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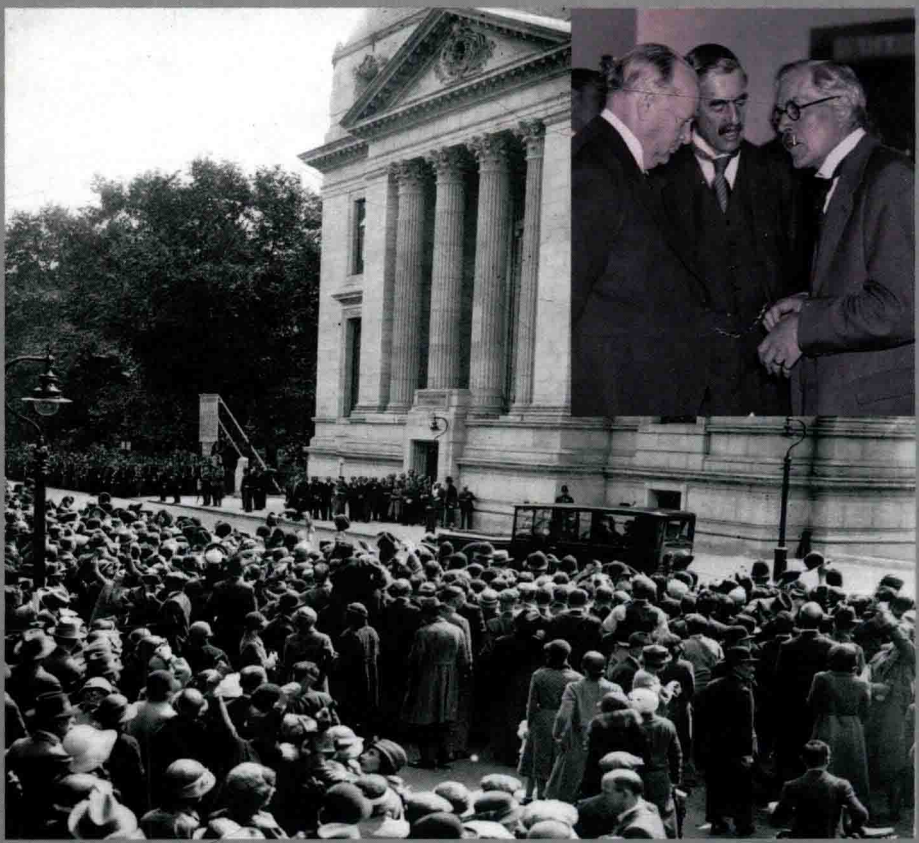
Liberal Internationalism

The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain

Michael Pugh



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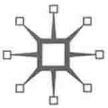

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In Memory of

***Mabel Elsie Antill**, formerly Pugh, née McGeehan (Private), conscript, Auxiliary Territorial Service, anti-aircraft batteries.*

***Charles Pugh** (Sergeant), conscript, Wiltshire Regiment, killed and buried near Cheux, Normandy.*

***Leslie Antill** (Private and Lance-Corporal unpaid), volunteer, Essex Regiment, patrolled in Piraeus without a weapon to avoid firing on Greek comrades.*

Preface

This book is the product of many years of reflection on peace and politics. It began as a history thesis that took me into many archives. It has since been informed by critical international relations theories and the political economy of peace and conflict, topics that continue to fascinate. In particular, I became interested in the conceptualisation of liberal peace, and especially the neoliberal formulations of economic governance and politics. It seemed logical to revisit some of the foundations of liberal internationalism in the light of my subsequent critiques to help explain the *zeitgeist* of its hegemony, why the liberal peace came about, its governmentalities and resistances.

The research has been largely based on non-government archives, but I owe thanks to the staff of the National Archives (former Public Record Office) for their assistance in my researches on official documents. I recall with gratitude the late Lady Kathleen Liddell Hart's kind hospitality and permission to access the Liddell Hart Papers that were moved to King's College London. For access to other manuscript collections, I am indebted to the staffs of the British Library (Cecil and Balfour); the British Library of Political and Economic Science (Adams and Dalton, Papers); Churchill College, Cambridge (Alexander Papers); the University Library, Cambridge (Baldwin, and Templewood Papers); the University of Birmingham Library (Austen Chamberlain Papers); Nuffield College, Oxford (Cripps Papers); the Beaverbrook Library (Lloyd George Papers); the Scottish Record Office (Lothian Papers); the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Murray Papers); and the House of Lords Record Office (Samuel Papers). Acknowledgements are also due to the staffs of the Marx Memorial Library, the Gladstone Library, the National Liberal Club, the Labour Party Library, and the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. For the empirical work, I also had useful discussions with Lady Liddell Hart, Lord Brockway, Frank Hardie and Professors Martin Ceadel and H. Noel Fieldhouse. Permission to reuse parts of my article, 'Policing the World: Lord Davies and the Quest for Order in the 1930s', *International Relations*, Vol.16, No.1, 2002, pp. 97–115, has kindly been granted by Sage Publications, London.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Geoffrey Searle, who guided my research, and to Professors Paul Kennedy, CBE, and Donald Cameron Watt for important suggestions. I owe thanks to the support of colleagues

and the many debates on international issues with Professors Edgar Feuchtwanger, Oliver Richmond, John Groom, Mats Berdal, Christopher Cramer and Tom Woodhouse, among others; and for their insights and productive partnership, Neil Cooper and Mandy Turner. Responsibility for the work is mine. Production would not have been possible without the superb secretarial support of Kay Roberts and Michele Mozley. Finally, I owe special thanks to Margaret, Ingrid, Evan, Ella and Brannoc for humouring me.

Note on Usage and References

As was usual in the period, surnames were preceded by initials, but where there might be doubt about identification and where the person generally used their first name, this has been given. Philip Noel Baker was inconsistent about hyphenating his surname. It is given without here, as in the 1940 edition of *Who's Who*.

The complexity of primary sources has obliged me to use notes, except where the press is cited in the text with a date in parenthesis.

For parliamentary debates: 291 *HC Deb.*, 5s., 3671 (12 February 1926) refers to volume 291, fifth series, column 3671.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AC Papers	Austen Chamberlain Papers
ACIQ	Advisory Committee on International Questions (Labour Party)
Add.	Additional Manuscript (British Library)
C/A	Council of Action (Lloyd George Papers)
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of Imperial General Staff
Cmd	*Command Paper*
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DBFP	*Documents on British Foreign Policy*
DRC	Defence Requirements Committee
HC Deb.	*House of Commons Debates*
HL Deb.	*House of Lords Debates*
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IPC	International Peace Campaign
IPF	International Police Force
LNU	League of Nations Union
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
NCPW	National Council for the Prevention of War
NFRB	New Fabian Research Bureau
NLF	National Liberal Federation
NMWM	No More War Movement
NPC	National Peace Council
PDC	Preparatory Disarmament Commission
PPU	Peace Pledge Union
RIIA	Royal Institute of International Affairs
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UDC	Union of Democratic Control
UN	United Nations

Contents

1

Introduction: Liberal Internationalism, a Social Movement for Peace

Towards the end of his life, Alfred Milner, the nineteenth-century British colonial administrator, member of Prime Minister Lloyd George's cabinet and liberal imperialist, gave a statement of his political creed. 'I am', he recorded, 'a Nationalist and not a Cosmopolitan. This seems to be becoming more and more the real dividing line of parties'. Describing himself as a 'race patriot' favouring a 'British League of Nations' (the Empire), he claimed that 'competition between nations, each seeking its maximum development, is the Divine order of the world, the law of Life and Progress'.[1] It had ceased to be a dominant view before his death in 1925. Cooperation rather than struggle between nations had become the *leitmotiv* of mainstream British discourses on security. This study contributes to the literature on peace by analysing the historical contingencies and internecine politics, the streams and flows, of the potent British socio-political movement for an interwar liberal peace that assembled a dominant orthodoxy.

With notable exceptions there has been limited research on liberal internationalism and its focus on one of the important issues of the time – collective (or 'pooled') security. This affords a contrast to the interest in public opinion by contemporaries. Kingsley Martin provided regular commentaries for *Political Quarterly*; and pronouncements on the state of 'the public mind' about international questions frequently cropped up in other journals. The contemporary fascination reflected a widespread belief among intellectuals that public opinion was, or should be, concerned about foreign policy to a far greater extent than before the Great War. Indeed, the book shows that there was a good deal of public interest in international affairs; powerful social movements such as the League of Nations Union (LNU) existed to cater for it.

Seemingly impelled to adopt a teleological perspective because the period ended with an even greater world war, commentaries have attached pejorative labels to all or parts of the period: 'lost decade' (Rab Butler), 'unforgiving years' (Leo Amery), 'locust years' (Thomas Inskip and Winston Churchill), 'fateful years' (Hugh Dalton) and the 'lost peace' (*BBC* documentary). Interwar narratives of peace were disqualified by association with appeasement, the decline of the Liberal Party and the rise of competing ideologies. However, as Richard Overy argues, intellectuals were torn between creative modernism and angst about a civilisational crisis, but they failed through 'lack of power rather than lack of faith'.[2] In exploring liberal internationalism, this book contends that internationalists exerted hegemonic power domestically (though not internationally), and operated effectively in civil society to shape people's ideas by trailing liberal tenets about peace across political boundaries.

The argument

Although, clearly, liberal internationalism had roots in previous, centuries the justification for focusing on a period that ended badly is that it was, nevertheless, a halcyon period for liberal internationalists. The core argument is that the underlying principles of liberal internationalism had both a strong ethical dimension and a pragmatic adaptation to changes in international and domestic circumstances. This enabled the movement to trespass across political borders and spaces and appeal to people who also had allegiances elsewhere. In a curious way, as the Liberal Party itself disintegrated, liberal ideas about peace dispersed into a receptive population. Moreover, liberal internationalists had an imaginative view of global order that centred on peace through international law and collective security, and that foreshadowed the efforts in the Second World War to establish this approach on a firmer footing. Although many achievements of liberal internationalism lay partly in the future – and in the twenty-first century are associated with neo-colonial models of peace – the interwar internationalists displayed innovation in spreading bourgeois internationalism in Britain. Overshadowed by the subsequent Manichaean struggles of the next war, the end of Empire and the Cold War, the movement nevertheless had a profound influence on British approaches to international politics, and subsequently influenced the UN's approach to peace and international security. And, as a movement of resistance, interwar liberal internationalism had worthy successors in campaigns for nuclear disarmament and

anti-war coalitions. A complex movement that can be disaggregated into wings, factions and fluidities, the generic term 'liberal internationalism' captures the mainsprings of a movement suffused with values that were at once humane and superior, tolerant and dogmatic, universalistic and imperial.

The political imaginations of liberal internationalists were informed by a 'scientific' approach to the liberal belief in progress, H.G. Wells with his notion of a world-state perhaps representing the most innovative. At an international level, they pursued progress by developing a modern way of ordering the international system. This required a new architecture of peace based, in theory if not always in practice, on diversity, equality of sovereign states, social justice, self-determination, and a probing of received views about colonialism and the status of colonial subjects. International law, intergovernmental conferences and collective security would be the main mechanisms for transcending conflict. Liberal internationalists also elevated the idea of public opinion as a check on government, notably through the Union of Democratic Control. 'Open diplomacy' was a transparency mechanism that, in theory, would break a monopoly of privilege and the legacies of dynastic warmongering and territory swapping. It would also democratise foreign policy in ways that would avoid international misunderstandings and ensure that those most vulnerable to war would have a say about peace. One might even argue that an end to secret diplomacy was the reparation demanded by the classes whose public school and university offspring had been sacrificed. They also exuded a spirit of transnationalism, arguing that global public opinion would play a role in the system. The war had denied scientific rationalism, and so liberals aimed to develop knowledge and educate the British population in rational choices about international engagement. It was no coincidence that international relations became an academic study with the establishment of the first (Woodrow Wilson) Chair in the University of Wales in 1918, and as a policymaking tool in the foundation of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) in 1919, financed by the John Jacob Astor family. While polemic remained much in evidence, the sophisticated quality of much analysis, on the political economy of reparations and sanctions for example, had solid empirical foundations. Finally, liberal internationalism attempted to counter *realpolitik* through a moral, ethical approach to international order, with a concern to stress international justice and provide an alternative to power politics. A significant element of religious faith permeated the movement, whether the High Church Anglicanism of Robert Cecil,

president of the LNU; the Christian pacifism of the Labour Party leader, George Lansbury; or the Christian Scientism of the liberal imperialist, Philip Kerr (Lord Lothian). In the proposed revised Prayer Book of 1927, the House of Bishops gave the League of Nations its *imprimatur* with a variation on 'Jerusalem':

> He maketh wars to cease in all the world
> He breaketh the bow and knappeth the spear in sunder,
> And burneth the chariot in the fire.[3]

But not for nothing was the LNU called the Liberal Party at prayer. It can be argued that the Great War had caused a crisis of faith in liberalism as well as of international order, the Liberal Party having completely split in 1916. In Britain, Great-ness survived somewhat unhinged by the effort of 'victory'. It was also a crisis of liberalism, and, indeed, the liberal internationalist movement exposed a crisis of liberal governmentality, the techniques of control and social reproduction in the quest for liberal rights (discussed below). In this respect, liberal internationalism represents a rescue mission, signifying resistance to decay. This investigation begins with a conceptual framework deriving in part from the literature on social movements and from the characteristic of liberal internationalism as a coalition or assemblage of resistance to war through dependence on collective security.

The scope and conceptual framework

Interwar liberal internationalism has gone largely unheeded in the literature on social movements. Cecelia Lynch's *Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (1999) has two chapters specifically on Britain; Andrew Williams's *Liberalism and War* (2006) has a useful chapter on ideas of war and peace in a book mainly concerned with liberalism in war settlement and reconstruction; and David Cortright's general survey of the history and philosophy, in *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (2008) has valuable chapters on war resistance and disarmament campaigns in the 1930s. But the bulk of international relations focus has been on the institutional spread of liberal norms.[4] As well as Overy's research, perhaps the most erudite and enduring in historical studies has been Michael Howard's *War and the Liberal Conscience* (his Trevelyan lectures at Cambridge published in 1978). Peter Wilson's biographical studies and Martin Ceadel's work on pacifism have also paved the way for reinterpretations about peace movements in British

politics.[5] The focus here, however, is on liberal internationalism as a socio-political movement that expressed both elite preferences and attracted resistances. The study derives from historical investigation but also takes into account concepts of social movements,[6] and explorations of liberal peace in international relations.[7] It disaggregates the controversies that reached beyond officials and policymakers, but generally avoids the intricacies of state policy formation by governments, in order to give some weight to non-governmental diversity. Nor have I been primarily concerned with the appeasement debate about whether public opinion influenced British foreign policy.

Social movements are often framed, however, as resistance to the exercise of authority and its privileged discourses. Indeed, there have been significant shifts in the focal points of political history and international relations towards revealing the governed, the subjects of sovereignty and, in postcolonial scholarship, 'subalterns' whose voices are frequently neglected. In establishing the kind of phenomena presented by liberal internationalism, it is helpful to associate it with concepts of civil society and the philosophical stance of cosmopolitanism. From its emergence in the mid-eighteenth century, Enlightenment figures such as Adam Ferguson had considered civil society as a natural, universal and constructive political economy of societies.[8] And while a century later, Karl Marx argued that the struggle for bourgeois civil rights had no historical leverage without change in the mode of production, Antonio Gramsci, writing in the 1930s, believed that because the ideological and cultural ramparts of oppression would not end social strife, bourgeois civil society could be mobilised through intellectual leadership and education to foster emancipation and political orders.[9] By contrast, in the twentieth century, Robert Putnam conceives civil society as a kind of health farm for citizen relations. Located apart from state and market, it comprises voluntary civic engagements that knit society together, builds trust, produces 'social capital,' and sustains democracy, public affairs and economic life.[10] In this guise, it meshes with the neoliberal dissolution of state power, giving precedence to a new technology of governance in which assemblages of citizens seek consolation, sociability and solutions to problems through self-help organisations and associations. It is unclear how this neoliberal turn to civic responsibility can deal with the structures of global dominance, of which 'global civil society' is a constituent element. But seemingly influenced by transformation in central and eastern Europe, the concept was appropriated in the 1990s for the causes of social justice and cosmopolitanism. Indeed, transnational advocacy coalitions have given rise to a prolific literature

on the restructuring of international politics.[11] A vibrant civil society is regarded as the route not only to a peaceful domestic life, but to a fair and just international society free from genocide and other forms of uncivil behaviour.[12]

Resistance to war complemented a renewed interest in social resistance to power that engaged Michel Foucault, for example, in investigating the circularity and non-linearity of power, its contingent nature and fragmentation. A multitude of resistance techniques could be uncovered by bringing to the surface the 'hidden transcripts' and coded critiques of subjection of apparently powerless subalterns.[13] Similarly, from the engagements between colonial attempts at imposition and the reactions of colonised peoples (including counter-hegemonic resistances), hybrid forms of culture, politics and social life emerge, including what has been characterised as hybrid forms of peace.[14]

Whether the claims for resistance are too readily conflated with measures for coping with adversity remains an open question. A psychological reliance on hopes for peace to cope with fears of war was clearly a factor in liberal internationalism that resulted in a degree of wishful thinking. Moreover, for some critics of neoliberal globalisation, resistance based on the concept of civil society is a fiction. For example, Jean-François Bayart demolishes the apolitical, autonomy claims of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), since they are nationalised, even militarised, to reproduce global inequalities: '[t]he constitutive organisations of "civil society" are an essential part of "governance" (or "governmentality"), both national *and* global, of which they risk becoming mere cogs in the machine from the point of view of political co-option, economic accumulation, ideological legitimization or quite simply of foreign policy'.[15] Indeed, global civil society mobilised by governments in the name of rights and survival stands accused of constructing a simulacra of international peace.[16] Alternatively, in the quest to save strangers from abuse,[17] civil society provides rationales for wreaking havoc on illiberal governance and ousting dictators through regime-change wars. From the multifaceted character of the concept, it is reasonable to agree with Robert Cox in his revival of Gramsci, that '[c]ivil society is both shaper and shaped, an agent of stabilization and reproduction, and a potential agent of transformation'.[18]

Social movements obviously thrive on a sense of participation and trust, because they mobilise a collective mass of participants. But they cannot necessarily be regarded as builders of Putnam's civic virtue. They have projects and goals that seek to control a way of life and, whether or not imbued with a transforming consciousness, imply that an aspect