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# Arms and the Women: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom on Disarmament, 1945-1975<sup>1</sup>

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by

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**Abstract:** This paper follows the policies on disarmament of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from 1945 to 1975. The organization has been advocating for total and universal disarmament since its inception in the midst of World War I. It would be, however, incorrect to think of this stance as static, unreflexive or idealistic. Rather, WILPF's positions about the causes of war, militarization, the arms buildup, and its elimination became increasingly far-reaching and critical of ideological, political, and economic bases of the post-war order. Their story can help us to understand how organizations and social movements expand the boundaries of the ideological and historical milieu in which they are situated and open up possibilities for emancipatory social change.

## Introduction

Founded in 1915 by over one thousand women from neutral and belligerent countries assembled in The Hague to advocate for an end to World War I, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has become one of the most significant international women's organizations in the world today. Its influence on many areas of international governance related to peace and security is all the more remarkable when one considers its relatively small size of less than 5,000 members worldwide, distributed over forty sections in the same number of countries. For instance, as part of its work in the Steering Committee of the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), WILPF's disarmament program,

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Reaching Critical Will (RCW), coordinated the effort for the drafting and adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, arguably a significant step toward the destruction of all nuclear weapons and a ban on their use. This achievement has earned the organization in 2017 a third Nobel Peace Prize (two of WILPF's founders – Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch – were respectively the first and second US women to be awarded the Prize). The creation of RCW itself was inspired by the need to coordinate NGO actions around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, following the failure of its 1995 review conference to reach agreement on a number of contentious issues in regard to the treaty. In anticipation of the following review conference, WILPF New York office created RCW in 1999, to lead WILPF's "analysis and advocacy for disarmament, the reduction of global military spending and militarism, and the investigation of gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and of disarmament processes" (RCW n.d.). Through RCW and national sections, WILPF has taken an active role in the dissemination of accessible technical and political information on nuclear weapons negotiations and on other crucial disarmament questions, including small arms and light weapons, the relationship between disarmament and development, land mines, the health and environmental implications of nuclear technology, the weaponization of space, the relationship between gender and disarmament, the impact of the nuclear age on First Nations' lands, and many other topics. RCW continues today to promote women's access to disarmament forums and a feminist analysis of disarmament question. But gender and feminism have not always been central to WILPF's advocacy around disarmament.

This article looks back to WILPF's history at the dawn of the nuclear age, focusing on its disarmament policies during the first thirty years after the development and deployment of the first atomic bomb. I parse the organization's ideological and philosophical foundations, and argue that WILPF's policies on disarmament reflected its entrenchment in modernity-derived liberal political thought, the postwar liberal order, and their gendered underpinnings. WILPF eventually came to question these foundations, identify the limitations of its own liberalism, and formulating new, additional policies and strategies that reflected more explicitly feminist understandings of nuclear politics and weapons, as well as disarmament in general.

Disarmament was an important component of the WILPF's vision of peace and it had formed part of the WILPF's political platform since 1919. Its constitution unambiguously stated that WILPF stood for total and universal disarmament; the support for international law; the peaceful settlement of conflicts; and the development of a world organization. But between 1945 and 1975 there were significant, if subtle, shifts in WILPF's ideologies and policies on this issue. A 1974 resolution issued by WILPF's International Congress is notable in this regard. This resolution first indicted "an economic system based on production for profit rather than production for human needs" as ultimately responsible for the arms build-up and called for "fundamental economic change by non-violent means" as the only way to "eliminate war, racism, violence, repression and social injustice." The same resolution strongly condemned nuclear power, "whether used for weaponry or peaceful purposes," as a threat to peace and asked for the cessation of nuclear arms test-

ing as well as of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Finally, it linked women's emancipation with "the achievement of peace and the relaxation of international tension" (WILPF 1974).

On the one hand this resolution reflected WILPF's unwavering commitment to total and universal disarmament; on the other, it represented a departure from WILPF's postwar positions on armaments. Over the course of three decades, WILPF progressively lost faith in the power of liberal institutions and international law to regulate and tame international conflicts; second it exhibited growing skepticism toward the ability of science to persuade the public and political elites to pursue peaceful international relations; third a growing feminist movement within and outside of WILPF penetrated its political analysis and ultimately became central to WILPF as a whole. This chapter proceeds as follows: I first give an account of liberal modernity and its gendered underpinnings, as the historical and ideological context for the three decades under examination; secondly I explicate the changes in WILPF's policies on disarmament focusing on the three shifts that the 1974 resolution embodied; I conclude with an epilogue of sorts on WILPF's policies post the 1970s and lessons for the future of the feminist peace movement.

### **Liberal Modernity as Historical Context**

Liberal modernity was the transnational historical context in which WILPF was situated. Robert Latham calls the immediate aftermath of the Second World War a "liberal moment," when the destruction of the old world order gave rise to an opportunity for the creation of a new one, within the macro-historical fabric of liberal modernity and with the hegemonic agency of the United States. Modernity, of course, did not emerge in the mid-1900s, but scholars alternatively characterize the time as "peak modernity" (Welsh 2000: 17-18) or "high modernity" (Giddens 1990). It saw liberalism join "visions of the planned transformation of society by rational scientific means" (Welsh 2000: 18) in the establishment of the UN, the codification of international law along the principles of liberal political thought, and the institutionalization of mechanisms of "embedded liberalism" in the economy (Ruggie 1982). WILPF, like other international organizations, was part of that design: Its very existence was woven into the fabric of the postwar liberal order.

For postwar liberals, peace would be attainable through rational planning, organization, and institution building implemented by liberal states. A belief in progress and the power of rational norms and institutions to tame humanity's primitive instincts was at the core of liberalism's visions of peace. Economic, social, and scientific progress would eventually cause changes in the international system, which would induce peace. International institutions, multilateralism, and self-determination were seen as essential elements of the rational organization of the international system, as vehicles for the spread of the universal liberal values, norms, and rights so necessary to creating a peaceful international structure. Free markets and trade "would build up irrevocable and peaceful connections between states" by creating interdependence (Richmond 2008: 21-39).

Many feminist scholars have exposed the gendered (and racialized) construction of key elements of liberalism (Okin 1979, Pateman 1988, Di Stefano 1991, El-shtain 1992, Tickner 1992, Ackerly 2008), among which are concepts central to liberal political thought and praxis. They argue that western liberal political theory's values are inherently derived from the lived experiences of men, not women, with specific consequences for the content of key concepts in liberal political thought, including rationality, consent, citizenship, scientific objectivity, emotional distance, and instrumentality, all of which are characteristics associated with, and defining of, masculinity (Hooper 2001: 13). The construction of the liberal order was thus dependent on previously existing gender ideology.

WILPF was a participant to the building of this international liberal order. As long as the women of WILPF remained unquestioningly bound to the liberal internationalist tradition, they also reproduced the gendered assumptions of liberal political thought on which that order was built. WILPF was, in some important ways, a privileged international actor: its members were mostly white, upper- to middle-class, highly educated western women; as a consultative member in the United Nations (UN) system, WILPF had access to many of the international institutions that had been created after World War II. In other ways, WILPF was marginal to the liberal ordering project. It was not a very influential actor in the international scene, by virtue of the scarce consideration that women's opinions and issues or feminism garnered in international politics. Moreover, to the extent that militarism and war became progressively central features of that order, the antimilitaristic WILPF also belonged to the fringes, rather than the centers, of international political power.

When women of WILPF assembled in their first International Congress after the war, held in Luxembourg in 1946, their faith in liberal values was shaken but not defeated. The US section, which, despite its losses, had come out of the war as the largest and strongest section of WILPF, remained guided by a progressivist ideology, characterized by "a commitment to democracy, faith in scientific 'truth,' a concern for morality and social justice, and an unswerving belief in progress and the efficacy of education" (Foster 1995: 6). On the one hand, progressivist ideology implied a moral vision of the ideal society that defied social, political, and economic hierarchies. On the other, as a modern ideology, progressivism posited a trajectory of progress from uncivilized, ignorant, irrational states of being to the reign of logic, reason, and science, which would ultimately bring about human well-being.

Members of the European sections were no less convinced of the necessity, if not inevitability, of such a transformation than were their US counterparts. The women of WILPF remained convinced that humanity's worst instincts, which were the ultimate cause of war, could be tamed and controlled by a system of (liberal democratic) international laws: They valued deliberation as the means to achieve agreements based on rational arguments. They also stressed the principle of equality between states as the basis for organizing international institutions and laws. While they felt that the ideal move toward world government demanded limits to national sovereignty, they accepted (however, not enthusiastically) the nation-state as the main actor in international relations and the UN as the best avenue for the creation of a legal system that would make the existence of national armaments ob-

solete. These beliefs guided their positions on nuclear and non-nuclear disarmament, but were gradually and radically transformed during the course of the following thirty years. In the next section I outline the scope and nature of these transformations.

### **Liberal Peace v. Economic Restructuring**

For the first decade and a half after 1945, WILPF's peace ideology reflected its origins in the progressive era, and rested on the belief "that international norms and institutions had to possess the capacity to control, in addition to reform, states' war-prone tendencies" (Lynch 1999: 56). At this time WILPF's members were convinced that laws and rational reasoning would lead to the elimination of the war system, thus of states' weapons' arsenals. This position was exemplified by a 1963 widely-circulated report, in which the US Section (at the time led by Quaker pacifist Dorothy Hutchinson) interpreted Jane Addams' thought as follows:

Jane Addams and the other founders of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom ... exemplified and preached reconciliation and compassion but they never assumed that the world community was ready wholly to substitute these for war as a method for settling international disputes, maintaining order, and promoting human welfare. Their political proposals envisaged, not love, but law as the substitute for war. ... According to their analysis, wars are caused by the fact that there is no other means to settle international disputes or bring about necessary changes in the international status quo and war can be prevented only by the creation of 'an international government able to make the necessary political and economic changes' (WILPF US Section 1963: 1).

Therefore, liberal democratic laws and enforcement mechanisms would bring about peace, by minimizing the need to go to war. In the absence of a necessity for war, states would find it pointless to build up arms arsenals. Disarmament would necessarily follow the establishment of "a system of clearly defined world law and enforcement upon the individual offender" (WILPF US Section 1963: 13).

Partly as a consequence of the Red Scare that dominated the 1950s West, WILPF in this period was very reluctant to focus on economic arguments in defense of disarmament. This reluctance is exemplified by the animated discussions around the third paragraph of the WILPF's statement of aims which, since 1934 had referred to "the present system of exploitation, privilege and profit" as an obstacle to "lasting peace and true freedom" (WILPF 1934: 2). While a final agreement on all changes was not reached until 1959, it was clear during the 1950s that many sections were concerned that such an explicit reference to capitalism "suggest[ed] a party programme" (WILPF 1950: 1). The 1959 amendment eliminated from the statement of aims all economic references except for a general expression of hope in a future system "under which men and women may live in peace and justice free from the fear of war and of want" (WILPF 1959a: 1), in a likely intentional reference to the famous President Roosevelt's 1941 Four Freedoms message to the US Congress (Roosevelt 1941). References to a "system of exploitation and profit" would not return to the constitution until the early 1980s.

In another example of the relevance of international law for WILPF's ideas about disarmament, the 1952 International Executive Committee stated its support for:

The use and development of international law, engendering respect for the decisions of impartial tribunals so that law may grow to replace methods of violence, in international as in national conflicts (WILPF IEC 1952: 2).

In the early part of the period in question, WILPF also focused on advocating the establishment of a UN-based "machinery for political settlement" of conflicts as a "reliable alternative to the use of violence" (WILPF 1959b: 1). While it followed closely all arms reduction negotiations, it stressed the need for "the establishment of a truly international constabulary based upon international law, which would develop the trust and confidence needed for healthy world reconstruction" (WILPF IEC 1948: 4).

In essence, WILPF in this period believed that disarmament would *follow* peace, which in turn would be established with the help of a set of laws and consensual agreements among states. These positions partially, but in very important ways, embodied liberal modern and progressive-era ideas about the role of states and international institutions to bring about peace, with all the gendered underpinnings embedded in these ideas.

Gradually, however, WILPF started thinking of disarmament as a prerequisite of peace because it would follow the establishment of a human-needs-based and just economic order. The shift became more evident starting in the later part of the 1960s, although signs of incipient changes can be seen in various documents throughout these decades. WILPF gradually worked its way out of the constraints posed by the liberal hegemonic order while not entirely abandoning the liberal principles that guided it. Some examples of this shift are seen in the 1972 IEC meeting, and more strongly in the 1974 International Congress, which approved resolutions that indicate that, by that time, the WILPF had radically reassessed its position toward the relationship between disarmament and peace. These resolutions represented a switch in emphasis from a reliance on and faith in international law, arrived at through voluntary agreements, to a more sustained critique of the international economic system. They reflected an increased skepticism toward the rules of liberal democracy. This skepticism led them to contest the idea that international laws based on voluntary consent and rational deliberation would be enough to guarantee disarmament. It led them to view peace as both the result of international mechanisms and machinery for the peaceful resolution of conflicts (these initiatives were never abandoned) and most fundamentally as the outcome of a restructuring of an international economic system, which provoked, fueled and perpetuated a state of constant violence. WILPF had by this time initiated a radical reassessment of the role of power in international relations: by shifting its focus on the recognition of the power inherent in a "system of exploitation" WILPF was also starting to doubt that principles of liberal democracy and democratic deliberation were in themselves sufficient to bring about peace, in the context of unequal power relations. Moreover, the WILPF had begun to critique those elements of the interna-

tional system (including laws and agreements) that made impossible or negated, in WILPF's views, human obligations to each other.

Divisions on these issues stated to manifest themselves early in the 1960s. In 1961 for example WILPF began a "serious study of the economic and social aspects of disarmament" (WILPF IEC 1961: 3). While this initiative was borne out of the concern that disarmament would lead to unemployment (Baer 1955: 8-9), it also reflected the extent to which WILPF was willing to inquire into how disarmament and the economy interacted at different levels. In the late 1960s discussions centered on whether it was the absence of a legal and political structure for the solution of conflicts that caused the need to arm or whether the arms themselves, and the market that produced them, were the origins of violent conflict. These issues were intensely and openly debated within national sections, as they had been in the 1930s. The Italian section, for example, was divided between those who believed that wars and the necessity for arming were fostered by the absence of legal and political mechanisms to peacefully solve disputes among states and those who believed that "the necessity to market the arms incessantly produced by the industries" caused and fed wars (Della Seta 1968: 7).

By 1966 WILPF had recognized the existence of powerful economic interests behind the urge to arm, but it was not yet ready to let go of its belief that rational deliberation and education could convince political and economic leaders of the fact that disarmament was in everyone's interest. In 1966 another IEC resolution condemned "military-industrial interests'" blockage of disarmament negotiations and urged the drafting of a UN Convention against the export of arms across borders (WILPF IEC 1966: 4). The IEC also considered the possibility of "convince[ing] industrialists that disarmament was not to their disadvantage" (WILPF IEC 1966: 5).

Gertrude Baer had closely followed most UN-sponsored disarmament talks and negotiations on behalf of WILPF. In 1972 she expressed frustration and skepticism toward public declarations of goodwill and interstate agreements (specifically the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty I) as public displays with little practical effectiveness, and a dissatisfaction with limited-objective agreements that she felt hampered, rather than facilitated, what WILPF had advocated since its birth: universal and total disarmament. Further, she put forward her realization that international politics could not be separated from "certain world-wide industrial monopolies, which control military research, development and policy" (Baer 1972: 2).

WILPF methods for political work as well gradually changed: while in the first decade after the war WILPF focused its work on UN advocacy and refrained from participating in international coalitions or other mass actions with other NGOs; in the 1960s and 1970s, it organized and participated in various citizens' actions (including Women Strike for Peace for example), publishing material, and conducting research on military expenditures and the trade-offs between the military budget and human needs.

### Science as Savior v. Science as Political

The belief in logical reasoning and an international system of law went hand in hand with a distinctly modern belief in science and rationality. The WILPF of the two immediate post-war decades believed that reason and science would ultimately show people and world leaders alike that there was no way other than disarmament, because the rational, reasonable, and scientifically proven way to avoid wars was to get rid of the instruments of war. Between the end of World War II and the mid-1960s, WILPF remained convinced that the US, the USSR and other states could willingly let go of power politics, if only they let themselves be guided by rationality. WILPF didn't deny the existence of power politics and Cold War machinations; rather, they believed that rational thought could lead leaders of all countries to voluntarily consent to limitations of sovereign rights in the name of an obligation to save humanity from war.

Rationality and rule of law were found to be antithetical to the existing system based on irrationality and fear. A statement by the International Executive Committee in 1957 stated:

We do believe that it is unrealistic to expect fear of weapons to prevent their use, for there is ample evidence that we can develop immunity to fear and horror. But fear and peace cancel each other out. There cannot be peace, freedom and security where there is fear and horror (WILPF IEC 1957: 20).

WILPF believed that, while fear ruled contemporary policies toward disarmament, rationality and the “more civilised weapons of the mind” could bring about the willingness to “find ways and means of discussing their differences as rational beings” (WILPF IEC 1957: 21). WILPF shared with other peace movements of the time (Welsh 2000: 261; Wittner 1993; Wittner 1997), the sense that the system of security based on fear and power politics was obsolete. Gertrude Baer at the time Secretary General of WILPF said in 1956:

Modern scientific warfare has made it obvious that the concepts and doctrines of security hitherto existing have become utterly obsolete and that new measures are urgently required – measures as bold and unparalleled as the evil design of making the fantastic progress in science and technical skill serve wholesale diabolic destruction (Baer 1956: 3).

This statement reflected a trust in the scientific endeavor, which was corrupted by “evil design” but in itself was “fantastic” and ultimately good. But it also reflected a liberal modern belief in reason as the antithesis of, and superior to emotion. Many feminists have observed that this is a profoundly gendered false dichotomy: because emotion has been historically associated with women and reason with men, this dichotomy has been a foundational aspect of hierarchical social relations between men and women (James 1997; Prokhovnik 2002; Tickner 1992; Harding 1986; Keller 1982; Keller and Longino 1996).

As for policies, in 1946 WILPF passed a resolution on atomic energy, which called for destruction of all atomic bombs, the need for international control and creation of a civilian “Atomic Development Authority” with complete control over supply of nuclear material and “directing all production for civilian purposes only,



controlling power development and research activities, and encouraging the beneficial uses of atomic energy, especially in the healing of diseases and in industrial development” (WILPF 1946: 198-199). In 1948 WILPF supported the 1946 United Nations General Assembly’s resolution calling for the establishment of international control of atomic agency to ensure that it be used for peaceful purposes (WILPF 1948: 4). In 1957 again WILPF’s Executive Committee reiterated its confidence in the possibility of using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, provided that it was put under international control. WILPF’s appeals to the objectivity and political neutrality of science and to the power of rationality and logical reasoning to lead to disarmament were inscribed in a distinctly modern and distinctly liberal outlook which, as shown earlier, was grounded in specific gender assumptions and dichotomies.

In the second part of these three decades, WILPF’s development of an economic critique of the arms race was paralleled by a reversal of WILPF’s support of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. This reversal was made possible by an increasing skepticism toward the supposed ‘neutrality’ of science. In fact, references to scientists and ‘experts’ as the ‘saviors’ of humanity disappear almost entirely from WILPF’s documents of the 1970s.

Again in this case, there had been many occasions on which dissenting opinions had emerged in internal WILPF debates on the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes. Gertrud Woker, a leading Swiss authority on chemical and biological warfare, had been leading WILPF’s efforts “against the misappropriation of science for military purposes since 1924” (Bussey and Tim 1980). In 1957, as head of the Committee against Scientific Warfare, she convinced the IEC to issue a resolution condemning “those who profit from the war industry” and asking that governments

in all circumstances, even in relation to the “peaceful uses of atomic energy,” . . . consider the life and health of the peoples above the economic advantages and profit interests of a reactor industry which may develop without any such inhibitions (WILPF IEC 1957: 3).

The resolution further advocated the exploration of alternative sources of energy, other than nuclear. Though worded more mildly than the resolutions of the late 1960s and especially of the 1970s, the statement is indicative of WILPF’s ongoing reflections on the political economy of nuclear energy and the potential dangers of nuclear science.

### **Growing Relevance of Feminism and Gender Analysis**

While early on WILPF failed to see gender and feminism as relevant to disarmament questions, it increasingly offered a feminist critique of the arms race in the second part of the three decades under analysis. In the 1940s and continuing in the 1950s WILPF rarely, if ever, entertained discussions on the relationship between women and peace. While it worked on women’s rights and equal representation at the UN, for example, feminist-inspired reflections on disarmament, peace and gender were notably absent from WILPF documents of the first two decades after the war. This absence partly reflected the lack of input from a feminist

movement that in those years was rather dormant in much of the western world (Foster 1989: 32).

In the mid-1970s in particular WILPF started to systematically address women's contribution to peace work and disarmament issues and discuss whether or not feminism and militarism were compatible projects. Such debates, of course, have occupied feminists since the late nineteenth century, if not earlier, and have been inscribed in larger and older feminist conversations about whether, to what extent, how, and with what consequences women are like men or different from them.

For WILPF of the 1970s women had the obligation of active political participation and a special interest in questions of peace. For instance, Swedish member Aja Selander, addressing the Conference of Women's Organizations on European Cooperation and Security in 1973, proclaimed,

Our task as European women is not only to work for equality and development. We should not hesitate to deal with all political questions that have impact on the future of mankind (Selander 1973: 2).

Not only did women possess a special obligation toward peace. They also were uniquely apt at peace work: "Women have ways of overcoming difficulties and reaching agreement, and . . . women show understanding and tolerance" (Pax et Libertas 1974: 22). In 1975 Kay Camp, president of WILPF from the US section, proposed the inclusion of the following statement in the UN Plan of Action for the International Women's Year:

Equality is impossible and development gravely hampered in a world wrecked by wars and impoverished by preparation for war. In our day, women are increasingly involved in warfare and increasingly victimized by it. The peril and cost of militarism must be ended. Likewise, racism and sexism on which militarism thrives must go (Pax et Libertas 1975: 3).

Camp, and with her much of WILPF, had undertaken a critique of militarism as antithetical to feminism and women's equality, and as fueled by other harmful and related forms of social inequality.

The 1960s and 1970s, as I mentioned earlier, also saw the recommitment to concerted actions with peace and women's NGOs and movements, including women and organizations from Eastern Europe (the Women's International Democratic Federation, for example) and other countries of the Soviet bloc, and the more deliberate and consistent use of direct protest as a form of political action. While these actions had been marginal to WILPF's activities in earlier postwar years, they became increasingly prevalent. WILPF also helped launch a series of disarmament campaigns and meetings which focused on women's role in disarmament and peace. In 1975, the International Executive Committee, for example, decided to undertake disarmament actions on International Women's Day.

A number of changes in the international context of course coincided with changes in the WILPF: the resurgence of the feminist movement, the relaxation of the Red Scare, the decolonization movement, and the emergence of neoliberal ideology. But there were changes internal to the WILPF also (see Confortini 2012). These internal developments opened WILPF to wider participation in the feminist, decolonization, anti-racist, movements more broadly, and thus to the influence of these movements. In other words, these new initiatives were not simply the conse-

quence of WILPF's new thinking on disarmament. Rather, they made new thinking possible by delivering contacts with outside critics and political allies.

### Conclusion

In this article I have traced important changes in WILPF's policies against the research, development, production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear and other armaments during the first thirty years after World War II. I have shown that WILPF's views on the causes of war, militarization, the arms buildup, and their elimination went through two distinct phases, which reflected different understandings of peace. During the first phase, WILPF believed that disarmament would follow peace. This, in turn, would be established with the help of a set of rational laws and consensual agreements among states that would make the resort to war unnecessary. Science and technology, guided by rationality and reason, had the ability to guide humanity toward progress and tame nuclear energy for peaceful uses. Though it was important to have an avenue like WILPF where women could speak out on matters of international politics and in favor of disarmament, peace, and the rational, peaceful utilization of nuclear energy, WILPF thought that women had no special knowledge or special interest in peace. These positions reflected liberal modern understandings about the nature of law and science and WILPF's adherence to the normative and ideological framework that was shaping the creation of the postwar international order. WILPF gradually worked its way out of these constraints while not entirely abandoning the liberal principles that guided it. So, in the second phase, the organization came to understand peace as an outcome of disarmament, which would follow the establishment of a just economic order. Its economic critique of the international system brought WILPF to question the profit-driven nuclear and military industries as inextricably linked to weapons production. Finally, WILPF came to see disarmament and a just economy to be of special interest to women; it began to view peace work as a task for which women had developed useful skills, and it started to understand militarism and the arms race as incompatible with the goals and principles of feminism as a political movement for people's equality and well-being and, ultimately, for peace.

After 1975, WILPF continued and in fact intensified its feminist analysis of disarmament. The early 1980s were marked by the proliferation of women's and feminist antimilitarist movements for disarmament primarily (but not exclusively) in the west (Liddington 1991; Foster 1989: 82-94). This "politics of protest" was expressed in many forms of feminist nonviolent action, often inspired by the ecofeminism of the 1980s (Stienstra 2000: 77; Alonso 1993: 245-248). A peculiar manifestation of feminist nonviolence were the peace encampments, such as the ones in Greenham Common (England), Seneca, New York (where the US section of WILPF bought a farm to support the campers – Alonso 1993: 249), and Comiso (Sicily, Italy), where women camped for months protesting NATO missiles and bases in Europe and North America as well as nuclear arms more generally. In November 1981, in conjunction with other women's peace organizations, WILPF sponsored a meeting in Amsterdam called "Women of Europe in Action for Peace"

that saw women from twenty-five countries talk together about nuclear war and détente (Foster 1989). The Stop the Arms Race (STAR) campaign was another extremely popular WILPF initiative that involved most WILPF sections across the world. Started on International Women's Day in 1982 under the slogan "One million women can stop the arms race. Be one in a million," its purpose was to collect women's signatures against nuclear weapons development and testing and in support of UN disarmament efforts (Alonso 1993: 229). Other than these general aims, the petition drive was shaped differently in each country and adapted to regional and local needs and demands. For example, the Sri Lankan section included an appeal against US bases in the Indian Ocean, while the British section protested the stationing of nuclear submarines in their harbors (Foster 1989: 86). One million signatures were delivered to NATO in Brussels one year from the launch of the campaign (Alonso 1993: 229).

WILPF also helped organize one of the largest peace demonstrations ever held in the United States: Between 750,000 and 1 million people marched to and rallied in New York's Central Park in occasion of the UN General Assembly's Second Special Session on Disarmament (SSDII) in June 1982. The march was accompanied by a month-long series of events, which included demonstrations and sit-ins in front of the embassies of major nuclear powers, cultural events, concerts, and lectures (Foster 1989: 87; Alonso 1993: 229-230). WILPF sponsored two women's peace conferences shortly before the SSDII meeting (Foster 1989: 88). Out of one of these meetings, organized by WILPF US and the American Friends' Service Committee, came the idea of the Seneca Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice mentioned above (Alonso 1993: 247-249). In all these actions, WILPF's main message was not only one of disarmament but one that stressed the human and environmental costs of the development, testing, and deployment of nuclear and other types of weapons.

In the summer of 1982 WILPF changed its statement of aims to a formulation critiquing the economic roots of the arms race and war, a reference that had been eliminated in 1959. Moreover, the 1983 International WILPF Congress in Göteborg issued a resolution that stated:

It is demonstrable that the arms race is a part of the larger issue of injustices in international economic relations, there being close links between disarmament and peace and the present crisis of development with a growing share of the world's resources going toward armaments rather than basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, etc." (WILPF n.d.).

The same international congress passed a resolution on the women's decade that acknowledged the responsibility of the North in perpetuating global inequalities at the expense of recognition for Third World women's agency (WILPF n.d.).

WILPF was also instrumental in bringing peace and disarmament to the UN Women's Conferences since the first one, held in Mexico City in 1975. It was thanks to WILPF that the 1985 Forward Looking Strategies from the Nairobi Conference, for example, explicitly identified armed conflict and the arms race as ob-

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<sup>2</sup> On this occasion, the Reagan administration denied over 300 visas to the US for applicants thought to be Soviet sympathizers, including a number of WILPF women (Foster 1989: 90).

stacles to the full participation of women in “international decision making with respect to peace and related issues,” hence to their full enjoyment of human rights (United Nations 1985). In turn, the growing synergy between WILPF and newer women’s groups nurtured the organization’s renewed emphasis on its prewar feminist roots (Foster 1989: 74-89).

Following Chernobyl, WILPF called for halt in nuclear power plants and the development of renewable energy technologies (WILPF n.d.). In 1990, it produced a document pointing to the effects of military activity on the environment, which was submitted as part of a statement by seventeen NGOs to the preparatory committee for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (WILPF 1991: 163). Among the first organizations to call for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (Meyer 1999: 113), in 1991 WILPF protested the failure to achieve one by calling, together with several other NGOs, for a “People Test Ban Treaty” (WILPF n.d.). In 1994, WILPF reluctantly renewed its support for the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT; though it decried its discriminatory character) but urged that the review conference scheduled for the next year call for a five-year extension in view of providing a deadline for complete disarmament.

While all of these initiatives were important precursors to WILPF’s participation in ICAN and its work to ban nuclear weapons, WILPF’s history on disarmament offers a lesson for feminist organizing more broadly. It highlights how even a feminist organization – or at least an organization that established itself as feminist since the beginning – can be informed by non-feminist principles, lest vigilance about methods as well as policies is not practiced consistently. At a time when feminism was “in abeyance” in the west, and radical politics was under attack, WILPF muted its critique of the world system and tamed its feminist message. As feminism is scapegoated and vilified today, therefore, WILPF’s history is a reminder to fight back – not to dilute our message to make it more palatable to the Zeitgeist of the day.

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