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Women, War and Revolution

Jane McDermid

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**Women, War and Revolution
in Europe 1914-45**

Jane McDermid



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Introduction

On the surface, the period 1914 to 1945 seems to have encompassed massive changes in the position of women in Europe, in response to the demands of war and revolution. Yet historians have questioned the extent of the transformation, since the acquisition of the vote, as well as improvements in female education and employment, did not in practice bring women social or political equality with men. Indeed, at the end of both the First and Second World Wars, and of the Spanish Civil War, there was a backlash against the 'New Woman'. Moreover, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed widespread demographic anxiety throughout Europe, which was reflected in the construction of welfare systems and the adoption of pro-natalist population policies. Hence whatever the political system, the state became increasingly interventionist in social policy, reinforcing the nuclear family, with the mother at its heart, and father at its head.

Though some changes were made, war and revolution did not bring any radical turning-points for women. Not only did

many of the gains made by women in both World Wars prove to be short-lived, but ideologies, of both left and right, either prevented or limited changes in the status of women. In addition, a study of this period reveals significant diversity in women's experience of war and revolution, not only between states, but within individual societies. Certainly, the inter-war depression, particularly in the 1930s, pushed women's rights off the political agenda, as the fight against mass male unemployment took precedence throughout much of Europe. In contrast, in Stalin's Russia, the push for modernisation greatly expanded women's education and job opportunities. However, it did not lead to a revolution in relations between the sexes. Indeed, what all European states had in common in the inter-war period was a stress on pro-natalism, with the wife in the role of nurturer, identified not only with the family but with the welfare state. Thus, in 1945, the elements of continuity in the position of women in Europe since 1914 were much more striking than those of change.

Women and the First World War

Whatever the political regime — whether a constitutional monarchy as in Britain, a republic as in France, or an authoritarian state as in Germany and Russia — the attitudes towards the use of women in the First World War were remarkably similar. There was no state planning of the involvement of women in the war effort. Lower-class women were increasingly recruited into munitions factories and took over what were previously seen as male jobs, such as in transport; but their position was seen as temporary, for the duration of the War only. Middle-class women tried, with varying degrees of success, to enter the professions. Although there were exceptions, few women fought as combatants; if women served at the front, it was generally as nurses, or in some other support role. The War was seen to offer women unprecedented freedom, while their men died in the trenches. In practice, war brought increased responsibilities to women, especially lower-class women, both urban and rural, who were thrust into the role of head of household, expected to provide for the family and produce for the war effort. While feminists generally continued to support the war effort in the hope of winning the vote, working-class women grew increasingly desperate with the burdens of war.

combatant states for the most part rallied to the flag, proclaiming their support for the War and suspending their campaigns. In Britain, the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was especially vigorous in support of the war effort. Indeed, Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, asked Mrs Pankhurst to rally women for the munitions factories. She and her daughter Christabel saw war as providing great opportunities for women. Not all WSPU members were happy with the decision to suspend the suffrage campaign, but the Pankhursts prevailed. They were fiercely nationalist, attacking pacifists and socialists (including Sylvia Pankhurst) as traitors. In October 1915, the WSPU's paper, *The Suffragette*, was renamed *Britannia*.

In France and Russia too, suffragists believed that loyal support for the War would bring them the vote. The French suffragists became increasingly conservative, leading to a significant change in their arguments for the vote, from a basis in natural justice (an idea which had its origins in the French Revolution of 1789) to what women had contributed to the war effort and could do for national reconstruction. They were deeply alarmed by the Revolution of October 1917 in Russia which, as we shall see, eclipsed the Russian feminist movement. Indeed, the Russian feminists, through their support for a war which inflicted such heavy losses on Russian troops, alienated both working-class and peasant women.

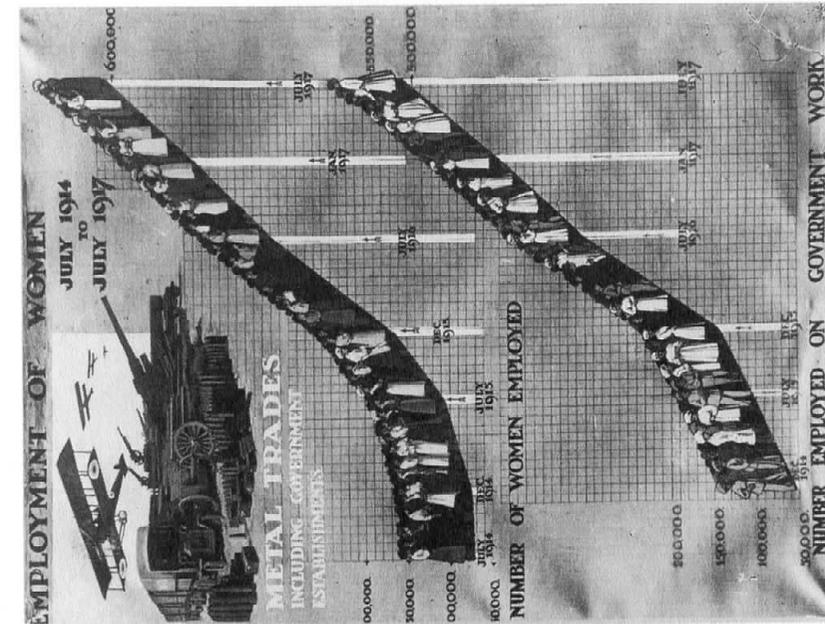
In Germany, there was a similar situation: suffragists believed expressions of loyalty would prove their civic responsibility.

Women's Attitudes towards the First World War

When war broke out in 1914, the national female suffrage movements throughout the



Statistical diagrams showing the upturn in British women's employment. Left, in the metal trades and, above, in the professions generally. Imperial War Museum



Indeed, given the German fear of encirclement, the suffragists believed that women's domestic skills would be a weapon in German resistance to their enemies: housewives would make best use of limited supplies of both food and clothing. In addition, middle-class women could extend their philanthropic work by joining state welfare agencies, as well as continuing their voluntary efforts (such as running soup kitchens, distributing second-hand clothing and organising childcare), while lower-class women worked in the factories.

In all these states, most middle-class women supported the War to the end, confidently expecting the vote as a reward.



Emily Pankhurst, above with her daughter Christabel, saw the First World War as providing great opportunities for women, and even suspended the suffrage campaign to actively support the war effort.
Mary Evans Picture Library

There were few pacifists among the feminists. Still, Johanna Alberti has revealed a variety of pacifist organisations and initiatives, both within Britain (such as the Women's Peace Crusade, begun in Glasgow in 1916) and beyond (such as the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace, founded at the Hague in 1915).¹ Some women supported male pacifists, while others opposed the War from religious conviction. Although not insignificant, pacifists were in the minority and were viewed with distrust by governments. While male conscientious objectors were often brutally treated, women pacifists were subjected to various forms of

harassment, including censorship, surveillance and efforts to prevent travel and contacts with pacifists abroad.

There were also political divisions among pacifist women, notably between feminists, for whom war represented the subjection of women and the triumph of masculine militarism, and socialists, for whom war was the product of imperialism. Within the latter, there were divisions between those who remained opposed in principle, and the majority who compromised, supporting their country's war effort as defence against an aggressor. As the War dragged on, other issues, such as coping with the growing problems of everyday life on the home front, took priority. Indeed, in Germany, as conditions deteriorated, socialist women were drawn into welfare work among the lower classes, ironically winning applause from the

government which they opposed. Ironically too, while pacifism in Germany was generally associated with socialist women such as Clara Zetkin, in Britain Mrs Pankhurst seemed convinced that the anti-war socialists were German agents, and she felt vindicated when the Bolsheviks took power and prepared to sign a separate peace with Germany. Indeed, she manipulated fear of socialism to try to stem the rising criticism of the War, both in the armed forces and among factory workers. The WSPU, therefore, turned its attention to fighting the influence of socialism among patriotic women workers.

Yet pacifism and socialism were not the only threats to the war effort. There was also nationalism. In Ireland nationalists regarded the conflict as England's war. Irish men still enlisted in the British armed forces but, in contrast to Britain, the social and economic impact of the War in Ireland was very slight. Instead of being drawn into war work, Irish women became more involved in politics. Women who were opposed to Home Rule joined the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (established in 1912), which supported the war effort. Nationalist women joined Cumann na mBan (1914), which split over the War, with some holding that it should support Britain in return for Home Rule, and the more militant faction opposed to any Irish involvement in the War. In both unionist and nationalist organisations, women were expected to play a subordinate, supportive role to the male activists. The 1916 Easter Rising of nationalists in Dublin against British rule changed the situation. The Rising was portrayed very much as a male affair, but women nevertheless participated. When the Rising was crushed, it was the men who bore the brunt of the repression, thus giving Cumann na mBan

a bigger role. Feminists, who until then had been critical of Cumann na mBan for its subservience to men in the nationalist movement, were drawn into the organisation, partly in response to the Easter Rising's Proclamation, which promised sexual equality in the future republic. However, Cumann na mBan rejected the 1922 Treaty with Britain which endorsed the partition of Ireland. The opponents of this Treaty lost the ensuing Civil War, after which there was a reaction against 'political' women. Thus feminism, which since 1916 had drawn closer to nationalism, suffered a serious setback at the foundation of the Republic.

Women's Work on the Home Front

Even in the most industrialised of the combatant states, domestic service was by far the biggest employer of urban women on the eve of the War. Indeed, the War led initially to female unemployment as the demand for servants and for luxury products, such as silk, lace and millinery, declined. Wartime industries soon expanded, however, and women began to replace men in offices and in the transport system. In France, the war seemed to provoke a change in public attitudes to working women — an acceptance of their economic independence, and even of their working alongside men, though it was seen as a temporary situation.

In Britain, women began to replace men in industry, especially in munitions, only from the summer of 1915 and more so after the introduction of male conscription in January 1916. Few of these women workers came from the middle or upper classes. They were mainly working-class

women who had already had a job. Generally there was hostility to the recruitment of women workers into what male workers saw as their jobs. Both male workers and employers were influenced by the ideology of domesticity which disapproved of women stepping outside the home. Male workers also feared that employers would use female labour to lower wages and weaken the unions, traditionally bastions of skilled men. Some trade unions in Britain demanded equal pay, partly in response, and partly as a challenge to the government's promise that the status of skilled men would not suffer. The latter were determined that, once the war was over, pre-war practices would be resumed.

The war dragged on longer than expected, so that by 1915-16 the combatant states were experiencing labour shortages, in agriculture as well as in industry. In Britain, the former led to the establishment of the Women's Land Service Corps in February 1916, which was succeeded by the Women's Land Army the following year. In contrast to factory jobs which drew in working-class women, the Land Army attracted many middle-class women. In industry, women were welcomed into routine, repetitious work, keeping alive the old ideas about women's 'natural' patience and dexterity and assuming that they lacked ambition. While employers benefited from the lower wages paid to women workers and tried to dilute skills, they also accepted that women were temporary replacements for male labour. Women were accepted as longer-term replacements for men only in some light industries and in offices and shops where training was minimal. Wages there were even lower than male wages, because it was expected that women would leave after marriage.

In Germany, women were not drawn into the industrial work force in large enough numbers to make up for the men conscripted into the imperial army. Indeed, there was a greater increase in the use of home-based rather than factory women workers.² By 1916, the labour-power situation caused Field Marshal Hindenburg to ask the government to enact mandatory labour service, to cover women as well as men. This demand was not accepted by either the government or the trade unions, nor even by the majority of women's organisations. Women's reproductive functions were seen as fundamental to the survival of the German nation. Thus the forced labour law, the National Auxiliary Service Act of December 1916, did not include women.

The German War Office, however, was forced by the acute labour shortage and insistent demands for more fighting men to set up Women's Work Centres for the recruitment and distribution of female workers to war industries. In the spring of 1917, appeals in the German press asked women to accept jobs in the army at the rear (for example, in supply and ammunition depots, and military offices) to release men for the front. These women in the Rear-Area Women's Auxiliary Programme were working-class and still regarded as civilians. By May 1918, women volunteers were being trained to replace army signal corps officers in communications; but the armistice came before any were employed.

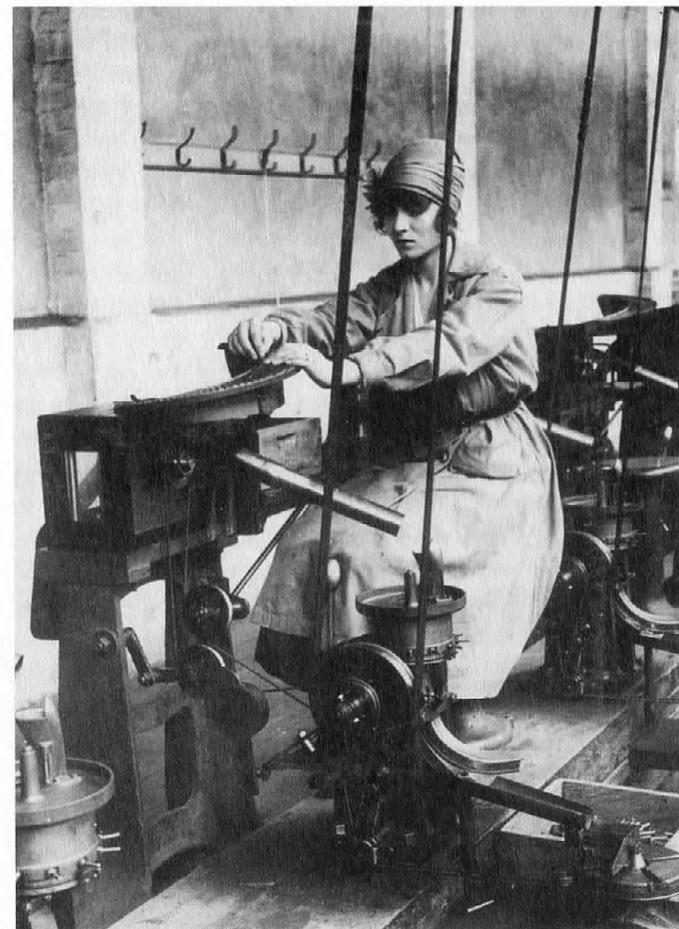
It was in Russia, with its massive mobilisation of men, that women were drawn into the labour force on a huge, though still unplanned, scale. The proportion of women in industry as a whole soared in Russia from 26.6 per cent in 1914 to 43.4 per cent in 1917; the numbers of factory women rose from 723,000 in 1914 to over

a million in 1917. For example, before the war, men had constituted two-thirds of the St Petersburg labour force. Towards the end of 1917, less than half the total number of workers employed in the renamed capital city were men. Even in the male dominated industries, such as the metal and chemical industries, the proportion of women and children towards the end of 1916 was at least a third.

Women continued to work in the traditionally female areas of domestic service, textiles and clothing; and besides the factories, women were employed in sweatshops, offices and in retail. Again, their employment was on the largest scale in Russia: by January 1917 around 130,000 women worked in Petrograd factories, while there were approximately 80,000 employed as domestic servants, 50,000 as office workers, and another 50,000 as shop workers. Women still performed the bulk of agricultural labour too, especially in countries like Russia where millions of male peasants, as well as draft animals, were conscripted for the war effort.

Women at the Front

In general, women were expected to 'man' the home front. Military combat was seen



From the summer of 1915, British women, mainly working-class, began to replace men in industry, particularly munitions. Above, a girl operates an automatic cartridge machine at Park Royal, London. Imperial War Museum

very much as an exclusively male responsibility. However, in certain areas women could be used to free men for the front, while as nurses many others attended to the medical needs of the casualties. Nursing was an area in which middle-class women were to the forefront. On the one hand, nursing was a caring profession and therefore 'womanly'; on the other, there were clashes between the 'amateurs' (the volunteers) and the professionals (the

trained nurses). At the same time, there was a social divide between the lower-class patient and the middle-class nurse, with the former often feeling patronised by the latter. However grateful for the care, soldiers were often resentful of being patched up by their social superiors for further service at the front.

A few women served as doctors, such as the surgeon Elsie Inglis whose Scottish Women's Suffragette Federation (established 1906) sent two women ambulance units to France and Serbia in 1915. Inglis set up three military hospitals in Serbia in 1916, and in the following year she was in Russia with a voluntary corps, which was withdrawn after the Revolution. Such women were exceptional, organising their own efforts. For the most part, the employment of women at the front by the various governments was not planned.

There was no planned involvement of women in the War in Russia, though perhaps as many as 5,000 fought, with some posing as men. After the February Revolution of 1917, which overthrew the Tsar, one woman soldier, the peasant Maria Bochkareva, established the Women's Battalion (sometimes known as the 'Battalion of Death') to defend the Provisional Government. It was the first instance in modern history in which women combatants were used as models of military heroism to shame deserting male soldiers. The Battalion, which initially had about 2,000 volunteers, settled at around 300. It fought on the Western Front in June 1917, suffering heavy casualties, and in October unsuccessfully defended the Provisional Government against the Bolsheviks, facing women in the Red Guard which stormed the Winter Palace.

Mrs Pankhurst, an active supporter of the war, had applauded the establishment

of Bochkareva's Women's Battalion, despite the non-combatant status of British women. She had also welcomed the February Revolution in Russia, suspecting that the Tsar had been unduly influenced by pro-German court intrigue. Lloyd George, by then Prime Minister, arranged for Mrs Pankhurst to go to Russia on a special mission where she was to encourage the Women's Battalion in their example to male waverers among the troops.³ In Petrograd, she met with feminist leaders and addressed several meetings in private houses. The Provisional Government refused permission for public meetings, fearing that Mrs Pankhurst's extreme pro-war stance would be too provocative to Bolshevik supporters. However, she addressed a large meeting of supporters of the war effort to raise funds for the Women's Battalion. She declared that it was a terrible thing that women who brought children into the world should feel compelled to fight because the men were deserting. She insisted that women would never be slaves to Germany, and that it was better to die fighting. Mrs Pankhurst was trying to encourage Russia to remain in the War, and she stayed for three months, leaving only in September when the Provisional Government seemed vulnerable to Bolshevik agitation. On her return to London, she expressed deep anxieties about the Russian situation and advised Lloyd George to intervene to prevent a socialist seizure of power.

By then there was growing unrest in Britain. Christabel Pankhurst called the Labour Party leader, Ramsay MacDonald, 'the flunkey and toady and tool of the Kaiser'. In her view, strikes, of which there were an increasing number, were not only playing into enemy hands,

but were part of a German plot to cripple British industry. In November 1917, when the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, the WSPU renamed itself the Women's Party, with an extremely nationalist programme, calling for measures against foreign nationals because of the continuing threat from Germany, and denying Irish Home Rule. Ironically, the first woman elected to Westminster was Constance Markievicz who had fought against the British in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. She had the support of Irish suffragists, but as a nationalist she refused to take her seat in the British House of Commons.

The Impact of the War on Women

As early as 1915, women, especially in the lower classes, were suffering from the impact of war. Their difficulties included fear for the men at the front as the death toll mounted, the burden of being single heads of households, and the shortages and higher prices. There were protests by women throughout the combatant countries against war-profiteering. In Britain the expansion of wartime industries exacerbated an already existing housing shortage and drove up rents. The landlord-tenant conflict grew increasingly bitter in



Russian women played a crucial role in the February Revolution of 1917. Women combatants were also, for the first time in modern history, used as models of military heroism to shame deserting male soldiers. Above, the Women's Battalion (known as the 'Battalion of Death') taking their oath of allegiance in Red Square before leaving for the Front.
Mary Evans Picture Library

industrial cities. The situation deteriorated when it was seen that landlords were harassing, even evicting, soldiers' dependants. By the spring of 1915, tenants in Glasgow were organising resistance through the Women's Housing Association. The issue was not simply rent increases; there

was also dissatisfaction at the rising cost of foodstuffs. Tenants began to refuse to pay the increase in rent and 'rent strikes' escalated in the summer of 1915. Evictions were also resisted and workers in the shipbuilding and munitions industries supported the campaign. So too did pacifists and anti-war socialists. By the autumn, the issue was seen as a potential threat to troop morale, especially as unrest had spread to other industrial centres in Britain, finally convincing a reluctant government to pass a bill restricting rents and mortgage interest on working-class housing in munitions districts, which was a limited gain. This struggle, which had united the working classes, was seen as essentially a women's fight.⁴

If the British people suffered serious shortages in 1917 as a result of the submarine blockade, conditions in Germany were much worse. From the start of war in 1914, Germany had been blockaded by sea, causing raw material as well as food shortages; and because Germany was fighting on two



Countess Markievicz (Constance Georgina Booth) in military uniform
Mary Evans Picture Library

fronts, it became cut off from the Ukrainian 'bread basket'. Already in 1915, there was rationing of bread which, by the end of 1916, was extended to cover many basic commodities, including potatoes, dairy products, sugar and coal. There was also a severe clothing shortage. Thus the

feminists were right to stress the importance of female domestic skills for the home front, but as the War dragged on these simply could not cope with the gravity of the situation. The potato harvest failed, which led to a dependence on turnips, adulterated bread and rigid rationing. The flourishing black market, which served the needs of the better-off, like the spread of malnutrition among the poor, deepened popular bitterness. Anger erupted, reflected in food riots in the second half of 1917, not only in Germany but also in France and Italy. These riots seemed all the more serious given the revolutionary situation in Russia which had been sparked off by women demonstrators calling for bread.

Women at the end of the First World War

By the end of 1918, all the combatants were war-weary, suffering from unrest among both civilians and troops. In general, with

peace and demobilisation, women were pushed back into traditionally female trades, notably laundry work and domestic service. During the war, women had been seen as the guardians of the home front, even the saviours of the nation. After it, women workers were soon seen as selfish, depriving male breadwinners of their livelihood. Certainly many women had looked on their wartime jobs as temporary. Yet they did not simply return to the home or to domestic service. Some at least found work, mostly unskilled, in the light industry and service sectors. The late nineteenth-century debate about whether or not it was desirable for married women to work in industry was revived, as was discussion about the 'health of the race'.

After four years of trench warfare, the returning men often had difficulty in readjusting to civilian life and a society in which their women seemed to have grown in independence and into traditionally male roles. The War, however, was commemorated as a masculine affair, primarily of fallen soldiers. There was no thought now of a 'war between the sexes' among people who had had enough of conflict and sought the stability of traditional family values and gender roles. Yet while there was a return to the stress on the complementarity of the sexes, there was also a perception that the War had stimulated a looser morality. The onset of depression, moreover, led to a backlash against the 'New Woman' of the 1920s. To both men and women, the peace seemed unstable, yet another war unimaginable.

The two parliamentary states, France and Britain, survived the War with their institutions intact. Women in Britain won the vote in 1918, though on a restricted franchise until 1928. Brian Harrison argues

that women's suffrage did not result in any far-reaching short-term change in the balance of political forces, nor even in the relative influence of political parties.⁵ Certainly, while only a few exceptional women made an impact on national politics, a significant minority did so at local level. In France, however, women were denied the vote until 1944. Historians often point to France as the birthplace of feminism and of the struggle for female suffrage, yet it was one of the last western countries to accede to that demand. One explanation is the influence of the Catholic Church: women won the vote more quickly in Protestant states (though women in Ireland were given the vote on the same basis as men in 1922). Other explanations point to the lasting influence of the Napoleonic Code, which enshrined female inferiority in law, and the social conservatism of French society, in which peasant and small town influence was strong. In addition, the low birth rate in France caused government anxiety, which in turn stressed the role of mother. Again, pro-natalist concerns were common to all European powers in the inter-war period. In France, not only was feminism a minority movement, but it seemed more interested in non-political issues such as education than in suffrage and was intent on working within the system for gradual change. The suffragists were so confident of winning the vote after the First World War ended that, in contrast to the suffragists in Britain and Ireland, they did not campaign strongly for it, allowing the politicians to delay, and finally to deny women suffrage.

In most countries, feminism moved to the right in the early twentieth century, reflecting the middle-class fear of socialism, even though left-wing parties were by then committed to the emancipation of women

and sexual equality. Such fears of the left were reinforced by the Russian Revolution of 1917, while demands for women's rights were swamped by the economic depression of the 1930s. Moreover, though in Russia and Germany women won the vote, it soon seemed a hollow gain with the former becoming a one-party state in 1918, the latter in 1933. The same was true of Italy, a late 'entrant' into the First World

War, where the fascists' initial flirtation with female suffrage quickly proved meaningless. In any case, what all the European states had in common in the inter-war period was a stress on pro-natalism. Such a policy raised the status of motherhood, but it also reinforced patriarchal views of woman's role, of relations between the sexes, and of the family, whatever the dominant ideology.

Women, Revolution and Counter-Revolution

Russian Women and Revolution

Even before the end of the First World War women in Russia had won the vote, albeit from a reluctant Provisional Government, in July 1917. While the vote had been the primary concern of aristocratic and gentry feminists, the Revolution of February had been instigated by women workers in Petrograd. The feminists tried hard to attract working women to the campaign for equal rights, refusing to accept that revolution for the latter was simply about bread, land and peace. Generally, women are missing from what are essentially political accounts of the revolutionary process between February and October. Yet women of all social classes participated in the intervening period of turmoil, even if rarely in a leadership role.

Revolution in October took Russia out of the First World War, while feminists were written out of Soviet history.⁶ Most western historians see Alexandra Kollontai, the first female government minister in Europe and later the first female ambassador, as an increasingly lonely voice in communist Russia calling for women's rights and a new morality. The Revolution at least brought formal equality between the sexes in law, and women continued to take an active part in the revolutionary process and in the Civil War in a variety of roles, ranging from the traditionally female tasks of caring for

the sick and wounded to the conventionally male prerogative of fighting at the front; it seems that some 80,000 women, including medical personnel, fought in the Civil War. Russia's mobilisation of women both in the First World War and the Civil War was exceptional, compared to the other protagonists; but like them, the main function of Russian women in war was supportive.

The Revolution championed sexual equality which was reflected in the 1918 Family Code, the most progressive the world had seen. The ideals of 1918, however, lacked a sufficient economic base to underpin them and were imposed by an urban Communist Party on a conservative, predominantly peasant country. Indeed, many Communists argued that the reforms, which included rights to divorce and abortion, were not only premature but potentially harmful to women's position. The Communists had no blueprint for family legislation after the Revolution. The primary aim was to abolish the traditional patriarchal institution, yet there was no agreement on how this should be achieved, nor on what should replace it. Moreover, the Civil War absorbed all energies. In the struggle for survival, an extremely functional attitude towards sexual relations developed, in which women and children were the main victims. While some saw a 'sexual revolution' occurring in Russia in the 1920s, most Communists disapproved

of indiscipline in sexual relations. The left-Communist Victor Serge later recorded:

Doubtless, sexuality, so long repressed, first by revolutionary asceticism and then by poverty and famine, was beginning to recover its drive in a society which had been abruptly cut off from any kind of spiritual nourishment. Promiscuity fed upon the misery of the environment. Books ... propagated an oversimplified theory of free love: an infantile variety of materialism which reduced 'sexual need' to its strictly animal connotation. The most sophisticated section of youth, the university students, was discussing [the] theory of the disappearance of morals in the future communist society.⁷

The sympathetic German visitor, Rosa Levine-Mayer, believed that in practice promiscuity was rare; people were too absorbed in the new tasks, and too preoccupied with cold and hunger, to have much time for what was called 'personal life'. In her view, men appeared to be the main beneficiaries of the loosened divorce and marriage regulations.⁸

Indeed, given woman's lack of control over her fertility, her position was especially precarious. The Communist regime was the first to legalise abortion; but it regarded the 1920 measure, though socially and medically necessary, as a temporary evil. The assumption was that when conditions improved and the cultural level rose, the widespread use of abortion would diminish. In practice, the Communists disapproved of abortion, considering maternity a social duty as well as a natural function of women. The issue was one of greater and better maternity protection,

rather than reducing the birth rate or giving the individual woman control over reproduction.

In fact, public concern was roused by a result of the disintegration of traditional family relations: the millions of *besprizorniki*, or abandoned children. Despite the shocking but unfounded rumours that communism meant the collectivisation of both women and children, the issue of the role of the family had been raised by the sheer scale not only of child abandonment, but also of divorce. The situation of unstable family relations against the background of a hostile world, growing economic problems from the mid-1920s and Stalin's eventual victory in the factional struggle within the Communist Party, seemed to pave the way for a reactionary backlash, or revolutionary retreat: what Trotsky termed 'thermidor' in the family. Abortion was subsequently outlawed in 1936 and divorce made increasingly difficult to obtain. Yet it was not a total reaction. Stalin needed women workers as well as men to fuel his 'revolution from above', the economic modernisation of the economy in the 1930s, which he considered necessary in face of the fascist threat from the West, above all from Germany.

Women and Counter-Revolution in Germany

Despite the severe privations and growing social unrest, the German people had not been psychologically prepared for defeat in November 1918. With the armistice came a profound political crisis which led to the abdication of the Kaiser and other German princes, and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. To some historians,



this amounted to a revolution which began with the naval mutiny in Kiel in October 1918. In contrast to its Russian counterpart of February 1917, in which women played a crucial role, the German revolution began as a military affair. The old order was not destroyed in Germany in 1918, but was simply disarmed by the shock of defeat.

Moreover, the extreme left was in a distinct minority, while the Social Democratic Party was prepared to compromise with the old order and indeed relied on the army to keep order. In January 1919, the German communists attempted to seize power by a coup — the so-called Spartacist Rising — which was quickly repressed and its leaders, Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht, brutally murdered by officers. The forces of counter-revolution were strengthened, while moderates were fright-

Above, Russian women in 1921 before going on duty as street car conductors.

Hulton Getty

ened both by the fate of the Spartacists and their demands. Some historians believe that if there was a revolution in Germany after the First World War, then it was a revolution from above which established a parliamentary democracy. The ensuing attempts at more radical change mainly served to encourage counter-revolution and ensured that there was no loyalty to the Weimar Republic either on the extreme left or right. This lack of enthusiasm was reflected in the attitude of German women. Women in Weimar Germany gained the vote, yet many of them used their new political freedom to support conservative and nationalist parties, including the Nazis.

It was the 1929 Depression which turned the situation in the Nazis' favour. In such an unstable social and political situation, with millions of men suddenly thrown out of work and with increasingly violent political activities (street fights between Nazis and the Left), conservative ideas about women's domestic role seemed very attractive. Yet while the unemployed do not seem to have voted Nazi in any great numbers, Nazi ideas were popular with large numbers of women. The reasons might be a desire for security, a nostalgia for traditional roles or a longing for order. Nazi propaganda was extremely powerful. The 1932 crisis brought women into voting in large numbers (a considerable proportion of those women eligible for the vote had not actually used it before); and it seems that generally a third of women voted for the Nazis.

It is ironic that Nazi women had more opportunity for political activities under the Weimar regime, which they despised, than under Hitler. The general assumption is that Nazi views on women were totally repressive; but the situation was more complex. Certainly, the Nazis wanted to put the clock back socially, to a pre-industrial society in terms of women and the family, but Tim Mason has shown that their policies were contradictory, having both repressive and progressive features.⁹

Roughly 1.7 million German men had died in the War and in the inter-war period there were approximately two million more women than men in Germany. There was also a fall in the birth rate. This was partly a long-term development and a sign of a maturing economy. But in the context of defeat in war and under the influence of eugenics and Social Darwinism, there were fears for Germany's future, even talk of the 'suicide of the nation'. This idea was

picked up by political parties, and not only the Nazis but also the conservatives, including the Catholic Centre Party.¹⁰ Thus Nazi views on women's domestic role and reproductive duty were hardly unique.

One of the first acts of the Nazi regime, in the summer of 1933, was to introduce the Marriage Loan. This was a substantial loan (of 600 marks), at low interest, to set up a household, upon marriage, provided the woman left work. It proved popular: by 1939, it underpinned 40 per cent of all marriages. For each child born, the loan was reduced by 150 marks. The birth rate was also encouraged by Family Allowances, medals for motherhood, laws against abortion and the discouraging of contraception. Family Planning was replaced by Family Welfare.

Initially the birthrate increased, yet it remained below the rate for 1922. The Nazis slowed down, but did not reverse, the trend of falling birth rates. Most people married, and married earlier, but in practice couples had fewer children than in the past. In addition, Nazi family policies were targeted at 'pure' German women. They were determined to destroy what they believed to be racial 'pollution'. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 forbade marriage and sexual intercourse between Germans and Jews. There was a secret policy of sterilising 'undesirables' (those with so-called hereditary illnesses), while a euthanasia programme was directed against the elderly and the infirm. In *Mothers of the Fatherland* (1987), Claudia Koonz claims that it fell to women, as much as to men, to put all the Nazi racial edicts into practice: as social workers, teachers and nurses, they were expected to identify 'racially unfit Aryans' to the Nazi sterilisation agencies. Furthermore, Koonz sees Nazi women as the social side of tyranny,



A meeting of the German Girls Association (*Deutsches Frauenwerk*) in Potsdam Castle, with the Nazi politician Alfred Rosenberg and, to his left, Fraulein Hilde Monske. This organisation, aimed at working-class women, claimed some eight million members. Hulton Getty

ministering to the men who committed genocide.¹¹

Hitler believed that women's emancipation had been an invention of Jewish intellectuals, whom he equated with communists. The Nazis established two organisations for women: the NS Frauenschaft and the *Deutsches Frauenwerk*. The former was the elite organisation, and claimed around two million members. The second, which was aimed at the working class, claimed eight million. There is considerable disagreement among historians over the complicity of German women with the Nazi regime. Jill Stephenson points out that the Nazi women's organisations were shorn of any political role once Hitler came to power. She is less harsh in her judgement

of German women under the Nazis than Koonz, even claiming that, compared to men, they were 'peculiarly resistant to National Socialism'. Tim Mason's position lies somewhere between Koonz and Stephenson. He believes that in a variety of ways German men were the direct and perhaps the main beneficiaries of the regime's policies towards women. Yet he contradicts Stephenson by arguing that in the later 1930s, the Third Reich enjoyed a large measure of active and passive support among German women, even a larger measure than it gained from men. Whichever interpretation one accepts, it is clear that Nazi women did not see themselves as docile and submissive.¹²

What is also evident is that Nazi policies with regard to Aryan women did not

always have the desired effect. The Nazis failed both to halt the long-term trend of a falling birth rate and to keep women in the home. Indeed, the number of working women in Germany actually grew in the 1930s, although there were still 400,000 fewer female workers in 1938 (5.2 million) than in 1928. By the late 1930s, industry and agriculture in Germany were suffering a labour shortage. In response, the Third Reich reluctantly legislated the Reich Labour Service in 1938, designed specifically to employ young women in agricultural or domestic service by means of a 'duty year'. It was the only compulsory measure adopted before the Second World War, and even during the War, the Nazi ideology of female domesticity came before the needs of the industrial economy.

Women and Italian Fascism

Much less has been published in English on the subject of women and Italian fascism than on women in Nazi Germany. The general assumption is that in both forms, fascism was explicitly anti-feminist and that it exalted the role of woman as mother and as reproducer of the nation. Thus fascism had an interventionist role for the state in family affairs, refusing to accept the traditional distinction between the political and the social, or even the personal and the political.

There were, however, differences between the two fascist states. In Italy, economy and society were more backward, the Catholic Church was much stronger and the racial element much weaker than in Germany. Mussolini did not use abortion or sterilisation to 'purify' the race. Thus in contrast to Hitler,

Mussolini was less concerned with 'quality' than with quantity. Indeed, some prominent fascist women were Jewish, such as Olga Modigliani who fled Italy only in 1938 when Mussolini introduced Racial Laws. Moreover, early fascism did not appear explicitly anti-feminist, even supporting female suffrage, which may have reflected Mussolini's earlier association with the socialist movement and with the leading socialist Angelica Balabanova. With the inception of the fascist dictatorship, the suffrage issue soon became academic.

In 1925, the National Agency for Maternity and Childhood (the Italian initials being ONMI) was established. Its main purpose was to coordinate a range of initiatives which put the family at the centre of society and nation. Besides charitable work, the agency was expected to exercise some form of moral supervision. In that same year, the fascist women's organisation (*Fasci femminili*) was reorientated, taken away from political activities to focus on the social/familial, including supporting and implementing ONMI's activities. Victoria de Grazia argues that some middle-class women thought that this might be an opportunity to raise the level of mothering skills and introduce modern, scientific practices to improve the health and welfare of mothers and children. At the same time, lower-class women, both urban and rural, resented the interference of their social superiors. De Grazia claims that the Catholic Church also resisted state interference, preferring to encourage local initiatives and private charity. She believes that ONMI was frustrated not just by the Church's claim to authority in social affairs, but also by Mussolini's unwillingness to spend much

money on it.¹³ Besides being underfunded, another contrast to Germany was that the development of Mussolini's social policy towards the family was not centralised.

On the other hand, Mussolini, like Hitler, was very concerned with population growth. There were various incentives, both negative and positive, to encourage the birth rate: a ban on abortion, unavailability of contraceptives, tax benefits (though these were never as generous or as widespread as in the Third Reich), protective legislation which barred women from certain areas of work and a preference in public employment shown to men with children. Mussolini was concerned with the health of the nation, but whereas women were encouraged to participate in sports in the 1920s, by the 1930s the Italian fascist regime was portraying sportswomen as unfeminine, even immodest.

Thus while Communist Russia differed from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in its stress on women taking a public role in building the economy, the three authoritarian regimes nevertheless equated women with domesticity. In the second half of the 1930s, such differences as well as the similarities between Left and Right over the position of women were reflected in the conflict in Spain between the Republican government, which enlisted women in its struggle against counter-revolution, and the opposing nationalist forces which saw such 'free women' as the embodiment of the godless republic.

Women, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain

Until at least the late 1970s, histories of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) were writ-

ten from the viewpoint of the conflict as a precursor to the Second World War, with Spain as the 'cockpit of Europe'. Yet women played a crucial role in the bitter struggle between revolution and counter-revolution. As in the Russian Civil War, women in Spain became more visible in public affairs; but even less so than in Russia was there a radical challenge to traditional gender roles.

Yet a central propaganda image of the early part of the Spanish Civil War was the *Miliciana*, the revolutionary heroine who was prepared to take up arms alongside the men to defend the Republic. Again there are parallels with the Russian Civil War: in both, women fought and died for the revolution. Mary Nash, however, has recorded that the image of the *Miliciana* had disappeared from Republican propaganda by the end of 1936, to be replaced by the home-front heroine, the *Republican Mother*.¹⁴

This idealisation of motherhood might be seen as little different from the fascist ideal. In Spain, however, the *Republican Mother* undermined the traditional notion of the 'angel in the home' because the domestic sphere had become politicised. Spanish women, like Russian women, showed themselves prepared to take direct action to protect not only their individual families but also their community and their revolution. The *Republican Mother* was expected to instill in her children republican virtues and to encourage them to fight against fascism. Moreover, while fascism stressed biological motherhood, in Spain women simply had to show maternal feelings towards the Republic to achieve the status of mother.

The one woman to figure prominently in the history, and mythology, of the

Spanish Civil War was La Pasionara, Dolores Ibarruri, a communist who quickly became a symbolic figure; depending on the bias of the observer, she was either idealised or demonised. Yet the first female government minister (of Health) was an anarchist, Federica Montseny. It was the anarchist women's organisation *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women, 1936) which did most to question, though only partially, traditional gender roles. Anarchist women stressed community and empowerment, and like communist women (to whom they were ideologically opposed) they concentrated on mobilising women to contribute to the war effort, rather than on the fight for women's rights. Indeed, both anarchist and communist women saw feminism as middle-class and divisive for the revolutionary movement.

With the exception of Ibarruri, and to a lesser extent Montseny, women were 'lost' from the history of the Civil War. One reason is that the Republic was defeated and the winning side under General Franco established a patriarchal state, writing women out of the history of the Civil War except as victims. Franco, who ruled until his death in 1975, quickly repealed all legislation which supported sexual equality. Those women who had been politically active in support of the Republican cause were harshly treated, portrayed as prostitutes and destroyers of the Christian family. The only place for women in Franco's Spain was in the home.

Yet as in Germany and Italy, women had also been active on the side of counter-revolution. In 1934 fascist women were organised in the *Sección Femenina* of the Falange under the leadership of Pilar Primo de Rivera. As in Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, once Franco was in power

all women's organisations were banned, with the exception of the fascist women's movement which lost all political functions. It was left to oversee the organisation of women for social service and to propagandise women on a mass scale.

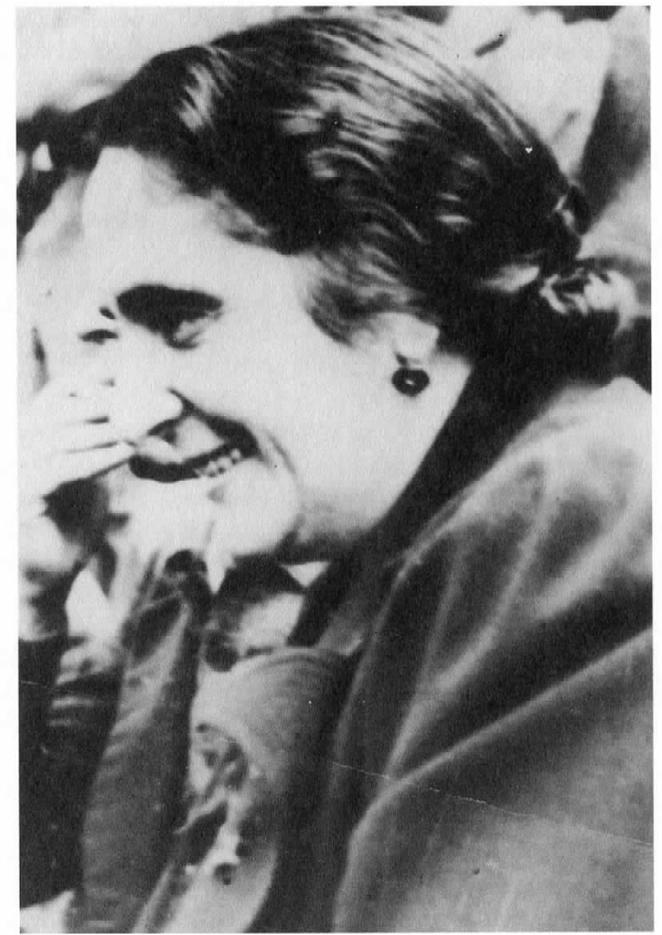
Women and Dictatorship

There were similarities in the position of women in Russia under communism, and in Germany and Italy under fascism: all three states were pro-natalist; women, like men, were expected to serve the needs of the state; and women were remarkable by their absence from positions of power. Women's experience of democratic Republican Spain was much briefer than the other case studies, but show similarities to the Russian situation, whereas the dictatorship of Franco, with its pro-natalist policies from 1939 and legislation reimposing women's subservience to their husbands and fathers, echoed the programmes of Hitler and Mussolini.

The main difference between the dictatorships is that, even taking into account the limitations upon sexual equality in Soviet Russia, the ideology concerning women's role in society was much more positive. In democratic Republican Spain, any gains made by women proved short-lived, replaced under Franco with hatred for and persecution of women who had supported the Republic. Sexual equality, however imperfect in practice, was written into the Soviet constitution. Certainly it resulted in Soviet women carrying a heavy burden, the 'double burden' of work and family. But it also gave them a public as well as a private role, with limited scope for political activity, most commonly

at local level. It gave Soviet women, too, a pride in their ability to cope with the double burden, reflected in the saying 'women can do everything, men can do the rest'. Such an attitude was anathema to Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. Their counter-revolutions had sought to defeat the revolutionary 'New Woman'. Yet such women were in a minority. For the most part it was men who went off to fight. Revolutions as well as war were, by the late 1930s, very much masculine affairs.

In contrast to the First World War, and as a reflection of the preceding Spanish Civil War, the Second World War was portrayed as an ideological conflict. It purported to be between the forces of fascism and democracy, though the Stalinist dictatorship, which began as an ally of Hitler, fought the Great Patriotic War against the Nazis in alliance with the West from 1941. While all the combatants thought in terms of female domesticity, since October 1917 the Soviet Union had proclaimed sexual equality. However limited in practice, the Stalinist stress on the in-



Above, the communist Dolores Ibarruri, known as 'La Pasionara', was the one woman to figure prominently in the history, and mythology, of the Spanish Civil War. Following Franco's victory, women were written out of the history of the Civil War, except as victims. Imperial War Museum

clusion of women in the labour force ensured that they would play a crucial role in the war effort.

Whereas women's role in the combatant states during the First World War was for the most part similar, in the Second World War ideology was significant in defining female activities. Thus in Britain and the Soviet Union, women were organised by the state to contribute to the war effort. In Nazi Germany, ideology limited the role women could, and indeed were allowed to play. In terms of combat,

there was no consistency in the use of women. Their involvement depended on a variety of factors: on historical and cultural traditions; on the prevailing political ideology or religious system; and on the actual circumstances of the war itself. When women were involved, it was almost always a decision made by men,

who were generally reluctant and had not planned for female participation. Usually women were seen in a support role and not on the front line. If they took part in fighting, whether spontaneously or through official recruitment, the situation was seen as one of desperation, in the face of invasion or occupation.

Women and the Second World War

Women in Britain during the Second World War

As in 1914, an immediate effect of war in 1939 was a rise in women's unemployment. War hit the traditional female industries which concentrated on consumer goods, such as pottery, footwear, clothing, textiles and domestic service. Yet women workers were soon to prove crucial to the war effort. Indeed, some historians believe that the British government mobilised the population for war work more effectively than any other Western state, though at first the government agencies were not prepared to handle the numbers of women who responded to the national emergency. In 1941, all women between the ages of 19 and 40 had to register at employment exchanges so that the Ministry of Labour could direct those suitable into essential work. The National Service Number 2 Act of December 1941 decreed that all single women between 20 and 35 years of age were liable for military service.

Once again, as in the First World War, the large-scale employment of women was assumed to be temporary, for the duration of the War only. Nor did women gain equal pay with men. Women were faced with a wider variety of jobs than in the earlier conflict, reflecting both the different style of combat and the technological developments since 1918. The government, however, mobilised male as well as female

workers during the Second World War, designating certain crucial occupations as reserved, preventing men who worked in those skilled areas from either enlisting or being conscripted. One result was that there were fewer opportunities for women to do skilled work, despite wider job opportunities for them than in the First World War.

As the War continued, more and more demands were made on the work-force, especially in essential war industries. Women workers were faced with long hours, with constant shift work, with wages which were lower than those for men, and with the strains of feeding a family on rations. Whereas in the First World War British women had protested about their situation by resisting rent increases, in the Second World War they complained about their wages. The main grievance was about low, rather than unequal pay. Towards the end of the War, women workers were involved in sporadic strike action. Nor were wages the only issue, for while there was state help for women workers with children, it was limited and often did not parallel the long hours of shift work expected in key industries such as engineering.

For some women, there was the evacuation of their children to contend with, and for others the task of caring for the evacuees. Another group of women went into the armed forces, through the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps; but as in the First World War, they did not take part in

military combat. Instead, they served as support workers, in catering, clerical duties, stores and nursing. There was also the Women's Land Army, in which women, often with no experience of rural life, worked as farm labourers, an essential job given the efforts of the Nazis to cut off supplies.

The mobilisation of female labour on such a scale, for food and services as well as armament production and the military, seemed to bring a real change to the relations between the sexes during the Second World War. There was a loosening of moral and sexual restraints, partly due to the impact of long separation upon partners. By the end of the war, the divorce rate in Britain had soared (five times more than before the war), while illegitimate births had trebled. War time was recognised as a period of intense sexual relations, while there was the influence of another culture, with the presence of thousands of North American troops in Britain. Yet by the end of the War, there was a general desire for stability in sexual partnerships, for security in domestic life.

Women and Occupation

Britain, of course, had neither been invaded nor suffered occupation. In occupied coun-



Constructing an aircraft wing at a war factory in Slough. Women were faced with a wider variety of jobs than in the First World War, reflecting both the different style of combat and the technological developments since 1918. Imperial War Museum

tries, women faced the same dilemma as men — resistance or collaboration — but in neither were they accorded leadership roles. Claire Duchon writes that in terms of women the Liberation period in France was more concerned with collaboration (especially 'sexual collaboration' with German troops), while the history of women's part in the Resistance was understated and undervalued.¹⁵ The country had been divided into German-occupied France and the collaborationist Vichy regime. Like Nazism, Vichy stressed motherhood as a duty to the nation. However, while cham-

pioning the patriarchal family, Vichy proved unable to restrict women's participation in public life. Indeed, with a million French men as prisoners of war in Germany, and hundreds of thousands of men (and around 45,000 women) sent to Germany on Compulsory Labour Service from 1942, women in Vichy were left to support their families. Certainly most women remained in traditional female roles, preoccupied with the problems of everyday life, but just as civil war had politicised daily life in Spain, so occupation did in France. While women protested against the conditions of occupation, and especially against food hoarding, few took part in armed resistance. Instead they filled dangerous support roles in providing safe houses, communication and information to the male-dominated Resistance movement.

Those women who participated in the Resistance remembered the experience as egalitarian, even if the reality was one of female inferiority.¹⁶ Indeed in the Second World War women, including a few British women, played a significant role in all the resistance movements, encompassing terrorist acts and political agitation, from France to the Soviet Union. Italy, which began the War on the side of the Nazis, ended with a strong anti-fascist resistance movement, in which women also played a part. As in France, after the war women's contribution to the Italian Resistance went for the most part unrecognised. In Yugoslavia, in contrast to both France and Italy there was a tradition of women fighting against foreign oppressors, from the Turks to the Nazis. In the Second World War, Yugoslavia was invaded by German, Italian and Bulgarian troops; there were also clashes between the nationalities, especially the Serbs and Croats. The

Yugoslav communists in particular involved women, who participated in combat alongside men; but all the groups — nationalist, fascist, as well as communist — had women fighting. Yet most women provided support at the rear, as was the case in all the combatant countries.

Women, War and Ideology

Both Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany were dictatorships, yet the role of Russian and German women in the war differed considerably, both in the war industries and at the front. At first, Stalin's response had been to replace men in factories, farms and mines with women. By 1943, over three-quarters of the agricultural labour force was female, while in industry women constituted up to 52 per cent of the labour force. Those women not directly involved in war industries were mobilised into building fortifications and digging trenches. Given the huge loss of men, there was no alternative. Eventually, childless women not engaged in war work were eligible for military conscription. Almost every detachment from as early as 1941 had some women. Most performed medical, communications and domestic work; but all were armed, and many fought, both in direct combat and in sabotage missions.

Soviet women were directly engaged in fighting, using arms of every sort. They fought on the ground and in the air. They were organised in both mixed- and single-sex units, though more commonly in the former. Most of them were young, but ages ranged from 15 to 50 years. Overall, women made up around eight per cent of the combatants. They fought in both the regular and irregular (or partisan) units. The sources generally remark on the



It's the women we need..



**Women ambulance drivers, women wardens,
women for first aid and casualty stations.**

ENROL AT ONCE!

greater equality of the sexes among the partisans, but it is a picture which might well be romanticised. Part of Soviet wartime propaganda was the depiction of the woman warrior defending her country against the enemy, reminiscent of the Spanish Miliciana. At the end of the War however, all Soviet women combatants were demobilised.

The opposite was the case in Nazi Germany. Besides holding an ideology which insisted that a woman's place was in the home, the Nazis believed that a major reason for defeat in the First World War had been domestic discontent. In contrast to its opponents, Germany did not try to fill its labour shortages by the increasing use of women in the work-force. As in the earlier conflict, there was a profound hostility in Germany to the use of women for military purposes. The Nazis at first used women in only small numbers, and later tried to hide their increasing participation by means of 'indirect conscription' such as the 'duty year', not only in agriculture but in nursing and other support services, especially anti-aircraft units.

Thus in 1940 the Women's Signal Auxiliary, set up in the First World War, was re-established. It included, for example, telephonists. By 1942 it was around 8,000 strong, but it did not increase thereafter and never mixed with soldiers who performed similar duties. The Luftwaffe was the most intensive employer of women among the armed forces. In the Air Force Women's Auxiliaries (which by 1945 employed 100,000 women), they worked in

communications and weather stations, as aircraft spotters and operators of barrage balloons. As the War dragged on some women were trained as mechanics. On a smaller scale, the German Navy employed around 20,000 female auxiliaries in mainly clerical and communications duties. Even the Waffen SS had its women auxiliaries, numbering about 5,000.

When the Germans captured over 100,000 Russian female soldiers early in the War, they were shocked that these women held full combatant status. German women auxiliaries, however essential for the war effort, were never allowed to use weapons. Even though the women were in uniform and subject to military discipline, they were considered civilians. Nazi ideology prevented the direct conscription of women as combatants. Only with the certainty of defeat did the Nazis consider establishing a female combat battalion, and even mixed-sex partisan groups, but such plans came to nothing.

Yet in spite of the Nazi ideological objection to women in paid employment, as high a proportion of women worked in Germany as in Britain during the War. What the Nazis did not do was force women to change jobs, even when the demands of a war-time economy called for planning the labour force. The Nazis did not want to become unpopular by compelling women to work. Nor did necessity force women to work, in contrast to the other combatant states, because wives of men in the German armed forces received generous allowances. Certainly, in January 1943, all German men between 60 and 65 and all women between 17 and 45 years of age were told to register for work. Yet only a fifth of the women who did so were employed. Even when it was clear, by the end of 1943, that the millions of forced

Left, poster for the Air Raid Precaution campaign of 1938. Some historians believe that the British government mobilised the population for war work more effectively than any other Western state, though at first the government agencies were not prepared to handle the numbers of women who responded to the national emergency. Hulton Getty

labourers could not satisfy the demands of the economy, Hitler still resisted the compulsory mobilisation of German women workers. To make up for the shortfalls in the labour force, Germany relied increasingly on the forced labour of foreigners, including women.

Women and Genocide

What is often missing from studies of the Holocaust is a consideration of gender. Yet Claudia Koonz, in her study of women in the Third Reich, asks what role women played in the genocide. She points on the one hand to the few thousand female prison matrons and camp guards who participated in, even if they did not plan, the 'final solution'. On the other hand, Nazi wives provided the murderers with emotional stability, what Koonz terms 'an ersatz sanity'.¹⁷

There was a certain equality in the brutal treatment meted out by the Nazis, who nevertheless separated the women from the men in the camps. Those women who survived, such as Kitty Hart, showed that it was necessary to build relations with other inmates — survival was a social, rather than an individual, achievement. The same was true of those who were involved in ghetto resistance, such as Vladka Meed, who played crucial roles, smuggling arms and dynamite as well as correspondence, and fighting the oppressor. Yet it also seems that in this resistance, women were expected to do, and assumed, traditional domestic tasks.¹⁸ Many women as well as men resisted the 'Final Solution' in a variety of ways. For the vast majority the result was death.

Women probably made up more than half the dead in the Holocaust. In the

ghettos, Jewish men had been more likely to be killed; but from 1942, with the increasing rate of deportations to the death camps, more women than men could now be considered 'surplus' when labour selections were made. There is disagreement concerning a focus on the specificity of women's experience of the Holocaust, because the Final Solution was to rid the world of all Jews, men and women. However, Jewish women were killed not simply because they were Jews, but because they could reproduce the Jewish race. While both women and men were victims of sterilisation experiments, memoirs show that in the camps Jewish motherhood was to be eradicated: no Jewish child or woman who could produce children was to be allowed to live. A pregnant Jewish woman was gassed immediately. Thus though 'the hell was the same, the horrors were different'.¹⁹

Women in 1945

With the exception of the Soviet Union, where the death toll among men had been so high as to preclude women leaving paid



Some women (like this SS guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp) actively supported the Nazi regime. While racially 'pure' German women were confined to the home, non-Aryan women were treated as slave-labourers.
Wiener Library

employment, most women, whether in war industries or the armed forces, were demobilised after the Second World War, just as they had been after the First World War. They were expected to return to the home and the ideal of domesticity. After such a long struggle, there was nostalgia for traditional gender roles; and as relations between the former Allies soured and the Cold War intensified, the 'liberated woman' was associated with communism. Integral to the anti-communism of the 1950s was the

resurgence of domestic ideology, in which the family with the mother at, or even confined to, its centre represented a haven of stability. In her study of British women and the Second World War, Penny Summerfield stressed the continuity in 1945 with pre-war attitudes and practices, both in paid employment and in the home. Indeed, she saw a cultural offensive against women, or rather married women, working.²⁰ Perhaps the main advance, and one which men found hard to cope with, was that women had gained in self-confidence. The experience of all the combatants was similar, with the exception of the Soviet Union, where the magnitude of population losses, particularly of men, was such as to

preclude the return of women to the home. Yet while Russian women made up just over half the workforce after 1945, the demographic shock of the War had been so great that there was a nostalgia for traditional gender roles which ensured the continuing association of women with domesticity.

Indeed, during this half century, the aftermath of wars and revolutions had invariably seen such nostalgia throughout the whole of Europe. This desire to return to a past security might be partly explained by the huge burdens and immense suffering which political and military strife had brought to both women and men. Yet even before war in 1914, the established order between the sexes was already being challenged, under pressure from economic and

social developments and under question from women themselves. The wars and revolutions between 1914 and 1945 provided women with new opportunities, and while many gains were either partial or temporary, there could be no total retreat to a situation of separate spheres for the sexes. One reason was that women were needed to help rebuild devastated economies; another was that women's confidence and expectations had risen. Still, what was clear by 1945 was that in terms of notions of 'a woman's place' it was the similarity rather than the difference between directly opposing ideologies which was remarkable. Between 1914 and 1945 war and revolution had shaken but not shattered traditional relations between women and men.

- ¹ Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 71-87.
- ² Ute Daniel, 'Women's Work in Industry and Family: Germany 1914-1918', in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in Europe 1914-1918* (Cambridge, 1988), Richard Wall and Jay Winter (eds.), pp. 267-296.
- ³ For the impressions of Mrs Pankhurst and other foreign visitors to the Women's Battalion in 1917, see Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed As Men In Pursuit Of Life, Liberty And Happiness* (London, 1989).
- ⁴ Joseph Melling, *Rent Strikes: People's Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890-1916* (Edinburgh, 1983), chapters 7-10.
- ⁵ Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists between the Wars* (Oxford, 1987), p. 303.
- ⁶ Non-Bolshevik pre-revolutionary feminists have been rescued by Linda Harriet Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia 1900-1917* (London, 1984).
- ⁷ Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901-1941*, translated by Peter Sedgwick (Oxford, 1963), p. 205.
- ⁸ Rosa Levine-Mayer, *Inside German Communism* (London, 1977), p.100.
- ⁹ Tim Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925-1940: Family, Welfare and Work', *History Workshop*, (1976), no. 1 and no. 2.
- ¹⁰ See Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford, 1990).
- ¹¹ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers of the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London, 1987), see chapter 11.
- ¹² For Koonz, see *ibid*; for Mason, see note 9; for Jill Stephenson, see *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London, 1981).
- ¹³ Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley, California, 1992).
- ¹⁴ Mary Nash, "'Milicianas' and Homefront Heroines: Images of Women in Revolutionary Spain (1936-1939)", *History of European Ideas*, (1989), vol.11. See also Frances Lannon, 'Women and Images of Women in the Spanish Civil War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, (1991).
- ¹⁵ Claire Duchon, *Women's Rights and Women's Lives in France 1944-1968* (London, 1994), pp. 11-16.
- ¹⁶ See Paula Schwartz, 'Partisanes and General Politics in Vichy France', *French Historical Studies*, (Spring 1989), vol.16.
- ¹⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, p. 416.
- ¹⁸ Kitty Hart, *Return to Auschwitz: the Remarkable Story of a Girl who Survived the Holocaust* (New York, 1985); Vladka Meed, *On Both Sides of the Wall* (New York, 1979).
- ¹⁹ Myrna Goldenberg, 'Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust' in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, Roger S. Gottlieb (ed.), (New York, 1991). See also Judith Tydor Baumel, 'Gender and Family Studies of the Holocaust: A Historiographical Overview' in *Women: a cultural review* (1996), vol.7, no.2.
- ²⁰ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (London, 1984), p. 1.

Further Reading

Overview

A very informative and thoughtful collection of essays is M. Higonet et al (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987). Also very relevant are Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (eds.), *Women, War and Revolution* (New York, 1980); Siân Reynolds (ed.), *Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789* (Brighton, 1986); Richard Evans, *Comrades and Sisters: Feminism, Socialism and Pacifism in Europe 1870-1945* (Brighton, 1987); G. Bock and P. Thane (eds.), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s-1950s* (London, 1991); Marie Sophia Quinn, *Population Politics in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, 1996); and F. Thébaud (ed.), *A History of Women in the West. vol.V. Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

For Britain, Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield have usefully combined their expertise on the two world wars in *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars* (London, 1987). Also very relevant here is Martin Pugh's *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1991); and Jill Liddington's *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-militarism in Britain since 1820* (London, 1989). For Ireland, see Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds.), *Women Surviving: Studies in Irish Women's History in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Dublin, 1990); for France, Siân

Reynolds, *France Between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (Routledge, London, 1996); for Germany, Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford, 1990), and for Russia *Daughters of Revolution: A History of Women in the USSR* by Barbara Clements (Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1994).

The First World War

For Britain, Gail Braybon in *Women Workers in the First World War* (London, 1981) incorporates research since Arthur Marwick's still valuable *Women and War 1914-1918* (London, 1977). G. Thomas gives a concise view of *Life on All Fronts: Women in the First World War* (Cambridge, 1989), while Susan K. Kent provides insight into the long term impact of war, in *Making the Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-War Britain* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1994).

For France, Steven G. Hause — biographer of *Hubertine Auclert: The French Suffragette* (New Haven, 1987) who died in 1914 — has also written on 'Women Who Rallied to the Tricolore: the Effects of World War I on the French Suffrage Movement', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, (1979), vol. 6. Another interesting article in the same journal (1978, vol. 5) is 'Women against the War: a feminine basis for internationalism and pacifism?' by Charles Sowerwine. For the longer term impact of the war, see *Civilisation Without Sexes: Reconstruct-*

ing Gender in Post-War France 1917-1927 (Chicago, 1994) by Mary Roberts.

For Ireland, see Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London, 1989); Rosemary Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement 1889-1922* (Dublin, 1984); Diana Norman, *Terrible Beauty: A Life of Constance Markievicz* (London, 1987); Leah Levenson and Jerry Natterstad, *Hanna Sheehy Skeffington* (Syracuse, 1986); and *Coming into the Light: The Work, Politics and Religion of Women in Ulster 1840-1940* (Belfast, 1994) by Diane Urquhart and Janice Holmes.

The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism 1860-1930 by Richard Stites (Princeton, New Jersey, 1978) is packed with useful detail and interesting insights. Besides Linda Edmondson's work on feminism (see Notes), there is the chapter by Alfred G. Meyer, 'The Impact of World War I on Russian Women's Lives' in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, B. E. Clements, B.A. Engel, and C.D. Worobec (eds.), (Berkeley, California, 1991). There are a number of biographies of the leading Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai: see for example *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai* by Barbara Evans Clements (Indiana, 1979); see also R.C. Elwood, *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist* (Cambridge, 1992).

Revolution and Counter-Revolution

Both the above biographies, as well as the previously cited works by Stites and Edmondson have obvious relevance for

women and the Russian Revolution, and there are relevant chapters in *Women in Russia* (Stanford, 1977), edited by D. Atkinson, A. Dallin and G.W. Lapidus. A useful article is Moira Donaldson's 'Bolshevik Activity among the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917', *International Review of Social History*, 1982, vol.xxvii. See also Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993).

For women in Nazi Germany, there is a wealth of material. Besides the works of Jill Stephenson, Tim Mason and Claudia Koonz cited in the Notes, there is Leila Rupp's *Mobilizing Women for War* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1978); Alison Owing's *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (London, 1993); *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, Renate Bridenthal, Alina Grossman and Marion Kaplan (eds.), (New York, 1984); and Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (London, 1975).

Much of the literature on women and the Holocaust is in either fiction or memoir. Besides Kitty Hart and Vladka Meek cited in the Notes, see Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond* (London, 1987) and Giuliana Tedeschi, *There is a Place on Earth: A Woman in Birkenau* (New York, 1993). For a range of experiences see Vera Laska (ed.), *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses* (London, 1983). Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (eds.), *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993) is divided into three sections: the first contains extracts from memoirs of mostly Jewish women who were in Auschwitz; the second consists of historians

discussing the relationship between gender and genocide; and the third contains reflection by Holocaust survivors and the children of survivors.

Since the 1980s more interest has been shown in the subject of women and Italian fascism: see Lesley Caldwell's important chapter 'Reproducers of the Nation: Women and the Family in Fascist Policy' in David Forgacs (ed.), *Rethinking Italian Fascism: Capitalism, Populism and Culture* (London, 1986). Victoria de Grazia's *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley, California, 1992) is a detailed analysis. Perry Wilson's *The Clockwork Factory: Women and Work in Fascist Italy* (Oxford, 1993) is a special study of Magneti-Marelli, possibly the most modern firm in Italy at the time, which had been founded in Milan as a result of the demand for arms in the First World War.

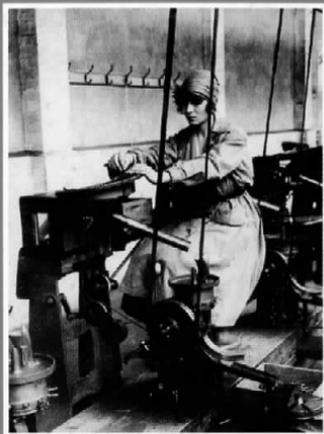
For the Spanish Civil War, pioneering work has been done by Mary Nash: see her *Defying Male Civilisation: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, 1995). See also Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1991); and Shirley Mangini, *Memoirs of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, 1995). A novel feature of the anthologies by Valentine Cunningham, *The Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War* (Oxford, 1986) and Jim Fyrrth (ed.) with Sally Alexander, *Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1991) was the emphasis on the role of non-Spanish women in the war. For a woman who sided with Franco see Priscilla Scott-Ellis, *The Chances of Death: A Diary of the Spanish Civil War* (Norwich, 1995).

The Second World War

For Britain, Arthur Marwick again provides a standard text, *The Home Front: Britain and the Second World War* (London, 1976), whose findings are added to by Penny Summerfield's *Women Workers in the Second World War* (London, 1984). C. Lang's *Keep Smiling Through: Women in the Second World War* (Cambridge, 1989), and *Bombers and Mash: The Domestic Front 1939-45* (London, 1980) by Raynes Minns provide interesting detail. A study of women whose contribution to the war effort is often either overlooked or underestimated is *They Fought in the Fields. The Women's Land Army: The Story of a Forgotten Victory* by Nicola Tyrer (London, 1996).

On France, see Margaret Collins Weitz, *Sisters in the Resistance: How Women fought to Free France, 1940-1945* (West Sussex, 1996); M.L. Rossiter's *Women in the French Resistance* (New York, 1985); Miranda Pollard, 'Women and the National Revolution' in R. Kedward and R. Austin (eds.), *Vichy France and the Resistance: Culture and Ideology* (London, 1985); and Sarah Fishman, *We Will Wait: Wives of French Prisoners of War 1940-1945* (New Haven, 1991). For Yugoslavia, there is *Women and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-45* (Denver, 1990) by B. Jancar-Webster. The works on women and Italian fascism, and on women in the Third Reich mentioned above and in the Notes are also relevant, as is Frevert's *Women in German History*. For Russia, see Atkinson et al's *Women in Russia and Daughters of the Revolution* by Clements, both previously cited. See also Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley, California, 1978).

NEW APPRECIATIONS



On the surface, the period 1914 to 1945 seems to have encompassed massive changes in the position of women in Europe, in response to the demands of war and revolution. In this thorough yet concise overview of the period, Jane McDermid questions this perception and reveals the diversity of women's experience not only between states but within individual societies. She argues that many of the gains made by women in both World Wars proved to be short lived, and that ideologies, of both left and right, had shaken but not shattered traditional relations between the sexes.



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