

**Daring and Defiant:  
Helen Crawford (1877-1954), Scottish Suffragette and  
International Communist**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is based upon the political activism of Helen Crawford (1877-1954), Scottish suffragette and communist internationalist. Through invoking a biographical approach, I argue that Crawford's political experience can shed light upon the complexities of women's activism in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. This thesis analyses three key pillars of Crawford's activism: the campaign for women's suffrage, the era of Red Clydeside in Glasgow, and communist internationalism. The over-compartmentalisation of women's activism in British historiography has led to the omission of vital connections between actors, movements and political ideas. This thesis thus seeks to surpass the confines of methodological nationalism by illustrating various instances of transnational connections and organising that were present locally and nationally. By focusing on Crawford's lived experience of communist internationalism, I offer an analysis of her politics that challenges the dominance of political history writing; asserting the importance on the personal and the everyday, as opposed to so-called high politics. Through analysing local movements, I also illustrate instances of resistance and divergence that have been widely overlooked in the writing of national history. Ultimately, this thesis posits that Helen Crawford has been widely neglected by historiography because of her gender, locality and her commitment to communist internationalism. Such historiographical tendencies undoubtedly continue to contribute to marginalization of historically important women, both in Britain, and further afield.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that his thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed            Kiera Wilkins

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## List of Abbreviations

BUF	British Union of Fascists
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CWC	Clyde Workers' Committee
GWhA	Glasgow Women's Housing Association
GWSAWS	The Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women's Suffrage
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
SFRF	Society of Friends of Russian Freedom
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SSS	Scottish Sunday School
TUC	Trade Union Congress
WCG	Women's Cooperative Guild
WIL	Women's International League (the title of the British section of WILPF)
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WIR	Workers' International Relief
WPC	Women's Peace Crusade



## INTRODUCTION

“My bankbook may have few figures in it. My stocks and shares are non-existent, but I am a very rich woman. I have walked and talked with the great ones of the Earth. Great because they were engaged in a great and worthy task.”<sup>1</sup>

Helen Crawford (1877-1954) was a staunchly socialist, Scottish suffragette. Having been involved in the British women's suffrage movement, anti-war campaigns and the Communist Party of Great Britain, in addition to various other Left leaning local and transnational organisations, Helen Crawford offers historians the opportunity to examine the complexities of feminist, Leftist activism in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. I seek to demonstrate, through use of a biographical lens, the interconnected nature of women's activism of the time and the historiographical problems that remain rife in the study of women's and gender history in Britain.

This thesis will posit that the over-compartmentalisation of women's activism in British historiography has led to the omission of vital connections between actors, movements and political ideas. By employing both a local and transnational focus, I will illustrate instances of resistance and divergence that have been widely overlooked in the writing of national history. Specific emphasis on Scotland and Glasgow serves to exhibit the myriad ways in which factors such as class, nationalism and gender affected political activism differently, depending on context. Crucially, this thesis will argue that personal development, friendships, and previous political experience are factors that informed, and often defined, movements. I wish to emphasize, through the case of one individual, the broader structural forces that continue to marginalise women, particularly Leftist women, from the writing of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 400. Manuscript and digitised version available at Marx Memorial Library, accessed 20 May, 2019, <https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/project/socialist-opposition-ww1/autobiography-helen-crawford>.

## ***Introducing Helen Crawford***

Helen Crawford was a remarkable woman who fought vigorously for women's rights and social justice more generally. Born November 8, 1877 in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, Scotland, Crawford enjoyed a relatively comfortable upbringing. Her father's job, as a Master Baker, secured the family's middle-class status. Crawford's parents were both devoutly religious people who maintained a strong commitment to humanitarianism.<sup>2</sup> When Helen was a young girl, the family moved to Ipswich, a relatively wealthy town in southern England, where they stayed for some years. Later in her teenage years, the family moved back to Glasgow.

Upon her return, Crawford was horrified by the extent of poverty and inequality she witnessed. Stirred by a sense of injustice and dismay, she became acutely aware of the maltreatment of Clydeside workers by business owners and the slum-like living conditions the working-class was forced to endure.<sup>3</sup> Marrying widower Reverend Alexander Montgomerie Crawford (1828-1914) in 1898, Crawford became heavily involved in organised religion; this period allowed her to work closely with the religious community in Glasgow and, vitally, enabled her to develop her skill as a public orator- an attribute that would later come to define her as an activist.

In 1910, Crawford joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Glasgow and soon became known as one of the most active Scottish suffragettes. During this time, Crawford developed a wide network of feminist friends and became a "leading ally" of the WSPU leaders Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.<sup>4</sup> Smashing windows was Crawford's preferred act of militancy, however, she was also arrested on other occasions for making

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<sup>2</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.

<sup>4</sup> Lesley Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?' Helen Crawford, War Resistance and the Women's Peace Crusade 1916-1918," 2. Accessed July 7, 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/33114337/SHALL\\_WE\\_NOT\\_SPEAK\\_FOR\\_OURSELVES\\_HELEN\\_CRAWFURD\\_WAR\\_RESISTANCE\\_AND\\_THE\\_WOMENS\\_PEACE\\_CRUSADE\\_1916\\_18](https://www.academia.edu/33114337/SHALL_WE_NOT_SPEAK_FOR_OURSELVES_HELEN_CRAWFURD_WAR_RESISTANCE_AND_THE_WOMENS_PEACE_CRUSADE_1916_18).

“inflammatory comments” at public meetings.<sup>5</sup> Crawford experienced multiple stints of imprisonment, in both Glasgow and London, during which she employed the infamous method of hunger strike.

Following her suffrage activism, the onslaught of WWI prompted Crawford to disassociate herself from the Pankhursts and the WSPU, due to their pro-war stance, and instead became actively involved in the anti-war effort on Red Clydeside.<sup>6</sup> Crawford was active in a range of different capacities on Red Clydeside, most notably as Secretary of the Glasgow Women’s Housing Association (GWhA) in 1915, in which Crawford helped to mobilise women of Glasgow against unjust rent increases during war time. In 1916, building on the success of this movement, and her brief involvement in the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF, founded 1915), Crawford co-founded the Women’s Peace Crusade (WPC). The WPC (1916-1918) was an organisation that sought to give a voice to women who opposed the wasteful, imperialist War.<sup>7</sup> While the movement began as a local, Glaswegian body, it soon gained popularity and grew into a national mass movement.

After the War, while Crawford had originally left WILPF in favour of pursuing her work with WPC, she was nonetheless invited to the Conference of the Women’s International League at Zurich in 1919 to speak on behalf of the British delegation.<sup>8</sup> I would argue that this invitation is indicative of the level of national and international respect Crawford had accumulated due to her ceaseless anti-war campaigning. Throughout WWI, Crawford was involved with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and later became one of their most renowned speakers. In 1918, she was appointed vice-chairperson of the ILP Scottish

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<sup>5</sup> Graham Stevenson, “Crawford, Helen (1877-1954),” Encyclopedia of Marxism: Glossary of People, Marxist Internet Archive, accessed May 7, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/c/r.htm#crawford-helen>.

<sup>6</sup> The River Clyde runs through the heart of Glasgow towards the Atlantic Ocean. The term Clydeside refers to the geographic region that is defined by its industrial character. Red Clydeside refers explicitly to the socialist political culture that was present in the region during the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century.

<sup>7</sup> Orr, “‘Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?’,” 3.

<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, “Crawford, Helen (1877-1954).”

Divisional Council. Having been greatly moved by the Russian revolution of October 1917, Crawford became increasingly fascinated by the country and wished to see, for herself, the changes it was undergoing.<sup>9</sup>

In 1920, Crawford travelled alone to Russia with the hope of attending the Second World Congress of the Comintern in her role as representative of the ILP. Due to unforeseen circumstances, she did not arrive in time. However, she stayed in Moscow for three months and met with some of the leading communists across the globe. Crawford was able to secure interviews with both Vladimir Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, where they discussed, primarily, the role of women in communism.<sup>10</sup> Throughout the course of her life, Crawford visited Russia five times- sometimes alone, other times with family and friends.

After failing to convince the wider ILP base to maintain their affiliation to the Communist International (established 1919), Crawford left the Party and became a co-founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920. Appointed as member of the Executive Committee, Crawford was tasked with organising women. She soon after became editor of the women's page of *The Communist*, the CPGB newspaper, where she used her platform to inform women of the benefits of communism.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1, which depicts Crawford exiting a CPGB meeting, gives a sense of her striking appearance; the long, black dress appears to have been her garment of choice.

From 1920, until her death, Crawford worked tirelessly to promote international communism, with much of her efforts directed towards her involvement in the international

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<sup>9</sup> Crawford details this journey and her experience in Moscow 1920 in: Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 188-210.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)," Glasgow Digital Library: Red Clydeside, accessed May 5, 2019, <http://gdl.cdli.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redclypeobyecra.htm>. These interviews were conducted in English with the help of a translator. I have found no evidence in my research to suggest that Crawford spoke, or read, any language other than English.

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

aid organisation Worker's International Relief (WIR).<sup>12</sup> WIR was an organisation that sought to support struggling working-class communities by encouraging workers elsewhere to offer their solidarity and financial support. Having been invited to be Secretary of the British section of WIR in 1922, Crawford retained a strong belief in the radical potential of a united, international working class. Through her role in WIR, Crawford spent a decade of her life (1922-1933) travelling across Europe to aid workers who were experiencing extreme poverty.



*Figure 1 Helen Crawford leaving a meeting of the CPGB, 1920s (exact date unknown). Glasgow Digital Library, accessed June 13, 2019, <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redcly181.htm>.*

Despite the demanding nature of her WIR activism, Crawford still found the time to contribute to national CPGB work and other transnational causes. In 1927, she travelled to Brussels to help establish the League Against Imperialism;<sup>13</sup> an organisation inspired by the Second Congress of the Comintern, which sought to bring together anti-colonial

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<sup>12</sup> Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)."

<sup>13</sup> Helen Crawford's attendance is documented in: List of organisations and delegates attending the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. Brussels. 1927. League against Imperialism Archives, International Institute of Social History, accessed May 5, 2019, <https://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/ARCH00804>.

organisations and thinkers from across the globe. Meanwhile, Crawford continued to contribute articles to the women's pages of the various communist newspapers. She also stood for local and national election in Scotland on numerous occasions, including as CPGB candidate for Bothwell, in Lanarkshire, in 1929 and North Aberdeen, in 1931.<sup>14</sup> Crawford was unsuccessful in electoral politics until the year 1946, when she was elected first woman councillor on the local Dunoon Council.

By 1933, Crawford, aged 56, had grown tired of the constant travel that her activism demanded of her so returned to Scotland to settle down. However, 1933 was also the year of Hitler's ascendance to power; it was thus not long until Crawford became secretary of two separate anti-fascist organisations.<sup>15</sup> In the lead up to WWII, in 1939, Crawford organised a Peace Congress that welcomed representatives of countries from across the British Empire.<sup>16</sup> Despite her peace work, she was committed to the fight against fascism and became an ardent supporter of the Allied forces in WWII.

In 1944, Crawford officially retired from public life and moved to Dunoon, a small town on the West coast of Scotland. In 1946 Crawford's retirement ended and she began her work on Dunoon Council; she simply could not stay away from politics. After two years in this role she was forced to retire due to deteriorating health.<sup>17</sup> In 1947, she married George Anderson, fellow CPGB activist. It is assumed that it was during these years of retirement in Dunoon that Crawford wrote her autobiography.<sup>18</sup> On April 18, 1954, just hours after her sister died, Helen Crawford-Anderson passed away in her home in Dunoon aged 77.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)."

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

<sup>16</sup> Stevenson, "Crawford, Helen (1877-1954)."

<sup>17</sup> Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)."

<sup>18</sup> As speculated by Audrey Canning in the introductory essay to the Crawford-Anderson collection. GML-Box 129 X3912, Gallacher Memorial Library, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>19</sup> Helen Crawford-Anderson was her name at the point of her death. However, from here this thesis refers to her as Helen Crawford as this was the name she used during most of her political activism and it is the name most prominently used by historians. I was informed of the circumstances of Crawford's death through an e-mail exchange with historian Lesley Orr.

## ***Historical relevance and historiographical shortcomings***

While more recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge Helen Crawford's vital role in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century political movements, much of the historiography concerning the specific pillars of activism that Crawford was enmeshed in have either reduced the extent of her involvement or omitted it entirely. In my view, Helen Crawford has been overlooked by much of the historiography specifically because of her gender, her geographic location and her communist internationalism. This thesis seeks to challenge dominant historiographical approaches to women's activism in Britain through illustrating the importance of transnational and localised forms of organisation. To ignore these sites of political activism is to disregard how, and why, women such as Helen Crawford engaged in such diverse, and often high-risk, forms of political action.

I will posit, in line with historian Kasper Braskén, that methodological nationalism within historiography has rendered international organisations such as Workers' International Relief somewhat absent from CPGB literature.<sup>20</sup> While anti-communism is a topic that scholars like Braskén tend to shy away from, it is undoubtedly a force that has also contributed to the historiographical omission of WIR, and more specifically, Helen Crawford.

As is apparent upon reading about Crawford's life, the extent of her political activism is immense. For this reason, given the limited scope of this thesis, I have made decisions as to which parts of her activism to focus on, and which elements to pay lesser attention to. As there has been some scholarship regarding the role of women in the CPGB in the 1920s, most notably that written by historians Sue Bruley, Karen Hunt and Matthew Worley,<sup>21</sup> I have chosen not to dedicate significant space to her role as CPGB women's organiser or to her role

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<sup>20</sup> Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Braskén uses the direct English translation from the German *Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe*, however "Workers' International Relief" was used most prominently in Britain and by Helen Crawford so this thesis will use this form.

<sup>21</sup> Sue Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939* (Garland Publishing Inc: New York, 1986) and Karen Hunt and Matthew Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," *Twentieth Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004) 1-27.

as editor of the women's page of *The Communist*. These positions were indeed of great importance, however given the severe lack of attention paid to international organising, it is her role in the WIR that I will focus on most in terms of her CPGB activism.

In addition, this thesis will not dwell on the numerous electoral campaigns Crawford engaged in. Partly out of a desire to avoid reproducing forms of political history, I have decided to focus instead on forms of local community organising and anti-fascist campaigning. These elements of Crawford's activism, and that of socialists more generally, continue to be widely devalued within the literature.

The overarching research question of my thesis is: how can the political activism of Helen Crawford challenge dominant historiographical approaches to the subject of women's activism in Britain in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century? Subsequent questions this thesis seeks to answer are: why are forms of local and transnational organising so pivotal to the understanding of Helen Crawford's life and broader political movements of the time? How have British women on the political Left been side-lined by historiography? In order to answer these questions, I employ the method of content analysis to the study of Crawford's unpublished autobiography and various archival materials; including newspapers, photographs and official documents.

### ***Outline of thesis***

**Chapter 1** will provide an explanation of the methodology and theoretical concepts this thesis relies upon. This Chapter includes discussion of Crawford's autobiography and the process of finding Crawford in the archives.

**Chapter 2** will offer an analysis of three key fields of historiography relating to Crawford: the British women's suffrage movement, the era of Red Clydeside and the CPGB. This Chapter brings to light various issues- including England-centrism and the obsession with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, tendencies that continue to plague the suffrage



scholarship. Regarding Red Clydeside, I will posit that the enduring limited focus of labour historians on the work-place and industrial relations has served to obscure the extent of political activism that was present within working-class communities. Anti-communism and methodological nationalism are two further key concepts that this Chapter draws upon in order to offer an explanation as to why Crawford's international communist activism has been so readily omitted from much of the historiography.

**Chapter 3** is devoted to Helen Crawford's experience as a Scottish suffragette. Through a biographical approach, this chapter will draw upon Crawford's autobiography to illustrate the extent to which her personal life, in terms of her marriage and her literary influences, impacted her politics. In doing this, I wish to reassert the importance of the personal when discussing the ardent activism of people like Helen Crawford. Throughout the chapter, I will show how Crawford's experience in the WSPU feeds in to broader questions of how factors such as nationalism, class and political partisanship influenced the way Scottish women participated in the suffrage movement. While there is a wealth of literature on the British women's suffrage movement, I argue that further study of "regional women",<sup>22</sup> as well as the transnational connections that underpinned the political methods of the suffragettes, is both fruitful and necessary.

**Chapter 4** provides an analysis of the era of Red Clydeside (1910-1918) in Glasgow.<sup>23</sup> In situating both the Rent Strike of 1915 and the Women's Peace Crusade firmly in Glaswegian traditions of socialism, syndicalism and strike, this Chapter will assert that women's activism should be seen as part and parcel of the Red Clydeside era, as opposed to an isolated example of women's organising. I will argue that the neglect of women from Red Clydeside historiography has led to the role of women being undervalued and

<sup>22</sup> I use the phrase "regional women" as an umbrella term to encompass British women who did not live in London, who subsequently experienced the suffrage movement from the geographic peripheries.

<sup>23</sup> The year which the era of Red Clydeside ended is subject to debate, however this research focuses on the years 1910-1918.

underrepresented. Moreover, the connections between the women leaders of the GWHA, the WPC, and the suffrage movement, as well as other transnational organisations, will be emphasised not only as present but as integral to the success of the campaigns.

Following chronologically from WWI, **Chapter 5** will address Crawford's role in the Communist Party of Great Britain and her involvement in diverse forms of communist internationalism. This Chapter will posit that methodological nationalism and anti-communism have served to omit the role of WIR, and thus Helen Crawford, from CPGB historiography. In stressing the importance of internationalism, anti-fascism and socialist feminism to Crawford's communist activism, I seek to offer an analysis of the CPGB that surpasses the dominant historiographical questions of Comintern "control" and "front" organisations.

In the **Conclusion**, I will iterate my main questions and main findings. This section will also indicate areas for further research.

## CHAPTER 1- METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

This Chapter will provide an overview of the methodological process I embarked upon when conducting this research and writing this thesis. Following an explanation and justification of feminist content analysis as a method, I will posit that Helen Crawford's autobiography, alongside various archival sources such as newspapers, film and photographs, can serve to illuminate important connections between gender, class and political activism. This Chapter also provides a brief overview of the conceptual framework I have used to frame Crawford's political activism and the movements she was involved in. The key concepts utilised are: socialist feminism, community feminism, transnationalism, communism and communist internationalism.

### **Methodology**

#### **Feminist Content Analysis**

Sociologist Shulamit Reinharz describes feminist content analysis as the study of a set of cultural objects, or artefacts, by interpreting the themes and data contained within them.<sup>24</sup> Such artefacts, she argues, can take a range of forms- from newspaper rhetoric to fine art to organisational life.<sup>25</sup> Reinharz states that feminist historians treat these cultural objects as texts; through the study of objects relating to either individuals or groups of women, scholars can examine the relations between forces that have shaped women's lives.<sup>26</sup> The intersections of gender, class and race, for example, can thus be ascertained through the study of women's experiences. Critically though, these categories of analysis, and the relationships between them, are not presupposed but rather brought to light through the subjects of research.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 146.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> As posited in: Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1055-1075.

In line with more traditional understandings of content analysis, such as that of cybernetics scholar Klaus Krippendorff, I “make inferences” from source material; these inferences are then substantiated and granted analytical weight upon justifying them in relation to existing scholarship.<sup>28</sup> For example, if Crawford refers to media outcry related to her activism, I find supporting evidence of this within other primary sources and secondary literature. Importantly however, in line with Reinharz and historian Rachel Kulick, this thesis renders the method of content analysis feminist by seeing the meaning of cultural artefacts as mediated; therefore the “meaning” of cultural artefacts is found both within the “text” and in the processes that have produced it.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the inferences I make also take into consideration the context in which objects were produced, the forms of power relations that were embedded in their creation, as well as the silences that remain in the archives.

This thesis relies predominantly on Reinharz’s conceptualisation of feminist content analysis because it provides the flexible approach to archival material, which in my view, feminist research demands. Seeing value in all traces of the past and all elements of women’s experience is fundamental to this thesis and my outlook as a researcher. In line with Reinharz, I maintain that when historically marginalised women, such as Crawford, are made visible through the study of relevant articles and objects, one can illuminate the wider structural forces that have contributed to shaping the lives of those side lined within historiography.<sup>30</sup> Given the systematic neglect of women from history writing, the study of what is missing is thus rendered an equally crucial aspect of my content analysis and archival research.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (London: SAGE Publications, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Shulamit Reinharz and Rachel Kulick, “Reading Between the Lines: Feminist Content Analysis Into the Second Millennium,” in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2007), 259.

<sup>30</sup> Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, 156.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

## Autobiography

Helen Crawford left behind a 403 paged, untitled, autobiography. The type written manuscript, believed to be written in the early 1950s (the exact date unclear), remains unpublished but held under copyright in the Marx Memorial Library in London- home to the CPGB archives. The autobiography, which was digitised in 2015, is freely available to the public.<sup>32</sup> While it is positive that the autobiography can be so readily accessed, the poor quality of the digitisation renders some of the passages illegible. Moreover, the first page of the autobiography is missing and, since it is a scan of the original transcript, one can see the corrections and changes that (presumably) Crawford made to the text after typing it on her typewriter. These corrections may be of interest to scholars, but I doubt that Crawford envisaged them becoming a permanent feature of her autobiography. While these technical issues do not hinder one's ability to read most of the text, I would argue that they are indicative of the lack of care and attention that has been attributed to the preservation of Crawford's writing.

Interestingly, in a film entitled *Red Skirts on Clydeside*, which will later be discussed in this chapter, historian Elspeth King recalls her dismay when she first searched for Helen Crawford's autobiography, as part of her research of Scottish suffragettes in the late 1970s. She describes searching for the manuscript in the Marx Memorial Library in London, and eventually finding it in a box entitled "miscellaneous labour movement women" that had been placed up on a high shelf.<sup>33</sup> While Crawford's autobiography, due to its digitalisation, has become more widely appreciated and utilised by scholars and archivists alike, this lacklustre approach to the archiving of women's writing is one that persists.

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<sup>32</sup> Helen Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, Marx Memorial Library, accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/project/socialist-opposition-ww1/autobiography-helen-crawford>. Information regarding digitisation was obtained through e-mail exchange with staff at Marx Memorial Library.

<sup>33</sup> Christine Bellamy and Jenny Woodley, "Red Skirts on Clydeside," Sheffield Film Cooperation, 1984.

Another example of this is depicted by historian Gemma Elliott, whom in researching Scottish socialist suffragette Jessie Stephens, stresses that Stephen's autobiography remains unpublished and confined to the Working Class Movement Library in Manchester, England.<sup>34</sup> Elliott goes on to describe the way in which the (unpublished, non-digitalised) memoirs of numerous Scottish suffragettes remain scattered across British archives- rendering the very study of Scottish suffragettes, and Scottish women more broadly, extremely difficult.<sup>35</sup> This scattering of materials relating to Scottish women who were involved in different movements was an obstacle I too experienced during this research- as I will later expand upon.

Autobiographies of men have tended to enjoy much greater public, and historiographical attention. The most relevant to this research is William (Willie) Gallacher's *Revolt on the Clyde: An autobiography*, originally published in 1936.<sup>36</sup> Gallacher and Crawford were great friends and engaged in astoundingly similar forms of political activism- both having been active on Red Clydeside and in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).<sup>37</sup> Yet, while Gallacher was published as early as 1936, Crawford's writing has still not been deemed worthy of publication over 80 years later. This disparity is indicative of the forms of (gendered) mediation that Reinhartz and Kulick argue determines the availability, and value, of *certain* cultural artefacts, over others.<sup>38</sup>

Through the very act of writing an autobiography, Crawford wished for her life, and political experience, to be remembered. In contributing to the writing of her own history, Crawford clearly foresaw future historical interest in her life of activism. While she is not explicit about her intentions, the text reads both as an informative account of her experience as well as an attempt to galvanise future generations into fighting for a more equal society. In

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<sup>34</sup> Gemma Elliott, "'Women who dared to ask for the vote': The Missing Memoirs of the Scottish Suffragettes," *Women's Writing* 25, no. 3 (2018): 326.

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

<sup>36</sup> William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde: an autobiography* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936).

<sup>37</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 400.

<sup>38</sup> Reinhartz and Kulick, "Reading Between the Lines," 259.

illustrating her experiences in great detail- particularly her militancy during the suffrage campaign and her travels to impoverished parts of Europe, she expresses the importance of socialism throughout the text, as well as the (often harsh) realities of political activism. There are parts in the autobiography that read as somewhat of a call to arms; the final lines of the text, for example, are: “The World is Ours. Let us go in and possess it”.<sup>39</sup> Crucially, this statement suggests that Crawford is writing for, what she perceives to be, a politicised audience. She is thus writing with a view to stir and evoke a meaningful, political response. The autobiography does not always follow a strict chronology or structure, nor does it dwell on dates or specifics. Rather, at times, it reads as a stream of consciousness through which Crawford stresses the elements of her work that she feels are most important, offering anecdotes she feels will help to capture the imagination of the reader.

What has been particularly interesting throughout my reading of her autobiography, is noticing the varying amounts of space that Crawford dedicates to the political events and movements she was involved in. For example, she spends a great deal of time discussing the development of her feminism and her activism within the WSPU. I would argue this is significant because it shows that Crawford remained proud of her involvement in the suffrage campaign despite the bourgeois connotation it harboured. She recognised the momentous achievement of suffrage campaigners and through her writing, wishes to place herself, firmly within that movement.

In recognition of these (informed) decisions, I became particularly interested during my research in the amount of attention Crawford pays to her role in WIR. It is difficult to ascertain whether this emphasis is because she felt future generations would be interested in the subject, or because she predicted her international activism would be lesser known. Either

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<sup>39</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 403.

way, this thesis understands Crawford's focus on internationalism as suggestion that this area was one of vital importance to her life's work.

Equipped with concepts of transnationalism and socialist feminism, as will later be discussed, I searched Crawford's autobiography for discussions relating to these key ideas. Crawford's experiences provided vital evidence of the ways in which such intersecting forces and ideas impacted her life. Moreover, in line with historian Lesley Orr,<sup>40</sup> I sought to invoke Crawford's autobiography to show the ways in which her personal life, religion and prior political experience shaped and informed the way she engaged in politics. By drawing upon extracts from the text, I analyse and synthesize her words in conjunction with other primary source material and secondary literature. The purpose of using the autobiography is to garner a sense of Crawford's character, to analyse her own understandings of key political events and to show, through one individual, the complexities and interconnectedness of women's activism.

Throughout my research, I have been disappointed to learn that some scholars have dismissed the usefulness of Crawford's autobiography, claiming that she "failed" to develop her political experiences beyond a broad chronology.<sup>41</sup> Neil C. Rafeek posits that a "more intense and deep political work" would have been more beneficial for one looking to research the CPGB and women's role within it.<sup>42</sup> While I appreciate that Rafeek may have not found the political history he was searching for, I would argue that the inference that Crawford's work is not deeply political is precisely the kind of narrative that has prevented her autobiography from being taken seriously. In light of such tension, this thesis will reassert the political importance of the personal and the transformative potential of friendships and communities. By understanding the political as existing beyond the parameters of formal,

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<sup>40</sup> Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?'"

<sup>41</sup> Neil C. Rafeek, *Communist Women in Scotland: Red Clydeside from the Russian Revolution to the end of the Soviet Union* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 2008), 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



political partisanship, this thesis uses Crawford's autobiography to demonstrate the presence of the political in all spheres of life.

By adopting a biographical approach to guide my study of Helen Crawford in the British suffrage movement, Red Clydeside and the CPGB, I will argue that one person's life can offer valuable insight into broader social and political currents. In line with historians Francisca de Haan et al, I utilise a biographical approach as a means to show why some individuals sought societal change, how they became engaged in politics and, finally, the forms of challenges they encountered once active.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as Barbara Caine asserts, the focus of an individual life can serve to illustrate particular events, such as the 1915 Rent Strike, but also wider historical themes that affected society such as feminism, communism and fascism, in Crawford's case.<sup>44</sup>

### **Archival materials**

In order to strengthen and substantiate my analysis, I utilise a range of archival sources that I accessed through the National Library of Scotland (NLS), the Glasgow Caledonian University Archive Centre (GCU) and the British Newspaper Archive. The "Women on Red Clydeside" research collections finding aid that was created by scholars at Glasgow Caledonian University proved to be remarkably helpful during my research.<sup>45</sup> The document contains information as to where to find materials relating to key individuals, and a bibliography of helpful secondary literature. While some of the information within the finding aid is outdated, due to its creation in 2008, it nonetheless offered an excellent starting point.

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<sup>43</sup> Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi, "Introduction," in *Biographical dictionary of women's movements and feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th centuries*, ed. Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova and Anna Loutfi (New York: CEU Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Barbara Caine, *Biography and History: 2nd edition* (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Alison Cunie, Helen Jeffrey and Helen Sim, "Women on Red Clydeside: A Research Finding Aid," Glasgow Caledonian University, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/library/content/Clydewomen.pdf>.

The National Library of Scotland (NLS) holds a film entitled *Red Skirts on Clydeside*.<sup>46</sup> The film is a 40-minute documentary that features interviews with descendants of the 1915 Glasgow Rent Strike leaders. I draw upon the film's use of oral history primarily to illustrate the events of 1915 in Glasgow. However, the film, created in 1984, also serves as evidence of the state of women's history at the time. Conversations with historian Elspeth King regarding her researching of Red Clydeside is testimony of the various challenges she, and others, faced when trying to find women in the archives.

In the NLS, the archival material that relates to Helen Crawford is kept as part of the wider Gallacher Memorial Library (GML) collection. The GML, named after Willie Gallacher (the aforementioned Red Clydeside activist and communist), has recently been acquired by the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh (having originally been held by Glasgow Caledonian University Archive Centre). The move meant that at the time of my research, June- August 2018, the GML collection was unsorted, uncatalogued and difficult to access; some of its content was held in off-site premises, inaccessible to the public. On numerous occasions throughout my research, materials that the GML was stated to hold on-site could not be found by members of staff. There seemed to be some confusion, due to the move, as to where parts of the collection were. As a result, I was unfortunately unable to access a range of photographs related to Red Clydeside and the CPGB.<sup>47</sup> I believe this material could have served to enrich my project, however, this issue was beyond my control.

Despite this disappointment, after extensive e-mail exchange with the coordinator of the GML, Jan Usher, I was able to arrange a visit where I could access a box within the GML

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<sup>46</sup> Bellany and Woodley, "Red Skirts on Clydeside."

<sup>47</sup> The collection I am referring to is Acc. 5659 of the Gallacher Memorial Library. It was stated to contain photographs of CPGB members, of the 1915 Rent Strike as well as numerous images captured in Russia-primarily Gallacher engaging with the workers and the Comintern. Attempted access June-July 2018. See: Acc. 5659 Inventory, accessed April 02, 2018, <https://www.nls.uk/catalogues/online/cnmi/inventories/acc5659.pdf>.

referred to as the Helen Crawford-Anderson collection, which was held off-site.<sup>48</sup> Jan Usher kindly took the time to arrange the transfer of the collection from its holdings to the central library- this involved arranging the transportation of the material and providing me access to a private work-space within the offices of library staff.

The Crawford-Anderson collection contains over 15 photographs, an original election pamphlet and various documents relating to Crawford's activism; including copies of official prison records that documented her arrest during suffrage militancy. While some photographs are dated, sometimes with an explanation of the image, others remain undated with no context; in this thesis I have only included the photographs that are dated or where the context is easily discernible. The material relating to Crawford is not vast (limited to one large cardboard box); therefore, I was able to study every part of the collection in detail; photographing materials relating to the three primary topics, or periods of study, this thesis focuses on (the suffrage movement, Red Clydeside and communist internationalism) and taking extensive notes on the materiality and contents of the collection.

It is of vital importance that archivist Audrey Canning is credited for the creation and maintenance of the Crawford-Anderson collection. Audrey Canning became the voluntary librarian of the GML in 1979 and worked tirelessly, without remuneration, for over thirty years to ensure the preservation and growth of the collection. Canning went above and beyond to reach out to previous acquaintances of Crawford in attempt to gain more information about her; the replies to which are contained within the collection. The letters offer descriptions of Crawford's life, her character and demeanour, as well as details of her involvement in the local community in Dunoon during her retirement. The collection also

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<sup>48</sup> Helen Crawford-Anderson Collection, GML-Box 129 X3912. Gallacher Memorial Library, National Library of Scotland, accessed August 2018.

contains a short essay, written by Canning, that introduces both Crawford and the archive; explaining how it was created and the contributors that have helped it grow.

Interestingly, in both the NLS and the GCU archives, historians who had previously utilised the collections for their own research, contributed copies of materials they found relating to Helen Crawford (or Red Clydeside in the case of GCU) elsewhere. These contributions are particularly helpful considering the scattered nature of much of the material relating to politically active Scottish women. In the GCU archive, historian Myra Baillie contributed copies of her PhD thesis research material, which was about Red Clydeside, to the archive; the material is so vast that it now forms the “Myra Baillie collection”.

The Myra Baillie collection in the GCU archive contains an array of copied newspaper articles relating to women on Red Clydeside. Importantly for this thesis, the collection contains articles from the *Workers Dreadnought* and *Forward*: two key Leftist publications. Baillie’s research helped to guide me as a researcher to articles that contained relevant and valuable information. Offering over 30 copies of articles, the Baillie collection became the most important part of my GCU archival research.

The efforts of archivists such as Canning, and the contributions of scholars like Myra Baillie, often remain invisible when archival research is discussed. Yet without their exhaustive labour, the GML and GCU collections would not be what they are today. As historians Nupur Chaudhuri et al assert, archives are not passive, ahistorical repositories but rather active sites of knowledge production.<sup>49</sup> This is a notion that I felt was particularly evident in the archives I visited. While archival research can often feel like an isolating experience, this form of support that previous scholars and Canning provided rendered the project one that felt more akin to a collective endeavour.

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<sup>49</sup> Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, “Introduction,” in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz and Mary Elizabeth Perry (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), i.

In addition to my visits to GCU and the NLS, I have used the digitised British Newspaper Archive to draw upon articles relating to Worker's International Relief and the CPGB anti-fascist campaigns. Through this portal I acquired over 30 articles from national and local newspapers.<sup>50</sup> The *Daily Herald*, a Left leaning newspaper in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century, is the newspaper that I draw upon most. I used the search engine of the British Newspaper Archive to find articles related to Crawford, WIR and British fascism.

Throughout this research, I have also utilised Sherry J. Katz's notion of "researching around the subject".<sup>51</sup> In instances where archival material has been lacking, particularly regarding Crawford's anti-fascist and CPGB work, I have referred to other forms of primary sources and secondary literature that may not mention Crawford by name, but do indicate or suggest the types of activism or experiences she was likely familiar with. Where Crawford does not mention specifics in her autobiography, I also employ the method of "researching around" in attempt to garner a more holistic depiction of her political involvement.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, I attempt to remedy the lack of Crawford's own discussion of her role in Red Clydeside and anti-fascist campaigns through drawing upon other sources.

There are of course a range of limitations associated with this method of research. Material relating to Crawford remains scattered across Britain and, presumably given the international character of her activism, further afield. My archival research was limited to the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and the collections there, while useful, offer only a partial insight into her activism; gaps within the sources are thus inevitable. Other relevant materials relating to the ILP and CPGB remain in possession of other archives- most notably the Working Class Movement Library in Manchester and the Marx Memorial Library in London.

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<sup>50</sup> The British Newspaper Archive, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

<sup>51</sup> Sherry J. Katz. "Excavating Radical Women in Progressive-Era California," in *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources*, 90.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Theoretical concepts**

### **Feminisms**

In recognising the multitude of feminisms that exist, this thesis will draw upon two key conceptualisations of feminism: socialist feminism and community feminism. Early in her autobiography, Crawford identifies herself as a feminist; in discussion of her political development she claims, “it was my respect for women (...) that made me a Feminist”.<sup>53</sup> While Crawford does not explicitly state the feminism she subscribed to, this thesis will utilise the concept of socialist feminism to frame her beliefs and activism.

Historians Boxer and Quartaert describe socialist feminists as those “who saw the root of sexual oppression in the existence of private property and who envisioned a radically transformed society in which man would exploit neither man nor woman”.<sup>54</sup> To push this argument further, historian Barbara Taylor asserts that feminism was “not merely an ancillary feature” of socialism, but rather one of its key motivations.<sup>55</sup> Socialist feminists thus perceived women’s emancipation as intrinsic to the broader socialist project. The assertion of class and gender as inextricably linked is pivotal to Crawford’s politics and is a view that, as I will demonstrate in the Chapters that follow, permeates through Crawford’s writing and political activism.

Despite historical and more recent theoretical arguments about the intrinsic links between socialism and feminism,<sup>56</sup> the notion that socialism and feminism are two separate and conflicting entities has remained subject to fierce debate since the late- 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> I would argue that the perceived incompatibility of the two concepts is partly due to

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<sup>53</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quartaert, “The Class and Sex Connection: An Introduction,” in *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Marilyn J. Boxer and Jean H. Quartaert (New York: Elsevier North-Holland Inc, 1978).

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Taylor, “Socialist Feminism: Utopian or Scientific?” in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (New York, Routledge, 1981), 161.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Sowerine, “Socialism, Feminism, and the Socialist Women’s Movement from the French Revolution to World War II,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Susan Mosher Stuard and Merry E. Wiesner (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 358.

<sup>57</sup> Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 189; 212-213.

ahistoricism. The term “feminism” was, indeed, rejected by many Left leaning activists in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup>-centuries because it was perceived as limited and definitively bourgeois.<sup>58</sup> Many socialists and communists alike, rejected this restrictive notion of feminism because they believed legal equality and individual rights would not cease women’s oppression;<sup>59</sup> women’s emancipation could thus only be secured through the overhaul of the exploitative, capitalist system.

This thesis will therefore argue that socialist feminism is not a contradiction of terms, nor an amalgamation of two separate entities, but rather a type of feminism that many women on the political Left subscribed to and engaged in. I have chosen to use this concept as it encapsulates Crawford’s political activism. As will be demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, Crawford frequently engaged in movements that asserted the intersection of class and gender as forces of oppression.

The second concept of feminism this thesis, namely Chapter 4, relies upon is that of community feminism. Coined by historian Ula Y. Taylor, community feminism is entrenched in the notion that “communitarian ideas”, based on viewing the self as “collective, interdependent and relational”, should be understood within a feminist context.<sup>60</sup> Taylor, writing in 2000, developed the notion of community feminism through the study of a black US American activist named Amy Jacques-Garvey (1896-1973). Jacques-Garvey’s encouragement of women to perform supportive roles (often to men), as opposed to

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<sup>58</sup> Francisca de Haan, “Writing Inter/Transnational History: The Case of Women’s Movements and Feminisms,” in *Internationale Geschichte in Theorie und Praxis / International History in Theory and Practice*, ed. Haider-Wilson, William D. Godsey and Wolfgang Mueller (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 505.

<sup>59</sup> Donna Harsch, “Communism and Women,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 489.

<sup>60</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, “‘Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers’: Amy Jacques-Garvey and Community Feminism, 1924-1927,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12, no. 2 (2000): 106.

leadership positions, in the Pan-African struggle spurred Taylor to call for an expansion of the historical meaning of feminism.<sup>61</sup>

Community feminists, to Taylor, are thus women whose activism is centred upon aiding their communities and engaging in tasks that seek to contribute to the bettering of their local societies.<sup>62</sup> This thesis will utilise community feminism in reference to the forms of women's activism and support networks that were present in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century working-class neighbourhoods. I have chosen to use Taylor's concept as it enables the (often domestic) labour of women to be granted political meaning; broadening, and historicising, what can be defined as feminist activism.

### **Transnationalism**

Historians Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake assert that transnational history "seeks to understand ideas, things, people, and practices which have crossed national boundaries".<sup>63</sup> This understanding of transnationalism is one that I invoked throughout my research. I find this definition helpful, particularly with regards to Crawford's life, as it recognises manifestations of transnationalism at the micro, or individual level, as constitutive of much broader, global processes. In line with the global history approach, Middell and Naumann argue that transnational history does not deny the relevance nor importance of the nation state, but rather it seeks to bridge the local, the national and the global- emphasizing the "actors, movements and forces" that cross these spatial boundaries.<sup>64</sup> Through approaching Crawford's activism with these conceptualisations in mind, it is my intention to stress the everyday, lived experience of transnationalism- particularly regarding people, travel and ideas.

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<sup>61</sup> Taylor, "'Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers'," 105-106.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>63</sup> Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys, "Introduction," in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Marilyn Lake and Ann Curthoys (Canberra: ANU Press, 2006), 5-6.

<sup>64</sup> Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, "Global history and the spatial turn: from the impact of area studies to the study of critical junctures of globalization," *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010): 160.



## Communism

Given Crawford's commitment to the CPGB, this thesis refers to Crawford as a communist. This thesis understands communism, in the context of Crawford's activism, as an ideology that seeks to establish a classless society, where the nation state is (eventually) rendered obsolete, based on common ownership of the means of production.<sup>65</sup> The terms communism and socialism are, at times, used interchangeably by Crawford in her autobiography; I would argue this is likely since Crawford did not become involved in communist politics in later in her life. Nonetheless, I find the concept of communism helpful in framing Crawford's political activism considering she actively subscribed to such an ideology.

## Communist internationalism

This thesis understands communist internationalism as the notion that all communist revolutions, and worker-led movements, are part of a single global struggle against capitalist domination.<sup>66</sup> Historian Duncan Hallas maintains that internationalism remains the "bedrock" of socialism and an "indispensable part of the [1917 Russian] revolution".<sup>67</sup> It is important to note in using this concept that the terms proletarian internationalism, international communism and international socialism are often used interchangeably, to portray a similar conviction. Fundamentally, this thesis uses communist internationalism to assert the fact that Crawford's international activism, which began most notably in 1920, was driven by her communist commitment.

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<sup>65</sup> "Communism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed April 3, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/communism>.

<sup>66</sup> David Leopold, "Proletarian Internationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden, Marc Stears and Lyman Tower Sargent Tower (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20-38.

<sup>67</sup> Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern: A History of the Third International* (London: Bookmarks, 1985), 7.

## CHAPTER 2- HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Introduction

The historiography chapter will focus on three bodies of literature: those on the British women's suffrage movement, the era of Red Clydeside (1910-1918) in Glasgow and the Communist Party of Great Britain. I will begin by focusing on key debates that exist within British women's suffrage historiography; primarily those based upon class, locality and an obsession with the Pankhursts. The subject of Red Clydeside, in more recent years, has welcomed scholarship that has sought to address previously undervalued elements of the movement, particularly the role of women. In addition, the novel focus on the interconnectedness of actors, movements and ideas offers an exciting opportunity for scholars to explore the multifaceted nature of women's local political activism. However, I will argue that much like broader trends in British labour history, Red Clydeside historiography, for the most part, continues to centre its discussion of working-class politics on the workplace, to the detriment of local, community activism.<sup>68</sup>

The final section of this Chapter will address the historiographical trends that have rendered communist women such as Helen Crawford somewhat absent from the history of the CPGB. As my analysis will show, anti-communism, methodological nationalism and the absence of gender analysis are all important factors that have served to minimize the extent of communist women's political activism- particularly those who worked internationally.

### **1.1 The women's suffrage movement in Britain**

Historian June Purvis asserts that one of the key themes in Women's and Gender History in the UK over the past two decades has been an enduring interest in women's

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<sup>68</sup> Broader labour historiography trend of workplace centrism as argued in: Ann McGuckin, "Moving Stories: Working-Class Women," in *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society*, ed. E. Breitenbach and E. Gordon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 197.

suffrage movements.<sup>69</sup> She argues that current UK feminist activists are interested to learn more about their “foremothers”, the suffragettes.<sup>70</sup> The interest in the suffrage movement is of course a positive thing for Women’s and Gender History, and for society as a whole. Historian Jaqueline R. DeVries argues that while there is a common perception that little more can be learned of the movement; plentiful recent scholarship has sought to shed new light on “the shifting political dynamics” of women’s activism in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>71</sup>

### 1.1.1 Regional activism

Despite the great gains made so far, I would argue that much of the historiography of the movement remains clouded by dominant narratives that persist in obscuring the extent, and fabric, of women’s activism of the time. Writing in 2000, June Hannam asserts that histories of the suffrage movement have tended to direct most attention to the WSPU, the militant suffragette group, and their activities in London.<sup>72</sup> In much of the historiography written prior to the 2000s, this is indeed a clear and dominant trend.<sup>73</sup> Fortunately, however, in more recent years, Jaqueline De Vries has noted a surge in studies that analyse “the politics of location” in relation to the suffrage movement.<sup>74</sup> The importance of regional dynamics and localised action has begun to capture the interest of many suffrage scholars.<sup>75</sup>

Of great relevance to this thesis in terms of regional study is the work of historian Leah Leneman on the subject of the Scottish suffragettes.<sup>76</sup> Rooted in her desire to reassert

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<sup>69</sup> June Purvis, “A Glass Half Full’? Women’s history in the UK,” *Women’s History Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 93.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Jacqueline R. DeVries, “Popular and Smart: Why Scholarship on the Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain Still Matters,” *History Compass* 11, no. 3, (2013): 177.

<sup>72</sup> June Hannam, “I had not been to London’: Women’s suffrage- a view from the regions,” in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 226.

<sup>73</sup> As exemplified in: Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Princeton University Press, 1990) and June Purvis, “Deeds, Not Words” The Daily Lives of Militant Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 18, no. 2 (1995): 91-101.

<sup>74</sup> DeVries, “Popular and Smart,” 180.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>76</sup> Leah Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes* (Edinburgh: NLS Publishing, 2000).

the role of so-called regional women, Lenemen provides an impressive account of Scottish women's involvement in the campaign.<sup>77</sup> While historian Elspeth King was one of the first to write about the Scottish women's suffrage movement in a pamphlet in 1978,<sup>78</sup> Lenemen took the subject further and sought to stress that without the work of regional women, the suffrage movement would have never been able to gain such impressive political momentum.<sup>79</sup> Leah Lenemen's book remains one of the most pivotal, and heavily cited, texts regarding Scottish suffragettes. However, her study lacks a comprehensive account of how Scottish suffragettes negotiated with complex questions of nationalism, class and centralized WSPU leadership (that was rooted in a sense of English superiority).<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the interconnections present between women's personal lives, political partisanship and other forms of local activism are somewhat hidden in Lenemen's account. This thesis seeks to analyse such issues in order to contribute to these gaps within the literature.

The question of class and the WSPU has been a contentious subject for many years. Historians Liddington and Norris, writing in the 1970s, famously argued that the WSPU harboured a distinctly bourgeois character that contributed to the exclusion of working-class women from the organisation.<sup>81</sup> The authors claim that the militant tactics of the WSPU, which involved the risk of imprisonment, alienated working-class women as they could not afford to take such risks. However, scholars have since emphasized the importance of regional study as a means to challenge such a sweeping characterisation.

In particular, historian June Hannam, writing in 2000, asserts that through analysis of local WSPU activism, the more complex nature of class dynamics within the organisation can

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<sup>77</sup> DeVries, "Popular and Smart," 179.

<sup>78</sup> Elspeth King, *The Scottish Women's Suffrage Movement* (Peoples Palace Museum Glasgow Green, 1978).

<sup>79</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*.

<sup>80</sup> For discussion of English superiority and the WSPU see: Antionette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Virago, 1978), 204-205.

be revealed.<sup>82</sup> Critically, Hannam maintains that in certain industrial cities, such as Glasgow and Liverpool, working-class women were actively attracted to the militancy of the WSPU. Historian Krista Cowman posits that many working-class, socialist women had prior experience of militant forms of political activism through their ties to Leftist political parties such as the ILP.<sup>83</sup> The militancy of the WSPU, therefore, left many feeling enthused rather than excluded. In line with Hannam and Hunt, I would argue that in order to truly understand the political motivations of the women involved, a local analysis that goes beyond official organisational branches is of the utmost importance.<sup>84</sup>

A biographical approach, as Hannam and Hunt maintain, remains a “crucial” mechanism that enables one to understand the diverse political choices of individuals.<sup>85</sup> This approach becomes particularly important when it comes to matters of resistance and militant activism. I wish to explore this argument further in this thesis by detailing the ways in which suffragettes, in Glasgow specifically, negotiated with issues regarding their class, militancy and Leftist politics.

### 1.1.2 The Pankhurst problem

An analysis of local WSPU activism also speaks to the problem of equating the WSPU with its leaders, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. As regional studies have shown,<sup>86</sup> the WSPU was more than the Pankhursts and in reality, relied heavily on women on the geographic periphery to mobilise women in support of the cause.<sup>87</sup> I would argue that historian June Purvis, while having made valuable contributions to suffrage scholarship,

<sup>82</sup> Hannam, “‘I had not been to London’,” 232.

<sup>83</sup> Krista Cowman, “‘The stone-throwing has been forced upon us’: the function of militancy within the Liverpool W.S.P.U., 1906-14,” *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 145 (1996): 175-177.

<sup>84</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, “Towards an Archaeology of Interwar Women’s Politics: The Local and the Everyday,” in *The Aftermath of Suffrage Women, Gender and Politics in Britain 1918-1945*, ed. Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2013), 124.

<sup>85</sup> June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, (Routledge: London, 2002), 31.

<sup>86</sup> Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes* and Ryland Wallace, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928*. (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru / University of Wales Press, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes* and Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*.

offers a prime example of how an obsession with the Pankhursts has coloured suffragette historiography. Writing in 2013, Purvis rebukes the notion that WSPU could be described as a terrorist organisation. Her justification is that the Pankhursts did not encourage, or know about, arson or bombing attacks.<sup>88</sup> I find it fascinating that through such a line of argument, Purvis inadvertently confirms that, for her, the WSPU amounts to the thoughts, beliefs and directives of its two leaders.

To the question of violent militancy, in a piece published in 2018, historian Fern Riddell argues that by distancing the Pankhursts, and thus the WSPU, from more violent forms of militancy, historians like Purvis have contributed to the sanitising of the suffragettes.<sup>89</sup> Their activism, consequently, rendered less violent and more palatable. For reasons as discussed above, this thesis will focus less on the Pankhursts and rather on the broader membership, and it will not shy away from discussing the more dangerous forms of militant activism that suffragettes knowingly, and purposefully, engaged in.

Scholars such as Martin Pugh, keen to point to examples of Pankhurst “autocracy”, have failed to look for, or study, the forms of resistance that many WSPU members undertook when they disagreed with the leadership.<sup>90</sup> In silencing these forms of opposition, Pugh presents the WSPU membership body as subservient and lacking agency. In contrast to Pugh’s approach, Chapter 3 will use Crawford’s autobiography to cast light upon instances of resistance among Scottish WSPU members in order to gauge a more comprehensive understanding of how regional women engaged with such a centralised form of leadership.

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<sup>88</sup> June Purvis, “Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: some reflections,” *Women’s History Review* 22, no. 4 (2013), 577.

<sup>89</sup> Fern Riddell, “Sanitising the Suffragettes: Why is it so easy to forget an unsavoury aspect of Britain’s recent past?” *History Today* (2018): 9-11.

<sup>90</sup> Martin Pugh, *The March of Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women’s Suffrage, 1866-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 176.

### 1.1.3 The suffragettes and the First World War

One of the most, for me, frustrating and persistent narratives regarding the British suffrage movement is that suffrage campaigners ceased their activism to devote their energies to the war effort.<sup>91</sup> While this is true in terms of the official policies of national suffrage organisations, it problematically infers that suffragettes stopped their campaigning out of respect for the war effort. However, for many, as will later be discussed, their attentions turned to actively opposing the war-effort. WWI is still often perceived as the catalyst of suffrage success; the extension of the franchise thus portrayed as a reward for women's service during war-time.<sup>92</sup> This narrative, which diminishes the work of pre-war suffrage activists, is still given a great deal of space in the teaching of the suffrage movement in the national curriculum of secondary schools in Scotland.<sup>93</sup>

With the rise of Leftist women's history writing in Britain, the 1980s enjoyed a surge in scholarship about British women's anti-war activism. Feminist historian Anne Wiltsher, writing in 1985, sought to disrupt the dominant narrative that women who had campaigned for suffrage ceased their activity in order to offer their full support to the War.<sup>94</sup> Wiltsher states that while the world has heard plenty about the women's war effort; about the suffragettes who sought to shame conscientious objectors, and those who fulfilled their patriotic duty through their munitions work, little attention has been paid to the huge number of women in the British suffrage movement who actively opposed the war.<sup>95</sup>

Historian Jo Vellacott, in an attempt to remedy such absence, stresses the radicalism of the women involved in anti-war political activity. Female opposition to war, Vellacott asserts, represented a fundamental rejection of the notion of women as passive, subservient

<sup>91</sup> A narrative perpetuated in: Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Princeton University Press, 1990), 220.

<sup>92</sup> As exemplified in: Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914*, 220.

<sup>93</sup> "How far did women's war efforts contribute to gaining the vote in 1918?" BBC Bitesize History, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/higher/history/britsuff/wwone/revision/1/>.

<sup>94</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 1-3.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

agents of masculinist, militaristic demand.<sup>96</sup> In response to historian Susan Kingsley Kent's claim that the women's movement lost its "radical edge" during the Great War,<sup>97</sup> Sarah Hellawell, writing in 2018, asserts that women engaged in anti-war activism were defying their gender role as patriotic servers of the nation.<sup>98</sup> In my view this is a point that must be acknowledged whenever the question of women's anti-war activism is brought to light. Women anti-war activists, whatever their reason for opposing the War, were engaged in radical activism that constituted a rejection of societal gender norms.

In recent years, historians such as Lesley Orr have sought to reassert the role of suffragettes, particularly socialist suffragettes, in anti-war campaigns such as the Women's Peace Crusade (WPC).<sup>99</sup> Chapter 4 of this thesis will dedicate space to the WPC and how its guiding principles were informed by Red Clydeside activism.

## 1.2 Red Clydeside

Unfortunately, titles that claim to offer analysis of British labour history, or of British women's movements for that matter, often tend to reduce Britain to England. A prime example of this is historian Pamela Graves' book entitled *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939*.<sup>100</sup> In discussion of her research, which was based on interview and testimony, she describes the exclusion of Welsh and Scottish activists as a "significant omission".<sup>101</sup> I would argue "significant" is an understatement; it is rather an omission so great that it renders the title of the book, by definition, incorrect. This trend of excluding the likes of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from a study of *British* working-

<sup>96</sup> Vellacott, "A place for pacifism and transnationalism in feminist theory: the early work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom," *Women's History Review* 2, no. 1 (1993): 26.

<sup>97</sup> Susan Kingsley Kent, "The Politics of Sexual Difference: World War I and the demise of British feminism," *The Journal of British Studies* 27, no. 3 (1988): 232.

<sup>98</sup> Sarah Hellawell, "Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood: the formation and early years of the Women's International League (WIL), 1915-1919," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 4 (2018): 552-553.

<sup>99</sup> Orr, "Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?"

<sup>100</sup> Pamela M. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 42.



class politics illustrates the forms of English centrism that contributes to the sidelining of the activism of those on the geographic peripheries.

Despite this issue, the era of Red Clydeside has received significant scholarly attention from labour historians across the UK and further afield. However, the historiographical treatment of the era, which has often involved scholars heralding it as a communist microcosm, led historian Ian McLean to argue, in 1983, that the notion of Red Clydeside is a myth.<sup>102</sup> His underlying argument is that the politics of the Clydeside at the time was Labourist, not socialist, in outlook. Activism, he claims, was more concerned on issues of working conditions as opposed to broader socialist issues such as equality and social justice. McLean posits that the emphasis on the shop stewards who led the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC), and their own interpretations of events, has led to the Marxist character of Red Clydeside becoming overestimated.<sup>103</sup> Such an account has since encouraged a stream of scholars, including historian John Foster, to vehemently refute such claims of mythology and assert that it was socialism that defined the CWC.<sup>104</sup>

Such a polemic serves to substantiate my own arguments regarding the problems with Red Clydeside historiography. In basing the question of whether Red Clydeside was socialist in character solely on industrial activism and opinions of male workers and the CWC, the activism of women, both in their workplace and in their local communities, is rendered unimportant and marginal to the wider Leftist politics of the time. Historian Kay Blackwell asserts that women “are simply not part” of Red Clydeside historiography.<sup>105</sup> As a result, Red Clydeside, and the socialist political activism that was present within it, is conceived as an exclusively male endeavour.

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<sup>102</sup> Ian McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 1983).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 154-173.

<sup>104</sup> John Foster, “Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919,” *International Review of Social History* XXXV (1990): 33.

<sup>105</sup> Kay Blackwell, “Women on Red Clydeside: The Invisible Workforce Debate,” *Scottish Economic and Social History* 21, no. 2, (2001): 140 -163.

### 1.2.1 Ethical socialism

Historian Eleanor Gordon's distinction between "scientific socialism" and "ethical socialism" offers a means to uncover the extent of women's activism on Red Clydeside and how women have been so easily omitted from historiography.<sup>106</sup> Gordon posits that activities of the scientific socialist realm tended to be focused on the workplace, with emphasis being placed upon the importance of fair working conditions and the worker-led trade union movements. The ethical socialist group, on the other hand, tended to rally around broader social issues, such as health and housing, emphasising community organising and encouraging the participation of women in politics.<sup>107</sup>

A key tendency that I have recognised in the literature, and wish to critique, is that of equating Red Clydeside to the activities of the so-called scientific socialist group. Similarly to the historiography of labour politics more generally, the study of industrial and working-class struggle tends to be confined to the workplace; the non-industrial locations of political activism are thus marginalised within the literature.<sup>108</sup> Recognising this trend while writing in the early 1980s, historian Joseph Melling goes as far to suggest that there is a clear historiographic tendency that ignores the work of local communities and rather attributes political developments of the time, specifically, to John Maclean- one of the CWC leaders.<sup>109</sup>

I would argue that the more complex forms of local activism and organising, that were characteristic of the ethical socialist group are, inadvertently, deemed peripheral to working-class politics. Historians such as John McLean thus perceive and portray women, because of their local community organising tactics, as having performed more supportive

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<sup>106</sup> Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 262.

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

<sup>108</sup> As argued by Helen Corr, "Introduction," in *Rent Strike: Peoples Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890-1916*, by Joseph Melling (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1983), vi.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Melling, *Rent Strike: Peoples Struggle for Housing in West Scotland 1890-1916* (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1983), 112.

roles in the broader Red Clydeside movement.<sup>110</sup> While Gordon does not venture into an analysis of the gendered nature of the two ideological camps of ethical and scientific socialism, it is precisely this issue that I seek to rectify in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

### 1.2.2 The Women's Peace Crusade

There have been some attempts by historians, such as Michael Pacione, to include women in their depictions of working-class politics on the Clyde in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland.<sup>111</sup> While this is positive, women's involvement (if acknowledged) tends to be understood as limited to the Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915.<sup>112</sup> Historian Lesley Orr maintains that other campaigns that occurred in Glasgow during WWI, such as the Women's Peace Crusade, remain neglected by Red Clydeside historiography.<sup>113</sup> This omission is particularly disappointing considering the WPC's distinctly socialist character. While the WPC is discussed in literature on the topic of women's anti-war activism,<sup>114</sup> it has become largely isolated from its Red Clydeside context. To date, it has been James Smyth and Lesley Orr who have stressed the Red Clydeside connection.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, by placing the WPC firmly in its local political context, I seek to reassert its deserved position as a pivotal part of Red Clydeside history.

Since 2016, historian Lesley Orr has contributed several insightful articles on Helen Crawford and her role within the WPC.<sup>116</sup> Through use of Crawford's autobiography, Orr discusses the WPC with specific reference to how Crawford's previous political and religious experience informed her activism. Lesley Orr remains one of the few scholars who have

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<sup>110</sup> As exemplified in: McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Pacione, *Glasgow the Socio-spatial Development of the City* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 240.

<sup>112</sup> As exemplified in: Neil C. Rafeek, *Communist Women in Scotland*, 31.

<sup>113</sup> Lesley Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?'"

<sup>114</sup> Most notably in Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women* and Jill Liddington, *The long road to Greenham: feminism and anti-militarism in Britain since 1820* (London: Virago, 1989).

<sup>115</sup> Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?'" and James J. Smyth, "Rents, Pace, Votes: Working-Class Women and Political Activity in the First World War," in *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society*, ed. E. Breitenbach and E. Gordon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

<sup>116</sup> Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?'" and Lesley Orr, "'If Christ could be militant, so could I': Helen Crawford and the Women's Peace Crusade, 1916-18," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 31, no. 1 (2018): 27-42.

recognised the full potential of Crawford's autobiography; understanding it as a resource that can guide the study of, and illuminate connections between, actors, ideas and movements. Orr has also been instrumental to informing the public about the life of Helen Crawford. Through her contributions to national newspapers, radio programmes and events,<sup>117</sup> Orr has taken significant strides towards ensuring Crawford receives the historical recognition she deserves. Given that her research has tended to focus primarily on the years 1916-1918, it is my intention to apply this approach, namely the in-depth analysis of Crawford's autobiography, to a wider time period.<sup>118</sup>

### 1.2.3 The importance of local organising

Historian Paul Griffin, on the subject of "re-visiting" Red Clydeside, alludes to the importance of the street corner as a form of local political activism. While Griffin does not recognise explicit connections between gender and street organising, he nonetheless recognises that community organising and street corner activism were crucial for articulating a form of accessible, working-class, feminist politics.<sup>119</sup> This focus on local activism is also present in the writing of historians Karen Hunt and Shani D'Cruze, who in discussing the broader topic of women's activism, emphasise the role of communities and neighbourhoods in shaping women's political organising.<sup>120</sup> D'Cruze asserts that the mutually supportive networks of lending and caring, established by women present in working-class communities were vital to the survival of the working-class. This thesis will push D'Cruze's contribution further by arguing that such networks and forms of local organising, present in Glasgow's

<sup>117</sup> For example, see: Lesley Orr, "The importance of being dangerous," *The Herald*, April 23, 2017, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/15240274.the-importance-of-being-dangerous-lesley-orr-pays-tribute-to-the-unsung-scotswomen-who-fought-for-peace-and-justice-during-wwi/>. The radio programme is no longer available to the public however it was part of the BBC's "Women with a Past" series. The programme was entitled "Helen Crawford" and was aired on April 30, 2014. Accessed May 10, 2019, [http://www.radiolistings.co.uk/programmes/w/wo/women\\_with\\_a\\_past.html](http://www.radiolistings.co.uk/programmes/w/wo/women_with_a_past.html).

<sup>118</sup> Orr, "'Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?'"

<sup>119</sup> Paul Griffin, "Diverse political identities with a working-class presence: Revisiting Red Clydeside," *Political Geography* 65 (2018): 128.

<sup>120</sup> See: Karen Hunt, "The Politics of Food and Women's Neighbourhood Activism in First World War Britain," *Labour and Working-Class History* 77, (2010): 8- 26 and Shani D'Cruze, "Women and the Family" in *Women's History Britain; 1850-1945: an introduction*, ed. June Purvis (London: Routledge, 1995), 64.

working-class communities, constituted a distinct form of political activism that has been undervalued by scholars of Red Clydeside.

The historiography of women's activism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been compartmentalised to the extent that the interconnections between actors, campaigns and movements are often silenced or brushed aside as somewhat self-explanatory. In 2013, historians Karen Hunt and June Hannam called upon scholars to transcend beyond such compartmentalisation and instead understand women's politics as something that exists in a wide variety of spaces.<sup>121</sup> Studying women's political activism solely through the limited study of women's roles in specific groups, Karen Hunt argues, neglects the broader politics that was being formed "across, between and even beyond parties and women's organisations".<sup>122</sup> Throughout the entirety of this thesis, I seek to illustrate the numerous political spaces that Crawford inhabited and the ways in which various movements, and actors, connected with one another.

In a somewhat similar vein, Paul Griffin has made significant strides towards a more holistic analysis of Red Clydeside with reference to labour geographies and radical connections.<sup>123</sup> By entrenching his study in discussion of traditions such as anarchism and communism, Griffin seeks to stress the importance of political experience in shaping Glaswegian politics. Moreover, in recognition of the gender disparity that remains rife in Red Clydeside literature, Griffin refers to Helen Crawford's life as an example how the activism of women intersected with both the suffrage movement, and working-class struggle.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Karen Hunt and June Hannam, "Towards an Archaeology of Interwar Women's Politics: The Local and the Everyday," in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*, ed. Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 137.

<sup>122</sup> Karen Hunt, "The local and the everyday: interwar women's politics," *The Local Historian* 42, no. 4 (2012): 268.

<sup>123</sup> Griffin, "Diverse political identities with a working-class presence," 128.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

Describing Crawford as a woman who has been marginalised within the historiography, Griffin seeks to reassert the importance of her contributions to the movement.<sup>125</sup>

In line with Griffin, I would argue that the biographical lens also enables scholars to alleviate the lack of scholarly attention granted to the international connections that were present on Red Clydeside. In light of the potential of such an approach, this thesis will demonstrate how friendship, transnationalism and personal experience affected the activism of Helen Crawford, and how she conducted her Red Clydeside political work.

### **1.3 The Communist Party of Great Britain**

#### **1.3.1 Anti-communism, internationalism and the trope of the “front” organisation**

Anti-communism remains rife in the scholarship of the CPGB. The work of historian Robert Service, published as recently as 2007, provides a salient example of how such discourse seeps in to the writing of history. Upon discussion of Stalinist purges and Maoist violence, Service claims that it was not the leaders, as people, who were monsters, but rather “the communist system that made them behave monstrously”.<sup>126</sup> Service, offering no explanation or justification for this sentence, arguably demonstrates just how entrenched, and normalized, anti-communism is in the writing of Communist history. Service also infers that Henry Pollitt, the leader of the CPGB from 1929 until 1956 (with a brief interruption in the years 1939-1941), would have been likely to commit acts of violence if Moscow had instructed him to.<sup>127</sup> Service claims: “Pollitt’s bowing and scraping before Stalin anyhow does not induce confidence that he would have resisted an injunction from Moscow to root out ‘enemies of the people’”.<sup>128</sup> This kind of speculation problematically implies that Pollitt was aware of the extent of violence involved with the purges, and that he would have been willing to conduct such crimes himself.

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<sup>125</sup> Griffin, “Diverse political identities with a working-class presence,” 128.

<sup>126</sup> Robert Service, *Comrades: A History of World Communism* (London: Macmillan, 2007), 194.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

Historian Matthew Worley argues that the historiography of the international communist movement remains stuck in a similarly anti-communist, cold war paradigm, where scholars write “determinist” history that correlates communism with Stalinist orthodoxy.<sup>129</sup>

The historiographic debate over the extent of Comintern control over the CPGB remains problematic for several reasons. Firstly, its pre-eminence within the literature leaves little space for discussion of grassroots activism. By focusing solely on such high-level politics, the work of Party members on the local level becomes invisible, which in turn marginalizes women’s work, as will later be discussed.<sup>130</sup> Secondly, many historians apply present-day concepts of political party autonomy without acknowledging that the CPGB *chose* to commit itself to an international Communist movement built on disciplined democratic centralism.<sup>131</sup> As Andrew Thorpe asserts, many parties, including the CPGB, joined the Comintern because they believed that cooperation on an international level could lead to the establishment of international communism.<sup>132</sup> I wish to stress this point as it one that in my view is often lost.

In 2015, historian Lisa A. Kirschenbaum iterated that historiography focused on communism is often based upon the question of the extent to which Moscow exerted control over the national committees and so called “front organisations”.<sup>133</sup> “Fronts” were, and still are, understood as organisations that sought to deliver communism in disguise; by hiding their connections to Moscow these organisations are accused of luring innocent, unknowing

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<sup>129</sup> Matthew Worley, “The Communist International, The Communist Party of Great Britain, and the ‘Third Period’, 1928-1932,” *European History Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2000): 185.

<sup>130</sup> Hunt and Worley, “Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s,” 1.

<sup>131</sup> For an example see: Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* (London: A and C Black Limited, 1958), 17-18.

<sup>132</sup> Andrew Thorpe, “Comintern ‘Control’ of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1943,” *The English Historical Review* 113, no. 452 (1998): 637.

<sup>133</sup> Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity and Suspicion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

people into supporting communist projects.<sup>134</sup> While scholars may not always adopt an overtly anti-communist approach, I would argue that the subtleties of terminology, such as the use of the term “front” organisation, continue to discredit various projects of communist internationalism.

The historiography of the CPGB thus far, has largely failed to analyse the extent to which CPGB members were engaged in international activism.<sup>135</sup> This tired question of the extent to which Comintern exerted “control” over the national Party has served to the detriment of scholarship regarding the positive societal contributions of communist internationalism.<sup>136</sup> In terms of Worker’s International Relief (WIR) an organisation discussed in Chapter 5, I would argue that this trope of the “front” organisation continues to affect that way in which it is portrayed in historiography. For example, in introducing WIR (albeit briefly) in relation to Helen Crawford’s life, Paul Griffin, writing as recently as 2018, maintains that WIR was one of the many “fronts” that was founded by the Comintern.<sup>137</sup> Although Griffin otherwise succeeds in describing the primary motives and work of the WIR, I would argue that the initial framing of the organisation as a front only serves to perpetuate persisting misconceptions surrounding organisations that were rooted in communism.

The fact that Griffin is still utilising such terminology in 2018 arguably shows how persistent, and relevant, anti-communism in scholarship remains. Communist organisations, even ones (as in the case of WIR) that were centred upon supplying vital relief for victims of famine and extreme poverty, continue to be treated with suspicion; their work obscured by language of conspiracy and deception.

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<sup>134</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers’ Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 6.

<sup>135</sup> For an example, see: Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1985).

<sup>136</sup> As exemplified by: John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “‘Nina Ponomareva’s Hats’: The New Revisionism, the Communist International, and the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1930,” *Labour/ Le Travail* 49 (2002): 147-187.

<sup>137</sup> Griffin, “Diverse political identities with a working-class presence,” 129.



Only in the past five years has an attempt been made, by Kasper Braskén, to write a comprehensive history of WIR.<sup>138</sup> Braskén asserts that one of the primary reasons for this is that methodological nationalism continues to dominate historiography of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>139</sup> This argument resonates with the fact that Noreen Branson's history of the CPGB has ignored the work of WIR and the CPGB members who were active within it.<sup>140</sup> To write a history of the CPGB, an organisation committed to the belief in communist internationalism, without the internationalism, appears remarkably counter-intuitive. In light of this omission, Chapter 5 of this thesis seeks to reassert the importance of communist internationalism to CPGB history by focusing on this element of Helen Crawford's communist activism.

### 1.3.2 The gendered experiences of CPGB women

Historiographic work that focuses specifically on women's activism within the CPGB remains slight, especially that of the post-1945 era. Given that Crawford was most active in the pre-WWII years, this thesis will unfortunately not be able to contribute to the post-1945 scholarship.

Historian Wang Zheng in her discussion of state feminism in Communist China argues that historiography that remains fixated on power struggles between male leaders inevitably results in the silencing of feminist activism.<sup>141</sup> In line with Zheng and in relation to CPGB historiography, historians Hunt and Worley maintain that the continued focus on "high politics" detracts attention away from the question of how gender affected the political experience of CPGB members; particularly, they argue, those whose work was focused on their local communities.<sup>142</sup> This tendency is one that has profound implications regarding the

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<sup>138</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*.

<sup>141</sup> Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1964* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 7.

<sup>142</sup> Hunt and Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," 4.

historiographical neglect of women, such as Helen Crawford, who were involved in a multitude of communist activities.

While the work of historian Sue Bruley gives a comprehensive analysis of women's activism in the early years of the CPGB, it is limited to the pre-WWII years.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, work conducted by Hunt and Worley that seeks to “rethink” CPGB women's activism, also focuses solely on the decade of the 1920s. However, in 2007, historian Neil C. Rafeek dedicated his book to the study of Scottish communist women that covered CPGB's entire life span (1920-1991).<sup>144</sup> The book offers a rich and insightful analysis of Scottish communist women's activism, however due to the time period it is, understandably, lacking in depth and detail. While Rafeek successfully draws upon the interconnectedness of women's organising, in terms of their affiliations and friendships, the engagement of Scottish women in matters of international communism is a subject that is not discussed at length. The question too of gender and how it impacted the way women engaged politically, is one that deserved greater attention in the study.

Sue Bruley conducted interviews with ten surviving female founding members of the CPGB.<sup>145</sup> In her research, she found that many women did not associate themselves with women's sections of the CPGB and were not active within them.<sup>146</sup> Instead, many female Party members sought to disassociate themselves from women's activism, as they identified themselves as communists first, not women communists.<sup>147</sup> While this may indeed be true, I believe Zheng's notion of the “politics of concealment”, a form of camouflaging explicitly

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<sup>143</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*.

<sup>144</sup> Rafeek, *Communist Women in Scotland*.

<sup>145</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 114-115.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

feminist concerns through utilisation of Party rhetoric, to be pivotal to some of the work of female members of the CPGB.<sup>148</sup>

Many of the founding members of the Party, including Sylvia Pankhurst, Dora Montefiore and Helen Crawfurd, had roots in the Leninist notion of pre-war “bourgeois feminism”.<sup>149</sup> Through their involvement in the WSPU, these women had been leading figures of the suffrage movement.<sup>150</sup> This is important because CPGB put pressure on many of its female foundation members to cut ties with their relationship to feminism and feminist organizations, in order to show their commitment to the communist cause.<sup>151</sup> Bruley asserts that the CPGB’s unquestioning commitment to the Comintern led to a “denial of any socialist feminist tradition” within the Party, presenting itself as detached from its own broader British historical context.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, it is vital that historians recognize the complex political tensions that women were forced to negotiate with and the potential attractiveness of the “politics of concealment” as a strategy.<sup>153</sup>

The CPGB has been described within much of the historiography as “very much a man’s Party”, whose (lack lustre) approach to women’s activism was guided by its relationship with the Comintern.<sup>154</sup> Hunt and Worley claim that the “Bolshevization” of the party, in terms of discipline, was likely to have prevented women from being able to critically engage with political issues they cared about.<sup>155</sup> While these statements may indeed harbour a great deal of truth, they infer that there remained little room for manoeuvre with regard to women’s activism. Zheng asserts that many historians *assume* the limitedness of female agency within male-dominated structures of power; I believe this argument remains

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<sup>148</sup> Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*, 17-18.

<sup>149</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 87.

<sup>150</sup> Hunt and Worley, “Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s,” 6.

<sup>151</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 88.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>153</sup> Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*, 18.

<sup>154</sup> Hunt and Worley, “Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s,” 3.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

particularly relevant to debates within CPGB historiography regarding women's activism.<sup>156</sup>

In Chapter 5, I suggest that one of the ways in which women responded to the male dominated nature of the national Party may have been through international organising.

The diversity of women's activism within the Party arguably poses a challenge to CPGB historiography. Domesticity and locality are two areas of CPGB history that many historians appear to deem of less relevance. Dora Montefiore, for example, in addition to her work as a member of the CPGB executive committee, adopted Austro-Hungarian children whose parents had been imprisoned for Communist activity.<sup>157</sup> Discussion of Montefiore's activism in this realm remains rare, arguably because, despite its international communist character, it does not fit neatly into the category of public Party work.

This form of activism rooted in the domestic sphere arguably echoes what Bruley describes as a recurring theme regarding women's activism within CPGB- the division between women recognized as "cadres" and those recognized as "supporters".<sup>158</sup> Work of supporters was thus often understood to be confined to the domestic, or the "servicing" of Communist men.<sup>159</sup> Donna Harsch argues that communist men tended to regard such work as intrinsically apolitical.<sup>160</sup> However, I believe that Bruley, in accepting this binary division rather uncritically, risks reifying the public and private divide. In recognition of this tension, Hunt and Worley conclude their article by asserting the need for greater historical research into how women were represented as either "communist women" or as the (seemingly) ungendered "communist cadre" and how this affected later history writing.<sup>161</sup> The authors

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<sup>156</sup> Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 67.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>160</sup> Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 492.

<sup>161</sup> Hunt and Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," 26.

also seek to analyse how these processes of identification varied within the Party geographically.<sup>162</sup>

While this thesis looks to challenge historian Sue Bruley's dichotomous claim that CPGB women fell into one of two categories: "cadre" or "supporter"; the "cadre" title does, nonetheless, hold some insight into the gendered dynamics of CPGB activism.<sup>163</sup> Bruley claims that the so-called cadre women, took on the persona of "pseudo-men", by which she means remaining unmarried, childless and politically very ambitious.<sup>164</sup> Of course, this term is problematic for a number of reasons, namely gender essentialism, however Bruley's analysis does address some key issues relating to women's activism within the CPGB.

Bruley maintains that this pseudo-male character was adopted by women who wished to disassociate themselves from the domestic sphere and from politics that focused on women's issues and the home. In doing so, she fails to account for the heightened demands placed upon women CPGB activists in relation to their male counterparts. Behaving like "pseudo-men" was likely the only way that women could enter the political arena, gain legitimacy and campaign for the politics they believed in; these women had to prove, through exhaustive activism and vast time commitment, that they were worthy of the leadership positions that remained more readily accessible to their male comrades. It is also important to acknowledge, in relation to Bruley's claim, that many women believed that communism would result in the freeing of women from the drudgery of the domestic; to wish to be involved in broader communist campaigns was thus not necessarily to belittle the importance of domestic politics.

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<sup>162</sup> Hunt and Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," 26.

<sup>163</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 122-123.

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

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to emphasize the myriad ways in which historiographical trends have contributed to the omission of women, such as Helen Crawford, from the respective bodies of literature. Although historiography of the British suffrage movement is vast, activism of regional women remains peripheral. This thesis will therefore use the study of regional activism, in the case of Scotland, to bring to light issues of nationalism, class and resistance. By avoiding extensive discussion of the Pankhursts, this thesis calls for an understanding of the WSPU as a collective movement of women, originating from across the British Isles (and beyond), who used militant tactics to fight for women's suffrage. Understanding such women as entrenched in their own local and national contexts, I will show the various connections that were present that informed the activism of suffragettes.

Red Clydeside historiography has, since the 1990s, begun to encompass the activism of women. However, this largely remains limited to their role in the Rent Strike of 1915. Chapter 4 of this thesis seeks to remedy this omission by emphasising the multitude of ways in which Glaswegian women were involved in socialist political activism. By reasserting the role of women in the ethical socialist branch of Red Clydeside, particularly through their forms of community organising, I will stress the need for a more inclusive approach to the writing of labour history.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the historiography of the CPGB too, remains lacking. The role of women and the extent of international organising are issues that are yet to be fully explored. The gendered experiences of CPGB women remain understudied with little attention being paid as to how women negotiated their position within the Party; this is an issue that Chapter 5 of this thesis will touch upon. Moreover, the prevalence of anti-communism, which manifests itself both explicitly and implicitly throughout the historiography, remains a major problem. Of great interest to this thesis, however, is the

“front organisation” trope and how it has contributed to the historiographical omission of organisations such as WIR. The methodological nationalism exhibited in Noreen Branson’s CPGB history remains a hindrance to the study of how CPGB members engagement in international communism.

The figure of Helen Crawford and her involvement in the British suffrage movement, Red Clydeside and the CPGB will allow me to offer a new understanding of the ways in which early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Leftist women engaged in various forms of socialist feminism and communist internationalism.

### CHAPTER 3- HELEN CRAWFURD: THE MAKING OF A SCOTTISH SUFFRAGETTE

“The position of women is to me a fundamental question. If half of the human race are frustrated and prevented from playing their part, and their inferiority complex is developed by being compelled to occupy a position of subjection and inferiority, what hope is there for the human race?”<sup>165</sup>

#### Introduction

The British suffrage movement has received a significant amount of scholarly attention since the 1980s. Despite the great gains made so far, as described in Chapter 1, this chapter will argue that a greater emphasis on factors such as personal development, nationalism and transnational connections, is pivotal to the further understanding of the movement. By employing a partly biographical focus, this chapter will analyse the activism of Helen Crawford, illustrating the ways in which she was forced to negotiate her personal life, her national identity and her feminism, during her campaigning for the extension of the franchise.

This chapter begins with a discussion of Helen Crawford’s personal feminist development. I will show, through Crawford’s own words, the ways in which her marriage, her religion and her literary influences informed her feminism, and thus feminist activism. By foregrounding the rest of the chapter in this introduction to Crawford’s early political development, I will emphasise the myriad ways in which her lived experience of oppression and sexism fuelled her desire to fight for women’s rights.

As Helen Crawford was active within the Women’s Social and Political Union, it is this element of the suffrage campaign that this Chapter will concentrate on. As iterated in Chapter 1, much of the historiography of the WSPU focuses on its leaders, the Pankhursts, and their activism in London. In demonstrating the local context of WSPU activism, particularly through the involvement of working-class women in Glasgow and the positive relationship enjoyed by the Glaswegian branches of the WSPU and Independent Labour Party

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<sup>165</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 391.



(ILP), I will challenge some of the dominant narratives regarding the alleged exclusively bourgeois nature of suffragette militancy,<sup>166</sup> and the apparent discord between suffragettes and the labour movement.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to the biographical and local axes, a key focus of this chapter will be the forms of national tensions that arose within WSPU activism. Using the example of the attempted arson of Robert Burns' cottage that occurred on July 8, 1914, I will situate the public's response to the suffragette attack, and the subsequent punishment of the perpetrator, within the context of Scottish nationalism.

This section of the Chapter will also address the question of how Scottish organisers responded to the WSPU leadership in times of disagreement. Through an example of confrontation regarding the dismissal of esteemed Scottish organiser, Janie Allan, I will argue that while Scottish suffragettes harboured the courage to question leaders, their concerns were ultimately belittled by arguments that were entrenched in notions of English superiority; a concept that lay at the heart of the WSPU.<sup>168</sup> Crucially, however, these sources of national tension have largely failed to capture the attention of suffrage scholars; it is my intention, therefore, to shed light upon why they matter.

In the final section of this chapter, I will demonstrate how transnational connections defined the suffrage movement. Through discussion of the hunger strike as a transnational political method I will argue that the interconnectedness of actors, ideas and knowledge in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century were intrinsic to the suffrage movement's political success. In addition, I will posit that friendships, such as the one between Helen Crawford and Charlotte Despard (leader of the WFL and member of the IWSA), enabled local suffrage campaigners to gain news of, as well as insight and access to, transnational political activism. Importantly for this

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<sup>166</sup> Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*.

<sup>167</sup> Hannam, "I had not been to London," 233.

<sup>168</sup> Burton, *Burdens of History*, 6.

thesis, such connections contributed enormously to Crawford's later political activism as detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **3.1 *The becoming of a Scottish suffragette***

#### **3.1.1 Marriage and religion**

In the first section of her autobiography, Crawford dedicates a great deal of space to discussion of her personal life and her experience of religious practice.<sup>169</sup> Her writing indicates that Crawford understood the earlier years of her life, particularly her teenage years and early twenties, as intrinsic to her political development. Marrying relatively young, to a man many years her senior, was a major decision in Crawford's life but clearly one that she did not take lightly. Her religious commitment at this early age, epitomised through her decision to marry a Reverend, required a great deal of emotional strength; especially as several members of her family remained opposed to the marriage.<sup>170</sup> While it may be, for some, difficult not to feel slightly saddened by the notion of a young woman feeling pressured, partly by her own religious understanding, to marry someone whom she did not initially want; I would argue that her decision to marry is reflective of the type of dedicated and bold character she was.

Crawford's own reflections on this time of her life, while she acknowledges that the marriage was difficult for both parties, she claims she never questioned her husband's "goodness and sincerity".<sup>171</sup> It is difficult to know the extent to which this experience of marriage influenced Crawford's own feminist activism. What is evident though, is that the religious nature of the marriage informed Crawford's initial feelings of discontent towards gender disparity.

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<sup>169</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 69.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

Crawfurd describes daily life with her then husband as revolving around Biblical reading and prayer. Through these activities, Helen was able to develop a deep understanding of scripture and gain a bank of stories that she would later refer to, and utilize, in her later propaganda work- as discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Her autobiography suggests that from her early twenties onwards, Helen enjoyed critically analysing texts and ideas. In reaction to some of the examples of “cruelty to women” that the Bible contains, Crawfurd would openly criticize and question Scripture; when she did so, her husband would scold her for her blasphemy.<sup>172</sup> In my reading of Crawfurd’s own words, it strikes me that she did not seem to hold any fear of her husband or for the potential consequences of her disobedience. A sparkling example of this is the way in which Crawfurd reacted to her husband’s disapproval of reading fiction. While she believed it would be wrong to read in secret, Crawfurd instead chose to continue to read novels “in open defiance”.<sup>173</sup> What I seek to stress here, is that already in her early 20s, Crawfurd’s character embodied a reluctance to blindly obey; her desire to challenge ideas that she viewed as morally wrong was fundamental to her being.

While the Bible gave Crawfurd plenty reason to criticise, it also provided her with some sources of inspiration. In her reading, she managed to find and cling to voices of marked dissent. She notes:

Queen Vashti in the book of Esther refused to come in and parade herself before the King, her lord and master, and his nobles. She was my first suffragette, or feminist, or rebel. She lost her position as Queen, but she kept her soul.<sup>174</sup>

Crawfurd’s understanding of Queen Vashti as her “first suffragette” indicates the importance of religious text to her formative years. The fact that Crawfurd was able to find women’s resistance within Scripture appeared to arm her with substantive religious

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<sup>172</sup> Crawfurd, Unpublished Autobiography, 44.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

arguments in favour of women's emancipation. Queen Vashti, therefore, provided her with the discursive weaponry required to challenge the misogynistic elements of the Bible. This theme of using the Bible, selectively, in order to push certain arguments forward is one that is present in Crawford's later suffrage and anti-war activism. Crucially, she understood how to harness the power of the Bible and how to "spin" certain stories within it. This talent enabled Crawford to become a relatable person who could reach out to otherwise relatively closed parts of the religious community.

It is most likely that Crawford's teaching work within the Church contributed to her development as a gifted orator. As mentioned throughout the entirety of this thesis, Crawford maintained a gleaming reputation as a gifted public speaker- known for her ability to turn crowds of angry mobs into sympathisers of whatever cause she was working on. A prime example of this was in 1914, in the Scottish city of Perth. Having learned of the resistance suffragettes were facing there in their ability to organise and occupy public space, Crawford decided to try to convince a group of angry protestors of the worthiness of the suffragette cause. At the beginning of Crawford's week of speaking she was pelted with rotten fruit and "other missiles" by the rowdy crowd.<sup>175</sup> Yet by the end of the week, she recalls having turned the crowd in her favour, and even had them singing along to Scottish songs with her.<sup>176</sup> As will be discussed more fully in Chapters 4 and 5, Crawford became a highly sought after speaker whose skill was recognised and valued by an array of different political parties and organisations.

I wish to stress that Crawford's religious and marital life were essential to shaping her feminist beliefs and equipping her with great argumentative and oratory power. These skills,

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<sup>175</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 104.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 104-105.

partly developed through intense study of Scripture and attendance of religious gatherings, should be perceived as a valuable part of her feminist education.

### 3.1.2 Literary influences

In describing her openly defiant reading, Crawford recalls reading about the Poor Law (legislation in England and Wales that forced those who could not support themselves financially to be placed in prison-like work houses) through the work of Dickens, and remembers how deep an impression Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* made on her.<sup>177</sup> These novels were not just sources of escapist pleasure to Crawford; they provided insights to the systemic exploitation and dehumanisation practices that were prevalent across Western Europe and beyond. Reading was thus not only a pastime to Crawford but a valuable, educational tool. These novels enabled Crawford to develop her socialist sentiment and recognise the transnational nature of such conditions.

In addition to her literary endeavours, Crawford remembers the extent to which the theatre, particularly the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, contributed to her political development. "A Doll's House" by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and plays of Maxim Gorky and Israel Zangwill, were, to Crawford, fundamental in exposing the hypocrisy and ignorance surrounding questions of class and gender.<sup>178</sup> She notes that the Repertory Theatre was bold in its decision to bring such provocative plays to the "thinking population of Glasgow"- other commercial theatres were reluctant to take such risks.<sup>179</sup> Historian Martin Pugh asserts that "A Doll's House", in particular, had a profound influence on many women in Britain including the very actresses who performed in it; several of whom went on to become militant suffragettes.<sup>180</sup> It appears then that these plays, written by people originating from

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<sup>177</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 62.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>180</sup> Pugh, *The March of Women*, 225-226.

across Europe, were pivotal to the transnational circulation of ideas around the issue of women's rights and women's position in society.

### 3.1.3 Pioneering women

It is refreshing to read Crawford's autobiography with the knowledge that she is writing of events that happened over forty years ago, and yet, still manages to remember the full names of her comrades, as well as their educational attainment and roles in various movements. The level of care and attention she dedicates to these details, I would argue, is indicative of the importance she places upon women's work and achievements. Her respect for women, as detailed in the quotation below, is evident not only in acts such as naming and accrediting, but also in her detailing of the various "pioneering" (predominantly Scots) women, who she infers paved the way for the rise of the British suffrage movement.<sup>181</sup>

The status of women implied in the Old and New Testament by the words: 'Let your women keep silent in the Churches' made me rebel, but I think it was my respect for women more than this that made me a Feminist.<sup>182</sup>

Astronomer Mary Somerville, gynaecologists Elizabeth Blackwell and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and trade unionist Mary Macarthur, are among the many women Crawford believes Scotswomen, in the present, owe a great deal to.<sup>183</sup> I would posit that the space she dedicates to these pre-suffrage movement, pioneering women is evidence of her belief that women's activism, and feminist thought, in Britain should be understood as more than the suffrage campaign. Crawford clearly believes that the British women's movement needed these courageous individuals to pave the way for the national fight for women's political rights that was to come.

Josephine Butler, an English feminist and social reformer, is another woman who Crawford argues was fundamental to the British women's movement. In describing her

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<sup>181</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 69.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 69-73.

contributions, Crawford iterates that Butler's work *The Queen's Daughters in India*, a text that sought protection for Indian women from (forced or coerced) prostitution, was a source of great admiration.<sup>184</sup> While this Chapter, and the larger body of this thesis, will not spend a great deal of time on the subject of the relationship between the British women's suffrage movement and Empire, it is vital to this work that it is acknowledged.

In *Burdens of History*, historian Antionette Burton argues that the image of the "downtrodden Indian women, needful of Western women's help" was central to British middle- and upper-class women's claims for suffrage.<sup>185</sup> Burton asserts that it remains "virtually impossible" to read feminist literature of Victorian Britain, such as that of Josephine Butler, without recognising that imperialism was intrinsic to women's claims for citizenship; the Empire was thus conceived as a legitimate ground for the exercising of their political participation.<sup>186</sup> Crucially, as Burton so eloquently describes, leading British feminisms (socialist feminism included) would often invoke the notion of Indian women as in need of salvation by British "sisters".<sup>187</sup>

Helen Crawford, though her politics was often rooted in anti-imperialism and the betterment of the working classes, was not immune to exhibitions of white saviour tendencies (e.g. her praise of Butler's work in favour of the protection of Indian women) or imperial reasoning. What is important though, is that the time in which Crawford's politics was developing, is understood in its historical context. As Burton maintains, Victorian culture understood "nation" and "empire" as synonymous to one another; it should then not come as such a surprise that British feminist thinkers and activists understood themselves as citizens, not only of Britain, but of the British Empire.<sup>188</sup> Historians' neglect of the imperial nature of

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<sup>184</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 67-68.

<sup>185</sup> Burton, *Burdens of History*, 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

early-20<sup>th</sup>-century British feminisms contributes to wider societal ignorance regarding the British Empire and how it shaped (and continues to shape) Britain today. Ultimately, I wish to stress the imperial context in which the British suffrage movement occurred and the myriad of ways in which the very existence of a British empire informed the Women's Social and Political Union's own activism.

### **3.2 Crawford and the WSPU in Glasgow**

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Sylvia and Christabel. Firmly rooted in the labour movement, specifically the ILP, the WSPU began as a group of socialist women who sought to actively campaign for the Parliamentary vote.<sup>189</sup> While the politics of WSPU leaders changed over time (partly due to their increasingly tumultuous relationship with the Labour Party), it is important to recognise that the formation of the movement represented a distinct break from the historic allegiance of women's suffrage movements to the Liberals.<sup>190</sup> Today, the term "suffragette" is most often used to describe WSPU members, known for their militant activism, while "suffragists" (most often members of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) are known for their "constitutional", non-militant activism that consisted primarily of letter writing and political engagement.

In an attempt to integrate the "view from the regions" in to broader British suffrage historiography, June Hannam asserts that it was the local WSPU groups that provided the "key site" for most suffrage activity.<sup>191</sup> Local groups, such as the one in Glasgow that Crawford was involved in, offered women the opportunity to participate in direct political action. While suffragettes are most known for their militancy, the tasks of fundraising,

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<sup>189</sup> Purvis, "Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: some reflections," 577.

<sup>190</sup> Katherine Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>191</sup> Hannam, "I had not been to London'," 226.



building community support and loyalties remained pivotal to the functioning of the movement. Lenemen goes as far to state that without the “lively, articulate” campaigners outwith the metropolis of London, “the whole thing would have gone nowhere”.<sup>192</sup> By detailing the activities of Crawford and her fellow Scottish suffragettes, I wish to stress just how valuable peripheral countries and regions were to the success of the British suffrage movement.

### 3.2.1 The beginnings of the WSPU in Glasgow and a trip to London

In the Autumn of 1906, the WSPU sent Teresa Billington-Greig to Scotland to gather supporters and to form local branches. To her delight, she was met by many “ready converts”.<sup>193</sup> This is not surprising as the issue of women’s suffrage was not a novel one in Scotland; organisations such as the Glasgow and West of Scotland Association for Women’s Suffrage (GWSAWS) already existed and enjoyed relatively popular support.<sup>194</sup> However, unlike organisations such as the GWSAWS, the WSPU offered Scottish women the unique opportunity to be involved in a national, militant movement.

Crawford attended her first WSPU meeting in 1910. Crawford recalls that the meeting, held in Rutherglen, Glasgow, was disrupted by some students (presumably those of an anti-women’s suffrage persuasion) who began burning pepper; forcing everyone to start sneezing.<sup>195</sup> She asserts: “There were some funny incidents but the main emotion around in me at that meeting was one of indignation, and a feeling, that I could not allow these women to fight alone”.<sup>196</sup> Soon after her first meeting, Crawford became actively involved in the WSPU movement and became one of the most well-known suffragettes in Glasgow, and later, Scotland.

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<sup>192</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 7.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>195</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 86.

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

Crawfurd dedicates a significant amount of space in her recollections of the suffrage movement to the London window smashing raid of March 1912. Crawfurd, along with eight other Scots women, had volunteered as part of the Glasgow WSPU branch to participate in the raid, despite not knowing exactly what they would be asked to do.<sup>197</sup> Armed with stones, Crawfurd was directed to the house of the Minister for Education; thanks to her great aim, she managed to shatter two windows.<sup>198</sup> Almost immediately after the attack, Crawfurd was arrested. Upon her arrest, she recognised the privileged treatment she received from the police as a result of her middle-class appearance; she was even offered to be taken by car, instead of police van, to the station.<sup>199</sup> Despite preferential treatment, she was still sentenced to one month in Holloway Prison. Crawfurd recalls waiting in her cell for other Scots to arrive:

The wing that I was put in was near the entrance to the Prison, and I heard the sound of the Black Maria [prison van], as it came in daily with fresh loads of prisoners. I stood up on the back of my chair and made a megaphone with my hands, and shouted out as each load came in, "Are there any from Scotland?". I could not see the prisoners but about the third day I heard a voice "Scotland for ever". It was the woman Kirsty from Dumbarton.<sup>200</sup>

This scene offers an illustrative insight into the sense of community felt within the group of Scotswomen that had travelled down to London. Crawfurd mentions that the prison was full of other suffragettes, and yet, despite not knowing some of the Scotswomen well, she still felt a much stronger connection with them, as opposed to the others who had been imprisoned for their WSPU activism. Their participation in the London raid depicts a commitment to the national character of the WSPU movement. Despite the great journey they

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<sup>197</sup> Crawfurd, Unpublished Autobiography, 87.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, 89.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 90-91.

had to embark upon, the Glaswegian delegation wanted to represent their local branch, and their country, in this pivotal event.

### 3.2.2 Local militancy and the participation of working-class women

Leah Lenemen notes that suffragettes in Glasgow, and Scotland more broadly, embraced the militancy of the WSPU, particularly during the years of 1913 and 1914 after the Government's failure to progress further with women's suffrage legislation.<sup>201</sup> Hannam iterates that while the escalation of WSPU militancy during this time led many women across Britain to leave the organisation, membership in Glasgow all but increased.<sup>202</sup> In the 1980s, historians Liddington and Norris accused the militancy of WSPU of being exclusionary towards working-class women; risky militant tactics, they argued, were not a luxury the working-class could afford to enjoy.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, more recently, historian Martin Pugh claims that militancy was indeed regarded as an "indulgence" that contradicted working-class notions of respectability.<sup>204</sup>

However, in line with Hannam, I would argue that a more in-depth analysis of local groups can challenge such hypotheses and instead can shed light upon the complex and varied nature of working-class involvement in the WSPU. In an interview conducted by historian Elspeth King in 1975, Jessie Stephen, a working-class suffragette and organiser of the Domestic Labour Union, describes the way in which her position as a maid helped her to commit anonymous acts of militancy across Glasgow:

I was able to drop acid into the postal pillar boxes without being suspected, because I walked down from where I was employed in my cap, muslin apron and black frock... nobody would ever suspect me of dropping acid through the box.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 12-13.

<sup>202</sup> Hannam, "'I had not been to London'," 240.

<sup>203</sup> Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, 204-205.

<sup>204</sup> Pugh, *The March of Women*, 214.

<sup>205</sup> Elspeth King, *The hidden history of Glasgow's women* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 125-6.

The painting of WSPU as an exclusively bourgeois, or middle-class, movement has led to the militancy of figures such as Jessie Stephen being side-lined or seen as exceptional. Interestingly, as Jessie Stephen herself asserts, the encouragement of covert militant tactics, such as attacks on pillar boxes, *enabled* working-class women to participate. The anonymous nature of the attacks gave women the confidence to feel secure in their political activism. This anonymity element also suggests that perhaps, to this day, working-class militant suffragettes are still unknown to historians because they were careful to protect their identities and to operate secretly. Moreover, historian Krista Cowan asserts that working-class women were not put off by WSPU militancy as they could choose whether to engage in activities that were more likely to lead to their arrest.<sup>206</sup>

Therefore, through the experience of Jessie Stephen, we can ascertain that working-class women were actively engaging in militant activities in Glasgow. A focus on locality can enable historians to understand the class dynamics of the suffrage movement more effectively. In this case, through the tracing of these anonymous forms of activism, perhaps there is a chance to discover a whole new side of suffrage activism and activists.

Crawfurd, in part due to her privileged position as a middle-class woman, was able to engage in militancy without, it seems, much care for the (judicial) consequences of her actions. After breaking the windows of an Army Recruiting Office in Gallowgate Glasgow, Crawfurd was arrested and sentenced to one month's imprisonment.<sup>207</sup> Believing that other women would follow suit, she had smashed the windows in protest to Emmeline Pankhurst's arrest in Glasgow the day before. While others did not follow her course of action, Crawfurd received staggering community support throughout her time in prison. Embarking on what was to be an eight-day hunger strike, her imprisonment became the focal point of pickets that

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<sup>206</sup> Cowman, "The stone-throwing has been forced upon us," 175-177.

<sup>207</sup> Crawfurd, Unpublished Autobiography, 98.

occurred “night and day” outside of Duke Street prison.<sup>208</sup> While Crawford was not aware of the situation outside at the time, she reflects upon the diverse range of people who gathered at the prison:

Nightly from the East end, men and women came to watch the crowds. While some had little idea of the political significance of the demonstration, they looked upon it as a manifestation of loyalty ‘to a Pal who was down’.<sup>209</sup>

The East End of Glasgow was known for its strong working-class character. Here, we can see that Crawford takes pride in the fact that both men and women of the working-class community came partly to watch the crowd, but also perhaps to show their support and solidarity. Learning that a local woman was starving herself for the sake of the right to vote would have been a novel, and presumably, shocking event for many Glaswegians. In bringing this form of activism to the forefront of local community affairs, Crawford arguably increased awareness not only of the WSPU campaign, but also of herself as a committed political activist. This reputation that Crawford was continuing to build for herself undoubtedly contributed to her standing in the local community. She became a known, respectable figure whose defiance and indignation were met with respect and trust.

### **3.2.3 The relationship between the Glaswegian branch of WSPU and the local ILP**

The relationship between the labour movement and the WSPU is one that has been granted relatively significant attention within suffrage historiography. After the WSPU “declared war” on the Labour Party in October 1912 for supporting the Liberal government, historians tend to agree that the relationship between the WSPU and the labour movement severed.<sup>210</sup> However, examining local relationships between WSPU and ILP members can serve to question such clear-cut distinctions. While Hannam maintains that it became difficult

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<sup>208</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 98.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> Hannam, ““I had not been to London’,” 233.

for local WSPU groups to maintain working relationships with the ILP after 1912, I would argue that this was not necessarily so evident in Glasgow.<sup>211</sup>

The local newspaper of the ILP in Glasgow, *Forward*, provides us with an opportunity to examine the cooperation and mutual support between the Party and the local WSPU that existed before, and after, the apparent watershed of 1912. Crawford, in her memoir, pays tribute to ILP member Tom Johnstone, editor of *Forward*, for his continual support of the suffrage cause. She describes how Johnstone not only arranged for “dockers and navvies” to remove any disruptors (such as those who would burn pepper) from WSPU meetings, but also how he offered the services of the *Forward* printing press to the WSPU when their paper *The Suffragette* was suppressed.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, between 1906-1909, and then again in 1913, *Forward* featured a women’s suffrage column that was edited by several Glaswegian WSPU members, including Janie Allen (who will later be discussed) and Helen Crawford herself.<sup>213</sup> While this 1910-1912 gap may be indicative of difficult relations, the resurgence of the column in 1913 shows that the relationship did not fit neatly into the periodisation so often referred to in suffrage literature.<sup>214</sup>

This issue of ILP and WSPU cooperation relates to the question of women’s “negotiation” of their socialist politics and their militant suffragism. Historian Gemma Elliott posits that Jessie Stephen was forced to negotiate her “conflicting identities” as both a working-class socialist and militant suffragette.<sup>215</sup> This argument of “conflicting identities” is, problematically, put forward based on the apparent fragile relationship between the ILP and the WSPU at the national level.<sup>216</sup> I would argue that it was not a case of conflicting

<sup>211</sup> Hannam, “‘I had not been to London’,” 233.

<sup>212</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 108.

<sup>213</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 113.

<sup>214</sup> The periodisation as argued in: Hannam, “‘I had not been to London’,” 233.

<sup>215</sup> Elliott, “‘Women who dared to ask for the vote’,” 319.

<sup>216</sup> It is important to note here that the ILP was affiliated with the Labour Party from 1906-1932 so was often understood as part of the broader Labour Party.

identities, but rather conflicting policies of the respective national leaderships. To conflate the two serves to distort the relationships that members of these movements had with each other and their own politics. In discussion of this very issue, Crawford explains the disconnect between the *policies* of the Labour Party and the WSPU in a more nuanced way:

(...) the opposition of the Labour Party to anything but adult suffrage [the right of all men and women to vote] led some of us who were socialist in outlook into embarrassing positions when we found ourselves opposing candidates who really stood for a programme with which we were in sympathy with.<sup>217</sup>

Therefore, Crawford's own words infer that the tension between the WSPU and the Labour Party was often due to different understandings of how universal suffrage could be achieved. The question of "adult suffrage" is one which is often seen as in opposition to women's suffrage,<sup>218</sup> but, once again, the distinction is not so clear cut. As Hannam and Hunt assert, suffrage historians too often infer that proponents of adult suffrage were somehow weaker in their commitment to women's suffrage.<sup>219</sup> In my view this kind of rhetoric reifies the apparent opposition between socialist politics and the question of women's suffrage when in fact for many- including Helen Crawford and Jessie Stephen, the two were intrinsic to one another.

### **3.3 Scottish suffragettes: sources of (national) tension**

Antionette Burton argues that the British suffrage movement privileged "Englishness" as its core value; the terms "English" and "British", to the dissatisfaction of many non-English women, were often used interchangeably.<sup>220</sup> The NUWSS naming of the 1911 Coronation Procession (that featured women from across the entirety of the British Empire)

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<sup>217</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 94.

<sup>218</sup> See: Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 65-69.

<sup>219</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 107.

<sup>220</sup> Burton, *Burdens of History*, 6.

as “The March of England’s Women” sparked uproar.<sup>221</sup> Writing in the NUWSS newspaper *Common Cause*, Nellie M. Hunter argued that the naming of the event represented the arrogance of English women and their “ignorance” towards their “junior partners”.<sup>222</sup> With regard to the case of Scottish suffragettes, Leah Lenemen asserts that women took pride in their Scottishness and “resented” their national sensitivities being ignored.<sup>223</sup>

Despite incidences of national insensitivity, such as that of the March of England’s Women, the suffrage movement, and the WSPU more specifically, clearly saw the benefit of invoking national symbols and accentuating the national differences within the movement. It was in the interest of WSPU (in terms of mobilising popular support) to depict the movement as one that was inclusive, diverse, and most importantly, representative of Britain’s women. In various processions, the different national symbols and historic figures of Scotland and Wales would be deployed to create a sense of unity and sisterhood.<sup>224</sup>

Literary scholar Sean Murphy argues that the suffragette movement was keen to employ Scottish national emblems and idioms into various campaigns. Use of vernacular language served useful in the formation of “pithy, attention grabbing slogans”.<sup>225</sup> Banners that read statements such as “Scots wha haena’ votes Women!” (Scots who have no votes Women) and “Ye maunna tramp on the Scotch thistle, laddie!” (You come on and stamp on the Scottish thistle, boy), a provocative call directed towards the British Prime Minister, were held with a great sense of national pride in processions in Scotland and London.<sup>226</sup> The invocation of Robert Burns’ poetry and the national emblem of the thistle serve as prime

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<sup>221</sup> Burton, *Burdens of History*, 6.

<sup>222</sup> *Common Cause*, June 29, 1911, 7. As found through Burton, *Burdens of History*, 56.

<sup>223</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 10.

<sup>224</sup> Burton, *Burdens of History*, 196.

<sup>225</sup> Sean Murphy, “‘A great weyahaerin’?: Popular Poetry, the Press, and Women’s Suffrage in Scotland,” *Scottish Literary Review* 10, no. 2 (2018): 112.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*



examples of how the Scottish elements of the WSPU sought to engage the Scottish population.

While the notion of English superiority persisted at the heart of the movement, the efforts to include the peripheral regions and nations (both by the leadership and local branches themselves) represented a clear attempt to attract more supporters to the cause. The calls to nationalist sentiment thus enabled suffragettes like Helen Crawford to carve themselves a unique space in the movement in which they could express their claim to suffrage through their Scottishness. For the most part, Scottish symbols offered a relatively harmless spin on suffrage propaganda, however after the attempted bombing of Robert Burns' birthplace, the relationship between the suffrage movement and the Scottish nation came into direct contention.

### **3.3.1 The attempted bombing of Robert Burns' birthplace: an attack against the nation**

The attempted bombing of Burns' cottage in Alloway on July 8, 1914 was a key turning point for the suffrage movement in Scotland. As Sean Murphy so eloquently argues, the attack on the Burns cottage represented the interconnecting issues of locality, politics and nationalism in the campaign for women's suffrage in Scotland.<sup>227</sup> The event, that is often glossed over by much of the historiography,<sup>228</sup> catalysed a string of distressing consequences for those involved.

Before describing the events in more detail, it is essential to stress just how much of a national treasure Burns was (and still is) to the people of Scotland. Robert Burns (1759-1796), Scotland's national bard, wrote in Scots language and produced some of the country's most well-known poems and songs. To this day, on January 25, Scottish people across the globe celebrate Burns Night by reciting his poetry, eating haggis and participating in ceilidh dancing. emphasise Burns' popularity because it is simply not stressed enough in the

<sup>227</sup> Murphy, "A great weyahaerin'?: Popular Poetry, the Press, and Women's Suffrage in Scotland," 96.

<sup>228</sup> Most notably in: Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 88-89.

literature. Without this context, the significance of the suffragettes' decision to bomb his birth place is somewhat lost. To target such a renowned national figure was an incredibly bold choice.

In the early hours of July 8, 1914, two suffragettes attempted to blow up the birthplace of Robert Burns in Alloway, Ayr.<sup>229</sup> After being discovered by a watchman, the pair tried to flee the scene having left their hand-made explosives behind. One managed to escape, while the other, who initially gave the false name "Janet Arthur", was caught and subsequently arrested. Upon her arrival to trial, "Janet Arthur" began to quote passages of Burns' "Scots Wha Hae"- a poem that celebrates Scottish history and national identity.<sup>230</sup> In denouncing the Government's maltreatment of suffragettes, "Janet" tried to draw parallels between the suffragettes and other Scottish national icons, such as King Robert the Bruce (Scots leader during the First War of Scottish Independence 1296-1328), in attempt to align their fights for freedom.<sup>231</sup>

As the news of the attempted attack began to spread across the country, Crawford was in Perth, a city in central Scotland. Perth was an important place for Scottish suffragettes at the time as it housed the prison that hunger strikers would be sent to for forcible feeding. After hearing of the attack, Crawford recalls:

I was appalled to read in the evening paper that two women had attempted either to burn or blow up Burn's cottage at Alloway (...) I must confess that I did not know how I was to address the crowd that night. I saw myself being torn limb from limb, but it had to be done.<sup>232</sup>

This statement suggests that Crawford was genuinely shocked to hear the news of the attempted arson and was clearly aware of the severity of the incident and the potential harmful position it would place suffragettes in. It is apparent that through her knowledge of

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<sup>229</sup> Murphy, "A great weyahaerin'?: Popular Poetry, the Press, and Women's Suffrage in Scotland," 95.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

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

<sup>232</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 104.

Scottish people and local communities she instantly realised the pandemonium that this attack would cause. What is also evident in her recollection, is her anger and astonishment towards the behaviour of the suffragette culprits. Yet, whilst clearly disagreeing with their behaviour, she knew that she would nonetheless have to defend the women in front of the angry mob that had already begun to gather in Perth. The fact that Crawford was fearful of being “torn limb from limb” emphasises the very real and violent behaviour that she thought this kind of attack would provoke.

As predicted by Crawford, the public response to the attempted bombing was one of fury. Newspaper reports and letters to editors were filled with scathing attacks against the suffragettes and the question of women’s suffrage. The following poem printed in the *Daily Record* further adds to the sense of hostility that the attack catalysed:

Oh, ye restless, graceless women,  
I can hardly think you’re human.  
I was with you for the franchise, but that’s finished; now I’ve sworn.  
Never more to recognise ye,  
But forever to despise ye,  
Since ye’ve tried to wreck the cottage where our Scottish Bard was born.<sup>233</sup>

This poem depicts the dismay and utter contempt of the Scottish public towards the suffragettes. It states that while the suffrage campaign once had relative support, the attack against Burns was an unforgiveable step too far. *The Glasgow Herald* scolded the suffragettes for attempting to “destroy a shrine that Scotsmen in all parts of the world regard as sacred”.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, Figure 2 shows a letter written to the *Evening Times* in response to the event.

<sup>233</sup> Unknown Author, *Daily Record*, July 14, 4. Found through: Sean Murphy, “‘A great weyahaerin’?: Popular Poetry, the Press, and Women’s Suffrage in Scotland,” 102.

<sup>234</sup> Unknown Author, “Alloway outrage - attempt to blow up Burns's Cottage - suffragist in custody,” *Glasgow Herald*, July 9, 1914. National Library of Scotland, Digital Archive, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://digital.nls.uk/scotlandspages/timeline/1914.html>.

**THE OUTRAGE AT BURNS'S COTTAGE.**

National Convalescent Home for Miners,  
Saltcoats, July 10.

Sir,—Your strong and timely leader in "The Evening Times" on the lunacy of the suffragists is just what is wanted. The latest outrage shows what crimes these women are fit for. I look upon the outrage at Burns's Cottage as an insult to all Scotland and to every Scotsman at home and abroad. To break windows and cause wreck and ruin in buildings, as has been done to so large an extent is bad enough, but it is little compared to the attempted destruction of the very house in which our national poet was born. There has been only one Burns; there will never be another in Scotland. I think there should be indignation meetings all over Scotland to let the Government know that they will be held responsible for such dastardly crimes. They have hitherto been merely playing with these criminals. They are afraid to do their duty. "Wait and see," says Mr Asquith. Well, we have seen more than enough of this farce of the "Cat and Mouse Act." Let Scotland tell him so.—I am, etc.,

WM. C. M'DOUGALL.

Figure 2 Letter from Reader, *The Evening Times*, July 14, 1914,  
Accessed April 2, 2019,  
<https://digital.nls.uk/suffragettes/sources/source-30.html>.

As the letter indicates, the (attempted) attack on Burns' birthplace was equated to an attack against the Scottish nation. The suffragette movement, that was once treated largely with ambivalence by the Scottish press (and the wider Scottish public), became subject to fierce criticism.<sup>235</sup>

It soon became known that the two women responsible for the attempted attack, Frances Parker ("Janet Arthur") and Ethel Moorhead, were suffragettes of English and Irish descent who had moved to Scotland some years earlier. In light of this information, Scottish suffragettes, Helen Crawford included, began to try to subtly disassociate themselves from these women.

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<sup>235</sup> Murphy, "A great weyahaerin'?: Popular Poetry, the Press, and Women's Suffrage in Scotland," 102.

I expressed my Scottish sentiment in being glad the destruction hadn't been accomplished, and stated that the two women who had attempted it were not aware of the reverence Scottish people had for Burns (...) At the same time I said, I felt certain had Burns felt that the burning of his birthplace would give political freedom to the women of his country, he would have gladly sacrificed it.<sup>236</sup>

In distancing herself, and other Scottish suffragettes, from the perpetrators, Crawford sought to argue for their ignorance regarding the importance of Burns to the Scottish nation. Even though both Moorhead and Parker had lived in Scotland for several years and had been prominent WSPU activists in Dundee, Crawford tried to place them outside of the parameters of the Scottish nation. It is difficult to imagine that Moorhead and Parker were oblivious to the eminence of Burns, yet Crawford refused to relay their (likely very deliberate) political message.

The reasoning behind Moorhead and Parker's decision to attack Burns' birthplace is subject to interpretation; perhaps they felt that the sacrificing of this beloved national landmark would be the final catalyst in securing women's rights. Maybe, they cared very little about Scotland's history and wanted maximum shock factor to rile up the public into a frenzy. Whatever their motivations, it seems the women did not consider the opinions of their Scottish sisters, nor the practical implications such an act would have on them. Scottish suffragettes, like Crawford, were put into an impossible situation where they were forced to grapple with accusations of national treachery whilst simultaneously maintaining their commitment to the WSPU and their fellow suffragettes. Ultimately, Moorhead and Parker had decided, it appears, on behalf of Scottish suffragettes, that this attack would be worth the furious public denunciation Scottish suffragettes would, inevitably, receive.

While Crawford undoubtedly sought to place distance between Scottish members of the WSPU and the perpetrators, she nonetheless tried to manipulate the writings of Burns into

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<sup>236</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 105.

support for the movement and its militancy. Much like her use of the Bible, Crawford carefully instrumentalised Burns' own words to justify the principles of suffragette militancy. In my view, the attempted bombing of Burns' birthplace, which has thus far received relatively little scholarly attention, indicates the sensitivities surrounding issues of nationalism and the question of suffrage.

After being convicted for the attempted attack, Frances Parker, also known as Fanny Parker, was subject to brutal forms of "forcible feeding" upon her arrival to Perth prison.<sup>237</sup> In describing Parker's experience, historian Leah Lenemen claims that "(...) she reacted badly to food being poured into her by a tube. It was therefore decided to feed her by the rectum".<sup>238</sup> I find the way in which Lenemen presents rectum feeding as a logical alternative to the first-choice method of throat feeding rather disturbing. This had happened before to another suffragette prisoner elsewhere and had caused widespread outrage;<sup>239</sup> and yet, the authorities chose to continue with this line of action.

Historian June Purvis asserts that the nature of such treatment; specifically, the instrumental invasion of the body, overpowering physical force and degradation, should be understood as a form of rape.<sup>240</sup> While Purvis applies this understanding to all methods of forcible feeding that suffragettes experienced, she affirms that it is especially relevant to those forcibly fed through the rectum.<sup>241</sup> In line with Purvis, I would argue that forcible feeding through the rectum should be called what it is: rape. By euphemising what happened to women like Frances Parker through the term "forcible feeding", both her brutal treatment and the extent of state-imposed violence are reduced and perceived, troublingly, as logical consequences of hunger strike.

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<sup>237</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 88.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> June Purvis, "The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain," *Women's History Review* 4, no. 1 (1995): 123.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

A medical examination that took place after Parker's traumatic experience detailed that the suffragette suffered swelling in the genital and vaginal area. Lenemen posits that this injury was likely gained as a result of incompetent staff rather than "deliberate cruelty".<sup>242</sup> Again, this is problematic given the context and downplays the enormity of violence exerted.

While Lenemen recognises the "furore" this method of "forcible feeding" (or rape) provoked previously, I would argue that she fails to draw an explicit connection between the perception of the Burns bombing plot as an attack on the nation and the brutal treatment of Frances Parker.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, Purvis, who uses the abuse of Frances Parker as an example in her article of suffragette imprisonment, also fails to allude to *why* she was treated in such a terrible way.<sup>244</sup>

Frances Parker was an upper-middle-class, English woman (the niece of Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener) who had had the audacity to plot an attack on the birthplace of one of Scotland's most beloved national heroes. Parker's Englishness, rendering her of outsider status, may of course have also had some impact on her maltreatment; particularly considering the nature of her crime. While middle and upper-class suffragettes were known to receive preferential treatment in prison,<sup>245</sup> it seems apparent in the case of Parker that her punishment for this crime against the nation was one that could not be alleviated by her class privilege. I would argue that it was Parker's gender that influenced the way she was treated in prison. She was punished *as a woman*; a woman who dared to place the need for women's suffrage above the nation's need to preserve the history of its national hero. Once we accept Purvis' notion of forcible feeding as rape,<sup>246</sup> the gendered nature of Parker's punishment becomes glaringly obvious.

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<sup>242</sup> Lenemen, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 88.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> Purvis, "The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain," 123.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>246</sup> Purvis, "The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain," 123.

There was a reason that Burns' birthplace was chosen by the suffragettes in question and there was a reason as to why Crawford feared she would be "torn limb from limb" by the public. The forces of nationalism, in this case that of Scottish nationalism, must be acknowledged and granted more space. While it may not be a comfortable topic for many, historians and the public alike should recognise the state brutality that was inflicted on Frances Parker for her crime.

### 3.3.2 The dismissal of Janie Allan

As incidences of painful forms of forcible feeding increased, several members of the WSPU movement voiced serious concern over the well-being of imprisoned suffragettes. The year 1914 bore witness not only to the cruel treatment of Frances Parker, but also of Ethel Moorhead (Parker's accomplice in the Burns' birthplace attack). Arrested and imprisoned for a separate crime, Moorhead, after her eighth consecutive round of forcible feeding, developed double pneumonia after a "foreign substance" was reportedly injected into her lungs.<sup>247</sup> Upon learning of the appalling forcible feeding practices, and the increasingly dangerous health conditions of women such as Moorhead, Janie Allan, the West of Scotland organiser of the WSPU from 1913-1914, sought action.<sup>248</sup> As a committed socialist whose familial wealth had enabled her to make significant financial contributions to the suffrage cause, Allan had enjoyed relatively great authority within the WSPU at the local level prior to this point.

In a letter addressed to the Chairman of the Prison Commission, Allan claimed WSPU responsibility for the arson of Whitekirk chapel (a small medieval church in rural East Lothian).<sup>249</sup> This arson, she asserted, was conducted in direct response to the forcible feeding of Scottish political prisoners. The focal point of the letter, however, was a threat. She wrote:

<sup>247</sup> June Purvis, "'DEEDS NOT WORDS': Daily Life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 147.

<sup>248</sup> Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 73.

<sup>249</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 8.



It seems a pity to enter upon such a course [of forcible feeding] especially in view of the Royal visit to Scotland which would, of course, present many opportunities for protests of a memorable and disastrous nature.<sup>250</sup>

With the King and Queen scheduled to tour Scotland in July of 1914, Allan's letter was a clear attempt to bargain with authorities. By threatening further destructive militant action if forcible feeding continued, Allan inferred that such action would cease (particularly during the Royal Visit) if forcible feeding was halted. Upon discovering of the contents of Janie Allan's letter, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst called for her immediate expulsion from the position of WSPU West of Scotland organiser.<sup>251</sup> Martin Pugh, in support of his claim that the Pankhurst leadership was fundamentally autocratic, states that Allan was promptly sacked, and reminded of the fact that one simply cannot "bargain with the enemy".<sup>252</sup> While this appears to indeed be true, I would maintain that such a simple depiction of events serves to silence the local resistance to Allan's dismissal.

Helen Crawford remembers the "considerable indignation" of the Glasgow WSPU members upon hearing the news of the Pankhursts' decision.<sup>253</sup> The Glasgow Sauchiehall Street WSPU Office immediately called a meeting to discuss their desired course of action. It was decided that a delegation would travel down to London to question the Pankhursts over why they chose to expel such a pivotal member of the Scottish movement over this isolated incident. Crawford suggests that the group sought to form a united front against the seemingly unfair dismissal of Janie Allan.<sup>254</sup>

Upon reaching London, Crawford and her comrade Dr Mabel Jones, met with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and tried to defend Allan's position. Before long, the

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<sup>250</sup> Letter from Janie Allan to the Scottish Office quoted in Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, 8.

<sup>251</sup> Pugh, *The March of Women*, 179.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 110.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

Glaswegian delegates found themselves sympathising with Emmeline's reasoning. Crawford quotes Emmeline as having said:

'The position is this, that the only thing that can stop militancy is the granting of the Vote to Women. You cannot bargain with the enemy. If Scottish women are prepared to bargain on any other terms, then English women are not'.<sup>255</sup>

This argument, in its clarity and "common sense presentation", resonated with Crawford.<sup>256</sup> Given the high stakes involved in the suffrage movement, I would posit that Crawford felt that if women's suffrage was to be achieved, it would be this form of relentless, uncompromising activism that would secure it. It is interesting to note here though that Pankhurst invoked the issue of nationality—presenting English women as morally superior and stronger in their political will, in contrast to the Scottish suffragettes. In distinguishing between English and Scottish women, Emmeline supports the notion that the women of these two nations were not seen as equals.

Ultimately, the Glasgow delegation left London feeling humiliated but convinced that Allan's dismissal was right for the cause; "[we] had allowed our hearts to run away with our heads", Crawford reflects.<sup>257</sup> Crawford asserts that the majority of the Glasgow members came to accept the Pankhursts' decision, including Janie Allan herself.<sup>258</sup> While there may have been some left feeling disgruntled, it seems that Scotswomen were united in their desire to secure women's suffrage as quickly and as efficiently as possible; even if it meant losing an esteemed colleague.

Importantly, despite their eventual acceptance of the Pankhursts' decision, the fact that the Glasgow delegation travelled over 500 kilometres (from Glasgow to London) to confront the Pankhursts illustrates their resistance against Allan's expulsion. They sought to

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<sup>255</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 111.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

question, and challenge, the autocratic nature of the WSPU leadership and, vitally, felt they possessed the collective strength to do so. Therefore, this example of Janie Allan's dismissal serves to puncture the narrative that WSPU leaders held unchallenged, autocratic power. As evidenced by the Glaswegian WSPU, local women did actively negotiate with the power of the centralised leadership. In my view it is crucial, for a fuller understanding of the WSPU and suffrage movement, to analyse the multitude of ways in which local members reacted to centrally-made decisions.

### **3.4 Transnational connections**

#### **3.4.1 The Russian roots of the hunger strike**

As is clear from scholarship on the WSPU, the method of hunger strike was one of the central components of the movement. The image of the (forcibly fed) suffragette released from prison with "hollow eyes and gaunt features", historian Barbara Green argues, was perhaps the most shocking spectacle invoked by the WSPU.<sup>259</sup> While the name Marion Wallace Dunlop is frequently referred to with regard to the origins of the hunger strike, as she was the first British suffragette to employ the method; it is only in recent years that the transnational connections surrounding this form of political act have been made.<sup>260</sup> While June Purvis touches upon the fact that Wallace Dunlop began her hunger strike for a very specific reason- she wanted to be placed in the First Division of the prison where more privileges could be enjoyed- she fails to allude to why Wallace Dunlop chose this course of action.

In a fascinating study of the political method of hunger strike, historian Kevin Grant makes the connection between Russian political prisoners, who used hunger strike from the

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<sup>259</sup> Barbara Green, *Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage 1905-1938* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>260</sup> Kevin Grant, "British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53, no. 1 (2011): 113-143.

1870s onwards, and the suffragettes.<sup>261</sup> Crucially, Grant stresses, Wallace Dunlop began her own hunger strike because she wanted to be recognised as a political prisoner.<sup>262</sup> This category of “political prisoner”, Grant asserts, had thus begun to gain traction in the UK because of transnational connections to Russia.<sup>263</sup> Fittingly, the political prisoners in Russia in the 1880s and 1890s harboured relatively high social status; partly for this reason, they enjoyed much greater privileges within the prison system than so-called “regular criminals”.<sup>264</sup> Grant suggests that the WSPU recognised the struggle of suffragettes in that of the Russian political prisoners.<sup>265</sup>

The British branches of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF), formed in 1890, enjoyed membership from a range of suffragists- including Charlotte Despard, Keir Hardie and F.W. Pethick Lawrence (co-editor of *Votes for Women*).<sup>266</sup> These societies helped to spread news and ideas, providing a forum for Russian immigrants to share their experience and their knowledge of events in their homeland. Upon the news of Wallace Dunlop’s hunger strike, Frederick Pethick Lawrence wrote in *Votes for Women* that she had “adopted the Russian method”.<sup>267</sup> This clearly infers that there was knowledge of the so-called “Russian method” of hunger strike within the suffrage community. I would argue, in line with Kevin Grant, that this connection is one that deserves much greater attention and appreciation within the literature.

### 3.4.2 Friendship and the International Women’s Suffrage Association

Charlotte Despard was a key figure in the women’s suffrage movement. As leader of the Women’s Freedom League, a group that split from the WSPU to pursue more democratic

<sup>261</sup> Grant, “British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike,” 113-143.

<sup>262</sup> Purvis, “‘DEEDS NOT WORDS’: Daily Life in the Women’s Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain,” 114.

<sup>263</sup> Grant, “British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike,” 117.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>267</sup> As cited in: Grant, “British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike,” 114.

forms of militant suffrage activism, Despard remained committed to the notion that women's emancipation required more than enfranchisement and relied upon a fundamental questioning of relationships between men and women.<sup>268</sup> In addition to her national work, Despard was also an active member of the International Woman Suffrage Association (IWSA). Critically to this thesis, despite existing in different suffrage organisations, Despard and Crawford maintained a strong friendship during the suffrage movement and beyond. Crawford states: "Mrs. Despard was a very close friend of mine in the Suffrage Movement, and later in the socialist movement and the Women's Peace Crusade".<sup>269</sup>

This friendship is of importance for several reasons, but perhaps most relevant here, is that it was likely through this relationship that Crawford was able to gain extensive knowledge of transnational women's activism; particularly that of the IWSA. Given that the IWSA was the group that went on to initiate the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1915, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, this friendship likely provided Crawford with information of, and access to, WILPF activities. Despard was also a member of the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom - an organisation that would later play a key role in matters of the Communist Party of Great Britain and communist internationalism; entities that Crawford became heavily involved in. Historian Lucy Delap asserts that the suffrage movement operated transnationally at all levels; reading matter (as we have seen earlier in this Chapter), the sharing of political agitation methods (such as hunger strike) and strong friendship networks were vital to the success of the movement.<sup>270</sup> Delap maintains that

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<sup>268</sup> Hilary Frances, "'Dare to be free!' The Women's Freedom League and its Legacy," in *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 181.

<sup>269</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 121.

<sup>270</sup> Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67.

friendships, correspondences and speaking tours enabled the transnational circulation of both ideas and people.<sup>271</sup>

While it is somewhat difficult to gauge the presence or extent of other friendships (with transnational connections) that Crawford maintained during the suffrage campaign, her frequent mentions of Despard, paired with the fact that she often travelled to Ireland to stay with her, suggest that it was a strong one. Such relationships offer vital insight as to how Crawford, and others like her, gained access to various transnational events, and introductions to numerous, high-ranking international activists.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the ways in which the personal, the local, the national and the transnational, each contributed to Crawford's feminism and suffragette activism. Marriage, religion and literature were elements of Crawford's youth that defined her political development and instilled a fierce sense of (in)justice within her core belief system.

I have argued that in order to understand the suffrage movement, and the politics of the WSPU, it is essential to reassert the value of work conducted by local groups. Analysis of such activism can serve to question dominant narratives regarding the relationships of actors to matters of class, Party politics and centralised leadership. Moreover, the forms of resistance that occurred within local groups, such as the case of Janie Allan's dismissal, can serve to complicate the preconceived notion of Pankhurst autocracy.<sup>272</sup> In the example of Allan's dismissal, I have also sought to emphasize the challenges that arose out of the WSPU's intrinsic belief in English-superiority. English women and Scottish women were not understood as equals in the minds of WSPU leaders; yet, Scottish WSPU members tended to accept their decisions and reasoning on the basis of their common interest: women's suffrage.

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<sup>271</sup> Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde*, 327.

<sup>272</sup> The Pankhurst autocracy as argued in: Pugh, *The March of Women*, 179.

Through analysing the tensions that emerged between nationalism and the suffrage movement, in my discussion of the Robert Burns' birthplace (attempted) bombing, I have highlighted the correlation between this perceived attack on the Scottish nation and Frances Parker's experience of rape in prison. While this is no doubt a difficult topic for many, we must acknowledge and discuss the forms of sexual violence that the state inflicted on suffragettes. To euphemise such horror as "forcible feeding" serves to systematically neglect both the gendered nature of the abuse and the cruel reality of such punishment.

In highlighting the transnational connections entrenched in the friendships and political methods of the WSPU, this Chapter has called for a fresh perspective on the British suffrage movement. In tracing the roots of a political method such as hunger strike, it is possible to witness the global connections that underly forms of political agitation.<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the friendships that were developed during the suffrage movement, such as that between Crawford and Despard, serve to illuminate the practical ways in which women activists learned of, and became involved in, a range of national and transnational political movements and ideas.

The following Chapter will detail how the forces of transnational friendship and local women's activism contributed to Crawford's activism on Red Clydeside. Her oratory power and political experience equipped Crawford with the necessary skills to become a prominent activist in women's organisations such as Glasgow Women's Housing Association and the Women's Peace Crusade. Moreover, the mutually supportive relationships that had already been developing between Crawford and the ILP, paved the foundations for her future work with the Party. Overall, the WSPU offered Crawford her first taste of high-stakes political activism; preparing her for what would come to dictate the next 40 years of her life.

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<sup>273</sup> Grant, "British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike," 113-143.

## CHAPTER 4- RED CLYDESIDE

“I was an International socialist with a profound hatred of war with all its ghastly cruelty and waste (...) From the outbreak of war in 1914 right until 1917, I travelled throughout the country, exposing the Armament Rings and the war makers and urging the women to revolt against the sacrifice of their sons, and against the few who despised them; who wouldn’t send their children to the same school as the workers’ children; who wouldn’t even live in the same district as the workers and saw them as creatures whose only use was to toil and build up wealth for their master, and then to go out and get slaughtered in their wars of aggression.”<sup>274</sup>

### Introduction

The era known as Red Clydeside was a time of political radicalism in Glasgow that began in 1910, made famous, primarily, for its working-class led opposition to the War.<sup>275</sup> While historians debate the exact year that it came to an end, the First World War arguably defined the epoch.<sup>276</sup> This chapter will posit that the anti-war activism of women in Glasgow was rooted in a specific, localized, working-class context. An understanding of the political context of Red Clydeside, particularly its’ traditions of syndicalism, socialism and strike, is thus essential for a more holistic analysis of the anti-war movement and the nature of Helen Crawford’s involvement. I also seek to shed light upon the methods that Crawford and her comrades used to negotiate their gender in a time of contentious labour and social politics.

In addition to these issues, I hope to problematise the commonly held assumption that anti-war activists, such as Helen Crawford, can be labelled pacifist. The anti-imperial socialism of the activists this chapter will discuss, demonstrates that their opposition to the war was less based on the immorality of violence, but rather on an opposition to capitalist profiteering and the exploitation of working-class people. Therefore, to label such activists pacifists, without a fuller understanding of their argumentation, is to contribute to the silencing of their core politic.

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<sup>274</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 133-134.

<sup>275</sup> Foster, “Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919,” 34-35.

<sup>276</sup> Michael Pacione, *Glasgow: The Socio-spatial Development of the City* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1995), 239.



#### 4.1 Red Clydeside in context: traditions of socialism, syndicalism and strike

Prior to the onslaught of WWI, Glasgow had already gained the reputation of being one of the most politically active, “fervently socialist” centres in Britain.<sup>277</sup> The main weapon of political activism on the Clyde during this time was strike.<sup>278</sup> Between the years 1910-1914, there were over 412 strikes in Scotland; almost 60% of which occurred in the Clydeside region.<sup>279</sup> The Singer strike of 1911, led by female workers, is a key example of industrial action that informed anti-war activism on Red Clydeside. US American company Singer, in addition to introducing new management techniques and the speeding up of manufacturing process, sought to introduce wide spread pay cuts.<sup>280</sup> Twelve female employees, in reaction to these changes, decided to take industrial action against their employer.<sup>281</sup> In an act of solidarity, and likely in protest to the shared experience of exploitation, the women were met with mass support from across the Singer workforce. Within two days of the initial strike, over 11,000 employees at the plant took industrial action in unity with their colleagues.<sup>282</sup> After several weeks, the strikers were defeated and over 400 people were sacked. Nevertheless, despite the strike’s apparent failure, Communist organiser Jim Whyte (who worked alongside CWC member Willie Gallacher in the 1950s), in a lecture on the topic of Scottish Communism and Red Clydeside, asserts that the sacking of “militant Marxist workers” only helped to spread the ideology, and notions of worker solidarity, to other work places on the Clyde.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>277</sup> I.G.C Hutchison, “Glasgow Working Class Politics,” in *The Working Class in Glasgow, 1750-1914*, ed. R. A. Cage (London: Routledge, 1987), 112.

<sup>278</sup> Pacione, *Glasgow: The Socio-spatial Development of the City*, 239.

<sup>279</sup> “How close did WWI bring Glasgow to Revolution?” BBC, accessed January 3, 2019, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zpvffg8>.

<sup>280</sup> Griffin, “Diverse political identities with a working class presence,” 123.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Michael Byers, “Red Clydeside: A history of the labour movement in Glasgow 1910-1932,” Glasgow Digital Library, accessed July 4, 2019 <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/>.

<sup>283</sup> Jim Whyte, “Scottish Communism & Red Clydeside,” Lecture (2016) [Video File] accessed June 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiI4307B9M8>.

The significance of the Singer strike to this research, lies in the fact that as early as 1911, women workers on the Clyde had initiated industrial action, thus already demonstrating their political potential. As Gordon maintains, it is clear that prior to WWI women had already started to carve out a place for themselves in the broader labour movement.<sup>284</sup> This experience of strike and syndicalism was one that went on to inform the activism of women during war-time. While women in industry did not always enjoy the support of their male counterparts, as will later be discussed, the 1911 strike set a precedent of good practice; showing how syndicalism could be realised.

#### **4.1.1 Party Politics of the Left in Glasgow**

An important feature of Red Clydeside, and Scotland more generally during the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century, was the fluidity of party politics and the diverse range of socialist organisations that existed. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) were among the most popular leftist political parties on the Clyde between 1910 and 1918. The party politics of the Left during this time was fragmented and complex; it was not uncommon for politically active people to be members of more than one party.

Historian William Kenefick asserts that Scottish socialism, in terms of party politics, while difficult to organise, was notably original and articulate.<sup>285</sup> This originality and articulateness was arguably partly due to the lines of communication and knowledge sharing processes that existed within this realm. While fragmentation may have been detrimental to parliamentary success, the “dense and interlocking network” of socialist and labour organisations ensured a constant dialogue between groups.<sup>286</sup> Public meetings held by the ILP and the SLP, for example, tended to draw upon speakers from across the Leftist spectrum,

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<sup>284</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 269.

<sup>285</sup> Kenefick, *Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 81.

<sup>286</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 262.

enabling for a constant stream of dialogue.<sup>287</sup> Well-known socialist activist John Maclean, famously held Marxist evening classes in factories and workshops throughout the Clydeside region.<sup>288</sup> These classes, often referred to as Labour Colleges, were attended by a range of (predominantly working-class) men and women, including Helen Crawford, who wished to understand the complexities of Marxist economics.<sup>289</sup>

Open-air Sunday meetings organised by the SLP provided yet another platform for leftist voices to be heard. Known for her talent as an orator, Helen Crawford would often speak alongside the likes of John Maclean and SLP member Willie Gallacher, in her capacity as an ILP representative.<sup>290</sup> These examples of inclusive political practices based on open learning, help to conjure an image of a leftist movement that placed the need for the articulation of class struggle and exploitation, above rivalrous party politics.

#### **4.1.2 The ethical socialism of Red Clydeside**

Eleanor Gordon posits that there were two defining strands of socialism present in Glasgow in the decade that led up to the First World War.<sup>291</sup> Firstly, that of “ethical socialism”- with its roots in “early Utopian socialism” and radical liberalism, and the second, often referred to as “scientific socialism”, which was centred upon the writings of Karl Marx and tended to focus primarily on industrial relations.<sup>292</sup> Gordon argues that the ILP was the most representative of the so-called ethical socialist branch while the SLP tended to represent the Marxist tradition.<sup>293</sup> It was within the ethical socialist realm that one could find a culture committed to campaigning around broader social issues such as housing, unemployment, and

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<sup>287</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 262.

<sup>288</sup> James D. Young, “Marxism and the Scottish National Question,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 1 (1983): 157.

<sup>289</sup> Byers, “Red Clydeside: A history of the labour movement in Glasgow 1910-1932.”

<sup>290</sup> Orr, “‘Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?’,” 9.

<sup>291</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 262.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

children's health.<sup>294</sup> The ILP thus focused less so on industrial struggles and rather on social and political issues; the emphasis on locality, as opposed to the workplace, remained characteristic of its' agitational work.<sup>295</sup>

The Socialist Sunday School (SSS) movement offers an interesting example of the types of ethical socialist, non-partisan organisations that Crawford and her fellow activists were a part of. SSSs sought to offer an alternative to Christian education and aimed to promote socialist values; the movement was successful in Glasgow from as early as the 1890s.<sup>296</sup> Love, justice and social responsibility were some of the key principles that underlined the movement.<sup>297</sup> Crawford, in her role as ILP member (from 1914), is known to have given lectures at various SSS branches.<sup>298</sup>

The Clarion Scouts were a similar organisation, centred upon leisure pursuits such as cycling and hiking. The group has since been described as a socialist propaganda organisation that sought to spread the message of socialism.<sup>299</sup> Hannam and Hunt assert that this form of "new life socialism" emerging across Britain at the time was used to promote a means to end injustice and exploitation.<sup>300</sup> Such movements were often committed to ideals of prefiguration; where they ultimately sought to "equate", or perhaps enact, their political ideology within their own personal development and relationships.<sup>301</sup> Interestingly, historian Linda Gordon claims that this "utopian" socialist, prefigurative approach to politics that was

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<sup>294</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 261.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>296</sup> Jessica Gerrard, "'Little Soldiers' for Socialism: Childhood and Socialist Politics in the British Socialist Sunday School Movement," *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 58 (2013): 72.

<sup>297</sup> "The history of working people in Scotland: Socialist Sunday School certificate, around 1900." National Library of Scotland, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.nls.uk/learning-zone/politics-and-society/labour-history>.

<sup>298</sup> Rafeek, *Communist Women in Scotland*, 33.

<sup>299</sup> National Library of Scotland, "The history of working people in Scotland: Socialist Sunday School certificate, around 1900."

<sup>300</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s*, 4-5.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

somewhat prevalent in Britain (and elsewhere) in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century was later enshrined in to the socialist feminist stream of second wave feminism.<sup>302</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Community feminism

Eleanor Gordon asserts that the ethical socialist wing of the labour movement in Scotland at the time was most active in its commitment to attracting and involving women.<sup>303</sup> Organisations such as the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG, founded in England in 1883 with local branches opening in Scotland from 1890) and the Women's Labour League (the women's section of the ILP formed in 1908 that went on to co-found the Glasgow Women's Housing Association, GWHA) succeeded in appealing to a diverse range of Scottish women.<sup>304</sup> Historian Gillian Scott asserts that the WCG in particular enjoyed what was, at the time, a unique ability to reach and engage with working-class housewives.<sup>305</sup>

The local branches of the WCG were able to capitalise on working-class women's roles as consumers by creating a democratic space in which working-class interests could be advanced.<sup>306</sup> While the organisation kept a neutral stance towards party politics, Scott maintains that it was able to generate "an autonomous politics" of working-class women.<sup>307</sup> One of the most successful branches of the WCG in Glasgow was that of the Kinning Park Guild. The abhorrent living conditions of the working class in Glasgow at the time inspired the emergence of the Kinning Park group. Committed to the principle of mutual aid, the Kinning Park Guild sought to offer good quality food for an affordable price and, more

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<sup>302</sup> Linda Gordon, "Socialist Feminism: The Legacy of the 'Second Wave'," *New Labour Forum* 22, no.3 (2013): 20-21.

<sup>303</sup> Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland 1850-1914*, 265.

<sup>304</sup> Sue Innes and Jane Rendall, "Women, Gender and Politics," in *Gender in Scottish History Since 1700*, ed. Lynn Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, Deborah Simonton and Eileen Janes Yeo (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 65.

<sup>305</sup> Gillian Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Cooperative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>306</sup> Barbara J. Blaszak, "The Women's Cooperative Guild, 1883-1921," *International Social Science Review* 61, no. 2 (1986): 1.

<sup>307</sup> Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women*, 3.

broadly, it strove to teach women of the advantages of cooperation.<sup>308</sup> It was through these external, often non-partisan, Left-leaning organisations such as the WCG, as well as organisations related to the ILP and the suffrage movement, that Helen Crawford, and her fellow activists, were most prominently involved.<sup>309</sup>

I believe historian Ula Y. Taylor's notion of community feminism can serve as a useful analytical tool in the case of Red Clydeside.<sup>310</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, community feminism is the notion that mutually supportive forms of community activism, particularly those centred around assisting members of the community, constitute a form of feminist activism. In my view, the women's organisations that were present during Red Clydeside all represented this notion of community feminism. Each of the organisations focused on improving living standards and addressing social issues that affected their neighbourhoods.

Critical to my argument, therefore, is the notion that this Glaswegian form of community feminism was an integral part of the ethical socialism present on Red Clydeside prior to, and during, WWI. The local networks of women that were already in place ensured that collective action within communities was possible and effective. Furthermore, on a more practical note, given Crawford's involvement in these various groups it is likely that she, and her comrades, were already relatively well-known figures to many who had an interest in Clydeside socialist politics. Critically, these women existed in both explicitly political networks and in more informal communitarian organisations throughout the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century. They were well-known faces who likely had a great deal of respect amongst their neighbouring women.

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<sup>308</sup> Sue Rawcliffe, "The Kinning Park Cooperative Guild," Interview by Dr. Valerie Wright. [Video Interview] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXIJ9NubOk&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>309</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 144-154.

<sup>310</sup> Taylor, "Negro Women Are Great Thinkers as Well as Doers," 104-126.

#### 4.1.4 The significance of ethical socialism

Such diverse forms of political activism and engagement illustrate the rich political climate that defined the Red Clydeside era and paved the foundations for the Rent Strike and WPC movement. Scholarly analysis of Red Clydeside all too often focuses on the so-called scientific socialist realm which tends to be concentrated within the workforce and dominated by men. I would argue that only through a thorough understanding of the activities within the ethical socialism branch, including the prevalence of community feminism, can we fully appreciate the extent of women's political activism at the time. This ethical socialism, particularly the belief in collectivism, a notion that encompassed worker solidarity, but also stretched beyond it, was already entrenched into the thinking of many working-class people in Glasgow prior to WWI. These social and political beliefs guided and fuelled women's activism in Glasgow throughout the entirety of the War, but perhaps most notably during the Rent Strike of 1915.

### 4.2 The Rent Strike of 1915

#### 4.2.1 Context: the housing issue

Glasgow tenement housing was already overcrowded and in extremely poor condition prior to the beginning of WWI. The tenement block, most often consisting of four storeys, has been described as the “architectural hallmark” of Victorian Scotland.<sup>311</sup> Defective ventilation, hazardous staircases and darkness were some of the many negative characterising features of the housing at the time.<sup>312</sup> While overcrowding remained a stubborn problem across Britain, it was intensified in Glasgow. When the onslaught of WWI prompted an influx of munitions workers to the city, the problem was only exacerbated.<sup>313</sup> The immigration of war-time workers to Glasgow offered landlords, who already had a “near

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<sup>311</sup> Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780-1914*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> Some of this section is based upon previous research I conducted for a seminar paper on the topic of local activism in Glasgow against the war effort.

monopoly” over city housing, a chance to profit.<sup>314</sup> In industrial areas such as Govan and Partick, rents increased by up to 25%.<sup>315</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, those hardest hit were women. Not only were women whose husbands were serving in the army affected by these increases, but also women who were employed in munitions work. In the context of dilution and the Munitions Act of 1914, those who were working were likely to have been receiving a meagre wage (in many cases half the wage of the men who had previously occupied their jobs).<sup>316</sup> This financial assault on working-class women was deemed fundamentally unjust by prominent Leftist activists of the time.<sup>317</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Glasgow Women’s Housing Association in action

In the summer of 1915, and in direct response to rent increases, the ILP and the WLL established the Glasgow Women’s Housing Association.<sup>318</sup> Led primarily by Mary Barbour, who was assisted by Helen Crawford, Agnes Dollan, Jessie Ferguson and Mary B. Laird, the GWhA sought to mobilise working-class women against rent increases and evictions through the means of a rent strike.<sup>319</sup> The members of GWhA utilised public space, be it the street corner or the back courts of tenements, to hold their meetings and attract supporters.<sup>320</sup> Significantly, several GWhA leaders had ties to organisations such as Socialist Sunday Schools, local cooperatives, the suffrage movement and the Independent Labour Party,<sup>321</sup> entities that were characteristic of the ethical socialist political realm.

In the documentary film entitled *Red Skirts on Red Clydeside*, descendants of Mary Barbour recall stories of their Grandmother during the time of the strike; one being that Barbour and others often “got on top of the midden [refuse heap]” to speak, while the women

<sup>314</sup> Pacione, *Glasgow the Socio-spatial Development of the City*, 240-241.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 182.

<sup>317</sup> Pacione, *Glasgow the Socio-spatial Development of the City*, 240-241.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> Couzin, *Radical Glasgow: A Skeletal Sketch*, 26-29.

<sup>320</sup> Pacione, *Glasgow the Socio-spatial Development of the City*, 241.

<sup>321</sup> “Key political figures of the Red Clydeside period,” Glasgow Digital Library, accessed May 5, 2019, <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/redclydeo001.htm>.



in their homes would open their windows and listen.<sup>322</sup> Barbour's granddaughters, and others with connections to the period, go on to explain that evictions could only occur between 10am and 4pm; during this time, one woman would be assigned a designated close (a narrow street between buildings) and keep look out.<sup>323</sup>

Historian Joseph Melling, in analysing the more practical details of the strike, describes this form of collective effort as intrinsic to the very fabric of the tenement building.<sup>324</sup> The material structure of the tenement, he claims, in terms of the Rent Strike, ensured "an unusual degree of integration" whilst simultaneously rendering tenant eviction extremely difficult for authorities to conduct.<sup>325</sup> In the *Red Skirts* film, Barbour's granddaughters recall that if a bailiff was spotted, the monitor of the close would ring their bell to alert the others in the tenement.<sup>326</sup> Women would then gather to "pelt" [throw] wet cloth and flour at the bailiff to stop him from entering the premises.<sup>327</sup> Bags of soot and peas meal were also thrown in attempt to obstruct the bailiff's entry.<sup>328</sup> This kind of activity lasted for several months.<sup>329</sup> Recalling her own experience, Crawford notes:

Whenever the Bailiff's Officer appeared to evict a tenant, the women came from all parts of the building. Some with flour, if they were baking, wet clothes, if washing, and other missiles. Usually the Bailiff made off for his life, chased by a mob of angry women.<sup>330</sup>

Crawford's memories serve as testament to the forms of collective activism that women, many of whom would otherwise be engaged in domestic activities, unapologetically engaged in. Moreover, the sign in Figure 3 that reads "GOD HELP THE SHERIFF WHO

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<sup>322</sup> Bellany and Woodley, "Red Skirts on Clydeside."

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Melling, *Rent Strike*, 65.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Bellany and Woodley, "Red Skirts on Red Clydeside."

<sup>327</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 150.

<sup>328</sup> Bellany and Woodley, "Red Skirts on Red Clydeside."

<sup>329</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 150.

<sup>330</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 145.

ENTERS HERE”, appears to serve both as a warning, and as an indication, of the type of unpleasant treatment bailiffs were at risk of being subjected to.



Figure 3 Glasgow Rent Strikes in 1915.

Daily Record, March 8, 2018. In article entitled “Trailblazing heroine of Clydeside finally honored with hometown statue, accessed June 6, 2018,

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/scotland-now/trailblazing-heroine-clydeside-finally-honored-12146239>.

In a meeting of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, recorded in *The Worker's Dreadnought*, Sylvia Pankhurst was reported to have said:

The women of Govan have been in the vanguard of the agitation. They have made systematic arrangements to protect the homes of those against whom notices of eviction have been served. Crowds of them have spent the night on the common stairways leading to the tenement dwellings and neighbours have served tea to those who have kept the vigil. When the factors have arrived (...) the women have poured oatmeal and flour all over them, and have poured a little milk to make the mixture stick.<sup>331</sup>

Evidently, through creation and encouragement of such public spectacle, the GWAHA were able to attract a great deal of national attention to their cause. By late 1915, the Rent

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<sup>331</sup> *The Workers Dreadnought*, December 4, 1915. Myra Baillie Collection, Glasgow Caledonian University Archive Centre.

Strike had managed to garner impressive momentum and spread to most parts of the city. Describing the Strike in his autobiography, CWC activist Willie Gallacher recalled “back-court meetings, drums, bells, trumpets- every method used to bring the women out and organise them in the struggle”.<sup>332</sup> This use of noise, parade and creative attacks against representatives of local government, were key forms of spectacle used by the GWHHA to reach less penetrable parts of society.

Upon reflection of agitational politics, Crawford states: “it has been, and still is, my opinion that we do not make sufficient use of the artistic and spectacular in our work”.<sup>333</sup> It is clear, therefore, that Crawford and her comrades understood the potential benefits of the “spectacular” and went on to use such tactics again later during the WPC. Historian Lisa Tickner argues that this employment of “spectacle” was a vital method used by feminists throughout the suffrage campaign.<sup>334</sup> It is therefore fair to assume that Crawford and her comrades had learned the potential of the spectacular from their role in the suffrage campaign. Mass public demonstration and militant tactics, in the form of bailiff harassment, were invaluable to the Rent Strike and the GWHHA.

In addition to the skills acquired by GWHHA leaders during the suffrage campaign, the activism of working-class housewives, particularly those who were already involved in the WCG, was pivotal to the success of the Rent Strike. Historian Joseph Melling, describes, in a very practical sense, the role of housewives who made the strike possible by physically manning the closes throughout the day (to prevent eviction).<sup>335</sup> This recognition of working-class housewives as “the backbone of resistance” is Melling’s key contribution to the

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<sup>332</sup> Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clydeside*, 55.

<sup>333</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 155.

<sup>334</sup> Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-1914* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).

<sup>335</sup> Melling, *Rent Strike*, 110.

scholarship of the Rent Strike movement.<sup>336</sup> In 1923, GWAH leader Agnes Dollan went as far to claim that it was the Kinning Park WCG activists (who were, themselves, predominantly working-class housewives) in South Govan who had first called for a rent strike.<sup>337</sup> This strong form of community feminist activism that was present amongst working-class housewives during the Rent Strike had clearly been fermenting before the onslaught of WWI and the introduction of unjust rent increases. As this chapter seeks to emphasise, the fact that working-class housewives were already, perhaps even inadvertently, politically active on Red Clydeside rendered them better prepared to engage in such spectacular political activism.

#### 4.2.3 Syndicalism and the Clyde Workers' Committee

By November 1915, 20,000 people had become involved in the Rent Strike.<sup>338</sup> As the strike grew, the Government had become organised and sought to sue striking householders at the small claims court.<sup>339</sup> Crawford recalls:

I soon found myself in the thick of this fight, addressing meetings, always somewhat disgusted that the workers were asking so little when the whole world was theirs by right (...) nine cases were summoned to appear at the Sheriff Court in Brunswick Street, and on this occasion the men from the shipyards and engineering works in Govan, Partick and Clydebank came out in their thousands.<sup>340</sup>

Arguably the great presence of men at such protests was partially because Crawford and her comrades enjoyed significant political support from the ILP, and industrial support from the Clyde Workers' Committee. The CWC were able to use their power as shop stewards in the industrial realm to mobilise support amongst the (predominantly male) workforce while the ILP were able to garner broader public support through their various popular media outlets (the newspaper *Forward*, for example). Historian Michael Byers

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<sup>336</sup> Melling, *Rent Strike*, 110.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>338</sup> Pacione, *Glasgow the Socio-spatial Development of the City*, 240.

<sup>339</sup> Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clydeside*, 55.

<sup>340</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 146.

describes this “triple alliance” of GWhA, ILP and CWC as instrumental to the success of the strike.<sup>341</sup>

By the end of 1915, the Government had bowed to pressure and resolved the issue through the establishment of the Rent Restriction Act, which froze rent during war-time across the UK. This influencing of national policy was a huge achievement for the GWhA. Crawford asserts: “the fight put up by those brave Glasgow women was crowned with success, and the working people of Britain reaped the benefits”.<sup>342</sup> It is interesting here that Crawford appears to separate herself from the “brave Glasgow women”. Critically, I wish to stress how momentous this outcome must have felt to local Glaswegian communities. By 1915, Crawford and her comrades had already witnessed the political power and might of mobilised, working-class women.

However, the exchange between the Red Clydeside community and the British Government contributed to increasingly severing relations. Some months after the Act was passed, the CWC became an explicit target of punitive government measures because of their role in orchestrating industrial action and their production of anti-war propaganda. By April 1916, Hinton asserts that the CWC “had been broken”, with its leaders either deported (to other Scottish cities) or imprisoned.<sup>343</sup> Hinton maintains that the suppression of the organisation was ultimately the result of a “well planned offensive” conducted by the Ministry of Munitions.<sup>344</sup> In response to critical voices that had managed to circulate in the left-wing media of the time, the Government began to ban key publications. *Vanguard* and *The Worker* were ordered to cease printing on

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<sup>341</sup> Byers, “Helen Crawford (1877- 1954).”

<sup>342</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 147.

<sup>343</sup> James Hinton, “The Clyde Workers’ Committee and the Dilution Struggle,” in *Essays in Labour History 1886–1923*, ed. A. Briggs and J. Saville. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1971), 153.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

2 February 1916, while *Forward* was subject to repression through strict censorship.<sup>345</sup> Police reportedly raided the printing offices of *The Worker* and arrested John Maclean, Willie Gallacher and Walter Bell, three key figures of the CWC movement, on site.<sup>346</sup>

While the CWC is not the subject of this thesis, it was a key supporter of the Rent Strike. Crawford was extremely fond of Maclean and Gallacher and showed her reciprocal support on numerous occasions. Most notably, in Spring 1916, Crawford was arrested for taking part in a demonstration against their deportation.<sup>347</sup> These arrests and deportations are representative of the high stakes of political activism against the war effort in Britain. Further, the mutually supportive relationships between the GWHM and the CWC should be understood both within this complex period of labour unrest and, as originating from the pre-War Clydeside context where syndicalism and Leftist cooperation was present.

#### **4.2.4 The impact of gender and locality in shaping the organisation of the GWHM**

While the GWHM did receive substantial support from male-dominated organisations such as the CWC and branches of the ILP, this should not be mistaken as evidence of progressive gender politics. It is important to note that rent restrictions were, for most working-class men on Red Clydeside, in their own self-interest. The fact that women felt the need to organise independently of men (in founding the GWHM), and in separate unofficial meeting places, is somewhat indicative of the gendered antagonism that existed during this time.

I would argue that while many scholars acknowledge the role of women in the Rent Strike, the majority do not appreciate the gendered experiences of women in labour politics throughout this time. Given the contested nature of the suffragette movement, as discussed in Chapter 3, paired with increasing trade union frustration directed towards women entering the

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<sup>345</sup> Keith Ewing and C. A. Gerty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford Clarendon Press: London, 2001), 73-78.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*, 114-115.

skilled workforce through dilution, 1915 was an undeniably sensitive time for women involved in political movements in the UK. Kay Blackwell in her discussion of the “invisible” female workforce on Red Clydeside, maintains that “blatant inequality and resentment” existed in many Clydeside industries and in war-time Glaswegian society more generally.<sup>348</sup>

Gender politics thus appear to have contributed massively to the GWha’s decision to render itself such a localised, public movement. Historian James. J Smyth, in an attempt to explain why the GWha preferred to hold less formal, open meetings, states that “for women in particular” large official meetings would likely have been “intimidating and unenlightening”.<sup>349</sup> While this indeed may have been the case, Smyth fails to elaborate on *why* women might have felt intimidated, excluded, or unenlightened. These unsubstantiated comments risk contributing to the essentialisation of women’s characters and their role in political movements.

In a more insightful discussion of female workers in WWI, historian Angela Woollacott details that there was an immense feeling of hostility towards women emanating from male craft unions, particularly within the engineering trade.<sup>350</sup> The threat of female competition in the workplace increased resistance to women’s participation in the workforce (particularly within trade unions such as the CWC), and thus their participation in working-class politics more generally.<sup>351</sup> It was likely this form of gender-based tension, tied with the historic confinement of women to the domestic sphere, that rendered male dominated spaces less hospitable to women. It is of little surprise then that open meetings were considerably preferable to trade unions or other more official male dominated, working-class organisations

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<sup>348</sup> Blackwell, “Women on Red Clydeside: The Invisible Workforce Debate,” 141.

<sup>349</sup> Smyth, “Rents, Peace, Votes,” 191.

<sup>350</sup> Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 201.

<sup>351</sup> Woollacott, “Feminist Consciousness and the First World War,” 83.

(such as ILP forums or those of the CWC). While Crawford does not explicitly address this issue in her autobiography, she does emphasize the fundamental importance of the street corner as a political meeting place.<sup>352</sup> Historian Paul Griffin concurs that it was the public meetings of the GWHM that were “integral to articulating an alternative working-class and feminist politics”.<sup>353</sup>

#### 4.2.5 Historiographical oversight

The likes of Mary Barbour, Agnes Dollan and Helen Crawford have only recently begun to receive significant scholarly attention. Hannam and Hunt maintain that one of the reasons for the absence of leading women in historiography is that women, and their work, are often omitted or overlooked in memoirs of prominent males.<sup>354</sup> This is certainly applicable to the memoirs of CWC activist Willie Gallacher, whom in remembering the Rent Strike accredits the success to “Mrs. Barbour’s army”.<sup>355</sup> While it is of course positive that Mary Barbour is named, it is unfortunate that he has chosen to omit the names and significance of the other leading women. While Gallacher seems to appreciate the strength of GWHM in terms of their numbers, he offers little further credit to them in terms of their leadership and broader political goals.<sup>356</sup> Male individuals, who held significantly smaller political roles, enjoy much greater attention throughout Gallacher’s autobiography.<sup>357</sup>

While Gallacher, writing in a different time, overlooked the role of women in these movements, unfortunately so too do many present-day historians. Historians Kenefick and Foster, in their explicit discussions of the Rent Strike, have paid surprisingly little attention to the fact that that it was both fuelled and led by women.<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, when the Rent Strike

<sup>352</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 155.

<sup>353</sup> Griffin, “Diverse political identities with a working-class presence: Revisiting Red Clydeside,” 123-133.

<sup>354</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain in the 1880s-1920s*, 151.

<sup>355</sup> Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 56.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Foster, “Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside 1914-1919,” 49 and Kenefick, *Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left*, 96.



is mentioned within Red Clydeside literature, as Melling affirms, it is all too often presented as either a chapter in CWC history or a movement ascribable to the activism of John Maclean.<sup>359</sup> The Rent Strike thus becomes a chapter of a male-dominated history of unionism as opposed to an era of women's political activism on Red Clydeside. In my view, this is indicative of the aforementioned trend of viewing Red Clydeside through the limited lens of those involved in the scientific socialism branch of politics. As argued in Chapter 2, this broader labour history tradition of focusing on the work-place as the centre of Leftist activism has contributed to the historiographical neglect of women's political activism.<sup>360</sup>

Another persistent problematic tendency within Red Clydeside scholarship, is for the activism of Glaswegian women to be limited and contained to the Rent Strike. The connections between movements, actors and political ideas are thus omitted and the extent of women's activism on the Clyde, distorted. As I have argued, the pre-war experience of the suffrage movement, of WCG activism, of ethical socialism and of strike, all contributed to the political development of working-class Glaswegian women and the organisation of the GWhA. Considering these troubling historiographical tendencies, one must delve deeper into primary and secondary sources to gauge a more holistic picture of women's activism on Red Clydeside during WWI.

While the Rent Strike may not constitute explicit anti-war activism, it nonetheless symbolised the overt rejection of war-time, working-class exploitation. The Strike, while centred upon housing needs, was not limited to issues of consumer demand. Crawford claims: "Rent Strike meetings gave the opportunity for anti-war and socialist platforms".<sup>361</sup> The Strike thus gave activists like Crawford a platform to relate social issues with broader arguments against capitalism, militarism and imperialism, in the context of WWI.

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<sup>359</sup> Melling, *Rent Strike*, 46 and 112.

<sup>360</sup> McGuckin, "Moving Stories: Working-Class Women," 197.

<sup>361</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 146.

### **4.3 The Women's Peace Crusade 1916-1918: transnational and local connections**

Once the Rent Strike was over, Glaswegian women's political activism did not stop. On June 10, 1916, Helen Crawford and Agnes Dollan established the Women's Peace Crusade. Building on the momentum of anti-war feeling generated by the Rent Strike, the WPC was able to channel the frustrations of Glaswegian women towards further protest.<sup>362</sup> Before delving deeper in to the practices of the WPC, some attention must be paid to the circumstances in which it arose.

#### **4.3.1 Introducing the WPC and its' transnational connections**

Prior to the WPC's establishment, Crawford and Dollan had been involved in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Born out of the 1915 International Women's Congress that was held at The Hague in the Netherlands, WILPF harboured members from across Europe and the US. The women involved, originating from both sides of the conflict, were united in their opposition to war.<sup>363</sup> Jo Vellacott, a historian who has conducted extensive research on the subject of suffrage and pacifism, argues that WILPF was a truly transnational movement in the sense that the women sought cooperation that extended beyond the limited nature of national borders; no one was "representing" their country.<sup>364</sup> Rather, shared experiences such as grief were understood as forces that could unite women and incite productive cooperation. Historian Richard Evans maintains that the most interesting element of the Hague Congress was the way in which connections were drawn between women's subjugation and the "triumph" of militarism.<sup>365</sup> Arguments that had been posited in pre-War suffrage movements harboured new dimensions and enshrined a

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<sup>362</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 150.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>364</sup> Jo Vellacott, "Feminism as if All People Mattered: Working to Remove the Causes of War, 1919-1929", *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 384.

<sup>365</sup> Richard Evans, *Comrades and Sisters: Feminism, Socialism and Pacifism in Europe 1870--1945*, (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Bodes Ltd, 1987), 125.

renewed sense of urgency. WILPF's brand of feminist pacifism thus held two primary objectives: to end war and to secure women's enfranchisement.<sup>366</sup>

The three British women that were present at the 1915 Hague Congress; Chrystal Macmillan, Kathleen Courtney and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, have enjoyed relatively significant scholarly attention.<sup>367</sup> However, it is important to note the circumstances that led to their presence. Many more British women had tried to attend the Congress but were stopped by the Government. Of the 180 women who applied to go to the Congress, only 24 were granted passports by the Home Office- one of whom was Helen Crawford.<sup>368</sup> Despite the successful obtainment of travel documents, shipping lanes in the North Sea and the Channel were closed for the entirety of the Congress.<sup>369</sup> It was lucky then that Macmillan and Courtney were already in The Hague prior to the conference and that Pethick Lawrence was travelling directly from the US. Had these women not been abroad prior to the Congress, it is likely that no British women would have been able to participate. Evans asserts that the month of April 1915 bore witness to numerous attempts by Governments across Europe to prevent feminists from reaching the Hague Congress; Britain clearly embraced this trend.<sup>370</sup> In this discussion of WILPF, I wish to stress the contentious, interconnected and transnational nature of the peace campaign.

While the WPC is often referred to in the literature as either its own independent group, or as a local branch of WIL (the British section of WILPF), little attention appears to be granted to the politics behind the WPC leaders' decision to separate from WIL to form a distinct, localised group. Hannam and Hunt, however, assert that the WPC was actually

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<sup>366</sup> Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, 126.

<sup>367</sup> Most notably in Beryl Haslam, *From Suffrage to Internationalism: The Political Evolution of Three British Feminists 1908-1939*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999).

<sup>368</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 84.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>370</sup> Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, 126.

formed as a direct result of political disagreement.<sup>371</sup> In early 1916, Crawford had fulfilled the role of Honorary Secretary in the Glasgow branch of WIL but stepped down some months after.<sup>372</sup> In her autobiography, Crawford states that while she felt that the educational work of WILPF was valuable, she nonetheless felt limited by the constitutionalism of the organisation.<sup>373</sup>

Constitutionalism, for Crawford, undoubtedly held negative connotations. I would argue that Crawford understood constitutionalism, generally, as an adherence to the rule of law, and an abidance to the preestablished regulations of a given organisation. Considering the members of the non-militant branch of the pre-war suffrage movement were, and still are, often referred to as “constitutional suffragists”, it is likely that Crawford understood constitutionalism as a hindrance to political activism.<sup>374</sup> Crawford’s frequent stints in prison, as discussed in Chapter 3 and earlier in this chapter, suggest that she harboured little respect for laws that were created by, and for, the ruling class and the ruling sex. Regarding her position in WILPF, Crawford states:

I still remain a member of the Women’s International League, but gave up my official position as secretary. The executive accepted my resignation rather hurriedly, afterwards telling me that they did not want to be responsible for what I might do.<sup>375</sup>

This statement is of interest for two key reasons. Firstly, the fact that Crawford remained a member of WILPF until late in her life shows that, despite some political disagreement, she remained committed to the organisation’s fundamental beliefs regarding women’s potential contribution to the establishment of a permanent peace. Secondly, the Executive’s response to Crawford’s resignation appears to cast some light upon her character;

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<sup>371</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain in the 1880s-1920s*, 186.

<sup>372</sup> National Report of British Section of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Myra Bailie Box 5/2, Glasgow Caledonian University Archive Centre.

<sup>373</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 154.

<sup>374</sup> Vellacott, “Feminist Consciousness and the First World War,” 81.

<sup>375</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 154.

invoked is an image of Crawford as an outspoken person, perhaps intimidating to some, whose morals and politics do not fit particularly well within the stringent rules and behavioural guidelines that constitutionalism imposes.

Constitutionalism aside, it was Crawford's dissatisfaction towards WILPF leaders being "merely anti-war and not socialist" that seemed to serve as the primary impetus for the founding of the WPC.<sup>376</sup> For Crawford, and her Glaswegian comrades, to be anti-war without being committed to wider socialist ideals was not enough. The two, for Crawford, had to be understood as inextricably linked. In light of this tension, Crawford details that "some of the more active spirits in Glasgow who were socialists" decided to pursue the formation of a Women's Peace Crusade that would take "greater risks" in literature and propaganda methods.<sup>377</sup> One can assume that by greater risks, Crawford was referring to the kind of provocative propaganda activity that would overtly challenge Government and violate censorship law.

While Crawford may not have agreed entirely with the politics of WILPF, I believe the importance of her involvement lies in the transnational connections that were clearly present at the time. The fact that Crawford was engaged in a wider conversation about peace with women from across Europe is quite astounding; the significance of which is often granted little appreciation within the literature. These transnational connections were present across the Clyde during the war, and even more so during the years that followed.

#### **4.3.2 The WPC and local agitation**

In line with Crawford's socialist beliefs and previous experience of community feminism, members of the WPC took their message directly to working-class women in Glasgow.<sup>378</sup> Their activities consisted primarily of holding demonstrations, marches, public

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<sup>376</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 154.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>378</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain in the 1880s-1920s*, 186.

meetings (again often on streets and outside shipyard gates), selling badges and distributing literature.<sup>379</sup> The group utilized key media outlets such as *Labour Leader* and *Forward* (while it was still enjoying relative freedom) to spread their message even further.<sup>380</sup> Patrick Dollan, the husband of Agnes Dollan, was a prominent ILP member and used his position to report upon WPC action in various left-leaning publications. In an article about the WPC in the *Women's Dreadnought* in July of 1916, Dollan describes Helen Crawford as an “able” and “enthusiastic” woman, “who has no leisure hours that are not devoted to furthering the cause of peace”.<sup>381</sup> This promotion of the WPC, and of Crawford as a leader, helped to raise awareness of the campaign and to inform readers of how they could (and why they should) get involved.

The WPC was undoubtedly driven by a stark commitment to socialist, anti-imperial ideals. This was exemplified in a 5000 strong demonstration on 23 July 1916, where the WPC called for an end to the “wasteful” war that was being driven by “imperialist profiteers” who were “robbing and plundering the people”.<sup>382</sup> Their message was loud, and it was clear. In line with Liddington, it is my view that through the expression of gendered and classed experiences of war-time, the WPC were able to appeal to a broad audience.<sup>383</sup> In attempt to translate more theoretical arguments regarding gendered and classed experiences of war into more tangible examples, leaders drew upon every-day subjects that emanated with Glaswegians. Motherhood, religion and living standards were examples of such issues that WPC sought to capitalise on.

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<sup>379</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain in the 1880s-1920s*, 186.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>381</sup> Patrick Dollan, “Glasgow Women Demand Peace,” *Woman's Dreadnought*, July 29, 1916, 6.

<sup>382</sup> Hannam and Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain in the 1880s-1920s*, 186.

<sup>383</sup> Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*, 129.

Historian Sarah Hellawell posits that the use of maternal rhetoric during the War was immensely complex as it was employed by all sides of the political spectrum.<sup>384</sup> Patriotic war supporters would invoke the imperial image of women as “mothers of the race” whose national service was rooted in their role as mothers.<sup>385</sup> On the other hand, pacifist organisations such as WIL used maternal rhetoric to frame loss of life, and war as a waste of women’s work (in terms of raising sons).<sup>386</sup> In line with WIL, Patrick Dollan described the WPC’s objectives as wishing to “bring home to the minds of the women in Glasgow that all the mothers in Europe are suffering from the War, which has been thrust upon them by scheming diplomats”.<sup>387</sup> This attempt to highlight the shared experience of women as mothers, across Europe, whilst tying the blame to imperialist profiteers, helped to instil a sense of international sisterhood, that was rooted in maternalism.

Furthermore, the image of the innocent child was represented in the emblem of the WPC: the illustration depicts an angel protecting a young girl. The notion of protecting children, not only from war but also from potential bereft, was extremely important throughout the entirety of the WPC campaign. Children who joined WPC marches yielded banners that read messages such as “I want my Daddy”.<sup>388</sup> This inclusion of children in public protest demonstrates yet another example of the way in which Helen Crawford and her comrades used, what Lisa Tickner describes as,<sup>389</sup> the power of spectacle to shock, attract and appeal to the wider public.

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<sup>384</sup> Hellawell, “Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood,” 553.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>387</sup> Patrick Dollan, “GLASGOW PEACE CRUSADE,” *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, July 22, 1916. Myra Baillie Collection.

<sup>388</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 184.

<sup>389</sup> Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 4-8.

The WPCs conscious linking of socialism and religion was one that was made with a view to build a broader support base against the war.<sup>390</sup> While this pairing of socialism and religion to today's reader may seem somewhat confused or misplaced, it was one that had a history in Glasgow, particularly among the Catholic population.<sup>391</sup> As detailed in Chapter 3, Crawford, having had a deeply religious upbringing herself, had a complex relationship with religion but often found her knowledge of the Bible advantageous in her activist work.<sup>392</sup> She states that in her "propaganda among women", she would often use biblical stories, upon which she would inject her own interpretation, as a means of communicating with the more religious parts of the Glaswegian public.<sup>393</sup>

In a recent work that explicitly examines the religious element of the WPC, historian Lesley Orr posits that Crawford, in her public speeches, would entrench her analysis of war-time oppression in "stories, symbols, language and drama drawn from scripture".<sup>394</sup> Orr continues to describe the WPC as constituting a form of "performative activism" that sought to emanate notions of a battle of good against evil.<sup>395</sup> This utilization of religion, and that of performance (or spectacle), arguably depicts the extent to which Crawford and the WPC understood the need to translate arguments of anti-imperialism and socialism into relatable, easily accessible contexts.

In the summer of 1917, the WPC was re-launched as a national movement, with local groups cropping up across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Letters from the WPC to *Forward* on 16 June 1917 reportedly sought to address and mobilise the "war weary working

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<sup>390</sup> Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, 184.

<sup>391</sup> Gerry C. Gunnin, *John Wheatley, Catholic Socialism and Irish Labour in the West of Scotland, 1906-1924* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 23-28.

<sup>392</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 22-46.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>394</sup> Orr, "If Christ could be Militant, so could I", 32.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, 28.



women of Glasgow, Scotland and Britain”.<sup>396</sup> The WPC became a mass movement that “stood for grassroots, women-led public action calling for an immediate negotiated end to war”.<sup>397</sup> However, despite its relatively broad support amongst the working class, the WPC suffered scathing attacks from the mainstream press. As the WPC continued to spread across the country it became subject to increasing surveillance, hostility and violent physical attacks.<sup>398</sup> Lesley Orr asserts that government-backed “patriotic mobs” were often used to break up peace demonstrations.<sup>399</sup> Nevertheless, undeterred, the WPC persisted.

The news of the Russian Revolution in 1917 instilled a new-found source of optimism in those involved with the WPC movement. Helen Crawford recalls:

In March 1917 the revolt of the Russian workers against the war and the corrupt government of the Czar was the first real gleam of hope we received (...) It was extremely difficult for our anti-war groups to fully appreciate the significance of what had taken place in Russia.<sup>400</sup>

Crawford’s remarks not only confirm that transnational connections were present beyond WILPF, but also that localised Leftist movements understood political events abroad as intrinsically related to their own struggle. Learning of revolution, at a time of devastating loss and heightened political activism, would have been difficult to fathom, but, as Crawford mentions, it was a source of hope and solidarity nonetheless.

#### **4.3.3 The question of pacifism**

A persistent narrative this thesis hopes to disrupt is the misrepresentation of WPC as a pacifist organisation. Historians such as Paul Ward, describe the WPC simply as an “expansion of pacifist activity”.<sup>401</sup> In my view there is a risk associated to applying the term pacifist to movements ahistorically. Heloise Brown, a historian of pacifist feminism, asserts

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<sup>396</sup> Orr, “‘Shall We Not Speak for Ourselves?’,” 2.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>400</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 161.

<sup>401</sup> Paul Ward, “‘Women of Britain Say Go’: Women’s Patriotism in the First World War,” *Twentieth Century British History* 12, no. 1 (2001): 24.

that the term pacifism in WWI Europe held ambiguity and tended to encompass all forms of renunciation of war.<sup>402</sup> In countries such as the USA however, the term was used to portray the absolute rejection of all war.<sup>403</sup> Considering the term's meaning in Europe in the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century, members of the WPC may well have identified themselves as pacifist.

However, given the meaning of the term today (the rejection of war and violent action as a means of solving dispute),<sup>404</sup> it is fundamentally misleading to describe the WPC as pacifist. The WPC's opposition to war was driven by a commitment to socialist anti-imperialism, rather than a fundamental opposition to the use of physical force. Therefore, to label the WPC pacifist, is not only to obscure and thus, perhaps unwittingly, omit their justification for their anti-war stance at the time, but it also infers that WPC leaders can (unproblematically) be labelled pacifist too. However, as Chapter 5 will demonstrate, many of the WPC leaders, including Helen Crawford, later became actively involved the fight against fascism in the 1930s and wholly supported Britain's military role in WWII. Fascism, as an ideology and a lived reality, was unknown to the women of the WPC during WWI. Even if WPC members had considered themselves pacifist during WWI, they had not yet learned of the terror that fascism would invoke. Therefore, the pacifist label should be handled with care so as not to misrepresent the political lives of these activists.

## Conclusion

Overall, the period of Red Clydeside was an immensely colourful time for activists like Helen Crawford. Glasgow's brand of ethical socialism that had existed on Red Clydeside prior to WWI contributed enormously to the making of the Rent Strike and the WPC. The networks that were created during the pre-war period, and the types of knowledge sharing

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<sup>402</sup> Heloise Brown, *The Truest Form of Patriotism: Pacifist Feminism in Britain, 1870-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> "Pacifism", *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed 3 March, 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/135824?redirectedFrom=pacifism#eid>.

and community organisations that were already present, enabled women to organise effectively. Experience of community feminism and involvement in other ethical socialist organisations equipped local working-class women with the tools, and mutually supportive relationships, needed to mobilise against the war effort.

It is essential not to over-compartmentalise women's activism; the local, national and transnational connections between the suffrage movement, ethical socialism, the Rent Strike and the WPC must be appreciated. These movements did not exist in a vacuum, nor in isolation from the lives of those who led and participated in them. The connections between the Rent Strike and the WPC illustrate how declining, unjust social conditions were used as a platform to articulate feelings of discontent towards the British involvement in WWI. As this chapter sought to relay, women's anti-war activism in Glasgow took a variety of forms and was by no means confined to the limiting umbrella of pacifism.

This chapter has shown how Helen Crawford used her knowledge of the local community (through the topics people care about and the forms of agitation they respond to), and her previous experience of Leftist feminist organising, to mobilise working-class women and engage them in complex arguments of anti-imperialism and socialism. This form of grassroots activism undoubtedly went on to inform Crawford's later activity within the CPGB.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, Crawford's experience of Red Clydeside politics rendered her a well-respected, sought after member of the Leftist movement. Her talent for engaging with the public, particularly with working-class women, was invaluable to her later national, and international, CPGB work.

## CHAPTER 5- HELEN CRAWFURD, THE CPGB AND COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM

“‘Workers of the world unite,’ that’s certainly my slogan.”<sup>405</sup>

### Introduction

From 1921 until her death in 1954, Helen Crawford was an active member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. While this chapter will offer some discussion of her role on the Executive Committee of the CPGB (established in 1920), I will concentrate primarily on her work regarding women, internationalism and anti-fascism. As detailed in the Introduction, Crawford stood for various local elections throughout the 1920s and 1930s as a representative of the CPGB, but to no avail. Although this sporadic engagement in local electoral politics is of course important, this chapter will not dedicate space to this element of her activism. Rather, out of respect for Crawford’s commitment to communist internationalism, I will use this chapter to illustrate the multifaceted, transnational nature of Crawford’s political activism throughout these years. By bringing internationalism to the forefront of this discussion, I hope to challenge the limitations of methodological nationalism, as discussed in Chapter 2, an approach that many scholars have adopted in their writing of CPGB history.<sup>406</sup>

Firstly, this chapter will frame Crawford’s initial communist involvement through her visit to Moscow in 1920. I will argue that her personality, her middle-classness and her Red Clydeside connections were all decisive factors that enabled her to reach Moscow and engage in likely life-altering conversations with Lenin and other prominent figures of international communism. By adopting a biographical approach, this chapter will present Crawford’s life as a lens through which historians can understand the challenges faced by women involved in communist internationalism.

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<sup>405</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 82.

<sup>406</sup> An example of this is: Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941*.

Secondly, I will introduce Worker's International Relief (WIR), formed 1922, and Crawford's role within it. Founded on principles of worker solidarity and mutual support, WIR was a movement that sought to provide financial aid to workers in need. Although it was a distinctly international movement, I will argue that Crawford's experience of local activism on Red Clydeside, in the form of mutual support and self-help networks, fuelled her passion for, and belief in, WIR.

Through discussion of WIR's work and its support of the British General Strike of 1926, this chapter will emphasize the essential aid that the organisation managed to deliver, despite the negative impact of anti-communist resistance at the time. Following discussion of her involvement in WIR, this chapter will explore the reasons behind Crawford's return to Glasgow in 1933 and her subsequent involvement in the anti-fascist movement. By reasserting the role of the CPGB in the anti-fascist movement, I will illustrate the ways in which local organising, transnational networks and militant political methods of protest ensured that fascism did not gain significant traction in Britain.

### **5.1 Post-war communist internationalism**

Historian Kasper Braskén maintains that WWI aroused severe concern among many regarding the future of Europe and its citizens.<sup>407</sup> Rooted in this concern, he argues, grew a range of utopian aspirations centred upon the reshaping of the world order. While these utopian ideas took remarkably different forms across the Left and Right of the political spectrum, internationalism reasserted itself as one of the core components of communist activism. Historians Agnew and McDermott assert that the total war experienced between 1914-1918, led many to believe that the old capitalist, imperialist order had been "irredeemably undermined".<sup>408</sup> The events of WWI thus led many to genuinely believe that

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<sup>407</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 11.

<sup>408</sup> Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), xix.

the time had come for a total overhaul of the existing order. The Russian Revolution had instilled a sense of belief within those Left of the labour movement who were both socialist, and internationalist, in outlook.

What I wish to stress here, and throughout the entirety of this thesis, is that many communist activists by the end of WWI, including Helen Crawfurd, harboured genuine belief in the ability of the working-class to rise, and unite, against capitalist, imperialist exploitation. Building on this momentum, the Third International was formed. The Third International, or the Comintern, was an organisation whose mission was to build an international movement of communists, dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism and the instilment of collective ownership and production.<sup>409</sup> Crawfurd recalls that when the Third International was formed, “one felt that we had entered a new period of history”.<sup>410</sup>

Between 1918-1920, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), of which Crawfurd was still an Executive member, was riddled with the question of whether to seek affiliation to the Third International. Crawfurd recalls that this debate led to the consolidation of a prominent Left-Wing group within the Party.<sup>411</sup> The Left Wing encompassed those who would later, in 1920, go on to become the founding members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Aligned with key figures such as Willie Gallacher and Henry Pollitt, Crawfurd fought tirelessly within the Left-wing group for affiliation to this international movement that was based on the “power and might of the working-class”.<sup>412</sup>

Prior to the formation of the CPGB, Crawfurd details that, through a comrade of the British Socialist Party, she received an invitation to attend the Second Congress of the Third International that would be held in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in July 1920.<sup>413</sup> While still

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<sup>409</sup> Agnew and McDermott, *The Comintern*, xix.

<sup>410</sup> Crawfurd, Unpublished Autobiography, 257.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, 189-190.

Vice President of the ILP Scottish Division at the time, Crawford was able to obtain passports and letters of introduction to various social democrats whose countries she would be passing through, with relative ease. In describing her wish to visit Russia, it seems that Crawford wanted to see first-hand what had been achieved following the Revolution; she wanted to be able to speak about Russia, and the potential benefits of communism, with honesty and authority.<sup>414</sup>

### 5.1.1 Crawford journeys to Moscow, 1920

With the intention of travelling from Newcastle to Bergen, then across the Baltic sea to Petrograd, Crawford embarked on what was to be a long and strenuous journey to Moscow.<sup>415</sup> Rail strikes in Norway meant that her journey was subject to significant delays, forcing her to stay longer in places than anticipated. The most notable disruption to her journey however, was one morning in Vardø, a small town in North-East Norway, when the police seized her passport and instructed Crawford that further travel on to Russia was forbidden and that arrangements would be made for her imminent return to Britain.<sup>416</sup> Historian Andrew Thorpe, in discussion of British Leftists travelling to the Congress notes that it was “no easy matter” to travel from Britain to Soviet Russia in 1920; emphasizing that several figures often were forced to travel without passports and would often opt for illegal means of border crossing.<sup>417</sup>

In remembering her interaction with the police, Crawford writes: “I took their decision calmly but had already decided I was not going back if I could help it, without seeing Russia”.<sup>418</sup> Cunningly, Crawford accepted their orders without resistance to avoid arousing suspicion. In her writing, Crawford also notes that because she presented, through

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<sup>414</sup>Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 189-190.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, 194-195.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>417</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>418</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 196.

her dress and demeanour, as a reasonable middle-class woman, she was able to exploit the likely gendered and classed preconceptions the authorities harboured towards her.<sup>419</sup> “I looked such a respectable person (...) that the police thought I would just go back as they had ordered me”.<sup>420</sup> On the contrary, Crawford learned that there would be a cargo ship heading for Alexandrovic, a small port on the Russian Murmansk coast. She promptly arranged for some local fishermen to take her out to shore on their fishing boat so she could later board the cargo ship. She remembers fondly:

I had to wait until it was fairly late, and went out to a quiet part of the shore with my knitting (...) Those hours on the rowing boat were the most exciting of my whole journey, as I expected every moment that the police would discover I had got away.<sup>421</sup>

Crawford unfortunately did not arrive in time for the Second Congress. However, the incident that occurred in the small town of Vardø is important for understanding the practical obstacles that Crawford, and others, faced when they tried to engage in international politics. The act of defiance Crawford committed against the Norwegian police authorities indicates both what a daring character she was, and the kind of behaviour that was required if activists were to ensure successful travel to Soviet Russia. The thrill she so clearly felt when waiting on the little rowing boat suggests that, for Crawford, this kind of audacious behaviour was something she relished.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Crawford was well versed in acts of defiance and indignance. In an insightful piece based on the notion of “rethinking” women’s activism, historian Karen Hunt asserts that by exploring the relationship between political experience and everyday life, it is possible to draw out the “extraordinariness” of activism.<sup>422</sup> In this case, Crawford rendered the experience of border control extraordinary by defying the

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<sup>419</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 197.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

<sup>422</sup> Hunt, “Rethinking Activism: Lessons from the History of Women’s Politics,” 221.



authorities and arranging to be, essentially, smuggled into the country. It seems, therefore, that the personality and character of Crawford were vital to her ability to engage in this higher-risk, international work.

Moreover, in terms of the police, I would go as far to suggest that Crawford's previous political experience, particularly her frequent stints of imprisonment during her suffrage activism, tied with her middle-class privilege, had freed her of fear of legal repercussions. She appears to understand restrictions; be it national borders or police authority, as somewhat futile, and trivial. In 1915, arbitrary border controls that had prevented Crawford from reaching the WILPF conference in The Hague 1915. I would therefore posit that by 1920, in the context of post-war devastation, Crawford understood such expression of state power as a senseless hindrance.

The arrival of Crawford in Russia was reported in the *Daily Herald* – a national Left-leaning newspaper.<sup>423</sup> Quoting Crawford, the paper stated that she had embarked on the journey to “put Mrs. Snowden's statements to the test”.<sup>424</sup> Ethel Snowden had famously been very critical of the Bolshevik regime when she had travelled there in early 1920 as a Labour delegate; she claimed that the politics of Soviet Russia had nothing to offer Britain.<sup>425</sup> Crawford's words read as somewhat of a provocation; it seems that she adopted a confrontational approach towards those critical of Russia- eager to prove them wrong. The fact that Crawford's arrival, and later return to Britain,<sup>426</sup> are both documented in the *Daily Herald* demonstrates the extent to the public's interest in these journeys to Soviet Russia. Moreover, that the articles are centred solely on Crawford, without introducing her or her politics, is indicative of the extent to which she was known among readers as early as 1920.

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<sup>423</sup> “MRS. CRAWFURD IN RUSSIA,” *Daily Herald*, September 9, 1920. British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>425</sup> Jonathon Davis, “Left out in the cold: British Labour witnesses the Russian Revolution,” *Revolutionary Russia* 18, no. 1 (2005): 83.

<sup>426</sup> “BACK FROM RUSSIA: Mrs Helen Crawford Praises People and Leaders,” *Daily Herald*, November 24, 1920, 3. British Newspaper Archive.

Crawfurd's stay in Russia, which lasted three months in total, enabled her to experience post-revolutionary life in St Petersburg and Moscow. Enjoying dinner with the likes of Maxim Gorky, the playwright who had contributed to her formative political awakening, amongst other communists from across the globe, Crawfurd found herself right at the heart of communist internationalism.<sup>427</sup> Although the Second Congress was over, many who had been involved lingered in Moscow for weeks afterwards; enabling Crawfurd to meet key figures of the movement and to learn of the discussions and debates that had taken place during the Congress.<sup>428</sup>

Crawfurd notes that one of the first things she did when she arrived in Moscow was to "enquire into the position of women in the new scheme of things".<sup>429</sup> Illustrative of her feminist commitment, Crawfurd immediately arranged visits to educational institutions, children's homes and the Zhenotdel, the department for work among women. Crawfurd recalls being particularly impressed with factory kitchens and crèches whilst being simultaneously aware of the extreme shortages the country was experiencing.<sup>430</sup> In her search to gauge a fuller understanding of the Bolsheviks' social programme, and the role of women within it, Crawfurd managed to arrange a meeting with Nadezhda Krupskaya, the then Chair of the Education Committee and wife of Lenin.

Through the assistance of an English speaker at the Zhenotdel, Crawfurd was able to ask Krupskaya about the obstacles the Bolsheviks continued to face regarding the advancement of women. She recalls: "I was somewhat overawed by the fact I was to meet her, but in her presence this fear vanished".<sup>431</sup> Crawfurd's writing thus suggests that this meeting provided a space for both deep ideological discussion regarding socialist feminism,

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<sup>427</sup> Crawfurd, Unpublished Autobiography, 199-200.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid*.

as well as consideration of practical means to secure women's emancipation.<sup>432</sup> In a touching account of their meeting, Crawford describes Krupskaya as:

A very clever woman, with the modesty of one who knew that no matter how much she knew, there was still so much that she had yet to learn. Most people worth knowing, are those who have learned something of their own ignorance.<sup>433</sup>

The profundity of this statement alludes to the value that Crawford placed upon meeting these remarkable communist figures. It is interesting to note too, that Crawford appears to harbour greatest respect and admiration for those who recognised the limits of their knowledge- a trait that arguably remains underrepresented in so-called high politics. This meeting clearly had quite the impact on Crawford and appears to have assured her that the Soviet model, and mindset, was something to aspire to.<sup>434</sup>

Through her friendship and professional relationship with Willie Gallacher, fellow Red Clydeside activist, Crawford was able to secure an interview with Lenin.<sup>435</sup> The interview took place just a few days after Crawford arrived in Moscow.<sup>436</sup> Interestingly, Crawford does not describe, in her writing, the anticipation she felt prior to the meeting; instead, she darts ahead, eager to share her experience of meeting "the GREAT MAN" with the reader.<sup>437</sup>

There was no attempt to overawe or impress the people, he needed no crown of gold, or ermine tippet, or purple robes. The man inside was one in whose presence you had to speak truth and deal with realities. I felt as if I were having a talk with my own father, or brother. His kind questioning, his utter lack of pretentiousness; called forth from me in answer to his enquiries the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 205.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>436</sup> The exact date of the meeting appears unknown however it likely took place late in August or early September.

<sup>437</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 208.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

Moved by Lenin's humble and virtuous nature, Crawford appears awe-stricken by his very being. Although Crawford referred to the meeting as an interview, the passage above suggests the conversation adopted a reciprocal character. Lenin's inquisitiveness appears to have spurred Crawford to speak candidly about issues within the British Left.

She recalls, once she had overcome her sense of awe, discussing three main items with Lenin: the importance of women to the class struggle, oppressed colonial workers and the essentiality of international workers' movements.<sup>439</sup> Crawford also fondly describes a conversation regarding the Labour Colleges that had begun on Red Clydeside. She appears to take great pride in the fact that Lenin saw the radical potential of such a local education scheme that had been so successful in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Glasgow.<sup>440</sup>

It is interesting to note that the interview between German communist Clara Zetkin and Lenin regarding the woman's question, which occurred in the autumn of 1920,<sup>441</sup> remains somewhat of a seminal text. While Crawford's account of her interview is not extensive, nor does it resemble a transcript (as in the case of Zetkin's), it is remarkable that it has not been granted significant attention by historians. Her meeting with Lenin is often added merely as a side note, without much appreciation for how monumental the experience was.

During this first visit to Russia, it seems that Crawford managed to establish herself as one of the key left-wing female figures of Britain. The fact that she was able to speak with both Krupskaya and Lenin is indicative of her standing and would have undoubtedly bridled her with a renewed sense of commitment to the communist cause. Moreover, her enquiries as to the position of women in Soviet Russia further evidence her enduring desire to carve out space for women in the communist movement.

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<sup>439</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 210.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid*, 208.

<sup>441</sup> Clara Zetkin, "Lenin on the Women's Question (An Interview with Lenin on the Woman Question)," accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1925/lenin/zetkin2.htm>.

### 5.1.2 Women and the CPGB

Once the 1920 Annual Conference of the ILP confirmed the Party's final decision to cease relations with the Third International,<sup>442</sup> Crawford, and others associated with the Left-wing, abandoned the Party and, in 1921, joined the CPGB.<sup>443</sup> Shortly after joining the CPGB, Crawford was elected to the Executive Committee and was made the Party's first Women's Organiser.<sup>444</sup> Helen Crawford, and her comrade Dora Montefiore, were known as two of the most prominent women in the CPGB; both women had been members of the WSPU and brought considerable experience of women's politics to their respective roles.<sup>445</sup>

However, historians Hunt and Worley assert that the Party came to value "only certain" pre-CPGB political experience; involvement in the suffrage movement was not included.<sup>446</sup> The authors infer that, partly for this reason, and presumably because they were women, several of those on the Executive Board often found themselves underappreciated and tasked with very little to do.<sup>447</sup> In relation to this argument, historian Sue Bruley claims that in the latter months of 1920, Helen Crawford was struck off the pay roll as the Party could no longer afford her wages.<sup>448</sup> While several workers were made redundant, it is somewhat curious that Crawford's was the only non-clerical position to be axed.<sup>449</sup> It would seem that this incident indicates the lack of importance the Party, and its members, placed upon providing women of the Executive with meaningful, paid, agitational work.

Such occurrences suggest that despite the rhetoric of Communism at both international and national level,<sup>450</sup> women were still struggling to have their work truly appreciated by their male counterparts. Crawford recalls that the "traditions which held

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<sup>442</sup> Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-1943*, 40-41.

<sup>443</sup> Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)."

<sup>444</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 69.

<sup>445</sup> Hunt and Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," 6.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>448</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 70.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> Hunt and Worley, "Rethinking British Communist Party Women in the 1920s," 1.

women in the background” continued to hinder her work of organising women both within and outwith the Party.<sup>451</sup> While she does not go into significant detail regarding what it was like to be an (explicitly) feminist woman in a male-dominated political arena, she does mention that members of the Party did not appreciate the urgency and importance of women’s work.<sup>452</sup>

In 1922, following the Third International’s emphasis on the woman question, Crawford was granted the role of editor of a regular woman’s page in *The Communist*, the CPGB newspaper.<sup>453</sup> The page was entitled “A Page for Women (Which Men Can Read with Advantage)”.<sup>454</sup> In detailing the aim of a woman’s page in general, later in 1925, in the communist newspaper the *Sunday Worker*, Crawford writes:

Give us pictures of the men, women and children of the future. Give us pictures of the romance and beauty of life, under the common ownership of the workers. Show the tired woman how drudgery *can and will be abolished when sane communal methods of feeding the people are adopted* (...) Let us talk of the right to work, and more of the right to live, the right to leisure, the right to beauty, the right to think.<sup>455</sup>

The above passage illustrates the way in which the woman’s page was used to inform and convince women of how communism could, on a very practical level, free them from capitalist exploitation and the burden of the domestic. Crawford’s emphasis on beauty, and the beauty of life, is one that she returns to frequently throughout her autobiography.<sup>456</sup> Her advocacy of Soviet style communal facilities demonstrates her genuine belief in the need to fundamentally restructure society and the gender relations within it.

In reading Crawford’s autobiography, it is telling that she tends not to spend a great deal of time discussing her role as Women’s Organiser or detailing broader issues of women

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<sup>451</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 233.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Bruley, *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women’s Movement in Britain, 1920-1939*, 69.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> Helen Crawford, “Aim of Woman’s Page,” *Sunday Worker*, March 26, 1925. Gallacher Memorial Library, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>456</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 11.

and the Party. I would argue that this is partially because she, like many of her comrades, saw women's advancement as part and parcel of communism; not as a separate and distinct issue.

As outlined in Chapter 1, much of the historiography relating to CPGB women has focused on national organising and traditional analyses of party politics. The widespread omission of women's international organising has thus served to distort the extent to which CPGB women were active beyond the confines of the nation state. This Chapter seeks to reassert the relevance, and value, of communist internationalism and women's work within it. The next section will offer an insight into the activism of Worker's International Relief; an organisation that Crawford was actively involved in and one that she clearly felt enormously passionate about.<sup>457</sup> Though speculative, given the previous discussion of the underappreciation of women's CPGB work, it could be argued that women likely found themselves, and their work, valued more appropriately at the international level; thus, offering further incentive to pursue their politics transnationally.

## **5.2 Workers' International Relief**

Founded in September 1921, by German communist Wilhelm (Willi) Münzenberg, WIR was initially formed to aid those affected by the Russian Volga famine.<sup>458</sup> Through emphasizing shared experience and the power of solidarity, WIR sought to bring workers of Europe, and further afield, closer together. By arranging collections in various work places, WIR encouraged workers to donate, directly, to specific causes. In Germany, upon mobilising financial support for the Volga region, WIR referred to Russians as "brothers" with whom workers of Germany could empathise, and identify, with based on their shared experience of war and hunger.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 257.

<sup>458</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 1.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

As time went on, the WIR came to encompass a broad range of “solidarity ventures” including hunger relief, support for striking communities, social programmes for children as well as campaigns against imperialism and fascism.<sup>460</sup> The WIR sought to represent an organisational form, or embodiment, of international solidarity; it encouraged workers to “think globally” and to practice forms of reciprocal support.<sup>461</sup> Importantly the WIR rejected the depoliticised label of charity, and rather pushed for recognition as an international worker, self-help group- as depicted in the posters held by WIR activists in Figure 4.

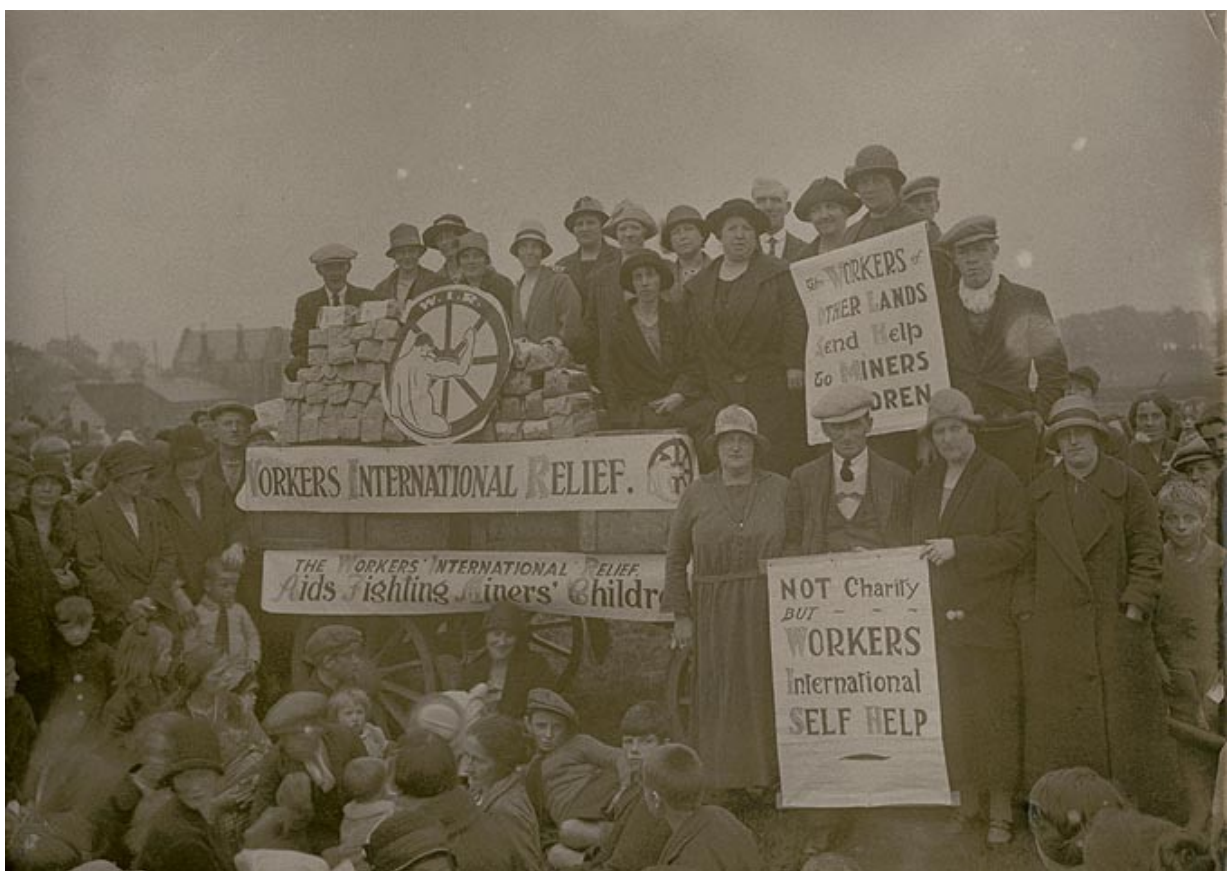


Figure 4 Helen Crawford and WIR distributing food supplies, 1926. Crawford stands first row, second from right. Location unknown, likely in British mining town. Gallacher Memorial Library, National Library of Scotland.

Throughout the 1920s, WIR harboured members from a diverse range of political groups and enjoyed contributions from an array of different organisations such as trade unions, cooperatives and, at times, other leftist political parties. While the WIR clearly had

<sup>460</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 2.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*



roots in communism, it sought to work beyond the confines of party politics by encouraging the involvement of the wider labour movement. Critically, as Braskén emphasises, the WIR enabled those who were already sympathetic to radical notions of worker solidarity to find a concrete expression of such politics without feeling obliged to commit to a political party.<sup>462</sup> Braskén infers that this notion of participation, detached from the strings of serious political commitment, was particularly attractive to workers.<sup>463</sup>

I would argue that this form of non-partisan, working-class politics of solidarity resonates with subjects discussed in Chapter 4. Transcending beyond the rigidity of party politics, in the same way ethical socialist women's organisations on Red Clydeside did, the WIR was able to attract like-minded people and show them, through direct action, what working-class solidarity could tangibly mean. In describing the WIR, Crawford maintains that "it was nothing new" for workers to help each other, but it was often done in a sporadic and uncoordinated manner.<sup>464</sup> Self-help and solidarity were thus concepts that were already being practiced, locally, by many working-class communities; they were not novel ideas.

However, through entrenching these notions into the guiding principles of international organisation, WIR was able to harness the power of such radical local activism and translate it into a coordinated, international mass movement. The Head Office of WIR was in Berlin, but national committees, and subsequent local committees, began to spring up across Europe and further afield in countries such as Japan and the USA.<sup>465</sup> As early as 1922, just one year after WIR was founded, Helen Crawford was asked to become Secretary of the British Committee.<sup>466</sup> This invitation was likely issued due to her growing recognition amongst international communist circles as well as her previous Red Clydeside experience.

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<sup>462</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 6.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>464</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 243.

<sup>465</sup> Griffin, "Diverse political identities with a working-class presence," 129.

<sup>466</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 243.

### 5.2.1 Crawford's involvement in the WIR movement

Crawford, in her role as Secretary, travelled a great deal throughout the 1920s to some of the most impoverished areas of Europe. In her autobiography, Crawford dedicates significant space to describing the hardship she witnessed; particularly in areas of Germany and Ireland.<sup>467</sup> In 1922, once the effects of the punitive Treaty of Versailles began to hit Germany, inflation and unemployment soared rapidly. With no unemployment relief in place to support affected workers, WIR turned its attention to the devastated country.<sup>468</sup>



*Figure 5 Helen Crawford with children in Berlin, 1922.  
Gallacher Memorial Archive.*

In discussion of her visit to Berlin, as captured in Figure 5, Crawford recollects that “hunger looked out from the faces of the children; malnutrition was evident”.<sup>469</sup> While it may be

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<sup>467</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 244-250.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid*, 243.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

difficult to appreciate the extent of mass devastation caused by WWI and the following reparation agreements, it is vital to the understanding of movements such as the WIR: people were starving. In 1923, in response to the growing crisis, WIR arranged the Hunger in Deutschland Congress. As shown in Figure 6, Crawford attended the Congress and appears, judging by her elevated seating position, to have filled a prominent role. The Congress, which contained only 10-15% communist delegates, sought to mobilise support from various organisations across Europe.<sup>470</sup>



*Figure 6 Hunger in Deutschland Congress, December 9, 1923.  
On the back of the photograph, Crawford has written: "This is the picture of the German Congress. You will see me sitting up where I have marked with ink [small black smudge indicates that she is sitting on the left, on the highest tier of the central platform]. Gallacher Memorial Library.*

Despite the initial success of cross-party cooperation, WIR began to face increasing instances of anti-communist backlash and resistance. Anti-communists, on both the Left and Right of the political spectrum, claimed that WIR was merely a “front” used to lure

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<sup>470</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 93.

unassuming people into joining the Communist Party.<sup>471</sup> Following the Hunger in Deutschland Congress, and in recognition of the growing anti-WIR smear campaign, Clara Zetkin, President of WIR until her death in 1933, stressed that the neutral political character of the organisation was essential if its work was to continue to reach the masses, enjoy broader political support and remain legal.<sup>472</sup>

Although the organisation had sought to show its non-partisan character, anti-communist resistance against WIR persisted. Such sentiment surfaced in Britain, notably, in 1924. In response to growing media outcry regarding WIR's intentions, the *Daily Herald* published an article entitled "WORKER'S RELIEF IS GENUINE: Indignant Denial of Press Insinuations".<sup>473</sup> The piece quoted allegations circulating in the press, which claimed WIR was "absolutely subordinate" to the Comintern and that it used funds to do propaganda work "under the cloak of charity".<sup>474</sup> Offering comment to the article, Crawford described such claims as a "gross misrepresentation" of the organisation.<sup>475</sup> This article suggests that anti-communism was an intrinsic part of Crawford's political involvement in WIR.

Crawford's experience of anti-communism was particularly salient during the years 1924-1925, when WIR sought to offer relief to several areas situated in the West of Ireland that were experiencing extreme poverty.<sup>476</sup> Problems within the fishing industry meant that many rural communities were suffering from severe food shortages. Helen Crawford and another Scottish CPGB member, Bob Stewart, travelled to such areas to gain more

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<sup>471</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 6.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>473</sup> "WORKERS' RELIEF IS GENUINE: Indignant Denial of Press Insinuations," *Daily Herald*, April 16, 1924, 8. British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> Adrian Grant, "'Workers to the Rescue': Workers' International Relief in Ireland, 1925," *History Ireland* (2011): 38-40.

information and to assess the extent of WIR support required.<sup>477</sup> Appalled by what they saw, the pair set out to encourage the full participation of the labour movement in the relief effort.

In an appeal to the leader of the Irish Labour Party, Thomas Johnson, Crawford wrote an open letter asserting that political differences must be ignored in order to assist those suffering in the West.<sup>478</sup> Reluctant to cooperate with communists, Johnson expressed his concern that WIR's intentions were less humanitarian in character, and rather based on increasing communist propaganda.<sup>479</sup> This trope of the "front" organisation, is one that Crawford and WIR were forced to confront at almost every step of their relief efforts. On a practical level, this form of anti-communism severely hindered the potential of the relief effort; as illustrated by the reluctance of Labour in Ireland to engage with WIR, protecting against potential communist propaganda took precedence over the delivery of vital aid to people in need.

As argued in Chapter 2, the trope of the "front" also continues to hinder the way in which WIR is written about within the literature. Although Braskén dismisses the notion that WIR was a front organisation, by asserting that the group made no attempt to hide the fact that many of its leaders were communists-<sup>480</sup> he fails to allude to how forces of anti-communism continue to weaponize the term "front" to drive forward this historical smear campaign. Regardless of intention, through engaging with the term, scholars implicitly reproduce this very specific form of anti-communist discourse. Therefore, this same trope that served to discredit the work of Crawford and WIR in the 1920s, continues to influence how the work of WIR is remembered.

Despite the resistance WIR faced, its work nonetheless had an impact on the communities it helped. In a particularly poignant moment in her autobiography, Crawford

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<sup>477</sup> Grant, "'Workers to the Rescue'," 38-40.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>480</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 6.

recalls witnessing the power of reciprocal support. Once information about the conditions of Western Ireland had been circulated within the wider WIR network, Crawford remembers the first response as a cheque of £60 from the WIR committee of Saxony- an area of Germany that had greatly benefited from previous WIR support.<sup>481</sup> She claims that the Saxony group “expressed gratitude to Irish and British workers for help rendered to them during the economic collapse in Germany in 1924 and regretted that the sum was so small”.<sup>482</sup> This memory of Crawford’s illustrates that she genuinely believed in the reciprocal power of the working class and the radical potential it harboured. It must have been incredibly frustrating for Crawford to see her own work, and that of the wider WIR, reduced to communist propaganda, especially by fellow Left-leaning political parties.

### 5.2.2 The General Strike of 1926

From 1924 onwards, support for strikes became a focal point of WIR’s work. National and local strikes were perceived as struggles that were relevant and meaningful to workers across borders.<sup>483</sup> Striking workers were thus represented as legitimate recipients of relief support and solidarity; it was stressed that these individual sacrifices, even on a relatively small-scale, local level, were sacrifices committed in the name of the international working class.<sup>484</sup> A relevant example of such a strike for this thesis is that of the British General Strike.

The General Strike of 1926 had profound consequences for the British public and members of WIR. For Helen Crawford, the Strike was “one of the most spectacular events in the history of the British Working Class”.<sup>485</sup> On May 3, 1926, between 1.5 and 1.75 million

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<sup>481</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 254.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>483</sup> Braskén, *The International Workers’ Relief, Communism and Transnational Solidarity*, 125.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>485</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 277.

British workers went on strike to show their support for the 1 million locked out miners.<sup>486</sup> The miners, having been locked out of their work place by their employers for refusing to accept pay cuts and longer hours, mobilised and prepared for enduring strike. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the more centrist elements of the Labour Party feared the revolutionary zeal of those further to the Left. Many leading communists were arrested during the lead up to the strike to ensure they could not exploit the discontent for political gain.<sup>487</sup> By May 12, the TUC announced its decision to call off the strike; against promises and to the dissatisfaction of many, no guarantees were established to ensure those who had participated remained in their positions. Once the General Strike was over, British miners continued their strike, alone, for a further six months.<sup>488</sup>

WIR had been prepared for the possibility of a General Strike. In April 1926, British miners had contacted the organisation with a request for potential assistance.<sup>489</sup> In the following weeks, WIR, in Britain, Germany and Moscow, had begun to mobilise resources and plan for the months ahead. WIR proposed various ideas of how to effectively enact international solidarity; one of which was to stop coal shipments to Britain and to encourage the spread of the strike to British colonies, in order to weaken the Empire.<sup>490</sup> While these ideas did not come to fruition, WIR recognised the revolutionary potential of the miners' strike. It was stressed that just as the failure of the Strike would be a defeat for the international working class, so too would a victory be one for the international proletariat.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Kasper Braskén, "The British Miners and General Strike of 1926: Problems and Practices of Radical International Solidarity," in *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics, 1919-1939*, ed. Holger Weiss. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 168.

<sup>487</sup> Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London: I. B Tauris, 2002), 10.

<sup>488</sup> Braskén, "The British Miners and General Strike of 1926," 168.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

Braskén asserts that for WIR, the campaign for British miners represented an “unprecedented opportunity” to illustrate the potential of radical, international solidarity.<sup>492</sup>

In her autobiography, Crawford writes furiously about the events that unfolded in May 1926. She expresses her anger towards the TUC who had succumbed to government pressure and left the miners alone in their fight. WIR, for the six months that followed the Trade Union Congress’ decision to end the General Strike, worked tirelessly to provide aid to mining communities (such as that pictured in Figure 4) across the country. Attacked by the British press for supporting the miners,<sup>493</sup> WIR nonetheless was able to help sustain striking communities for the six months of hardship they were forced to endure. In her concluding remarks regarding WIR, Crawford states:

The work of the WIR organised in all countries was strengthening international working-class solidarity. This was its glory, and also the reason for the virulent attacks upon it by the reactionaries in every country. It was becoming dangerous to international capitalism. Therefore it must be destroyed.<sup>494</sup>

Triumphant in tone, Crawford clearly felt that the achievements of WIR were something to be proud of. The organisation, in her view, was strong enough and radical enough to invoke genuine fear in capitalists across Europe.

### **5.3 Communism and anti-fascism**

#### **5.3.1 Crawford’s return to Glasgow, 1933**

In 1933 I was beginning to feel the strain of the arduous life I had been living- travelling throughout the country, changing beds and generally leading the life of one who had no abiding city. The life of the Socialist propagandist is no easy one. I had reached my fifty-sixth year and was a bit battered and tired and felt that my future work must be less strenuous. I went to live with my sister Jean in Renfrew and from her house carried on work in Glasgow, becoming Hon. Secretary of an anti-Fascist Committee. In this work I came again into contact with some fine Jewish comrades in

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<sup>492</sup> Braskén, “The British Miners and General Strike of 1926,” 188.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

<sup>494</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 257.



the study circle in Gorbals. We organised public meetings and tried to arouse people to a sense of the danger of Fascism here at home.<sup>495</sup>

By 1933, Crawford was feeling the physical and emotional strain of decades of intense political activism. In describing herself as having “no abiding city”, Crawford clarifies some uncertainties regarding her geographic base.<sup>496</sup> This lifestyle of constant travel and change is one that many people would undoubtedly find incredibly difficult- particularly in terms of personal relationships. Despite such challenges, Crawford makes little reference to her own well-being throughout the autobiography. However, the passage quoted above asserts that she did find her life of activism immensely challenging and, ultimately, exhausting.

Crawford’s reflections on the difficulties of being a “socialist propagandist” allude to, but do not explicitly engage with, arguments posited by historian Karen Hunt.<sup>497</sup> Hunt maintains that interwar Communist women faced immense pressure from within the Party to maintain a certain level of activism and agitation.<sup>498</sup> Expected to behave like “disciplined soldiers”,<sup>499</sup> Hunt asserts that many CPGB women were left feeling isolated, overwhelmed and, sometimes, physically ill as a result of their political commitments.<sup>500</sup> In many cases, Hunt argues, women tended not to be able to have life beyond their party work- familial, emotional, domestic or otherwise.<sup>501</sup> For this reason, Hunt claims, the involvement of women within the CPGB tended to be fleeting.<sup>502</sup> This insight into CPGB women’s work serves to reaffirm the exceptionalism of Crawford’s activism, particularly in terms of the number of years she dedicated to this work despite its all-consuming nature.

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<sup>495</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 382.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>498</sup> Hunt, “Rethinking Activism: Lessons from the History of Women’s Politics,” 215.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

From Crawford's writing it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which she was able to maintain personal and familial relationships; however, the fact that Crawford returned to Glasgow to live with her sister suggests that this relationship was one that was strong, and constant. While it is known that Crawford re-married in 1945 to CPGB member George Anderson, I have not found any evidence that indicates how long this partnership had been a part of her life prior to marriage.

While Crawford mentions only in passing the fact that she was involved in anti-fascist activity in Scotland, this element of her activism deserves attention.<sup>503</sup> Although Crawford inferred such activism was "less strenuous" in character compared to her other work, I wish to stress the fundamental importance of the CPGB in preventing the rise of British fascism. Through utilising historian Sherry J. Katz's notion of "researching around the subject", as discussed in Chapter 2, I will use literature regarding anti-fascism in Britain during the 1930s, to re-centre Crawford, local politics and the CPGB, in this era of critical resistance work.<sup>504</sup>

### 5.3.2 The British Union of Fascists and CPGB resistance

The British Union of Fascists (BUF) was founded by Oswald Mosley in October 1932. Inspired by the rise of Mussolini's National Fascist Party in Italy, Mosley sought to build his own group of "Blackshirts" that would offer Britons the chance to channel their anti-Semitic, xenophobic, misogynistic, anti-communist and economic protectionist sentiments, into a mass political movement.<sup>505</sup> The majority of the historiography of the BUF has tended to focus on London and other areas of England,<sup>506</sup> however there have been some attempts, more recently, to analyse the movement's success in Scotland.<sup>507</sup> Historian Henry

<sup>503</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 382.

<sup>504</sup> Katz, "Excavating Radical Women in Progressive-Era California," 90.

<sup>505</sup> Henry Maitles "Blackshirts across the Border: The British Union of Fascists in Scotland." *The Scottish Historical Review* 82, no. 213 Part 1 (2003): 92-100.

<sup>506</sup> For example, see: Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain: Second Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) and Neil Barrett, "A Bright Shining Star: The CPGB and Anti-Fascist Activism in the 1930s," *Science & Society* 61, no. 1 (1997): 10-26.

<sup>507</sup> Maitles "Blackshirts across the Border," 92-100.

Maitles asserts that although it may be tempting, upon reading BUF history, to conclude that fascism did not reach Scotland, this is a false assumption.<sup>508</sup>

The first meeting of the BUF in Scotland occurred in Dumfries, a traditionally conservative area near the English border.<sup>509</sup> This meeting was peaceful and was not subject to interruption. Later in Motherwell in 1934, fascist tennis courts were opened to the public. Reporting on the opening ceremony of the tennis courts, the *Motherwell Times* quoted the organisers to have said that while fascism has a serious side, “good Fascists believed in providing healthy forms of recreation for the people”.<sup>510</sup> This positive press, tied with such forms of fascist-led community spiritedness, likely contributed to Motherwell becoming, as Maitles describes, “a pocket of strong BUF activity”.<sup>511</sup>

As other meetings began to spring up across the country, communist anti-fascists soon mobilised themselves into local groups across Scotland. In Dumfries, for example, Scottish CPGB members set up an anti-fascist committee that sought to inform the community of the dangers of fascism.<sup>512</sup> This work culminated in 1935 with a CPGB representative being elected, for the first time, to the town’s council.<sup>513</sup> While historiography tends to focus more on the CPGB’s militant approach to anti-fascism, as will soon be discussed, I would argue that this form of community work, establishing committees and participating in local elections on the basis of anti-fascism, deserves greater attention.

Anti-fascist committees, such as the one in Glasgow that Crawford was Honorary Secretary of, performed vital educational work. Critically, fascism, in the early 1930s was still a relatively young phenomenon in Britain. These forms of awareness-raising and

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<sup>508</sup> Maitles “Blackshirts across the Border,” 92.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, 92-100.

<sup>510</sup> “OPENING OF FASCIST TENNIS COURTS: Blackshirt’s Ceremony,” *Motherwell Times*, May 11, 1934, 3. British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>511</sup> Maitles “Blackshirts across the Border,” 96.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid*.

information-sharing activities that CPGB members were involved in were thus pivotal to the success of the anti-fascist campaign. Without the physical presence of CPGB members in rural areas such as Dumfries, detailing the violent intentions that underly fascist ideology, it is likely that such areas would have been at risk of becoming unopposed pockets of BUF activity.

Undoubtedly, the CPGB anti-fascist movement benefited immensely from the Party's transnational connections. While many people in Scotland and Britain by 1933 had not been familiar with notions of fascism and anti-fascism, Kasper Braskén asserts that anti-fascist rhetoric had existed within the international communist movement as early as 1923.<sup>514</sup> Discussions regarding fascism, the dangers of it and how to oppose it, had thus been prominent within the transnational Left for over ten years prior to BUF opposition in Scotland.

Members of the CPGB, such as Crawford, had clearly been able to benefit greatly from the circulation of information and political tactics in organisations such as the Comintern and the WIR. Moreover, Sylvia Pankhurst, informed by her network of anti-fascist Italian comrades living in London, was one of the first British Leftist figures who wrote of the dangers of fascism.<sup>515</sup> Writing in the *Dreadnought* she sought to urge readers to treat Mussolini's rise to power with caution and concern; she asserted, as early as 1923, that fascism posed a threat to Europe.<sup>516</sup> Considering these various networks, be it the Comintern or immigrants living in London, historian Hugo García calls upon historians to recognise, and

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<sup>514</sup> Kasper Braskén, "Making Anti-Fascism Transnational: The Origins of Communist and Socialist Articulations of Resistance in Europe, 1923-1924." *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 573.

<sup>515</sup> Connelly, *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire*, 118-119.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

credit, the eminence of transnational networks to the founding, and success, of the British anti-fascist movement.<sup>517</sup>

### 5.3.3 Anti-fascism: militancy as method

Clara Zetkin, in a speech held in Frankfurt in March 1923, famously asserted the need for national communist parties to organise locally, and to engage in violent activity where necessary.<sup>518</sup> The CPGB, although trying to avoid violence where possible, adopted this position. This form of militant street activism, often organised and led by CPGB members, has since become the defining character of anti-fascism in Britain.<sup>519</sup> However, the extent to which this issue of political method split the Left, specifically CPGB and Labour, has only been analysed in detail relatively recently.

In an interesting analysis of the changing traditions of popular protest in the interwar years, historian Malcolm R. Petrie posits that while the CPGB and the Labour Party overlapped ideologically, it was activism that differentiated the two.<sup>520</sup> The Labour Party was reluctant to engage in, or support, local action against the BUF in the form of disruptions, counter-demonstrations and street fighting. Petrie claims that British communists, on the contrary, came to be defined, both by themselves and others, by their methods of public protest and more militant behaviour.<sup>521</sup> Tensions between the Labour Party and the CPGB came to a head in June 1934, when Mosley was due to hold a BUF rally at Olympia stadium in London- expected to be the biggest one yet. CPGB arranged a Coordinating Committee for

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<sup>517</sup> Hugo García, “Transnational History: A New Paradigm for Anti-Fascist Studies?” *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 564.

<sup>518</sup> Braskén, “Making Anti-Fascism Transnational,” 588.

<sup>519</sup> Nigel Copsey, “Communists and the Inter-War Anti-Fascist Struggle in the United States and Britain.” *Labour History Review* 76, no. 3 (2011): 184-185.

<sup>520</sup> Malcolm Robert Petrie, “Public Politics and Traditions of Popular Protest: Demonstrations of the Unemployed in Dundee and Edinburgh, c. 1921-1939,” *Contemporary British History* 27, no. 4 (2013): 502.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid*, 507.

Anti-Fascist Activity inviting Labour to join forces, however, the Party refused to be involved.<sup>522</sup>

On the day, CPGB counter-protestors, alongside others in the labour movement who wished to defy the party line, raided the stadium.<sup>523</sup> Yielding pamphlets and banners, over 1000 protestors ensured that Mosley was unable to speak without interjection.<sup>524</sup> Consequently, hecklers were violently removed by Blackshirts. While it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the violence that occurred, historian Richard Thurlow maintains that, given the nature of the wounds acquired by protestors, Blackshirts likely used knuckledusters and razors against them.<sup>525</sup>

While some historians, such as Martin Pugh, question whether the events of Olympia had much of an impact on the collapse of British fascism,<sup>526</sup> historian Jon Lawrence asserts that the violence witnessed at Olympia, which spurred feelings of revulsion amongst the public towards the BUF, was a watershed moment for the fascists.<sup>527</sup> Thurlow, too, notes that those who had been neutral towards fascism and the BUF, were left feeling dismayed and frightened by the violence that had been inflicted upon the (mostly CPGB) counter-protestors.<sup>528</sup> Crucially, had counter-demonstrators not been present at such events, the violent potential of the BUF would likely not have been recognised until much later.<sup>529</sup> By starving the BUF of physical space, and by confronting the movement with their disruptive

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<sup>522</sup> Copsey, "Communists and the Inter-War Anti-Fascist Struggle in the United States and Britain," 195.

<sup>523</sup> "Oswald Mosley's Circus", *The Guardian*. Accessed April 18, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1934/jun/08/thefarright.uk>

<sup>524</sup> Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985* (New York: Basil Blackwell Limited, 1987), 102.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> Martin Pugh, "The British Union of Fascists and the Olympia Debate," *The Historical Journal* 41, no. 2 (1998): 529-542.

<sup>527</sup> Jon Lawrence, "Fascist violence and the politics of public order in inter-war Britain: the Olympia debate Revisited," *Historical Research* 76, no. 192 (2003): 239.

<sup>528</sup> Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 102

<sup>529</sup> Lawrence, "Fascist violence and the politics of public order in inter-war Britain," 239.

presence, the CPGB refused to allow the fascists any room to develop. The reluctance of the Labour Party to engage directly with fascists arguably left CPGB alone in their fight.

Historian Neil Barrett asserts that CPGB historiography remains deeply imbalanced; the importance of the Party's work in preventing the rise of fascism in Britain has all too often been devalued, or omitted entirely.<sup>530</sup> Critically, Barrett seeks to stress that communists did not have the benefit of hindsight; they had no way of knowing whether the BUF would rise in Britain or not- their activism and dedication, he argues, should thus be judged and appreciated accordingly.<sup>531</sup> While this may appear to be a relatively simple point, it is one which I believe has been lost.

As previously mentioned, the transnational connections that were rife within the CPGB enabled its members to learn of and appreciate the potential dangers of fascism. Working with others across Europe who were fighting their own battles against fascism enabled communists to gauge the means necessary to prevent the BUF's rise. While militant activism was important, the local forms of awareness raising were vital to ensuring that members of the public knew exactly what fascism entailed. As Helen Crawford iterates, the prevalence of study circles and local groups were pivotal to such work. In my view, the pre-eminence of anti-communism that remains intrinsic to a great deal of British historiography has led to the systematic devaluation of the vast CPGB, anti-fascist effort.

After her anti-fascist campaigning and other CPGB involvement, in 1944, Crawford announced her retirement from public life.<sup>532</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, retirement for Crawford was difficult and, true to form, she soon became involved in local politics in Dunoon- a town in the West of Scotland. Crawford, upon learning that women's concerns in her local council

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<sup>530</sup> Neil Barrett, "A Bright Shining Star: The CPGB and Anti-Fascist Activism in the 1930s," *Science & Society* 61, no. 1 (1997): 10.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>532</sup> Byers, "Helen Crawford (1877-1954)."

were being dismissed, remembers: “Like an old war horse my fighting spirit arose”.<sup>533</sup> She was subsequently elected the first woman councillor of Dunoon Council later in 1944.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to reassert the value of transnational activism and its myriad forms. Internationalism was intrinsic to Crawford’s communist politics. Meeting with Lenin and Krupskaya in 1920, Crawford experienced communist internationalism in a way her comrades could only dream of; her experience in Russia is indicative both of her international reputation and her commitment to revolutionary politics. As this chapter has iterated, Crawford’s class, previous political experience and indignant personality, were all vital factors that enabled her to reach this great political height.

While much has been written about the internal party politics of the CPGB and Comintern “control”, this chapter has sought to bring to light other, lesser known, forms of communist activism through discussion of Crawford’s own experience. Through invoking this biographical approach, it is apparent that organisations such as WIR have yet to gain the scholarly attention they deserve. Methodological nationalism and the trope of the communist front have, together, ensured that the work of WIR, and thus Helen Crawford, have remained peripheral in the historiography of the CPGB. Moreover, through drawing upon arguments posited by Sue Bruley and Karen Hunt, I have stressed that communist women had to navigate complex instances of gender politics to assert themselves as valuable members of the CPGB. Such gendered experience, I have suggested, may well have influenced Crawford’s decision to focus her political energy on international organising.

Finally, through an analysis of the anti-fascist movement in Britain, it is clear that CPGB activists, such as Helen Crawford, held a pivotal role in preventing the rise of the BUF. Much of the historiography regarding fascism in Britain fails to explicitly credit the

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<sup>533</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 391.



CPGB for exposing the BUF for what they were: violent and dangerous. The transnational sharing of information regarding the rise of fascism in Europe, as early as 1923, ensured that local CPGB groups were equipped with the knowledge to inform the wider public of fascist reality. As I have stressed, the militant political method of opposition that the CPGB adopted ensured that the BUF was severely limited in its ability to organise.

Overall, what I have hoped to convey in this Chapter, and throughout the entirety of this thesis, is the way in which Helen Crawford's internationalism, communism and gender are *all* factors that have contributed to her being systematically underrepresented in dominant historiographical accounts of the various movements she was involved in. Moreover, it is precisely through the study of Crawford's life, that I have been able to contribute to broader arguments regarding issues of communist internationalism and anti-fascism, and to indicate the links between the movements she was involved in.

## CONCLUSION

“Thanks and greetings to the unconquered and unconquerable pioneers of the entire world who are leading the workers towards Power. The World is Ours. Let us go in and possess it.”<sup>534</sup>

In the concluding remarks of her autobiography, Helen Crawford calls upon workers across the globe to unite, and revolt. Fittingly, Crawford’s parting statement expresses her belief in transnational solidarity and the power of the working class. Out of tribute to Crawford’s life of vast and diverse political activism, this thesis, through invoking a biographical approach, has sought to illustrate the interconnected and complex nature of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century British women’s activism. While Crawford was, in many ways, extraordinary, her experience nonetheless speaks volumes to that of British women during this period, particularly those involved in Leftist politics.

Crawford’s gender, locality and communist internationalism are all key contributing factors to her historiographical omission. By analysing, precisely, how these processes have contributed to Crawford’s marginalisation, we can apply such knowledge to other British women, and those further afield, who have suffered a similar historiographical fate.

In light of the research questions this thesis sought to answer, I have shown that the political activism of Helen Crawford can serve to challenge dominant historiographical tendencies within labour and communist history. These bodies of literature, which have tended to limit their analysis to men, the workplace, “high” politics and the nation-state, have rendered women, especially those who were active internationally, side-lined in the writing of Leftist history. Crawford’s politics, importantly, also serves to complicate the often-unproblematised delineation between “socialism” and “feminism”. Crawford’s feminist activism was not limited to the suffrage movement; it was rather, as it was for many, an integral element of her communism. Crawford’s experience in the WSPU calls into question

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<sup>534</sup> Crawford, Unpublished Autobiography, 403.

assertions present within British suffrage scholarship regarding class, militancy, and the Pankhurst leadership. Helen Crawford's activism thus challenges fundamental conceptions regarding what it meant to be a Scottish woman involved in feminism, anti-war campaigning, and communist internationalism in the first half of the 20th century.

Through the study of local political campaigns and transnational connections, this thesis has been able to contribute fresh perspectives on the broader political movements of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. These foci have proven crucial to understanding the ways in which women engaged in politics and how they navigated the complex gendered dynamics of their time and context. This thesis has argued against the over-compartmentalisation of women's activism within historiography. Compartmentalising instances of women's activism into separate and distinct entities serves to obscure the extent to which women inhabited political spaces and how they engaged with politics. In the case of Scottish women like Helen Crawford, the local, national and transnational connections within and between the suffrage campaign, Red Clydeside, and communist internationalism, were pivotal to the successes of the respective movements and her involvement within them.

Political campaigns in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain were shaped by the lives, and contexts, of those who participated in them; previous political experience- be it traditional political involvement or personal experience of oppression- contributed to the fabric of their activism. By confining one's research to the boundaries of the nation state, connections between actors, movements and ideas are overlooked. As Crawford's work has shown, such connections- from international peace organising to the uptake in hunger strike as a political method- informed the way in which people engaged in politics. Therefore, by offering analysis of the transnational elements of Crawford's activism, this thesis has sought to avoid the analytical pitfalls of methodological nationalism.

Through invoking Crawford's own words to describe her political development and experience, I have also sought to reassert the value of women's voices and stories. Given that Crawford's autobiography remains unpublished, it was of paramount importance to me to grant her writing the attention, and respect, it so rightly deserves. As illustrated in Chapter 2, women's writing, for example that of Scottish suffragettes, remains undervalued and largely unpublished. I hope that through the writing of this thesis, I have demonstrated the immense political importance of such texts.

Lastly, this thesis has provided insight to only some aspects of Helen Crawford's political life. To cover the full extent of her activism would require greater scope than available here, but it seems obvious that Crawford is deserving of significant biographical attention. Further research into questions of ethical socialism and communist internationalism would also provide rich and valuable material that could contribute to broader questions of women's activism in early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Moreover, in terms of transnationalism, while I have stressed the importance of friendships, more research into such relationships and that of transnational exchange would be beneficial.

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