directive Number 32, 20 May 1982.

WSP's endeavours. Gray expressed the view, shared by several defence planners, that the expected deaths of 20 million American citizens should not dissuade the government from launching a nuclear war.<sup>105</sup> WSP exploited the comment, intimating that the government considered millions of American lives expendable. Asserting that Reagan considered there to be an "acceptable" level of civilian deaths, Ethel Taylor designed an advert for nationwide dissemination. It declared "I refuse to be One of 20 Million 'Acceptable' Dead," and urged members of the public to become "one of twenty million" to state "I am not a statistic. I and my family refuse to be part of the 20 million acceptable dead."<sup>106</sup>

The campaign's simplicity, both in highlighting government attitudes and personalising the effects of nuclear war, brought substantial support from members of the public.<sup>107</sup> Thousands of people took part in the project. Though participation did not require communication with Women Strike for Peace, many sent notes of support to branch staff.<sup>108</sup> The campaign certainly raised interest in WSP and proved highly popular among other peace organisations. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* reproduced the ad as a full-page item in their February 1983 edition and the particular phrasing used by the campaign also brought acclaim.<sup>109</sup> Gender and security scholar Carol Cohn juxtaposed the slogan with the abstract language often employed when discussing nuclear war. She noted that the "very act of putting phrases like '20 million acceptable dead' into human consciousness cracks our conceptions" and highlights the reality that exists behind the "theoretical plans of defence intellectuals."<sup>110</sup>

Reagan's confidence in the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) offered another avenue to criticise arms build-up. The president's belief in the limitless potential of American science, added to his dismay at the absence of defence against nuclear attack,

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<sup>105</sup> Colin S. Gray and Keith Payne, "Victory is Possible," *Foreign Policy*, No. 39 (Summer 1980): 14-27; Wade Greene, "Rethinking the Unthinkable," *New York Times*, 15 March 1981, SM12.

<sup>106</sup> "I Refuse to be One of 20 Million 'Acceptable' Dead," UCB WFP Archives, 9-20, "I Refuse to be One of 20 Million Acceptable Dead" Campaign, 1982; "Reagan Will Be the Death Of Us!" AU WSP Archives, Box 14, Reagan Policy, 1980-1987.

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 132.

<sup>108</sup> "Note from Mariene River," UCB WFP Archives, 9-20, "I Refuse to be One of 20 Million Acceptable Dead" Campaign, 1982.

<sup>109</sup> *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, February 1983, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Carol Cohn, "'Clean Bombs' and Clean Language," in *Women, Militarism, and War: Essays in History, Politics and Social Theory*, eds. Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), 34.

led him on a determined pursuit of his SDI “dream” throughout the 1980s.<sup>111</sup> Its planned use of intricate and futuristic lasers to blast missiles out of the sky saw the initiative derogatively labelled “Star Wars” by its opponents, including members of the scientific community who rebuffed the President’s unreasonable expectations of “current technology.”<sup>112</sup> Yet Reagan pressed ahead with his plans in the midst of widespread public apathy. With public opinion on SDI remaining mixed, Women Strike for Peace sought to galvanise opposition. It predicted that “Star Wars will fall on the facts of it – when enough people have the facts.”<sup>113</sup> Noting public confusion and lack of knowledge about SDI, Ethel Taylor drafted *A Basic Primer on Star Wars for the Legitimately Confused*. A central part of WSP’s Stop Star Wars campaign, the booklet addressed “all those Americans who are legitimately confused by and scared of this escalation of the nuclear arms race into space.”<sup>114</sup> Taylor concisely described the impossibilities of SDI’s planned function and spelled out the farcical nature of research into the program. Referencing the criticisms of renowned scientists, the booklet argued that the public had a right to be confused about the program, as officials had systematically “swindled” them through a concerted program of “disinformation and the selling of Star Wars.”<sup>115</sup> WSP sought to ridicule Reagan’s vision by pointing out the similarities between SDI and a futuristic weapon featured in *Murder in the Air*, a 1940 movie starring the President. WSP mockingly remarked that he “is now starring in another science fiction production.”<sup>116</sup>

*Primer* was distributed with an “educational kit” designed to help activists teach the intricacies of SDI to the public.<sup>117</sup> The inclusion of a detailed slide show and accompanying script encouraged WSPers to lead study groups and public meetings on the issue. “A Short Course for the Legitimately Confused” covered the origins and history of the nuclear arms race before discussing SDI and the 1968 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. It then explained, in simple terms, how missile defence was expected to

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<sup>111</sup> Don Oberdorfer, *The Turn: How the Cold War Came to an End: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1990* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 25; DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 313.

<sup>112</sup> Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 394; Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 477-478, 594-599.

<sup>113</sup> “Stop Star Wars: A Campaign of Women Strike for Peace,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, WSP Internal Notes, Goals etc. Star Wars.

<sup>114</sup> “A Basic Primer on Star Wars for the Legitimately Confused,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-076, Material from Refile Box (1992), i.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>116</sup> “Stop Star Wars: A Campaign of Women Strike for Peace,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, WSP Internal Notes, Goals etc. Star Wars.

<sup>117</sup> “Letter from Ethel Taylor,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, Slide Show – Final Script and Packet.

function and the problems involved, encouraging people to “start the process of change where they live.”<sup>118</sup> By combining *Primer* with an appealing educational show, WSP’s Stop Star Wars campaign proved highly popular. Fellow peace activists called it an “excellent tool...both informative and readable.”<sup>119</sup> The group distributed 45,000 copies of the booklet in 1986. By the following year Taylor reported it had gone into its “eighth 10,000 printing.”<sup>120</sup>

## **The Relevance of Women Strike for Peace**

Resurgence in antinuclear activism re-energised WSP’s members, but also allowed them to reflect positively on their past efforts for peace and disarmament. New medical research vindicated the organisation’s historic stance against atmospheric nuclear testing, as studies claimed that communities subjected to the fallout from 1950s weapons tests developed cancer in higher numbers than those in other parts of the country.<sup>121</sup> A law suit brought against the government on behalf of soldiers whose health was affected by their involvement in weapons tests became a national scandal.<sup>122</sup> A plethora of books supported the notion that the government consistently misled the public and knowingly subjected them to harmful doses of nuclear radiation.<sup>123</sup> News

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<sup>118</sup> “Star Wars: A Short Course for the Legitimately Confused,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, Slide Show – Final Script and Packet.

<sup>119</sup> “Letter from Sister Diane Edwards IHM,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, Primer Promotion Religious Orders.

<sup>120</sup> “Stop Star Wars: A Campaign of Women Strike for Peace,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 3, WSP Internal Notes, Goals etc. Star Wars; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>121</sup> “Warning on Utah Fallout is Termed Inadequate,” *New York Times*, 22 September 1982, A20; “1949 Test inked to Radiation in Northwest,” *New York Times*, 9 March 1986, 35; “Excess of Leukemia Detected In Fallout Zones, Doctor Says,” *New York Times*, 18 September 1982, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Judith Miller, “4 Veterans Suing U.S. Over Exposure in ‘54 Atom Test,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1982, B15; States News Service, “Atomic Veterans Press for Benefits,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1982, NJ10; Judy Mann, “Atomic Victims,” *The Washington Post*, 20 April 1983, C1; “Atomic Veterans’ Plead for Better Treatment, Recognition,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 July 1983, 5; “Reagan’s Advisers Push Veto of ‘Atomic Veterans’ Measure,” *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1988, 16; Howard Ball, “In the 1950s, the Government said its atomic tests in Nevada were safe. Now, faced with a high cancer rate, people living downwind of the test sites are disillusioned. Did Washington lie?” *New York Times*, 9 February 1986, SM33; “Report Tells of ‘46 Warning on Atomic Tests,” *New York Times*, 25 May 1983, A16; George Raine, “Expert Faults U.S. on 50’s Atom Tests,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1982, 32; “Bomb Test Official Testifies on Fallout,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 September 1982, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas H. Saffer and Orville E. Kelly, *Countdown Zero* (New York: Putnam, 1982); Tod Ensign and Michael Uhl, *G.I. Guinea Pigs: How the Pentagon Exposed Our Troops to Dangers More Deadly Than War* (New York: Playboy Press, 1980); Harvey Wasserman and Norman Solomon, *Killing Our Own: The Disaster of America’s Experience with Atomic Radiation* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982); Leslie J. Freeman, *Nuclear Witnesses: Insiders Speak Out* (New York: Norton, 1981); Howard L. Rosenberg, *Atomic Soldiers: American Victims of Nuclear Experiments* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980); Blanche Wiesen Cook, “The Legacy of Atomic Testing,” *New York Times*, 1 August 1982, BR3; Fred C. Shapiro, “The Glowing of America,” *The Washington Post*, 25 July 1982, BW4.

headlines began to report that the radiation emitted from earlier weapons tests exceeded the levels dispersed by the recent Chernobyl reactor meltdown.<sup>124</sup> Meanwhile, the concept of “nuclear winter” emerged to describe the environmental effects of a nuclear war. In addition to the immediate death and destruction caused by thousands of multi-megaton explosions, studies predicted that a massive release of dust and smoke reaching the upper atmosphere would exacerbate the already deadly effects of radiation.<sup>125</sup> A “climactic catastrophe” would occur with freezing temperatures and the failure of crops leading to global famine and billions of deaths.<sup>126</sup> Doctors criticised notions that the health service could adequately treat the wounded amidst the inevitable ruins of American cities.<sup>127</sup> The government’s predications that the United States could recover from a war within “just two to four years” seemed recklessly naïve in light of these new understandings.<sup>128</sup>

The media also exhibited antinuclear sensibilities. In February *The New Yorker* published a series of articles by journalist Jonathan Schell, depicting the implications and consequences of a nuclear war. The serialisation and later publication of *The Fate of the Earth* drew substantial support, eliciting praise and horror in equal measure for its depiction, not only of “the extinction of mankind,” but of “the death of the earth.”<sup>129</sup> Film and television provided their own visual interpretations of a post-nuclear world. In November 1983, ABC aired *The Day After*, a television movie following the residents

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<sup>124</sup> Casey Burko, “Fallout from ‘60s A-tests worse than Chernobyl,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 June 1986, E3.

<sup>125</sup> Paul J. Crutzen and John W. Birks, “The Atmosphere After a Nuclear War: Twilight at Noon,” *Ambio*, 2, No. 2-3 (1982), 114-125.

<sup>126</sup> Stanley L. Thompson and Stephen H. Schneider, “The Nuclear Winter Debate,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 65 (Fall 1986), 163-178; Carl Sagan and Richard Turco, “Don’t Relax About Nuclear Winter Just Yet,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1990, A14.

<sup>127</sup> S. Bergstrom et al., *Effects of Nuclear War on Health and Health Services: Report of the International Committee of Experts in Medical Sciences and Public Health to Implement Resolution WHA34.38* (World Health Organization, 1984).

<sup>128</sup> Scheer, *With Enough Shovels*, 18; DeGroot, *The Bomb*, 306; Carl Sagan, “The Nuclear Winter,” *Boston Globe*, 30 October 1983, SMA4; Terry Atlas, “A Grim Picture of Nuclear War,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 October 1983, 8; Philip Shabecoff, “Grimmer View Is Given of Nuclear War Effects,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1983, A16; Philip J. Hilts, “Scientists Say Nuclear War Could Cause Climactic Disaster,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1983, A1.

<sup>129</sup> Jonathan Schell, “Reflections: The Fate of the Earth – A Republic of Insects and Grass,” *The New Yorker*, 1 February 1982, 47-113; “Reflections: The Fate of the Earth – The Second Death,” *The New Yorker*, 8 February 1982, 48-109; “Reflections: The Fate of the Earth – The Choice,” *The New Yorker*, 15 February 1982, 45-107; Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth and the Abolition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 109; Michele Slung, “Book Report: Nuclear Fears,” *The Washington Post*, 28 February 1982, BW15; John Leonard, “Books of the Times: The Fate of the Earth,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1982, C15; Kai Erikson, “A Horror Beyond Comprehension: The Fate of the Earth,” *New York Times*, 11 April 1982, BR3; James Lardner, “The Bomb Schell: the Media Fallout After ‘The Fate of the Earth’,” *The Washington Post*, 22 April 1982, C1; Richard Rhodes, “Schell’s Timely Nuclear Nightmare Right on Target,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 April 1982, H1.

of Lawrence, Kansas, as they attempted, in vain, to survive a nuclear exchange between the US and the USSR. A wave of controversy greeted the film. Images of victims, unable to escape the attack and left facing certain death amidst the rubble of their idyllic community, proved harrowing for many.<sup>130</sup> The film buttressed the notion that the public needed a voice in discussions over nuclear policy. Similar shows ensured that fear of nuclear war remained visible worldwide. *Countdown to Looking Glass* aired on Canadian TV in 1984, detailing the fictional events leading up to nuclear war from the perspective of news anchors, while the British public witnessed a catastrophic image of life following a nuclear attack when *Threads* aired in the same year. WSP felt their earlier demonstrations were validated by such public displays of antinuclear views.<sup>131</sup>

Reagan's policies in Central America supplied another opportunity for WSPers to publicly celebrate their past endeavours. With revolutions and counter-revolutions occurring across Central America, the president saw in the region "an opportunity to resume the anti-communist struggle abandoned in Vietnam."<sup>132</sup> He invoked the notion of falling dominoes to justify America military.<sup>133</sup> WSP took solace from the difficulties the president faced in achieving support for his policies.<sup>134</sup> Amy Swerdlow argued that the "United States can't invade Nicaragua as easily as it could have" if anti-Vietnam War activism had not occurred.<sup>135</sup> Ruth Pinkson found "tremendous progress" to have come from the group's earlier activism, while Donna Allen proudly declared that "we stopped the thing in Central America. You know we did."<sup>136</sup> Todd Gitlin supported these sentiments, suggesting that Reagan's continuing troubles with the Vietnam

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<sup>130</sup> Tom Shales, "'The Day After' Approaches," *The Washington Post*, 11 October 1983, C1; John Corry, "'The Day After': TV as a Rallying Force," *New York Times*, 20 November 1983, H1. Jack Thomas, "Before 'The Day After'," *Boston Globe*, 18 November 1983, 81; Kenneth J. Cooper, "For Some Viewers, a Sleepless Night After Watching TV's 'The Day After'," *Boston Globe*, 22 November 1983, 6; Dan Sullivan, "After the Shock of 'The Day After'," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1983, G1; "Letters to the Editor," *The Washington Post*, 24 November 1983, A26; "Reactions to 'The Day After' Holocaust," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 November 1983, N16; Geraldine Ferraro, *Ferraro: My Story* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 121.

<sup>131</sup> Ruth Rosen, "Next Time, Listen to Mother," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1997.

<sup>132</sup> Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 394.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas G. Goodnight, "Reagan, Vietnam, and Central America: Public Memory and the Politics of Fragmentation," in *Beyond the Rhetorical Presidency*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 127, 151.

<sup>134</sup> Goodnight, "Reagan, Vietnam, and Central America," 123; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; "Minutes of Meeting: Women Strike for Peace Annual National Conference 11/10/83-11/13/83," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1983.

<sup>135</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>136</sup> Pinkson interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Allen interview, 26 April 1989, ARS.0056.



Syndrome owed much to the work of previous anti-war campaigns.<sup>137</sup> Historian Bradford Martin said that “it is a notable outcome of this era...that Americans do not speak of the ‘Nicaragua War’.”<sup>138</sup>

The increasing numbers of female activists suggested that WSP possessed a legacy as a pioneering peace organisation as public descriptions of the contemporary antinuclear movement referenced the past activities and history of the organisation.<sup>139</sup> Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND) demonstrated the continuing saliency of WSP’s appeal. Following her successful revival of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Dr. Helen Caldicott held an influential role within the peace movement and, along with Randall Forsberg, represented “the growing importance of women in the movement.”<sup>140</sup> She founded WAND in Cambridge, MA, taking inspiration directly from Women Strike for Peace. Under Caldicott’s guidance the group adopted a maternalist outlook towards its peace work, justifying the activism of its members by saying “as mothers we must make sure the world is safe for our babies.”<sup>141</sup> Its founding statement argued that “as women, we have traditionally been assigned the responsibility of caring for and raising children” and, “accustomed to managing a home, a family, and a job, they can organize the United States for survival.”<sup>142</sup> Even WAND’s aims imitated those of Women Strike for Peace. The group listed as its most important legislative priority the passage of bills “that can lead to a bilateral testing moratorium and eventual negotiation of a comprehensive test ban treaty.”<sup>143</sup> Though feminist commentators, such as Simone DeBeauvoir, remained critical of organising around maternal identity, WAND’s soaring membership showed the latent power of such a stance.<sup>144</sup>

The rise of women’s peace camps in the early 1980s also raised interest in WSP’s historical example. The Greenham Common Peace Camp made headlines worldwide in 1981 for its direct action tactics against the stationing of American cruise missiles at RAF Greenham Common. Women chained themselves to the perimeter

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<sup>137</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 435; “No Weapons, No Advisers, No Vietnam in El Salvador,” CHM WFP Archives, 2-1, WFP El Salvador 1981-1982.

<sup>138</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, xii.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Hodge, “Mock Evacuation of D.C. Set Today,” *The Washington Post*, 26 May 1984, B2.

<sup>140</sup> Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam*, 108.

<sup>141</sup> Johanna Brenner, “Beyond Essentialism: Feminist Theory and Strategy in the Peace Movement,” in *Reshaping the US Left: Popular Struggles in the 1980s*, eds. Mike Davis and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1988), 104; Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam*, 108.

<sup>142</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women’s Issue*, 240.

<sup>143</sup> “Congressional Action Alert, 20 January 1986,” AU WSP Archives, Box 16, WAND (Women’s Action for Nuclear Disarmament), 1984-1993.

<sup>144</sup> Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb*, 153, 156.

fence, blockaded deliveries, and infiltrated the base. The peace camp inspired a wave of similar protest actions around the world. Peace encampments formed across the United States, notably at Puget Sound in Seattle and outside the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California. The most significant iteration developed in Seneca, New York. Formed over summer 1983, the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice drew thousands to an area outside the Seneca Army Depot. Protesting the depot's complicity in deporting missiles to Europe, the camp became a "bold experiment in a communal life of nonviolence" and a staging point for several acts of direct action protest.<sup>145</sup> Women Strike for Peace had a notable role in the organising and maintenance of camps in the UK and the US. WSPers travelled to Greenham Common to offer their support, while activists remaining in the US served as contacts and organisational staffers for the Seneca Peace Encampment. Across the country WSPers added to the numbers engaged in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience.<sup>146</sup>

New activists were eager to learn about the history of the women's peace movement. Jill Liddington, a contributor to Greenham Common, explained that the upsurge in activities stoked "curiosity about precedents" and provoked the question, "did women do anything for peace *before* Greenham?"<sup>147</sup> Attempting to create a forum for integration, information sharing, dialogue, and action, the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment offered a summer program of workshops dealing with issues relating to women and peace.<sup>148</sup> Workshops celebrated "herstory" and placed the recent upsurge in protest within a long history of women's activism.<sup>149</sup> As activists became aware of past influences, the story of Women Strike for Peace was disseminated to a new generation. A pamphlet explaining the peace camp phenomenon stated that "seeds for believing the effectiveness of such actions" came from previously successful instances of feminist organising, such as the "women's peace strike of 1961." The piece continued by equating the impact of Women Strike for Peace with the historic 1848 Seneca Falls

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<sup>145</sup> Cataldo et al., *The Women's Encampment*, 3; Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, *Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice: Resource Handbook* (New York: Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, Summer 1983).

<sup>146</sup> "Minutes of Conference," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1983; "Letter from Edith Villastrigo to Janet Harrell, 29 December 1983," AU WSP Archives, Box 8, Greenham Common Women, 1983-1987; "Letter from Hazel Grossman to 'Fellow Peace Workers,' August 1983," UCB WFP Archives, 9-26, University of California Nuclear Weapons Lab Conversion Project and Livermore Action Group 1983.

<sup>147</sup> Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common*, 2-3.

<sup>148</sup> "A Call to Action, Seneca Army Depot Summer 1984," AU WSP Archives, Box 14, Seneca Women's Peace Encampment, 1983-1984.

<sup>149</sup> Cataldo et al., *The Women's Encampment*, 10-13.

Women's Rights Convention.<sup>150</sup> Workshops taught the history of "Women in the Peace Movement" by describing centuries of women's efforts before reciting the "herstory of WSP."<sup>151</sup> Dagmar Wilson provided services as a guest lecturer for courses discussing the "roots of the women's peace movement" and the publication of Amy Swerdlow's first historical article on Women Strike for Peace, the celebrated "Ladies' Day at the Capitol," drew praise for its contextual relevance to women's activism of the 1980s.<sup>152</sup>

The fortunes of the contemporary peace movement validated WSP's historic efforts and raised the importance of the group's history, but also determined the way activists framed their own experiences. The testimony of Esther Newill, a key figure from Riverdale WSP in New York, provides an excellent example of this. The Women's Peace Oral History Project interviewed Newill in 1980, just prior to Reagan's election and in the midst of Carter's rising militarism. In this context, Newill offered a sobering reflection of her time with Women Strike for Peace. She condemned the group's early reluctance to oppose the Vietnam War, referred to frequent divisions within groups, and offered a near-conspiratorial account of leading figures stymying grassroots voices. Reflecting on the contemporary peace movement, she chastised WSP's "Jobs for Peace" campaign that intended to lobby Congress and call for the diversion of military funds towards work programs. Newill declared, "so far as I'm concerned this is just a lot of bullshit. Memorialize Congress? Why, these bastards are the same ones that have been approving more money for the war machine than any president has asked for!"<sup>153</sup> Newill's diatribe offered a pointedly pessimistic reflection of the contemporary disarmament movement as she bemoaned her own inability to become enthused by its efforts. "I'm old and tired now, I want results! I'm not interested in any kind of an effort that does not have, well, I want a 75% chance of success!"<sup>154</sup>

Just three years later, Newill appeared transformed. She became involved with direct action protests at the Livermore weapons development facility in California in 1983 that resulted in the mass arrest of hundreds of protesters and their detention in the

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<sup>150</sup> "Why a Women's Peace Camp?" AU WSP Archives, Box 14, Seneca Women's Peace Encampment, 1983-1984.

<sup>151</sup> "Women in the Peace Movement: Conference on the Fate of the Earth, 22 September 1984," AU WSP Archives, Box 14, Seneca Women's Peace Encampment, 1983-1984.

<sup>152</sup> "Women in the Peace Movement," AU WSP Archives, Box 8, Greenham Common Women, 1983-1987; Ruth Milkman and Rayna Rapp, "Preface," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Autumn 1982): 491-492.

<sup>153</sup> Newill interview, 23 February 1980, ARS.0056.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

Santa Rita Women's Jail. In an impudent twist, the protesters decided to call the prison the "Santa Rita Peace Camp" for the duration of their stay. They remade the prison in the image of the Greenham Common and Seneca Peace Camps, offering educational workshops, nightly entertainment shows, and art classes. The protesters' jovial attitude won over several guards. The whole experience refreshed Newill. She recounted with humour her involvement with the Livermore protests and the Santa Rita Peace Camp. Departing from the sentiments expressed in her earlier interview, she praised WSP, remarking that its idea that "everyone is a leader and no one is a leader" created "a long and painful process, but my gosh it works!" Her faith in the peace movement renewed, she encouraged others to join the cause, claiming that "we're unbeatable." Newill continued by stating her belief that "in the course of winning this struggle, and I know we're going to win, we're going to change society!"<sup>155</sup> The transformation in tone, from downhearted pessimism to unbridled positivity, reflected the persuasive influence of contemporary circumstances on Newill's memory. As the fortunes of the movement improved and instances of activism increased, members of Women Strike for Peace adopted a more positive outlook on their past efforts. They saw their actions as "part of an ongoing process" that, they believed, would result in the attainment of their goals.<sup>156</sup> While providing WSPers with relevant contemporary issues to inform their histories, the rising fortunes of the United States peace and disarmament movement allowed Women Strike for Peace to reflect positively on their past achievements.

### **The End of Women Strike for Peace**

Although individual activists felt rejuvenated, the future of their organisation did not appear bright as it moved into the latter half of the decade. Members continued to wrestle with the problems that had plagued WSP since its inception, as national meetings revived past uncertainties over membership and finances. Addressing the 1984 national conference, Pat Gross voiced her exasperation at the perceived inability to make the organisation appealing to potential activists. "Although WSP has not lost ground, it is barely holding its own...now is an ideal time to increase our membership, but HOW?!"<sup>157</sup> One activist remarked in March 1983, that "the sad fact is that in 22

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> "Minutes National Conference 1984," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1984.

years we have less branches than when we started and the same people are in positions of leadership.”<sup>158</sup> Unease grew over the group’s aging character. Ethel Taylor remarked at the 1986 national conference that “25 years ago, our feet didn’t hurt, our eyesight was keener, and we had more of a waistline.”<sup>159</sup> She saw the recruitment of young members as an urgent necessity if WSP was to groom the future of the organisation. WSPers worried that “we are not developing a replaceable leadership.”<sup>160</sup> Los Angeles WISPer Mary Clarke observed in 1970 that “our natural allies in our work are our sons and daughters, a generation that has inherited our mistakes and problems, but a generation that has taken heart from our challenge.”<sup>161</sup> But older activists began to recognise their inability to entice their children to join. Ethel Taylor’s daughter, while proud of her mother’s efforts, did not herself “take time for activism.”<sup>162</sup>

Financial uncertainty still clouded WSP’s future. East Bay WFP persisted in their criticisms of the National Office, raising their concerns over the costs of upkeep amidst the “financial problems besetting our organisation.”<sup>163</sup> That WSP should retain a “unique identity” remained a popular belief. Repeating the anxiety experienced over the group’s earlier involvement in anti-war coalitions, some stressed their fear that involvement in issues unrelated to nuclear disarmament could see WSP “end up a group of women without a real purpose.”<sup>164</sup>

WSP’s problems were exacerbated by the group’s inability to adapt to a modern era of social protest. In the early 1980s, many organisations recognised that they needed to adopt a more professional approach towards their work than previous groups that relied almost exclusively on direct action tactics. John Trinkl, addressing the disarmament movement specifically, noted that “too many progressive grassroots organisations are wedded to old-fashioned notions about citizen participation.” In the 1980s, he added, building a mass movement had less utility than “motivating grassroots

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<sup>158</sup> “Unsigned letter to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1983,” ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>159</sup> “A Summary of New York WSP Report Made at Conference 1986,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, 1986 National Conference.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid; “Minutes National Conference 1984,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1984.

<sup>161</sup> “Memo – Special Commemorative Issue, 1970,” UWS SWAP Archives, 3-13, Women Strike for Peace 1962-2000, 22.

<sup>162</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 151, 153.

<sup>163</sup> “Letter from Edith Laub to Ethel Taylor, 4 November 1987,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, National Conference 1987 Arrangements; “Sunday Afternoon, 3 October 1982,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Conference – 1982, Philadelphia PA.

<sup>164</sup> “Keynote Speech by Ethel Taylor, Delivered by Mary Clarke (For November 1988 Board Meeting),” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, Minutes National WSP Board – 1988.

activists to execute a simple financial transaction – writing a small but substantial check.”<sup>165</sup> WAND confronted this necessity, conducting a nine-month research initiative into organisational strategy. The group accepted that “tremendous social and technological change,” including the development of telecommunications and the “complexity of everyday life,” necessitated a reassessment in how it communicated with the public.<sup>166</sup> WAND acknowledged that its programs should consider that most people now “would prefer to write a check and delegate management responsibility to a trained professional staff.”<sup>167</sup> The group felt that the majority of the public now understood the dangers and consequences of nuclear war and did not need further convincing. It instead set out to tackle policy at a governmental level. Professional lobbyists, complemented by donor networks and financial contributions, appeared the most effective way to achieve this. The Freeze movement also engaged with political processes and formed political action committees to “manipulate the technology and organisation of contemporary campaigning.”<sup>168</sup> Bradford Martin suggests that, while heavily influenced by their 1960s predecessors, the majority of 1980s activists started to develop “new tactical innovations...to supplement 1960s-style direct action.”<sup>169</sup>

Some WSP leaders attempted to update the organisation’s operations and conspired to create the WSP Foundation: Women Strike for Peace Research and Education Fund, Inc. Unveiled at the 1982 national conference, the creators explained their motives. The foundation would grant tax-exempt status to WSP for the first time, making it comparable to its contemporaries, such as WILPF, while yielding more financial benefits.<sup>170</sup> The foundation promised an easier method of fundraising and the prospect of achieving donations from sources who exclusively offered grants to tax-deductible organisations.<sup>171</sup> The appearance of the fund’s label on WSP campaign documents certainly made the group appear more professional, as well as assuring potential donors that “all contributions are tax deductible.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Trinkl, “Struggles for Disarmament in the USA,” 56-58.

<sup>166</sup> WAND Education Fund, *Turnabout: The Emerging New Realism in the Nuclear Age* (Arlington, MA: WAND Education Fund, 1986), 1.

<sup>167</sup> Trinkl, “Struggles for Disarmament in the USA,” 56.

<sup>168</sup> Cockburn and Ridgeway, “The Freeze Movement Versus Reagan,” 11.

<sup>169</sup> Martin, *The Other Eighties*, xiv-xv.

<sup>170</sup> “The WSP Foundation: Women Strike for Peace Research & Education Fund, Inc.” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> “I Refuse to be One of 20 Million ‘Acceptable’ Dead,” UCB WFP Archives, 9-20, “I Refuse to be One of 20 Million Acceptable Dead” Campaign, 1982.

WSP also began implementing official membership, reversing its lifelong opposition to such an organisational system. Jean Shulman broke news of the change to activists. She reassured women that requesting membership dues did not signify a departure from WSP's past initiatives that sought yearly subscription payments in return for issues of the group's newsletter. Shulman reasoned that most activists already "proudly proclaim 'I am a member of WSP' and consider their subscription synonymous with being a member of WSP" anyway. She argued that official membership simply formalised an existing system.<sup>173</sup> East Bay WSPer Edith Laub supported the new system. In the past, she explained, potential activists interested in joining WSP expressed "some unhappiness" when told "we were not a membership organisation. There are people who feel there is something more stable, valuable, meaningful in an organisation that gives you a card."<sup>174</sup> Supporters hoped that official membership would attract new activists, while the distribution of membership cards to existing WSPers would renew pride in the organisation among those already committed.

Those accustomed to the traditional methods, however, appeared uncomfortable with attempts to change WSP and expressed their discontent. Dagmar Wilson, at this stage more involved with Loudoun County Citizens for Disarmament, wrote of her unhappiness at modifications to WSP's organising. Edith Villastrigo, the National Legislative Director, also voiced concerns.<sup>175</sup> New processes caused "quite a bit of confusion," obliging Secretary Ruth Tabak to distribute a step by step guide of the organisation's latest procedures.<sup>176</sup> While some urged WSP to revert to its previous setup, those wishing to modernise grew exasperated with what they saw as stubborn unwillingness to adapt to contemporary circumstances.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> "Letter from Jean Shulman," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>174</sup> "Note from Edith Laub to Edith Villastrigo, 22 April 1983," AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>175</sup> "Unsigned letter to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1983," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference; "In Preparation for 1983 WSP Conference: Issue for Discussion – Reexamination of WSP Membership Policy," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>176</sup> "Letter from Ruth Tabak to Dagmar Wilson, 23 December 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference; "Procedures for Funding Requests Made to the WSP Research & Education Fund, Inc." SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>177</sup> "Unsigned letter to Dagmar Wilson, 8 March 1983," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference; "In Preparation for 1983 WSP Conference: Issue for Discussion – Reexamination of WSP Membership Policy," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference; "Note from Edith Laub to Edith Villastrigo, 22 April 1983," AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

Reluctance to alter WSP's processes arose from more than simple uncertainty over new processes. Those in opposition to modernisation efforts were concerned that changes to the group's methods could profoundly alter its very identity. WSP had forever publicised its members as non-political housewives agreeing on decisions by consensus and stressed that the structureless format of the group was an outgrowth of their attitudes towards activism and community organising generally. Attempts to change Women Strike for Peace into a more professional unit therefore troubled its activists on a personal level. Couching their opposition to the new membership policy in practical terms, Washington D.C. WSPers nevertheless opined that making Women Strike for Peace "a membership organisation and an activist women's movement" deeply affected them personally.<sup>178</sup> Edith Laub, who continued to support the modernisation of WSP, acknowledged that "our women were terrified of losing their identity, their privacy, their 'differentness'" should WSP try to change its method of organising.<sup>179</sup>

As such, in contrast to other failing organisations, WSPers maintained a vigorous sense of their organisation's identity and image.<sup>180</sup> Even updates made to WSP's newsletters yielded critiques of the group's attempts to modernise. Following some redesigns, a complaint suggested that WSP no longer held its former appeal. The organisation now appeared "to have enough money to hire editors" and "pay for printing," signalling a departure from its previously unsophisticated methods. "Hurrah for your becoming more affluent," the complaint continued, "but you attract me less." That the organisation now owned a word processor meant it had "enough money," and therefore should no longer need to request funds from its supporters. The letter ruminated on the amateur qualities of past mailings, "mimeographed, stapled together. It gave me the impression that here were women really working for peace, an inexpensive voice crying in the wilderness that touched my heart and made me contribute."<sup>181</sup> By updating the newsletter to a "modern format," the complainant felt that WSP had betrayed its own identity.

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<sup>178</sup> "In Preparation for 1983 WSP Conference: Issue for Discussion – Reexamination of WSP Membership Policy," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference.

<sup>179</sup> "Note from Edith Laub to Edith Villastrigo, 22 April 1983," AU WSP Archives, Box 2, History 1961-1994.

<sup>180</sup> Friedman and McAdam, "Collective Identity and Activism," 167.

<sup>181</sup> "Unsigned letter to Women Strike for Peace, 19 October 1987," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Miscellaneous Correspondence; "Letter from Ethel Taylor to Helen, 4 November 1987," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Miscellaneous Correspondence.



Aversion to modernisation also hindered WSP's ability to adapt to the changing status of women in the 1980s. In its 1960s heyday the organisation depended on people to volunteer their time by providing administrative and organisational help without pay. The ascent of women's liberation, however, empowered women to demand payment for these sorts of tasks. The National Organisation for Women (NOW) took the position that volunteering was akin to unpaid housework and extended women's domestic subordination into the public sphere. NOW observed that modern-middle class women felt that such work conferred "little status" and reinforced women's low self-image.<sup>182</sup> WSP acknowledged these sentiments. Leaders stated that "these are different times than 25 years ago. Women need to work for money." They observed that "the full-time volunteers who used to be available are not available anymore" and accepted that "two of our most active, loyal younger Philadelphia members" would look for part-time paying jobs and limit their contributions to WSP.<sup>183</sup> But the organisation still struggled to adapt to this modern climate and chose not install more paid positions. Rather than it being "a reflection on the worth of the organisation," WSP's leaders felt these circumstances were "a reflection of reality" they could do little to change.<sup>184</sup>

Many groups experienced similar problems in this period. Assessing WSP's recruitment of new, young activists, Libby Frank asserted that "Church Women United" and WILPF also wrestled with membership issues. She noted that, at one meeting, she "sat next to" the 65-year-old William Sloane Coffin, President of SANE/Freeze and a veteran of the peace movement. "He spoke at a WILPF luncheon in NYC and he thinks he was the youngest person there!"<sup>185</sup> But more robust peer organisations absorbed such challenges and actually expanded their membership in this period. By early 1985 SANE boasted over 100,000 members. WAND's professional approach appealed to young female activists who swelled its ranks to 25,000. Meanwhile, the rigid organisation and historic prestige of WILPF ensured that it progressed throughout the

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<sup>182</sup> Marilyn Gittell and Teresa Shtob, "Changing Women's Roles in Political Volunteerism and Reform of the City," *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Supplement. Women and the American City (Spring 1980): S77; National Organization for Women, *Task Force on Volunteerism, Position Paper* (Washington, D.C.: National Organization for Women, November 1973); Peggy Petrzelka and Susan E. Mannon, "Keepin' This Little Town Going: Gender and Volunteerism in Rural America," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (April 2006): 236-258.

<sup>183</sup> "Meeting Notes for Thurs, 5/4/88," UCB WFP Archives, 11-8, Office Files – General, 1988.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> "Report to May WSP Board Meeting, Libby Frank," AU WSP Archives, Box 1, Board – 1988-1989, 1992.

decade.<sup>186</sup> WSP's persistence in its loose organisational structure, in contrast, saw it ill-equipped to deal with the issue. Discussions at national conferences conceded that it could not compete with its rivals. Its "sister group WILPF" appealed to WSP's constituency, but was in a better position to do so, while "many women have already joined" SANE or WAND.<sup>187</sup>

Ultimately Women Strike for Peace appeared unable to cultivate sustained commitment to its organisation from anyone but the loyal leadership that had served since the early 1960s. The widespread public distribution of WSP materials, such as the "1 in 20 Acceptable Dead" ads and the *Stop Star Wars Primer*, masked poor participation in WSP events. Only 22 women attended the 1982 Philadelphia national conference, while 29 travelled to Berkeley the following year, substantially lower than the near 100 members expected to attend in previous decades.<sup>188</sup> National Coordinator Ethel Taylor initiated most of WSP's projects during the 1980s as she felt solely responsible for the instigation of national campaigns.<sup>189</sup> The burden on WSP's leaders to keep the organisation going became clear in the aftermath of Shirley Lens' withdrawal from Chicago WFP. Lens had influenced activities in the Chicago area since the branch's foundation. On announcing her decision to retire in 1986, the branch panicked and, in her absence, felt it would struggle "to keep Women for Peace as a viable group." Writing to its members, branch staff exhorted that "we will have to pitch in to help fill the gap."<sup>190</sup> By the end of the decade, Taylor acknowledged that, although WSP had made a "real national contribution in grassroots education" in the last few

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<sup>186</sup> Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb*, 156.

<sup>187</sup> "In Preparation for 1983 WSP Conference: Issue for Discussion – Reexamination of WSP Membership Policy," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 17, 21<sup>st</sup> Annual National Conference; "Minutes National Conference 1984, Presentation of Organizational Matters by Pat Gross," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1984.

<sup>188</sup> Attendance at the 1962 national conference was 105, 82 participated in 1964, 76 WSP activists took part in 1966, while 82 travelled to Santa Barbara in 1972, at a time many considered the group to be at a nadir; "WISP Conference, Ann Arbor – June '62," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI; "Roster – 1964 National Conference of WSP," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Conference – 1964, Winnetka IL; "Women Strike for Peace – 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference – Attenders," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Conference – 1966, Chicago IL; "W.S.P. National Conference, 1972," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 1, National Conference – 1972, Santa Barbara CA; "Registration of Delegates to 1983 WSP Conference – Berkeley, CA," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, Conference 1983; "Minutes of the WSP National Conference, Monday, 4 October 1982," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1, National Conference 1982 and Prior.

<sup>189</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 129.

<sup>190</sup> "Letter from Noreen Warnock," CHM WFP Archives, 8-11, Misc Administration Materials.

years, the National Office only survived thanks to the “continuous painful struggle on the part of a few of us to maintain it” and the “financial generosity” of several others.<sup>191</sup>

WSP’s decline seemed inevitable. Despite its best efforts, the public viewed the organisation as peripheral and ineffectual compared to newer groups. Judy Mann, a journalist who wrote about the politics of the women’s movement, lamented that British peace activists visiting the US chose to base their operations in the headquarters of Women Strike for Peace, “which is hardly the political arm of the League of Women Voters.”<sup>192</sup> A rumour circulating around San Francisco in 1984 claimed that Women for Peace was “dead.”<sup>193</sup> By the end of the decade WSP members accepted “we are no longer visible and viable as a national movement. Although our cause is vital and connected to other causes, it is for the other causes that women are marching.”<sup>194</sup>

### **“Unfinished Business” and Defining Success**

By the mid-1980s, the surge of optimism within the peace movement again receded. In addition to the fading fortunes of SANE, WSP, and the Freeze campaign, the 1984 re-election of Ronald Reagan served to undermine the confidence of many peace activists within the United States.<sup>195</sup> Defeated Vice-Presidential Candidate Geraldine Ferraro opined that the Democratic campaign could not have hoped to scupper the incumbent’s chances. Even though many voters agreed with the Democratic platform, Reagan’s “style had been more appealing to the voters than his substance...his politics of optimism, of never being the bearer of bad news, had catapulted him into popularity – and victory.”<sup>196</sup> WSPers, having campaigned for Walter Mondale, seethed with frustration at his defeat. Amy Swerdlow, now less involved with WSP, recalled wanting to “tear my hair out and say ‘for heaven’s sake, what’s going on in this country?!’”<sup>197</sup> The huge Republican victory came as a blow to Freeze activists who had hoped to influence the election. McCrea and Markle noted that the movement itself “began to fall

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<sup>191</sup> “Meeting Notes for Thurs, 5/4/88,” UCB WFP Archives, 11-8, Office Files – General, 1988; “Message from Ethel Taylor to 2/7/90 Meeting,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11, Coordinating Committee Meeting National 2-7-90.

<sup>192</sup> Judy Mann, “Stop the Arms Race: It Seems So Simple,” *The Washington Post*, 8 May 1981, B1.

<sup>193</sup> “Letter from Hazel Grossman, 16 March 1984,” UCB WFP Archives, 10-3, Office Files – General, 1984.

<sup>194</sup> “Message from Ethel Taylor to 2/7/90 Meeting,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11, Coordinating Committee Meeting National 2-7-90.

<sup>195</sup> Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 162; McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 112.

<sup>196</sup> Ferraro, *Ferraro*, 311.

<sup>197</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

apart” in 1985.<sup>198</sup> Randy Kehler, one of the leaders of the Freeze campaign, explained that “the movement suffered from having a support based that was ‘a mile wide and an inch deep.’”<sup>199</sup> In 1987 the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign merged with the similarly struggling Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, renaming themselves Peace Action.

Those still working within Women Strike for Peace retained confidence and offered an altogether more positive attitude, refusing to dwell on the apparent setbacks they faced. While the organisation’s strength depleted, individuals resolved to dig in for “four more years of Reagan.”<sup>200</sup> Some voiced determined optimism on his re-election. At the 1984 national conference, Pat Gross declared that “now is an ideal time to increase our membership.”<sup>201</sup> Ethel Taylor supported such an attitude, believing that “the Reagan victory will be the prod to goose millions of Americans into the peace force because of fear.”<sup>202</sup> East Bay WFP activist Rose Dellamonica asserted that, while nuclear weapons continued to exist, “the job doesn’t end and the responsibility doesn’t end – I will probably have this sense of responsibility until the end of my life.”<sup>203</sup>

Underlying this tenacity was an understanding that Women Strike for Peace had to tie up loose ends before it collapsed. The group had “unresolved business,” chiefly the passing of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In May 1985, WSP publicly endorsed Joint Resolution 3 legislation that urged President Reagan “to resume talks with the Soviets for a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty.”<sup>204</sup> In their statement the organisation invoked their own historical legacy, tying the CTBT to their earlier campaign for the Partial Test Ban Treaty. “President Kennedy’s Limited Test Ban Treaty pledged signers ‘to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time and to continue negotiations to this end.’ This commitment is yet to be fulfilled.” Emphasising their determination, WSPers declared “a ban on all nuclear explosions is the unfinished goal of Women Strike for Peace.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> McCrea and Markle, *Minutes to Midnight*, 112.

<sup>199</sup> Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam*, 169.

<sup>200</sup> “Minutes National Conference 1984,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 90A-028, Box 1 Conference 1984.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> “Ethel Taylor Speech to 23<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary,” UCB WFP Archives, 10-4, Office Files – National, 1984.

<sup>203</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

<sup>204</sup> “The House: Test-Ban Treaty,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 March 1986, 2.

<sup>205</sup> “Statement of Support for J.J. Res. 3 by Women Strike for Peace to the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Security and Science, 8 May 1985,” UCB WFP Archives, 10-13, Office Files – WSP National, 1985.

Acknowledging the context in which activists recorded their history proves crucial to understanding their perspectives of Women Strike for Peace. With activists unrelentingly pursuing disarmament as the organisation declined, leading WSPers began offering their interpretations of the past in a series of interviews given to the Women's Peace Oral History Project. But the varying commitments of those offering their reflections affected their perceptions of the group's historical legacy. Notable differences emerged between those who remained active and those who had withdrawn. Amy Swerdlow, active in WSP only in a peripheral sense by the late 1980s, did not think it remained a relevant organisation. She acknowledged "I'm not that faithful in Women Strike for Peace...I don't see myself as one of those women who kept marching." This attitude towards activism appeared to influence her appraisal of WSP. Asked whether she had any advice to "a young person" wishing to get involved, she answered, "I would not send them to Women Strike for Peace" over other organisations. Based on Swerdlow's contemporary attitude, it is perhaps unsurprising that her history of Women Strike for Peace placed the organisation in the context of the 1960s and early 1970s. Its later activities did not seem relevant to the story Amy Swerdlow wished to tell. Throughout her 1987 oral interview she referred to the group in the past tense, despite its ongoing activities. She exclaimed that she would "hit the streets" again in the cause of peace, but her reduced interest in activism affected the way in which she addressed Women Strike for Peace.<sup>206</sup>

In contrast, existing members of the organisation exhibited a more positive reflection of the group's continuing efforts than those no longer involved. Attitudes towards the group were not necessarily informed by the fortunes of the organisation as it declined towards the end of the 1980s, but by the ongoing belief that efforts towards disarmament had to continue. Ethel Taylor in particular felt the upkeep of WSP's status as her personal burden. While Swerdlow could arguably take a more objective view of Women Strike for Peace, Taylor's position as National Coordinator saw her defend the organisation's work.<sup>207</sup> In their interviews for the Women's Peace Oral History Project in 1987, both she and Edith Villastrigo, the organisation's National Legislative Director and essentially Taylor's second-in-command, made deliberate efforts to praise WSP's current activities. They spoke of the "One in Twenty Million" Campaign and ongoing

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<sup>206</sup> Swerdlow interview, 25 September 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>207</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

efforts to cut funding for the Strategic Defence Initiative.<sup>208</sup> While Swerdlow consigned WSP to history, Taylor considered the group's late 1980s work "our most successful campaign."<sup>209</sup>

Additionally, the current WSPers proclaimed their enduring affinity with the group. Taylor spoke of Women Strike for Peace as "the most important entity" in her life. The organisation took on abstract qualities for the national coordinator, becoming "more than an organisation; it's a state of mind." In glowing terms, both Taylor and Villastrigo emphasised the transformative experience of working for peace and the harmonious community they encountered after becoming involved.<sup>210</sup> The reflections offered by remaining WSP activists represented what William Howarth and Martha Solomon understood as "oratorical autobiography," in that their motivations for recording the past determined what they recalled and how they recalled it.<sup>211</sup> In discussing their life stories current WSPers wished to create "a tool for recruiting new members" and provide an "inspirational model for followers"<sup>212</sup> Activists still embroiled in peace work did not offer reflections of the past from a teleological position but in the midst of their campaigning. As such they tied the history of Women Strike for Peace to the belief that their work was ongoing, offering an appraisal of the past that entailed a defence of the group's continuing relevance. WSPers promoted an idealised vision of their peace work as a vocation that others should become involved in, whether or not WSP survived.<sup>213</sup>

This perception explains the emphasis that activists placed on the personal fulfilment they experienced by participating in WSP's campaigns. The transformative impact of working for the peace movement appeared through Taylor's descriptions of the group's past. She described herself as a housewife following her marriage in 1937. "I cleaned a lot" she wrote in her memoir, to the extent that she was "polishing the polish."<sup>214</sup> As a result of working in Women Strike for Peace, Taylor's life changed. She proudly recalled her work as national coordinator of an internationally recognised peace group. Recounting her trip to Hanoi in December 1969, she gauged the progress

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<sup>208</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>209</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>211</sup> Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," 363-381; Solomon, "Autobiographies as Rhetorical Narratives," 354-370.

<sup>212</sup> Solomon, "Autobiographies as Rhetorical Narratives," 355.

<sup>213</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," 363-381.

<sup>214</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, xvi.

she had made in her life from childhood. “It blew my mind that little Ethel Barol, child of the Depression, formerly of Longstreth School, was standing with a baby in her arms in Hanoi, North Vietnam, as an emissary of the US women’s peace movement.”<sup>215</sup> Other narratives also revealed stories of members’ political transformation. Dagmar Wilson is frequently referred to as a “political novice,” someone with “no political experience” who managed to organise a nationally supported political movement that received recognition from around the world.<sup>216</sup> Amy Swerdlow believed Women Strike for Peace created an environment for American women to become empowered. She explained that “thousands of women who had identified themselves only as housewives found to their surprise that they could do serious research.”<sup>217</sup> In this sense, the depiction of Women Strike for Peace is altered from that of a group strictly concerned with peace to one that intended to change the lives of its activists. This fits the notion that members offered oratorical autobiographies with their recollections. It was through gauging their own transformation, as members of Women Strike for Peace, that activists shared their life stories.

The underlying motivations driving WSPers’ historical pronouncements are vital to understanding perceptions of the organisation’s successes. Ethel Taylor used a number of rhetorical flourishes to demonstrate WSP’s continuing relevance, but one technique in particular involved distancing Women Strike for Peace from any notion that it had achieved its aims. One anecdote in particular served to emphasise the perception that the organisation remained an irreverent and outspoken critic of the establishment. Following the National Women’s Conference in 1977, Taylor was personally invited by President Jimmy Carter to attend a reception at the White House. On arriving she was stopped by a security guard for additional checks. Taylor asked why she alone had been subject to such scrutiny. The guard replied, “there’s a bad Ethel Taylor out there and we had to make sure it wasn’t you.”<sup>218</sup> Taylor revelled in the story and retold it on many occasions. “If only he knew!” she later quipped. “I silently cackled and went on to join my colleagues.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>217</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 4-5.

<sup>218</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 115.

<sup>219</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056; Adams ed., *Peacework*, 18.

Social movement theorists, notably William Gamson, suggest that a group's relationship with opposition figures can be used to gauge success. Gamson argued that the level of "acceptance of a challenging group by its antagonists, as a valid spokesman for a legitimate set of interests," could show a group's impact.<sup>220</sup> Likewise, acceptance of a group by the public, through its position "as spokespeople for the cause concerned" would also demonstrate a measure of success.<sup>221</sup> David S. Meyer, writing about the Freeze campaign specifically, argued that "social movements end when they are institutionalised, that is, when they have found a means of accommodation with established political institutions and society."<sup>222</sup> In keeping with the perception that WSP had "unfinished business," Taylor publicly put distance between Women Strike for Peace and the authority figures it protested against.<sup>223</sup>

The retelling of Taylor's anecdote provides two useful insights. First, it demonstrates the leader's perception of her ideal role - a subversive, rebellious figure who displayed irreverence towards authority. The anecdote became a source of pride for the peace activist, who gleefully assumed the identity of "Bad Ethel Taylor," a constant check on the government's otherwise rampant militarism. Taylor closely tied her own identity to the image of Women Strike for Peace through her role as national coordinator. By referring to her own conduct, she argued that WSP remained important critics of government policy. Second, by foregrounding WSP's work in the late 1970s with reference to this brief incident, the national coordinator attempted to distance WSP from establishment figures that had actually supported the group's work. Indeed, during President Carter's term in office, WSP activists generally boasted that the administration tacitly endorsed the group's work. Taylor herself worked closely with the IWY Committee having received the personal approval of President Carter. Midge Costanza, Carter's liaison with non-governmental organisations, was a WSP supporter who managed to set up a meeting between activists and representatives of the Defence Department, the ACDA, and the National Security Council.<sup>224</sup> However, Taylor felt that being considered "bad" by the security services better served WSP's image than that of

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<sup>220</sup> Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, 28, 32.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> David S. Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent: The Nuclear Freeze and American Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 1.

<sup>223</sup> "Unsigned letter to WSP Branch Leaders, 28 March 1989," SCPC WSP Archives, 90A-028, Box 4, Comprehensive Test Ban Correspondence.

<sup>224</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 103-105.



it being welcomed into government circles as valid spokespeople for the peace movement.

Given her strong affinity for Women Strike for Peace, other reflections on the group's successes made by Taylor seem oddly pessimistic. She reflected that "to work for something or to have a job and rarely have a real success, never see the light, you can really go nuts."<sup>225</sup> She almost entirely dismissed the impact WSP had on nuclear disarmament and regretted that the passage of the Partial Test Ban Treaty, previously an emblem of WSP's historical victories, did not yield further gains. Taylor remarked that on her entry into peace activism "there were two bombs, and they were both ours. Now there are 50,000 in the world."<sup>226</sup> This candid assessment was not totally unique within the anti-nuclear movement. Activists had a contemporary realisation that, while the Partial Test Ban Treaty made grounds, nuclear weapons testing had not completely ceased.<sup>227</sup> Measuring the success of a peace activist group entails certain caveats, such as understanding that even small steps can count as achievements, especially if the goal is as difficult to obtain as general world disarmament.<sup>228</sup> However, Taylor downplayed any notions of WSP's success in favour of highlighting a perceived failure. As if to cement the perception that her fortunes were tied to those of Women Strike for Peace, she took the failure to secure general nuclear disarmament as a personal defeat, calling it something that would "look lousy on your resume."<sup>229</sup>

Understanding the intent behind Taylor's recollections, however, this declaration appears less a despondent reflection on WSP's history and more an incentive to continue working for peace. Taylor offered her perceptions in the midst of her activism, rather than from a teleological position. She remained energetically committed to peace work and looked to future goals. Because nuclear disarmament had not been achieved, she determined that women needed to continue mobilising and acting for peace.<sup>230</sup> The tone of her recollections mirrored the pronouncements made by Taylor during her tenure as WSP's National Coordinator. She wrote off the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1973 as "less than half of what we wanted," quashing the potential for

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<sup>225</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 154.

<sup>227</sup> Paul Boyer, "From Activism to Apathy"; Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail*; Wittner, "The Nuclear Threat Ignored," 439-460; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 127.

<sup>228</sup> Busby, *Moral Movements and Foreign Policy*, 49-50, 59-60; Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, 35; Katz, *Ban the Bomb*, 169.

<sup>229</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

members to feel that their work was complete.<sup>231</sup> A notice to branch leaders in March 1989, urged WSPers to resolve the group's "unfinished business," the securing of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, within the next decade.<sup>232</sup> Though referring to myriad small successes achieved during the Vietnam War and the widespread acceptance of antinuclear sentiments by the general public, Taylor discredited the notion that WSP had achieved what it had set out to achieve in 1961 out of a belief that, by highlighting the work still to be done, she could spur potential activists to join the peace movement.<sup>233</sup> Her later memoir built upon stories shared in oral interviews that continued to proclaim this message. Taylor argued that "the reason for WSP's existence since 1961 was the eradication of these weapons as a step toward universal disarmament. It still is."

The glowing reflections of their group's impact aside, WSP leaders were unable to stymie the organisation's inexorable decline. Faced with "galloping attrition in membership all over the country" and diminishing public influence, WSP began a two-year initiative in November 1988, tasked with "building, growing, and maintaining" WSP "as a national organisation."<sup>234</sup> But the attempt to rally members was in vain. In February 1990, a national board of representatives from across the country made the decision to close the National Office. "With a heavy heart," leaders broke the sad news to their branches and Ethel Taylor wrote "a difficult letter" to WSP members explaining the reasons for the closure.<sup>235</sup> She offered her resignation and, without a National Office, felt her plans for future involvement "in abeyance."<sup>236</sup> Key women attempted to calm WSP members by intimating that the absence of a National Office would not end the organisation. Nevertheless, the news brought considerable upset.<sup>237</sup> On 15 March 1990, Women Strike for Peace closed the doors to its National Office.

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<sup>231</sup> "Keynote Address by Ethel Taylor at WSP National Conference, Chicago, Illinois, October 1973," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3.

<sup>232</sup> "Unsigned letter to WSP Branch Leaders, 28 March 1989," SCPC WSP Archives, 90A-028, Box 4, Comprehensive Test Ban Correspondence.

<sup>233</sup> Villastrigo interview, October 1987, ARS.0056; Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>234</sup> "Report to May WSP Board Meeting, Libby Frank," AU WSP Archives, Box 1, Board – 1988-1989, 1992; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 153-154.

<sup>235</sup> "Letter from Anci Koppel, 5 February 1990," UWS SWAP Archives, 1-17, General Correspondence, Jan 1990 – Aug 1991.

<sup>236</sup> "Letter from Ethel Taylor, 20 February 1990," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 12, Closing Philadelphia Office; "Message from Ethel Taylor to 2/7/90 Meeting," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11, Co-ordinating Committee Meeting National 2-7-90.

<sup>237</sup> "Letter from Ethel Taylor, 20 February 1990," SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 12, Closing Philadelphia Office.

Any sense that members had ended their 29-year commitment to peace activism soon vanished. Individuals resolved to continue their campaigns locally under their existing Women Strike for Peace monikers. A “Transitional Coordinating Committee,” set up in April 1990, heard that Seattle members felt it “unanimous for WSP to continue.” New York WSPer Celia Fink reported that the branch had “got 82 renewals recently.”<sup>238</sup> Initiatives continued in Los Angeles, East Bay, Seattle, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Though the Cold War drew to a close, members vowed to maintain pressure on the government. With President Bush hesitating on arms control and conflict brewing in the Persian Gulf, activists saw further avenues of protest. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty continued to elude negotiators and gave more motivation to WSP’s continuing members.<sup>239</sup> Although their organisation had diminished significantly, their individual sensibilities allowed them to take comfort in their past achievements and look to the future with optimism and determination. In 1998, Ethel Taylor published her own anecdotal account of her time with Women Strike for Peace. She closed her story with the forceful assertion that “we made a difference.”<sup>240</sup>

In announcing the decision to close the National Office, Ethel Taylor offered her thoughts. “I think we should feel good about ourselves and nothing lasts forever. We have done fantastic things and broken ground in the forefront of other groups. But that’s not now.”<sup>241</sup> The statement encapsulated the attitudes of WSP activists in the 1980s. In a practical sense, the organisation faded without much struggle, despite some campaigns exhibiting the group’s ability to engage with public concerns. Yet the state of the organisation did not diminish the resolve of activists who felt optimism towards the future and vindication of their past efforts. They felt their campaign had been successful in the sense that the public’s stance on nuclear weapons and American military intervention generally reflected WSP’s historic concerns. As most of the history relating to the group was compiled and recorded in this decade, WSP’s experience of the 1980s is vital to understanding how the organisation has since come to be perceived.

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<sup>238</sup> “WSP Coordinating Committee Notes – 4/18/90 Transitional Coordinating Committee,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11, Co-ordinating Committee Meeting National 2-7-90.

<sup>239</sup> “Making the Connection – The Test Ban and Iraq,” AU WSP Archives, Box 8, Iraq – 1990-1992; “Letter from Ethel Taylor to Editor, 2 December 1990,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11, Iraq, Kuwait.

<sup>240</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 153-155.

<sup>241</sup> “Message from Ethel Taylor to 2/7/90 Meeting,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 01A-005, Box 11 Co-ordinating Committee Meeting National 2-7-90.

Although spent as an organisational force by 1990, positive reflections offered by members in this period would forever inform perspectives on WSP's history. But attitudes towards the past were complex. In reflecting on their past, WSPers took into account the contemporary state of the peace movement, their own commitments towards peace activism, and their optimism for future achievements. Of equal importance was the motivation each activist held towards offering their recollection. WSPers, past and present, held very different perceptions of the organisation. The complexity of WSP's 1980s experience demonstrates the importance of understanding contemporary context when assessing the perceptions activists hold towards their history.



## **Conclusion: “Who Are These Women?”**

In 1962, sociologist Elise Boulding conducted a survey of WSP participants. Intending to shed light on the personalities involved in the “new social phenomenon,” Boulding’s guiding question became the title of her study; “who are these women?”<sup>1</sup> If ambiguity surrounded the organisation in its early years, by the time Women Strike for Peace closed the National Office its activists had developed and articulated a vigorous, monolithic historical narrative describing the group’s formation, its activities, successes, and values. In their personal recollections, WSPers portrayed a consistent image of the organisation as a close-knit group of like-minded women, united in their maternal fear for the world’s children. They described themselves as politically inexperienced housewives who, against all odds, influenced arms limitation agreements, ended the Vietnam War, and stymied the influence of the US military. Former members contended that they were not just part of an organisation, but a lifestyle. Women Strike for Peace was the “most important entity” beyond their immediate families and remained a part of their life beyond the years they were involved in its activities.<sup>2</sup> Such was their confidence in the identity of WSP, leading figures affirmed that they considered “all women to be WSPers.”<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, in offering their impressions of the organisation, members could not help but impose their own sense of themselves into their stories of Women Strike for Peace

This thesis provides the first assessment of WSP beyond the context of its test ban and anti-Vietnam War activism, expanding its history to assess its role within the peace and social justice movements of the 1970s and 1980s. It is the first study to give in-depth consideration to the latter two-thirds of the organisation’s life and document the closure of WSP’s National Office in 1990. It, therefore, fills a notable gap in the historiography while demonstrating the importance of this period for assessing recollections and historical descriptions of the group. Previously overlooked events in WSP’s history provide valuable insight into the attitudes of its

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<sup>1</sup> “Elise Boulding, ‘Who Are These Women?: A Progress Report on a Study of the Women Strike for Peace,’ 1963,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor interview, 5 October 1987, ARS.0056.

<sup>3</sup> “Let’s Keep Moving! Keynote Address – Ethel Taylor, National Board Meeting, 6 May 1989,” SCPC WSP Archives, ACC 2013-050, Box 4, WSP Working to Stop the Arms Race.

members, allowing fresh perspectives on the character, identity, and history of the organisation.

### **Memory and Identity**

This thesis offers a methodological model for unpacking complex social movement organisations through engagement with memory studies. It explores the dynamics involved in the construction of history and memory in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of WSP's identity. In doing so, it shows the fragility of historical assessments provided by former activists, demonstrating that recollections were influenced by a number of observable factors, including personal identity, social pressures, contextual circumstances, geographic location, and gender. Accounting for these influences provides a more accurate historical assessment of Women Strike for Peace. But, as Lisa Tetrault succinctly explains, questioning the construction of history and memory does not mean declaring existing perceptions "false." Instead, the dissertation reveals alternative understandings of the past while explaining the significance of established narratives for perceptions of a group.<sup>4</sup> It understands that the story of Women Strike for Peace "had to be created by people," who infused their own version of the past "over other possible events, with a particular kind of meaning."<sup>5</sup> In order to grant the history of WSP "the respect it deserves" the study documents how and why the prevailing version of WSP's past came about.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the alternative experiences of activists, the myriad external pressures on individual recollections, and the pervasive influence of identity on memory, this thesis demonstrates that existing work reflects only part of WSP's story.

From the group's founding in autumn 1961, WSP's key women claimed to marshal the support of housewives and mothers from across America. While many participants did identify with their domestic role, the decision to foreground the image of motherhood no doubt arose from savvy considerations of the contemporary cultural and political climate. Nevertheless, this image instructed WSP activists how to identify as a part of the organisation. Over time, the perception that WSP

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<sup>4</sup> Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

represented a strictly maternal and domestic constituency influenced historical accounts produced by those within the group, as conformity with the group's collective identity meant speaking to this desired image. WSPers downplayed their activist backgrounds in their biographies, presenting themselves as inexperienced in political and community organising. They displaced WSP from the contemporary context of peace activism that existed when it formed, intending to distance it from other contemporary groups it took influence from, such as SANE, WILPF, and SDS. Historical accounts spoke to the "politics of motherhood" that informed the group's protest, something that has since become a defining feature of WSP.<sup>7</sup> This perception remains prevalent in historical assessments.

Analysing the memory of activists, this thesis shows that WSP represented a far more complex group of women. Not only did the organisation harbour a diverse assortment of political attitudes and personal characters, but activists endured significant changes to their identities between 1961 and 1990. By the late 1960s, WSPers replaced the image of "staid housewives" donning dresses, hats, and "white gloves" for their protests, by challenging police officers, engaging in tax resistance, and chaining themselves to the White House gates.<sup>8</sup> With the onset of the women's liberation movement, they began to alter their outlook, downplaying their role as mothers in order to appeal to second-wave feminists. The group's single-issue prioritisation of nuclear disarmament wavered when the subject fell from the public agenda. On its return in the mid-1970s and 1980s, WSPers once more asserted their interest in the campaign, extolling disarmament as their most urgent concern.

Identity is an ever changing concept, necessarily responding to new information and influenced by natural shifts in social and cultural contexts. As such, assessments of Women Strike for Peace cannot be static and must allow for the significant transformations in attitude WSPers experienced. The group was neither strictly a maternalist antinuclear organisation, nor a feminist group seeking social justice. Studies that explain WSP in such ways depend entirely on the context in which it is referred to.

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<sup>7</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*; Swerdlow, "The Politics of Motherhood."

<sup>8</sup> Alonso, *Peace As a Women's Issue*, 211, 215; Estepa, "Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women's Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980."



Transformations in activist identities necessarily affected memory of the organisation. Eleanor Garst's initial history of the organisation, drafted in 1968, spoke clearly to WSP's maternal and "folksy" public image.<sup>9</sup> An entirely different perspective pervaded historical accounts by the end of the 1970s. Members now reflected that they exhibited "fiercely feminist" compulsions and were the "harbingers of women's liberation" from WSP's founding, contradicting contemporary pronouncements that distanced the organisation from any intent to upset the social order.<sup>10</sup> This was particularly evident in the re-evaluation of Bella Abzug, occasioned by WSP's new attitude. Acknowledging these contextual influences proves vital when considering Amy Swerdlow's motivations for recording WSP's history. The former leading activist situated her evaluation in contemporary debates "regarding the relationship of traditional female culture to radical social change and to feminism," while explaining that she wrote her work "in the spirit of WSP as it was transformed in the early 1970s."<sup>11</sup> Recollections spoke to particular themes and appropriately tailored the image of WSP to suit contemporary circumstances. Studies must contextualise the attitudes of WSP activists in order to fully understand the group's identity. Equally, to provide an accurate assessment of the historical perspectives of its members, this thesis demonstrates the importance of assessing temporal influences on memory.

The regional and personal subtleties at work within Women Strike for Peace, a dynamic uniquely brought out by this thesis, also problematizes allusions to a uniform, national memory of the group. Out of practical necessity, the principal agents of WSP's memory were key women and participants from the east coast, as discussed in chapter 6. But their attitudes and experiences did not represent members working out of branches in other parts of the US. Activists associated strongly with their local branches, referring to themselves as, in the case of Rose Dellamonica, a member of "East Bay Women for Peace" before asserting their involvement in Women Strike for Peace nationally.<sup>12</sup> Such findings confirm that national narratives of WSP, even those that engage with the activities of branches, inadequately

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<sup>9</sup> Swerdlow, "The Politics of Motherhood," 2.

<sup>10</sup> "WSP Commemorative Journal, 1961-1979," SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 2, Documents Describing WSP History; Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 234.

<sup>12</sup> Dellamonica interview, 10 September 1985, ARS.0056.

represent the recollections of local activists who often held entirely different attitudes towards their past than those in other parts of the country. Indeed, members of Seattle Women Act for Peace, a historically autonomous group, felt unrepresented by national narratives.<sup>13</sup> Such broad overviews struggle to depict the various nuances and contradictions at work within WSP's diverse regions. Even referring to the organisation as "Women Strike for Peace" serves to lower the importance of those who adopted alternative titles, exhibited varying levels of loyalty towards the national body, and developed differing memories depending on their geographical location.

This thesis also contributes to the burgeoning field of gender memory theory, particularly in recognising consistent themes in the recollections of WSP activists. Reflecting the work of Selma Leydesdorff, Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, and Deborah Tannen, this study has observed women who consistently affirmed notions of community in their recollections. Similarly WSPers' accounts of particular instances of protest tally with the findings of Luisa Passerini, and demonstrate attitudes of rebellion and irreverence towards authority. Indeed, the humour with which WSP activists recalled their encounters with government officials is prevalent throughout their testimonies, especially in discussions of surveillance and the HUAC hearings. Although conclusions regarding differences between gender cannot be extrapolated from this thesis, further comparative studies of female and male peace activists may yield valuable insight. Likewise assessing the impact of socialisation and norms of behaviour could emerge from a broader study of the historical consciousness of women's peace activists generally. Nevertheless, this thesis demonstrates the benefits of acknowledging facets of gender memory theory in a study of this kind.

### **Diversity and Representation**

By highlighting the nature of memory relating to WSP, this study uncovered alternative narratives and overlooked events that suggest it was a more fragmented and layered organisation than is commonly understood. Its 1962 national conference firmly decreed that WSP welcomed activists "of all races, creeds, and political

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<sup>13</sup> "Aina Doczi review of *Women Strike for Peace*, Seattle Women Act for Peace Newsletter, February 1994," UWS SWAP Archives, 1-21, General Correspondence, May 1993-1994.

persuasions,” a stance reaffirmed at the HUAC hearings months later.<sup>14</sup> Asked if her group would permit communists and Nazis to join, Dagmar Wilson replied “unless everybody in the whole world joins us in this fight, then God help us.”<sup>15</sup> The group seemingly welcomed diversity and, by accepting anyone who would commit their energies towards nuclear disarmament, WSP attracted activists with varying levels of experience and differing attitudes towards peace protest. Like other expansive social movement organisations, WSP developed ambiguous stances to issues such as unilateral disarmament, civil rights, and feminism in order to placate the competing interests of those involved.<sup>16</sup> But because WSPers were, for the large part, allowed to express their own sentiments, interpretations of the group’s identity can take many forms by focusing on a selective sample of actions and activists. For example, allowing Donna Allen, Bella Abzug, Barbara Deming, and Shirley Lens to be cast as representatives of the whole presents an image of a women’s group with a staunch feminist outlook at odds with the attitudes of many other figures.<sup>17</sup> Adam Rome highlights particular aspects of the group’s atmospheric testing campaign to claim that WSP was an environmental activist organisation rather than a disarmament group.<sup>18</sup> By limiting their scope to selective events and members, existing studies use WSP’s diversity to create divergent interpretations while paradoxically overlooking the group’s ranging and fragmented membership.

WSPers’ experiences within their organisation also varied considerably. Depictions of heralded events in the group’s past serve to instil a particular narrative that downplays frequent resistance to particular stances. Claims that the group was an early opponent of the Vietnam War are problematized when considering that leading figures resisted such a stance at the time. The image of WSP activists as among the first to critique US intervention only emerged when later reflections expanded the role of local activists to represent the views of the national organisation as a whole. The 1965 Jakarta Meeting and the 1967 Pentagon protest provoked significant disagreement from WSPers who felt reluctant to endorse such activities. Substantial

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<sup>14</sup> “Ann Arbor Statement, First National Conference, June 1962,” SCPC WSP Archives, A1, Box 3, National Conference – 1962, Ann Arbor MI.

<sup>15</sup> *Communist Activities in the Peace Movement*, 2200.

<sup>16</sup> Friedman and McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism,” 164.

<sup>17</sup> Estepa, “Taking the White Gloves Off: Women Strike for Peace and the Transformation of Women’s Activist Identities in the United States, 1961-1980,” 307.

<sup>18</sup> Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance’,” 525-554; McKay, “Margaret Ells Russell,” 119-120.

consternation arose from the 1962 HUAC hearings as a result of WSP's publicly ambiguous stance. Differences existed over the effectiveness of arms agreements, such as the Partial Test Ban Treaty and SALT II. These points of discussion problematize current perceptions of what WSP stood for, but remain somewhat absent in the group's history and memory. For example, Alice Herz performed an unprecedented act with her immolation, but she received little attention in depictions of the group. Her historical footprint remains small. While the exact reasons for Herz's relative absence are contestable, it nevertheless demonstrates alternative experiences that can produce a different narrative of WSP's history.

Ultimately, WSP's decentralised approach to organisation, one that intended to make life easier for participants located outside of the north east, facilitated drift and division. West coast branches, for example, were more inclined to collaborate with other women's peace groups and those in the civil rights movement than their counterparts on the east coast. East coast women evidently wielded more power over national decisions than those located elsewhere, exercising this by demanding that national conferences be held within a reasonable distance of their own branches, often to the detriment of those located in the west. Even between local branches differences emerged. Though both Seattle and Tacoma branches felt isolated, they arguably displayed more animosity towards each other than that experienced by any other two groups. Regional dynamics and variations in approach at a local level contribute much to existing understandings of the organisation. As such, this study builds on the work of Byron Miller, Harriet Alonso, Amy Schneidhorst, Raymond Mohl, Robert Surbrug, Jr., and Yohuru R. Williams and Jama Lazerow, among many others, who have emphasised the utility of conducting local studies of national activist organisations in recent years.<sup>19</sup>

“Nonorganization” also fostered the growth of an informal “leadership clique” that gradually drifted from WSP's grassroots base. The existence of “key women” within the organisation contradicts common perceptions of Women Strike

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Geography and Social Movements*; Alonso, “Dissension in the Ranks”; Schneidhorst, *Building a Just and Secure Movement*; Mohl, “A Merger of Movements”; Surbrug, Jr., *Beyond Vietnam*; Yohuru R. Williams and Jama Lazerow, *Liberated Territory: Untold Local Perspectives on the Black Panther Party* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

for Peace as a group in which women were “all leaders.”<sup>20</sup> As such, recognising the layered nature of WSP provides unique insight into the operations of the group. Curiously for an ostensibly grassroots organisation, there remains a disproportionate focus on the activities and attitudes of leading figures without reference to this contradiction. While the presence of certain influential activists warrants attention, the attitudes, ideology, and activities of overlooked grassroots members offer an entirely different view of WSP’s identity. Grassroots activists felt overridden by ostensibly “consensus” decisions, particularly over events such as the 1965 Jakarta Meeting and by instances of civil disobedience during the Vietnam War. Pointing to these moments of conflict alters our perception of WSP as a cohesive group.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of examining conflict and unrest within activist groups. In extending the scope of existing historiography, this thesis has, arguably, highlighted some of the more unsavoury aspects of WSP’s past. But incidences of disagreement, tensions, and conflict add significant detail to the group’s history. The relationship between Bella Abzug and other WSPers, for example, demonstrates WSP’s fraught relationship with feminism, but also indicates personal dynamics within the group. As noted by R. Scott Frey, Thomas Dietz, and Linda Kalof, evaluating the impact of a social movement organisation involves assessing such relationships. “Students of social movements,” they argued, “would be well advised to direct more attention to organisational problems of internal movement politics and factionalism.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Harriet Alonso noted the saliency of tensions between local and national bodies in building a comprehensive historical image. Observing the history of the women’s peace movement, she suggested that “a more accurate and complete history” emerges through seeking “to address the issues of difference and dissension as well as consensus.”<sup>22</sup>

Conflict within a group is a valuable place to investigate how it understands its collective identity. It is from these disagreements that this study finds intriguing conversations over the essence of Women Strike for Peace and its attitude towards divisive issues. Features that are accepted as an integral part of the organisation’s

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<sup>20</sup> “1973 Progress Report on Women Strike for Peace Research,” SCPC WSP Archives, C1, Box 3, Research on WSP by Amy Swerdlow.

<sup>21</sup> R. Scott Frey, Thomas Dietz, and Linda Kalof, “Characteristics of Successful American Protest Groups: Another Look at Gamson’s Strategy of Social Protest,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (September 1992): 384.

<sup>22</sup> Alonso, “Dissension in the Ranks,” 342.

historical image have been problematized by this thesis. It shows the difficulty in describing WSP as a group universally inclusive of communists, as many disagreed with the ambiguity of such a stance. Likewise, WSP never quite affirmed its stance on unilateral disarmament. Conflict arose over its early protests against the Vietnam War. Highlighting such aspects may appear unpleasant, but acknowledges the competing attitudes of those involved in WSP to bring valuable insight to the elusive question, “who are these women?”

The silence surrounding WSP’s decline in the late 1960s is a noteworthy example of this. Even WSP activists remained silent over the problems that beset their organisation. But charting the fortunes of the group in this period fills a significant historiographical gap. It explains the withdrawal of Dagmar Wilson from her leadership of WSP, an episode curiously absent from existing histories and the recollections of members given her centrality to the story of Women Strike for Peace. The circumstances of her withdrawal reveal the unique pressures she faced and show her somewhat irritated by her obligations as leader, demonstrating an entirely different side to common depictions of her involvement. Similarly, this thesis uniquely details the work of Trudi Young, whose status as the first official leader of an organisation known primarily for its non-hierarchical approach to organising needs more attention. Young faced exceptional difficulties in her role as national coordinator, and her experience provides an important example of the inner tensions that grew in Women Strike for Peace. Yet this period remains overlooked. Scholars and WSPers allude to WSP’s reduced influence as it entered the 1970s, but never discuss the reasons for this decline in depth. Although an unpleasant period for activists, examination of this period highlights important events and enlightens understandings of Women Strike for Peace. This dissertation’s consideration of these aspects is a unique contribution to existing knowledge.

### **Making a Difference**

In examining its history, this dissertation asserts that Women Strike for Peace formed an important part of the US peace movement during the Cold War. For nearly 30 years its activists strived to raise public interest in peace protest, from their visually effective marches in support of a Test Ban Treaty in the early 1960s to the

educational outreach projects of the 1980s. Activists made significant contributions to the antinuclear, anti-war, feminist, and environmental movements. But perceptions of success emerging from WSPers themselves varied considerably. The Partial Test Ban Treaty validated the group's existence at the time, but seemed to fade as a significant achievement for members who remained committed to the disarmament movement and observed that weapons build-up continued unabated. As the group declined in the 1980s, some who had withdrawn from involvement felt WSP irrelevant, contrasting with those who, recognising the work still to be done, articulated a vision of a rewarding, if incomplete, campaign against nuclear weapons. Once again, contemporary circumstances and social influences seemed to dictate assessments of the group's past.

Unanimous agreement occurred, however, over the significant role WSP played in the lives of activists involved. WSP brought women together, empowered them to speak out on issues they cared about, and fostered relationship that endured for decades. WSPers made emphatic statements declaring that, achievements aside, the experience of participating in Women Strike for Peace alone transformed their lives. Moreover, the group offered an identity through which members understood their past experiences. While historical assessments can debate substantive achievements, they cannot stymie the sense of achievement extolled by activists themselves. But such sentiments can contribute to nostalgic and complimentary perceptions of the past that unconsciously blur important historical details. It is exactly for this reason that this thesis resolved to produce a better understanding of the characters, attitudes, and experiences of those involved in Women Strike for Peace.

Although the doors to its National Office closed in 1990, the commitment of activists ensured that WSP's influence continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Los Angeles, San Francisco, East Bay, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., WSPers supported the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, lamented war in the Balkans, criticised aggression in the Persian Gulf, and railed against the War on Terror. They witnessed the formation of new women's peace organisations, such as Women in Black and CodePink, who replicated WSP's historical example to project their own feminine critiques of militarism to a new generation of activists. WSPers made direct contributions to these new campaigns, linking peace efforts and transcending

historical divides. But historical recognition of Women Strike for Peace remains inadequate. While this thesis recognises that perceptions of the past can be critiqued, that WSPers considered themselves significant actors cannot be doubted. As Ethel Taylor emphatically declared, “WE MADE A DIFFERENCE...and the beat goes on.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *We Made a Difference*, 155.





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### **Conference Papers**

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