

**"Engendering Citizenship"**

**The Political Involvement of Women on Merseyside, 1890 - 1920**

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Frontispiece



**THE SUFFRAGISTS DREADNOUGHT.  
THE LAUNCHING OF THE "PATRICIA" FROM HOLLOWAY GAOL.**

..... How "Votes for Women" depicted the release of Liverpool suffragette

Patricia Woodlock from Holloway Gaol, May 1909.

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*Votes for Women.*

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

Birkenhead Women's Suffrage Society (BWSS).

British Socialist Party (BSP).

British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA).

Catholic Women's Suffrage Society (CWSS).

Church League for Women's Suffrage (CLWS).

Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA).

Fabian Society (FS).

Independent Labour Party (ILP).

Liverpool Council of Women Citizens (LCWC).

Labour Representation Committee (LRC).

Liverpool Trades Council (LTC).

Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society (LWSS).

Liverpool Workwomen's Society (LWS).

Men's League for Women's Suffrage (MLWS).

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

National Union of Women Workers (NUWW).

Scottish Women's Hospitals Association (SWHA).

Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

Society for Promoting Women's Trade Unions (SPWTU).

United Suffragists (US).

Votes for Women Fellowship (VFWF).

Women Citizens' Association (WCA).

Women's Freedom League (WFL).

Women's Industrial Council (WIC).

Women's Labour League (WLL).

Women's Liberal Association (WLA).

Women's Liberal Federation (WFL).

Women's National Liberal Association (WNLA).

Women's Party (WP).

Women's Provident and Protection League (WPPL).

Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

Women's Trade Union League (WTUL).

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis studies women's activities within various political organisations on Merseyside, between 1890 and 1920. It compares three models of political activity, developed from contemporary theories about women's political roles, with their practice as experienced by those women who sought political activity at a local level. Through examining a broad range of organisations from the women's sections of national political parties such as the Women's Liberal Federation, through to the various suffrage societies, the thesis will attempt to assess how successful the three models were at providing women with opportunities to participate in public politics, over both a short and a long-term basis. It will demonstrate how some of the models which appear woman-friendly in a national context, such as those developed within socialist parties, often failed to thrive at a local level, whilst others which have been considered too hierarchical, such as that of the WSPU, could be very different in a local context.

The following themes are explored: the relationship between political theory and its practice; the importance of suffrage to politically active women; the development of a gendered concept of citizenship in Britain; the growth of woman-centred political movements, and their apparent failure to survive beyond the First World War; the extent and importance of cross-organisational political participation by individuals.

The thesis uses the methodology of a local study to draw close comparisons between the practice of different organisations. It reassess the contribution of organisations such as the WLF and the smaller church suffrage groups to Edwardian politics. It argues that whilst certain gender-based political movements, notably the WSPU, achieved great

success in mobilising large numbers of women in the local area around a single-issue campaign, they did not succeed in altering local democratic structures, which continued to be controlled by issues such as party and class rather than gender.

# ENGENDERING CITIZENSHIP.

## THE POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN ON MERSEYSIDE

1890 - 1920

### INTRODUCTION

#### Section 1

In 1928, the veteran feminist Ray Strachey prefaced her history of the British women's movement, *The Cause*, with the observation that:

The sudden development of the personal, legal, political and social liberties of half the population of Great Britain within the space of eighty years....[has meant that] the true history of the Women's Movement is the whole history of the nineteenth century: nothing which occurred in those years could be irrelevant to the great social change which was going on.<sup>1</sup>

This "great social change" has been well documented by historians. Many volumes now cover women's successful challenges to the boundaries imposed upon them, concentrating either on individual women or their collective organisations.<sup>2</sup>

Initially these challenges had specific aims. The "personal" and "legal" liberties identified by Strachey were won through steady campaigns which improved women's legal status, and increased their opportunities within higher education and the medical and legal profession through removing existing boundaries. Such improvements are comparatively easy to chart, as they all involved alterations to existing laws or regulations. However, the second set of liberties which she cites, the "political and

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<sup>1</sup>Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, Virago, 1988 edition, first published 1928, p.5.

<sup>2</sup>For a full discussion of such things in a European context, see, for example, R. Bridenthal, C. Koonz and S. Stuart, *Becoming Visible, Women in European History*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin & Co, 1987; R. J. Evans, *Comrades and Sisters: Feminism, Socialism and Pacifism in Europe 1870 - 1945*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf, 1987; Christine Bolt, *The Women's Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

social" ones, provide problems for historians seeking to identify and assess their effects. There is no doubt that European women became more visible within the world of politics throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries<sup>3</sup>. The "Woman Question," as it became known, was widely discussed within European political parties as women developed their own spaces within them. Mass suffrage campaigns drew women into the public political arena. Yet it remains difficult to uncover exactly what if any alterations this increasing political participation brought to the majority of women's lives. This problem is augmented by the fact that whilst the leaders of political movements leave a noticeable mark on the pages of history, the motives and feelings of the majority of their organisations' members become lost. Thus an unrepresentative history is created which, as Anna Davin has pointed out, "will....reflect the general assumptions and concerns of the dominant group," in this case not of the white male ruling class but of national female political leaders.<sup>4</sup> Much of the history of women's political involvement has suffered from this phenomenon. Whilst the actions of pioneering figures such as Eleanor Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson or Margaret MacDonald remain well documented, less prominent activists are at best shadowy figures.

An additional problem within Britain, highlighted by Selma Leydesdorff is that "women's history has, from the start, been closely linked to labour history," hence placing more stress on women in the Labour movement than in other areas of the

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<sup>3</sup>Koonz & Bridenthal, *Becoming Visible*.

<sup>4</sup>Anna Davin, "Redressing the Balance or Transforming the Art? The British Experience," in S. Jay Kleinberg, ed, *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions in the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, London, Berg/Unesco, 1988, p.60.

political spectrum.<sup>5</sup> Such an approach can result in the creation of histories which celebrate the achievements of working-class and socialist women, but also construct them as a 'correct' model of female political involvement, which is presented as representative of all women. This negates the contributions toward the advancement of women's political liberty of many other women, middle-class or otherwise, active in the Liberal or Conservative parties. A good example of this is Jill Liddington and Jill Norris' pioneering work *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, which, as Christine Stansell put in her review, "[does] not admit the theoretical possibility that [labour men] were not simply *unenlightened* on the woman question, but actively *opposed* to women's interests."<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to overcome this, historians such as Olive Banks and Dale Spender who are not as closely descended from the socialist tradition as Liddington and Norris have moved the focus away from active women's personal political affiliations and the issues of class and party politics which divided them, writing from a less self-consciously socialist, more feminist perspective. Their work seeks to relocate all female political activists as being primarily feminist, concerned with advancing the cause of women above that of political parties. This trend can also be found in the work of non-feminist historians such as Brian Harrison, whose article in the *Historical Journal* explores the category of "Woman MPs." The fact that many of them did join political parties, and thus directed some of their campaigning energies against other women in opposing parties is given little consideration.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Selma Leydesdorff, "Politics, Identification and the Writing of Women's History," in A. Angerman, G. Binnema, A. Keunen, V. Poels and J. Zirkzee, eds, *Current Issues in Women's History*, London, Routledge, 1989, p.11.

<sup>6</sup>Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, Virago, 1978. Christine Stansell, "'One Hand Tied Behind Us' - Review Article," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1., Spring 1980, pp.65-75.

<sup>7</sup>Brian Harrison, "Women in a Men's House: The Women MPs 1919 - 1945," *Historical Journal*, 29, no. 3, 1986, pp.623-654.

I find both of these approaches equally problematic. Both place heavy emphasis on what they identify as the factors unifying early female political activists without seeking to locate them in any particular context. As a result, the concerns of all women involved in political campaigns are seen as being identical, and two oppositional 'correct' models for female political involvement are presented, women being either natural socialists, or political feminists independent of party. Neither affords much space to women who question or differ from these models, which are presented as dominant and typical. This problem was identified by Judith Walkowitz in 1980 when she worried that too little acknowledgement was given historically to the fact that "women inhabited many female worlds in the nineteenth century....their cultures were differentiated by class, race and other social divisions."<sup>8</sup> As a result, there was too little space given to discovering "what unites women for common action and what divides them."<sup>9</sup> In constructing this thesis, I am attempting to take this into account, and uncover both unifying and divisive factors within women's political involvement. My purpose is to present, through a close examination of the activities of the political organisations which recruited a female membership, a detailed picture of the breadth of political activity available to women in the Merseyside area between 1890 - 1920.

I am aware that there are problems with limiting a study to organisations where membership involved a formal act of enrolment. Much recent work has concentrated on the importance of informal networks in women's politics, which recognise, in the words of Catharine Hall, the "power that collectivities of women could have, whether

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<sup>8</sup>Christine Stansell, "'One Hand Tied Behind Us' - Review Article."

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

in friendship groups...or in informal....organisations."<sup>10</sup> Her work draws on Foucault's theorizations of the multiplicity of power relations, refuting the contention that power resides only in the state. However, whilst recognising the multiplicity of sites of power that women had to challenge in the period, I believe that those within formal political organisations provide us with valuable insights into women's *collective* strategies when faced with an organized, gender-based opposition in a way in which the individualism of informal networks cannot. For this reason, I have selected a definition of public political activity based on activity in the public sphere involving women in organisations where formal membership was a necessity. This includes bodies such as the School Boards and the Boards of Guardians, where women could stand independent of party, but had to undergo a formal election process, and engage in membership of these official bodies, but excludes areas such as community politics where no formal act of enrolment was required.

All writers of women's history must take Joan Kelly's point that women did not necessarily experience the world in the same way as men, or share their political concerns or methods, and that a different approach is sometimes required when fitting women into the historical picture.<sup>11</sup> Basing my work in an area where women work alongside men, sometimes in direct competition with them, allows these differences to be highlighted within an historical context.

Coming from a background in labour history, I began my research with the primary

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<sup>10</sup>Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, pp.14-15.

<sup>11</sup>See Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory; The Essays of Joan Kelly*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984.

concern of providing a class analysis of female political involvement which exposed what I saw as the major weaknesses in the more simplistic feminist analyses which stressed gender as the primary factor of unification amongst women of all backgrounds. However, since undertaking the project, I have become more aware of, and concerned with the ways in which women chose different political priorities at different times, and were able to move between issues of class and gender in ways which did not appear to be available to male activists. For this reason, I have spread my work from 1890 to 1920, enabling the full effects of both the struggle for the vote and the First World War to be considered.

## Section 2: Three Positions on 'The Woman Question'

The 'Woman Question' was widely discussed within European political parties, as women's activities within them increased.<sup>12</sup> New disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and scientific socialism were invoked in conjunction with older religious and medical thinking. The discourse widened as the 'Woman Question' became an ideological battle ground with positions ranging from those attempting to seek even greater equality for women through to those which advocated a regression of this trend. Newspapers and weekly journals covered the question, as did the papers of political parties and trade unions. Party and union conferences debated the role of women both within their organisations and within society. Popular culture reflected and expanded the debate, with plays, novels, and music hall songs all seeking to define what women's place should be. From the many different positions available, I have selected three for closer examination: the concept of 'separate spheres'; the 'sex equals class' or socialist

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<sup>12</sup>This construction was in common use at the time. See Eleanor Marx Aveling, "The Woman Question," *The Westminster Review*, New Series, LXIX, January 1886, pp.207-222. For further examination of its development in a European context, see Bridenthal, Koonz & Stuart, *Becoming Visible*.

analogy; and the later 'sex-class' interpretation. I have selected these three, as although they do present some common features, they also represent conflicting ideologies as to the purpose and shape of political activity for women, and hence fostered a variety of different models of female political organisation. However, apart from providing a brief outline of the characteristics of each of these ideologies, my thesis will not concentrate on outlines or interpretations of the broader discourse which surrounded them. This is because I am more concerned with discovering the implications these ideologies had on the range of organisations which became available to women seeking public political access than on chronicling the debate they fostered amongst feminists and anti-feminists alike. There is an important question here as to the extent to which ideology actually influences political practice. In an attempt to explain this relationship in terms of the way ideology influences society, Philippa Levine has commented:

The true power of ideology might be understood....as a psychological one....ideology [is] the means, the process by which existing power relations are made to appear not simply the best, but also the *natural* social formation.<sup>13</sup>

I would agree that, in some cases, ideology is used to bolster existing power relations. However, it must also be stressed that, within political organisations, the power of ideology is not merely psychological. Ideologies influence theoretical debates, which in turn prescribe the organisational practices of these groups. Mary Poovey's influential work, *Uneven Developments* recognises this in its contention that:

Ideologies....are given concrete form in the practices and social institutions that govern people's social relations and....constitute both the experience of social relations and the nature of subjectivity.<sup>14</sup>

I wish to explore this relationship between ideology and practice in more detail, showing

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<sup>13</sup>Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, London, Hutchinson, 1987, p.13.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, London, Virago, 1989, p.3.

how the three ideologies I have selected directly influenced the range of organisations available to Merseyside women across the political spectrum by predetermining the types of national organisation available from which local branches would be formed. By tracing their incarnations within various local branches of political organisations, I will also attempt to explore the extent to which seemingly contradictory ideologies could merge together to construct political practice.

### Section 2.i: Separate Spheres

Chronologically, 'separate spheres' was the first of the three ideologies to develop. It rested on a recognition and acceptance of an essential difference in the natures of men and women which was biologically governed, therefore unalterable, and predetermined the roles which men and women should play in a civilised (i.e. Westernised) society. Man was assigned an active role in the public sphere, whilst woman, controlled by the biological urge to bear and protect children, remained passive in the safety of the home. Alterations to this state thwarted nature, and would bring chaos to society.

This ideology was in its most fluid state of construction between 1790 and 1850. Within Europe and America, it rested on material necessity. Carroll Smith Rosenberg has found that in America;

women and men had to re-form their senses of self in response to radical economic and institutional transformations....to distinguish themselves from the older mercantile artisan and agrarian groups to which they had belonged....They did so gradually, through the construction of elaborate etiquettes and metaphoric 'discourses.'<sup>15</sup>

So constructing and maintaining a social identity became essential to the new middle-

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<sup>15</sup>Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Writing History: Language, Class and Gender," in Teresa de Laurentis, ed, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, London, Macmillan, 1988.

classes. Nowhere was this more marked than within the middle-class home, as home and workplace became increasingly physically separate. Whilst work occurred in towns, increasingly seen as harbourers of all manner of vice including radicalism, the home could be reconstructed as a safe haven. The allocation of the domestic sphere to women coincided with the trend towards domestic living.<sup>16</sup>

However, although the increasing links between women and domesticity co-incided with the separation between home and work, this physical separation was not the sole reason for women's withdrawal into the private sphere. Catherine Hall points out that whilst for some occupations separation was inevitable, with other such as medicine it did not occur. Also as the period advanced, trends in education increased separation in some trades as women simply lacked the knowledge to participate on equal terms with men.<sup>17</sup> Other ideological factors were clearly at play at this stage, with results as concrete as those of physical relocation. It was the permeating nature of such factors which allowed these ideologies to spread throughout all layers of Victorian society, thus presenting the passive woman as the ideal for all classes.

As a subordinate role for women was seen as vital to the continued success of middle-class and nation, a further paradox arose which had important organisational implications for women. Wives were now the guardians of family morality. Without their efforts, the family so crucial to the maintenance of middle-class power could not survive. So women became agents of control over the morality of society. Their role was no longer

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<sup>16</sup>For a fuller discussion of issues around the debate on women and domesticity in early nineteenth century Britain, see Chapter Six, "'The Nursery of Virtue' - Domestic Ideology and the Middle Class," in Leonore Davidoff & Catharine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780 - 1850*, London, Hutchinson, 1987.

<sup>17</sup>Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p.100.

supportive, secondary and passive, but was of equal importance to that of men, presented as active within the female sphere. This concept of women's role as 'equal but different' allowed separate spheres ideology to co-exist alongside claims of liberal individualism which increased throughout the nineteenth century. Deborah Valenze claims that "the doctrine of separate spheres was based on a liberal interpretation of the place of women," hence leaving working-class women most oppressed by its tenets.<sup>18</sup>

Middle-class women used separate spheres ideology to justify a role for themselves which was far from inactive. Mrs Ellis, a well known writer of prescriptive literature around the theme, explained how lack of public political activity did not necessarily have to equal total passivity for women, if "as a wife, a woman [placed] herself, rather than risk[ed] being placed, in a secondary position."<sup>19</sup> Large numbers of women began to make careers for themselves writing similar tomes aimed at other women. The irony of their position is clear: only by being in a position to avoid domestic responsibility themselves, many of these writers being single or childless, or with servants, were they able to write at such length on the necessity of female domesticity to the nation.

From providing opportunities for individual women to move into public life in this way, the ideology of separate spheres began to be used to justify models of political organisation which allowed women to enter the public sphere in greater numbers. They stressed that in doing so they were concerned with extending their special influence on the life of the whole nation. Pat Thane has explained that:

An important characteristic of many of the women who sought to promote

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<sup>18</sup>Deborah Valenze, "Cottage Religion and the Politics of Survival," in Jane Rendall, ed, *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800 - 1914*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, p.54.

<sup>19</sup>S. J. Ellis, quoted in Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.183.

women's causes in this period was their acceptance of such essential elements of the ideology of separate spheres and their determined reinterpretation of it as a basis from which to promote the notion of *female superiority*.<sup>20</sup>

Initially, superiority was demonstrated in single issue campaigns such as that around the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts where Josephine Butler turned the ideological tables on Victorian Patriarchy, arguing that men;

should, in fact, accept the moral lead of women....take *seriously* the rhetoric about woman's moral superiority and her role as man's guide towards a more spiritual existence.<sup>21</sup>

There was obviously a massive paradox to be overcome by women who attempted to justify their entry into the public political sphere by means of the theories of separate spheres which stressed their unsuitability for this area. Thus, they sought access to areas where their special qualities gave them an advantage over men. For many Victorian women, philanthropic work provided this point of entry, followed by local government work. Local government, its budget-based economics presented as identical to those involved in running a large household, provided the next logical step.

Hence the ideology of separate spheres fostered the development of a variety of models of political organisation for women. They held in common an acceptance of an essential biological difference between men and women, which facilitated the formation of cross-class alliances such as those which formed within the women's trade union movement where all women were perceived as having common interests transcending class differences. The Merseyside work of Jeannie Mole, wealthy socialist benefactress of many causes including the early unionisation of Liverpool's women workers, fits well

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<sup>20</sup>Pat Thane, "Late Victorian Women," in T. R. Gourvish and A. O'Day, eds, *Later Victorian Britain, 1867 - 1900*, London, Macmillan, 1988, p.186.

<sup>21</sup>Paraphrased by Thane, *ibid*, p.186.

into this pattern. However, the models which developed on Merseyside were rarely cross-political. Conservative women's organisations drew their inspiration from the rhetoric of separate spheres, arguing that all women had a common interest in being, and indeed by their very nature, were, automatically Conservatives, by nature opposing the immorality of radicalism.<sup>22</sup> Simultaneously, socialist women claimed that the essential caring side of female nature made women automatic socialists, whilst the Women's Liberal Federation based its election work on the claim that its members were ideally suited to public life on the poor law boards. The influence of the separate spheres ideology appears the most deeply rooted of the three positions I have identified, and enjoyed the greatest degree of longevity. Hence, having been vital to the model of organisation enjoyed by women trade unionists on Merseyside in the 1890s, it also underlies women's relief work during World War One.

#### Section 2.ii: The Socialist Model

The second of these interpretations, the sex/class analogy, developed in the late nineteenth century, and decided the models of political organisation made available to socialist women within European socialist parties. For this reason, I will refer to it as the socialist model. As Richard Evans has outlined, socialism and feminism were in strong conflict throughout Europe in the period leading up to the First World War.

Indeed;

of all the divisions within the camp of many women...who actively supported the idea of women's liberation, the deepest, the most obvious and the most long lasting was the division between feminists and socialists.<sup>23</sup>

Many socialists, male and female, were suspicious of the growth of feminism, which

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<sup>22</sup>See Gilbert Samuel, "Women's Franchise: A Safeguard Against Socialism," *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 3, May 1910, pp.30 - 31.

<sup>23</sup>Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, p.3.

they saw as an ideology which would only benefit bourgeois women in the long term, whilst having the short term disadvantage of turning working-class women away from socialism. Some hard line socialists feared "that amalgam of intriguing, naive, deranged and hysterical woman which is bourgeois feminism."<sup>24</sup> Others were more explicit in outlining the reasons underlying their objections, such as this anonymous correspondent to the British Social Democratic Federation's newspaper, *Justice* in 1896, who explained:

My only objection to the so called 'Woman Question' [is] that it threaten[s] a division in our ranks by directing the attention of women from the real enemy, Capitalism, to an imaginary enemy, an abstract 'brute man.'<sup>25</sup>

However, there was still pressure from within the European socialist movement to develop a position on the woman question. One was initially outlined in two books, August Bebel's *Women in the Past, Present and Future* (1894), and Frederick Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), which rapidly became established as the key socialist texts in this area.

Bebel's text was not immediately published in an English edition, although its contents were made available for discussion for the English speaking socialist parties through the works of Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling in the *Westminster Review*.<sup>26</sup> However, the book had tremendous popular appeal in Germany, and a report in the *Clarion* shows it enjoying popularity amongst Liverpool's socialists by the 1890s.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>The view of French socialist Louise Caumoneau, quoted by Charles Sowerwine in *Sisters or Citizens? Women and Socialism in France since 1876*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.88.

<sup>25</sup>Anon, *Justice*, 16th May 1896.

<sup>26</sup>Marx Aveling, "The Woman Question."

<sup>27</sup>*The Clarion*, 19th October 1895. Also, letter from Moira Anderson to Joseph Edwards, Liverpool Fabian Society, 3rd February 1894, mentioning her correspondence with Bebel about his book. Joseph

No comparable statistics exist for Engels' work, although it had reached its fourth edition by 1891. Both texts drew heavily on new anthropological data to provide a materialist interpretation of women's oppression, tracing how it emerged alongside the development of class society, and increased as class divisions became more rigid.

Stressing that class oppression and women's oppression held common origins allowed the European socialist movement to develop a position on the woman question which was not incompatible with its emphasis on class as the primary contradiction within society. The oppression of women had historical origins, this argued, therefore it would have historical resolution. However, several prominent European socialists developed this theory further, to ensure that it did not result in women being told to wait until after the revolution before their demands could be met. European socialist parties began to make policy on issues which had previously been dismissed as feminist., and a detraction from the class struggle. Women's suffrage, for example, was adopted as policy by the French socialist Party in 1879. Other European parties followed, and the Second International committed all member parties to campaign for equal suffrage in 1900. European socialism's increasingly positive stance on women is evidenced by the adoption of an International Women's Day in 1911, following the suggestion of Clara Zetkin.

The debate on positions to be taken by socialists on the woman question had direct implications for the types of organisations which European socialist parties felt able to offer their women members. As has been stressed, their original emphasis was that women should fight side by side with men of their own class in the struggle for

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Edwards Papers, Liverpool Record Office.

socialism. However, with developing debates came a recognition that there was a difference between the oppression suffered by women and that suffered by men under capitalism. Engels had outlined woman's double oppression within the family where "[man] is the bourgeois, [and] woman represents the proletariat."<sup>28</sup> Socialists such as Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai and Dora Montefiore began to press for women's demands to be fought for as short term reforms. Zetkin's position especially shows the implications this had on organisation as she moved from a position which;

emphasized the economic struggle of women workers almost to the exclusion of any general struggle for women's rights [to viewing] civil rights for women in more positive terms *as essential preconditions for proletarian woman's full and equal participation in the class struggle*. It was necessary, she said, to erect new barriers against the exploitation of proletarian women....by gaining equal civil rights, [they] would be drawn into the class struggle through politicization.<sup>29</sup>

The direct result of this debate was the organisation of separate women's sections within the major European Socialist Parties.<sup>30</sup> These provided a separate space where women could organise their own campaigns around issues which they had selected, but from a socialist perspective. In 1907, the Second International formed its own Women's International which henceforth met during the International's congresses. Although they had varying degrees of status within, and influence on their various member parties, they

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<sup>28</sup>F. Engels, *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Chicago, Charles H. Kerr, 1902 edition, first published 1884, p.89.

<sup>29</sup>Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, p. 187, my italics. This position, which recognised the relevance of some feminist demands for working-class women, and wished to find a means to meet them within a socialist context, was shared by other European socialist women. See, for example, chapters on Kollontai, Sylvia Pankhurst and Madeleine Pelletier in J. Slaughter and R. Kern, (eds), *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism and the Problems Faced by Political Women 1880 to the Present*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1981, or Dora Montefiore, *The Position of Women in the Socialist Movement*, London, Twentieth Century Press, 1909.

<sup>30</sup>For a full discussion of the forms, sizes and relative successes of these parties, see C. Sowerwine, "The Socialist Women's Movement from 1850 to 1940," in Bridenthal, Koonz & Stuart, eds, *Becoming Visible*.

represent an important step forward for the politicization of working-class women. However, although gender-focused in that they were closed to male socialists, they retained a fierce class perspective. There was no question of cross-class collaboration with middle-and upper class women, except in cases where they as individuals were willing to become socialists. Clara Zetkin explicitly stated that in Germany, "the cause of the bourgeois woman has also become the cause of social democracy," and not vice versa.<sup>31</sup> Socialism declared that women's oppression and class oppression held common origins, and hence would have a common solution. So within the socialist women's sections, gender was allowed short-term priority within a woman-centred space, but only with a view to drawing more women into the class struggle where class alliances dominated. Reforms such as suffrage could be demanded, but only as they would politicize working-class women, drawing them to socialism. Hence a model of female political involvement developed which recognised differences between women's and men's oppression, but located the centre for women's struggle firmly within the wider working-class and socialist movements. In some instances the model did not even provide separate spaces for women, as it was felt that even these could offer a detraction from the class struggle. Within the Independent Labour Party, women never achieved a separate women's section, although its members could join the Women's Labour League from 1906. The Social Democratic Federation did form separate women's circles. On Merseyside, the ILP recruited many women whose access to the public political sphere was only obtained on those occasions when they successfully competed with men for it. A local branch of the WLL only established itself successfully in the inter-war period, whilst the local SDF was never large enough to support a women's circle.

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<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, p.28.

### Section 2.iii: Women as a 'Sex Class'

Chronologically, the most recent of the three ideologies to develop was that which identified women's position within society as being that of a 'sex-class'. This developed an analysis of women's oppression and its solution based on the understanding that all women formed a single class and shared a common oppression. Although this ideology was never formulated as explicitly as that of separate spheres, its existence and progress can be easily traced from the early writings of feminists within the women's suffrage movement, especially in the Women's Social and Political Union, through to the writings of many prominent feminist theoreticians today.<sup>32</sup> Its legacy is well expressed by Elizabeth Sarah, who sees as central to suffrage ideology;

[the] insistence on seeing *men* as the enemy and an autonomous feminist movement as fundamental to the challenge to male power.

She insists that:

Contemporary feminists must recognise that we have a responsibility to our foremothers....to reclaim a feminist tradition of autonomous thought and practice.<sup>33</sup>

The ideology of women as a class as opposed to a group or caste drew important elements from the discourses surrounding both the ideology of separate spheres, and the socialist model. From separate spheres came the principle of certain factors being common to all women. Many of these were presented as positive. The gentle, caring side of female nature, for instance, was stressed repeatedly within the writings of suffrage activists as a counter-argument within the militancy debate. Militancy was

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<sup>32</sup>See for example the works of Mary Daly, or Sheila Jeffreys, especially J. Hanmer, C. Lunn, S. Jeffreys, S. McNeill, "*Sex Class - Why is it important to call women a class?*" *Scarlet Women*, vol. 5., pp.8-10. n.d.

<sup>33</sup>Elizabeth Sarah, "Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming her Power," in E. Sarah and S. Friedman, (eds), *On the Problem of Men*, London, Women's Press, 1982.

opposed;

not on the grounds of physical incapacity...but because it [is] inimical to everything that women....It is women's function to preserve, to nourish, to succour, to give life and not to take it.<sup>34</sup>

Biological similarities between women, this analysis argued, led to common experiences being shared by all women. These enabled women to unite together in collective actions and automatically transcend economic class differences, rendering them secondary or even obsolete. However, unlike supporters of separate spheres, proponents of a sex-class interpretation of women's position in society were not content to accept an 'equal but different' analysis. Much of their writings concentrate on explaining how biological differences actually made women superior to men, and their acceptance of the main premise behind separate spheres ideology does not indicate support for a secondary role for women. Take for example this piece by Dora Marsden, who both supported and engaged in militancy, and drew on the language of difference in her call for:

A morality which shall be able to point the way out of the social trap we find we are in. We are conscious that we are concerned with the dissolution of one social order....Men are involved, but women differently from men because women themselves are very different from men. [This] difference....is the whole difference of a religion and a moral code. Men are pagans....women are wholly Christian.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps what separates the sex-class interpretation most decisively from that of separate spheres and also underlines this refutation of a secondary, passive role as following logically from an acceptance of sexual difference, are those elements within the ideology which are taken from the socialist model. From this came the language of class, along with the concept of class as a unifying factor. The oppression of women was no longer

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<sup>34</sup>NUWSS pamphlet, quoted in *The Suffragette*, 10th January 1913.

<sup>35</sup>Dora Marsden (possibly with Mary Gawthorpe), editorial, *The Freewoman*, no. 4, vol. 1., December 1911.

seen as simply analogous with that of the working-class by the ruling-class. Instead, the oppression of women was portrayed as the oppression of the female-class by a different ruling-class, that of men. The economic concepts of class were taken, broken down, and rearranged into new ones, wholly based on gender. Divisions between working-class and middle-class women were portrayed as irrelevant when the interests of working-class men became identical to those of middle-class men, that is when it was accepted that all men had a common interest in maintaining the rule of patriarchy through the oppression of women. The appropriation of the language of class by feminist campaigners gave a new edge to their ideology. As one Edwardian feminist explained:

The sex war is going to be the biggest thing that civilisation has seen - big, that is, as far as consequences are concerned. The....effects will be gigantic. And let (no-one) be deceived by the circumstances that men are fighting on women's side, and women on men's here and there, in meetings and societies, in articles and what not. The great mass of the armies on the two sides are similar. Men are on one side, women on the other. Watch for the clash.<sup>36</sup>

This ideology has the most obvious organisational implications of the three. Separate spheres ideology initially led into single-sex organisations, but later gave rise to mixed ones, when men and women worked together to promote woman's 'correct' place in society. The socialist position allowed for some development of a separate political space for women in women's sections. However, these remained auxiliary, which often led to ambiguities arising over their import and influence within the wider movement. Acceptance of an ideology which saw sex as class meant an effective end to such ambiguity. Women were to unite within political organisations only with other women. As the ideology held that all women were oppressed by men to a greater or lesser degree, there was no room within it for an approach which involved working in mixed-

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<sup>36</sup>'VIR,' *The Freewoman*, no. 4, vol. 1., December 1911.

gender feminist organisations. Instead of fighting for equal space within these organisations, women would now act politically within all-female political organisations which would provide them with unique opportunities to access the public political sphere.

Of the organisations which I examine on Merseyside, the WSPU gives the best example of the implications sex-class theory had on political practice for women. Although some men were accepted locally as WSPU supporters, and were afforded some space on local public platforms in this capacity, the national organisation prohibited formal membership for men, and this line was firmly followed by the Merseyside branches. Equally, although some women within the local WSPU had already gained significant political experience through working within mixed political parties, national policy required them to place all political and economic differences aside and concentrate only on differences and alliances based on gender. This thesis will examine in detail the extent to which this directive was followed locally, and assess its effectiveness in the context of the anti-party campaigning which the WSPU engaged in during parliamentary elections.

### Section 3: Historiography

Much published history of the public political involvement of British women during the 1890-1920 period concentrates on the suffrage campaign, which has been presented as the first identifiable mass movement of women into the public sphere. The bulk and breadth of suffrage historiography makes it a natural starting place for any study of women's political involvement within this period, encompassing as it did women from a broad class spectrum, with a wide variety of other political concerns. As Nancy Cott has explained, "the vote appealed instrumentally to different sub-groups for various

reasons, while they had their common disenfranchisement to unite them."<sup>37</sup>

Initially, much suffrage historiography was written by people involved in the movement themselves, often, although not always from an autobiographical perspective.<sup>38</sup> Non participatory accounts began with the 1957 publication of Roger Fulford's *Votes for Women*. His aim to "tell the story of a single aspect of [the wider women's] movement...and to disentangle it from the general march of women towards emancipation" formed a narrow model from which suffrage historiography rarely deviated for the next twenty years.<sup>39</sup> Later works by Andrew Rosen, David Mitchell and Leslie Hume all concentrate on the ideologies and policies of the leadership of two of the suffrage organisations.<sup>40</sup> Such works helped foster the development of a narrow and historically inaccurate picture of an autocratic, fanatically militant and increasingly sectarian WSPU in diametric opposition to a democratic, law-abiding and eventually pro-Labour NUWSS. The London centredness of both these organisations was stressed, as was their middle-class base. Of the other suffrage organisations, the Women's Freedom League consistently appears as a WSPU splinter group whilst other groups

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<sup>37</sup>Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, Connecticut & London, New Haven, 1987.

<sup>38</sup>Examples of autobiographies which fall into this category include Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, London, Eveleigh Nash, 1914; Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember*, London, Fisher & Unwin, 1924; Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How we Won the Vote*, London, Cresset Library, 1987 edition, first published 1959; Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1938; Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant*, London, Arnold, 1924; Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, London, Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1953. Accounts by participants which attempt to avoid an autobiographical content include Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, London, Virago, 1977 edition, first published 1931, and Strachey, *The Cause*.

<sup>39</sup>Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women*, London, Faber & Faber, 1957, p.10.

<sup>40</sup>Andrew Rosen, *Rise up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 - 14*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974; David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts, A Study in Tenacity*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967; David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, London, MacDonald and Jane, 1977; Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897 - 1914*, New York, Garland, 1982.

such as the Men's League, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society and the Church League for Women's Suffrage receive acknowledgement only when their actions coincide with those of the two centre stage organisations.<sup>41</sup>

A decisive break from this tradition followed the 1978 publication of Jill Liddington and Jill Norris' *One Hand Tied Behind Us*. This provided the first detailed local study of the suffrage movement. Using the technique of a local study, they were able to uncover the vast amount of work done for the suffrage campaign by the working-class women of the Lancashire cotton districts, providing an alternative to the focus of previous accounts. This has been followed by other local studies, such as Leah Leneman's work on Scotland, and Angela John's collection on Wales.<sup>42</sup> These works represent an important progression in suffrage historiography, for it is only through the detail of such local studies that serious attempts can be made to reconstruct both the variety of activities which encompassed suffrage activism, and also the differences which existed between women united in the campaign. Their focus on individual branches show how the branch was an important place of feminist development for many local activists. Leneman and Stanley and Morley are particularly keen to present the branch as a relatively autonomous structure, exercising degrees of independence previously

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<sup>41</sup>Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, p.92. There have recently been some attempts to look at other suffrage organisations. On the Women's Freedom League, see Claire Eustance, "'Daring to be Free': The Evolution of Women's Political Identities in the Women's Freedom League, 1907 - 1930," University of York, D. Phil. thesis, 1993. On links between religion and suffrage, see Brian Heeney, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England 1850 - 1930*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, and Frances M. Mason *The Newer Eve: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society in England, 1911 - 1923*. Little has been written on the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, or its political counterpart, the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union, although the latter is mentioned in Claire Hirschfield, "Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892 - 1914," *Gender and History*, vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 1990, pp.173 - 197. Groups such as the United Suffragists and the People's Suffrage Federation still await their own studies.

<sup>42</sup>Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press 1991; Angela John, ed, *Our Mother's Land: Essays in Welsh Women's History*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1991.

unacknowledged.<sup>43</sup> Focusing on Merseyside, my study is in part a validation of such approaches, and its relation to these will be discussed in greater detail below.

Aside from local studies, more recent work on suffrage has moved into broader areas of debate. Les Garner began to look in detail at the different types of feminism contained within the women's suffrage movement, and expanded on this within his biographical study of Dora Marsden which locates suffrage as part of a wider discourse regarding female sexuality and its emancipation.<sup>44</sup> The interest in the various themes that ran throughout suffrage is shared by other historians such as Olive Banks and is developed further by Susan Kingsley Kent. Her *Sex and Suffrage in Britain* locates suffrage as part of wider feminist discourses around sexuality, and uses a methodology more reliant on discourse than archival research.<sup>45</sup> Kent's work does much to broaden conventional views of suffrage concerning the vote and nothing else, outlining the wider critiques within suffrage campaigning of issues such as marriage, prostitution and sexuality which challenged the dominant discourse on female sexuality. However, her work is somewhat problematic, using the writings of prominent suffrage campaigners to identify feminist critiques. This seems to me to be as much open to criticism for its unrepresentativeness as the earlier WSPU based historiography, as the prominent activists were all atypical in that they were able to work full time for their organisations, without having to balance other demands on their time. The application of Kent's

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<sup>43</sup>Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, London, Women's Press, 1990.

<sup>44</sup>Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty*, London, Heinemann, 1984; Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden, 1882 - 1960*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1990.

<sup>45</sup>Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism*, Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1981; Olive Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of First Wave Feminism*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf, 1986; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860 - 1914*, London, Routledge, 1987.

approach to a local study would not be possible for Merseyside, as most local branch members left no records of their beliefs to be subjected to such analysis. Also, such an analysis would require previous studies of local women's politics which do not exist: indeed, the construction of such a study is central to my work.

An alternative approach to creating a broader history of suffrage which I find more attractive is taken by Sandra Stanley Holton in her 1986 work *Feminism and Democracy*.<sup>46</sup> This work also seeks to reinterpret suffrage as extending beyond the fight for the vote, but takes a far more materialist, class-based analysis than any of the works cited above. Although she accepts that her work still focuses on the more active women in the movement and therefore does not recreate the reality of what suffrage involvement was for all of its participants, she defends this with the convincing argument that for many women this activism was an essential part of their day-to-day existence, and that "political activity may form as significant a party of the 'existential reality' of women as, say, sexual relations or mothering."<sup>47</sup> Her work also makes the first serious attempt to break down many of the organisational barriers which have been created between suffrage organisations, showing that "many [women] belonged to both militant and constitutionalist societies simultaneously...[and] did not themselves view the two approaches to campaigning as either mutually exclusive or at odds with one another," although she does not extend her line of inquiry to interpret why some suffrage activists should find it necessary to redefine themselves publicly as being also Catholic, Church of England, Liberal or Conservative suffragists.<sup>48</sup> My research shares her

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<sup>46</sup>Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

attempt to represent suffrage as part of the everyday experience of a wide variety of women, but seeks to go further in exploring the links between the varying suffrage organisations and providing some insight into why such a wide variety of groups were felt necessary.

Although suffrage accounts for a large part of the historiography of women's political involvement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is literature which covers other areas of their involvement. In the area of formal politics, Patricia Hollis' full study of 1987 reclaims the important work done both for communities and women's rights by women involved in local government.<sup>49</sup> Much of the work on women within political parties reflects the links highlighted by Selma Leydesdorff between women's history and labour history, and has focused on the role of women within the British Labour Party and other socialist groups such as the SDF and ILP.<sup>50</sup> Karen Hunt's work on women in the Social Democratic Federation is a notable example in this field, studying in detail the relationship between the theories of the need for the political organisations of women within the European Left, and their practice in terms of the models of political organisation which were accepted by the SDF for its women members.<sup>51</sup> Of particular relevance for me within her work is the light which she throws on the existence of a European socialist community around the First and Second Internationals in which an active role was played by British socialists, hence firmly linking the European debates and the British experience. This is also shown in the work

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<sup>49</sup>Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865 - 1914*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1989.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Karen Hunt, "Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question," Manchester University, unpublished PhD thesis, 1988.

of Susan Bruley, whose study of women in the British Communist Party covers the later period of 1920 to 1939, thus providing a link between the Second and Third Internationals to show how European models continued to influence sections of the British left.<sup>52</sup>

Although both these studies use some local material to provide evidence for the models of political organisation they discuss, they are essentially studies of national movements, and are therefore open to the same criticisms of unrepresentativeness as the early suffrage historiography discussed above. Literature on women in the workplace initially also followed this trend, looking at the Women's Trade Union League and unions with a high or exclusively female membership.<sup>53</sup> However, within this field, attempts to recover a more representative picture by researching into the forms political involvement took at grass roots level have been made through local studies, notably by Patricia Hilden and Eleanor Gordon.<sup>54</sup> Both use this technique to interpret how theories which developed at national conferences about the space for women's political involvement were translated into actions on the shop floor.<sup>55</sup> Avoiding parochialism, Gordon explains how local studies have a broader contribution to make within history, and are an excellent way to "shed light on some of the key debates which have emerged in the historical and theoretical literature on women and work."<sup>56</sup> The amount of detail they

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<sup>52</sup>S. Bruley, *Leninism and Stalinism in the Women's Movement in Britain*, New York, Garland, 1986.

<sup>53</sup>Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1987; N. Solden, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, Dublin, Gill & MacMillan, 1978.

<sup>54</sup>P. Hilden *Working Women and Socialist Politics in France 1880 - 1914: A Regional Study*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986; E Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991.

<sup>55</sup>The PSO and Guedist parties in Hilden's work, and the Trade Unions within Gordon's.

<sup>56</sup>Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, p.1.

can encompass allows many of the stereotypes of large organisations, created from their national positions, to be successfully challenged. Gordon and Hilden also make an important contribution to our thinking about the complex nature of women's relationship to work and workplace organisations, exploring the "special organisational problems which arise out of the particularity of [women's] private and public experiences within a male dominated world."<sup>57</sup> It is this complexity which I believe justifies the need for separate studies of women and work in particular localities, rather than assuming that accounts of male experience will mirror correctly the experience of women. With the exception of my chapter on women in trade unions, much of the work I discuss is of a political nature. However, I believe that the arguments for women's separate experience of such activities is as valid for these bodies as for those which fit our more traditional ideas of a workplace.

The works cited above critically examine women's experience within the Trade Union movement, and in British socialist politics. The historiography dealing with the nature of women's involvement in the Liberal or Conservative parties is much less developed. Both David Morgan and Constance Rover have examined the relationship between the Liberal Party and suffrage campaigners, but do not extend their coverage beyond 1920.<sup>58</sup> A recent article by Claire Hirshfield also follows this trend.<sup>59</sup> Other authors such as Martin Pugh and Beatrix Campbell have studied the involvement of women in

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<sup>57</sup>Hilden, *Working Women and Socialist Politics*, p.1.

<sup>58</sup>D. Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985; C. Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866 - 1914*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.

<sup>59</sup>Clare Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

the Conservative Party.<sup>60</sup> However, Pugh's work focuses on the origins of the early Primrose League and the involvement of women in elections in the mid nineteenth century, whilst Campbell mainly charts the efforts of Margaret Thatcher's Tory Party to recruit women. Through examining women's involvement in all three political parties over a significant period of time, I hope to be able to extend the approaches of the historians cited above. I believe that it is only through contrasting the opportunities of activity provided for women by each of the parties within a single area that their stances towards feminism can be assessed. This reflects the approach of Linda Walker, whose study of the Women's Liberal Federation and the Primrose League allows comparisons to be drawn between the approaches of two separate organisations to recruit women, and give them access to the wider political arena, on a national scale.<sup>61</sup> Over the period 1890 - 1920 it is possible to explore, comparatively, which organisations were the most successful, first of all in recruiting women members, and, secondly, in maintaining and improving women's access to public political life in the longer term.

My work within this thesis has been greatly influenced by those writers who have recently attempted to expand the uses of biographical writing as an historical tool. Historians such as Brian Harrison and Johanna Alberti have used collective biographies to good effect, allowing the disparate concerns of many individuals to be recreated.<sup>62</sup> Recently the works of Carolyn Steedman and June Hannam have also shown the value of biographical approaches in charting the history of a socialist feminism which can

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<sup>60</sup>Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880 - 1935*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985; Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory* London, Virago, 1987.

<sup>61</sup>L. Walker, "Liberal Women and the Primrose League," in J. Rendall, ed, *Equal or Different*.

<sup>62</sup>Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914 - 1928*, London, Macmillan, 1989. Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.

easily become lost within the familiar historiography of party splits and policy debates.<sup>63</sup> Whilst my thesis does not claim to offer a substantive biography of any of Merseyside's leading political women, it does follow Hannam's attempts to use "the individual as a starting point [to] reveal the richness and complexity of social movements."<sup>64</sup> The careers of several local activists are charted, highlighting range of issues with which such women concerned themselves.

Local studies also require close engagement with the historiography of an area. The wide-ranging historiography of nineteenth-century Merseyside underlies much of this thesis. These works will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

#### Section 4: Justification and Importance of a Local Study

Arguably the most famous local study in British women's history is the 1978 work of Jill Liddington and Jill Norris.<sup>65</sup> As the previous section demonstrates, this account of the suffrage work of working-class women in the Lancashire cotton districts proved invaluable in facilitating the creation of an alternative suffrage historiography. Yet its focus is a narrow one, in a way that is not necessarily inherent within the genre. This narrowness comes from their concern, restated by Liddington in 1984 to use a local study to create an alternative to the view of the WSPU as the dominant suffrage

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<sup>63</sup>Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret MacMillan, 1860 - 1931*, London, Virago, 1990. June Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989. Similar approaches can be found also in Stanley with Morely, *The Life & Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, and Jill Liddington *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864 - 1946*, London, Virago, 1984.

<sup>64</sup>June Hannam, "'Usually Neglected in Standard Histories': Some Issues in Working on the Life of Isabella Ford, 1855 - 1924", in D. Farran, S. Scott and L. Stanley, eds, "Writing Feminist Biography," *Studies in Sexual Politics*, issues 13 & 14, Manchester, University of Manchester Sociology Department, 1986, pp.4 - 27.

<sup>65</sup>Liddington & Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*.

organisation.<sup>66</sup> This has led to a tendency to replace one 'exact' model of suffrage history with another. Hence their research on the Lancashire campaign focused on those areas where the NUWSS was strong, and the WSPU weak, leading to the establishment of an alternative suffrage history which portrayed the WSPU as marginal and unrepresentative, whilst the 'real' suffrage work was carried out by the NUWSS. The NUWSS was also presented as a radical, progressive organisation, deeply rooted in the Lancashire Labour movement, and as being the only suffrage organisation to attract and retain a working-class membership.

I intend to use the technique of a local study of the Merseyside area to provide a critique of this hypothesis. My research findings lead to a different interpretation, showing that the findings of Liddington and Norris do not hold for all Lancashire. Through uncovering links between the WSPU and radical and socialist politics on Merseyside, I will show how the character of suffrage organisations could vary widely even within a small locality such as Lancashire, depending very much on the character and policies of the local leadership. In contrast to the picture of the NUWSS constructed by Liddington and Norris, I will illustrate how the Merseyside branches of this organisation eschewed the local labour movement, creating instead a strong base for itself within the local Liberal Party, and enjoying wide support from the more progressive elements of the middle-class elite within local politics.

I am able to do this within my research through taking a broader perspective whilst still retaining a local focus. Rather than concentrating on a small aspect of a single campaign I have been concerned with examining the variety of political organisations which

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<sup>66</sup>Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*.

attracted a wholly or partly female membership during the period. With reference to the suffrage campaign, for example, I will look not only at the policies and actions of the WSPU and NUWSS, but of the Women's Freedom League, and some five other suffrage organisations which sustained active branches where Merseyside women could organise. Such a wide ranging study would prove unmanageable at a national level. It is the ability to provide a broad focus on the range of cross-organisational activities which I believe constitutes the greatest strength of a local study. This ability allows us also to examine how national ideologies worked in practice, that is how they were experienced by the rank and file membership, instead of recreating national debates which may have had no effect on the lives of many activists.

Celebrating the growth of women's history in an article written in 1983, Joan Wallach Scott observed that:

During the last decade, Virginia Woolf's call for a history of women - written more than fifty years ago - has been answered....Bookshelves are now being filled with biographies of forgotten prominent women, chronicles of feminist movements, and the collected letters of female authors.<sup>67</sup>

Key words within this extract are 'prominent', 'movements' and 'authors.' Despite the advances made in reclaiming the role of the rank and file, much women's history retains an unbalanced focus on leaders and the role of prominent activists or organisations. This is understandable. To begin with, there would not be the space within a single work to recreate the breadth of activities undertaken by all active women. Also, the comparative accessibility of national movements and leaders makes them attractive subjects.<sup>68</sup> However, I believe that women's history should be about more than just

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<sup>67</sup>Joan Wallach Scott, "Women in History," *Past and Present*, no. 101, November 1983, pp.141-157.

<sup>68</sup>The organisations leave archives whilst the leadership are more prone to leave letters, autobiographies or interviews.

reclaiming prominent bodies. As Slaughter and Kern comment:

To understand the scope and significance of women's involvement in radical political movements, we must have some idea of the contradictions and patterns of this participation as...have appeared in the past. The struggle of other women to define ideology, translate female consciousness into practice and scale major obstacles provides us with a historical base by which we can more accurately assess the current potential of feminist radicalism.<sup>69</sup>

Or, in Anna Davin's words:

It is essential, intellectually and politically, to try to understand the past if we are to understand the present and work effectively for the future we want....As women we need our history.<sup>70</sup>

A local study can go a long way towards providing this historical base. The whole range of past options available can be considered, enabling valuable conclusions to be drawn as to the reasons underlying the relative successes and failures of various models of female political organisation. In such a fashion, a picture of how women could and did gain access to the public political arena in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain can be created which can teach us much about our current political concerns as women.

Obviously there is a danger concealed within the geographical boundaries of a local study. I have already highlighted the challenges my research provides to the findings of Liddington and Norris who focus on another part of Lancashire, and I accept that similar studies in other areas of the country would throw up alternative interpretations to the national picture which differed widely from my findings. However, despite its specificity, a local study does present a different angle from which the national picture may be viewed, or a small part of a greater whole. In this particular case, I have been

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<sup>69</sup>Slaughter & Kern, *European Women on the Left*, p.10.

<sup>70</sup>Anna Davin, "Redressing the Balance or Transforming the Art?" p.60.

able to study a far greater range of models of organisation, comparing nationally developed theories about women's political involvement with their practice at the grass roots.

#### Section 5: Critical Introduction to Sources Used

As my work is concerned with a wide range of organisations, a broad range of detailed sources chronicling the political activities of women on Merseyside from 1890 - 1920 might be expected to be available. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Obviously, there are still problems when searching for records of women. Pat Jalland observes in connection with her work on middle-class women, that whilst;

[the] achievements of the men were saved for posterity....the personal correspondence of the women was frequently burned. Women's records tended to be kept by accident, sentiment or default.<sup>71</sup>

This rings even more true when applied to working-class women. There are also additional problems in the lack of archives dealing with some of the political groups I examine, which are shared by all social historians concerned with radical political movements. In the case of Merseyside, these are compounded by the sad reality that the city archives suffered severe bomb damage during the Second World War.<sup>72</sup> However, the absence of specific archives has not made the task of locating the political activity of local women an impossibility, as enough material remaining on women's suffrage movements, party politics and the trade unions. When introducing these sources I have used the nominal headings of 'suffrage,' 'party politics' and 'trade unions' in order to simplify the task, although there is some overlap between the three

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<sup>71</sup>Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics, 1860 - 1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p.3.

<sup>72</sup>This does not only apply to the city archives. The records of Walton Gaol, which contain much relevant detail about local suffragette prisoners, were also lost in this way. Letter to Ms K. Cowman from the Governor of Walton Gaol, November 1991.

groups.

### Section 5.i: Suffrage

When researching the history of suffrage on Merseyside, the absence of membership records presents a problem which is by no means unique to the area. The official records of all suffrage societies, branch minute books, and correspondence and membership lists tended to remain in the possession of the local, voluntary secretaries. Few of these have found their way into public archive collections anywhere in the country. The WSPU kept some national membership lists and figures sporadically, but this practice ceased as the organisation moved towards increasingly violent militancy from 1912, as records were frequently seized by the police.<sup>73</sup> The national records of the NUWSS, the WFL, the Church League for Women's Suffrage, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association and the United Suffragists are frequently sparse on local detail, whilst no national records of the United Suffragists or the Votes for Women Fellowship have been traced.

The approach I have taken in the thesis to overcome this problem has been to use the names mentioned within the newspapers of the period, the local and national daily press, the local weekly press and the national suffrage press in connection with the branches and activities of the local suffrage organisations. There are obvious problems with such

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<sup>73</sup>During the conspiracy trial of 1912, official censorship resulted in *Votes for Women* appearing with blank columns, where certain articles had been suppressed. This trend continued within *The Suffragette* which has frequent references to books and figures being seized by the police up until its suspension by Christabel Pankhurst at the outbreak of the First World War. *The Vote* also contains blank spaces when the WFL resumed militancy in 1913.

material. Suffrage newspapers were intended first and foremost as propaganda tools.<sup>74</sup> They were all intended to convince their readership of the need for women's suffrage and to recruit new members by presenting their organisation in a highly positive light.<sup>75</sup> Much of the rhetoric in the suffrage press is open to accusations of bias, and it is important to keep this in mind when using them to reconstruct what was happening in any area at a given time. However, some balance is achieved by using the reports in the suffrage press in conjunction with reports in the local press which, whatever their own biases, were not aimed at building or promoting particular suffrage organisations.

There are also problems connected with the selection of events reported by a campaigning paper. The majority of material concerning the Merseyside branches is to be found within the 'Local Reports' columns, written and sent down to London by the local organiser.<sup>76</sup> The intention of these columns was to provide new readers, potential recruits, with information as to what activities were available within their areas. Reports were supposed to appear every week, but there are gaps, so what remains is an impressionistic account, tending to concentrate on more prominent activists, paint a rosy view of anything which could count as a success, and gloss over or ignore completely any problems. Despite this, readings of these columns do yield valuable information

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<sup>74</sup>For this thesis, several suffrage journals have been used. These are, in order of publication: *Women's Tribune*, later *Women and Progress*; *Women's Franchise*; *Votes for Women*; *Women's Freedom League Temporary Newsheet*; *Men's League for Women's Suffrage Newsletter*; *The Vote*; *Common Cause*; *The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*; *The Suffragette*; *The Freewoman*, *The Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*; *the Independent Suffragette*; *The Catholic Suffragist*; *The Britannia*; and *The Suffragette News Sheet*. Some of these provide a wealth of detail over a number of years. Others enjoy a lesser degree of longevity, but are nevertheless most useful. They are reference throughout the thesis when used.

<sup>75</sup>This need for a positive image was most keenly felt by the WSPU and WFL during their times of militancy, and their papers contain much repeated explanations of the need for militant tactics.

<sup>76</sup>All suffrage papers used here either contained these on separate pages, or devoted space to area reports within their main accounts of campaigns.

about the range of activities available to women within the local suffrage organisations, and the numbers of women who were participating in them. Even assuming that the reports featured only the most active members by name, the fact that for example almost one thousand women were mentioned by name in *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette* in connection with Merseyside WSPU branches between 1907 and 1914 gives the organisation a far wider constituency than other studies would admit.<sup>77</sup> Tracing the names of activists over the years can also lead to evidence of cross-organisational activity by certain individuals, as well as showing the recruiting of new supporters over a period of years, and the presence of a stable core of long term members.

In addition to these sources, and published accounts referenced, there are other forms of evidence for local women's suffrage movements. These are rare and sporadic, but give valuable glimpses of the internal working of local branches, and are referenced when used. There are also occasional mentions in council and police records, again mentioned where applicable. I have also relied on evidence collected from the written and oral testimonies of the children of three women prominent within the local suffrage campaign.<sup>78</sup> Their memories of their mothers' suffrage activities rely on their recollections of family stories rather than on first hand knowledge. However, their testimonies have been valuable in helping to create an impression of the wide variety of activities undertaken by suffrage campaigners on Merseyside, and the broad social

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<sup>77</sup>This figure does include women who came in from outside the area, such as Christabel Pankhurst, but is mainly comprised of local women who publicly associated themselves. Activities which led to a mention in the press ranged from speaking at meetings to entertaining at socials, and from taking official office to donating a shilling to the funds.

<sup>78</sup>These are Mr Frimstone, son of Noel Frimstone, secretary and co-founder of the Liverpool Men's League for Women's Suffrage, and Ethel Frimstone (nee Martin), WSPU activist. Also, of Mr Edgar Criddle, son of Helah Criddle of Wallasey WSPU and Socialist Society, and Mrs Paula Francomb, daughter of Jane Colquitt of Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society.

base in which these were located.

#### Section 5.ii: Political Parties and Trade Unions

Local political parties have left more specific records. A substantial archive exists relating to the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party. The Trades Council admitted women delegates from 1890, the Labour Party from its inception. The records show a number of active women, as well as discussions relating to women. However, they only cover the district party, and give no detail on local branches, effectively cutting out a layer of active female membership. This can partly be overcome through applying the tactics used in the suffrage section to the national socialist press such as the *Clarion* and the *Labour Leader*. Even more useful are the two local socialist papers which survive, the *Liverpool Labour Chronicle* which ran from 1894 to 1902, and the *Liverpool Forward* 1912 to 1914. These give a wealth of detail on individuals and groups, as well as having a clearer indication of the true extent of an alternative socialist culture on Merseyside. The *Labour Chronicle* also has a woman's page which helps redress the inequalities within the District Labour Party archives. Further valuable evidence comes from national collections with a strong local bias. The Fabian Society archives at Nuffield College, Oxford, contain much material relating to the active local branch of this body. Similarly, the papers of *Labour Annual* editor Joseph Edwards and his Liverpool wife Eleanor Keeling show local concerns and connections. These and other papers are referenced fully within the bibliography.

For the Liberal and Conservative Parties, the absence of local newspapers means that

their archives are not as rich as for socialist groups.<sup>79</sup> However, some local papers had political links, (the *Conservative Courier* and *Liberal Daily Post* for instance), and carried detailed reports of their meetings. These are consolidated by the papers of the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Federation which both have a local dimension. There are also several published sources relating to the activities of members of local political parties, either autobiographies, or collected speeches or satirical biographies published locally.

For the trades unions, a mixture of political sources have been drawn on. These range from the papers and newspapers of the Women's Trade Union League, through to local press reports of strikes involving women. In addition to these there are some autobiographical fragments by local trade union activists, published and unpublished, referenced within the bibliography. These tend to be the work of men, but sometimes include references to local women activists. Again, they have been more valuable for the impressions they convey than for giving concrete facts and figures.

### Section 5.iii: Other Sources Used

Other fragmentary sources have helped broaden my understanding of women's political involvement in Merseyside at this time. Whilst the local records of the Women's Co-operative Guild are stronger for the period after the First World War, the minute book of the Toxteth branch survives for the earlier period, indicating a broad variety of concerns for the membership of this body, and highlighting some areas of cross-organisational activity as suffragettes and socialists surface in its pages. Much of

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<sup>79</sup>There is the late nineteenth century *Liberal Review of Politics, Society, Literature and the Arts*, later the *Liverpool Review of Politics, Society & etc*, but this is far more than a local Liberal Party campaigning paper, covering arts events, fashion, architecture, and giving little coverage of Liberal party news itself.

women's early public activity, whether party directed or not, came through public bodies such as the Boards of Guardians, and their surviving records chart their concerns and actions in this area. Church records provide yet more insight into women's public work. Between 1890 and 1914, many Merseyside churches involved themselves in highly political issues such as socialism, suffrage and municipal poverty, with women at the forefront. Archives and magazines show how women were involved in these issues, and also how they were often the same women who were active elsewhere.

From all of these sources, I have constructed a large database of individuals mentioned in any way in connection with the local political organisations I am examining. This consists of over five thousand entries, representing around four thousand local women. For single-sex organisations I have included both women and the few men mentioned within sources, whilst for mixed organisations I have included only women. I have used this to provide information about levels of public activity and indications of cross-organisational involvement. The database is subject to the limitations of sources mentioned above, and to problems of representativeness, as only individuals who did something (such as speaking, chairing a meeting, or taking a collection) appear in the sources. However, it does provide evidence for a continuity of activity within varying locations by individuals within the period, and gives a broad indication of the large numbers of women involved in local politics.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO MERSEYSIDE

#### 1.1: Introduction

'Merseyside' is a recent conception, a product of 1970s local government reorganisation. The area covered by today's county boundaries belonged, during the timespan of this thesis, to South West Lancashire and North West Cheshire, separated by the River Mersey. Yet, surprisingly to someone who grew up with the local dissent around the creation of Merseyside and can remember well the fury of successive 'Wirral out of Merseyside' campaigns, a definite sense of 'Merseyside' is found in the 1890s. There is a real corporate identity amongst those who lived on the Lancashire and Cheshire sides of the river. One reason for this may be in the demographic relocations which occurred in the later nineteenth century, moving wealthy individuals to the villages which developed into Merseyside's suburbs. For those who moved West across the river, Liverpool represented the same as for those who moved North, South or East: the city. Liverpool's business centre made and controlled their fortunes. Its cultural opportunities provided their leisure. Its shops clothed them and furnished their houses. In some cases its churches and chapels remained the focus of their spiritual lives. Consequently, many of the organisations discussed in this thesis which relied on the personal networks of early members for their initial development grew as Merseyside rather than Liverpool and Wirral branches. This trend is particularly marked in relation to suffrage organisations. WSPU organisers were Liverpool based, but responsible for members in Cheshire too, and members freely participated in activities on either side of the river in its name. Similarly, the local Catholic Suffrage Society, although concentrated mainly in the Catholic areas of Northern Liverpool, was founded by Wirral

inhabitant Florence Barry.

In party political organisations, the trend is less discernable as much activity centres around local town and city councils. Yet even here certain individuals retain a Merseyside focus. Mrs Jeannie Mole, pioneer socialist and organiser of women's trade unions in Liverpool devoted thirty years of her life to political work in the city whilst residing on the Wirral. Socialist suffragette Hattie Mahood organised first in Birkenhead and then simultaneously for the whole of Merseyside, and never allowed her Wirral address to prevent her taking an active role in the life of Liverpool's Pembroke Chapel. Similar networks formed amongst Liberal and Conservative women, although much of their branch activity was more party affiliated and thus more localised. For this reason, although the main body of this thesis concerns Liverpool, the somewhat anachronistic term 'Merseyside' will also be used, specifically when dealing with organisations such as the suffrage groups who would have recognised the geographical area if not the modern county.

For women seeking political activity, Victorian Merseyside offered many choices. Some saw their primary allegiance as being to their class, others to their sex or to a political party (often dictated by class). Also, there were occasions when those who normally prioritised one of these chose to subjugate it temporarily in favour of another, as through the cross-class and cross-party alliances found in local suffrage groups. The politics of the workplace, frequently demonstrated through trade union activities were important, as were wider concerns of philanthropy and education. The remainder of this chapter will contextualise the areas in which women worked through outlining the social, political and geographic characteristics of Victorian and Edwardian Merseyside.

As Tony Lane has recently pointed out, "Liverpool is the only city in Britain....upon which other Britons have definite opinions."<sup>1</sup> Yet whilst there are no end of recent newspaper articles tracing the industrial decline and urban problems of the region academic histories of Liverpool are rather sparse.<sup>2</sup> Compared with the self-conscious chronicles of municipal greatness which appeared in Liverpool as in other similar cities at the end of the nineteenth century aimed at explaining how the city came to be what it was, the twentieth century rests largely untouched.<sup>3</sup> There are works dealing with specific aspects of the area. Wal Hamling has written on the history of the local trades council up to 1948. Tony Lane has traced how the port contributed to the local character of the area. Harold Hikin's edited collection on trade unionism details the 1919 police strike amongst other events. Greg Anderson has greatly increased knowledge of the local Clerks' Association, forerunner of NALGO, and Bob Holton has worked on local syndicalism, especially concerning the 1911 transport strike.<sup>4</sup> Whilst these all provide excellent material on the history of the local labour movement, and concentrate more on the experience of the rank and file, they have a narrow focus. A more substantial work is that of P. J. Waller which provides "a history of over a century of recent

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Lane, *Liverpool, Gateway of Empire*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1987, p.13.

<sup>2</sup>These generally follow events which bring Liverpool to national prominence. See for example British national press coverage of the Toxteth Riots, August 1981; St Saviour's school, February - March 1982; the Heysel Stadium disaster, May 1985; the stand off between the city council and central government, August - November 1986.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, J. A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool, Historical and Topographical*, London, Longmans, 1875; R. Muir, *History of Liverpool*, London, Liverpool University Press, 1907.

<sup>4</sup>Wal Hamling, *A Short History of the Liverpool Trades Council 1848-1948*, Liverpool, Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party, 1948; Lane, *Gateway to Empire*; Harold Hikin, *Building the Union" Studies of the Growth of the Workers' Movement on Merseyside*, Liverpool, Toulouse Press, 1973; Greg Anderson, *The Service Occupations of Nineteenth-Century Liverpool*, Salford, Salford Papers in Economics, Salford University, 1981; Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900 - 1914*, London, Pluto Press, 1976.

political life."<sup>5</sup> This work of painstaking detail adds much to our understanding of the development of Liverpool's political map. However, it has nothing to say specifically about the role of women in this development. Few women appear within the work, and no women's organisations are mentioned in the index, not even those affiliated to the local political parties so richly detailed. The main focus of the work is "sectarian conflict [which] especially injected political life with unusual intensity and moulded the popular Conservatism and immature Labour Party which were the hallmarks of Liverpool before the Second World War."<sup>6</sup> A more recent collection by John Belchem challenges this view, as I will show later in this chapter, postulating that in many areas of local life, "the unbridgeable division was not sectarian, but sexual."<sup>7</sup> This thesis is an attempt to explore the extent and rigidity of this division locally, and reclaim the contribution of a generation of women to the development of Liverpool's history.<sup>8</sup>

One thing common to all these histories is an agreement that Liverpool is "the exception which proved the rule."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Michael Bentley has cautioned;

Liverpool says much that is unrepeatable...[it] stands as a warning to anyone wishing to paint a national picture by enlarging local tints.<sup>10</sup>

Much of this thesis supports these observations. In many areas, Liverpool remains a

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<sup>5</sup>P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.xiv.

<sup>6</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.xv.

<sup>7</sup>J. Belchem, "Introduction: The Peculiarities of Liverpool," in J. Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour; Essays in Liverpool History 1790 - 1940*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1992, p.7.

<sup>8</sup>I cannot claim to be the only person working in this field. For example, Pat Ayers has done valuable work on local women in the inter-war period, and Linda Grant has pioneered work on Liverpool women and the trade unions. Other earlier historians such as Margaret Simey, whilst not focusing entirely on women's contribution to social services, have demonstrated an awareness of its importance.

<sup>9</sup>Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics*, p.1.

<sup>10</sup>Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics*, cited in Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics*, p.1.

thorn in the historian's side, the asymmetrical shape which stubbornly refuses to fit neatly into a national picture. Obviously, in the area of local politics, local peculiarities govern development and can account for much of this difference, as will be illustrated below. However, as I indicated in the Introduction, recent developments in other areas such as suffrage historiography have thrown up so many 'exceptions' in particular localities as to call into question the validity of taking any national 'rule.' As a social historian, I believe that local histories are no more a true picture than national ones, and am not attempting here to create an alternative overall picture of women's political involvement between 1890 and 1920. However, I must take issue with the claim of Waller, who prefaces his book about Liverpool with the observation that "the mass of people" remain elusive within history, and that "the problem [for the historian] is not to recover them, for that is impossible."<sup>11</sup> Whilst each individual member of an organisation may not be recoverable, the immediacy of a local study allows us to get closer to the individual's experience of political activity. By focusing on the continuities and changes within a single area over a short period of time, I hope to reclaim what political activity meant to the majority of women who undertook it, who had to fit it in as part of their everyday lives, rather than concentrate on the experience of a national leadership who were often able to subjugate everything to their cause.

### 1.2: "A Threshold to The Ends of the Earth" : Later Victorian Liverpool

The industrial revolution, the Slave Trade and a geographical position which made it the perfect port for America all assisted in transforming Liverpool into one of the largest ports in Victorian England. However, unlike other British cities, ports or otherwise, which expanded simultaneously, Liverpool is unique in that it was "an urban complex

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<sup>11</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.xv.

built and founded on commerce."<sup>12</sup> Liverpool became a borough in 1207, granted its charter by King John. By the time of Victoria's accession, local manufacturing industries which had existed, such as pottery and watch making, had vanished without being replaced. Sparse attempts to introduce cotton manufacturing to the port in the nineteenth century met with little success, Liverpool lacking the tradition of textile working common to the rest of Lancashire.<sup>13</sup>

Manufacturing trades which did develop through the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries tended to be dominated by and associated with the port. Thus there were shipyards (mainly on the Cheshire side of the Mersey) rope makers and chandlers. Other industries also reflected Liverpool's port status, and lay close to the docks or the canal. Sugar and whale oil refining were important to the local economy. Muspratt's chemical works was sited in Vauxhall Road alongside the Leeds-Liverpool canal, allowing easy import of raw and export of refined products. Soap making and tobacco processing also reflected the port function. Women, who were never welcomed on the docks, found their employment opportunities limited within the port. Without the large textile factories of Northern Lancashire, Waller situates most women in smaller trades associated with the port; tobacco making, confectionary, rope making and sack making.<sup>14</sup> An even larger number of women found employment in domestic service. By 1911, there were 6,700 female clerks (including typists) in the city.<sup>15</sup> All of these forms of employment share a lack of collectivisation, which coloured the development of female trade unionism

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<sup>12</sup>D. Caradog Jones, *A Social Survey of Merseyside*, London, University Press of Liverpool/Hodder and Stoughton, 1934.

<sup>13</sup>See Caradog Jones, *Social Survey of Merseyside*, Volume 1, pp.30-31.

<sup>14</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.358, note 18.

<sup>15</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, pp.6-7.

locally, as Chapter Three will explain.

Geographical features limited Liverpool's growth. The River Mersey prevented expansion to the West.<sup>16</sup> As it provided the main source of employment at manual and commercial level, the city initially developed along its banks. The basic structure of today's commercial centre was in place by the eighteenth century. Surrounding it were large and splendid family homes build for the emerging middle-classes during the Georgian period, close to their business areas. Beyond this, lands to the North South and West remained farmlands with small villages. On the outskirts lay the often substantial remains of the old landed estates, still inhabited by titled aristocracy.

By 1890, Liverpool geographically began to resemble the area recognisable today. Through the later nineteenth century, many of the middle-class inhabitants moved from the city centre, and a trend in suburban living developed which has yet to be fully reversed. Large homes in the centre were vacated in favour of newer properties in emerging suburbs to the South and East. Often these were the only substantial buildings in areas which remained essentially villages without the city boundaries. Boundary changes gradually began to take account of population movement. In 1895, the municipal boundaries established in 1835 were altered to include the separate townships of Walton, Wavertree, outstanding portions of Toxteth, and some of West Derby. Garston was added in 1901, Fazakerly in 1905, Allerton, Childwall, Little Woolton and

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<sup>16</sup>The River Mersey remained a solid boundary. The first rail tunnel was opened in 1886, but offered mobility mainly for the middle and upper-classes who were relocating their homes in Cheshire's rural suburbs. Ferry boat remained the main way of crossing for pedestrians and cars until the road tunnel was opened in 1934.

Much Woolton in 1913.<sup>17</sup>

The displacement of the middle-class population from the city centre coincided with an influx of immigrants to the developing port, and led to the growth of slums within the city centre and its surrounding areas, especially in the Scotland Road area to the North. Unscrupulous builders capitalised on the necessity caused by rising migration, and the infamous courts developed. This pattern of poorer housing within the inner city and North contrasting with better housing in the Eastern and Southern suburbs remained consistent for the 1890 - 1920 period, although some city centre areas retained a low level of middle-class habitation, notably the Abercrombey parliamentary constituency around the University which attracted a large population of middle-class intellectuals, many of whom were politically active. The trend towards building housing for upper-working and lower-middle classes began as the city expanded, and was exemplified in areas such as the Dingle and Wavertree by small, three-bedroomed terraces, each with their own back yard and private lavatory. Such districts were colonised by skilled workers (confectioners, cabinet makers, sea captains and their counterparts) as well as the newer professions of clerks, policemen and schoolteachers. The geographical development of the city coupled with a poor system of transport from the new suburbs to anywhere but the city centre minimised all contact between the impoverished working-classes and their fellow citizens. Indeed, save for the presence of barefoot beggars in the fashionable shopping streets of the city centre many middle-class citizens could live without any connection with the poor.

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<sup>17</sup>See Muir, *History of Liverpool*, p.302; G. Chandler, *Liverpool*, London, B. T. Batsford, 1907, or Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, *passim*.

By 1885, Liverpool had attracted sufficient immigrants to merit the title "the Marseilles of England."<sup>18</sup> The Irish community, which can be traced back to the twelfth century, numbered 78,000 by 1881.<sup>19</sup> Many of their number were poor, casual labourers, who often found their lives in the North end slums worse than the situation they had left. A significant Welsh community was attracted by the opportunities of the port, estimated at between 60 - 70,000 by 1881.<sup>20</sup> Their common language, and network of chapels, stressed their separateness from the non-Welsh community. These were the main ethnic groups, although large numbers from Scotland, Cumberland and Westmorland also made the voyage by sea down the West Coast of England to settle. This diversity of population added to a local sense of identity in much the same way as immigrants to America instantly became 'Americans' (with their former ethnic identity acting as a prefix). As Tony Lane summarises, "Liverpool was the gateway of the British Empire...[and her] people became accustomed to thinking of themselves as belonging to a city with a place in the *world*."<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3: Party Politics

The history of Liverpool's municipal politics demonstrates much of the uniqueness which has come to characterise the city. Politically Liverpool returned a Conservative administration from 1890 - 1920 (and beyond) apart from a brief Liberal interlude between 1892 - 5. This can be explained in terms of peculiarities in both parties. The

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<sup>18</sup>T. H. S. Escott, *England, its People, Policy and Pursuits*, quoted in Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.7.

<sup>19</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.7.

<sup>20</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.9.

<sup>21</sup>Lane, *Gateway of Empire*, p.22. His first chapter, "Gateway of Empire" is packed with embellished descriptions of the greatness of the port, taken from observers as diverse as Charles Dickens and Francis Kilvert.

Conservative Party managed to appeal broadly to all classes. Their economic strategies were applauded by merchants as the best ones to safeguard both personal fortunes and the future of the port, whilst they enjoyed a level of working-class organisation unrivalled in any other contemporary city. Waller explains that;

....fluency characterized the Liverpool Conservative leaders' social behaviour. They 'mixed with the crowd without assumption of superiority; they have become Freemasons, Oddfellows, Buffaloes, Shepherds etc; they have attended Trade Union balls and danced freely with the women.' The Conservatives' ascendancy....was in part a *tour de force* of five men [who] had a common touch....Class distances did not vanish, but some Conservatives by a conspiracy of social breeziness made fainter lines of exclusion.<sup>22</sup>

The Working Men's Conservative Association expanded constantly up to 1914 whilst women developed an active Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association.<sup>23</sup> This organisation, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven, reflects Waller's observations on fluidity, attracting Conservative women from throughout Merseyside.

Victorian Liberalism in Liverpool failed to develop the strong working-class base it demonstrated in areas such as Birmingham. Aside from the brief interlude of 1892 - 5, local Liberal success was limited to certain wards and parliamentary constituencies. There was no significant support amongst the newly enfranchised, an attempt to form a Working Men's Liberal Association achieving only 4 branches in 1873.<sup>24</sup> Much of the blame for this situation can be laid at the door of the few grand families who personified local Liberalism. These grand local families permeated all levels of Liverpool's political society, as Tony Lane observes:

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<sup>22</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, pp.16-17.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p.16.

[Although] few had been resident for more than three generations and they were not always the most conspicuously rich....[they had] a cachet....based upon....commitment to civic duty. Without flamboyant display they practised *noblesse oblige* in the city in the same way that landowning families were supposed to practise it in the countryside. They sat in committees that offered no direct financial gain but which improved the quality of public life; their names were on the subscription lists raising money for good works and public projects.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, their very names became public projects. Holt Road, Bowring Park, Rathbone Road and Picton Library are just some of the surviving connections which link them to the city today. The patrician style of the Rathbones, the Holts, the Bowrings and the Mellys, who "neither worked hard at elections nor saw the need to do so" owed more to eighteenth-century Whig traditions than to nineteenth-century radicalism.<sup>26</sup> This "exclusive set, dominated by the richer merchants, shipowners and brokers" of the district, were tainted in the eyes of many fellow merchants due to their families' opposition to slavery, a position akin to heresy in a port owing much of its prosperity to the African trade.<sup>27</sup> They were joined in the late nineteenth century by a younger generation of Liberal families such as the Muspratts, the Brights, the Crosfields and the Cherrys, "newcomers making new fortunes and needing to establish their social importance."<sup>28</sup> These were less patrician in their political outlook, but still firmly part of a municipal élite.

From this newer generation came a group of active Liberal women, who joined the daughters of older Liberal families to establish a wide and influential network. Although the Women's Liberal Federation is not mentioned by Waller, their many

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<sup>25</sup>Lane, *Gateway to Empire*, p.53.

<sup>26</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.13.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>28</sup>Lane, *Gateway to Empire*, pp.53-4.

branches in the city demonstrate high political involvement by Liberal women within both the local party, and their own separate organisations. Women from this organisation, which will be discussed in Chapters Four and Eight, also formed the effective leadership of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society.<sup>29</sup>

The Liverpool Labour Party was in its formative stages in 1890, but had expanded massively by 1920. The beginnings of organised labour locally can be traced back as far as 1848, when the Liverpool Trades Guardian Association was established. This became the Liverpool Trades Council in 1888. Although Waller dismisses it as being "bypassed [by] politically active workmen," a more thorough history records its importance in building New Unionism locally.<sup>30</sup> New Unionism had a widespread effect amongst the city's female workforce, with a Women's Industrial Council forming in 1889 under the influence of Mrs Jeannie Mole. After Mrs Mole's pioneering work amongst women workers, which will be explored in Chapter Three, women were admitted as Trades Council delegates, and their organisations continued to grow, albeit sporadically, throughout the period covered by this thesis.

Liverpool's Independent Labour Party and Fabian Society had a closely linked membership, which included several active women as will be demonstrated in Chapters Four and Eight. These bodies, formed in 1892, enjoyed a slow but steady rise through municipal politics throughout the timespan of this thesis. Their small but significant electoral successes rested on a broad network of rich socialist culture, with a plethora of activities ranging from choirs to rambling clubs, open to members of either sex.

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<sup>29</sup>This organisation will be covered in Chapter Five.

<sup>30</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.100; Hamling, *A Short History of the Liverpool Trades Council*.

Other socialists joined the SDF branch, first founded in 1882 then relaunched a decade later. Some SDF branches later became part of the British Socialist Party which enjoyed a brief period of popularity in Liverpool in the years immediately preceding the First World War, although Bob Holton has found that attempts to make the BSP branch viable floundered due to the persistence locally of "those who wished to remain as dissidents within the SDF."<sup>31</sup> Women were important in building and spreading this socialist culture, as later local socialists such as Bessie Braddock and Jack Jones testified, their recollections of their socialist roots both stressing the role that women played as educators for socialism within the local Socialist Sunday Schools.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the main three strands of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism, Liverpool had other political movements organised within a formal party structure. Irish Nationalists represented Liverpool electors in the council and in Parliament through the Irish National League of Great Britain.<sup>33</sup> Waller sees them as more important than the LTC, as one of their members, J G Taggart, was "Liverpool's first working-class councillor" elected in 1888.<sup>34</sup> However, Ron Bean, who also charts the Irish influence on local politics, believes that their success was as much due to work they did on behalf of all their working-class electors than to the sectarian interests Waller reads as

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<sup>31</sup>B. Holton, "Syndicalism and Labour on Merseyside 1906 - 14" in Hikins, ed, *Building the Union*, p.134. The BSP's paper was sold at ten shops in the city, indicating interest if not membership. However, *The Clarion*, which carried BSP branch reports, gives a more optimistic reading of events, showing branches developing steadily.

<sup>32</sup>See B. Braddock & J. Braddock, *The Braddocks*, London, Macdonald & Co, 1963. Also, J. Jones, "A Liverpool Socialist Education," *History Workshop Journal* 18, Autumn 1984, pp.92-101.

<sup>33</sup>For more detail of this organisation in Liverpool, see L. W. Brady, *T. P. O'Connor and the Liverpool Irish*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1983.

<sup>34</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.100.

paramount in their politics.<sup>35</sup> Taggart, for example, was the first secretary of the local branch of the National Union of Gasworkers, and very much a 'New Unionist,' instrumental in getting a fair wage clause adopted into corporation contracts. Women were also able to organise separately in nationalist politics through the Ladies' Branch of the Irish National League. This was formed in 1891 by Miss Paul, daughter of a city councillor, but has left no records of its activities.<sup>36</sup>

As yet there are no specific histories of Liverpool's individual parties, and existing references do not list the ordinary membership. Membership figures given in published histories refer to men, with women's contribution remaining uncharted. However, the contrast between the emphasis given to women's contribution to local socialism in the works of Waller and Hamling, or to local Liberalism between Waller and the Women's Liberal Federation Reports, indicates that lack of historical references does not equal lack of incidence. In the 1890s the Trades Council first admitted women to its ranks, and the Liberal Party allowed a separate women's section to form. This decade then should hold evidence of the beginnings of a change locally both in the way women were viewed by politically active men, and in the levels of public political involvement they were able to claim for themselves.

#### 1.4: Religion and Neighbourhood Politics

In the area of other political activities, sometimes stretching into neighbourhood politics, women have achieved more historical prominence. Partly this reflects the influence of separate spheres ideology, whose rhetoric encouraged women to perform charitable

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<sup>35</sup>R. Bean, "Aspects of New Unionism in Liverpool 1889 - 91," in Hikins, ed, *Building the Union*, p.110-111.

<sup>36</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics, Society, Literature and the Arts*, 18th July 1891.

work, and give some of their time to voluntary organisations, but did not approve of their entering the party political arena. As many of these women were middle-class, their actions can be traced through the written records they left, both in personal collections and through a media which was generally keen to cover charitable events.<sup>37</sup> Religion often added a respectable edge to charitable work, although within Liverpool extra-mural religious activities were by no means restricted to the arena of middle-class philanthropy.

The strong element of Catholicism which has come to dominate twentieth-century Liverpool emerged in the mid nineteenth-century. Before that, Liverpool was a predominantly Protestant town, and had been at the time of the English Civil War. What altered both this and the character of much local Protestantism was the massive influx of Irish immigrants from the 1840s. Although Liverpool had had Orange Lodges since the early 1800s, immigration invested them with fresh dynamism. The marching season leading up to July 12th became a time for prolonged street battles. Newspaper reports show men and women's participation, and it was not uncommon to find women serving prison sentences as a result, including the infamous 'Belfast Mary' who allegedly required six policemen to arrest her.<sup>38</sup> Waller's *Democracy and Sectarianism* holds the view that sectarianism was always the main political issue in the city. However, some campaigns, (notably suffrage, but also some trade union and party political work) show cross-religious organisation. Whilst some trades were undoubtedly Catholic or Protestant, it would be dangerous to assume consistent sectarianism on the

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<sup>37</sup>Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860 - 1914*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986. This is based on collections of family papers and observes that the survival of middle-class women's personal papers is fortuitous as many families kept men's papers but destroyed women's.

<sup>38</sup>See Barbara Whittingham-Jones, *The Pedigree of Liverpool Politics: White, Orange and Green*, Liverpool, no publisher, 1936.

part of the workforce without further investigation. Eric Taplin has recently indicated this, finding that "religious differences....were less divisive than historians have assumed" and could be forgotten at times of major conflict, whilst John Bohstedt removes sectarianism from the workplace altogether, seeing its appeal in the associational culture it provided.<sup>39</sup> It would appear that the long overdue reassessment of sectarianism has begun.

Leaving aside the community work done by Catholic women in the local Catholic Women's Suffrage Society during the First World War which Chapter Nine will discuss, it was from Liverpool's non-conformist community that much organised charity initially came. Margaret Simey places the local Unitarians at the forefront of local philanthropy.<sup>40</sup> Many of the families mentioned in connection with Liberalism's municipal élite figure again here, underlining their patrician stance, although philanthropy brought them into direct contact with the urban poor. Liverpool's first non-conformist Chapels were in the city centre, in Hope Street and Renshaw Street, and whilst new congregations formed in places such as Ullet Road, reflecting the population shift, Hope Street remained until after the First World War. Local Baptists, who tended to be less middle-class, and also more radical than the Unitarians, increased their city centre base at Pembroke Chapel in the 1890s. This allowed them instant access to the poor for philanthropic activities. However, Pembroke soon came to represent much more, hosting many political activities such as suffrage meetings and socialist

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<sup>39</sup>E.Taplin, "'False Dawn of New Unionism'; Labour Unrest in Liverpool 1871-1873," in Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics*, p.7. See also J. Bohstedt, "More than One Working Class: Protestant and Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool," in the same collection.

<sup>40</sup>Margaret Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1951. For further details of the splits between various strands of local non-conformists, see Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, *passim*.

conferences. Within Pembroke, women played a full role in the church. Suffragette Hattie Mahood was a deacon there, with other WSPU members regularly attending church meetings. Socialist Ethel Snowden was also a member of the chapel, and on one occasion preached from its pulpit.<sup>41</sup>

Unitarianism was less radical than Baptism, more concerned with preserving a veneer of respectability. Yet through their charitable work, Unitarian women found a means to escape the gender confines of this same respectability. Simey explains:

The ideals of middle-class society....pressed heavily upon women....The increased prestige of idleness as the traditional characteristic of gentility....drove women to the extremes of time filling ingenuity for which they have been derided ever since.<sup>42</sup>

Added to this was a general removal of women from social work in the mid nineteenth century as it became more professionalised. The establishment of institutions for the poor made them less accessible to women who had freely visited them in their homes. Simey points to an extreme case in Liverpool of women being barred by their church from workhouse visits once it was discovered that another denomination was freely working there, and that the two groups might come into contact.<sup>43</sup> Unitarians, whose mission to the poor, founded in 1831, was based on direct contact, allowed women more space within their visiting work.

As the family links outlined above indicate, much of Liverpool's philanthropy was both Unitarian and Liberal in character, and was largely controlled by a benevolent élite who

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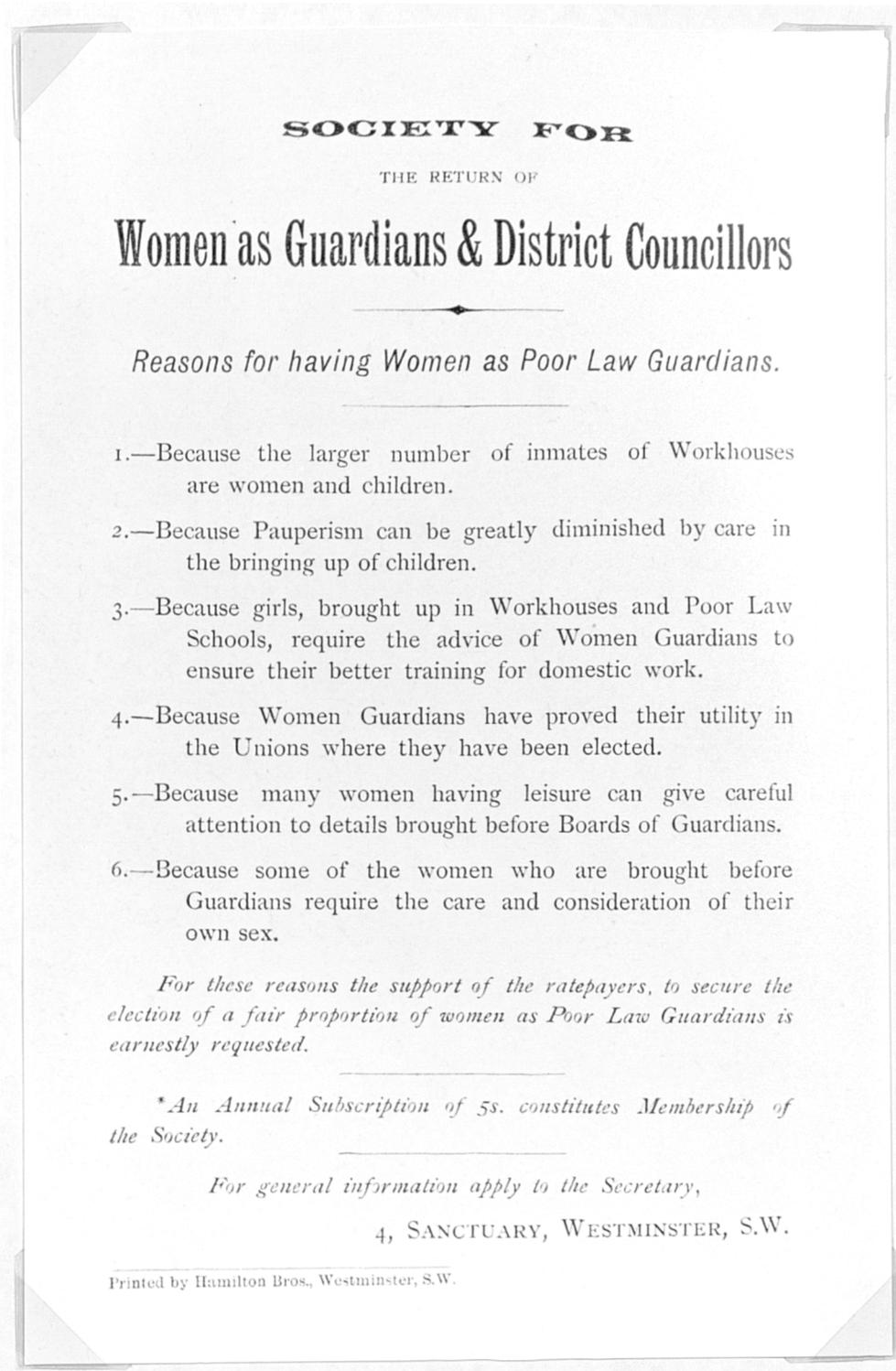
<sup>41</sup>See I. Sellers, "Nonconformist Attitudes in Later Nineteenth Century Liverpool," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CXIV, 1962, pp.215-239. Also, I. Sellers, *Salute to Pembroke*, unpublished typescript in Liverpool Record Office.

<sup>42</sup>Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, p.62.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid*, p.61.

defined the deserving poor and the amount of relief they should receive. However, for the women of the élite families, it offered a model for public activity, which they could build on in areas such as the public Boards once electoral reform opened these to female candidates, as Chapter Two will show.

Thus, the years 1890-1920 saw very rapid changes in Liverpool. Its geographical borders widened, whilst its political map, though still overwhelmingly Tory with Liberal islands, began gradually to reflect electoral reforms through occasional Labour successes. Public political opportunities for women, virtually non-existent until the 1880s, multiplied rapidly, until they became an accepted, if minority part, of local public life. Yet in order to get to this position, many conventions had to be broken by women who were in many senses political pioneers. The next chapter will outline some of the routes taken into public life by these first women, who paved the way for some of the twentieth century's best known female political activists to follow.



Handbill from the Society for the Return of Women as Guardians and District Councillors, c. 1890.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "THERE ARE MANY LADIES WHO CAN DO USEFUL WORK"

#### WOMEN ON LIVERPOOL'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARDS

1890 - 1914

##### 2.1: Local Government and its Significance for Victorian Feminists

Local government was the first public arena to test theories about the nature and extent of women's political involvement. Although, as Rubinstein observes, "the qualifications required of women....elected [for] office were almost impenetrable to contemporaries and have remained so to historians," the later Victorian period witnessed a slow but steady trickle of successful women candidates.<sup>1</sup> The 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act which established the right of women to stand for council office, providing they met the property qualifications demanded of male candidates, was preceded by many smaller victories. The Poor Law Boards, based on common law, had always accepted women although it was not until 1875 that Martha Merrington put this to the test in London. The reduction of property qualifications for vestry election to £5 in 1892 followed by their removal in 1894 allowed many more women to stand as guardians. The School Boards, established by the 1870 Education Act, admitted women from the start, and had no electoral qualifications. Many prominent feminists including Annie Besant, Emmeline Pankhurst and Charlotte Despard had their first taste of elective office on the boards.

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<sup>1</sup>David Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes*, New York, St Martins Press, 1986, p.165, and Chapter 10. Also, Patricia Hollis, "Women in Council: Separate Spheres, Public Space," in J. Rendall, ed, *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987; Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865-1914*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987; B. Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise - A Short History*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1952, pp.164-168.

Two main contemporary viewpoints supported this trend. Both enthusiastically highlighted the contribution of women to this area of public life, but drew widely different conclusions. Many men, and some of the women concerned, saw women's involvement flowing naturally from the ideologies of separate spheres. School Boards dealt with children's welfare, Boards of Guardians with that of the poor, the infirm, the destitute. All of these were seen as being "particularly appropriate for women...an extension of the philanthropic work which they had long undertaken."<sup>2</sup> They were an extension of woman's role within the home. As Ethel Snowden put it in 1911:

The work of local governing bodies is in the nature of collective housekeeping. Children and education, health and sanitation, the provision of food and medicine, the care and control of the sick, have always been held to be within the province of the woman.<sup>3</sup>

Women were portrayed as natural housekeepers, who would save ratepayers from the excesses of profligacy threatened by some local councils as a response to rising unemployment which threw wave upon wave of new paupers onto the local parish. Also, there were increasing calls for women to sit on the Boards to deal with the numbers of female paupers, female staff, schoolgirls and women teachers who fell under their control. "Some of the women who are brought before the Guardians require the care and consideration of their own sex," it was believed, making women better suited to deal with their dress, conduct and moral welfare.<sup>4</sup> Regarding issues of morality, such as unmarried mothers, or women engaged in prostitution, it was thought that women guardians could allow their superior feminine morality to permeate the Boards.

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<sup>2</sup>Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes*, p.166.

<sup>3</sup>Ethel Snowden, *The Feminist Movement*, quoted in Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, Hutchinson, London, 1987, p.73.

<sup>4</sup>Society for the Return of Women as Poor Law Guardians, undated campaign leaflet. See Plate Two.

However, alongside this developed an alternative ideology which saw local government as an essential first step into a broader public sphere, the "road to Westminster" rather than "woman's parallel path."<sup>5</sup> These women "spoke the language of separate spheres," constantly stressing that only women could help other women, and that as women they had something unique to offer public life, something which could not be offered by men.<sup>6</sup> Yet, whilst they professed their unique suitability for local government, unlike supporters of the first viewpoint they were also seeking to use the experience they gained there to argue their suitability for national parliamentary work, sometimes citing it directly as a counter-attack to arguments that woman's nature rendered her physically unsuited to public life.<sup>7</sup> Increasing numbers of women were coming to the Boards as representatives of political parties. Unsurprisingly, these same women were to use their work there to put pressure onto their parties which supported them in this area but refused them the parliamentary vote, and, in the case of the Liberal and Conservative parties, even party membership. As Honor Morten observed:

The experience gained on boards may be regarded as preparation for Parliament....Let women....there learn the country's laws, administer the public funds, experience the discipline of associated action, and so broaden their judgement...use their municipal vote so as to gain the Parliamentary vote.<sup>8</sup>

Patricia Hollis claims that women in local government during this period came into public life through three main routes: via philanthropy; as a result of their new-found

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<sup>5</sup>Hollis, *Women in Council*, p.193.

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

<sup>7</sup>See for example Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, London, Routledge, 1967, p.49.

<sup>8</sup>H. Morton, *Questions for Women*, cited in Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.30.

position as electors; and as party activists.<sup>9</sup> Philanthropy she cites as the most obvious route, taking the low profile public work which women had been doing throughout the nineteenth-century, and moving it into the field of elective work. She sees electors as those women who come to local government through "the suffrage movement, women's rights and the claim to political citizenship."<sup>10</sup> Party activists recognised the boards as elected bodies, extensions of the town and city councils, where political fights occurred on political lines. In this case, women, increasingly involved in party politics as members or auxiliaries, came to the Boards as representatives of organisations with the same motivations as their male colleagues. Whilst such a model is seductive in its neat characterisation, I would argue that the evidence of women's activity on the Liverpool Boards points to something more complex than this. Women were normally elected as representatives rather than independents in the city, although not always as representatives of the three main political parties, catholicism, non-conformity and nationalism being examples of equally influential constituencies. However, when there, their actions cannot easily be categorised. Although they did sometimes vote together as women, on other occasions they voted to defeat proposals by their fellow women members on the boards, their actions being clearly on party lines. They appear to have selected at will those occasions when they were to prioritise "the claims of women as women" and those when party loyalties came first.<sup>11</sup> If one is searching for common threads with which to mark out the boundaries of women's activity in local government in Liverpool, this element of choice, permitting a fluidity of movement, appears one of the strongest.

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<sup>9</sup>Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, *passim*.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, p.29.

<sup>11</sup>Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.48.

This chapter will concentrate on examining the work of women on Liverpool's local government boards rather than on the city council. This is because from 1909 until the 1920s Miss Eleanor Rathbone, Independent representative for Granby, was the sole woman to hold a council seat. Her influence on local politics cannot be denied, but will be discussed elsewhere. However, this thesis is mainly concerned with the space afforded to and taken by women in organised political movements between 1890 and 1920. With only one woman councillor, who represented no organised political body, the minutiae of council business neither expands on its major themes, nor enlightens its main questions. Whilst there remain important questions as to why women were not coming onto the council in greater numbers as representatives of the organisations mentioned in the thesis, these will be dealt with elsewhere when the particular bodies are studied in more detail. Similarly, the work of the Liverpool School Board will be examined from its formation until 1903, when it was replaced by the Education Committee, becoming a sub-committee of the city council.

## 2.2: Liverpool Women and the Boards

### 2.2.i: The School Board

In analyzing the position of women in local government in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century,<sup>12</sup> Hollis awards great import to the opportunities afforded by the new school boards. This is justified, she feels:

Because [as] School Board women were not hindered by the need for formal qualification, many women were able to serve. Because education was seen as entirely appropriate work for women, since infants and girls needed a woman's hand, and most teachers were women, many women were willing to serve.<sup>12</sup>

According to Hollis, women throughout the country were welcomed onto the boards by

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<sup>12</sup>Hollis, *Women in Council*, p.196.

men who were only too pleased to have them as dedicated, hardworking, unpaid social workers, "not only child-centred, but community-centred," who were;

conscientious and diligent, painstaking to a fault, setting themselves higher standards than they would expect of any man, turning in immaculate attendance records, visiting schools, cites and homes which never saw a male member.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these women worked themselves into the ground on behalf of the children whom they perceived as being in 'their' care. Hollis also argues that the School Board was providing a valuable public platform for women, allowing them access to the public political sphere, giving experience in public speaking, and, for some women, in chairing large committees, and creating an accepted role for them in public life which was valued by the community. Although part of the explanation for this enthusiastic acceptance of women was simply pragmatism by male members who recognised that women were ideal for the day to day donkey work necessary to the running of a successful Board, other historians have noted that the new School Boards were fast becoming strongholds of radicalism and as such would be more open to women.<sup>14</sup> That many radical women began their careers on the School Boards would appear to bear this out.

On a casual examination, the experience of women on the Liverpool School Board appears to fit Hollis' model. Indeed, she cites one of them, Miss Florence Melly, as an example of the kind of total self-sacrifice which typified women's attitudes towards their role on the boards, commenting:

It was said of Florence Melly that no paid official ever worked harder or longer hours than she did. Few would have known, as she bicycled to every elementary school in Liverpool in the worst of weathers, that she was a

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, pp.198, 199.

<sup>14</sup>That this was the case in areas like Nelson is noted by Geoffrey Fidler in his article "The Liverpool Labour Movement and the School Board: An Aspect of Education and the Working Class," *History of Education*, 1980, vol. 9, no. 1, pp.43-61.

diabetic struggling always to keep her condition stable.<sup>15</sup>

An obituary for another Liverpool School Board woman, Miss Ann Jane Davies, shows a similar pattern of work. She was lauded as:

A distinguished member of the Liverpool School Board, in which capacity she rendered invaluable service to the cause of education in the city. No member of the Board ever performed the onerous duties attaching to the office more faithfully nor yet more efficiently than did the deceased lady....She knew as no other member knew every detail in the working of the Board; her counsel and advice were sought and gratefully accepted on all intricate matters...her almost phenomenal attendance at committee meetings....gave her a unique position.<sup>16</sup>

However, at this stage, the model presented by Hollis begins to break down when applied to a Liverpool context. Both Miss Melly and Miss Davies were undoubtedly dedicated members of the School Board, and for both of them it provided a public platform from which they could exercise some of the skills developed in their broader and much varied voluntary philanthropic work. But they were unique in being able to do this within Liverpool. For, from its inception until its demise in 1903, they represented the sole female presence on the Liverpool School Board. No other women were elected. Furthermore, although acknowledging the value of their work, other commentators have highlighted the reticence of the two women. Margaret Simey, whilst praising Miss Melly's contribution to various charitable works in the city, maintains that, as a School Board member, she represented the next stage following the city's generation of "noble matrons." Although she;

belonged to the future rather than the past in that [she was] conscious of a call to public service because of [her] sex and not in spite of it

she still "adopted the habitual modesty of [her] predecessors." Similarly, Miss Davies' eulogising obituarist remarked that she was:

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<sup>15</sup>Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.185.

<sup>16</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 30th July 1898.

[A] quiet and unassuming lady....always unobtrusive.... [whose] opinions were always advocated with a calmness, earnestness and thorough ladyness [sic]....which in this roistering age of women's rights it would be pleasing to see imitated."<sup>17</sup>

Before presenting a closer examination of the work of these two women on the Liverpool School Board, which will show in greater detail how their work there does not support Hollis' model as closely as she claims, it is first necessary to outline some of the ways in which the Liverpool School Board differed from its fellow Boards in similar cities. The first major difference, which partially explains the lack of women on the Board, is that it lacked the radicalism attached to these bodies in other areas, and indeed found in other walks of public life within the city itself. None of "the broad pioneering advances in the field of public health [were] to be found in education."<sup>18</sup> Whilst other School Boards became obvious targets for the new socialist parties including the Independent Labour Party, no socialist was elected to the School Board in Liverpool for its entire lifetime.

Historians who have studied the Liverpool School Board in great detail agree that this is explained by what Geoffrey Fiddler claims is the "peculiarly complex politico-religious climate" of the Board, where religious sectarianism took priority over party politics.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, throughout its lifetime, the Board was dominated by members who had stood as religious candidates; Anglicans, Non-conformists, Catholics, Orangemen. The balance of power was always explained in religious terms. The Liberal Party, keen

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<sup>17</sup>Margaret Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, p.115; *Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 30th July 1898.

<sup>18</sup>B. D. White, *A History of Liverpool Corporation*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1951, p.159.

<sup>19</sup>Geoffrey Fidler, "The Liverpool Labour Movement & the School Board." This view is supported by Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*.

to attract the working-class vote away from the city's Tories, gained no electoral success for their condemnations of the Board's insistence on "furthering denominational ends at the expense of the great need of the city."<sup>20</sup> One of the important results of this, as far as socialist women were concerned, was that they had to develop their own strong forms of child-centred education in other areas of the city's life, rather than being able to use the Board for these purposes.<sup>21</sup>

Both Miss Davies and Miss Melly were elected onto the Board as 'non-sectarian' candidates. However, this does not mean that they were not religious candidates. In the context of the Liverpool School Board, 'non-sectarian' merely implies neither Anglican nor Catholic affiliation. A closer examination of their work on the Board indicates that on several occasions they followed their own itinerary, which, whilst it was not party-political, did not always mirror the web of feminist concerns which Hollis provides as motivation for other School Board women.

Miss Davies was co-opted onto the Liverpool School Board in 1879, at the suggestion of the local Welsh community, to represent the interests of Welsh non-conformity there.<sup>22</sup> As a non-conformist, she was an ardent supporter of temperance lectures in schools, but here the non-political nature of the Board worked in her favour, and her stance on this issue did not bring her into conflict with local business interest, or even

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<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Fidler, "The Liverpool Labour Movement & the School Board."

<sup>21</sup>Compare this with the experiences of Margaret MacMillan in Bradford, as described in Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood Culture & Class in Britain: Margaret MacMillan, 1860 - 1931*, London, Virago, 1990. The work of socialist women in Liverpool with regard to education is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

<sup>22</sup>See letter from Rev. W. O. Jones, and telegram from Dr Hugh Jones, Liverpool School Board minutes, 13th September 1898, Liverpool Record Office.

put her out of step with her colleagues.<sup>23</sup> However, aside from this, she does not appear to have picked up any of the issues Hollis identifies as being unique to women. For instance, in February 1892, the Female Visitors attached to the Board were given a grant of 30s to buy waterproof clothing, and boots for visiting schools in the winter, but this motion was moved and seconded by the male members of the Board, and did not originate from Miss Davies' concerns about members of her own sex undertaking public work in poor weather. Similarly, whilst Hollis portrays School Board women as champions of the rights of poor children, Miss Davies had no consistent input in the long running debate in Liverpool about the number of free places which should be provided in Board Schools. She moved a motion proposing making North Corporation School free, and opposed a similar one in regard to Roscommon School, without any explanation.<sup>24</sup> Aside from these instances, Miss Davies' contribution to the meetings of the Board appears to have been slight, with her diligent attendance not encouraging any active participation in meetings.<sup>25</sup>

Miss Melly was appointed to the School Board following Miss Davies' unexpected death from pneumonia in 1898. There was some dissent about her choice, as the Welsh community felt that they 'owned' this seat, hence Miss Melly's being accepted by 7 votes to 0 with 6 abstentions. However, whilst not Welsh, she was 'non-sectarian,' representing a strand of non-conformity within the city. Unlike Miss Davies, who stood

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<sup>23</sup>Liverpool School Board minutes, December 1889 - March 1897. For a discussion of the conflict temperance could cause between women and local business, see the case of Eva McLaren in Bradford, outlined in Hollis, *Ladies Elect*.

<sup>24</sup>School Board minutes 30th July 1891. The minutes are not very detailed, and the press give no reasons for her choices.

<sup>25</sup>She was also elected onto the Schools Management Committee, the Industrial Schools Committee and the Finance Committee but I have no details of what she did there.

on her own merits alone, she also represented the interests of one of the large Liverpool families, Liberal in politics, although she left this aside from her work for the Board. Like Miss Davies, Miss Melly was no radical. Indeed, one of her earliest acts on the Board was to vote against a motion that the School Board should accept and apply the Liverpool Trades Council's notion of a fair wage clause in its dealings. Certainly her approach was child-centred, and she was most active around an inquiry into Child Labour in Liverpool set up by the City Council in 1901, attending and participating in committee meetings despite not being a committee member. However, her views there display a strong consciousness of her own social position. She believed that "street trading by girls ought to be prohibited altogether" as it "led to depravity in many cases," but "did not see any harm in girls working after school hours in domestic service and similar employments."<sup>26</sup> It was the type of work which she deplored, and not the effect of working long hours on girls' concentration at school.<sup>27</sup>

Liverpool School Board does fit Hollis' model in the field of public elections. Whilst the Miss Davies and Miss Melly were initially co-opted onto the Board, they both stood for election when their initial terms expired, and attracted large numbers of votes.<sup>28</sup> Liverpool was more than ready for women in this field of office. Indeed, the resolution of West Toxteth Women's Liberal Association that "men and women should be equally eligible to serve on any local education authorities that may be created, so that women

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<sup>26</sup>*Liverpool Mercury*, 9th May 1901.

<sup>27</sup>For a further discussion of the attitudes towards schoolgirls and work, which highlights the way state schooling was tailored to certain female jobs, see June Purvis, "Social Class, Education and Ideals of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in G. Weiner & M. Arnot, eds, *Gender and the Politics of Schooling*, London, Hutchinson, 1987.

<sup>28</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 17th November 1900, gives Miss Melly with over 52, 909 votes as second in the poll below George Wise the Protestant candidate, and reminds readers that in the 1897 contest Miss Davies headed the poll with 48, 768 votes.

may have the fullest opportunity for useful service to the community," motivated in part by a fear that the new Education Committees would squeeze women out, was unnecessary, the decision being taken that the new Education Committee would contain three places reserved for women.<sup>29</sup> In the light of this, I would argue that it was the nature of the School Board in the city, with its stress on religion rather than class or gender, which kept women out, rather than any innate misogyny on the part of electors or other members. However, unlike the situation in other areas which saw the three routes into party political activity which Hollis describes, Liverpool saw no significant bloc of active women outside of party politics. It is this point which I believe largely explains their absence on the School Board, as it was not a site for party politics. An examination of the other elective bodies, the boards of guardians, during the same period will give further evidence to support this.

## 2.2 ii: The Boards of Guardians

After the School Boards, the poor law boards were an obvious site for women to continue their public work. They too were concerned with the kind of welfare issues women had been pursuing through charitable and philanthropic organisations: the feeding and clothing of children, the welfare of destitute women, the care of the sick. However, unlike the former, the contributions of women on these boards do not always appear to have been welcomed by men. Hollis comments that many of the early women elected had to cope with "the almost reflex hostility of many guardians....to women joining their boards." Whilst school boards were interested in increasing the amount of

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<sup>29</sup>*Liverpool Mercury*, 29th November 1901, *Liverpool Daily Post* 30th March 1903. Briefly, one of the four co-opted School Board members (later to be appointed by the City Council), one of the three public secondary school governors, and one of the additional three members co-opted by the council had to be women.

money they spent on education, she claims, the poor law boards were concerned mainly with cutting back. These institutions, run like gentlemen's clubs, were alarmed when women, immersed in the experience of giving out money to the poor through charitable endeavour, came to join their ranks.<sup>30</sup> Such attitudes could well explain why it was not until 1875 that women sought election to the boards, despite having been legally enabled to do so since the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

However, the case of women guardians in Liverpool does not fit snugly with the model which Hollis presents. She creates a picture of 'ladies' who, having overcome such odds to be elected, formed tight alliances with each other, and sat quietly until their position became "well established."<sup>31</sup> They were mainly politically independent women, "unable to appeal to....political parties for support," who therefore looked to other members of their sex for backing.<sup>32</sup> Often amused by the efforts of men to attempt what the received messages of separate spheres had informed them were essentially women's tasks: the selection of suitable costume for orphan children, or of food for babies, for example. They worked slowly and patiently, looking for obvious chinks to gain a foothold from which they would reorganise the boards.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike other cities which returned women guardians in increasing numbers from the 1880s, Liverpool had no women on the boards until the early 1890s.<sup>34</sup> One plausible

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<sup>30</sup>Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.209, also pp.210-14, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid*, pp.213-4. See Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes*, p.170, for a discussion of why candidates were 'ladies' rather than 'women'.

<sup>32</sup>Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.221.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*, Chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup>As explained previously, 'boards' refers to the Select Vestry and Toxteth Union, unless explicitly stated.

explanation for this fact is that, despite some very notable exceptions, such as Josephine Butler and Anne Jemima Clough, Liverpool had lacked the wide participation of women in Victorian philanthropy which had characterised this work in other large cities. As Margaret Simey explained of women's charitable work in Liverpool:

The scope offered was limited, and the responsible male never far to seek, firmly enforcing the distinction between men's responsibilities and those suitable for women....Women were...forced out of the field of practical social work, and were limited in the main to what they could do in their own homes....[they were] frustrated in such times of opportunity.<sup>35</sup>

Whilst there were individual women in the city who managed to overcome this, and who relied heavily on the type of female philanthropic network which has been ably outlined by Barbara Caine in order to develop and sustain their work, they remained the exception in the city.<sup>36</sup> Hence the women who came onto the boards as independents directly from philanthropic work were very much the exception. Most of the women elected onto the poor law boards of Liverpool stood on a party ticket with the backing of political parties. Once on the boards, although occasionally touching on some of the issues which Hollis describes as typifying women's work in this area, they mainly remained party political activists, advancing the cause of their party over others, even when this meant forming alliances with men against women.

Although the experience of women on the Liverpool boards concurs with that outlined by Hollis in that once elected they had to bide their time before being appointed to certain committees, they were not unwelcome locally. Indeed, the Liberal press, notably in the form of the *Daily Post* and the *Liverpool Review of Politics*, enthusiastically welcomed their presence in the elections. This was the case even when women were

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<sup>35</sup>Margaret Simey, *Charitable Effort in Liverpool*, p.53.

<sup>36</sup>See Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

not standing in the Liberal interest, as can be seen in the case of Miss Ada Cripps, a lady from Waterloo who, in January 1895, "yielded to a strongly-expressed local feeling that the Waterloo division of the West Derby Union should be represented by a lady guardian."<sup>37</sup> Far from having to fight her corner, Miss Cripps' candidature was reported to have been "met with general acceptance among the residents of the district."<sup>38</sup>

What local hostility there was to women appears to have been swiftly removed when the first women were elected. In 1893, Miss Jane Calderwood and Miss Johnson were the first to break through, standing successfully for election to the West Derby board.

The *Liverpool Review of Politics* remarked that whilst initially;

the Select Vestry pooh-poohed the idea of women being useful in parochial work, while the West Derby Board of Guardians felt indignant and immovable at the suggestion...the last-named body will probably now submit more readily to the voice of ratepayers in the union who have shown...the direction of their feelings by electing two lady members.<sup>39</sup>

The *Review* felt that women had a positive contribution to make to this part of public life. "In our workhouses and children's home there are numerous matters which can be better attended to by ladies," noted its report.<sup>40</sup> In such things, the paper's view was that independent women, such as Miss Calderwood and Miss Cripps had the greatest to offer. However, there was no question of support for a broader feminist aim in laying behind these sentiments. Women were supported on the boards as an extension of separate spheres. They were best suited to deal with pauper women and children, and

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<sup>37</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 4th December 1894.

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

<sup>39</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 8th April 1893.

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

were not to use the boards as a platform from which to assert broader claims to independence. In a further comment on women's role in public life, during the latter stages for the 1895 guardian's elections, woman's place was clearly defined:

[Whilst an] attractive element has been the ready manner in which ladies have come forward as candidates...to urge the right to representation on boards which have to deal with a large proportion of female paupers...we have no desire to see the blatant blue stocking or the neurotic nymph poking her nose into the affairs of the poor merely to amuse herself... This is a portion of the new women's career which we hope will never enter into the constitution of our parish councils. There are many ladies, well educated, gifted, sympathetic, with the womanly instinct highly developed, who can do useful work in our parish schools and infirmaries, and....we are glad to see that in and around Liverpool the voters have supported such candidates as a general rule.<sup>41</sup>

Yet in such praise of women's independent actions, this strand of Liberal opinion in the city is not speaking the whole truth. Of the two women elected in 1893, Miss Johnson was a Liberal, and Miss Calderwood, although initially coming forward as a ratepayer's candidate, was quickly offered and accepted a position on the official list of the West Derby Liberal Association. Indeed, her victory was heralded as "a great one, for it [had] been a tradition of West Derby that only Tories of the good old conventional school were fit to administer the Poor Law" and her defeat the following year was blamed entirely on the Tory Party's "introduction of politics....to defeat everyone who did not bear their colours; party, not men and women and measures, was their platform."<sup>42</sup> Such a claim of party politics being new to the board is not supported by contemporary evidence: this suggests that aside from a handful of ratepayers candidates, board elections were always fought under a party banner, and that women candidates were no exception. For most Liverpool women, the boards were not simply the natural first step into public life; many were in public life already, as members of political organisations,

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibid*, 22nd December 1894.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid*, 15th April 1893, 22nd December 1894.

and were relishing the opportunity to fight elections for themselves rather than on behalf of male candidates.

Following the elections of Miss Johnson and Miss Calderwood, a steady trickle of women began to appear on the Liverpool boards. In 1895, three women were elected to the Select Vestry. They were the first women to serve there, and their careers demonstrate that it was party politics, and not a shared feminist concern motivated through their common gender which would dictate their actions in this field.

The three women were Miss Mary Stanistreet, Mrs Alice McElroy, and Miss Frances Thorburn. Although the *Liverpool Review* had stated that they and other ladies were there as women rather than political representatives, the *Daily Post*, writing as a paper supporting the Liberal candidates, was more honest about their affiliations. Miss Thorburn and Mrs McElroy, Liberal and Nationalist candidates, respectively, were afforded prominent space within the paper as part of their campaigns. Their experience in philanthropic work was cited, and they were endorsed as potential "valuable addition[s] to the Board."<sup>43</sup> *The Liberals and the Nationalists had an electoral pact at this time, hence the dual support. However, Miss Stanistreet stood as a Unionist candidate and was the only one of the three women not to be profiled by the Daily Post during the course of the campaign. The three women remained on the Board until 1898, when Mrs McElroy came off. However, from their first meeting, they formed two blocks, with the Liberal/Nationalist Miss Thorburn and Mrs McElroy voting against the Unionist Miss Stanistreet over individuals who were being suggested for co-option.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 12th December 1894.

<sup>44</sup>Liverpool Select Vestry minutes, 1st January 1895.

Their voting consistently demonstrates a political rather than a gender-based alliance, although they were seen as women by the remainder of the board when they were placed on sub-committees such as the Industrial Schools and the Workhouse committee, where women were needed to perform the roles which Hollis has outlined.<sup>45</sup> In line with Hollis' findings for other boards, it took the women of the Select Vestry some time before they were able to sit on the Finance Committee, and break away from what was perceived as the most appropriate areas for their work. This exclusion did allow the women to explore the possibility of forming gender alliances between themselves, but not at the expense of their party allegiance. In 1902, a suggestion to include both Miss Stanistreet and Miss Wade (a Liberal) on the Finance committee was lost by 12 votes to 23, Miss Wade and Miss Thorburn voting against it, but another one "that the three lady members of the Board be appointed members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee" which also fell by 16 to 19 votes, attracted the support of all three women.<sup>46</sup> For these three women, therefore, gender was a factor which they were aware of, but it was less important than politics. Hence they were content for all of them to be appointed onto a committee *as women*, but the two Liberal women combined to oppose a Unionist women gaining any more power, even if it meant a position for one of them.

It is difficult from the remaining material to ascertain to what extent, if any, women on the Liverpool Boards were initiating any of the changes cited by Hollis as typical of women Guardians. The minutes of the Industrial Schools' Committee of the Select Vestry, do not specify which of the suggestions were coming from women, and which

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<sup>45</sup>For example, the 'Lady members' selected the children's outfits for children being placed at Calvert's Mills near Halifax. Industrial Schools Committee Minutes, 3rd December 1895.

<sup>46</sup>Select Vestry Minutes, April 1902.

of them were coming from men, although it is clear that men suggested door screens in dormitories, trough closets as opposed to pedestal, and pocket handkerchiefs for the children, as these changes were effected in 1895 prior to the appointment of any women. However, as the original visitors' reports do not survive, the synthesized versions which are fed through the minutes do not detail who initiated future changes. One episode where women are involved which would have provided them with a clear chance to display the sort of womanly concern for child welfare Hollis describes, saw them taking a rather different line. This occurred in September 1899, and emphasised how for these women, party politics and class allegiances were consistently prioritised above gender.

It was the custom of the Liverpool Board to encourage applications from employers for suitable pauper girls and boys who would be sent out as workers, thus taking them 'off the Parish'. Calverts' Mill in Halifax was a loyal employer for the Select Vestry. However, in September 1899, the Industrial Schools' Committee heard that two of the girls they had sent to work at Calverts had 'escaped'. The committee initially accepted the explanation of the company as satisfactory, but authorised the Lady Visitors to make a visit as soon as possible. On 29th September, Miss Thorburn described her visit. Things were, she reported:

On the whole satisfactory, [but she] considered that the relations existing between the girls and the foster parents in one of the homes and the absence of means of recreation for the girls in general would render advisable a further visit by members of the committee.<sup>47</sup>

Two men visited, and further reported that if the management of one particular foster home was to be changed, then they were "prepared to recommend that the application

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<sup>47</sup>Industrial Schools Committee minutes, 29th September 1899.

of Messrs Calvert for additional girls be favourable entertained."<sup>48</sup> Further girls were then sent to Calverts.

It is possible that the findings of Miss Thorburn were not as severe as she made out. However, such a sympathetic interpretation of her action becomes less credible when it was revealed that in May 1901, Margaret Graves, one of the Calverts' girls, was assaulted by an overlooker at the firm. Initially the committee decided to take no action, but following a further visit by the Lady Guardians, it was reported that their early recommendations were not acted on by the firm. The committee then agreed to legal proceedings on the part of Margaret Graves. Girls already at Calverts were not removed, and although a further request in August 1902 for more girls was denied, by March 1903 Liverpool girls were again sent to Calverts, Miss Thorburn reporting that all was now satisfactory there. What this episode underlines is that the cases of women being naturally more caring or concerned for the conditions of children in their care are by no means universal. Whilst Miss Thorburn did concern herself with welfare issues on other occasions, this concern was not a constant characteristic. According to Hollis, she informed the 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Law that "a girl gets more than one chance before we give up trying to help her."<sup>49</sup> This does not appear to have extended to the girls at Calverts.

On some occasions, the Liverpool women guardians did conform to Hollis' model. This is much more apparent on the Toxteth Board, to which women were also elected on party political lines. Here, for instance, Miss Booth and Miss Bowring, both Liberal

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<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, 10th October 1899.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in Hollis, *Ladies Elect*, p.269.

women, visited a Bradford cloth mill in August 1902, and reported that she found it unsuitable for boys to be sent there, a recommendation to which the committee agreed. Similarly, in November 1899, Miss Booth gave notice of her intent to move a resolution increasing the dietary allowances for able-bodied inmates, based on data which she appears to have researched herself, and again this was agreed to. These examples are somewhat ambiguous. Gender is more clearly a motivating force when Toxteth Board discussed the appointment of a doctor, in February 1913. Miss E. Davidson of London applied for the position, and was well qualified. Rather than interview her, the Board decided to readvertise, requesting this time a male medical officer. The two women present, Miss Crosfield and Mrs Blease, outraged by this manoeuvre, moved an amendment that as in the first advertisement, sex should not be mentioned. The amendment was lost. Miss Crosfield, a very active woman Liberal, also voted against the committee on 19th March 1914, when they censured the Women's Industrial Council, a body with which she and other women Liberals had a long tradition of involvement. Yet on other occasions when a woman's voice would be expected, they are silent. In September 1908, for instance, by which time there were four women on the Toxteth Board (all Liberals), a letter was read from the Women's Local Government Society calling for the appointment of women as relieving officers. Following a discussion, in which none of the women appear to have participated, the Board decided to take no action on this issue. Here, the women represented their interests as Liberals. Their gender was not the primary reason for their being on the Board, therefore they saw no need to support such a move which could bring in women indiscriminately, regardless of their political affiliation.

In the light of this evidence, I would argue strongly that in Liverpool, whilst there are

occasional episodes where women on elected bodies do unite on gender lines, supporting Hollis' view that they were self consciously "manipulat[ing] the language of Separate Spheres to extract from it and their gender as much mileage as they could," these are too disparate to form a consistent pattern.<sup>50</sup> Whilst there was, as I have stated, no significant bloc of women outside of party politics, there was a large group of women within this field. They fought elections, and achieved public space as political beings (generally as Liberals), rather than simply women. Therefore, it is to the political parties which we must turn in order to uncover women's main routes into the public political spheres.

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<sup>50</sup>Hollis, *Women in Council*, p.210.

Liverpool and Vicinity United Trades Council.

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# TRADES UNIONS FOR WOMEN.

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A  
**M E E T I N G**

WILL BE HELD IN THE

**TOXTETH HALL, 17, MILL STREET,**

AT EIGHT P.M.,

**On Tuesday Next, Dec. 2nd, 1890,**

**TO FORM A**

**SOUTH-END BRANCH OF THE COTTON, MARINE,  
AND PAPER SORTERS' UNION.**

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**Mr. C. DOEG, President Trades Council,**

*Will take the Chair, and will be supported by*

- Mr. E. KANEY, Amalgamated Society Engineers.**
  - ,, H. TIPLADY, Upholsterers' Society.**
  - ,, W. POTTER, Tailors' Society.**
  - ,, A. SMITH, Dock Labourers' Union.**
  - ,, J. GOODMAN, Secretary Trades Council.**
  - ,, P. HARRIS, Millers' Union.**
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All women employed in the above industry are earnestly invited to attend and join the Union, which has for its objects the reduction of the hours of labour, the increase of wages, and the mutual social improvement of its members.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE TRADES COUNCIL.

**J. GOODMAN, Secretary.**

Leaflet advertising an early attempt to unionise local women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "THE WORKWOMEN OF LIVERPOOL ARE SADLY IN NEED OF REFORM"<sup>1</sup>

#### WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS 1890 - 1914

##### 3.1: Introduction

No study of British women's involvement in political organisations can ignore the trade unions, for many the first site of public activity.<sup>2</sup> Within trade unions, working women borrowed and employed the language of class to define their situation and express their desires, yet worked quite happily alongside upper and middle-class organisers, finding that other women were frequently more sympathetic to their demands than were the unionised menfolk of their own class, who feared or suspected women's efforts to organise.<sup>3</sup> As Sarah Boston found;

women....shared in the struggle between employers and workers, but in addition....had to fight for recognition by male trade unions.<sup>4</sup>

Fear of dilution, the lowering of wages and working conditions, by male trade unionists was one reason why women tended to organise separately into smaller unions, even in trades with a mixed workforce, whilst rigid ideas on the sexual demarcation of labour emphasised divisions between 'men's' and 'women's' trades. The location of women's

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<sup>1</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 13th September 1890.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the route taken into politics by Ada Nield Chew, Ada Nield Chew, *The Life and Writings of a Working Woman*, London, Virago, 1982, or the links between trade unionism and suffrage cited in Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup>Isabella Ford, who worked with factory girls in Leeds, Lady Dilke and Emma Paterson of the Women's Provident and Protective League, later the Women's Trade Union League, and Fabian and ILP organiser Katharine St John Conway provide some of the most obvious examples of middle-class trade union enthusiasts.

<sup>4</sup>Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1987, p.11.

activities in smaller unions has helped push them further into the historical margins.<sup>5</sup> This is reflected when researching at a local level. Attempting to redress the balance which existed between knowledge surrounding the activities of male trade unionists on Merseyside and those of their female counterparts, Linda Grant concluded that:

The characters and events of women's trade unionism are not written large on the front page of *The Times*....but are tucked away on the back page of the local rag as curiosity items, easily overlooked. And because the history of women is not headline news, essential details are inevitably elusive or completely lost from our records.<sup>6</sup>

A brief glance at the local sources available when this statement was made - and indeed at those published since - supports this contention. Liverpool's female trade unionists appear largely written out of local history as its suffragists, suffragettes and party political women have been. Similar sources remain for tracing women's trade unions activities in the area, indicating that the history is there, but simply takes more trouble to write. However, turning to these surviving sources, it becomes clear that women's activities in local trade unions differ significantly from those in political parties and suffrage organisations. Union activity is much more episodic, characterised by a lack of continuity not apparent in other groups. Local women appear to move into union work for short term goals, and move out either when these are achieved, or when it becomes clear that they will not immediately be granted.

In tracing the history of women trade unionists on Merseyside, this chapter first outlines

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<sup>5</sup>There are few large studies of women in British Trade Unions. The main sources, Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, and Sheila Lewenhak, *Women in Trade Unions*, London, Ernest Benn, 1977, both cite the dearth of previous writing around the theme, especially in comparison to what has been produced on male trade unions and activists.

<sup>6</sup>Linda Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool 1890 - 1914," *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, no. 7, 1980 - 81, pp.65-83.

the many different, and frequently short-lived, attempts which were made to organise local women, examines their motivation, and postulates some explanation for their lack of success. It then focuses on three main incidents which stand out as the highpoints of activity. These are strikes, the moments when women decided to move into collective action in conflict with their employers. Each of these strikes; the Tailoresses' strike of 1890; the Ropemakers' strike of 1895 and the Bobbin Makers' strike of 1912 has been identified previously as a key episode by other historians.<sup>7</sup> Their prominence within local historiography is not accidental. Strikes may be atypical of women's day-to-day experience as workers, but they are far easier to trace, and can be held up by organisers as examples of what collective action can achieve. Whilst their tendency to produce 'heroines' can be problematic for historians seeking a more objective account of working women's experience, their attendant publicity allows the demands and grievances of the active membership to be examined when all other records of their voices have become lost. This last point is especially pertinent in Liverpool, where, rather than organising themselves into unions, working-class women allowed themselves to be organised by other women, generally from outside their trades, and even their class. Case studies of strikes allow the opinions of local workers to be reclaimed, even on the occasions when they were keener to speak against unionisation than in favour of it. The chapter concludes with a case study of the Upholstresses' Union, selected as the most tenacious local women's union, as an example of how women's unions could survive and succeed.

Chapter One stressed that Liverpool women in this period had little experience of

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<sup>7</sup>The tailoresses' strike and the bobbin makers' strike in Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool," and the ropemakers' strike in Hamling *A Short History of Liverpool Trades Council*.

collective industrial work. Women worked mainly in sweated trades or as domestic servants. Such trades are notoriously difficult to organise, and this chapter highlights the sporadic nature of many of the bodies which attempted to unionise women, showing how a few local activists attempted to continue a campaign, initiating and re-launching committees on a regular basis. When considering their lack of success compared with greater Lancashire, we must remember the vast gulf which lay between the experience of work for women in Liverpool and outside its boundaries.

### 3.2: New Unionism, Jeannie Mole and her Committees

Liverpool workers established an embryonic Trades Council for their protection and mutual self-help as early as 1848, but it appears to have been the influence of the development of New Unionism from 1889 - 91 which "lifted the trade union movement into a different gear" locally.<sup>8</sup> As Ron Bean has pointed out, the "unevenness in development" in Liverpool's new unions made New Unionism another area where Liverpool's experience deviated somewhat from the national pattern.<sup>9</sup> Some of the local new unions were organised by Liberals rather than socialists, and were characterised by a more pragmatic attitude towards employers, reminiscent of the old craft unions, such as the Mersey Quays and Railway Carters' Union who insisted that their organisation;

did not want any of the doctrines of John Burns and Ben Tillet....and they

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<sup>8</sup>Liverpool Trades' Guardian Association, with the "object of protecting Trade Unions from suppression by the employers' use of the criminal law," formed in 1848, and changed its name to Liverpool and Vicinity United Trades Council around 1888. See Hamling, *A Short History of Liverpool Trades Council*, pp.15-18; R. Bean "Aspects of New Unionism in Liverpool, 1889 - 91," in Hikins, ed, *Building the Union: Studies of the Growth of the Worker's Movement on Merseyside*, Liverpool, Toulouse Press, 1973.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, p.100.

did not call the masters 'bloodsuckers' or any other names.<sup>10</sup>

Others, such as the dockers, followed with much more enthusiasm the violent class language of their leaders, where strikes were seen as "battle[s] of capital against labour", described in terms of the events and language of the French Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Despite such uneven development, New Unionism did reflect a reaction away from the idea of unions as expensive clubs for higher paid trades, presenting them as something which unskilled workers could join and benefit from. Against this background came the first serious attempts to organise women, frequently the least skilled and worst paid section of the local workforce.

Sparse attempts had been made to unionise women in Liverpool prior to this. An organisation called the Liverpool Women Workers Union had been formed in 1879 with the help of the London-based Women's Provident and Protective League, but no trace remained of this by the 1890s.<sup>12</sup> Attempts had also been made to organise women within individual trades, such as the tailoresses, but again, these appeared to have quickly folded. The late 1880s witnessed a marked change through the development of local organisations aimed at winning women to the principles of unionism whatever their trade. Several organisations and committees formed during this time. There is great confusion within the existing historiography as to when these committees were founded, and what they actually did, with accounts frequently contradicting each other. This section will attempt to trace the ideology and chronicle the development of the main collective organisations, which originated in the late nineteenth-century.

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<sup>10</sup>*Liverpool Courier*, 7th October 1890, quoted in Bean, "Aspects of New Unionism," p.113.

<sup>11</sup>R. Bean, "The Liverpool Docks Strike of 1890," *International Review of Social History*, XVIII, 1973, pp.51-68.

<sup>12</sup>Women's Provident and Protective League Annual Report 1885.

The unionism which developed amongst women in nineteenth-century Liverpool mirrored national trends in New Unionism much more exactly than the experiences of their male comrades, as it involved both "a more radical social and political stance of unions in the context of the rise of a socialist labour movement," inspired by leading figures in the local Fabian Society and Independent Labour Party, and also 'the creation of new unions of hitherto unorganized or unorganizable workers.'<sup>13</sup> Much of the impetus for the local movement stemmed from the efforts of one woman, Jeannie Mole. Details of her early life are sparse, but it is known that she came to Liverpool in 1879 at the age of 38 with her second husband, the fruit merchant William Keartland Mole, and the son of her first marriage, Robert Frederick Willis.<sup>14</sup> According to the *Labour Annual* of 1895, she converted to socialism through reading Carlyle and Ruskin, and had worked for negroes' rights in America and amongst slum dwellers in London before settling in Liverpool where, finding only six other socialists, she set about organising a socialist society, sowing seed that is now springing up for the harvest.<sup>15</sup> Retaining links with both the local Fabian Society and the local ILP after its 1893 formation. Mrs Mole turned her attention and her significant organising talents to local industrial women in the late 1880s.

Later accounts of Jeannie Mole's life focus heavily on her wealth, implying that philanthropy was her main motivation, and her socialism almost accidental. A wealthy middle-class woman but also a Fabian socialist, and a wealthy woman...but...seeing

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E J Hobsbawm, "The 'New Unionism' Reconsidered," in W J Mommsen & H G Husung, eds *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany 1880-1914*, London, George Allen & Unwin 1985 p 13

<sup>14</sup>See entry by Geoffrey Fidler & Joyce Beamy, *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, London, Macmillan, 1993 Volume 9, p 222

<sup>15</sup>*The Labour Annual* 1895

the slums...became a socialist" are typical descriptions.<sup>16</sup> That she was financially better off than the women she attempted to organise cannot be disputed, but it was as a committed socialist that her contemporaries perceived her, and it was the religious socialism so predominant amongst supporters of the early ILP which provided her motivation.<sup>17</sup>

Jeannie felt united through her socialism in a common sisterhood with working-class women, and often urged other financially able women to "donate some of their leisure time to brighten the lives of their less fortunate sisters."<sup>18</sup> Although she never appears to have participated in the local suffrage campaign, she possessed a strong commitment to a feminism and sisterhood which permeated her writings and coloured her perception of socialism. "In sheer defence of our sisters, we must have unions!" she reminded Liverpool socialists when organizing proved an arduous task.<sup>19</sup> She initiated a Women's Page in the *Liverpool Labour Chronicle* in October 1895 which provided focal points for women's issues ranging from local disputes to wider issues of sweated labour and working women's health. Here, her work often drew on the language of separate spheres, as in her article on "Housewives and Queens" where she reminded her readers "some of our lives may seem narrow, but here with the houseband [sic] and the children we are moulding the destiny of man."<sup>20</sup> Another important strand to her feminism was her enthusiasm for dress reform, and she appeared almost exclusively in a Grecian style

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<sup>16</sup>Linda Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool"; Norbert C. Seldon, *Women in British Trade Unions 1874 - 1976*, London, Gill & Macmillan, 1978, p.31. See also Bean, "New Unionism," p.111, or Hamling, *A Short History of Liverpool Trades Council*, p.24, for similar descriptions.

<sup>17</sup>According to her entry in the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, she left £8694 on her death in 1912.

<sup>18</sup>Jeannie Mole, *Labour Chronicle*, December 1895.

<sup>19</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, October 1894.

<sup>20</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, December 1895.

gown which illustrated "how women can dress well and becomingly without corsets."<sup>21</sup> Jeannie managed to persuade her friend and fellow activist Caroline Martyn to adopt the same style of dress, and had the pattern published in *The Clarion* in September 1897, although *Clarion* woman's columnist Julia Dawson was less taken with its practicality, claiming that whilst indoors it was "of the order altogether lovely," outside it "persistently binds itself around our legs and threatens either to split up from the bottom or throw us forward on our faces."<sup>22</sup>

It was in May 1888 that Jeannie's campaign to reach Liverpool's industrial women began in earnest. At this stage, women were ineligible for Trades Council membership, so Jeannie reached this body through her son, Fred Willis, fellow Fabian and keen supporter of his mothers' campaigns. A large demonstration against the sweating system had been held in Liverpool, which numbered no women amongst its many platform speakers. Fred, presumably invited to participate due to a combination of his radical views on the subject and his social position, sent a letter of apology in which he suggested it "might also support a local committee to strengthen the efforts of the Women's Provident and Protection League (WPPL) in forming Trade Unions for women."<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously he contacted the WPPL who provided Miss Clementina Black for the launch meeting and a week's subsequent campaigning, but acknowledged that "the whole preliminary work of gathering the necessary committee was done by Mrs

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<sup>21</sup>Feature by Julia Dawson, *The Clarion*, 12th March 1898.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool," locates Fred as a "timber merchant and early supporter of women's trade unions" missing the family connection. The Conservative *Liverpool Courier* in its report of the meeting apparently feels that he needed no further introduction to its readers other than his name. See *Liverpool Courier*, 24th May 1888.

Mole with the help of her husband and son."<sup>24</sup> In the same month, Fred published a series of articles in the *Liverpool Review* on the conditions faced by sweated women workers in the city, and having thus raised the profile of the issue, wrote to the Trades Council "suggesting the promotion of a Women's Protective Society."<sup>25</sup>

Initially the Trades Council stalled on the issue by referring back to him "as to what he propose[d] to do in the matter," but he and his mother quickly responded and persuaded them to set up a sub-committee to consider the question.<sup>26</sup> This met regularly from July 1888, going through several name changes, from the "committee to discuss the formation of a women's provident and protective society," the "committee for the promotion of a women's industrial society" and the "committee to establish a society for working women" until it finally sponsored the inaugural meeting of the Liverpool Workwomen's Society in January 1889.<sup>27</sup> Although the socialism of Jeannie Mole and her son provided the impetus for this organisation, and would help some of its later activities, their views were very much in a minority on the committee. The Liverpool Workwomen's Society was affiliated to the Women's Provident and Protection League, and many on its committee were keener to share the national aim "to promote sympathy and harmony generally....so as to strengthen the hands of good employers" than to encourage industrial strife.<sup>28</sup> On occasions, the LWS appeared apologetic for the fact that there were working women in the city who were in need of representation. An

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<sup>24</sup>Women's Trade Union League Annual Report 1889.

<sup>25</sup>Liverpool Trades Council minutes, May 1888.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*, July 1888.

<sup>27</sup>These name changes probably account for some of the historiographical confusion mentioned previously. For instance, Soldon, *Women in British Trade Unions*, p.31, insists that the Women's Industrial Council of Liverpool was the organisation formed by Mrs Mole in 1889.

<sup>28</sup>Unidentified press cutting, Trades Council Minutes, 24th January 1888.

early statement of its aims declared:

We do not deny that far greater happiness results from a woman's ministering directly to the needs of her own people. Now, however, finding a constant number of women forced by circumstances to compete for employment, we feel it is needful that, in their bitter struggle for bread, they should have all the advantages of mutual counsel and assistance.<sup>29</sup>

The Vice President of the Trades Council felt that;

organising women would immensely benefit the organisation of men by preventing the underselling of women's labour....If masters found that a certain fair price had to be paid for an article, whether made by a man or a woman....the proper order of things would result - the man would be the breadwinner and the woman the housekeeper.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the LWS, supported by radical clergymen such as Canon Major Lester, provided a moral appeal to a city so concerned with the effects of vice on its public image. Rev. R. A. Armstrong, author of *The Deadly Shame of Liverpool* (1890), a tract concerning local levels of vice declared at its inauguration that:

When [he] considered the temptations to which these working girls were subjected and the keenness which was given to their condition by hunger and cold, they deserved the highest honour for keeping themselves in such multitudes pure and good and sweet in spite of the frightful lives which they were called upon to live.<sup>31</sup>

The Trades Council were similarly reminded by their Vice President that;

the miserable wages given in some workshops to their women workers had to be supplemented in a way he did not dare to mention but which [the Trades Council] would readily understand. This society will protect these young women.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Women's Union Journal*, November 1888.

<sup>30</sup>Unidentified press cutting in Liverpool Trades Council minutes, 4th January 1889.

<sup>31</sup>R. A. Armstrong, *The Deadly Shame of Liverpool*, Liverpool, n.p., 1890. Unidentified press cutting, Liverpool Trades Council minutes 24th January 1889.

<sup>32</sup>Unidentified press cutting, Liverpool Trades Council minutes 4th January 1889.

Such a blend of attitudes allowed the society to be promoted by local socialists, the politically mixed Trades Council, and also the Liberals who regarded "this new committee as one of the means by which in a happy, and we hope in a near future, everyone who will work will find....labour that will ensure a decent and wholesome if a frugal existence."<sup>33</sup> Little space remained for the women workers themselves to decide what they wanted from it. The large inaugural meeting was followed by smaller meetings amongst cigar makers, bookbinders and tailoresses, the trades the LWS had decided to target. Seventy women enrolled in the first week, and by March, the number had scarcely doubled to 25 tailoresses, 43 cigarmakers and 104 bookfolders.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that the LWS, "quietly working to encourage industrial women to band themselves together" was barely scratching the surface, despite having Jeannie Mole as organising secretary.<sup>35</sup> She attempted to build up the membership by collecting subs at a weekly meeting at which "a few words of encouragement" could be passed on to the women from more active members of the society. The meeting also featured weekly gymnastic classes and occasional tuition in country dance by the local Ruskin Society. A library was put together "for the encouragement of the present members," and once a month an entertainment was held.<sup>36</sup> However, membership remained static. Jeannie felt that the society, which met in the schoolroom of a church, was severely hampered by the lack of suitable premises, which prevented her from achieving her aim of developing a reading room and a nightly drop-in advice centre, and rendered it "unable to fulfil its

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<sup>33</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 26th January 1889.

<sup>34</sup>WPPL Annual Report, 1889. *Women's Union Journal* March 1889.

<sup>35</sup>*Women's Union Journal*, April 1889.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

mission to the thousands of industrial women in Liverpool."<sup>37</sup> An appeal for funds was begun, but by June the society was only able to report "a fair measure of success" and was still "labouring under a great difficulty in not having suitable class-rooms."<sup>38</sup> By 1890, Jeannie was appealing directly to London for help to save the society. Miss Abraham and Mrs Barber attended the city on behalf of the WPPL headquarters, but "after a short stay decided that much could not be done until the Trades Congress met in September."<sup>39</sup> As part of the Trades Congress in Liverpool, a large meeting for women trade unionists was held with John Burns and Lady Dilke amongst others in attendance. Here, the society was relaunched as the Liverpool Society for the Promotion of Women's Trade Unions, with Jeannie Mole as treasurer.

The new society immediately commenced similar work. The most significant difference appears in the trades which they targeted, which were untouched by the LWS, beginning with laundresses, the sack and bag makers, and the marine sorters, who numbered only 1000 in total. Surviving members of the LWS were not neglected. In her speech to the marine sorters, Mrs Mole was "accompanied by several officers of organisations already formed."<sup>40</sup> Again this new society was enthusiastically received locally, and appears to have benefited from the atmosphere surrounding the Trades Council, the *Liverpool*

*Review* reporting;

Great strides have been made [in the] past few weeks. The Trades Congress...[has] aroused the women from their lethargy and from the slough of despond. But it is not entirely the presence of the Labour Parliament in Liverpool which has brought about this change. Mrs Mole seized the

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

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

<sup>39</sup>Women's Trade Union League Annual Report, 1890.

<sup>40</sup>Unidentified press cutting in Liverpool Trades Council minutes, 3rd October 1890.

opportunities afforded and has worked the iron while it was hot to some purpose. No sooner does this able and energetic lady find out a new class of women workers in need of help than she endeavours to bind them together.<sup>41</sup>

Against this background, Liverpool Trades Council debated and approved the admission of women as delegates. A dissenting motion that they should not be admitted was ruled out of order by the Chairman, and the vote was almost unanimous. Having approved women delegates, the Council set about making them welcome by unanimously agreeing "to secure a fresh place for a meeting other than a licensed public house."<sup>42</sup>

They continued to offer women support, although it was not until 1908 that a woman delegate was actually elected.<sup>43</sup> The *Women's Trade Union League Review* noted in April 1891 that as a result of Trades Council work, "several employers [in Liverpool] have been brought before the police court and charged with breaking the factory act by working their hands for excessive hours." Despite this encouragement, and the enthusiasm of its organisers, the society had no more success in attracting and sustaining a membership than had its predecessors.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, by 1894, even the Trades' Council was publicly complaining that "they [were] not quite pleased with the attitude of women workers towards them...females hold aloof...although some of them have received valuable aid."<sup>45</sup> This aloofness was more due to the attitudes of women to being

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<sup>41</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 1st October 1890.

<sup>42</sup>Trades Council minutes, 3rd October 1890.

<sup>43</sup>See Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool."

<sup>44</sup>The exception to this is in the Upholstresses' Union, which will be covered in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>45</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 5th May 1894.

organised rather than to any explicit antagonism towards them on the part of the Trades Council. By October 1894, even Jeannie Mole was forced to admit she and her co-workers had "been disappointed in [their] work of forming unions" and conceded that ideally "the call should come with the need from the women themselves."<sup>46</sup> Another approach would have to be devised if Liverpool's dispersed women workers were to be won to unionisation.

The inspiration for the next attempt came from London, where a Women's Industrial Council was set up in November 1894.<sup>47</sup> This aimed to "organize special and systematic inquiry into the conditions of working women, to provide accurate information concerning those interests, and to promote such action as may seem conducive to their improvement."<sup>48</sup> Many later observers have made much of the mixture of political positions which were represented by its mainly middle-class executive. Sheila Lewenhak traces its development from earlier organisations such as the Women's Trade Union League, Scottish Council for Women's Trade Unions and National Federation of Women Workers, and stresses that its leadership "included members from [these] three other bodies as well as eminent Fabians," whilst Ellen Mappen notes that the membership "also belonged to the various liberal, social and labourite societies which flourished in London of this period."<sup>49</sup> However, although there were socialists involved in the WIC, Mappen feels that it largely;

practised a branch of feminism that was tempered by....Victorian thought

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<sup>46</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, October 1894.

<sup>47</sup>For a full outline of the history of the Women's Industrial Council, see Ellen Mappen, *Helping Women at Work: The Women's Industrial Council 1889 - 1914*, London, Hutchinson, 1985.

<sup>48</sup>*The Times* 26th November 1894, quoted in Mappen *Helping Women at Work*, p.61.

<sup>49</sup>Lewenhak, *Women in Trade Unions*, p.118. Mappen, *Helping Women at Work*, p.12.

about woman's place in life. Although its leaders were for the most part independent women, many of their solutions to the problems faced by working-class women...were based on the premise that these women were....wives and mothers first, and workers second.<sup>50</sup>

June Hannam similarly interprets the Council as less concerned with trade unionism than with social investigation, claiming that founder member Clementina Black "disliked strikes and was distant in her relations with workgirls" and that for her, the WIC represented a move "away from the organization of female workers to...the investigation of women's conditions of employment."<sup>51</sup>

Linda Grant feels that the WIC in Liverpool;

was essentially a committee of middle-class women whose main aim...was to research into and improve the conditions of work for the home workers in the clothing industry.<sup>52</sup>

implying that the local organisation mirrored the national one in its concerns. However, from the outset, there was tension amongst the local leadership as to exactly what its role should be. Jeannie Mole, its Hon Sec, clearly believed that it had an organising as well as an investigative function. Speaking of the failure of her earlier attempts in this respect, she highlighted the small nature of many women's trades which gave rise to the need for many separate unions as one reason for the lack of success. She explained:

When the Society for Promoting Women's Trade Unions began, needlewomen came, wishing to join, but they found that there was not yet any union that took in their special trade. While waiting for a sufficient number to justify the formation of a district branch, these women were lost.<sup>53</sup>

As a solution, she proposed to "try what are the possibilities with a federation of all

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<sup>50</sup>Mappen *Helping Women at Work*, p.25.

<sup>51</sup>June Hannam, *Isabella Ford*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p.52.

<sup>52</sup>Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism."

<sup>53</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, October 1894.

women who go out to daily labour."<sup>54</sup> The WIC, she felt, could play the role of a federation in the city, allowing all working women to join a single union, without having to rely on one for their specialised trade. In December 1894, the *Labour Chronicle* announced that "a federal council will be formed in our city" and appealed to "all who have the good of the people at heart [to] co-operate to fight this battle on behalf of women workers."<sup>55</sup>

These tensions between the motives of its organisers made the WIC an uneasy body from its birth. As with its predecessors, in practice its model of organisation drew heavily on separate spheres, as Mappen identified. Much of its investigative work offered little outside the method of shaming bad employers by putting them in the public eye. Socialists involved in the Council were to find that it offered no class-based solution to women's problems.

Liverpool's Women's Industrial Council was launched at a meeting at the Town Hall in February 1895. This occurred in the midst of the broader controversy over local unemployment, but Jeannie Mole managed to persuade the same Lord Mayor who had advised the unemployed to "go to the devil" to act as chair for the occasion.<sup>56</sup> The conference was aimed at attracting "men and women of all shades of opinion....who have one common interest at heart - the bettering of the condition of our industrial women," and it was hoped that "the work....[would provide] ample scope for the various talents

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<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*, December 1894.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid*, February 1895.

of social reformers."<sup>57</sup> Both an organising function and an investigative role were foreseen. Local Liberals, whilst supporting its aims, gave the new body a somewhat guarded reception. The *Liverpool Review* commented that whilst "it was all very well [for concerned parties] to issue appeals....the women themselves would have greater weight and would command more sympathy.....if the women wont [sic] bestir themselves in their own cause, neither will the public." Liverpool's socialists were much more enthusiastic in their reception of the new body, their keenness augmented by the presence of national activist Carolyn Martin, who spent some months in Liverpool working with Mrs Mole and Rachel MacMillan, to develop the Trade Union side of the WIC's work.<sup>58</sup> Immediately, political divisions caused splits in the Council. These were in part foreseen at the first meeting when, despite John Edwards' motion "which provided for [its] non-political and unsectarian character," others present ensured that the Lord Mayor "took the chair and something else he had not bargained for in the shape of a few home truths about himself" from socialists.<sup>59</sup>

Further friction within the Council arose from its initial work in organising local Ropeworkers into a union, which led a successful strike, (discussed in the final section). Hon. Sec. Jeannie Mole and her ILP co-worker Eleanor Keeling who was elected Secretary were the main motivators here, helped by Fabian Bessie Kazier. By 1896, Eleanor Keeling and Jeannie Mole retained their association with the WIC but devoted more of their time to the work of educating children for socialism. The WIC was

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<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>See *Labour Chronicle*, May - October 1895, *The Clarion*, May October 1895 for details. Also, Caroline Steedman *Childhood Culture and Class in Britain; Margaret MacMillan, 1860 - 1931*, London, Virago, 1990, pp.28-9.

<sup>59</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, March 1895. *The Clarion*, 29th February 1895.

working closely with the local branch of the National Union of Women Workers, dominated by the Liberal Mrs Bright and the Unionist Mrs Booth, in "obtaining and supplying information concerning women's work."<sup>60</sup> Further potential for discord within the Council's ranks followed the national appointment of Lady Aberdeen as President in 1897. Local Liberal women came into the Council, who saw no room for class conflict in its work. At the annual meeting of 1897, Liberal Mrs Stewart-Brown explained that the work was being impeded due to some "misapprehension of what the council was formed for", which centred around its "advanced wing....[which] appeared to think that they did not go forward sufficiently fast enough."<sup>61</sup> The presence of so many predominant middle-class Liberals on the WIC achieved the headquarters which Jeannie Mole had failed to secure for her earlier committees, but these were increasingly used for collecting and collating information rather than providing support for organising unions. The WIC also further altered its class focus by moving away from the unskilled trades to form an "Inquiry and Employment Bureau for Educated Women" in 1898.<sup>62</sup> By 1905, its main aim was "to assist the class who are called ladies in distress...a slightly better title than decayed gentlewomen" to secure positions.<sup>63</sup>

Although Jeannie Mole had little time for "the useless and dangerous illusion known as the general strike," she believed in direct action as a means of ameliorating the conditions of working women, and had little sympathy with the new direction of the

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<sup>60</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 31st October 1896.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid*, 13th March 1897.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid*, 14th May 1898.

<sup>63</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 19th May 1905.

WIC.<sup>64</sup> By 1897, she was prepared to sever connections with the body entirely, and recommence work under the Society for the Promotion of Women's Trade Unions.<sup>65</sup> In 1898, a branch of Tom Mann's Workers' Union, a group which attempted to "salvage some of the....spirit of New Unionism,"<sup>66</sup> was formed in Liverpool with the help of Jim Larkin, and Jeannie and other ILP activists attempted to persuade local women to join this, its multi-trade membership representing the Federation which she had hoped the WIC would become. This was her final attempt in this direction. She appealed via the *Clarion* to "beg women workers to attend the meetings...on Saturday evenings," noting "how few women are in [the] Workers' Union which only costs 3d a week." Through membership, she hoped "to raise the Liverpool tailoresses to better things."<sup>67</sup> Again, it appears that despite her best efforts, the women themselves could not be persuaded to join.

The Women's Industrial Council continued its investigative work in Liverpool throughout the period up to the First World War, aided by Eleanor Rathbone and other members of the local NUWSS, although it never again attempted to unionize unskilled women.<sup>68</sup> Mrs Mole's committees vanished and were not replaced. Eleanor Keeling left the area, and Jeannie, increasingly incapacitated through illness, died in 1912. The pattern of local women's union involvement, of occasional activity followed by prolonged absences of organisations repeated itself. Women were increasingly involved

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<sup>64</sup>Jeannie Mole, MS notes of Liverpool WIC delegation to the International Congress (July 1896). Joseph Edwards Papers.

<sup>65</sup>*Dictionary of Labour Biography* Vol. 9, p.222.

<sup>66</sup>S. Pollard, "The New Unionism in Britain - its Economic Background," in Wolfgang & Mommsen, eds, *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany*, p.37.

<sup>67</sup>*The Clarion*, 18th June 1898.

<sup>68</sup>See Chapter Five for details on NUWSS/WIC links.

in violent conflicts, attacking scabs during a docks strike in 1905 and on St Georges Plateau during 'Bloody Sunday.'<sup>69</sup> Indeed, during the insurrection surrounding the 1911 transport strike, Bob Holton has found that "women and children participated with male strikers in conflict with the military power."<sup>70</sup> Yet no sustained autonomous women's union movement existed.

### 3.3: Case Studies

This section will look at four case studies of local trade unions, in an attempt to explain why they were mainly sporadic.

#### 3.3.i: "The Girls....Presented a Very Respectable Appearance" : The Tailoresses' Strike<sup>71</sup>

Liverpool's tailoresses were amongst the first women in the city to unionize, forming an organisation in March 1881, helped by both the WPPL, and Mr Robert Moore of the male Society of Tailors. The society stressed the protective nature of Unionism and provided sickness, unemployment and death benefits. At their first meeting, over 100 women listened to Mrs Paterson of the WPPL advise them that although "the aid of the men's society would be invaluable, and would no doubt be readily given...it was important from the first that the women should understand the business of their union."<sup>72</sup> Supporting her, Mr Moore gave the women the use of the men's offices for

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<sup>69</sup>E. Larkin, *James Larkin, Irish Labour Leader*, London, Pluto, 1989, p.8. details women's involvement in the docks strike. Photographs of women on Bloody Sunday can be found in E. Taplin, *Near to Revolution: The Liverpool General Transport Strike of 1911*, Liverpool, The Bluecoat Press, 1994. See also the leaflet, "Strikes' Death-Roll, How the Children of the Poor Died - Dr Hope's Terrible Indictment." by Dr Hope, Liverpool Medical Officer of Health, in Legge Papers.

<sup>70</sup>Holton, *British Syndicalism*, pp.100-101.

<sup>71</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 12th June 1890.

<sup>72</sup>*Women's Union Journal*, April 1881.

Tuesday nights, and volunteered "if at first no one could be found to act as secretary [to] take that office provisionally," an arrangement which suited the meeting.<sup>73</sup>

Initially, the union attracted members from 15 workrooms, and raised £3 1s 1d in 3d subscriptions by July 1881.<sup>74</sup> Mr Moore then stepped down as secretary in favour of tailoress Miss Latham, but remained as a trustee. At some point during the following year, serious anomalies were discovered in the union's funding, and reconstitution was necessary the following year. The Annual Report of the WTUL explained:

The difficulties...fully justify the recommendation...that the members of societies should from the first understand and take an interest in the business *and appoint a committee of their own to carry it on.* In this instance a member of the men's society (since suspended from membership) who volunteered his services was allowed to act...without any control by a committee of members. He neglected to place the funds in a Bank, and upon finding that this was the case, the members discontinued their subscriptions...Your Hon. Sec. was able on visiting Liverpool to ascertain the amount of subs placed by members, and this amount was then placed by the League in a local bank for the society.<sup>75</sup>

This time tailoresses agreed to also admit needlewomen, broadening their organisation's scope, and increasing its membership. Through its new secretary, Mrs Style, it developed close links with the Liverpool Working Women's Union, but appears to have been enfolded into the Liverpool Workwomen's Society by 1889.<sup>76</sup>

As I have shown, New Unionism superseded the approach of the earlier craft unions by the 1890s. The tailoresses were the perfect target for local socialists. Most of the women involved in this trade in Liverpool worked for long hours and low wages in

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<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, August 1881.

<sup>75</sup>Women's Trade Union League Annual Report, 1882, my italics.

<sup>76</sup>See Women's Trade Union League Annual Report, 1885. References to the Union stop at around this time, but there are 25 tailoresses in the LWS according to the Women's Trade Union League Annual Report of 1889.

small workshops, and received their work from 'middlemen' rather than direct from the employers. In the Spring of 1890, in the radicalised political climate which followed the local dock's strike, the Liverpool Tailoresses and Coatmakers' Union was formed, drawing its membership of between 200 and 300 exclusively from the women who worked "long hours in cramped back rooms" for the notorious "sweaters."<sup>77</sup> Their demands were quite simple; an hourly rate of pay, and a reduction in hours. On 10th June 1890, an estimated 400 women came out on strike, resolving to do no work until their demands were met.

From the outset the women faced formidable opposition in the form of the Master Tailors' Association, a close knit body of Jewish men who controlled the local trade. They considered the women's demand for a two hour reduction in the working day at a meeting convened on the first day of the strike, and concluded that "they should get a time reduction only with a wage reduction," a decision resolved by a large majority.<sup>78</sup> They issued a statement to this effect, detailing the amount of pay they claimed most of the women made already.

The tailoresses then began to take the first direct action of any women in local industrial disputes. They picketed offices in Lord Street where women were still working, the local press being dismayed that some of the "fair strikers" were "demonstrating in a hostile manner against those who do not fall in with their views."<sup>79</sup> Although some women remained working, public opinion was very much on the side of the strikers.

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<sup>77</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 13th June 1890.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid*, 11th June 1890.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid*, 12th June 1890.

Journeyman tailors forced out through the strike reported sympathy with the women's demands, whilst the local press was quick to stress the "respectable appearance" of their public demonstrations, and were especially impressed with the "smart, business-like young lady" Alice Duggan who was the Union's Secretary.<sup>80</sup> Although prepared to take steps such as picketing, Miss Duggan was adamant that her strike did not present any radical threat to the social order as regards the relations between the sexes. Happily utilising the rhetoric of separate spheres, she informed the public that on wages, "We are quite content as we are. The only reason that a man gets more wages than a woman for doing the same work is that a man is a man and a woman is a woman." Reducing the women's hours would "adjust the balance between" rates of pay without challenging the basic assumption that men should earn more.<sup>81</sup>

The Tailoresses received support from both the Trades Council and the Liverpool Society for Promoting Women's Trade Unions, as well as prominent Liberal individuals such as the Muspratts and the Meade-Kings.<sup>82</sup> However, it was Trades Council support which altered the tone of the strike when some of the women appeared ready to return to work. Trades Council leaders who addressed the strikers following the offer of a one hour reduction by the middlemen urged them to "stand firm."<sup>83</sup> When some of the girls accepted the offer of one hour, Mr Goodman of the Trades Council spoke at a hastily convened meeting at which "he said they had nothing to fear as to the issue of struggle and that if a misunderstanding had arisen amongst them they must do their best

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<sup>80</sup>*Ibid*, 12th & 13th June 1890.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid*, 13th June 1890.

<sup>82</sup>See balance sheet in Liverpool Trades Council minute book, June 1889 - December 1890.

<sup>83</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 13th June 1890.

to rectify it."<sup>84</sup> This support for further struggle convinced the girls to continue, and by June 20th, most of them were able to return "very jubilant" to work. Alice Duggan contacted the WTUL at Mr Goodman's insistence, and proudly announced "the success of our recent strike - two hours reduction in the day's work with no reduction in wages."<sup>85</sup>

After this success, the Tailoresses' Union appears to have vanished, although tailoresses appear as members of the various women's union committees and federations which were established and reformed for the next decade. In this case, the union formed shortly before a strike. Once underway, it led a strike which attracted large participation amongst the trade and achieved its aims. When the strike was over, the union became moribund. Similar attempts to organise tailoresses, needlewomen and dressmakers are to be found in Liverpool for the next 20 years, with unions flourishing when there is a specific campaign around which they could organise, and floundering when the campaigning is over.

### 3.3.ii: The Ropemakers' Strike

The next case study, which examines the work done to unionise ropemakers in Liverpool reflects the patterns seen in the organisation of tailoresses, with three main differences: the union is organised by socialist women as a response to actions by the employers, forming out of rather than before a dispute; there is an attempt to broaden the concerns of the membership into something more than a protective organisation, and there is evidence as to why the union failed.

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<sup>84</sup>*Ibid*, 18th June 1890.

<sup>85</sup>*Women's Union Journal*, September 1890.

Ropemaking was one of Liverpool's few manufacturing industries, thriving as it was essential to the docks. At the two ropeworks in Smithdown Lane and Old Swan, women performed the majority of the work, often in dangerous conditions, for wages of around 9s per week.<sup>86</sup> In April 1895, a strike broke out at the Old Swan branch of Garnock and Bibby's. This co-incided with the relaunch of the Society for Promoting Women's Trade Unions, and local Fabians and ILPers involved themselves fully in the events. Jeannie Mole and Carrie Martin had already addressed the ropemakers as part of the SPWTU's launch. They now helped the women to secure "a very favourable compromise with the employers," and prevent "a reduction of from about 5d to 8d a day in the spinners' wages."<sup>87</sup> The strike involved about 100 women, although only 35 were directly affected, and on their return to work 18 had no reduction in wages, whilst 17 accepted a reduced rate in return for better material to work with.<sup>88</sup> The union continued to meet after this strike, largely through the work of its secretary, local Fabian Bessie Kazier. Socialists now began to campaign over the conditions in which the women worked. The machinery was dangerous and unguarded, and it was not until Mrs Mole intervened that a machine which had torn off a girl's finger at Jackson's ropeworks was guarded. This injury paled into insignificance when compared to events which occurred at Jackson's in July 1895, and provided the impetus for the next dispute of Liverpool's female workforce.

On July 27th 1885, 'Cissy,' a young girl employed as a spinner at Jackson's for 9s a week, broke a coil of rope off a machine. As she carried it across the factory floor,

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<sup>86</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, September 1895.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid*, May 1895.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid*, May 1895.

hooked over her arm, the loose end caught in "a useless piece of revolving shafting which was only eight feet from the ground."<sup>89</sup> She was drawn up to the ceiling and torn to pieces by the machine. Further trauma was added to the tragedy by the fact that the girl's mother, who worked alongside her, was the main witness to the event. At the inquest into her daughter's death, she informed the coroner:

I just turned, and there she was, looking so bonnie. She had a new blouse and shoes that morning, and a pair of ear rings that some one had given her, and I turned my head away, not to let her see how proud I was, when something happened. And oh, sir, it were Cissy! I heard a thumping against the ceiling, and it were my Cissy! and I never saw her any more.<sup>90</sup>

Supporting her story, the foreman told the court:

I never saw an accident so bad before. The nearest to it was when a woman was scalped....[And] another woman was being drawn into a machine, and was just about to meet the same death, when her skirt gave way and down she fell.<sup>91</sup>

Jeannie Mole won the workers' sympathy for her concern during the trial at which none of Cissy's workmates were allowed in court, although some of them were related to her mother, and wished to attend to give her support. Through the pages of the *Labour Chronicle*, Mrs Mole reprimanded both the local press, which attended the inquest but refused to highlight the evidence of the danger involved in ropemaking, and the court for holding the inquest "behind closed doors." She managed to persuade the jury to make safety recommendations, and the union's solicitor intervened for compensation for Cissy's mother, "peaceful negotiations having failed."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.* September 1895.

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

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.* November 1895.

In such a climate, sure of their support, the women were much quicker to take action in September when, shortly after the inquest into Cissy's death, an elderly woman had her wages docked for coming late to work. Arriving after the whistle one Saturday morning, she discovered that as well as losing the hours she had missed, she would be fined 1s 8d for her late arrival. Complaints from the woman and her workmates were met with accusations of 'laziness' from the employers. Upon hearing this, Jeannie Mole raged:

Do you know that many of these women rise before five, tidy their little homes, prepare the day's food and pass the factory gate, after a walk of two miles, before the steam whistle stops shrieking at 6.30...[then] must go on, at driven work, toiling until 6.....So many of them receive only a few shillings a week, and have to tramp a long way to reach cheap shelter, and were not able to afford out of their wages such food as would give them energy and vigour. Sometimes, then, it happens that a woman hears the dreaded whistle stop when she is a quarter of a mile away, and then she knows that some of her hard earned wage will be kept back from her.<sup>93</sup>

This event was the catalyst for the second strike amongst ropemakers. The walkout of women on the Monday following the imposition of the fine greeted by local socialists: "Hurrah! Here is an awakening...the women workers...give the signs of being roused to the 'courage of despair.'"<sup>94</sup> This short strike too was successful, the fining system being withdrawn as a result.<sup>95</sup>

Having led two successful strikes, the Union continued to meet weekly. As well as offering practical aid, attempts were made to organise social events around the combination. Socialists reported:

It is good to see the tired faces of the men and women brighten as they listen to the music and song and watch the happy dancers. Mothers sit

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<sup>93</sup>*Ibid*, October 1895.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid*, November 1895.

knitting and dreaming of their youth, whilst the younger wives nurse their babies with sad yearnings for the future.<sup>96</sup>

"Great things are expected" exclaimed James Sexton in the *Clarion*.<sup>97</sup>

Despite such great expectations, nothing more materialised from the ropemakers. They affiliated briefly to the WTUL in 1895, but had vanished from this organisation in 1896. Although there is no explicit evidence to support my contention, I suspect that the union folded due to the inability of the workforce to see its relevance once their campaigns for increased wages and safety and against fines and reductions had succeeded. On behalf of the Women's Industrial Council, Eleanor Keeling attempted to rouse the workers at the Lodge Lane (Smithdown Road) works early in 1896. Unfortunately, she met with little sympathy, and was forced to chide the girls;

Last time I only saw two and that was not enough and I was very disappointed. Besides these two were frightened and ran away. I wonder if they thought I was going to hurt them. Well I was not. I only want to talk to you about a union and see if we can start one. You know girls it would help you so much and it would be quite easy if you just made up your minds to have one.<sup>98</sup>

When a dispute was not necessary, the perception of these young working girls was that a union meant trouble.

### 3.3.iii: The Bobbin Makers' Strike

The last case study of a strike concerns events surrounding the strike of Summer 1912 at Wilson Brothers' Bobbin Works, Garston. This strike differs from the two previous ones in that it involved a mixed workforce. This, coupled with the fact that many of

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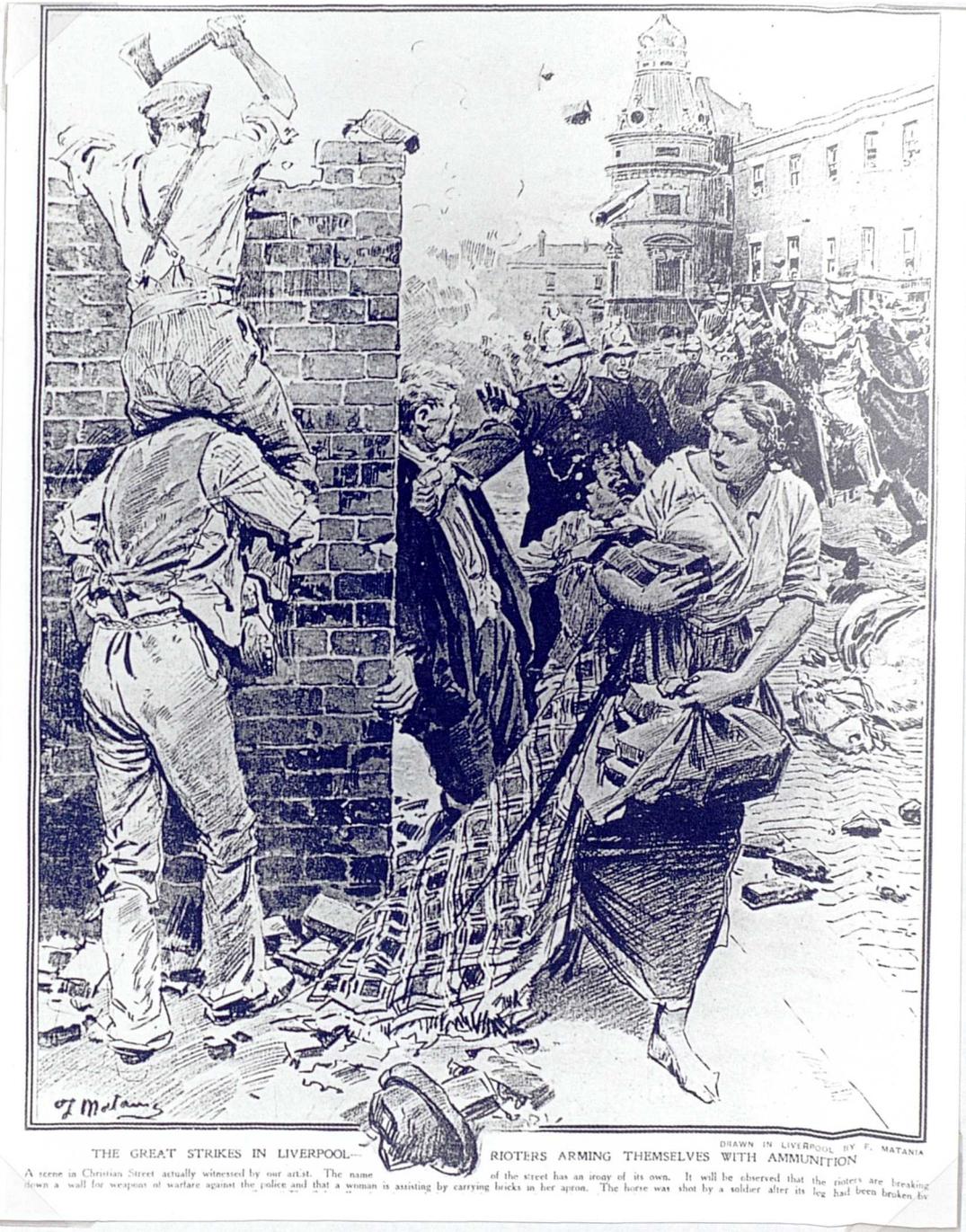
<sup>96</sup>*Ibid*, December 1895.

<sup>97</sup>*The Clarion*, December 1895.

<sup>98</sup>Eleanor Keeling, letter to Lodge Lane Rope Workers, Joseph Edwards Papers.

the strikebreakers employed by Wilson's were female, makes it a notable instance of the socialist model of women's political involvement being deployed locally. Women strikers and supporters united with male strikers and sympathizers against a group of strike-breaking women.

Plate Four



Women's involvement in the 1911 transport strike

The strike erupted following a year of severe industrial unrest on Merseyside.<sup>99</sup> Troops had been deployed against strikers, and skirmishes with police were commonplace, culminating in the events of 'Bloody Sunday' outside St Georges' Hall.<sup>100</sup> In the following year, a series of smaller strikes ensued, which Linda Grant claims "brought women onto the streets in large numbers for the first time since the tailoresses' strike twenty years [before]."<sup>101</sup> Although the remainder of this thesis will demonstrate that women were not as absent from the public political sphere as this may suggest, there does appear to have been a lack of their public trade union activity prior to the 1911 strike wave. Their move back into this activity was met with horror by many of Liverpool's 'respectable' citizens, who felt that this flouting of separate spheres further proved that the strike wave had brought them to the verge of anarchy. Dr Hope, Liverpool's medical officer of health, explained how the disruption in food supplies and refuse collection caused by strikes had led to an alarming jump in local death rates. He singled out for special concern;

[that] the growing turbulence [was] shared in by multitudes of women....accompanied by the neglect of the infants and young children and of the homes, whilst the distracted women were lounging or fighting in the streets.<sup>102</sup>

Women at Wilson's Mill had been unionised by socialist Mary Bamber in August 1911.

When they and male workers came out in June 1912, Mrs Bamber immediately appealed

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<sup>99</sup>For more details see, for example, E. Taplin, *Near to Revolution*; H. R. Hikins, *Strike 1911!*, Liverpool, Toulouse Press, 1981. Also Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn, *Liverpool, A City that Dared to Fight*, London, Fortress Books, 1988, pp.19-25.

<sup>100</sup>See Bob Holton, "Syndicalism and Labour on Merseyside, 1906 - 14," in Hikins, ed, *Building the Union*, p.137. Also Taaffe & Mulhearn, *Liverpool*, pp.21-2.

<sup>101</sup>Linda Grant, "Women's Work and Trade Unionism in Liverpool."

<sup>102</sup>Leaflet, "Strikes' Death-Roll, How the Children of the Poor Died - Dr Hope's Terrible Indictment". Legge Papers.

for socialist support, placing the strike firmly in the political arena.<sup>103</sup> The solidarity amongst the striking workforce was sufficient to result in the closure of the mill for several weeks. In August, the tempo of the strike increased as Wilson's reopened, employing large numbers of female strikebreakers or 'loyalists.' These young women, always referred to as 'girls' in press accounts of the strike, mainly lived around Park Road, some miles South of Garston, and travelled to and from work by tramcar. Following their employment, it became customary for the police to escort them back to their tram, as large pickets attempted to prevent their free passage. On Tuesday August 14th, severe violence erupted as some 6,000 strikers and supporters were subjected to repeated baton charges from police.

The *Daily Post* reported that the police were quite justified in their actions, and that "not a single case was....medically treated or taken to hospital" as a result.<sup>104</sup> However, depositions collected by the Trades Council tell a different story of severe injuries, and name the doctors who treated them. The accounts come from men and women, and highlight the wide levels of local support for the strikers. Many women interviewed restricted their accounts to details of police actions against themselves or their children. However, other accounts, especially those of women with a direct involvement in the strike, are clearer on the provocation pickets received. Bridget Flynn, one of the few single women strikers, spoke with contempt of the "loyalists in [the] charge of the police [who were] pulling faces at the strikers," whilst Alice Dodd, wife of a striking sawyer, testified that she saw "the strike-breakers getting on the car; and they were pulling faces

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<sup>103</sup>*Liverpool Forward*, 15th June 1912.

<sup>104</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 6th August 1912.

and jeering at the strikers."<sup>105</sup> Both women told in a matter-of-fact way of seeing the crowd move in and smash the windows of the tram car, but made no further comment on this, although both were shocked by the violence with which police reciprocated. There is an unspoken feeling in their accounts that the strike-breakers got what they deserved, in marked contrast to the *Daily Post* which was concerned that it was against a "company of....girl workers....[that] the feeling of hostility [was] bitterest."<sup>106</sup>

The women strikers exhibited no gender-based sympathy with the girls, but stood solidly with their men against them. Occasionally, women's depositions show a degree of hostility from the police at their presence in a labour dispute. Catherine Lunt, a strikers' wife who was pregnant when struck to the ground by PC 184 F, claimed he told her "you ought to be getting your tea."<sup>107</sup> Strikers' wife Elizabeth Remedios went to demonstrate by the tram with her friend Mrs Gibson. The two women went to aid a third, Mrs Dodd, and were "rushed" by a constable who "shouted, 'you had better put her down the cellar, and she will be out of the way for a bit'....in a sneering sort of way."<sup>108</sup> The depositions of male strikers are free from this sort of language, accepting that the women's place was alongside them on this occasion. Whilst there is feeling within them that the violence by policemen against women strikers was unfitting, this is due to a recognition of the difference in strength and weaponry of the two parties rather than to any belief that the women should be engaged in more ladylike behaviour

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<sup>105</sup>Testimony of Bridget Flynn, 31 Sinclair Street Garston, and of Alice Dodd, 114 York Street, Garston. Liverpool Trades Council Papers, Liverpool Record Office.

<sup>106</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 15th August 1912.

<sup>107</sup>Testimony of Catherine Lunt, 52 Ottoway Street, Garston. Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party Papers.

<sup>108</sup>Testimony of Elizabeth Remedios, 53 Ottoway Street Garston. Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party Papers.

elsewhere.

### 3.3.iv: The Upholstresses' Union

The final union which must be mentioned in any account of Liverpool women's organisations is the "Sturdy little Upholstress' [sic] Union," formed in 1890.<sup>109</sup> Other historians have been baffled by its survival in a climate where so many women's unions folded within a few months of their formation. Soldon, taking his cue from Hamling, claims that its success is due to the fact that "it amalgamated with the male Amalgamated Union of Upholsterers."<sup>110</sup> However, this amalgamation occurred in 1917, and cannot possibly account for the Union's 27 years previous history.

The Upholstresses were initially organised by a Mr Tiplady "in the face of apparently insurmountable difficulties, and soon had a membership comprising 70 women, or two-thirds of the entire trade."<sup>111</sup> Women took over the running of their own union, although the men continued to support and work closely with them, the *Labour Chronicle* observing that "it is a matter for congratulation that the men and women of the upholstering trade appear to work so well together."<sup>112</sup> This is one reason local socialists felt accounted for the success of the Upholstresses. The second was the interest taken in the Union by the London EC of the WTUL, who frequently visited and assisted them. The importance of these two factors cannot be ignored. However, there is a third which, although implicit in the writings of Jeannie Mole and her comrades, is

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<sup>109</sup>*Women's Trade Union League Review*, January 1896.

<sup>110</sup>Soldon, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, p.31.

<sup>111</sup>*Labour Chronicle*, March 1895.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*

never explicitly presented to explain the Union's position, but which I believe holds the key to their predominance. The impetus for the organisation came from the women themselves, and they were able to sustain it without outside help.

At the start of the Union's history, a small dispute was fought over wages, and the women gained an advance of 2s a week.<sup>113</sup> This appears to have been their only conflict. Without the excitement of a strike to keep them going, they continued to organise, and the union was praised as "the strongest of its kind" by 1895.<sup>114</sup> When its original secretary, Miss Owens resigned, she was replaced immediately by Miss Bryce from within the trade. No outsiders were ever required to help with organisation. Such was the position of the Union locally that by June 1897, they were able to secure a wage rise without resorting to a dispute.<sup>115</sup> The Union continued to impress national organisers, including Ada Nield Chew and Sarah Reddish, both of whom spoke to its membership of "girls of a very intelligent type."<sup>116</sup> Mary McArthur, who used it as a springboard for another unsuccessful attempt to unionise the rest of Liverpool's female workforce in 1905, found it "a model example of a well-managed and effective organisation" and it continued to occupy its unique position until merging with the men's union in 1917.<sup>117</sup> The last act of the Upholstresses' Union before amalgamation, the securing of a wage increase of 2s 6d per week plus a reduction in hours for its workers, came during the First World War.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>*Women's Trade Union League Review*, January 1893.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid*, January 1895.

<sup>115</sup>Letter from Miss Bryce to Miss Barry, *ibid*, October 1897.

<sup>116</sup>Article by Ada Nield Chew, *ibid*, February 1904.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid*, February 1905.

<sup>118</sup>*Women's Trade Union League Annual Report*, 1916 - 17.

As well as having enthusiastic secretaries from within the trade, the Upholstresses' Union gained from the fact that, unlike the tailoresses, the women in this trade worked in larger workshops. This, combined with its being a smaller trade, made combination easier. Once combination had been achieved and was seen to succeed, the Union attracted help from the WTUL, a body with limited resources which appeared unable to spare time to help fledgling campaigns. Hence, to a certain degree, its success gave rise to further successes. In all of this, the Union was best aided by the fact that, in this case, "the woman worker show[ed] that she [was] in real earnest to...better her condition."<sup>119</sup>

### 3.4: Conclusion

Although, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, no study of women in political organisations would be complete without a consideration of their work within trade unions, this area does not provide a fruitful line of inquiry for those concerned with imposing a gender analysis on the social history of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Liverpool. As I have demonstrated, with only one exception, the local women's trade unions were short-lived. Some of those which did form present us with instances of gender-based cross-class alliances between women, whilst others such as the Upholstresses demonstrate movements of women uniting with men of their own class, although in a separate organisation. Yet, the final example aside, none of the organisations survived long enough for such analysis to be meaningful, and the occasions when it can be drawn are often representative of moments of struggle and therefore atypical of day-to-day experience.

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<sup>119</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 20th April 1895.

Many of the organisations I have mentioned here drew support and involvement from other movements of women. Socialists from the ILP and the Fabian Society, were involved with Jeannie Mole in her committees, for example, whilst the ladies of the Women's Liberal Federation, and later the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, worked closely with the Women's Industrial Council in its later period. From these external organisations, those attempting to unionise women workers drew perspectives from other work that they did with women, and made their choices as to the respective hierarchies they wished to promote between the concerns of gender and the concerns of class.

Thus two distinct trends developed within women's trade unionism locally. One was informed by the socialist model of women's political organisation, which saw their trade union activity as a prerequisite to raising women's class consciousness and drawing them into the socialist movement alongside working-class men. The other owed more to the ideology of separate spheres, and allowed women to move across class boundaries to work with other women. This trend placed gender inequality at the root of working women's problems, but was also underlined by the idea that paid work was always secondary to woman's primary role as wife and mother. For this reason, it often fought shy of encouraging women workers to take action in defence of their conditions, preferring instead campaigns to educate the broader layers of the population of their plight in an attempt to alleviate the need for women to work without detracting from their household economies.

Both trends were informed by ideologies which women already politically active drew on and attempted to expand in the direction of women's trade unions. As this chapter demonstrates, much of their work there was sporadic, and met little in the way of

positive reception from the working women themselves. To discover more about the broader arena in which Merseyside's women activists developed their political perspectives, it is necessary to move to the area of party politics, where many of those who feature in this chapter as leaders began their political lives.

Plate Five



A RESTING PLACE IN STAFFORDSHIRE.

The Clarion Women's Van, during its inaugural tour

Summer 1896

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EARLY PARTY ACTIVITY 1890-1905

#### 4.1: Introduction

This chapter examines women in political parties in the early part of the period covered by the thesis. During this time, the Liberal and Conservative parties in Liverpool were reconstructing their appeal to meet the challenges of an enlarged, and recently enfranchised electorate, and the emergence of organised socialist and labour parties in the city. For socialists, working in uncharted waters, the period represented one of development and growth. They made their first tentative electoral gains in this period.<sup>1</sup> The Liberals gained control of the city in 1892, but lost it in 1895 to a reconstituted Conservative Party.

Women could and did stand for election for the School Board and the Boards of Guardians, as Chapter Two demonstrated. Although often they did so as independents, increasingly they stood as party candidates. Hence it is important to examine what roles they took or were allocated within political parties. Within the socialist parties, an organisational model developed nationally which equated gender with class providing women with full membership rights. However, the rhetoric of separate spheres often clouded socialists' perceptions of the nature of women's public role, and restricted it to 'women's issues.' The trend towards providing a distinct political space for women, in the form of women's sections, perpetuated this, and often led to their marginalisation. Within the Conservative Party, a general acceptance of separate spheres tended to

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<sup>1</sup>These were in 1901 when John Wolfe Tone Morrissey, ILP member and socialist candidate, was elected city auditor, and in 1905 when he and James Sexton were elected to the city council.

suggest that public political activity was unfeminine. However, the party's reconstitution in the face of the challenge of an emerging mass electorate forced it to explore new political constituencies. Some Conservative women, mainly those who possessed influence through wealth or rank, found limited space within these. Liberalism also withheld formal party membership from women, but comprised a broader range of political positions. A longstanding radical tradition used the rhetoric of equality to claim women's suffrage as a basic right. Simultaneously, Whiggish Liberalism leaned more towards separate spheres, but saw a role for women injecting feminine virtues into public life. This chapter provides a close study of how much political space the three parties afforded to women, aiming to assess how successful their models of organisation were in practice. For Conservative and Liberal women, it will focus mainly on their activities within separate organisations. However, although national socialist parties developed separate women's organisations at this time, they achieved little presence on Merseyside. Hence discussion of the work of socialist women here mainly concentrates on their roles in mixed organisations, whilst also attempting to suggest some reasons for the lack of success separate groups achieved.

#### 4.2: "Every Woman is at Heart a Unionist" : The Primrose League<sup>2</sup>

Although there has been no full length study of the Primrose League since 1942, its importance has recently been stressed by historians such as Martin Pugh and Beatrix Campbell, who are eager to stress its key role in the reconstitution of the Conservative Party.<sup>3</sup> Formed in 1883, in the wake of anxiety about the party's future following the

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<sup>2</sup>*The Primrose League Gazette*, 1st December 1888.

<sup>3</sup>See Janet Robb, *The Primrose League 1883 - 1906*, New York, Armstrong Press, 1968 edition, first published 1942; Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880 - 1935*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1985; Beatrix Campbell, *Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory*, London, Virago, 1987. For a comparison between the national Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Federation, see Linda Walker, "Party Political Women:

Liberal election victory of 1880, it put forward an ideology of Church, Crown and Empire, and attempted to unite the disparate classes of England in defence of these things. Obviously, there was great need to formulate a Conservative response to a changed electorate. Martin Pugh notes just how successful the League was in doing this, popularising politics, and creating a political social life for its members.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not just its populist approach which made it unique. From 1884, it admitted women to its ranks, acknowledging the importance of the Victorian political hostess, and formalising her role. The League was self-consciously proud of this fact, remarking that it was "the first body to recognise the usefulness of women in politics."<sup>5</sup>

Once admitted, women were organised separately in the League, under the direction of the Ladies' Grand Council. This was a financially autonomous organisation, independent of the Men's Grand Council. However, within the local branches, or habitations of the League, women worked alongside men. No separate women's branches formed, although there were some local Ladies' Councils. Much of the League's views on the role of women in political life came from the rhetoric of separate spheres, women's political concerns being presented as wholly natural, and an extension of their role as mothers. Lady Borthwick explained in the League's newspaper, *The Primrose League Gazette*, that the relationship between men and women within the League was based on an acknowledgement of their essential differences:

Let [woman] not try to emulate man in the many qualities he alone possesses; let her rather try to excel as woman in all that is most feminine and womanly. Woman was created to be the complement of man's stronger

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A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League," in Jane Rendall, ed, *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987.

<sup>4</sup>Pugh, *The Tories and the People*, Chapter Five.

<sup>5</sup>This is a phrase which occurs frequently in *The Primrose League Gazette*.

qualities, not the rival of his intellect. Their very contrast should make their strength.<sup>6</sup>

However, at no time did the women of the League consent to a secondary role. Although initially on their admittance, Lord Hamilton had advised them not to join "the rough and tumble of the contest," Jeannie Churchill's massive success in the Woodstock election, where it was widely agreed that she and Georgina Curzon had won the seat for her husband, meant that opposition to women canvassing was soon dropped.<sup>7</sup> Conservative women were soon participating in both municipal and parliamentary elections, on behalf of their male political allies. Yet the League was always careful to point out that its women were losing none of their essential femininity through such actions. Writing in the *Gazette*, T. Lennox Irwin explained;

the marked difference that exists between the truly feminine influence of the Dames of high and low degree of the Primrose League, and the unattractive pressure exerted by the ladies of the Liberal and Radical societies.<sup>8</sup>

The "lady orators" of the League were to attract none of the negative publicity given to the "female speakers" whose chief concern was women's rights, and not the sanctity of the Empire. They were to assist and persuade, rather than to fight for their own concerns. Whilst the women of the League acknowledged that they had directly lifted successful ploys such as separate women's meetings and a campaigning Ladies' Van from the radical camp, they posed no threat to an existing social order. Educating women was one of their key roles. Believing that "every woman is at heart a Unionist," their meetings were aimed at counteracting what they perceived as the radical threat,

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<sup>6</sup>Lady Borthwick, "English Women as a Political Force," *The Primrose League Gazette*, 15th October 1887.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in Campbell, *Iron Ladies*, p.10.

<sup>8</sup>*Primrose League Gazette*, 24th December 1887.

capturing the votes of men by persuading the minds of their wives and daughters.<sup>9</sup> This demonstrates how women seeking public political activity could turn the rhetoric of separate spheres - in this case regarding the supremacy of women's influence within the home - to their advantage. Subjects such as suffrage were always viewed as outside the interests of the League, which frequently proclaimed itself to be a non-party political organisation. This allowed for a remarkable degree of unity to be maintained within the organisation, with its Grand Council containing both members of suffrage and anti-suffrage organisations by the Edwardian period.

Such was the national success of the League, that membership reached one million by 1891. Although Conservatism lost support to the Liberal party in Liverpool before 1895, the League managed to establish seven branches in the city between 1884-8, and received much of the credit for winning the city back to Conservatism in 1895. Although much branch activity was socially orientated, this should not be taken as indicative of an apolitical stance. Locally, the League was as highly politicised as it was nationally, and its ability to create a political culture which prioritised entertainment as much as discussion is, as Pugh has noted, one of the secrets of its success. That it was aware of this as an organisation is clear in this report from Liverpool's Rodney habitation, following the third of their monthly Winter social events:

Apart from its pleasant social features, there is a deep feeling among members that they are united for a serious purpose, that is the maintenance of the Empire, the maintenance of freedom at home and abroad, the maintenance of religion and the furtherance of the constitution.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, 1st December 1888, and 14th July 1888.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, December 14th 1889.

The main political opportunity which the League provided for women was involvement in electoral contests, where local reports in the *Primrose League Gazette* repeatedly stressed their important role. Women were not restricted to particular wards, but took part in elections in working and middle-class districts alike, being especially singled out for their work in Kirkdale in the General Election of 1900, when the Chairman of the polling district declared "he believed that to a great extent the ladies of this habitation were responsible for returning the Conservative candidate...by such a splendid majority."<sup>11</sup> The threat of socialism was perceived as strong in this constituency, being as it was "densely and toughly peopled, [its] low life....very low."<sup>12</sup> Obviously, such work would provide valuable grounding for women wishing to move into public life.

The second important opportunity which the Primrose League presented to its women members, as Linda Walker has pointed out, was to learn and practise skills of public speaking. Some habitations allowed women to practise this at all levels, including contentious public meetings, where feelings often ran high, and the speaker was as likely to be attacked for the challenge she was presenting to woman's traditional role as for her politics. However, the Liverpool habitations appeared to have shunned this type of meeting, preferring smaller ones in front of an invited, or sympathetic audience. Unlike other political organisations in the city, women speaking for the League do not appear to have been directed to any specific topics, which could often then be marginalised as women's issues. In September 1888, Mrs Thomas Brocklebank, Ruling Councillor, addressed her Rodney habitation on "Europe after the death of the German Empire." In what was essentially an anti-Home Rule speech, the closest she came to domestic

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, December 1900.

<sup>12</sup>P. J Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.64.

politics was in a mention of the dangers of the local National League gaining influence. As Ruling Councillor of a mixed habitation, she was able to gain valuable experience of speaking to mixed audiences on such themes, as well as sharing committee work with men and women alike. As with the skills of electioneering, such public opportunities were vital for women who were to seek greater public involvement in the near future.

Yet despite such examples as Mrs Brocklebank and the Rodney habitation, material which survives indicates that the Primrose League in Liverpool was a sporadic and somewhat sparse organisation, which came nowhere near achieving the success it enjoyed in other parts of England. Despite the prominence of Conservatism in local politics, the League's local branches appear to have folded as rapidly as they formed, their many revivals being short-lived. In addition to this, although women enjoyed an equal role with men in the League, this appears to have led to their being eclipsed by them, at least within Liverpool. Despite the success enjoyed by Mrs Brocklebank, she was almost unique in achieving the position of Ruling Councillor. Most of the other Liverpool branches were either dominated by male executives, or reserved the parallel roles of Dame President and Lady Secretary for women. Liverpool was amongst several districts which attempted to achieve greater autonomy for its women members through organising a Dames' Committee in the city. This was established in 1892, and appears to have been enthusiastically taken up by local women, its lack of longevity being probably due to the tenuous position of the League locally rather than any strong anti-woman feeling within its ranks.

The lack of success of the Primrose League in Liverpool can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, as Beatrix Campbell has recently observed, much of its national success

came from the work done by the women from the dynastic Tory families. These were the women who had frequently moved throughout the local community via philanthropic work, and were now able to mobilise their links and knowledge on behalf of the local party.<sup>13</sup> As Waller and other local historians have shown us, despite the electoral success of the Conservative Party in Liverpool, there was no real local Tory élite, the political dynasties of the Liverpool bourgeoisie being almost entirely Liberal in character. Although there were some Conservatives involved in local philanthropy, it was mainly the Liberal party which controlled this, as Chapter Two demonstrates. Secondly, under such conditions, the Conservative Party in Liverpool developed its own strain of working-class Toryism, which whilst not directly antagonistic, was not immediately at ease with the League's determination to foster a "bond of union and sympathy...between the various classes of the community."<sup>14</sup> Liverpool's Conservatives were "practised in stooping to conquer." Rather than attempt to blur class distinctions, instead they attempted to sustain their belief that "working men accepted that a leisured and educated class should conduct Government." But they simultaneously recognised that there had to be a political role provided for the working man, for fear that he would otherwise take himself and his vote elsewhere. Liverpool's working men found this role within the Working Men's Conservative Association, which sustained 12 flourishing branches in the city by 1872, and expanded each decade up to 1914.<sup>15</sup> With such an organisation already in place, there was no real need for the Primrose League. Reconstitution in Liverpool was well in hand. However, the Working Men's Conservative Associations had little to offer women in the way of public political

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<sup>13</sup>This view is not explicitly stated in *Iron Ladies*, but was paraphrased in a recent paper with the same title, given at the National Museum of Labour History, Manchester, November 1993.

<sup>14</sup>Primrose League Ladies' E.C. Annual Report 1886.

<sup>15</sup>Waller, *Democracy & Sectarianism*, pp.16-18.

platforms or experience. It was not until the next century that Liverpool's Conservative women were able to unite as explicitly political *women* under the banner of party, in the ranks of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association.

#### 4.3: "Every Step to Improve the Condition of Women [is] Made by the Liberal Party" Liverpool Women's Liberal Associations<sup>16</sup>

For Liverpool women whose political sympathies lay with the Liberal Party, the route into party political activity was much more clearly defined. Through the ranks of the Women's Liberal Federation, they came into political life, and learned to canvass, to speak in public, and to stand for election themselves. A separate women's organisation, the WLF guaranteed its members the chance to represent themselves, control their own branches, sit on their own committees, and set their own agenda. There was no question of having to compete with men for space. Unique in its size, and containing some of the leading local women of its day, it was the WLF and not the Primrose League in Liverpool which enjoyed unprecedented success as a party political organisation for local women.<sup>17</sup>

The national WLF was formed in 1887, in an attempt to join together the several Women's Liberal Associations which had been forming locally in Britain throughout the 1880s.<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, although not enjoying much electoral success in the city,

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<sup>16</sup>Nessie Stewart-Brown to Wallasey Women's Liberal Association, *Women's Liberal Federation News*, 12th November 1907.

<sup>17</sup>See Appendix Five and Appendix Six for details of officers and membership figures of Merseyside WLF branches.

<sup>18</sup>There is no published history of the Women's Liberal Federation, to date. Although an important site of women's political activity in the Edwardian period, its role has yet to be fully evaluated. The most recent material on it, Linda Walker's comparative "Party Political Women," and Claire Hirshfield's "Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892-1914," *Gender and History* Vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 1990, pp.173-197, re-establish it as an important political group, but only touch

the local Liberal Party did enjoy the support of the city's radical élite. With such backing, it is not surprising to discover that Liverpool was amongst the first 26 associations to join the Federation.<sup>19</sup> The WLF was stronger in the North of England than in the South at this time. However, some associations still relied on using the patronage of prominent national women when establishing their branches, such as in Southport where Eva McLaren was the branch president. The predominance of prominent local Liberal families allowed the Liverpool associations to retain a wholly local character. Mrs Holt, first President of the Liverpool Liberal Association, fits this pattern well. A member of a wealthy local shipping family, and sister-in-law to Lallie Webb (sister of Beatrice), Mrs Holt had prominent Liberal connections in the area. Indeed, in 1892 her brother-in-law became first Lord Mayor of Liverpool. She also had links to other philanthropic organisations in the city, such as the British Women's Temperance Association and the general committee which campaigned for the establishment of a University in the city. She shared officialdom with Miss Frances Thorburn, one of the first women to be elected to the Liverpool Select Vestry.<sup>20</sup> In 1891, this branch was joined by one in West Derby. This was established by a woman who was to become one of the key figures in the WLF nationally, and whose name was to become synonymous with Liberalism in Liverpool, Mrs Nessie Stewart Brown. Like Mrs Holt, she was related to some of the city's most prominent Liberal families. The daughter of Dr E K Muspratt, a prominent chemical industrialist and one time chancellor of Liverpool University, and sister of Sir Max Muspratt, later to be a Liberal MP, her interests outside of Liberalism included anti-vivisection, and the welfare of working

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on its scope and strength, whilst other historians mention it only in relation to suffrage.

<sup>19</sup>WLF Annual Report 1888.

<sup>20</sup>Miss Thorburn was also concerned with nurses, working women and the Irish poor, amongst other things. See Chapter Two for more details.

women.<sup>21</sup> Once the West Derby Association was established, others soon followed, and by 1893, Merseyside had 7 affiliated organisations, as well as a branch of the Women's National Liberal Association.<sup>22</sup> An association needed a minimum of 25 members before it could affiliate. Membership figures for the Liverpool branches show that they were comfortably exceeding this.<sup>23</sup>

From its inception, like the Primrose League, the WLF saw education as its key concern:

[The Associations] have made the distribution of literature a main feature of their work, and in several cases, libraries of books...are being formed, as a valuable supplement to the courses of lectures....The work of the associations in this and in other directions is in the first place educational, the object being to raise an intelligent interest among women in political questions, and to enlist their sympathies on the side of Liberal principles,<sup>24</sup>

stated the executive in 1888. This also highlights an important characteristic of the WLF in its early days. It began life essentially as a Liberal organisation for women, rather than a women's organisation for women Liberals. Although it did address questions of specific relevance to women, much of its campaigning was around issues taken up by the national Liberal Party. Liverpool was no exception to this rule. Alongside local issues such as housing and municipal politics, Liberal foreign policy, the state regulation of vice in India, Home Rule and the Transvaal crisis were just some of the issues discussed by Liverpool WLAs prior to 1905.

However, alongside this party political agenda, the WLF took some of its organising

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<sup>21</sup>See Appendix Ten for biographical details.

<sup>22</sup>For a list of these, and some idea of their longevity, see Appendix Five. Details of the WNLA and its relationship with the WLF will be covered later in this chapter.

<sup>23</sup>Membership figures were available from 1904. See Appendix Six.

<sup>24</sup>WLF Annual Report 1888.

principles from the ideology of separate spheres. Separate organisation began as a reaction to the fact that women were denied membership of the Liberal Party. However, a belief that it could be a positive thing soon emerged in the ideology of the WLF. For example, the deputation on Poor Law relief which reported to the League's Annual Meeting in 1893 stressed that "In view of the large number of women and girls employed in mills and factories, it is of great importance to secure a considerable addition to the number of inspectors of their own sex." They concluded that they "trust[ed] Mr Asquith may soon be able to give further effect to the important reform he initiated."<sup>25</sup> This illustrates some important points about the ideologies of the WLF, and the conflicts between them. They believed that women were best represented by other women, who could understand and relate far better to women's problems, and their place in society, hence prioritising and forging alliances based on gender: this particular campaign was carried out with the close co-operation of the Women's Trade Union League, for example. However, at this time women could not sit in Parliament, but relied on men to pass legislation which would benefit women. As Liberals, they would liaise with Liberal men to do this, thus prioritising their party political affiliation. In the early years of the WLF, such an arrangement worked well, and women were able to remain fluid within the priorities of gender and party, choosing either at different times. By January 1893, at the National Liberal Federation conference, which was held in Liverpool, Mrs Stewart-Brown and other leading WLF members were given the honour of seats on the platform, "an acknowledgement of the position of the Federation in the Liberal Party which has not before been accorded."<sup>26</sup> Although it had taken seven years of auxiliary work, women who had gained invaluable platform experience through

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<sup>25</sup>WLF Annual Report 1893.

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

the WLF were now able to put it into practice through the National Liberal Federation, alongside Liberal men. However, such arrangements would only work when Liberal men and Liberal women wanted the same thing. When the women as a group demanded something different, they would be forced to choose between their political beliefs and the demands of their sex, as will be shown in a later chapter.

Before moving on to examine in greater detail what characterised the Liverpool WLAs, it is necessary to examine their links with the national Federation. Linda Walker has observed that the Federation began life as a socially mixed body, but rapidly lost its working-class members to both the ILP and the Primrose League. The middle-class, London dominated National Council was not blind to this fact, and made several attempts to broaden its appeal and become more representative. Initially, local associations could send one delegate per hundred members to the Federation, but this was altered to one per fifty, and then to one per twenty-five, with the explicit aim of allowing smaller associations national recognition. Local associations could decide their own programme, and the subscriptions which they levied were variable (from 1d to 3d), and voluntary, to encourage cross-class participation. Also, there were the local Unions, formed in the late 1880s, which further helped decentralization.<sup>27</sup> Although Walker claims that it was the London base of the National Council which allowed it to "press home its policies through Liberal MPs and other national organisations," close study of the Liverpool associations indicate that this process was often begun in the local branches, which diligently followed their resolutions through to national level via delegates who reported back at regular intervals.<sup>28</sup> Often, local associations would

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<sup>27</sup>WLF Annual Reports 1892, 1893. Walker, "Party Political Women," pp.168-9.

<sup>28</sup>Walker, "Party Political Women," p.170.

devote time to examining the agenda of national meetings, and recommending actions for their delegates. When East and West Toxteth WLAs held a joint meeting on sweated and dangerous trades in September 1893, Mrs Charles Mullet, the speaker, moved a resolution calling on the Home Secretary to prohibit the use of white lead and raw phosphorus which was sent directly to him by the associations concerned. Such freedom of action was essential to the beliefs of Liverpool's women Liberals. Indeed, in December 1898, when the National Council discussed a motion moved by Eva McClaren in which the hope was expressed that affiliated WLA members would refrain "from taking part in parliamentary by-elections when the EC and the local WLA have both decided not to take action," the Wavertree association sent in a protest resolution, and Mrs Stewart-Brown, a Wavertree member attending council as an EC member rather than a local association delegate, moved an amendment on the grounds that such a policy would interfere with the national WLF policy on freedom of individual action.<sup>29</sup> This illustrates how Liverpool *associations* were active nationally, and that figures such as Mrs Stewart-Brown who rose to prominence on the EC did so as members of local associations, and not just as individuals.<sup>30</sup>

However, such freedom for local associations should not lead us to see them as totally autonomous bodies with no regard for national policies. A high regard for personal liberty was an essential strand of late Victorian/Edwardian Liberalism, and the Liverpool branches appear to be acting from a regard for this principal rather than showing a maverick streak. The principal objects of the WLF changed little over its first two

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<sup>29</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, December 1898.

<sup>30</sup>This makes an interesting comparison with the stance taken by Miss Eleanor Rathbone, a prominent local woman on the EC of the NUWSS, where she became more and more involved with national issues at the expense of local ones (see Chapter Five) and this highlights the democratic nature of the WLF.

decades. In 1889, they were first set out thus:

- 1) To promote the adoption of Liberal principles on the government of the country.
- 2) To promote just legislation for women and to protect the interests of children.
- 3) To advance political education by meetings, lectures and the distribution of literature.

Liberalism and its spread through education were at the heart of the federation, with concern for women and children reflecting the influence the ideologies of separate spheres had within it from its inception. It was soon also to include suffrage as one of its principal aims, a step which it took ahead of the NLF, highlighting its more radical, feminist position on some women's issues<sup>31</sup>. Locally, the Liverpool branches worked in ways which were wholly compatible with the national aims.

As previously stated, WLAs formed in Liverpool during a time of local Liberal resurgence. Highly concerned with issues such as temperance, housing, working conditions and social policy, the local party was making genuine attempts to appeal to Liverpool's increasing numbers of working-class voters. A Liverpool Liberal Federal Council was established in 1889, and published a radical manifesto, declaring itself "for the people, for the poor."<sup>32</sup> Increasing gains in municipal elections culminated, in 1892, with the victory of the first Liberal council the city had seen for fifty years.

WLAs were in the centre of municipal politics. Although there is some evidence that women initially held back from electioneering, once they began the work they appear

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<sup>31</sup>Similarly, the WLF was committed to divorce law reform by 1892.

<sup>32</sup>For further discussion of this, see Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, Chapter 7.

to have taken to it.<sup>33</sup> On several occasions, their work was publicly acknowledged by men whose election they had secured.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes, men restricted women's work to tasks which kept them out of the public eye. For instance, a Birkenhead by-election in 1894 saw "the women chiefly employing their tact and energy in tracing removals and in doing clerical work."<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, a more public role was available. Many prominent local Liberals believed that women had a vital role to play in local politics, which stemmed directly from their essential feminine nature. The ideologies behind such beliefs were explicitly outlined on several occasions, such as in this extract from the *Liverpool Review*:

[Women] also have been, in some cases, elected to [School Boards, and other public bodies], and have discharged the functions associated with such with gentleness, intelligence and tact. On the School Board, the Select Vestry and various local Boards of Guardians, we have seen the beneficent influences exercised by such ladies as the Calderwoods, the Elroys, the Stanistreets, the Thorburns and the Davies'. There are duties in respect to these organisations that women perform with much more tenderness and tact than can be expected of men. Ladies obtain the confidence of women and children, and among them make their influence felt for personal and public good. The same excellent results are seen in regard to....various other efforts of a philanthropic character.<sup>36</sup>

So Liverpool's women Liberals were allowed space within the public political arena by their male colleagues, as long as they dealt with women's issues. At the local elections of 1893, whilst the Liberal party was holding many male-dominated meetings throughout the city which gave women no opportunity to gain experience in public speaking, East

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<sup>33</sup>At the West Derby WLA AGM in January 1892, Mrs Stewart-Brown reported that she was "sorry that more ladies did not volunteer to help the candidate in the ward." *Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 16th January 1892.

<sup>34</sup>For example, Richard Meade-King, who declared in 1893 "the work done by the WLA had had a great deal to do with his return at the head of the poll in the recent Municipal elections." *Women's Liberal Federation News*, September 1893. For further examples, see later editions of the *News*.

<sup>35</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, October 1894.

<sup>36</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 26th March 1898. This paper, initially published under the title of the *Liberal Review of Politics*, was edited by William Rathbone, who possibly wrote this anonymous leading article. As a paper its sympathies were wholly with progressive Liberalism.

and West Toxteth WLAs combined to hold a meeting of male and female ratepayers, which included male speakers (the candidates), but was chaired and run by women. The meeting was aimed specifically at mobilising support for Liberals amongst the voting ratepayers, which resulted in a mixed audience. A similar meeting was held the following June, when Mr A Henry addressed a mixed audience on "the Parish Councils Act with special reference to the position of women on such councils." As the meeting was about women's role in local government, WLF members chaired the meeting and gave the vote of thanks. Issues of women's role in public life continued to dominate the agenda of the local WLAs up to the First World War.

By the municipal elections of 1895, at which the Liberal Party suffered a defeat which was to mark the beginning of a lengthy period of municipal opposition, women were a recognised organising force:

On polling day they furnished in every ward a most active contingent of workers. Mrs Egerton Stewart-Brown spoke night after night for various candidates, and the Liberal women issued a leaflet calling upon the women voters to support the Reform candidates who would continue the Temperance and Moral Reform Policy of the Liberals. Although the results were disastrous for the Reformers....it is gratifying to know that the women voters polled in some wards in larger numbers than the men, and that so far as can be judged the majority of them did not vote for the Tory Party.<sup>37</sup>

Local women now attempted to push their role beyond areas which men defined as suitable. There had always been a certain 'trade off' between Liberal men and women, with men promising priority for women's issues in return for a willing body of workers at election time. After gaining such aid, Mr Paul (sic), the candidate in East Toxteth, declared himself "converted to the principle of women's suffrage" as a result of the

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<sup>37</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, December 1895.

work women had done for his campaign.<sup>38</sup> Such promises were easy to give, especially in a municipal contest, where the candidate, even if successful, would not be in a position to alter parliamentary legislation.

A wide gulf in the city between the role that men thought fit for women in politics, and the role women wished to take on for themselves emerged as a local campaign developed to elect women on to municipal councils. Having achieved limited success in other public elections, a group of women in Wallasey decided to extend this in 1898, and stand as council candidates. The three women, Miss A. Hoyle, Mrs M. Jones and Miss Bessie Shilston, did not stand under any party or organisation banner, despite the fact that Miss Shilston was an active member of the WLA locally and nationally.

On polling day, following a campaign in which they appealed to the electorate simply as women, they were badly defeated, Miss Shilston doing best with 132 votes (against a majority of 330). The Liberal press rebuked their campaign, especially the *Liverpool Review*, which had been so supportive of attempts to place women onto Boards of Guardians and other public bodies where the paper felt "women's practical knowledge of housekeeping prompts them to pay attention to details which escape the notice of men." Confronted by the idea of women taking such a role further within the confines of local government, the Liberal men behind the *Review* became quite vitriolic:

While women, - nobly planned to warm, to comfort and command, - may be of most beneficent service as representatives of the Poor Law System to women and children, petticoats and street paving are strangely incongruous. In other words, a lady may do duty as a Poor Law guardian and be a useful woman to the community, but she would be lost if deliberating with men about gas, water, sewerage and other public works....neither in municipal administration nor in the conduct of the affairs of local...district councils is

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid*, November 1893.

the feminine element countenanced.<sup>39</sup>

So, whilst some Liberal men were being convinced of women's greater abilities through seeing them at work in public life, others were becoming more convinced of the need to contain them within the confines of what they saw as their fit space, that part of the public sphere which bore closest relation to the domestic. Meanwhile, women were gaining valuable political experience through the ranks of the WLF, and were becoming increasingly keen to push further into public life.

Obviously, such tensions were bound to come to a head over something. Within the WLF both locally and nationally, it was the issue of suffrage more than any other which really forced women to make hard decisions as to whether they were women or Liberals. It became increasingly apparent that they could not be both and remain political. As I have argued, the issue of suffrage was one on which all women involved in politics had to take a position, even if that position was one of self-consciously having no position, the line taken by the Primrose League. Once women had shown a desire to participate in some area of the public political arena by publicly campaigning under a party political banner, they had to decide whether they were doing so because they believed such municipal politics were an extension of their natural role, in which case they would oppose the parliamentary franchise, or because they wished to use the municipal theatre as a forum from which to alter the social position of their sex, in which case they would support it.

Liverpool's women Liberals were drawn more into the suffrage issue through the dominance of Mrs Stewart-Brown in the local organisation. She was rapidly becoming

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<sup>39</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 9th April 1898.

identified as one of the key national figures involved in determining the WLF's stance on suffrage. Always passionate about the issue, she was fully involved in suffrage campaigns within her native city, as will be shown more clearly in Chapter Five. Therefore, her stance can never allow her to be interpreted as an anti-suffragist. The WLF split over suffrage as early as 1890, when moves on the EC to add a suffrage demand to its aims led to between fifty and sixty local associations leaving to form the Women's National Liberal Association (WNLA).<sup>40</sup> Abercrombey WLA, the original Liverpool branch, which forwarded a motion to the EC stating that its members did "not consider this an opportune moment for instructing the EC to press [the suffrage] question forward in the country," was still listed as an affiliated branch in the 1891 Annual Report.<sup>41</sup> However, further local tensions arose around suffrage, and when Mrs Stewart-Brown invited MP Walter McClaren to address the local Women's Liberal Federal Council, it was too much for them. Although some of its 'leading lights' did not necessarily agree, the branch decided that;

beyond refusing to take part in the meeting they [would send] out a circular stating that they would have nothing to do with it and in addition requesting the newspapers to state that the Abercrombey WLA was not represented at the meeting and took no part in it.<sup>42</sup>

Abercrombey then affiliated to the WNLA. The WLF and WNLA branches in the city did continue to work together during elections, but suffrage always remained between them. As the twentieth-century approached, suffrage and Liberalism became almost inseparable within Liverpool politics.

It was against this background that Mrs Stewart-Brown developed her suffrage policy,

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<sup>40</sup>For more details of this, see Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

<sup>41</sup>WLF Annual Report 1891. This motion was moved then withdrawn.

<sup>42</sup>*Liverpool Review of Politics & etc*, 6th April 1892.

working in an arena where most of her close political colleagues shared her concerns. Initially, she had held back from pressing the EC to adopt suffrage as policy, but she soon rethought this, and by 1898 she prioritised suffrage in her national federation work, and moved at the EC that "no measure which does not include women's suffrage will satisfy the just aspirations of Liberal women." Yet on one issue she still hesitated. This was the 'Test' question: should the WLF work for those candidates who refused to support women's suffrage, yet sought WLA aid in their parliamentary campaigns? In 1896, she had moved what was to become the position of the WLF for some years, a motion that associations could not dictate to other associations their stance towards individual Liberal candidates. Defining herself as a progressive, she continued:

There are a great many Liberals who have not yet made up their minds on the question of suffrage, and if we force this test upon them we shall alienate them entirely, whereas sometimes by working for a really good candidate we are able to convert him...*It is measures, not men that we work for.*<sup>43</sup>

In 1896 this position was easy for her to justify. Here, as a Liberal woman, she prioritised her politics over feminist concerns. Many of the men she worked with were converted to suffrage following WLF aid, so such gradualism appeared quite feasible at this stage. This was not her only justification for her beliefs. During the heated debate, she admitted that although he was an exception, she would still have worked willingly for Sir Naylor-Leyland, the candidate at Sefton who had declared that he would rather enfranchise the donkey boys on the sands than the women who were active in his campaign. For several years she retained a willingness to work for anti-suffrage MPs to further the Liberal cause, an attitude which left her more and more isolated upon the EC and its suffrage committee, on which she sat from May 1895. Again, in 1898, she was called on to defend her position against a motion moved by the Union of Practical

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<sup>43</sup>WLF Annual Report 1896.

Suffragists formed within the WLF in 1896 to persuade the Federation to adopt suffrage as a test question as the issue became an annual battle.<sup>44</sup> At this stage, she believed WLF members "could do a great deal in pressing forward the question of women's suffrage without adopting a menacing attitude towards the Liberal Party."<sup>45</sup> She was "disappointed" that a recent suffrage bill had been talked out in the house, but her need to resist the danger of alienating Liberal MPs remained prominent.

Although these debates took place in a national arena, Mrs Stewart-Brown retained the same strong insistence that the time was not yet right for test questions in her dealings locally. In 1898 she faced a direct challenge to this, in the person of Sir Naylor-Leyland who was again fighting the Southport seat. She called a meeting, which he was tactfully unable to attend;

[to discuss] what action should be taken at the Southport bye-election [sic]....[She] urged the members to work for Sir Naylor-Leyland and said that at this momentous crisis no whole-hearted Liberal could stand aside, even when the candidate did not yet see the necessity for women's suffrage

After the meeting, 55 women promised to help, and Sir Naylor-Leyland was this time duly elected. Defending this nationally in 1899 she declared:

We are proud to feel that we are an important party organisation. It is that we love Liberalism more, not women's suffrage less that we oppose tests....The time has not yet come...to withhold support from those candidates who do not as yet feel that they can support women's suffrage.<sup>46</sup>

This shows that whilst a passionate suffragist herself, she was aware that suffrage was a far more contentious issue *for some male Liberals* than were the issues of Home Rule, and Welsh disestablishmentarianism, both of which were approved as test questions in

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<sup>44</sup>See Walker, "Liberal Women and the Primrose League," p.189.

<sup>45</sup>WLF Annual Report 1898.

<sup>46</sup>WLF Annual Report 1899.

the same debate. Her insistence at prioritising Liberalism over suffrage in this manner led to her becoming increasingly isolated, and had organisational repercussions for the WLAs of Liverpool, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Eight.

So by 1905, although the Conservative Party was back in firm control of the City Council in Liverpool, it provided little in the way of points of entry for women wishing to enter the public arena through the world of party politics. Although the Primrose League was proud of the fact that it was the first national organisation to recognise the important role women could play in political life, albeit one which was strictly demarcated, it did not really extend this to Liverpool women, preferring to concentrate on the working men of the city. Of the two parties which held municipal power between 1890 and 1905, it was the Liberal Party which offered most to women. Although its thinking was still heavily influenced by the ideology of separate spheres, it trained them as canvassers, gave them space as public speakers, and even selected them as candidates for certain offices. However, by 1900, these were no longer the only two parties who sought to capture the popular votes within the city. From 1892, there was a flowering of the socialist movement in Liverpool, and it is in this direction that we must now look in order to assess fully what political parties had to offer women at this time.

#### 4.4: "In Many Cases, the Women do Really More Work than the Men"<sup>47</sup>

##### Women within the Socialist Parties

Of all the political groups, it was perhaps the socialists who spent more time debating the position of women, both in society and in their own political parties. Their

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<sup>47</sup>Letter from Fred Greasby to Eleanor Keeling, 7th April 1895, Joseph Edwards Papers.

construction of this issue as 'The Woman Question,' which my Introduction outlines, resulted, as has been shown, in particular forms of organisation being made available to women within the socialist parties of Europe, aimed at recruiting and retaining women to the class struggle as opposed to uniting them against an abstract male enemy. Within Britain, four main women's organisations developed within socialist groups; the women's circles of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF); the Women's Group of the Fabian Society; the Women's Co-operative Guild; and the Women's Section of the Labour Party. The Independent Labour Party never developed a separate space for its women members, although many of them took advantage of those made available to them by other socialist organisations, as will be shown.

As far as contemporary historiography stands, the problems identified in the Introduction relating to a national/leaderistic perspective become acute at this stage. Originally, much of the published work on labour and socialist organisations concentrated on the ideologies and policies of a (mainly) male leadership. As recently as 1983, David Howell's thorough analysis *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party* failed to list women in its index, and gave their role within the ILP no separate analysis within the text. More recent studies focusing on socialist women, both in their own groups, and in building up women's organisations, still concentrate heavily on national organisations and their leaders.<sup>48</sup>

When making value judgements about which socialist organisations were more open to

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<sup>48</sup> See for example, Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League, 1906 - 18*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989; Eleanor Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987; Karen Hunt, "Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question," Manchester University, PhD thesis, 1988. Although Gordon's work is related to Scotland, it can still be argued that it is concerned with one country.

women, and questioning why this should be, the key starting point must be their attitudes and policies on 'The Woman Question.' These can be compared by concentrating on what opportunities membership of a particular organisation afforded women rather than examining how convincing individual organisations' arguments were nationally. Here the usefulness of a local study becomes clear; close focus on an area throws into stark relief the differences between national policy and organisational practice at a given time, allowing for a clearer picture of how particular organisations facilitated women's involvement to be drawn.

#### 4.4 i: The Emergence and Extent of Liverpool's Socialist Culture

On April 16th, 1898, *The Clarion* carried a large advertisement for a soiree and dance organised by 'Liverpool Women Socialists'. The proceeds from the tickets (1/6d for a single ticket, and 2/6d for a double), were to go towards the building of a socialist hall in the city, and the advertisement closed with the promise, in large bold type, that "The Women Socialists of Liverpool mean to Build a Hall." This was the first time that a group of women had publicly proclaimed themselves as socialist women. However, Liverpool readers of *The Clarion* would need no introduction to the five women whose names made up the list of ticket sellers. They had previously publicly identified themselves with many political causes including Fabianism, the Independent Labour Party, the Women's Industrial Council and Suffrage. That they were working together as socialist women leads us into a political culture where co-operation rather than sectarianism was the order of the day.

Within Britain, Eleanor Gordon has noted that the developing socialist groups split neatly into two camps. The first, an ethical and religious socialism, which Stephen Yeo

has identified as the "New Life" movement, characterised the politics of the Fabian Society and Independent Labour Party as well as the Socialist Sunday Schools and Labour Churches they supported.<sup>49</sup> The second was more rigidly economic taking its theories from Marx and Engels, and was embodied within the Democratic Federation (later the Social Democratic Federation), the British Socialist Party, and the Socialist League. Both strands were well represented on Merseyside. Branches of the Fabian Society, SDF, ILP, BSP and Labour Party reflected national diversity, whilst a myriad of small, non-aligned societies such as the Walton Socialist Society gave local socialists further choice in locating their involvement.

Waller sums up the political climate of 1880s Liverpool in rather workerist terms:

The late 1880s and early 1890s are memorable as a period of trade union formation, particularly in the transport and distributive sectors of industry....a labour presence became increasingly distinct in....Liverpool politics.<sup>50</sup>

However, although Liverpool's socialists drew some of their leaders from the city's New Unionists (notably Jeannie Mole and dockers' leader James Sexton), and did much valuable support work amongst the New Unions, they prioritised a Socialism which was mainly absent from the political thinking of the Trades Council and the Labour Party during this period. Cross-organisational membership amongst socialists was common, fostering the development of a rich and varied socialist culture. Co-operation between the three main socialist organisations characterised this period, with smaller non-aligned socialist societies flourishing in areas which were too small to support individual branches of particular organisations. Walton Socialist Society, for instance, according to comments by its secretary in *The Clarion*, attracted 37 members during 3 months of

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<sup>49</sup>Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*; Stephen Yeo, "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883 - 1896," *History Workshop Journal*, 4, Autumn 1977, pp.5-56.

<sup>50</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.97.

building by the SDF and ILP, but posed "no threat of overlapping, as the district covered is practically untouched by any other socialist organisation."<sup>51</sup> As well as a lack of political sectarianism, socialist politics managed to avoid contact with religious sectarianism. Early socialists appear to have forcibly left this behind upon joining socialist parties, most explicitly in the case of those who were "expelled from the Orange Lodges because they had joined the ILP."<sup>52</sup>

Chronologically, the SDF was the first of Liverpool's three main socialist groups to appear. Lancashire was always a stronghold of the Federation, and its Liverpool branch was amongst its first six provincial branches, inaugurated in 1882. This was followed by the Liverpool Fabian Society. The national Fabian Society formed in London in 1884, "for the purpose of reconstructing society...in such a manner as to secure the general welfare and happiness."<sup>53</sup> The national society had strong links with the Liberal Party, but encouraged the formation of autonomous local societies. The Liverpool Fabian Society was one of the most significant of these. It enjoyed an unprecedented degree of longevity, and was unique in its relationship with the ILP, a body with whom it shared a high proportion of its membership, whilst never losing its separate identity. Its continual separation from the ILP also had special significance for women Fabians, as will later be made clear.

The ILP, with whom the Fabian Society interlinked so successfully, developed its Liverpool branch some time in 1893. Founded nationally in January 1893, its formation

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<sup>51</sup> *The Clarion*, 27th October 1904.

<sup>52</sup> *The Clarion*, Liverpool Local Report, 23rd March 1895.

<sup>53</sup> Edward Pease, *History of the Fabian Society*, London, Fifeild, 1916, p.37.

did not represent a new force in socialist politics, coming from "a number of completely independent socialist bodies committed to political independence....determinedly provincial."<sup>54</sup> The party;

could accommodate, with only a little strain, temperance reform, Scottish nationalism, Methodism, Marxism, Fabian gradualism and even a variety of Burkeian conservatism. Although the mixture was a curious one, it did have one overwhelming virtue of excluding nobody on dogmatic grounds.<sup>55</sup>

Within Liverpool, this willingness to create a broad socialist church enabled the ILP to plug into and support a wide socialist culture, on a scale beyond the scope of modern politics. Its strength in this respect has often been ignored until recently by historians who have looked only towards electoral success when evaluating particular organisations. However, as Eleanor Gordon has noted of Scotland, local socialist life could possess "an altogether more flourishing and vigorous existence" than its national public profile would suggest. In the early twentieth century in Scotland, although only two Labour MPs were elected by 1914, she found evidence of;

a flowering of socialist or more broadly labour organizations, which spearheaded a number of campaigns attracting widespread popular support amongst the working-class....A new socialist culture was created, which found organizational expression through the formation of Clarion Clubs, socialist Sunday Schools, rambling clubs, socialist orchestras and choirs, and a plethora of political education classes.<sup>56</sup>

The pattern of socialist culture in Liverpool reflects that shown by Gordon in Scotland, being if anything more varied and imaginative. Alongside the opportunities for involvement which Gordon identifies in Scotland, Liverpool socialists supported at various times drama groups, cycling clubs, newspapers, a Clarion Fellowship, and

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<sup>54</sup>Robert E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre; The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940*, London, Longmans, 1966, p.4.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*, pp.6-7.

<sup>56</sup>Gordon, *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, p.261.

Cinderella Clubs for children. As we re-examine these from a late twentieth-century perspective, it is necessary also to remind ourselves that these opportunities were not simply selected as an alternative to a night spent 'doing nothing.' Clubs and societies of all types flourished in late Victorian and early Edwardian Britain, alongside less active leisure time activities which could be pursued in the coffee houses, public houses and music halls of the cities. What these organisations represent is a conscious effort by the socialists to create a new, alternative culture for themselves, a reflection of the almost religious fervour which infected their political beliefs.<sup>57</sup>

As well as being affected by national organisational developments, Liverpool's socialist culture retained an international perspective. During the period of 1880-1914 prominent national and international leaders, including Wilhelm Liebknecht, appeared in the city.<sup>58</sup> There is evidence that the ILP, Fabian Society, and even the smaller groups sent delegates to congresses of the Second International (1889-1914), who diligently reported back on the proceedings.<sup>59</sup> From this, we can conclude that the international and national debates on the 'Woman Question' were reaching local activists even at branch level.

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<sup>57</sup>The element of choice in selecting a socialist club as opposed to one organised along other political, religious or neighbourhood lines is difficult to assess from this distance. Some evidence can be found in T. Joff, *Coffee House Babble*, Liverpool, privately published, n.d., which traces the migration of socialist groups between certain Liverpool Temperance coffee houses, showing how some of these establishments became almost exclusively socialist haunts. Also, John Bruce-Glasier's Diary, 5th October 1902, which describes a visit to the Clarion Café with his daughter. "where a host of socialists assemble for lunch." Glasier Papers, 1.2., Liverpool University Library.

<sup>58</sup>Liebknecht's meeting showed that the links between local and international politics could go both ways, when he focused much of his speech around a recent socialist obstruction case in the city. See *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2nd June 1896.

<sup>59</sup>For example, following his attendance at the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International, where he represented the Walton Socialist Society, Frank H. Edwards reported back on proceedings on November 2nd 1904. *The Clarion*, 27th October 1904.

The variety of active political participation offered by this myriad of socialist groups can be divided roughly into three categories, lifted from a Fabian slogan of the time; education, agitation and organisation. Much of the educational and agitational work merged together, and was characterised by particularly active forms of public propaganda work; street corner meetings, large demonstrations and public meetings with noted national and international speakers. Alongside this was a great stress on the importance of education, with a vigorous programme of smaller meetings to interested non-socialist organisations carried out by socialist speakers. Organisation covered campaigns for council seats and other elected bodies, which provided more opportunities for political experience.

Considering this variety, it would appear that women had more than ample chances of becoming involved in the public political sphere via initial involvement in the local socialist movement. Yet closer examination of the record of local socialist organisations reveals that, despite impressive national statements about the position of women within socialist organisations, very few local women achieved any personal political prominence on Merseyside, and that those who did managed to do so by carefully selecting their areas of work, and ensuring that these remained, generally, within the spheres which were thought 'acceptable' to their gender. Despite the increasing willingness of national socialist organisations to sanction women's sections during this period, there was no viable separate organisation for local socialist women until after the First World War.

#### 4.4 ii: Socialist Activities by Liverpool Women

Liverpool socialists appear to have had no difficulty in accepting women as speakers.

In 1895, ILP and Fabian leader John Edwards had;

venture[d] to prophesy....that the intense earnestness and holy passion which now animate the disciples of Socialism will be in great part attributable to the three or four women who have become prominent speakers at our meetings during the last few years<sup>60</sup>

naming Caroline Martyn, Enid Stacy, Margaret McMillan and Katherine Conway, all of whom had spoken in Liverpool. Yet few women managed to achieve similarly high profiles via the local socialist movement.

Whilst Liverpool socialists praised women leaders, their usual language when referring to local women socialists reflects an attitude at odds with this, and with national policy. Originally, the local reports column to *The Clarion* was written by local docker's leader James Sexton, whose views on women were less than radical.<sup>61</sup> Sexton was by no means a misogynist. He accepted and encouraged women's organisation, especially through his adherence to New Unionism. However, his language on more than one occasion betrays an alternative view. Writing in praise of two local socialists, he declared "To comrades Mr and Mrs Brown. I 'looks towards them'. *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother.*"<sup>62</sup> The view that women had their own particular role in the socialist struggle, which was outside that of the active and vigorous agitation undertaken by men, permeated the Liverpool socialists<sup>63</sup> Following one of the earliest May Day demonstrations in the city at St George's Hall in 1895 there were no women speakers on the platform, but Mrs Deane and her six assistants were thanked for providing the

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<sup>60</sup>*Liverpool Labour Chronicle*, August 1895

<sup>61</sup>See the details of his portrayal of suffragettes in his stage play mentioned in Chapter Ten

<sup>62</sup>*The Clarion*, 9th February 1895, my italics.

<sup>63</sup> The only time this differed was in the attitude of male socialists and trade union leaders towards unionising women, whom they always gave full and active support, as has been discussed Chapter Three.

refreshments.<sup>64</sup> Although the "Liverpool Socialist Women" described themselves in exactly those terms, Sexton often makes reference in his local reports to the "Ladies", and "Ladies Committees" the latter tending to emerge when some big event such as the 1895 Arts and Crafts exhibition was being planned. The best (or worst!) example of language being used to demarcate roles within the movement is in *The Labour Chronicle*, the Liverpool ILP and Fabian newspaper. This, although supporting a women's page, and giving prominent space to several articles on women by leading figures such as Carolyn Martin, persisted in referring to women as Miss or Mrs whereas men were generally classed as "comrade." Promoting a major socialist event, the paper stated "The organising secretary reported that Leonard Hall had been engaged for June 9th, 10th and 11th. On the 9th he will address two meetings in front of St Georges Hall for the Council. *Women Comrades please note that their services will again be required on this occasion as collectors.*"<sup>65</sup> Here, in their auxiliary role, women are "women comrades," a phrase which is never echoed with its obvious opposite of "men comrades." If such linguistics can be interpreted as simply the manner of the day, with no intent to subordinate women behind them, it is worth recalling that none of Liverpool's socialist organisations possessed separate women's sections before the First World War.

Unlike their Liberal counterparts, Liverpool's socialist women had to carve out their own political role, constantly competing with men for public space. On some occasions, they managed this admirably. A *cause célèbre* in the area in 1896, one of several prosecutions brought against socialists for obstruction whilst holding public meetings

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<sup>64</sup>*The Clarion*, 11th May 1895.

<sup>65</sup>ILP Federal Council Report, *Liverpool Labour Chronicle*, May 1895, my italics.

Park Street in the Toxteth area, involved both John Wolfe Tone Morrissey, and a woman socialist, Elizabeth Turner. In court, she represented herself, and was described as a "neatly dressed woman of about 30." In evidence against her, the police witness, a Sergeant McKeown, stated that she had identified herself as Chairman of the street meeting, and that upon being told that the meeting was being closed down by the police, she "got on the stool and conducted the meeting, carrying it on with Morrisy [sic] until after 9 o'clock." Elizabeth Turner comes across as intelligent and spirited in the report of her trial. She argued insistently with the magistrate, at one point urging him to summons the Salvation Army which used the same spot on Sundays, and at another declaring "I see royalty stopping up the traffic of the whole city."<sup>66</sup> However, there is no mention of her in any of the socialist press, despite the fact that as a Chairman and an apparently able public speaker she must have made some impact in the local movement. Much of Liverpool's early socialist activity was extremely localised, (Toxteth, Everton, etc), and it is likely that the activities of many women are submerged at this level. However, what Elizabeth Turner's case highlights is that although of socialism locally could not offer women (or men) much opportunity to practise municipal politics, it did give women opportunities to speak in public, often in conditions which were as far as possible from the safe confines of the private sphere.

#### 4.4 iii: Children and Education

The rhetoric of separate spheres decreed that motherhood, childcare and the education of children were all issues which were traditionally assigned to women. Although theoretically the socialist movement disavowed this, in practice many socialist men were happy to leave such issues to women. Nationally, education represented an area where

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<sup>66</sup>For the report of her trial, see *Liverpool Daily Post*, 5th June 1896.

socialist women were able to take a space which was allocated to them as 'suitable', and to transform it into something far more public.<sup>67</sup>

On Merseyside this was also the case, most notably through the socialist education of children. In a short biographical study of Liverpool Fabian Eleanor Keeling, Geoffrey Fidler comments on the importance of socialist education;

while the focus on formal education....was mainly situated in the context of a drive for independent working-class politics, such a focus was aimed not merely at securing working-class access to varieties of formal education, but also at a working-class control of education, thus envisaging a move towards "coming to power" in the fullest sense.....[Eleanor Keeling] attached considerable importance to the potential of the elementary school [when under Socialist direction] for laying "the foundation principles of Socialism", thereby lessening Socialist dependence on post-school informal education derived from participation in the labour movement, or on self-education.<sup>68</sup>

Within the Cinderella movement, socialist women found a role which was simultaneously acceptable to a broader society, and also allowed them to participate publicly in socialist politics. The Cinderella movement was begun by *Clarion* editor Robert Blatchford, who wished to alleviate the hardship endured by slum children by giving them a good feed, with social activities attached. Occasionally *The Clarion* ran a Cinderella column, dealing with events nationwide, but more usually details of the activities of various Cinderellas were to be found in Julia Dawson's Women's Column, showing that feeding children was primarily seen as a task for women socialists. The Liverpool Socialist Cinderella began in December 1896 at Faulkner Street. A detailed description by Julia Dawson reveals that 100 children were fed, with crowds more waiting to gain admission. Initially the Liverpool Cinderellas were run by men and

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<sup>67</sup>See for example Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*.

<sup>68</sup>G. Fidler, "The Work of Joseph Edwards and Eleanor Keeling, Two Liverpool Enthusiasts," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. XXIV, 1979, pp.293-379.

women, men enjoying a higher priority as speakers than women at the same gatherings. This says more about the lack of prominent local women than about a direct attempt to exclude them. Jeannie Mole was the first choice of local socialists to open the campaign, but withdrew through illness at the last minute to be replaced by John Edwards. However, whilst men simply did the organizational work needed on the day, sometimes acting as bouncers on the door, and limiting the numbers attending, women consciously used Cinderella as an opportunity for political propaganda. They tried to get the mothers of the children involved, first through helping with the food on the day, then later through sewing circles which came to be associated with the Cinderellas.

The Cinderella club was not an easy option for women. There was often a great deal of overt hostility to its activities by other groups in the community who felt that socialists and the poor were best kept apart. For instance, when the Liverpool Cinderella temporarily withdrew from its premises due to difficulties with safety in the building, a local clergyman, Canon Hobson, crowed to his parishioners:

I am thankful to inform you that the Socialists have withdrawn from the parish where for some time they have been catering for our poor children....this is an answer to prayer and effort for some months to get back our dear little ones who were thus drawn from our school.<sup>69</sup>

Here, the Socialist Cinderella is placed in direct competition with the church Sunday School, despite the fact that the Cinderella met on Friday evenings.

Geoffrey Fidler shows how Eleanor Keeling used her experience in the Liverpool socialist movement to attain a career for herself as a national socialist speaker. However, for other local women, who were not fortunate enough to have the education and

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<sup>69</sup>*The Clarion*, 29th December 1893.

financial security she possessed, or a husband as supportive as Joseph Edwards, who appears to have raised no complaint when Eleanor resumed her national lectures after the birth of their first child, the way was not as clear. Also whilst encouraging women to take on Cinderellas, the Liverpool labour movement left much of its educational work up to men.<sup>70</sup> Outside of the Cinderella clubs, it was within the Fabian Society that Liverpool women could most fully exploit the opportunities for public political participation which socialism provided. Much of this activity developed as the local Fabian Society grew, and will be covered in Chapter Eight.

#### 4.4.iv: Agitation - The Case of the Clarion Van

If education was accepted as a woman's role, agitation was by far the opposite. Here, women competed directly, not just against socialist men, but against the weight of late Victorian and early Edwardian convention.<sup>71</sup> Again, cases can be found of individual women who managed to transcend these boundaries, and become national public speakers, engaging happily in street corner debates and large public meetings. But there is one more interesting example from the Liverpool socialist movement which clearly shows women using gender conventions to slip into the public sphere, then retaining and enlarging their position when there.

The two Clarion vans which toured England spreading socialist propaganda figure prominently within labour history. Less well documented are their origins. The first Clarion Van was the Liverpool Socialist Soup Van which made its appearance on the

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<sup>70</sup>An article on the ILP's Socialist Sunday School, *Labour Chronicle*, September 1895, shows how this was run by men.

<sup>71</sup>The weight of gender conventions will be covered in more detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, which deal with suffrage.

steps of St Georges Hall in the Winter of 1894-5. An old gypsy caravan, donated by a *Clarion* reader, it was converted by Liverpool socialist Bob Manson.<sup>72</sup> This Winter was a particularly harsh one for the local unemployed, whom the Lord Mayor had advised to "go to the devil" rather than expect any extra help from the Boards of Guardians. Local socialists determined to use the van both as an agitational tool, and to raise public awareness of the situation of the local unemployed. John Edwards described how it worked, in comparison to some of the other relief carts;

[Food distribution was carried out in] a quiet methodical manner, which made our vicinity quite a contrast to the wrangling scrimmaging crowds around some of the bread carts which eventually came to help in the work of feeding the hungry.<sup>73</sup>

James Sexton added that the unemployed listened to socialist speeches as they queued for a red ticket inscribed with the word 'Socialism' which they then exchanged for soup.<sup>74</sup> Food distribution, which involved both cooking for and nurturing the unemployed population, was a perfect example of the type of role socialist women were expected to fill. Initially, the Liverpool women did just this. "Mesdames Blow, Dean and Anderson have worked hard inside the can filling the plates and have never been heard to complain of cold" remarked *The Labour Chronicle*.<sup>75</sup> Sexton described how "bowls of soup are distributed by the Lone Scout (Bob Manson) on the shafts assisted by Mrs Blow from within the depths of the contraption."<sup>76</sup> Although thanked for their contribution within the socialist press, the way it is presented shows women as very much out of sight. However, the van gave women a taste for agitation. In the Summer

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<sup>72</sup>See J. Braddock & B. Braddock, *The Braddocks*, London, Macdonald, 1963, pp.5-6.

<sup>73</sup>*Liverpool Labour Chronicle*, February 1895.

<sup>74</sup>*The Clarion*, 26th January 1895.

<sup>75</sup>*Liverpool Labour Chronicle*, February 1895.

<sup>76</sup>*The Clarion*, 26th January 1895.

of 1896, Julia Dawson suggested to women readers of *The Clarion* that they might take the Soup Van out onto the road for a national propaganda tour of England. This would involve public meetings, and distributing printed propaganda in towns and villages across the country. Women readers agreed to this, and the first national van tour began that Summer. The van was intended to be a women's van from the start. In recognition of their work in getting it off the ground, the Liverpool FS and ILP had control of it from its first week (15-22 June). Julia Dawson then noted "for June 15 to July 6 we can scarcely call it the Clarion Women's Van as men are in charge. It would have been unfair not to give the brothers a chance after their encouraging help."<sup>77</sup> However, her column continues to make frequent references to the Women's Van. Amongst the women on the full tour of the original van, were Liverpool's Mrs Dean, and Crewe's Ada Nield, a prominent socialist speaker.<sup>78</sup> The van movement was so successful that Julia Dawson eventually launched a campaign to take and fit another van, which was named after the late Caroline Martyn, and made its first public appearance on the steps of St Georges' Hall in May 1897. Although men also joined women on these van tours, it was in Julia Dawson's column that their progress was reported, where she referred to them as the "Women's Vans." So in this case, women took a prescribed role which was initially less active than that followed by men, and turned it into a more active one for themselves. Examination of the remaining share women were afforded in agitational matters by local socialists explains why they had to take this initiative themselves. Between 1885 and 1906, when Liverpool ILP met in a large local group on Tuesdays, then in branches throughout the week, and hosted at least three public meetings weekly, a total of 31 meetings featuring women speakers figured on its programme. Of these,

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<sup>77</sup>*Ibid*, 16th May 1896.

<sup>78</sup>See Plate Five.

26 featured national speakers (often the same women), whilst of the five local women, one was a Liberal, taking part in an inter-society debate.<sup>79</sup> As agitators, the Fabian Society provided less opportunity for women. Again, they accepted national women speakers, but did not feature any local women in their large public meetings or debates.

#### 4.5: Conclusion

Although the Conservative Party was limited locally, both the Liberal and socialist parties on Merseyside offered women opportunities for public political activity. For socialist women, their parties promised to equate their oppression with class oppression. However, in practice, this often led to their demands becoming marginalised. Liberal women found it easier to fit into an auxiliary organisation which dovetailed neatly with their espousal of the rhetoric of separate spheres. They initially found more political space, but were still granted smaller roles by men at times of heightened political activity, such as elections when they frequently failed to make the platform at public meetings. In addition to this, both parties restricted their opportunities for public activity, most obviously to women with particular political beliefs, but also largely to women of a particular class.

Until 1905, this was not particularly problematic. It was unlikely that women with personal political affiliations would alter these lightly. Conservative women, for example, did not rush to join the WLAs, despite sharing the class background of many Liberal women, when the Primrose League failed to offer them wide political experience. However, as a large suffrage movement emerged on Merseyside, political

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<sup>79</sup>Figures taken from my database, based on material from *The Clarion*, January 1885 - December 1906.

parties faced a more severe challenge to their organisational practices towards women. The suffrage movement through its many organisations appealed to all women, regardless of class or political affiliation. Increasingly, women who began their political activities through local political parties found their loyalties divided as suffrage took up more of their time. The responses of the parties to this challenge will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

PLATE SIX



Selina Cooper (right in car) with Liverpool WSS members during  
the Kirkdale by-election campaign of July 1910.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE LIVERPOOL WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETY

#### 5.1: Introduction

So far, this thesis has dealt with areas where women took their first tentative steps into public life. Although some women chose to take an independent route into local government, as described in Chapter Two, for most women their political work was largely directed by men. Working with other women in organisations attached to larger, mixed, but male-dominated bodies such as political parties or the TUC, they found the work they could undertake was often limited to leafleting during elections. At other times, they undertook work that men found less significant. This happened with the educational work of socialist women, where they developed a marginal area into an important site for their activity.

For all women seeking public life in politics, regardless of their personal class or political affiliation, the question of parliamentary enfranchisement became impossible to avoid by the turn of the century. The suffrage campaign called into question women's very presence in political life, forcing all organisations to take a position on suffrage, even if it was one of self-conscious avoidance, as in the case of the Primrose League. The detailed responses of existing political organisations of Merseyside women to the growing movement will be examined in Chapter Eight. Prior to this, the next three chapters will examine the suffrage organisations themselves. They will demonstrate the rich variety of opportunity local suffrage organisations offered women who sought political activity. Suffrage simultaneously attracted well-known activists from existing organisations, and many women previously uninvolved in public politics. These chapters will examine how local campaigns adapted to draw in women at such

different stages of political development. They will consider what, if any, were the advantages presented to political women by organisations with a completely or predominantly female membership over those mentioned in Chapters Three and Four where women competed with men for public space.

This chapter will introduce suffrage politics, focusing mainly on the first suffrage organisation which developed on Merseyside, the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society (LWSS), which later affiliated to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, (NUWSS), the constitutionalist wing of the British suffrage movement. This organisation originated within the radical élite of Merseyside society. Unlike the NUWSS branches located in Greater Lancashire by Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, the Merseyside branches remained overwhelmingly middle-class, sharing much of their membership with the WLF.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this, their branches strongly reflected the separate spheres ideology found within the WLF. In this chapter, I will argue that the predominance of middle-class and Liberal ideology within the LWSS restricted the growth and direction of the branch. As a result, the LWSS was not able to widen public political access to large numbers of Merseyside women, but devoted most of its energies to educating middle-class ladies in preparation for the franchise. The first section describes the background of the local suffrage campaign, whilst the second locates the LWSS within this, demonstrating how it became so restricted. The concluding section comprises a short biographical study of Eleanor Rathbone, arguably Liverpool's best known suffragist, using her as a medium to explore the organisational methods of the LWSS.

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<sup>1</sup>Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, Virago, 1978.

The issue of women's suffrage had been taken up increasingly in Victorian radical circles since the days of the Chartists. In London in 1867, 1,499 signatures were collected in favour of women's parliamentary suffrage, including those of such eminent women as Emily Davies and Jessie Boucherett.<sup>2</sup> This led to the formation of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage.

Other national societies formed simultaneously in Manchester and Edinburgh. Much existing historiography of the suffrage movement shows the London society predominating, whilst the other regional societies lack a national perspective. In 1883, Millicent Garrett Fawcett claimed that the Manchester and Edinburgh societies and those which followed them were "in correspondence with the London Society, but entirely independent of one another." Other early suffrage historians such as Strachey also imply the societies were separate and distant from one another.<sup>3</sup> However, the Edinburgh and Manchester Societies both proclaimed themselves "National Society for Women's Suffrage" in their official titles. The first annual report of the Manchester National Society shows that a loose federal structure had existed since 1867. This was confirmed in a resolution passed by Manchester in November 1867 "to form one National Society for Women's Suffrage, with independent centres of action" and also funds, executive committees and constitutions.<sup>4</sup> The resolution was also passed by London and Edinburgh, and by the new Birmingham and Bristol societies. This clearly demonstrates the Manchester National Society as having equal stature with London, something which

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<sup>2</sup>Millicent Garrett Fawcett, cited in T. Stanton, ed, *The Woman Question in Europe*, New York, Source Book Press, 1970 edition, first published 1884, p.7.

<sup>3</sup>Ray Strachey, *The Cause, A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, Virago, 1978 edition, first published 1928.

<sup>4</sup>Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, First Annual Report, October 1868.

is further evidenced through its membership list which locates early members living as far away from Manchester as Cambridge, Hertfordshire, York, the Isle of Wight and London itself.<sup>5</sup> The first Liverpool society formed in 1871 as the Liverpool National Society for Women's Suffrage.

Initially, suffrage societies followed tried and trusted methods of campaigning: petitions, quiet individual lobbying of prominent public figures, and occasional public meetings. Early suffragists did not threaten the order of society. Suffrage was seen as just one more of the many campaigning issues which attracted Victorian radicals. It did not yet possess the all-consuming characteristics it was to assume in Edwardian England. The awarding of the municipal franchise to women in 1869 justified gentle tactics to their originators within the movement. The very manner of its granting, quietly, late at night in the House of Commons, attended by no large demonstration, or public meetings, and attracting only one voice of dissent, led them to believe that the parliamentary vote would not be far behind.<sup>6</sup>

Merseyside's early suffrage work reflects national trends. Josephine Butler added suffrage to her campaigns and sat on the EC of the Manchester National Society from its first AGM, on 30th October 1868. Helped by a small group of anonymous workers, she collected 285 signatures for a suffrage petition which was presented to the House of Commons on behalf of Liverpool residents by William Rathbone MP on June 1st

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<sup>5</sup>*Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1st March 1870.

<sup>6</sup>For more details of the political climate and philosophy surrounding early suffrage campaigns, see Strachey, *The Cause, passim*; also Barbara Caine, "Feminism, Suffrage and the Nineteenth-Century English Women's Movement," *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol.5, no.6, 1982, pp.537-550; Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, New York, Garland, 1982; Sandra Stanley Holton, "Educating Women into Rebellion: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists," *American Historical Review*, forthcoming.

1869. This was repeated in 1870, when Mr Turner presented a petition from Liverpool with 498 signatures.<sup>7</sup>

Spurred on by the success gained over the municipal franchise, the 1870s became optimistic "days of active propaganda for all suffrage societies."<sup>8</sup> As the tempo of work increased, more societies formed. Thus by 1872 both Liverpool and Birkenhead had their own national suffrage societies.<sup>9</sup> Increased interest in suffrage is further evidenced by the emergence, in 1870, of a newspaper devoted to the question, the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, with Lydia Becker, mainstay of the Manchester National Society, as editor. This makes the activities of the embryonic suffrage movement on Merseyside easier to trace. In March 1870, the Liverpool Society was identified as Reverend and Mrs George Butler, Miss Ellen Bibby, Mr A. Leighton and Mrs Lister.<sup>10</sup> George and Josephine Butler were well known in Liverpool philanthropic circles. He was head of the Liverpool College boys' school, whilst she was active in fighting many feminist causes for women of all classes. President of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women, she was also working to secure better conditions for the town's female oakum pickers, and to help the 'fallen' women of the city to whom the couple regularly opened their home. The latter interest was developing into her work for the Ladies National Association, against the Contagious Diseases Acts, for which she is best remembered today. Miss Bibby was probably a member of the prominent local

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<sup>7</sup>Manchester National Women's Suffrage Society Second and Third Annual Reports, 1869 & 1870.

<sup>8</sup>Millicent Garret Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement*, London, T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1912, p.24.

<sup>9</sup>These were the Birkenhead branch of the National Association for Promoting Women's Suffrage, and the Liverpool National Society for Promoting Women's Suffrage, both formed in 1871.

<sup>10</sup>*Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1st March 1870.

shipping family of that name, and Mr Leighton was a local Liberal who had taken up the cause of women's rights.<sup>11</sup>

The interests and activities of these individuals outside the suffrage campaigns again situates suffrage amongst many issues concerning the radical middle-class élite of Liverpool and similar Victorian provincial metropolises. Seen as a question of natural justice, the main focus of suffrage agitation came at infrequent public meetings which featured a platform of well known local philanthropists active around several causes. Although their presence added weight to the campaign, pressures on the time of a few individuals could also work as a block to the movement. Millicent Garrett Fawcett praised the untiring efforts of the early campaigners in all directions, noting that;

the suffrage societies from the first saw the necessity of keeping to suffrage work only, but the same individuals in a different capacity were labouring with heroic persistence and untiring zeal to lift up the conditions of women's lives in other ways.

Although there was now a suffrage paper, it was not in any sense a campaigning tool, and there appears within its pages no record of its being sold on the streets like the socialist papers of the time. Between 1870 and 1880, the *Women's Suffrage Journal* mentions three public meetings on suffrage in Birkenhead, and one public meeting and one 'At Home' in Liverpool. The Liverpool Society may have been relaunched during this time, as the *Women's Suffrage Journal* of December 1872 mentioned that its AGM discussed progress over "its year's existence."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Liverpool Mercury*, 23rd October 1869. Strachey hints that there was a split in the national suffrage movement at about this time occasioned by the explicit nature of Mrs Butler's campaign, and I feel that this may explain why the Liverpool society was part of the Manchester National society rather than the London one, and also why it diminished in number the next year. Strachey, *The Cause*, Chapter Ten. For details on the Butlers' position in Liverpool society, see D. Wainwright, *Liverpool Gentlemen: A History of Liverpool College, an Independent Day School from 1840*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, pp.139-141.

<sup>12</sup>*Women's Suffrage Journal*, December 1872.

Liverpool's lack of public activity mirrors the national picture of the time. Suffrage formed part of a wider political picture, but was not yet considered as a separate cause. On Merseyside, for example, suffrage linked in closely with temperance, another philanthropic cause which had many female adherents. In December 1874, for example, Miss Beedy of Birkenhead Suffrage Society attended a meeting of the BWTA specifically to represent Birkenhead suffragists there.<sup>13</sup> Such links continued. The BWTA nailed its suffrage colours firmly to the mast in Toxteth in July 1874 when an At Home hosted by branch President Mrs Drysdale concluded with her husband speaking "a few words of encouragement on the temperance work and on his sympathy with women's suffrage."

October 27th 1880 saw an event which firmly located suffrage in the local political climate. Miss Becker came from Manchester to address a large meeting in the Hope Hall "of women electors and other women, convened with the purpose of considering their duties and responsibilities with regard to the municipal vote to be given on November 1st." Miss Becker noted that there were 8,398 women with entitlement to vote at the forthcoming municipal elections in Liverpool:

She believed that among women, as well as among men, there were honest differences of opinion - and that there were some women who would give a Liberal votes and others who would give a Conservative vote from equally pure political principles.<sup>14</sup>

She then urged women to vote only for those candidates who would promise to support council resolutions on the parliamentary franchise.

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid*, January 1874.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, November 1880.

This underlines three things about Liverpool's early suffrage campaign. Firstly, it stresses the importance Liverpool's middle-class philanthropists placed on duty. As Chapter Two observed, the wives and daughters of local society saw philanthropic work as their duty. Educating themselves and their contemporaries in the use of the vote was not something that they would undertake lightly.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, there is nothing accidental in Miss Becker's limitation of the choice of candidates to Liberal and Conservative. Socialism was not an option in Liverpool in the 1880s, but it was unthinkable that any of the women in the audience would have voted for 'Home Rule' or 'Protestant Reform' candidates. The early suffragists all held strong Liberal or Tory affiliation, and worked separately within these parties, uniting for suffrage and other similar causes. In later decades, this would serve to exclude many prominent socialist women from their ranks. Thirdly, Miss Becker's speech highlights the gradualist approach of the early suffrage societies. This large public meeting, at which a memorial was passed to the city council requesting them to petition parliament on the women's behalf, was the only public event to mark the extension of the municipal franchise to women of the city. Slow propaganda fitting suffrage in around other causes was to continue in Liverpool for the next twenty years.

## 5.2: "I Deny that Mre Stewart-Brown Would Include the Working Woman"<sup>16</sup>

### The Policies and Organisational Methods of the NUWSS on Merseyside

Following the defeat of the 1884 Bill, it became clear that the parliamentary vote would not be achieved as easily as the municipal one. Opening up a public debate on the suffrage question enabled its opponents to begin mobilising against the measure,

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<sup>15</sup>See the final section of this chapter for more discussion around this point.

<sup>16</sup>Anna Blair (People's Suffrage Federation) to *Liverpool Daily Post*, 16th October 1909.

attracting a fair amount of sympathy from the national press, leaving the suffragists with a hard battle to fight to convince public opinion of the right of their cause. Until the end of the nineteenth century suffrage remained an important political issue for those with reforming instincts, but was not centre stage in the political life of the nation. As David Rubinstein explains, between 1884 and 1905, suffragists;

kept their flag flying in difficult conditions. The movement remained active, its supporters...buoyant and its structure flexible....though not one to which ambitious politicians devoted much attention. It had, however, reached the limit of what could be achieved by meetings, petitioning and private members' bills. New forms of activity were required.<sup>17</sup>

As previous chapters have illustrated, the later part of the nineteenth century saw a marked increase in the numbers of women participating in active political life as members of political parties. The suffrage movement was not immune to this development. In 1888, a move to admit members of political organisations into the ranks of the NSWWS split the society in two, with the majority faction, led by Mrs Fawcett, strongly opposing the move, which it was felt would favour Liberals and alienate many Conservative supporters.<sup>18</sup>

Suffragists reunited in 1897 in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, with Mrs Fawcett as President. However, although those who opposed the admission of the WLF dominated this body, it was not anti-Liberal. Indeed, Sandra Holton sees it as "dominated by women Liberals who put great faith in their party's reforming traditions, and who in no way wished to embarrass a Liberal government," whilst Leslie Hume

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<sup>17</sup>David Rubinstein, *A New World for Women; The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p.137.

<sup>18</sup>Although the WLF was not the only organisation which would have been eligible for membership under the proposed rule change, it was the only one anxious to take advantage of it, the Primrose League steering clear of the political complexities surrounding suffrage.

assessed that by 1907, 50% of the NUWSS EC were Liberals.<sup>19</sup> This belief in a gradual reforming tradition was also used by prominent NUWSS women to court Conservative support, by presenting women as traditionally moderate in politics. Thus, in November 1890, Millicent Garrett Fawcett appealed to a women's meeting at the National Union of Conservative Associations' conference in dramatic terms:

What new forces were they prepared to bring against the anarchy, socialism and revolution which were arrayed against them? The granting of women's suffrage would be against the disintegrating power of the other side, as women were everywhere anti-revolutionary forces.<sup>20</sup>

Such rhetoric was keenly reiterated by the leadership of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association during the next decade.

The NUWSS branch that developed in Liverpool firmly reflected the political stance of its national leadership. Its initial leaders were mainly women with strong Liberal connections, although some prominent local Conservatives also identified themselves with the Cause. Thus suffrage remained almost exclusively the property of the city's middle-class reformers, ladies 'on the fringes of county,' as the daughter of one participant recalled.<sup>21</sup> Much of this class bias was due not to any desire on the part of the movement to remain exclusive, but rather to the politics, outlook and perhaps most importantly personal contacts of the individual ladies who built up the local branch.

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<sup>19</sup>Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.32. Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, p.36.

<sup>20</sup>Millicent Garret Fawcett, quoted in Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women*, p.139.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Mrs Paula Francombe, daughter of Jane Colquitt of Liverpool NUWSS. 1st December 1993.

Of these ladies, the most influential were Mrs Allan Bright, and Mrs Egerton Stewart-Brown. Together, they built the Liverpool branch of the NUWSS and remained leading lights in its organisations for its entire life. Although the 1890s are often classed historically as part of the 'first wave' of British feminism, these two young women represented what can be seen as the beginnings of a second wave of female activism on Merseyside. By the 1890s, in conjunction with national trends, suffrage was no longer a prominent issue, although there were signs that the campaign was about to be reactivated. Mrs (Edith) Allan Bright, already active in the WLF, joined the Central Society for Women's Suffrage in 1893, and invited Mrs Fawcett to a meeting in Liverpool in 1894 at which a Liverpool branch, the Liverpool Suffrage Society, was formed. She was a very wealthy woman, married to a merchant and shipowner, and had come into politics herself through earlier philanthropic work. She was joined on the EC of the LSS by Mrs Egerton Stewart-Brown, her WLF co-worker.<sup>22</sup>

For these two women, the step into public life was not a difficult one. They both enjoyed the support of their husbands and families as they moved together from philanthropy through Liberal politics and into the world of suffrage. The importance of this support cannot be too strongly emphasised. In a paper published in 1885 entitled *The Ladies of Liverpool* Sarah Tooley presented a series of interviews with ten ladies who were at the heart of Liverpool society. Of these ten (Mrs Bright and Mrs Stewart-Brown amongst them), nine were highly active in the various philanthropic concerns of the city, three as Liberals and one as a Conservative. The women frequently cross-referenced each other in the interviews, underlining the informal networks between them. Supported in their own environment, they were well suited to withstand the pressures

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<sup>22</sup>See Appendix Ten for biographical details of Mrs Stewart-Brown.

of outside attacks on their activities, as Mrs Stewart-Brown explained on behalf of all of them:

The private lives of our advanced women will bear the utmost scrutiny....look at the silly women who lead objectless lives. They think that there is no harm in idling away the morning, spending all the afternoon in society calls, returning home to dress and then out again for the whole evening. I should say that that was neglect of one's home, decidedly. But if one of our advanced women spends the afternoon at a committee, having a useful object, and goes out again for a couple of hours to address a meeting in the evening, our critics at one raise the cry 'what dreadful neglect of the home'....One would really think that the greatest crime was for a woman to try to be useful.<sup>23</sup>

For these 'Ladies' suffrage activism was to become the focus of their public activity, this reform being, as Mrs Bright put it, "the key to the solution of all others."<sup>24</sup> Their public work and social networks had brought them wide contacts, and they were able to bring other prominent local women into the LWSS. The platforms of the public meetings of the organisation soon began to resemble a who's who of local society, with the Pictons (founders of the central library), the Meade-Kings (prominent Liberals), the Rathbones, the Mellys and the Bibbys amongst those represented. A further important link came through the concern that they all shared with in the women's education. This facilitated contacts with the University, and its Victoria Settlement, which brought Eleanor Rathbone and Elizabeth Macadam into the movement.<sup>25</sup>

The position and local social contacts of Liverpool's early NUWSS leaders did much to raise its public profile in the area, and encouraged favourable reporting of its activities in the local press. However, I would argue that despite this, their presence

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<sup>23</sup>Sarah Tooley, *The Ladies of Liverpool*, Liverpool, n.p, 1885, p.174.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p.168.

<sup>25</sup>For a further examination between the links between old radical families and the British suffrage campaign, see Martha Vicinus, *Suffer and be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, London, Methuen, 1980, p.248.

eventually had a detrimental effect on the branch, holding it back from broader recruitment and a wider-based and more varied model of public activity, and allowing it to remain as a small group of middle-class women. Thus the NUWSS in Liverpool developed in a fashion which is so markedly different as to be diametrically opposed to the pattern reconstructed by Liddington and Norris in the North of Lancashire, a pattern which they and other historians have attributed as being mainly due to the influence of the Lancashire NUWSS leaders.<sup>26</sup>

Nationally, alongside public meetings in large halls, the NUWSS developed a new tactic for recruitment, which Mrs Fawcett explained to the public:

More recently, with a view to recruiting a class that is very seldom to be found at public meetings, a very large number of drawing room meetings have been held....The object of the drawing room meeting is not to make a demonstration of the numbers of those who approve of the movement, but to attract those who are either hostile or indifferent to it; and in their object I believe they have been markedly successful.<sup>27</sup>

However, even the demure Mrs Fawcett warned that the movement would endanger itself if it was to remain firmly rooted in one class alone:

From the very nature of these [drawing room] meetings, addressing as they do a limited class and very limited numbers, it is impossible to rely on them alone for the spread of the movement. Ward and District meetings among the working-classes to which working women were specially invited....have been held.<sup>28</sup>

The Liverpool WSS was an enthusiastic supporter of the new policy, but failed to take Mrs Fawcett's warning to heart. "I think Liverpool is very apathetic....We think the

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<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Gifford Lewis, *Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper - A Biography*, London, Pandora, 1988.

<sup>27</sup>Millicent Garret Fawcett in Stanton, ed, *The Woman Question in Europe*, p.13.

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

ladies need educating up to it" Mrs Allan Bright wrote of the franchise campaign<sup>29</sup>. The NUWSS continued to focus its Liverpool campaign in the direction of educating these "ladies" for the next 20 years. Public campaigning was limited, with most meetings occurring in members' homes, advertised by word of mouth. Many of the women who involved themselves in the LWSS came to it via their own personal contacts. This meant that the type of networks which many historians have identified as being at the heart of women's politics were especially strong within the LWSS. However, it also limited its membership largely to one drawn overwhelmingly from a single class with a common political focus, which had a constraining effect on the organisation, as comparison with the other suffrage societies will show.<sup>30</sup>

The absence of high-profile public activity combined with the lack of a national journal devoted to the NUWSS make the history of the LWSS difficult to trace between 1895 and 1909. However, a few slight facts emerge which suggest a level of continuity which events after the 1909 publication of *Common Cause*, the national NUWSS newspaper, confirm. It is known that some women, especially those with socialist leanings, were dissatisfied with the type of campaigning favoured by LWSS, and found a more sympathetic environment within the Liverpool WSPU from 1905.<sup>31</sup> The recruitment of Jane Colquitt to Liverpool WSS in July 1902 also reflects perfectly the earlier work of the society. At the age of 17 she was waiting for her father at a pilotage meeting in the city when "one of the pilot's wives said 'you don't want to sit round

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<sup>29</sup>Tooley, *Ladies of Liverpool*.

<sup>30</sup>For work on the relevance of women's networks within their political activities, see especially Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, London, Women's Press, 1988. Specific details of the process by which women were recruited to Liverpool LWSS come from interview with Mrs Paula Francombe, 1st December 1993.

<sup>31</sup>See Chapter Six for precise details of this.

here, I'm going to a more interesting meeting. I'll take you."<sup>32</sup> This accidental contact led her to long involvement with the LWSS, approved of by her family on the grounds that "she was with nice ladies."<sup>33</sup> Other details of the LWSS are sparse up to 1909. However the publication that year of *Common Cause* provides valuable details of the policy and activities of its local branches, and suggests continuity, showing that it remained a middle-class concern. I have already demonstrated that philanthropy and education were the two main causes that brought early NUWSS organisers together, and *Common Cause* shows that these remained at its heart within Liverpool. By 1909, Liverpool supported two branches, a city branch and a separate one at the University. These never supported a paid organiser in the city, as did other suffrage organisations. The affluence of many of its supporters meant that this cannot have been a financial decision. It is likely that there was no need for one: they did not really attempt high-profile public campaigns, and there were enough ladies within their ranks whose households maintained servants, freeing them from domestic chores to undertake virtually full time suffrage activity. The Liverpool branches raised £30 for the special effort week of 1909 followed by a further £14, 18s and 3d over the next fortnight.<sup>34</sup>

The first local public meeting mentioned in *Common Cause* came on 27th April 1909 when Sarah Reddish spoke in the Temperance Hall on 'The Bearing of Women's Suffrage on the Industrial Welfare of Women.' This event, and the subject of her speech, cannot be read as a serious attempt by Liverpool NUWSS to activate working-class women. The concentration of meetings held in drawing rooms by members' "kind

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with Mrs Paula Francombe, 1st December 1993.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Common Cause*, 25th May 1909.

permission" contrasts with the large number of public meetings being held by the militant suffrage societies at the same time. Furthermore, few of these meetings appear to have received any advance publicity. *Common Cause* was not a campaigning paper in the way that *Votes for Women*, *The Vote* and other suffrage papers were. In April 1909, for example, Miss Leadley Brown "made a special appeal for more subscribers to *The Common Cause*."<sup>35</sup> Its main sales came through individual private subscriptions, not from large groups of members taking the paper out onto the streets, simultaneously bringing them into the political arena. There is no mention within its pages of women chalking the pavements or taking part in poster parades to advertise their activities. It appears that most meetings were made known to the membership through word of mouth, and interested supporters invited to come along by members who knew them, again restricting the class basis of the branches of the National Union. One meeting on women's industrial welfare would not alter this.

The LWSS did not prioritise high level public activity. From May to September 1909, they appear to have held only one meeting, a public one in Hope Hall with local speakers as well as Sarah Reddish. Activity lulled again after the General Election campaign (discussed in Chapter Six), until April 1910, when drawing room meetings explaining the "new policy" of the Union, involving local Liberals, were held. The high involvement of Liverpool's leading Liberal women in the society was often reflected in the choice of Liberal politicians for public meetings. LWSS also worked closely with the local Men's League for Women's Suffrage. In November 1909 it was busy helping in the arrangements for the first of the Men's League's weekly At Homes, publicising the event beforehand in *Common Cause*, and providing a speaker, Eleanor Rathbone.

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<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*, 21st April 1909.

There was also a diversity of branch activity at this time, with a social event at which Liverpool University Suffrage Society performed Beatrice Harraden's play *Lady Geraldine's Speech*. There are other examples of joint activity between the LWSS and other local societies, especially during the large suffrage demonstrations which they organised more or less annually outside St George's Hall, when the WLF, the BWTA, and the CUWFA would join in. Occasionally, suffrage activists in the ILP would also participate, although their links remained close to the WSPU, as Chapter Eight will show. The LWSS also worked with the WFL, most notably at the start of 1913, when Miss Muriel Matters visited Liverpool for a week of joint campaigning between the League, the LWSS and the Church League for Women's Suffrage. However, LWSS never worked with the WSPU.<sup>36</sup> This is not due so much to the militancy of the WSPU, as the WFL shared in much of this, but is more likely to be caused by the political affiliations of the LWSS leaders whose close association with the Liberal Party meant that they could not associate themselves with the WSPU once its anti-Liberal policies were activated. The severe decline in local Liberalism placed its activists in no position to endanger their party through promoting groups which sought to hasten its downfall.

Perhaps due to the reasons outlined above, and also to the success which the WSPU had had in promoting a large campaign within the city, much of the work of the LWSS took place slightly outside the district. In May, the organisation took several of its members to Widnes, and reported that they were "endeavouring to form a new society there."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>With the exception of one demonstration, discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>37</sup>*Common Cause*, 5th May 1910.

Jane Colquitt undertook much of her campaigning in the Greater Lancashire area.<sup>38</sup> This typifies much of their actions. Whilst the LWSS appears to have remained small, and firmly rooted within its members' drawing rooms, its recruitment activities often occurred elsewhere, when it inaugurated new societies. In this, its methods appear to have had less to do with politics, and more with ideas lifted from social behaviour in polite society, which it proposed for other societies to adopt. One member recalled:

We had cards printed with space for the names of five persons, and gave them to as many new members as possible and asked them to fill them up. By this means, membership is rapidly increased, and the members have something to do at once for the new society.<sup>39</sup>

It is true that rapid integration of members is an essential part of ensuring that they remain in a movement. A brief glimpse of the history of any of Liverpool's political organisations shows many recruits drifting away within weeks of joining, a pattern which is repeated nationally. However, the process of filling up a card with names provided members with no experience of public political activity. Compared to the recruitment pattern of the WSPU, where women would sell papers, then graduate to speaking, such actions were tame in the extreme.

One area where the LWSS excelled was in the development and expansion of a tight organisational structure for the National Union. In building this, the political experiences of women like Mrs Stewart-Brown and Mrs Bright were invaluable. In 1910, a West Lancashire, West Cheshire and North Wales Federation was formed. This monitored activity throughout the region, including functions such as the monitoring and co-ordinating of press coverage. It provided many local women with the opportunity

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<sup>38</sup>Interview with Mrs Paula Francombe, 1st December 1993.

<sup>39</sup>*Common Cause*, 5th May 1910.

to develop political skills through sitting on committees. Whilst this was invaluable, the federation did not increase public political activity amongst local women in that it did not encourage them to campaign on the streets or to speak in public. The nature of the hierarchical structure meant that very few women served as representatives of many more. For the majority of women in the Liverpool NUWSS, their experience of membership would have been largely passive.

It is worth mentioning at this stage a point which will be further developed in Chapter Eight regarding the limitations which Liberalism placed on the LWSS. Initially, the presence of many members of leading local Liberal families had afforded the society prominence and an air of respectability. However, as opposition by militant suffragists grew to the Liberal government, those who still supported the Liberal Party from within the non-militant wing of the movement were placed in a difficult position. Attacks on the government undermined their party political work, but support for an increasingly anti-suffrage parliament made them appear less than whole-hearted to other suffragists. Non-Liberal LWSS activists such as Alice Ker and Alice Morrissey found the middle-class base of their movement restrictive compared to the other suffrage organisations, and abandoned it. The most obvious result of these two factors for the LWSS was that the organisation, whilst continuing its tradition of low-profile lobbying for suffrage, began to develop much of its work in other slightly less contentious directions, such as attempts to educate women into the political process in preparation for the vote. The final section of this chapter will touch on some of these campaigns, through their importance in the life of one of the best-known members of LWSS.

### 5.3: Eleanor Rathbone as a Suffrage Activist

The previous section identifies the campaigning methods of the Liverpool NUWSS as limited, never aimed specifically at recruiting women from across a broad spectrum. Here, I wish to explore further the reasons for this limitation through a brief biographical study of Eleanor Rathbone, whose name has long been synonymous with the women's suffrage campaign in Liverpool. I have selected Eleanor before the numerous other local leaders whom I have 'recovered' through my work. This is partly in an attempt to question her position as the "strength" and "driving force" behind the Liverpool suffrage campaign, a claim not made on behalf of her forgotten contemporaries.<sup>40</sup> Also, I am aware of recent attempts to create biographies where "individuals are seen as taking up issues and causes along with many others of their sex, generation and social class [so that] a study of their lives [can] make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of important historical questions."<sup>41</sup> Using this approach, I do not propose to present a truncated life of Eleanor. This has been undertaken elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> Rather I wish to present Eleanor as representative of many middle-class Liverpool suffragists whose background and outlook dictated the direction of its non-militant campaign. Thus, I re-interpret her suffrage activity as something more akin to personal ambition than to philanthropy, and perhaps suggest that her actions, which historians have interpreted as being for the benefit of Liverpool women,

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<sup>40</sup>Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel, Selina Cooper, 1864 - 1946*, London, Virago, 1984, p.187.

<sup>41</sup>June Hannam, "'Usually Neglected in Standard Histories': Some issues working on the life of Isabella Ford, 1855 - 1924," in Denise Farran, Sue Scott & Liz Stanley, "Writing Feminist Biography," *Studies in Sexual Politics* issues 13 & 14 (combined), Manchester, Manchester University Sociology Department, 1986.

<sup>42</sup>Mary Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone*, London, The Camelot Press, 1949; Brian Harrison, "Constructive Crusader: Eleanor Rathbone," in Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987; Susan Pedersen, "Eleanor Rathbone 1872 - 1946: The Victorian Family under the Daughter's Eye," in Peter Mandler & Susan Pedersen, eds, *After the Victorians: Public Conscience and Private Duty in Modern Britain*, London, Routledge, 1994.

often denied them precisely those opportunities for public activity which she claimed to seek.

Margaret Simey notes how by the 1890s Liverpool's best philanthropic workers came "from those families so long responsible for leadership in civic affairs, now a closely integrated group thanks to inter-marriage and the breaking down of denominational exclusiveness."<sup>43</sup> It was into one of these families that Eleanor Rathbone was born in 1872. The Rathbone name required no introduction in Victorian Liverpool. Simey's comment on the breaking down of denominational exclusiveness fits their family well. Quakers then Unitarians, Eleanor's family professed non-conformism as a faith, but religion does not appear to have figured largely in her life. Her father, who established his own philanthropic reputation in the city through relief work and setting up a district nursing scheme, was a Liberal MP at the time of her birth, her mother, his second wife, engaged in bringing up the children of his previous marriage along with her own.

Eleanor grew up with a fine sense of what it meant to be a Rathbone. Upon her father's death, she wrote of him that it was "impossible not to feel to how unusual an extent [his] life and character were the outcome and the natural culmination of lives that had gone before" and that he could almost be seen as "a single life over three generations." The sixth William Rathbone was never an outspoken supporter of women's rights. He stressed that his District Nursing Society was not to pose any threat to the existing social order: "Where women have families, there is their proper field, and we seek no help at the cost of neglected duties."<sup>44</sup> However, upon his death, the *Liverpool Daily Post*

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<sup>43</sup>Margaret Simey, *Charitable Effort In Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1951, p.133.

<sup>44</sup>Simey, *Charitable Effort*, p.70.

mentioned to how much importance he attached to the support of his own wife, and how much he consulted her for advice about his own work. Furthermore, whilst William and his wife never overtly professed feminism, the glimpses we have into their family life record no scene of conflict around Eleanor's decision to attend Somerville College, Oxford, a decision which her own student, Margaret Simey, claims "to have been accepted without fuss."<sup>45</sup> This sense of the importance of being a Rathbone outweighing any lesser question of gender led to Eleanor, upon her return from Oxford, being treated by her father as the natural heir to his public philanthropic duties.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst at Oxford, Eleanor had begin to extend her political education on her own terms, through her 'AP' debating society (which Mary Stocks, her biographer, informs us stood for the Associated Prigs), which discussed the Fabian essays, socialism, relief work and countless other topics. Intercollegiate debates followed, and a training in public speaking such as could be gathered from such occasions. On her return to Greenbank, the family's large Liverpool home, Eleanor took up some of her father's social concerns. Here she reflects the contradictory trap which engulfed many of the middle-class young women of her time. Oxford had educated her, and given her a taste of public life. She now had the difficulty of finding a niche. For socialist women seeking the public sphere, the Clarion Soup Van and the Cinderella Clubs of Mill Street beckoned. For respectable ladies like Eleanor, the way was not as clear. True, the Rathbones were radicals, but they were no socialists, and Eleanor herself was not interested in following

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<sup>45</sup>Margaret Simey, "Eleanor Rathbone," *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. XL, no. 3, 1966-7, pp 108-11. It is interesting to compare this with Vera Brittain's description of breaking the news of her desire for further education to her family. See Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiography, 1900 - 1925*, London, Virago, 1978 edition, first published 1935, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup>This meant that the Rathbone women were Rathbones first, then women, a phenomenon commented upon by many who have written about Eleanor's life, including Jane Lewis, "Eleanor Rathbone and the Family," *New Society*, 27th January 1983, pp.137-139.

the path from philanthropy to socialism trodden by her contemporary Isabella Ford.<sup>47</sup> Eleanor sought public life as a Rathbone, with the "faith in her capacity and [the] acceptance of [her] worth" common to all Rathbone women.<sup>48</sup> She was all too aware that for her, despite her class and education, "her professional and industrial opportunities were narrowly limited by custom."<sup>49</sup> Eleanor sought a role in public life which could become a profession.

Initially, she followed the path trodden by her father in charitable work, her first position being a visitor for the Liverpool Central Relief Society, in 1897. She also began an involvement with the local Women's Industrial Council, demonstrating for the first time a public commitment to women's issues and feminist causes.<sup>50</sup> Whilst at Oxford, she had come into contact with the ideology of the London-based Charity Organisation Society which she now attempted to put into practice in Liverpool. Her critical notes on the work of the Central Relief Society, which she presented to her father, show her to be ruthless in her condemnation of what she saw as worthless cases, believing that middle-class philanthropists like herself had a duty to help only the deserving poor, an attitude that was to colour much of her later work.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, she condemned her fellow visitors as "lower middle-class people, very willing and interested, but not highly

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<sup>47</sup>At Oxford, the AP's discussion of Fabian Socialism resolved that it could be fitted in within the present system. See Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p.44. Eleanor's later writings were to be more explicitly anti-socialist.

<sup>48</sup>Simey, "Eleanor Rathbone."

<sup>49</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, "Changes in Public Life," in R. Strachey, ed, *Our Freedom and Its Results by Five Women*, London, Hogarth Press, 1936, p.20.

<sup>50</sup>The Women's Industrial Council, discussed Chapter Three, was woman-centred, but with no socialist overtones.

<sup>51</sup>She still held firm to it, for example, when she wrote in 1911 that the Poor Law left "many of the better sort of widows....[unable to] bring themselves to rub shoulders....with the vagrant and the workshy, the failures and derelicts of society". *Common Cause*, 27th March 1911.

educated and quite untrained."<sup>52</sup> Eleanor herself, although not uneducated, was equally untrained, as training still carried with it the stigma of the need for paid employment. Such comments highlight the difference she saw in her own public work, and that of others whom she viewed as well-meaning individuals, but lacking her single minded dedication. For her, public life was a vocation.

In 1897, Eleanor demonstrated further her commitment to women's issues when she took on the position of Secretary to the recently refounded Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society. This new role involved her in very little extra work at this stage, as the society was still at a very low level of activity. She shared the leadership with the two Liberal activists Mrs Bright, and Mrs Stewart-Brown. Whilst Eleanor herself never joined the party, several of her female relatives were active in the WLF. Such family ties introduced Eleanor to other Liberal women and made it easy for her to work with them, sharing their class background and their ideas as to how suffragists should organise.<sup>53</sup> These ideas linked closely to her view of her own position. As a Rathbone, public work was her natural sphere, but it was a sphere with prescribed boundaries. Drawing room meetings interspersed with occasional public meetings such as those addressed by her father were fine. To go to a street corner at 5pm and shout her message to the passing crowds whilst clutching a pile of newspapers, as the socialists and the WSPU women did, was unthinkable to her for a woman in her position. She always believed that the suffrage cause would be better served by quietly convincing those of influence within the community of its worth rather than spreading the campaign as widely as possible amongst the disenfranchised and the remainder of the community who she felt were "not

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<sup>52</sup>Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone*, p.51.

<sup>53</sup>Members of the Rathbone family were heavily involved in both East and West Toxteth WLAs. See Chapter Four.

persons of trained intelligence."<sup>54</sup>

Feminism, suffrage and social work were thus linked from an early stage in Eleanor's public life, and were to remain intertwined throughout her political career. She became very involved in Liverpool University's Victoria Settlement, probably through her work in the Central Relief Society, and it was there in 1902 that she met Elizabeth Macadam, the newly appointed warden. Eleanor was suffering from the recent death of her father, and now found someone to fill the gap he had left in her life. Elizabeth was to become Eleanor's lifelong companion. She was one of a new breed of educated young women for whom a profession, - in her case that of a social worker - was a source of joy rather than an indication of a lack of social standing. To Eleanor, who despite her relatively unconventional position in public life still raged about the inequalities which meant that "whilst a woman of the labouring classes....shared the freedom of men to work....for the middle-class woman there was no entry into any honourable or accredited profession," she embodied a new way forward.<sup>55</sup> In 1936, Eleanor Rathbone wrote that "the struggle for the right to become politicians in itself made women into politicians." Her feminism and her social concerns now fused to provide the springboard for her political career.

Eleanor's suffrage work extended her public duty. She was fiercely anti-militant, believing that militancy "came within an inch of wrecking the suffrage movement, perhaps for a generation."<sup>56</sup> Partly this came from her belief in the importance and

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<sup>54</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, "The Methods of Conciliation," *Common Cause*, 5th September 1912.

<sup>55</sup>Rathbone, "Changes in Public Life," p.17.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid*, p.24.

seriousness of public duty. In much of her writings against militancy, there is a sense that it is somehow a flippancy. Increasingly there was the need to distance herself from what she saw as the publicly unacceptable face of the suffrage movement, as she began to seek public office. In October 1909, she was elected to Liverpool City Council, representing Granby Ward in the city. She was Liverpool's first woman councillor. Naturally, her election was seen by LWSS members, who had had a great deal of input into her campaign, as a triumph. However, suffrage had been downplayed as an issue by Eleanor herself, and did not appear to have been a prominent part of any of her campaigning literature.<sup>57</sup> Politics were now to become Eleanor's life, and she was not about to be classed merely as a suffragist alone. Politically she was a fierce independent, although she was more inclined to display sympathy toward the Liberal members of the Council, and began to develop a strongly anti-Labour streak. This came partly from her background in relief work: this had reinforced in her the notion of a deserving and an undeserving poor, which she felt was not overt enough within socialist thinking. She also feared the way the municipal socialists held a "doctrinaire dislike...of any form of volunteer effort, wishing to remove the responsibility from middle-class philanthropists and place it on the state."<sup>58</sup>

Eleanor's first move into politics held some advantages for the LWSS as it raised her profile, and therefore its own the locality. However, her great influence on the society discouraged it from mass campaigning, and left it rooted firmly in the middle-class of the city alone. Her anti-Labour politics, and her deep dislike of the trade union movement, which she felt was holding women back from equality at work, discouraged

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<sup>57</sup>Rathbone Papers, Liverpool University Library.

<sup>58</sup>*Common Cause*, 22nd January 1915.

the growth of any wider campaigning. This was to have more obvious effects for Liverpool suffragists when the NUWSS executive split over the question of the election fighting fund. The NUWSS had always mirrored Eleanor's own politics in its self-proclaimed non-party status. However, as Liddington and Norris have shown us, several individuals within it had been using their own labour movement contacts to advance the cause of suffrage there. This culminated in discussions to give what would amount to NUWSS support for the Labour Party through the creation of an election fighting fund, radically altering the NUWSS's election policy of support for the candidate who was the most pro-suffrage. Eleanor led the opposition to the move within the EC, and eventually resigned over the issue.

Although most of her opposition to the election fighting fund was centred around the EC, Eleanor's work as a local suffrage activist hints that she had foreseen the move towards Labour, and was making contingency plans to retain a role for the sort of women's organisation which she believed in. In October 1911, she had formed the Municipal Women's Association, which became the Liverpool Women Citizens' Association in 1913. Its aims were fourfold: to foster a sense of citizenship in women; to encourage self-education in civic and political questions; to encourage the return of women members of the City Council and Boards of Guardians; and to secure, by law-abiding methods, the Parliamentary Enfranchisement of women. They sum up Eleanor's main concerns; the desire for education, the importance of developing a sense of public duty, and the stress on law-abiding (ie non-militant) methods were all there. Also, we see again her desire to mix suffrage and philanthropic work. Yet the main question which the formation of the organisation raised is a simple one: with such a variety of networks occupying the time of LWSS members, why was another organisation outside

the LWSS necessary?

Eleanor found suffrage too big an issue for many women to grasp. She felt that women "whose interests have hitherto been limited to [their] home[s] and [their] neighbours find it difficult to extend them all at once to the wider issue of national politics."<sup>59</sup> Through the WCA, she claimed, women previously uninterested in suffrage could be reached by showing them how it held relevance to their own lives. However, there was another point to the work. She believed that WCAs would initially do best in "superior artisan or lower middle-class wards."<sup>60</sup> They also would allow complete independence from political parties. Eleanor claimed repeatedly that the WCA's (which were later adopted by the NUWSS as official policy, but of which the Liverpool one remained always one of the strongest) were not in contention with the NUWSS, but were complementary organisations. However, the reality in Liverpool is that they became, in effect, NUWSS branches, substituting their activity for what had previously been LWSS concerns, whilst avoiding the need to tackle the question of support for Labour which the NUWSS now proposed.<sup>61</sup> Thus Eleanor's personal desire to remain apart from the Labour Party had concrete results for her fellow LWSS members.

It is in the formation of the WCA that Eleanor's political vision is expressed most clearly. Their enthusiastic adoption by the Liverpool branch reflects the position of influence which she held in the branch, whilst at the same time illustrating how her

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<sup>59</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, "A New Form Of Suffrage Propaganda," NUWSS pamphlet, n.d., (1913?) Fawcett Library.

<sup>60</sup>*Common Cause*, 30th June 1916.

<sup>61</sup>LWSS launched the WCAs with a series of meetings in each of Liverpool's municipal wards, in October 1911. Following this, although meetings continue on the Wirral, only 10 LWSS meetings are mentioned in *Common Cause* prior to the outbreak of war in August 1914.

approach typified that of other women of her class who joined her in the local NUWSS. Initially, this approach constricted the work of the local society, as will be shown when it is compared with the work of the WSPU in the next chapter. In this respect, it can be argued that Eleanor's work as a suffragist, although advancing her own political career, had no part in promoting increased opportunities for political activity amongst the majority of women in her city.

#### 5.4: Conclusion

The LWSS successfully expanded political opportunities for Liverpool's middle-class women prior to 1911. Following the formation of the WCAs, it extended its concern about educating women for citizenship into 'respectable' working-class wards, but still restricted its message to those it felt fit to hold citizenship. This attitude led to a rapid collapse in the influence of the WCA following the post-war franchise, as enfranchised women previously bypassed by the LWSS channelled their energies in different directions. Liverpool WCA was rapidly marginalised, and became depoliticised by the early 1920s, as Chapter Ten will explain.

In addition to this, the LWSS found its position as the main local suffrage organisation threatened as branches of other suffrage societies formed in Liverpool. Most acute amongst these was the challenge posed by the local branches of the WSPU. The WSPU's view that women constituted a class, united through their gender, made it accessible to all women, regardless of class or political affiliation. This enabled it to provide local women with unprecedented levels of access to the public political arena. Against this, the LWSS found it increasingly difficult to attract publicity, its sedate campaigns lacking the attraction of the more flamboyant methods of the WSPU. Indeed,

as the next chapter will demonstrate, by January 1910, LWSS campaigns were unable to capture the attention of the sympathetic local press. Unable to meet these challenges, the LWSS became steadily less significant as an organisation until the outbreak of the First World War.

Plate Seven



"Will the Liberal Government give Working Women the Vote?"

The first act of militancy by Liverpool WSPU, Sun Hall, January 1906.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "A REAL LIVE ORGANISATION"

#### THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIVERPOOL BRANCH OF THE WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION, 1905 - 14

##### 6.1: Introduction

As with the LWSS, the WSPU initially formed as a single-sex, single-issue organisation, dedicated to achieving female parliamentary suffrage. Yet unlike the original local suffrage society which remained small and largely rooted in one class and political party, the local WSPU grew to an unprecedented size, providing its membership with varied opportunities for political activity. In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate how the variety of tactics the local WSPU developed succeeded as they were able to address *all* women rather than those of a single class or party. This was due to their development and implementation of what I have referred to in the Introduction as a 'sex-class' analysis; that is a philosophy which viewed all women as suffering from a common oppression which might be defeated through their collective action. Gender was thus presented as a more uniting factor than economic status. Recent histories have tended to be dismissive of the WSPU as a political organisation, concurring with the interpretation of Jill Liddington and Jill Norris that it was a narrow, sectarian group dominated by an élite of upper and middle-class women. Close examination of its workings within a local area allows this to be questioned.<sup>1</sup> This chapter develops the argument suggested in Chapter Five, that the suffrage organisations on Merseyside show the reverse of the pattern Liddington and Norris present for the remainder of Lancashire.

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<sup>1</sup>Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, Virago, 1978. This work has been largely aimed, as Edmund Frow has put it, at 'debunking the Pankhurst myth'. However, the WSPU is also portrayed as sectarian, and irrelevant to the lives of most women in the work of other historians. See for example David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, London, Macdonald and Jane's, 1977; Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, London, Pluto, 1973.

Having outlined in Chapter Five the close links between the LWSS and Liberalism, I will here demonstrate that the WSPU by contrast, although recruiting successfully from across all classes and political parties within Liverpool, retained close ties with socialism which deepened as it moved towards increasing militancy.

## 6.2: "Liverpool is a Stronghold of the Women's Movement"<sup>2</sup>

### The Early Development of the Liverpool WSPU, 1905 - 1909

The WSPU formed in Manchester in October 1903, as a suffrage organisation from within the ILP, its original members being ILP activists. Initially indistinguishable from other suffrage societies, its public work consisted of street meetings and lectures to organisations interested in suffrage generally under the auspices of the ILP.<sup>3</sup> This altered in October 1905, when, disillusioned with the lack of impact that their organisation was having in the public arena, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney attempted a new tactic, borrowed from the early Labour movement but hitherto unattempted by franchise campaigners.<sup>4</sup> A planned interruption of a Liberal meeting at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, led to their ejection, and subsequent arrest. In court both women refused to pay a fine, and were imprisoned. Their actions and the large public meetings which surrounded their release received national publicity. The WSPU was now transformed into a militant society, whose women members were prepared to take direct action in order to get the vote.

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<sup>2</sup>*Labour Leader*, 29th December 1905.

<sup>3</sup>The autobiography of ILP and WSPU activist Hannah Mitchell outlines the close links between the two organisations. See Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, London, Virago, 1987 edition, first published 1968. For more details of the positions policies and actions of the WSPU's contemporary suffrage organisations see David Rubinstein, *Before the Suffragettes*, New York, St Martins Press, 1986, Chapter 9.

<sup>4</sup>See interview with Christabel Pankhurst, *The Sunday Times*, 6th April 1906.

Militancy brought growth to the WSPU. By January 1906, Annie Kenney had been dispatched to London and was working with Sylvia Pankhurst, building branches in the capital. Branches sprang up all over the country, including Liverpool, where the new militant tactics struck a chord amongst certain individuals already disillusioned with the genteel, constitutional methods of campaigning favoured by the LWSS. Public dissatisfaction with these methods first emerged in April 1905 when a furious row, reported as a "little breeze" broke out at its annual meeting. The argument was between Eleanor Rathbone, and fellow LWSS members Alice Morrissey and Mr Buxton.<sup>5</sup> It occurred when Mr Buxton attempted to overturn a decision to elect the LWSS Executive Committee en bloc, proposing instead an election by ballot of all members of the society. He felt that at present the EC;

was...calculated to deprive the members of any share whatever of representation on the committee of the Liverpool Society. 90% of the women who would be enfranchised by the Women's Enfranchisement Bill would be working women, and yet [they] had no representation on the committee of the Liverpool Society. That anomaly would be perpetuated unless a more democratic method of election were adopted.<sup>6</sup>

In seconding, Mrs Morrissey made further criticisms of LWSS organisation:

She had been a member of the society for twelve months and had been very much disappointed in the work. She had thought the society would be a real live organisation and she would wish to take an active part in it. No headway would be made unless meetings were to be held in different parts of the town with the objective of educating women in the use of the vote.<sup>7</sup>

Mr Buxton refused to withdraw and negotiate the point in private, adding that:

there had been too much backdoor influence in the past. There were half a dozen women in Liverpool who had been labouring for the cause quite as hard as any members of the committee and who would be perfectly willing to bear their part in the work of the society. He strongly resented the idea

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<sup>5</sup>Both were active socialists. For more details on Alice Morrissey, see Appendix Ten.

<sup>6</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 13th April 1906.

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

that the committee should be reserved to ladies of a particular class.<sup>8</sup>

Miss Rathbone's reaction typified the approach criticised by Mrs Morrissey. She complained that "the subject had been brought forward in a manner which was distinctly discourteous."<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that Mrs Morrissey, raised in the ILP school of debate, would have found anything discourteous in raising a critical amendment at an AGM, and the episode serves to show the gulf in attitudes towards active public work existing within the local movement. Reporting on the meeting for the *Labour Leader*, she warned other ILP women that they would have to reconsider their attitude to the NUWSS.<sup>10</sup> Her ILP work quickly brought her into contact with the small WSPU, and she founded a Liverpool branch.

Mrs Morrissey built the Liverpool WSPU with the help of two outstanding local women, Miss Patricia Woodlock, and Mrs Emma Hillier. Together, they stood in stark contrast to the Liberal aristocracy who controlled the LWSS. Patricia Woodlock was the daughter of David Woodlock, a well-known but impoverished local artist who was as famous within the city for his socialist views as for his paintings.<sup>11</sup> Patricia lived with her father in the closest to Bohemia that Liverpool could provide, a crumbling Georgian street populated by painters, actors and masseuses, within walking distance of the city centre.<sup>12</sup> She was virtually a full-time worker for the WSPU on Merseyside until 1914.

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>*Labour Leader*, 21st April 1905.

<sup>11</sup> For more details on David Woodlock, see his obituary, *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10th December 1929. This includes a description of how he financed his artistic training through evening work as a library assistant.

<sup>12</sup> See *Kelly's Directories*, 1906 - 14.

However, as the branch offered no salaries aside from one organiser, she supported herself through various non-specified jobs in art studios in the city. She was frequently cited by the local press as being a capable and vibrant speaker, valuable assets in building the local branch. She also spoke at national WSPU events such as the June 1908 demonstration in Hyde Park. Mrs Hillier, the first president of the Liverpool WSPU was a platform speaker at the same event. Like Patricia, she also worked to support herself, and had followed more than thirteen careers, including those of missionary and dressmaker. She was a cosmopolitan figure who had lived in Spain and Newfoundland.<sup>13</sup> At the time of her presidency she lived alone in Southdale Road, a small street of respectable working-class terraces, surrounded by widows, retired policemen and clerks. There was a tremendous gap between Southdale Road, the Woodlocks' 'Bohemia,' and the large, urban mansions inhabited by the LWSS leaders during the same period, and it is likely that this difference in the background of their leaders enabled the WSPU to attract a membership from a wider social base.

Studying the development and growth of the WSPU from an American perspective, with the added distance of some eighty years, Nancy Cott has remarked how much of the phenomenon that became known as suffrage militancy was in fact a continuation of public activity followed by the European Socialist movement:

The staging of sensational events, the use of non-violent civil disobedience and the disruption of government....were adopted from an inventory available in working-class, socialist and nationalist politics.<sup>14</sup>

This provides a highly accurate reflection of the origins of tactics of organisation used by the Liverpool WSPU branch in its early years. It echoed socialist activities described

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<sup>13</sup> Biography of Mrs Emma Hillier, *Votes for Women*, 18th June 1908.

<sup>14</sup>Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, London, Yale University Press, 1987, p.126.

in Chapter Three. Indeed, Mrs Morrissey's first arrest at Belle View in August 1906 received sympathetic coverage by the socialist press.<sup>15</sup> The only significant difference is of perspective. Whilst the socialists constantly prioritised issues of class over gender, the WSPU developed a woman-centred focus which, although not always directly concerned with the franchise, consistently placed women's needs at the top of its political agenda. Although men involved themselves in the Liverpool WSPU, chairing meetings, stewarding rallies, occasionally speaking or providing financial support, they never held full membership. All official WSPU posts were held by women, and women formed its policies, selected its directions and carried out the large majority of its many public activities.<sup>16</sup>

Patricia Woodlock, Mrs Hillier and Mrs Morrissey directed the early policy of the Liverpool WSPU. As has been demonstrated, two of these women had known links with the Liverpool socialist movement, and their tactics for recruitment and propaganda focused in the direction of working-class women. By the Summer of 1907, they were holding regular weekly meetings at 6 Colquitt Street, a street which housed some trade union offices and the local theosophical society and would be accessible to all classes. They also held regular street meetings in areas frequented by working women. To aid this, Annie Kenney visited the city for a week of campaigning, arranged by the local branch. Her choice is significant; although often criticised by later historians as a 'token' working-class woman, as an ex-factory girl she was by far the best qualified of the WSPU's so-called 'inner circle' to address factory gate meetings. Along with

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<sup>15</sup>*Labour Leader*, 29th June 1906, and 6th July 1906. For more detail of the event, see Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, pp.143-6.

<sup>16</sup>Of 1365 public activities undertaken by or involving Liverpool WSPU branches between 1906 and 1914 that were mentioned in the suffrage press, only 70 name men as participants.

evening meetings at venues often used by Socialist speakers such as the Wellington Column, and Islington Square, a series of lunch-time gate meetings were also arranged. These concentrated on factories with a large percentage of women workers, such as Copes' tobacco factory, and Crawford's biscuits. The campaign's success was enthusiastically reported by Christabel Pankhurst in *Women's Franchise*, and it was repeated in September using the same tactics<sup>17</sup>.

As well as allowing local women increased participation in the public political sphere by opening up areas such as speaking at street meetings, a tactic previously available to local women only in collaboration with men, the WSPU offered them new forms of political experience.<sup>18</sup> Militancy in the form of direct action was first used by Liverpool WSPU in January 1906, against the then Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Several women staged a pre-planned interruption as he addressed five thousand Liberals in the Sun Hall. Whilst the interruption reflected Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney's first militant action, more stress was placed on the role of class within the Liverpool campaign. One of the banners used demanded "Will the Liberal Government give working women the vote?" and another interruption was made by a woman who claimed the right to be heard on the grounds that she was "a working woman."<sup>19</sup> Although no arrests were made, one woman slapped a man who had snatched her banner away; Liverpool suffragettes were determined from the start to force

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<sup>17</sup> *Women's Franchise*, 5th September 1906.

<sup>18</sup>The ILP and SPD in Liverpool used women speakers, but they nearly always shared platforms with men. (Women in both these organisations had to fight for space within them in competition with men, as has been shown in Chapter Four).

<sup>19</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post* 10th January 1906. Two reports are given, both very hostile to the women interrupters. However, one report gives a verbatim record of the Prime Minister's speech, including full details of the content of all of the interruptions.

their way into the public sphere by whatever means they deemed necessary.

Many early local newspaper reports of Liverpool WSPU were very hostile to its existence, making it difficult to critically interpret exactly how the local population received it. However, that an organisation did manage to expand in the city, organise large demonstrations and public meetings, and support four branches is testimony to its ability to unite numbers of women together across existing divides.<sup>20</sup> The LWSS formed a hostile opposition to the WSPU and was frequently presented as the sensible suffrage option within the local press. Furthermore, as Chapter Four has shown, radicalism of any type was not popular locally. The WSPU also avoided religious sectarianism. Here, the somewhat dictatorial methods developed by Christabel Pankhurst had a positive effect, as her absolute insistence that WSPU members subjugate all personal political beliefs and working only for the vote, could explain the absence of an obvious Protestant/Catholic divide within the Union. Often WSPU women preserved their religious identities simultaneously in other suffrage organisations, as Chapter Seven will show, but they never prioritised them within the WSPU. Sectarianism could make life difficult for local suffragettes. On 21st October 1909, a meeting of the Women's Freedom League was violently broken up by a mob of Catholic men, wielding sticks. Several women were slightly injured. The rationale behind the attack was the false belief that the WFL was officially linked with the militant Orange organisation the Protestant Crusade, as some WFL members had accepted an invitation from its leader, Mr George Wise, to speak at a public meeting called in his support following his release from gaol for provoking 'Orange Riots'. Acceptance guaranteed a wide audience for

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<sup>20</sup>These were Liverpool, Wallasey, Birkenhead and Liscard, the last three having formally emerged as separate branches in 1910.

the WFL, but they were naive in their underestimation of the depth of feeling running between Protestants and Catholics locally.

By October 1907, when the WSPU's newspaper *Votes for Women* began, Liverpool WSPU was well established. As the organisation grew nationally, more paid organisers were appointed to build districts and regions. Liverpool, as part of Lancashire, was overseen by the Lancashire organiser, Miss Mary Gawthorpe. Her personal influence was critical in enabling Liverpool WSPU to continue developing in a way which differed widely from the North Lancashire cotton towns, reflecting closely the socialist and working-class roots of the National WSPU's early days in Manchester. Miss Gawthorpe was known as one of the best speakers in the WSPU, and was also a member of its Executive Committee until 1911. However, she was never part of the circle which constantly followed the Pankhurst line. A working-class girl, she had learned her politics in the Labour Churches and the Leeds ILP through which she came into contact with the WSPU.<sup>21</sup> As organiser, she concentrated on efforts to bring working-class people to the Cause, putting her in sympathy with Patricia Woodlock and Alice Morrissey's methods. The Liverpool branch established and continued to expand a tradition of regular open air meetings. These were held at the rate of two or three a week often at night as people were leaving work, and brought the issues of women's suffrage, and the WSPU's policies and tactics, before the Liverpool public. During the Summer of 1908, the highest attendance for one open air meeting was reported to have been over one thousand.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Mary Gawthorpe, *Uphill to Holloway*, Penebscott, Maine, Travisty Press, 1966.

<sup>22</sup> *Votes for Women*, 8th October 1908.

To complement this trend towards reaching a wider layer of the local population, Mary Gawthorpe developed an interesting pattern for Liverpool's weekly 'At Home' meetings. These were the weekly branch meetings. In London they were often held in the Caxton Hall, sometimes on a delegate basis. In other areas, they were closer to the formal Victorian events their name suggests, held in a local member's drawing room. In Liverpool, Mary Gawthorpe retained the name 'At Home,' giving an image with which previously apolitical women could feel comfortable, but selected for the venue the Engineering Union's rooms in Mount Pleasant, demonstrating a clear effort to reach a working-class audience. This city centre venue was one of many available, but distinguished by its strong ties with the labour and trade union movements. Unlike a drawing room or a public meeting hall in a hotel, it was a place where working men and women would feel instantly at home themselves. At one of the earliest meetings at this venue, it was reported that "the room was crowded, many working men were present."<sup>23</sup> The socialists' Clarion Café was also used by the WSPU. These tactics were aimed at creating and retaining a wide base of support for the WSPU amongst all classes. They were so successful that on one occasion when suffragettes including Patricia Woodlock were arrested whilst demonstrating against Lloyd George, a large crowd attempted to release them, one gentleman with no previous or later recorded involvement with local politics ensuring his own arrest through his attempts.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Votes for Women*, 5th November 1908 contains a full description of a Liverpool At Home.

<sup>24</sup> *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 26th December 1908. This case is also the only record I have found which contains anything approaching a discussion of race within the Liverpool suffrage campaign, for the trial report quotes the Head Constable as saying Mr Salinger was "evidently a foreigner by birth, and if he gave a promise to observe the laws of this country which has given him hospitality, we will not proceed further with the matter." As there was no language problem at the trial, "evidently" can be taken as indication that he was black. Although Liverpool did have a substantial black population at the beginning of the twentieth century, the absence of any obvious connection through names or photographs with the local suffrage movement and the lack of photographic evidence in general makes it difficult to attempt any analysis of the racial composition of the movement.

By February 1909, Liverpool WSPU could fill the Sun Hall in its own right. Christabel Pankhurst was secured as a speaker, and the meeting was advertised in *Votes for Women* as "the largest indoor meeting yet in Lancashire," highlighting the importance of Liverpool as a suffragette centre.<sup>25</sup> The meeting provided an incentive to tighten up the formal organisation of the branch. The city was divided into areas and grouped under several captains, Patricia Woodlock and Mabel Capper acting as overseeing 'General Captains'. A fortnight's building went into the meeting. The organisational preparation was intense, and carried out only by women. Two parades were held in the city centre on the preceding Saturday, posters displayed throughout the city, and special cards were printed which were left in waiting rooms and at the landing stage. The emphasis on attracting women from all classes continued; Patricia Woodlock organised a series of smaller outdoor meetings including several at factory gates aimed at persuading working-class women to come to the Sun Hall. All these tactics reflect those selected by socialist women in Chapter Four, but here the women were not sidelined by men at the actual event, but stewarded, arranged the platform, and made the speeches. Following the meeting, the branch began twice-weekly At Homes. This was an unusual step, but ensured that the pressures of work inside or outside the home would be less likely to keep supporters away. This restructuring caused an increase in membership which prompted the question of a paid organiser. To facilitate this, an organiser fund was opened, and two months later, in May 1909, Mary Phillips came to Liverpool as the first salaried local organiser of the WSPU.

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<sup>25</sup>*Votes for Women*, 28th January 1909.

PLATE EIGHT



The first stage of Patricia Woodlock's Lancashire release celebrations, Manchester, May 1909. The scene was repeated in Liverpool.

### 6.3: "An Organiser who Understands can Kindle Such Interest and

#### Sense of Co-operation"<sup>26</sup> : Local/National WSPU Links, 1909 - 12

The prevailing view within WSPU historiography is that the organisation was London-centred, ruthless in its autocracy, and dictatorial in its control of local branches. Local organisers were sent from London into the provinces to ensure that the official 'line' was consistently imposed on branches.<sup>27</sup> However, as I stated in the Introduction, close study of local political practice can often lead us to revise our opinion of the influence of national theory. In this section I will explore the relationship between national theory and local practice of the WSPU by examining the role local organisers played in deciding policy and tactics of a local branch. By showing how branches were developed throughout Merseyside which were comfortably located within their own environment, with members recruited from a wide social base, I will argue that an effective organiser was far less important to a local area than a solid core of members. Liverpool had four paid organisers from 1909-14.<sup>28</sup> The first remained for only a few months, giving little time for a pattern of organisation to emerge. Through comparing the tactics followed by the second and third of these, I will show that they succeeded in expanding the branch when following methods established in the local area, whilst attempts to impose alien methods of organisation were largely ignored by the local membership. I will use this evidence to establish that the local Merseyside branches were not constantly in conflict with the national centre, but nevertheless initiated their own preferred methods

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<sup>26</sup>Isabel Marghesson to Ada Flatman, 1st March 1910, Ada Flatman's Correspondence, Museum of London MOL50.82/1134.

<sup>27</sup> See for example David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts: A Study in Tenacity*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967; Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*.

<sup>28</sup>These were Miss Mary Phillips (May 1909 - June 1909), Miss S. Ada Flatman (June 1909 - December 1910), Miss Alice Davies (June 1910 - September 1912), and Miss Helen Jollie (September 1912 - August 1914 when the branches closed in line with national policy on the war).

of working, and quietly circumnavigated any policies which did not suit these; local practice could differ from theory. The section will also argue that there was a strong continuity of activity achieved by the membership, which will be re-examined in 6.5 when the influence of the final organiser is discussed.

Local organisers were generally recruited by the EC of the National WSPU. The first were well known to them, often EC members themselves such as Annie Kenney and Teresa Billington. As the WSPU grew, so did the range of organisers. Its increasing affluence allowed more working-class women to become paid organisers. Mary Gawthorpe, and Dora Marsden (her close friend and the Southport organiser) exchanged teacher's salaries for those of paid organisers. Hannah Mitchell, a working-class housewife, recalled that "the WSPU had many wealthy members, who were glad to make it possible for poorer women to serve the cause...I was really glad of the small salary the WSPU paid me for suffrage work."<sup>29</sup> Yet although organisers came from varied backgrounds, the EC made no attempts to fit them into areas. Although no formal minutes survive which detail the mechanisms of these choices, it appears that organisers were sent to a region purely on the desire of the headquarters at Clement's Inn without discussion with local branch members, a policy which Leah Leneman has shown to have resulted in unpleasant friction when Scottish members resented the repeated imposition of English organisers on their branches.<sup>30</sup>

Although the local organiser was the main link between the local WSPU branch and headquarters, no formal structure facilitated their position as policers of local policy on

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<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, p.167.

<sup>30</sup>See Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1991, pp.195-6.

behalf of the Pankhursts. They did not have regular meetings with the WSPU leadership, but were frequently kept in touch with policy by letter, and occasionally by telephone, both less personal methods of communication, allowing for a degree of interpretation on both sides.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that they were allowed a certain degree of autonomy in their work, and could select from a wide variety of methods those which best suited their local area.

As the previous section has shown, by 1909 the WSPU was well established in Liverpool. Branches were also developing on the Wirral, although Liverpool remained the main focus for activity. Between October 1907 and May 1909, Liverpool members hosted large scale demonstrations in their own city, spoke at national events in London, and served several terms of imprisonment, yet the 'names' of the movement, Mrs Pankhurst, Christabel, Annie Kenney and Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, did not visit the city.<sup>32</sup> This did not go unnoticed by the local branch, and on the occasion of the visit of Mrs Martel, a less prominent national speaker, they published a plea in *Votes for Women* that "Liverpool only needs to hear more of the leaders of the WSPU to become enthusiastically favourable to the movement."<sup>33</sup> Thus the branch appears to have been largely left to the devices of its local members, and Mary Gawthorpe, hence perhaps its continuing stress on borrowing tactics from the socialist movement and directing its campaign towards the city's working class. The decision to appoint a paid organiser in the city came not from Clement's Inn, but from local members and Mary Gawthorpe. Once the organiser fund was opened, Clement's Inn presumably approved the idea, and

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<sup>31</sup>See for example the exchanges between Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Dora Marsden, January 1909 - December 1911, Marsden Papers, microfilm, University of York.

<sup>32</sup>*Votes for Women* local reports, October 1907 - May 1909.

<sup>33</sup>*Votes for Women* 10th September 1908.

therefore retained control over the final choice of organiser. However, any organiser coming to Liverpool would not have to build a branch from nothing, but would find a large informal organisational network already functioning.

Mary Phillips, the first appointed organiser, for unspecified reasons remained in the city for only a matter of months, succeeded by Susan Ada Flatman. Her time in the city represents its highest level of WSPU activity. Ada Flatman, as she was known, was a woman of independent means who had converted to women's suffrage whilst touring in Australia. She had first worked as an organiser in Aberdeen, but achieved nothing, possibly due to internal conflicts within the branch.<sup>34</sup> She had made one previous recorded trip to Liverpool in December 1908, and possibly made some local contacts then, for she plunged straight into the local work in a very business like manner. Her address of 22 Mulgrave Street soon came to serve as an office for the WSPU, its first in the area. This was situated in a street of large Georgian houses in Toxteth. Once highly desirable for their size and proximity to the city centre they housed middle-class families in splendour, but now they were sliding into multi-occupancy and decay, inhabited mainly by the respectable working-class; stewards, secretaries and several single women.<sup>35</sup>

As an organiser, Ada Flatman was first concerned with knitting together the loose network of women who unofficially led the local WSPU into something approaching an official body. She laid this out quite clearly in *Votes for Women*:

Liverpool is such a huge district that we have found it necessary to divide

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<sup>34</sup>Leneman, *A Guid Cause* p.71.

<sup>35</sup>See *Kelly's Directory*, 1909.

it into ten, appointing a captain at the head of each, with members living in her district to help her so that we may get at least one open air meeting in each district per week, and work up for the more important functions held in Liverpool from time to time. We already have four districts working with Captains....<sup>36</sup>

She claimed these plans as her own, but they were merely an extension of the 'Captains' scheme initiated by local women, so the step indicates neither innovation on her part nor an example of an organiser imposing new working methods on a branch. The captains selected came from a wide class base, underlining again the cross-class alliances fostered by women within Liverpool WSPU.<sup>37</sup>

The first large event over which Ada Flatman presided was Patricia Woodlock's release celebration.<sup>38</sup> She was arrested during a deputation of Lancashire working women to the Prime Minister, and imprisoned in Holloway for three months. Liverpool members firmly located their campaign around this in a working-class/Lancashire setting. Their speeches focused on the fact that, by refusing to receive women who were representing their region, the Prime Minister was delivering a snub to Lancashire.<sup>39</sup> The campaign of indignation at the imprisonment of four Liverpool women created enough interest in the city to raise the sales of *Votes for Women* to 700 in five days.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, local sectarianism interfered with the release celebrations. The large spectacular

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<sup>36</sup>*Votes for Women* 11th June 1909.

<sup>37</sup>Tracing them by their addresses through *Kelly's Directories* locates them mainly in the category of working women who would not be expected to have an independent income, with the single possible exception of the Blundellsands captain.

<sup>38</sup>See Plate Eight.

<sup>39</sup> The women selected had been chosen by a show of hands at public meetings. It was the custom of WSPU meetings indoor or outdoor to end with a show of hands for a resolution. Hence both the delegates and the resolution could be portrayed by the WSPU as being representative of the will of the region. *Votes for Women* would report the number of dissents.

<sup>40</sup>*Votes for Women*, 23rd April 1909.

procession and demonstration by the WSPU, which included decorated carriages and a band, did not make the front pages of any of the local papers (although they all carried reports and two had pictures of the procession). This was because the date of late June coincided with the beginnings of the Orange marching season, leading up to the 12th of July. Always a potential trouble-spot, this year the rioting began early. The sight of Catholic and Protestant women in the city centre "fighting each other with knives, [with] a great many arrests made" was far more newsworthy than the large WSPU procession at which "the police were a present force, but their services were not requisitioned."<sup>41</sup>

To attract press attention on a grand scale, peaceful suffrage demonstrations would no longer suffice. Here, the importance of a paid organiser is clear. Although local members continued to speak at meetings both alone and with Ada Flatman, her lack of work and family commitments outside the movement enabled her to organise and participate in a large number of open air events aimed at areas which would reach the maximum crowds. St George's Plateau and the Wellington Column were now joined by a number of venues on the Cheshire side of the Mersey as Ada Flatman's presence facilitated a Summer open-air campaign on the Wirral. Whilst the NUWSS still remained largely in drawing rooms, the WSPU's opportunities for women to participate in the public sphere proved a far more effective recruiting tactic. Dr Alice Ker, a widowed medical doctor who had published on the subject of women, and was known in the area for her work in the field of anti-vivisection, left the NUWSS for the WSPU at this time, and begins to appear listed in *Votes for Women* as a speaker.

Alongside this vigorous programme of events, Ada and the local membership determined

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<sup>41</sup>*Daily Post*, 3rd May 1909.

on a new scheme which raised the public impact of the WSPU in Liverpool to an unprecedented level, and provided another avenue of public participation for its members. This was the opening of the WSPU shop. In doing this, they were very much in line with national trends. Shops were opened by the Union all over Britain. They were an essential part of its marketing strategy, providing a public face and increasing awareness of its slogans and colours of purple, white and green.<sup>42</sup> They sold a variety of items: *Votes for Women*, WSPU pamphlets, Women's Press literature; badges, shawls, scarves and bags in the colours; Votes for Women tea and matching china; postcards of the leaders of the movement; even fundraising games with names like 'In and Out of Holloway' and 'Pankasquith'. The wide range of merchandise ensured that there were items for all pockets. Shops also helped in recruiting work. Situated in accessible areas, they actively encouraged local women to drop in and find out more about the Union. Their lengthy opening hours also allowed local members to spend more time working together, building a sense of belonging to a team.

Most local WSPU shops featured in articles within *Votes for Women* with pictures of their interiors and their workers, and details of their stock and opening hours, promoting their activities. However, the Liverpool shop was never awarded any space within the paper except in the local reports column written by Ada Flatman herself. This is because in opening the shop, Ada acted somewhat against the wishes of the national WSPU leadership, demonstrating the ability a local organiser had to take unilateral action when backed by the branch, and highlighting the fact that branches did not always follow the national leadership. The idea for the shop came from the local

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<sup>42</sup> For more details see Diane Atkinson, *The Purple White and Green: Suffragettes in London, 1906 - 14*, London, Museum of London, 1992. I am grateful to Diane for wider discussions around this theme.

branch. Objections came from the WSPU treasurer, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, who was worried about the financial aspects. That finances should be a problem in an area like Liverpool demonstrates that although the WSPU had a good base of public support in the district, it was amongst the less affluent of its citizens. Distrust of their ability to support a shop almost halted the Liverpool scheme. To overcome this, the Liverpool branch proposed a public meeting which never materialised, but allowed the Treasurer to overcome her objections:

Why did you not tell me that you were going to set up this big meeting on September 13th? This fact certainly makes a difference to the case. I think you might be able to raise fifty £s in this meeting and this as you say could go very far in paying a years' rent and fitting and decorating,<sup>43</sup>

Mrs Pethick-Lawrence wrote, giving permission for the scheme, and indicating that an earlier request had been denied.

The "big meeting on September 13th" did not take place, nor did it receive any advance publicity in the local reports column. Mrs Pethick-Lawrence gave her reluctant permission largely based on the financial guarantee of the fictitious meeting "since you are so very keen to take the shop...and since there is this big meeting coming up, I give my consent as treasurer, albeit with a measure of reluctance." But there was a condition attached to this, that it was "impractical to enter into business arrangements which...call for the close supervision of a responsible organiser" in that organisers's absence.<sup>44</sup> Backed by her branch, Ada Flatman ignored this directive. The shop was taken and fitted out over the Summer whilst she was away for six weeks, first in the Isle of Man for a holiday campaign, and then taking a fortnight's paid vacation. The fitting,

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<sup>43</sup>Emmeline Pethick Lawrence to Ada Flatman, 28th July 1909. Correspondence of Ada Flatman, Museum of London Suffragette Fellowship Collection, MOL 50.82/1134.

<sup>44</sup>Emmeline Pethick Lawrence to Ada Flatman, as above.

decorating and stocking was supervised by Patricia Woodlock who was in charge during Ada Flatman's absence, and the work done by Miss Dunn, the Wallasey WSPU captain, and a Miss Thompson, indicating that the Liverpool branch had firmly backed the organisers's decision to ignore a directive from Headquarters. Their faith in the scheme paid off, for it was reported that its opening encouraged 50 new members to join the union within a month.<sup>45</sup>

The Liverpool branch took over the running of the local shop themselves. They aimed to make it self-sufficient, and staffed it on a rota basis, with Ada Flatman playing no part in its day to day running. The area continued to grow, with the shop hosting weekly poster parades advertising *Votes for Women*, and providing a meeting point for paper sellers en route to their various pitches. Financially, Liverpool was also doing well, with a profit of over £120 being raised since April 1909.<sup>46</sup> However, in November 1909, the first hint of differences begin to appear between Ada Flatman and her branch. A report in *Votes for Women* states that she had to repeat an appeal "to ladies to open up their drawing rooms during the Winter," when, despite the cold, large crowds had to stand and listen to WSPU speakers for up to an hour and a half.<sup>47</sup> However, this ignores the fact that such meetings had been deliberately chosen and used by the branch to spread the union's appeal as widely as possible. The street meeting caught all those who happened to be passing, whilst a drawing room meeting required a certain degree of interest and pre-planning on the part of its audience. The audience

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<sup>45</sup>*Votes for Women*, 19th November 1909.

<sup>46</sup>Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence to Ada Flatman, 22nd April 1910. MOL50 82/1134. The profit was after the fitting of the shop was taken into consideration. £465 had been spent by the branch since April 1909, but £592 raised.

<sup>47</sup>*Votes for Women*, 26th November 1909.

would also be limited by size; the large crowds Ada Flatman claimed to wish to keep warm would not fit indoors in such numbers. Furthermore, there were regular indoor meetings being held at this time in the Engineers' Rooms, so it is possible to deduce that Ada Flatman was acting more out of a desire to alter the class basis of the branch than out of concern for the conditions endured by the audience. No 'ladies' appear to have come forward in response to this second request (the first was not published, and presumably was made within the branch), indicating that the branch preferred to continue to organise in its own way, despite Miss Flatman's wishes.

The lack of volunteers with drawing rooms prevented the immediate adoption of the plan. It was further thwarted by the unexpected General Election of January 1910 (see 6.4) which relied heavily on an outdoor campaign. However, throughout 1910, Ada Flatman still attempted to alter the direction of Liverpool WSPU. Its woman-centred focus remained, but attempts to expand throughout a broad social base diminished in favour of tactics which were aimed at attracting middle-class ladies into the Union. The At Homes in the Engineers' Rooms were temporarily cancelled to free members to aid in the Isle of Man holiday campaign, but did not resume that year.<sup>48</sup> Instead, a series of drawing room meetings were held, mainly on the Wirral. Open air meetings largely ceased, and members began to meet in indoor venues such as tea rooms and cafes as well as hosting some large indoor public meetings. Even these began to develop a degree of exclusivity. One meeting featuring Mrs Pankhurst concluded with a private reception, attendance restricted by ticket to invited members. Any At Homes that did occur were in the homes of newer members. Mrs Hillier had emigrated by this time,

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<sup>48</sup>Holiday campaigns were run by the WSPU in popular resorts throughout Britain. They gave a good opportunity to reach large numbers of crowds with suffrage propaganda, and also allowed members the chance to work closely together in a fresh environment.

but significantly neither Mrs Morrissey nor Patricia Woodlock participated in the indoor campaign. As Patricia especially was one of Liverpool's most active and frequent suffrage speakers, her non-appearance can be taken as signifying her disapproval of the change in methods.<sup>49</sup>

Ada Flatman was attempting to take the branch in a direction away from that chosen by local members. They for their part appear to have refused to co-operate with it. She began to write to Clement's Inn requesting a transfer.<sup>50</sup> A part-time organiser was sent in to assist her but no improvement in her personal feelings about her position followed, and she abruptly left the city in December 1910.

The local membership had built and run their branch alone before a paid organiser had been appointed. However, by December 1910 there were four branches functioning within the district, and the removal of the paid organiser and the secretary left local members with a massive task.<sup>51</sup> Mrs Morrissey came forward to act as temporary (unpaid) organiser, and also took over the position of secretary. Mrs Avery, who had been active in the Union since loaning her car for the January 1910 election campaign, took over the important organisational position of *Votes for Women* secretary. Birkenhead, Wallasey and Liscard appointed their own secretaries and *Votes* secretaries at the same time, indicating that the lack of a full time paid organiser was causing

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<sup>49</sup>Patricia Woodlock and Mrs Morrissey did not drop out of suffrage, or political work. Mrs Morrissey kept up her socialist work, and took over the running of the WSPU branch immediately on Miss Flatman's abrupt departure, whilst Patricia Woodlock was arrested in London following the national demonstration of Black Friday, November 1910. Their lack of activity in the Liverpool branch becomes specific to an area, when located within this broader context.

<sup>50</sup>MOL 50.82/1134 details her requests, the first of which came in March.

<sup>51</sup>She was Geraldine Lyster, who accompanied Miss Flatman to Cheltenham where Miss Flatman again worked as a WSPU organiser.

problems in co-ordinating the work across the River Mersey. The branches on the Cheshire side continued to expand, with the Birkenhead *Votes* sale reaching 100 per week.<sup>52</sup> The support given to the WSPU at this time by local members indicates a broad layer of active membership which is not reflected within the suffrage press. Although the names of these women are not awarded a place within any suffrage history, and in many instances do not survive, it is their efforts which consistently maintained an active suffrage presence within the district as much as those of the more prominent activists.

Despite the best efforts of local members to sustain the WSPU through these difficulties, their chosen pattern of organisation was largely ignored by Liverpool's next organiser, Miss Alice Davies, who attempted to impose a marked change on branch activities. She preferred a campaign of indoor meetings and social receptions. The open air meetings which had long typified the Liverpool suffrage campaign were virtually dropped and the At Homes remained suspended. A comparison of the number of public activities involving Liverpool WSPU from 1907-1914 advertised in the suffrage press shows how the arrival of a full-time paid organiser allowed the branch to increase its public profile.<sup>53</sup> However, Alice Davies, with four functioning branches to help her, achieved a level of public activity between 1911-12 only slightly higher than that achieved by the Liverpool branch when it was in its embryonic stages.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, much of the

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<sup>52</sup>*Votes for Women*, 10th March 1911.

<sup>53</sup>These range from addressing street meetings, through poster parades, to boating lake parades and participation in national events such as demonstrations and lobbies.

<sup>54</sup>In her 15 months between June 1911 and September 1912, 230 public events were organised or participated in by Merseyside WSPU branches, compared to 152 in the last 15 months before the appointment of a paid organiser, from February 1908 to May 1909. When these figures are considered in the light of the increasing national membership of the WSPU from 1909-12, it can be seen that Miss Davies was not mounting as effective a public campaigns as she might have done. In the six months before her arrival, January - June 1911, the branch members, without an organiser, arranged 50 events,

activity which occurred was on the Cheshire side of the Mersey. Although she involved herself in some events organised by the Birkenhead and Wallasey and Liscard branches, speaking at a handful of meetings, Alice Davies appeared content to leave most of the speeches at public events up to the individual branches, so the Wirral branches received less pressure to alter their methods of operation due to the physical distance between themselves and the organiser. Several of the more active Liverpool public speakers, whilst appearing in the few street meetings that were taking place in Liverpool, spent much of Alice Davies' period in the city speaking at public meetings organised on the Wirral. Thus they did not effectively sabotage the efforts of an organiser to alter the mode of operation of a local branch, but developed their own strategies to overcome their differences, finding alternative areas where their preferred methods could freely operate.

Alice Davies' period within Liverpool did coincide with the national truce called by the WSPU in November 1910, but this suspended only violent militancy, with high profile public activity continuing nationally. So her attempts to move away from the public sphere cannot be interpreted as simply fitting in with a national trend in response to a national downturn in WSPU activity.

The change in direction had a detrimental effect on the level of branch activities. The shop was initially still functioning when Alice Davies came to Liverpool. It also hosted the weekly meetings which replaced the At Homes, but were now called "members' meetings", a title which lacks the broader appeal of the original. After a few months

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a figure which compares well with the 203 events during the same months of 1910 when it is remembered that 87 of these were directly connected with the General Election. For a comparison between the levels of public activity achieved by Ada Flatman and Alice Davies, see Appendix Seven.

the shop closed, again showing a fall in the level of active branch members willing and able to sustain the venture. The Liverpool branch took offices to maintain some form of organisational headquarters, but these lacked the public profile and the accessibility of a shop. Financial figures relating to Liverpool taken from the WSPU are sparse, but do reflect a massive drop in literature profit, from £18 7s 1d in 1910-11, to 19s 9d in 1911-12.<sup>55</sup> This suggests that fewer people had access to suffrage literature and therefore arguments and ideology during Miss Davies' time in office. Most literature was sold at public meetings, so these figures also demonstrate a marked drop in efforts to proselytize amongst the masses. Obviously, no definite statement can be made as to the extent to which she imposed her more sedate methods of operation onto an unwilling branch, or to the levels of rebellion such actions may have provoked, but such evidence as there is indicates a marked desire to resist her choice of action. The Liverpool branch stalwarts reasserted themselves whenever they had the chance; thus in 1912 during Alice Davies' absence from the city (she was in Holloway, following her part in the mass window smashing of that year), one Birkenhead branch member wrote that Patricia Woodlock was "addressing meetings at a great rate" whilst acting as temporary organiser.<sup>56</sup> The reappearance of Patricia Woodlock along with other long-term activists such as Miss Ada Broughton and Mrs Helah Criddle at those public events which were held also underline the continuity of the branch. Recruitment and growth, however, did suffer from the change in direction.

Other evidence indicates that Miss Davies did not enjoy as close a relationship with her Liverpool comrades as Miss Flatman had. Her Summer Holiday Campaigns were in the

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<sup>55</sup>WSPU Annual Reports, 1910-11 and 1911-12.

<sup>56</sup>Dr Alice Ker to Margaret Ker, 14th March 1912. Autograph Letter Collection, Fawcett Library.

Lake District rather than the Isle of Man, where several of the more affluent members of Liverpool's working class were to be found holidaying. Unlike Miss Flatman she took no local workers with her, relying instead on Vida Goldstein and the writer Beatrice Harraden, both well-known suffragettes nationally. On her return to Liverpool, she organised an Autumn campaign, the focus of which was to be a meeting in the Sun Hall held jointly with the NUWSS and the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association. Liverpool WSPU had a good record of joint activity with the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, and was developing one with the new Church League, as Chapter Seven will demonstrate, but this event marks only the second time they organised with the NUWSS, and the first (and last) time that they linked with the CUWFA. The WSPU gained no publicity from the event; the *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review* did not name their speaker nor print any details of their speeches, and *Common Cause* made no mention of it. It is possible that many of the local branch members chose not to co-operate with the venture, for the next big meeting which Alice Davies organised, when Mrs Pankhurst visited the Hardman Hall as the climax of Women's Mission Week, gave rise to her fullest ever local report in *Votes for Women*. She thanked several local members by name:

The organiser would like to say that she would not have dared to attempt this meeting if she had not been able to rely first and foremost on Miss C. Stephenson, then on a body of members who were willing to put in days of real hard labour; Mrs Abraham, Mrs Morrissey, Mrs Heathcote, Mrs Caldwell, Mrs Roberts, Miss Procter, Mr Jenkins, Mr Statham, and last but certainly not least, Miss Martin the Votes secretary.<sup>57</sup>

This was by no means the first large meeting attempted by Liverpool WSPU. Others had been organised by a similar team, Mrs Morrissey and Mrs Abraham particularly having a wealth of experience behind them. It is curious to see the uncertainty which Alice

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<sup>57</sup>*Votes for Women*, 9th February 1912.

Davies appears to feel in her ability to bring such an event off. It appears that the lack of public activity which Alice Davies pursued within the local branch had led to a crisis in confidence in its and her own organisational abilities. She did not believe that the public meeting could succeed because she had never seen the branch in action on this scale.

Despite this, there was no serious parting of the ways between organiser and branch, as occurred elsewhere.<sup>58</sup> Alice Davies is mentioned with affection in the "Prison Letters" of Dr Alice Ker during the time they both spent in Holloway together, and on her return the branch welcomed her with their first ever garden party, an event much more in keeping with her taste than the large demonstrations which met Patricia Woodlock and other Liverpool members on their releases from gaol. Alice Davies simply drifted away from the city, running a second Lake District campaign, and then taking a holiday from which she did not return, rather than abruptly disappearing.

As previously stated, Merseyside's WSPU branches created their own pattern of campaigning before supporting a paid organiser, which rested heavily on tactics lifted from the local labour movement. These tactics matched the early strategies of the WSPU leadership, especially of Christabel Pankhurst, Annie Kenney, and Teresa Billington-Grieg. However by 1912, Miss Kenney had abandoned such tactics, sharing the early concern of Christabel that the movement was becoming too dominated by the working-class women of the East End of London.<sup>59</sup> Christabel herself was exiled in

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<sup>58</sup>For details of such splits in Scotland, see Leneman, *A Guid Cause, passim*. Outlines of splits in the London branches are found in Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, London, Virago, 1987.

<sup>59</sup>Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote*, London, Hutchinson, 1987 edition, first published 1959, *passim*.

Paris, and Teresa Bilington-Grieg had severed her WSPU connections. It would be expected that paid organisers, were they as dictatorial as some historians claim, would impose this national trend rigidly, and that local branch members, if they were as passive as has been suggested, would meekly follow. However, the Liverpool branch does not reflect this pattern at all. The leadership of Ada Flatman initially saw a growth in the type of socialist model of public activity which the leadership was eschewing during the same period. She was willing to ignore the national leadership when it suited her purposes, making it likely that her later attempts to move away from such a model of activity stemmed from her personal desires rather than from Clement's Inn. That they were resisted by the local branch show a degree of independence on the part of the WSPU membership which is not reflected in much existing WSPU historiography. When an organiser was more determined to alter the focus of the branch, as in the case of Alice Davies, the local members either drifted away from activity, or ignored the changes and merely selected other venues slightly outside the city for their activities. The broad-based campaign which built the WSPU in Liverpool enabled the branch to root itself firmly within its own environment so that paid organisers were not that important. They were useful in that they had time to arrange events, but would be ignored when their methods cut across those of the branch.

To conclude this section, I would argue that it was neither Clement's Inn, the organiser, nor the membership that made for a successful branch within Liverpool, but the interplay between these three bodies which enabled the Union to build within the city. For many of the women named here, debates on the type of action they would or would not like to see were of secondary importance to maintaining an active branch. The increase in public activity of Patricia Woodlock during the absence of Alice Davies, for

example, shows how local members would quietly follow their own preferred methods of campaigning when possible, but placed the maintenance of the branch before any personal conflict about methods with an organiser, as these may have been detrimental to the overall campaign. This section demonstrates that whilst it is not possible to sustain blanket statements about the tyranny of the WSPU leadership when the effects of their actions are considered in a local context, it is equally not possible to view local areas as 'islands' untouched by national policy. Organisers were not essential to the branch, as activity continued without them, but it cannot be denied that their presence allowed branches to undertake a higher level of public political activity. The interplay between these figures, constantly sustained by an anonymous but essential sub-structure of unidentified women who comprised the bulk of the local membership, is the key to the success of the local branch, and tells us more about the WSPU than studies which look constantly towards Clement's Inn for answers.

#### 6.4: The 1910 General Election Campaign

Although the previous section highlights ways in which Liverpool WSPU deviated from the national picture, there were occasions when the branch chose to adhere rigidly to the policy of national headquarters. One example of this comes in their attitudes to parliamentary elections, where they followed the national line of "opposition to whatever government is in power until such time as the franchise is granted", a policy succinctly embodied within the slogan 'Keep the Liberal Out'.<sup>60</sup> Partly due to the close links which exist within Britain between women's history and labour history, this policy has been much criticised by historians who see it as a betrayal of the original links between

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<sup>60</sup>The WSPU constitution, drafted by Teresa Billington-Grieg in 1907. Although it was officially rejected by the Pankhursts in September 1907, which led to the formation of the Women's Freedom League, some of it was retained, and this statement represents a fair reflection on WSPU policy.

the WSPU and the ILP. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris have dismissed it as "arrant disloyalty" to the ILP which led to an irrevocable split between the two organisations, whilst Andrew Rosen claims the policy "gave rise to confusion and resentment" and was motivated only by Christabel being "intent on disengaging the WSPU from its connection with Labour."<sup>61</sup> It must be admitted that such an interpretation of the motivation behind the new policy is seductive, especially when viewed from a historical perspective which is informed by the later capitulation of Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst to the Conservative Party. In this section, through close examination of the way in which the election policy of the WSPU worked in practice when set against that of the NUWSS, I shall argue against these criticisms, presenting the WSPU's election policy as an intelligent, political strategy, informed by a woman-centred perspective, issue based rather than party based, which was highly effective both in promoting the issue of suffrage and in allowing women to advance into the political arena.

By the time of the 1910 General Election, the WSPU had put its election policy into practice on several occasions throughout the country. Elections were vital to both the militant and the constitutional wings of the suffrage campaign, as they placed the issue of women's suffrage before the electorate in a parliamentary context. The attitude of a particular candidate towards 'votes for women' became one of the key questions for political journalists. In contrast to the oppositional policy of the WSPU, the NUWSS worked for individual candidates who were willing to place women's suffrage on their personal political agenda. As Sandra Holton has explained it:

National Union election campaigns began with a canvass of all the

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<sup>61</sup>Liddington & Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, p.207. Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 - 1914*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974, p.70.

candidates, and with an attempt to extract written commitments to the introduction of women's suffrage....support was offered to the candidate who had demonstrated himself to be 'the best friend' of the cause.<sup>62</sup>

This is often advanced as a more sensible political strategy, which would have the effect of maximising the number of suffrage supporters in Parliament, and therefore increasing the chances that any Private Members' Bill addressing the question of women's suffrage had of becoming accepted by the House. (As no political party had officially come out in favour of women's suffrage in 1910, private member's bills were the only way in which the subject could expect to be advanced within Parliament). Yet such an analysis fails to take into account the lack of political influence of Edwardian women. Having no vote, they had no way of calling the candidate to account acted an election, and there was the possibility that unscrupulous candidates, wishing to harness the support of a willing body of suffrage workers would declare themselves in favour of women's suffrage as part of an extension of the adult franchise, a position which enabled them to do little or nothing on the question in the event of their being returned to Westminster. In Liverpool in 1910, the LWSS's suffrage campaign became effectively lost within the machinations of party politics practised by the individual candidates whom they were supporting.

By contrast, the WSPU's hard line election policy, coupled with their insistence that all individual members subjugated their personal political affiliations to those of the Cause, at least in public, until the vote was won, allowed them to mount a well organised, independent campaign in Liverpool. No women found themselves forced to choose between working for a candidate whose politics were alien to their own, or taking no

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<sup>62</sup>Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.32.

part in the election. The local branch had long supported this policy despite the socialist sympathies of some of its more prominent members, Mrs Hillier having explained in a letter to the local press in September 1907, during a by-election in the working-class Kirkdale division, that:

No member of the Union is taking any part whatever in the Kirkdale contest either officially or unofficially. Such action where there is no government candidate is contrary to the rules of our Union, and there would be a prompt demand for the offender's resignation.<sup>63</sup>

Liverpool became one of the main national focal points for the WSPU's January election campaign. Extra impetus was given by the ill-treatment of two suffragettes in Walton Gaol receiving much attention in the national press.<sup>64</sup> Hence the campaign was conducted against a background of militancy whose immediacy guaranteed public interest in the suffrage question. By contrast, the NUWSS placed no direct demands on its members. There was no national directive as to the methods to be followed during the general election. Instead, branches were allowed to determine their own level of activity. LWSS decided to take an active part in the election, following a campaign of public meetings in support of those candidates who in turn promised support for suffrage.

Contested elections were held in all nine of Liverpool's parliamentary wards. In most wards, the contest was between the Liberals and some form of Conservative, Unionist

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<sup>63</sup>Mrs Hillier to the local press, quoted in *Women's Franchise*, 19th September 1907. Actually, some of the more active socialists within Liverpool WSPU publicly campaigned throughout this election, although not as WSPU members, without any apparent conflict of interest, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

<sup>64</sup>Leslie Hall and Selina Martin were imprisoned in Walton Gaol for throwing an empty ginger beer bottle into Asquith's car. Their alleged frog-marching and excessively brutal treatment whilst in prison was the subject of a massive publicity campaign by the WSPU, outlined in the pamphlet *Atrocities in an English Prison*, London, WSPU, 1910. It was this which led Lady Constance Lytton to disguise herself as Jane Warton, seamstress and engineer her imprisonment in Walton in an attempt to prove that a distinct bias was operating against working-class suffragettes in English Prisons. See Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners*, London, Heineman, 1914.

or Democratic Tory. This picture was only altered in the divisions of Scotland, where the Irish Nationalist MP T. P. O'Connor formed the main attraction on polling day, in Kirkdale and West Toxteth where Alexander Cameron and James Sexton were LRC candidates. Reports in *Common Cause* show the LWSS actively involved in six constituencies; West Toxteth, East Toxteth, Everton, Abercrombie, Kirkdale and Walton. They worked for both Conservative and Liberal candidates in individual wards, but their campaign followed the same lines in each; one large public meeting, with a large number of locals 'names' on the platform, then much lower-key events in the wards in the weeks leading up to the election. The large meetings were held in December. They were open to men and women, and suffrage formed the main part of the agenda with candidates present being urged to make it a focal point of their election addresses. However, an examination of the composition of the platforms at the meetings highlights the high degree of political confusion occasioned by NUWSS policy. At East Toxteth, Cllr. Jacob, a Liberal, took a secondary role in the chair whilst Mr Allerton of the Men's League was the principal speaker. In Walton, Cllr. F. L. Joseph, Liberal candidate for the ward, was the main speaker, whilst Mrs Francis of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association shared his platform to put the suffrage point of view. The only prominent NUWSS speaker at these meetings (aside from Eleanor Rathbone who spoke at two out of the remaining four) was Sarah Reddish who spoke in Everton. The public remained unclear as to the extent or direction of any party political affiliation of the NUWSS.

As the main political parties advanced their campaigns in January, the LWSS campaign became much more low key. They rented a shop for the election in Lord Street, the heart of the fashionable shopping district. Unlike the WSPU's shop, described in the

previous section, this was not intended to be a commercial venture. It sold no merchandise, but was used to direct operations, and host nightly meetings. These meetings were always held inside the shop, and relied heavily on an audience being sufficiently interested in the question to come in and listen. As the campaign progressed, the main focus of the work consisted of getting electors to sign petitions calling for suffrage to be placed high on the political agenda, and also the distribution of handbills put out in the name of the Union, with the elections addresses of those candidates who were in favour of women's suffrage. In this way, the later part of the LWSS election campaign can be said to have been directed at helping individual candidates from varying parties to secure parliamentary seats, and involving the workers in the type of time consuming election work (such as delivering handbills), which allowed little time for the franchise to be prioritised with any degree of consistency. On polling day, 10,000 signatures in favour of women's suffrage were collected by the LWSS. However, their campaign attracted no attention in the local press, and does not appear to have motivated any new recruits to flock to their banner; the few women named in connection with it in *Common Cause* had all been active in the LWSS for some time. The election results clarify the lack of political direction within their campaign. Success was reported in five Liverpool seats which returned allegedly pro-suffrage MPs; East Toxteth, Everton, Exchange, West Derby and Kirkdale. Of these five seats, four were won by Conservatives, and one by a Liberal whilst the failures comprised of one Home Rule and three Conservative candidates. However, the policy of supporting individuals who expressed an interest in suffrage allowed the National Union to claim a higher level of success than it really achieved through its campaign. The results in West Derby and Exchange were both cited in *Common Cause* as successes, despite the fact that the LWSS had done no work in these wards. In reality

only three of the six candidates they had actively supported succeeded.

Furthermore, there was no consistency in the selection of individuals for support. July 1910 saw the sudden death of M'Arthur, the Conservative candidate whose election had been regarded as a success by the LWSS in January. This led to a by-election which was fought between two candidates. Col Kiffen-Taylor for the Conservative Party, and Alexander Cameron for the LRC. Cameron had fought against M'Arthur in January 1910, when he was opposed by the LWSS. On this occasion, the NUWSS threw itself wholeheartedly behind him. Jill Liddington explains the reasons for this, and the effect that the campaign had:

The Labour Candidate...was a particularly strong champion of women's suffrage - perhaps partly due to Selina [Cooper's] earlier lobbying of his union. So both the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society and the National Union decided on this occasion to offer Labour their warmest support. Selina helped open a suffrage shop with a 'Vote for Cameron' notice outside; and a six horsepower Rover was acquired to speed the suffragists' progress round the constituency. Yet all these efforts were to little avail...The Labour candidate...failed to wrest the seat from the ruling Tory group.<sup>65</sup>

Actually, Cameron's defeat was heavier this time than it had been in January, although 370 less people voted.<sup>66</sup> It is unlikely that this failure reflects on the LWSS campaign. What is of interest is that Cameron was supported in the by-election when he had not been offered LWSS support at his first outing at the polls, M'Arthur having been helped to a victory which was classed as a success on that occasion. The July campaign was more pro-Labour than pro-suffrage, revealing the main flaw in the NUWSS argument; support for an individual aligned to any party would result in a lack of ability to

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<sup>65</sup>Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864 - 1946*, London, Virago, 1984, p.188.

<sup>66</sup>P. J. Waller, *Democracy & Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.246.

prioritise their own suffrage campaign. The contrast between the position with regard to Cameron in January and July showed how this could also lead to a great confusion in the eyes of the general public with regard to their position on individual parties.

The WSPU campaign of January 1910 was vastly different. No fewer than 93 public meetings were advertised in *Votes for Women* as taking place in Liverpool during January, with the majority of these occurring in the first two weeks.<sup>67</sup> In addition to the local workers, five extra women were drafted into the city to help with the day-to-day running of the campaign, with Mrs Pankhurst and Lady Constance Lytton also addressing local meetings. The WSPU shop, by now a well known feature of Berry Street, provided the Union with offices from which to co-ordinate their work.

As the WSPU's election policy was aimed at opposition to the government candidate, they worked only in the inner-city parliamentary divisions of Exchange and Abercrombey, both Liberal/Unionist contests. Street corner meetings were held at busy areas within the constituencies, sometimes as many as ten separate meetings a day being covered. In addition to this, there were several large public meetings. Some of these were in large city centre halls, but others concentrated on the main city thoroughfares to maximise their impact. The Liberal *Liverpool Daily Post* ignored the LWSS campaign, but sympathetically reported a meeting on Exchange Flags in the main business centre of the town on January 12th 1910:

A large number of persons assembled. Miss S A Flatman, dressed in a flowing green overcoat with had to match, presiding. The principal speaker was Lady Constance Lytton, "a martyr" of modernism and the descendent of a historic noble family.  
Lady Constance referred to the present age as the "stone age of women"

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<sup>67</sup>There were 87 meetings in the first two weeks of January.

(laughter). If women did some law-breaking or window smashing to emphasise their cause, they were the persons who suffered for it. She objected to the abominable treatment which she alleged had been dealt out to women and strongly condemned the alleged cruel processes of prison life to which the law-breaking suffragettes were subjected.<sup>68</sup>

The text of this speech shows how the WSPU used the background of elections as a public platform to get their points across to a wider audience than usual at a time of increased public awareness of political concerns, and also how recent militancy within the city and the resulting gaolings were worked into the campaign. Their success in capturing public attention through a single-issue election campaign is highlighted by the *Daily Post* which had ignored many of the public activities previously carried out by the WSPU, giving two separate reports during a fortnight when its pages were full of the local election campaigning, to the type of public activities which according to Ada Flatman's local reports in *Votes for Women*, were commonplace in Liverpool for the previous ten months.<sup>69</sup>

As well as being more active than the LWSS during the election, freedom from party politics enabled the WSPU to organise a far more woman-centred campaign. The only 'woman only' meetings they ever held were during the January election campaign, marking out a distinct female space within the context of a male general election. Within the WSPU's election campaign, men were allocated the auxiliary role the main parties generally reserved for women. The development of a woman-only space at this time raises interesting questions about how a high profile campaign brought new women into the public political arena. A woman-only meeting provided a safer space in which the new recruits could attempt their first public speeches. Alongside these meetings, the

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<sup>68</sup>*Liverpool Daily Post*, 12th January 1910.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*, 13th January 1910.

WSPU employed exciting tactics which would be more likely to attract women to the cause than those of the LWSS which were simply occasional public meetings. *Votes for Women* focused on the element of spectacle involved in the WSPU campaign. Mr and Mrs Avery of Huyton, new supporters recruited at this time, loaned their motor car which was decorated in the WSPU colours and driven around the constituencies. Elsie Howey, dispatched into Exchange Division by Clement's Inn, was driving around in a decorated phaeton, loaned by Mrs Machettie. The large public meetings involved decorating halls in the colours, and the actions of the stewards were rehearsed in advance, showing the importance of visual spectacle to the campaign. Ada Flatman described the scene in Exchange, in a manner which is not too out of keeping with descriptions echoed in the less sympathetic local press;

...in the meantime, the women are the only party holding outdoor meetings, the candidates being apparently content with indoor or is it - as the organiser suggests - they are afraid to face the opposition of the women who are to be found in every available space in these large and busy constituencies? Crowds gather all day round the window of the WSPU committee rooms, which are decidedly the most attractive in the place, and the large posters have overflowed into the next door corner shop. The motor car...is seen daily flying four purple white and green flags, with the huge double-face Asquith poster on the back....A magnificent poster in the colours....is shown in the window of the committee rooms.<sup>70</sup>

After the election, the WSPU jubilantly reported that they had 'kept the Liberal out' in Abercrombey, although this was not the case in Exchange. Liverpool was selected for a special mention by Christabel Pankhurst when she reported on the campaign from a national perspective.<sup>71</sup> Other political commentators did not rate the suffrage influence very highly. P. J. Waller feels that the Liverpool elections were more coloured by local religious sectarianism, believing that Muspratt's victory in Exchange was due to the fact

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<sup>70</sup>*Votes for Women*, 14th January 1910.

<sup>71</sup>*Votes for Women*, 21st January 1910.

that he "showed what could be achieved in Liberal colours by campaigning single-mindedly for Catholic education."<sup>72</sup> Andrew Rosen explicitly denies the role of suffragettes in influencing the election; "Even the Union's best friends were dubious: H. W. Nevison wrote in his diary; 'Jan 18th...*Nation* launch, all rather jubilant over elections. Refused to believe in WSPU influence.'<sup>73</sup> But despite these differences of interpretation, the WSPU campaign did succeed on one level; that of the politicisation of individual women by bringing them into the public political arena in via a female space where they could decide on what their methods should be. Two women appear to have made their first speeches in Liverpool during election week, including Mrs Avery who followed this with a long level of involvement in the local WSPU, and five new names appear on the list of those thanked for election work. Such a large and vibrant public campaign had an important effect on opening the public political space within the city of Liverpool to these women campaigners, who were mobilised into activity at this time.

The direct participation of women in a public parliamentary campaign where they both selected the issues to be highlighted and chose their own campaigning tactics rather than following those issues and methods decided upon by the main political parties, represents a hitherto underexamined facet of the many different actions which comprised militancy within the WSPU. Although suffrage militancy is often assessed merely in terms of its later, more extreme forms, and in relation only to the gaining of the vote, I would argue that it operated at many different levels, and was a far more complex process than that demonstrated by single acts of violent direct action. Through its

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<sup>72</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.244.

<sup>73</sup>Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, p.30.

ability to provide various opportunities for public activity which cut directly across the accepted patterns of behaviour for respectable Edwardian women, militancy became more important as a means of increasing the politicisation of women than as a tactic aimed only at the eventual achievement of the franchise.

The next section will demonstrate the breadth and variety of actions which comprised militancy within Liverpool WSPU. I aim to show how 'militancy' within the branch consisted of a broad range of activities in which individual women chose to participate without coercion, always selecting their own forms and levels of activity. Through an examination of the different forms of public activity undertaken by the branch, and of public reaction to them, I will demonstrate that 'militancy' within Liverpool WSPU was not simply about breaking the law, but was equally about local women individually and collectively breaking the conventions of Edwardian society regarding acceptable feminine behaviour. Thus, heckling at political meetings will be shown to be as militant an action as arson.

This section will challenge the argument prevalent within existing historiography by using a local study to demonstrate that violent militancy did not act as a deterrent to membership of the WSPU.<sup>74</sup> By examining the recorded lists of donations to the local branch during the period 1912-14, and also the levels of public activity which accompanied these, I will show how increasing militancy actually drew more women

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<sup>74</sup>The main works considered here as representative of the range of suffrage historiography are, in order of publication: Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967; Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*; Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*; Liddington & Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*; Martin Pugh, *Women's Suffrage in Britain 1867-1928*, London, Historical Association, 1980; Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*; Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987; and Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860 - 1914*, London, Routledge, 1990.

into the organisation. I will also present details of the wide mixture of women involved in militancy locally, and argue that their involvement reflects the success and continuation of the branch's long-term policy of recruiting women from a broad social base, the wide choice of activity ensuring as many women as possible could find an acceptable level of participation.

As well as examining the variety of women who participated in militancy, I will show the existence and importance of a broad support network within the local branch comprised of women not currently engaged in direct action. Material drawn from the unpublished prison letters of Dr Alice Ker will demonstrate how this support network operated on two levels, in supporting women whose participation in militancy occasioned their arrest, and also in providing an alternative role for women who felt unable to undertake imprisonment themselves at the time.

Finally, this section will continue the arguments advanced in 6:3. By showing the methods by which Liverpool's final organiser, Helen Jollie, successfully rebuilt the public activity of the branch to levels matching those achieved by Ada Flatman, I will again demonstrate how the most successful organisers were those whose methods and tactics fitted most closely to those preferred by the local membership.

6.5: "Respectability has Never Been the Claim of Any Reformer"<sup>75</sup>

Militancy and its effects within the Liverpool WSPU, 1906-14

Militancy, which forms the focal point of much WSPU historiography, is presented as

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<sup>75</sup>Helen Jollie to *Liverpool Forward*, 7th March 1913.

having two distinct phases, from 1905-8 and from 1908-12. The first phase covers early acts of militancy such as heckling and large public demonstrations, whilst the second includes the more violent actions mainly occurring between 1912-14, the height of the arson campaign. Some historians present a sympathetic view of early acts of militancy. Andrew Rosen praises its "effectiveness" in attracting publicity, money and members to the WSPU, whilst Martin Pugh feels that it "undoubtedly played a role in destroying anti-suffrage amongst women."<sup>76</sup> However, both writers see militancy as a progressive phenomenon which gradually but consistently increased in violence, frightening women away from the WSPU in droves. Whilst Rosen feels that the "frenetic quality" of later militancy "alienated substantial segments of the population", Pugh goes much further in his condemnation:

The difficulty lay in the fact that, once begun, militancy had to be taken further lest the momentum become lost....[it] became less a method than a necessary prop to the WSPU itself....The evidence suggests strongly that politicians, voters and the general public and active suffragists turned against the WSPU [and] public attitudes deteriorated....drastically.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, Constance Rover believes that "as it turned out, militant tactics helped the women's suffrage movement until 1912, but after that date were harmful."<sup>78</sup>

Other historians share the opinion that militancy was counter-productive, but can find nothing praiseworthy even in its early forms. Whilst David Mitchell consistently belittles any use of militancy as a political tactic, presenting it as "the terrorist touch, the taste of blood [in] the WSPU's private war" to emphasise his interpretation of Christabel Pankhurst as an absurd autocrat with militaristic ambitions, his view is merely

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<sup>76</sup>Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* p.79. Pugh, *Women's Suffrage in Britain*, p.22.

<sup>77</sup>Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, pp.226, 243. Pugh, *Women's Suffrage in Britain*, pp.23-4.

<sup>78</sup>Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics*, p.93.

the most extreme amongst many overt condemnations.<sup>79</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris explain that militancy, which they feel undid the work of many of the constitutional suffragists, "seemed to carry within it the seeds of its own destruction."<sup>80</sup> These were inherent from its outset. "From Summer 1906 [it] began to develop faster and faster, and was not to stop until the WSPU had become a small group of outlawed arsonists."<sup>81</sup> Agreeing with this, Brian Harrison also sees all suffrage militancy as a negative factor which "had in reality been counter-productive for much of the period between 1906 and 1914."<sup>82</sup>

There are some alternative interpretations of militancy. An interesting attempt to reclaim it comes from Liz Stanley and Ann Morley who stress repeatedly that the more violent actions which were always directed at property rather than people came in *response* to the violence with which women's initial movements into the public political sphere were met, that militancy was a reactive phenomenon.<sup>83</sup> Recently, other historians have attempted to move the debate away from militancy altogether, presenting alternative accounts of the suffrage campaign, which view militancy as an irrelevancy. Sandra Stanley Holton is especially critical of the way in which militancy "has...dominated historical accounts of this period in [WSPU] campaigning," feeling that this focus hampers closer examination of the political tactics of the WSPU.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, p. 321. This criticism of Mitchell's work is well put by Elizabeth Sarah in "Christabel Pankhurst - Reclaiming her Power," in E. Sarah & S. Friedman, eds, *On the Problem of Men*, London, Women's Press, 1982.

<sup>80</sup>Liddington, & Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, p.210.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.* p.203.

<sup>82</sup>Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.318.

<sup>83</sup>Stanley with Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, p.150.

<sup>84</sup>Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.35.

All of these interpretations rest on a narrow definition of militancy as forms of illegal action which became increasingly violent in order to retain high levels of publicity. However, this view was never one presented by the WSPU during its militant campaign. Its members, although acknowledging the important links between militancy and publicity, were consistently explicit in their own writings about the breadth of actions which constituted militancy to Edwardian women. Any form of action which took large numbers of women into the public sphere was included within their definition. For example, the process of heckling politicians was a long established form of acceptable political behaviour for men, but was perceived by the public as unacceptable and militant action when undertaken by women.<sup>85</sup> Public meetings and demonstrations, and chalking the pavements or holding poster parades to advertise these events, was as militant an action to Edwardian women unused to public activity as the more violent actions such as throwing stones or burning pillar boxes were to others.

Within a local study, it is possible to reconstruct the wide variety of actions which constituted militancy to WSPU members. Some suffrage militancy within Liverpool was undoubtedly of the reactive type outlined by Stanley and Morley. Although there is no evidence of the explicit sexual violence against some suffragettes which Susan Kingsley Kent believes characterised the response of men to the migration of women into the public sphere, some local suffrage meetings were violently broken up, as suffragettes were increasingly looked on as fair game.<sup>86</sup> Anti-suffrage violence by Liverpool men was not locally confined. On August 20th 1909, for example, the unsympathetic *Liverpool Courier* reported that although Liverpool WSPU's Isle of Man

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<sup>85</sup>See Leneman, *A Guide Cause*, for an explanation of this.

<sup>86</sup>Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*, Chapter 7.

holiday campaign had allowed the cause "to triumph to some extent," extreme violence was also levelled against the women:

Despite special police precautions, considerable disorder ensued, fireworks being let off and a continuous din being maintained by the interrupters. The ladies upon leaving were followed by a huge mob which hustled them in the direction of the harbour. To prevent them being driven over the quay, the chief constable had to draw his baton and the police used force to deal with the mob.<sup>87</sup>

Ada Flatman felt this violence was deliberately orchestrated, and identified the perpetrators as well known Liverpool youths holidaying on the island. The *Courier* concurred that the event was premeditated by organised bands of young men. On Merseyside, even the police could not be relied on to protect suffragettes. Following the disruption of a meeting in Liscard by children as young as two years old, Miss Flatman complained to the press:

In your report, you suggest that we were met by our own methods. We are fighting a great battle, and the stone throwing has been forced upon us - either that or surrender. These children have no grievance against us...why do not the police take action in this matter? Women with a grievance are at once arrested and have to serve four months imprisonment for throwing a stone, but Liscard children may stone women and no notice is taken.<sup>88</sup>

The key question to ask of a local study of any WSPU branch is the effect that militancy had, not on the national press, but on the immediate response of an area to the tactics of direct violence undertaken by the WSPU from 1910 onwards. In studying the levels and types of militancy operated by members of the Liverpool WSPU, or by other WSPU members who entered the city specifically to commit acts of violent militancy, it is possible to construct an alternative explanation of militancy; that it was recognised as a necessary political tactic which can now be viewed as more important to the politicisation of women than to the final goal of the franchise and that even in its more

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<sup>87</sup>*Liverpool Courier*, 20th August 1909.

<sup>88</sup>Ada Flatman to *Liverpool Daily Post*, 22nd October 1909.

extreme forms, it won the WSPU a layer of new membership and allowed more established political organisations which had long since employed similar actions themselves to begin to treat the WSPU as a serious political body.

It was not until 1912 that Liverpool WSPU members first used violence against property.<sup>89</sup> In March 1912, a group of Liverpool women were specifically organised to attend the mass window smashing in the West End of London. Members unable or unwilling to attend were requested to pay a levy to cover the expenses of those who did.<sup>90</sup> A brief analysis of the women arrested reflects again the wide social base of Liverpool WSPU, and provides us with an interesting picture of the type of women who were militant suffragettes. Of the 12 local women arrested, only two were below the age of 30. (These were Miss Mary Callender, 21, and Miss Dorothy Abraham, 25). Of the remaining women, three were below 40, three below 50, and two below 60. (Dr Alice Ker, 58, and Mrs Mary Healiss, 59). Two were not identified by age. Five of the women were married, and seven were single. Two of the women named had no previous recorded connection with the WSPU, indicating a layer of active membership that operated beyond that reflected in the surviving local reports. Some of the women did live in middle-class suburbs, although two (Mrs Healiss and Miss Callender) lived in the working-class Wavertree district and a further two gave their address as the WSPU office. So there were no predominant factors linking these women other than their gender and their decision to participate in this particular militant action.

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<sup>89</sup>Attacks on property within Liverpool were rare in the first six years of the WSPU's campaign in the city, and those which did occur were perpetrated by WSPU members from other areas. The majority of Liverpool WSPU members who had served prison sentences had done so for events which took place outside the city, normally for technical offence such as obstruction, during national demonstrations.

<sup>90</sup>*Votes for Women*, 23rd February 1912.

Existing memoirs of suffragettes agree that there was never any pressure put on women to participate in militancy that might occasion arrest, but are vague as to what other strategies were available to those who supported militant action but were unable to choose imprisonment. Material relating to the Liverpool branch shows women who were not imprisoned for acts of violence playing a crucial role in enabling those who were to cope. Besides frequent mentions made in the branch reports of donations by other members to pay the fares and expenses of working women participating in militant events in London, WSPU members also offered to provide childcare for women who were on "active service for the union."<sup>91</sup> The letters which Dr Alice Ker wrote to her two daughters whilst in Holloway underline the importance of both this support network and of a dedicated core of local members to the workings of a branch.<sup>92</sup> Concerned that her daughters, Margaret (at school) and Mary (at Liverpool University), would not cope in her absence, she writes "I have written to Mr Sumner the Borough Treasurer, saying I will pay the fees and water bill as soon as I come home. If there is any trouble about it, consult Mrs Abraham."<sup>93</sup> Dr Ker and Mrs Abraham were close friends and WSPU comrades, and had daughters of similar ages, so it is likely that Mrs Abraham would be keeping an eye on Margaret's welfare. Other suffrage contacts proved useful at this time, again outlining the importance of the local support network. On 9th March, having detailed a letter from the Borough Treasurer who refused her more time to pay the gas bill, Dr Ker advises Margaret "If you come across Miss Robson, you might just

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<sup>91</sup>This role was publicly undertaken by Mrs Healiss, mother of suffrage prisoner Georgina Healiss, and reported in *Votes for Women* as an example of an action which was an alternative to prison. *Votes for Women*, 2nd July 1909. That Mrs Healiss herself later chose to participate in window smashing and go to prison as a result underlines the flexibility within militancy; differing levels of participation could be selected by individual women at different times.

<sup>92</sup>At the time of their writing, Alice Davies was also in prison, so they also indicate how a branch functioned *without* an organiser.

<sup>93</sup>Dr Alice Ker to Margaret Ker, 7th March 1912. Autograph Letter Collection, Fawcett Library.

mention the incident, he is a great pillar of Christ Church, you know."<sup>94</sup>

Dr Ker was also anxious that her daughters should not neglect the cause. "From March 9th to 16th is Self-Denial week" (a regular WSPU fund raising event), she wrote. "Try to do without some things and keep account how much. You need not pay the money in just now....but keep the reckoning and we will pay it into the war chest later on...[Y]ou might sell your theatre tickets for Saturday. I feel now as if I would never spend another unnecessary penny on anything else."<sup>95</sup> There is also a sense in the letters that she wants Margaret to keep in touch with the branch, not only for political reasons but so that she received the full support available. "Go often to Renshaw Street" [the WSPU offices] she wrote on one occasion, "I am sure there will be much to hear." Then on another occasion, "You must not let anything interfere with your terminals [exams], but when they are over, do go to any big meetings they have (or little ones for that matter), and help all you can....You might go and see Patricia [Woodlock] when you have time. I told you that before. I hear she is addressing meetings at a great rate."<sup>96</sup> And to another local suffragette, she confides "I am so glad that Margaret has you near her just now when I am so completely shut away from her. Please use her like you would a little sister, and advise her as you would your own sister in the absence of your mother. I hope she will work well at the exams; that will be good both for her and the Cause."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Dr Alice Ker to Margaret Ker, 14th March 1912. Miss Robson later became active in the Church League for Women's Suffrage.

<sup>95</sup>Dr Alice Ker to Margaret Ker, 7th March 1912.

<sup>96</sup>Dr Alice Ker to Margaret Ker, 14th March 1912.

<sup>97</sup>Dr Alice Ker to *anon*, 16th March 1912.

Although these are the only surviving prison letters from a member of Liverpool WSPU, they show a broad pattern of involvement between women within the organisation, and it is possible that the prison letters of Mrs Abraham, Patricia Woodlock, and other local women, had they survived, would provide us with a similar picture. Far from presenting a picture of unthinking fanatical militants, Dr Ker's letters reconstruct an image of militant activists participating in a well-considered political struggle, not for the thrill of martyrdom, but from the considered conclusion that there remained no other way.

From 1912-14, acts of violent militancy, arson, bombing and damage to property, characterised the WSPU campaign nationally and locally. The pages of *The Suffragette* show Liverpool well at the forefront of the new campaign, with almost as many instances of direct action as London. Amongst other actions, suffragettes fired a school at Greenbank Drive (next door to the home of Eleanor Rathbone), burned the alter of St Anne's Church and placed bombs at the Stock Exchange and Sefton Park Palm House as well as burning numerous pillar boxes and damaging the Liverpool exhibition. However, rather than these actions driving women away from the WSPU the Liverpool branch was revitalised during this period. Through examining the tactics used to achieve this by the city's final paid organiser, Miss Helen Jollie, I will argue that this revitalisation occurred due to the wide range of actions from which women wishing to identify themselves as militant suffragettes could choose, and the immediacy and effectiveness many of these tactics had in allowing women participation in the public sphere. Although violent militancy did have an important position within the campaigning tactics of the Liverpool WSPU, it never took the 'progressive' form of replacing other tactics, but always occurred alongside a broad range of possible militant actions.

The first indication that the WSPU was to move back into the public space which it had so successfully colonised between 1907-10 was the announcement that the shop was to re-open. Helen Jollie stressed that it was to be financed entirely by the local union, and a special fund was opened for the purpose. An increase in acts of violent militancy within Liverpool meant that the city had special need for finance. To cover these, Helen Jollie announced the opening of a legal defence fund. This would cover the costs incurred when individuals were caught, and would also allow non-participants to play their role in direct action. Lists of finances in *The Suffragette* demonstrate the extent to which the WPSU relied on small, individual donations. Overall from November 1912 when Helen Jollie's lists of donations began to appear to June 1914 when the last one was printed, 164 individuals made a total of 376 separate donations to the Liverpool branch.<sup>98</sup> These donations did not cover membership subscriptions, but represented other donations to the Union including office funds, and the money for Self-Denial week. They show the range of support enjoyed by Liverpool WSPU. Although the majority of them (103) came from single women there were 51 from married women, and 7 from men, the remainder being donated under pseudonyms. They also show the varying financial status of local suffrage supporters. The amounts received range from 5d through to £10, 2s, 6d. Although there were five donations of £10 or above, showing that the Union did enjoy a level of support amongst the city's wealthy inhabitants, most of the donations (300) were for amounts below £1, whilst the majority of these (178) were for below five shillings. Whilst some individuals did make more than one donation a year, many only gave once, for an event such as Self-Denial week, or the trial of Margaret Ker. Interestingly, the names of many of the more active supporters

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<sup>98</sup>Of these 376 donations, 11 were joint whilst 24 represent amounts which individuals had raised through collections.

such as Patricia Woodlock do not appear at all in the lists of donations. It is therefore likely that these lists represent the only record of some of the usually anonymous supporters who kept the local union active for so long. The wide range of amounts donated again stresses the pattern of an organisation which built wide alliances between women of many backgrounds within the district. So much of the work in Liverpool was funded not by a few rich sponsors, but by small amounts from many different sources. The figures also show that extreme militancy did not detract from support. As the height of the arson campaign in the city in 1913, £53, 6s, 8d was collected for Self-Denial week.

Publicly donating money to an organisation involved in an arson campaign can itself be seen as one form of militancy for Edwardian women who were concerned about their respectability. For others who were more willing to take public action, the arson campaign was not the only option. As has been previously stressed, militancy also involved the movement of women into the public political sphere during this period. To facilitate this, Helen Jollie used a wider variety of techniques than any previous organiser in Liverpool. She relaunched the weekly open-air meetings, and held weekly poster parades of 15 to advertise *The Suffragette*. When Mrs Drummond visited the city for large meetings (both in the city centre, and in the Garston Co-operative Hall), Helen Jollie relied on the tried and trusted Liverpool methods of daily street meetings and poster parades to attract support. Publicity was also afforded by the public display of posters, pioneered by the Wirral branch. These were displayed by shops and local businesses, so raising the local profile of the union and ensuring that the colours remained on public view. In this aspect, militancy does not appear to have deterred local businesses from linking in with the WSPU. Indeed, the sole example of public

hostility during the entire militant period came when the council refused the loan of a local library for a lecture on 'Militant Methods.' The WSPU's Liverpool premises were never subjected to reprisal attacks as were those in other cities.<sup>99</sup>

Unlike previous organisers, who simply reported events in *The Suffragette* or *Votes for Women*, Helen Jollie consciously used the paper as a way of encouraging new members into activity. Her tactics mirror those of organisations such as the ILP and the Fabian Society both in the pages of *The Clarion*, and their local papers. In her local reports, she notes the names of new paper sellers, speakers or members. She had three categories of membership: a paper seller was the first step, either street or door-to-door, then formal enrolment as a member (new paper sellers were frequently welcomed as new members a few weeks later), and finally the maiden speech which led to the member concerned being welcomed as a new speaker. During her period as organiser, the average weekly paper sale in the streets reached about 300 copies, exceeding the average sales reported under Ada Flatman's leadership, when no attacks on property were occurring. The best sellers each week were always congratulated by name, with their totals ranging from about 50 to 75 papers. Members were always encouraged to take as active a part as they could. so, for example, when 17 women volunteered to make up part of a deputation of working women in January 1913 (at a special meeting held for working women), the finance columns report a flood of donations to fund this event from other members.<sup>100</sup>

Helen Jollie appears to have brought a unique sparkle to the local suffrage campaign.

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<sup>99</sup>Leneman, *A Guid Cause*, contains many examples of such incidents in Scotland.

<sup>100</sup>*The Suffragette*, January - February 1913.

Quite simply, she made it fun, and it was possibly this new sense of excitement in direct action that brought new members flocking in under her leadership. On several occasions she took her branch to the cinema or to the theatre for a new type of protest. The first time this occurred in the Palais de Luxe Picture House, when the audience were amazed to find the intermission provided them with an on the spot view of suffragettes in action. One woman made a speech whilst others handed out leaflets about forcible feeding. Helen Jollie reported that there were "many remarks of sympathy and appreciation of the women's courage" and that the manager himself bought a paper, and apologised for any discourtesy the attendants may have shown the women during their ejection. 4 dozen more copies of *The Suffragette* were sold on this occasion. Sometimes the protests were planned to fit in with certain things in the performance. This interruption came after a film about the Statue of Liberty, when obvious parallels were drawn. The most furious protest was at the Liverpool Rep, when James Sexton's play *The Riot Act* was staged. This play was the first ever attempt to portray local working-class life upon the stage, and attracted an atypical audience of working men. However, as the only female character in the play "was disloyal, lied, had a past, and made open love to her employer - and was a suffragette," the WSPU singled it out for special attention.<sup>101</sup> Helen Jollie rose in the stalls to counter the picture Sexton painted of a Liverpool WSPU member on more than one occasion. Similarly, during the opera *The Dance of Death*, French soldiers sang "The hour has come to fight for freedom / Today our tyrants we defy / For liberty to live / Or for Liberty to die" before an interval during which the Liverpool WSPU addressed and leafleted the audience. On this occasion, they were so violently ejected one lady in the audience donated as a protest against their

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<sup>101</sup>Goldie, G. Wyndham, *The Liverpool Repertory Theatre, 1911-1934*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1935.

treatment. The theatre and cinema protests represent a type of militancy which did not include the risk of imprisonment, but laid its participants open to public ridicule and physical violence.<sup>102</sup>

During the same period, Helen Jollie attempted to broaden the appeal of the Liverpool branch in other directions. Her records of topics of public meetings in *The Suffragette* show broad themes, including Dr Ker on 'The Medical Aspects of Women's Suffrage,' Miss Hackey on 'The Position of Women in the Post Office' and Mr Fenn on 'Why I am a Socialist.' Sharing a concern for the importance of education with the early socialist movement in Liverpool, Helen Jollie organised a suffrage library from which members could borrow books. The library was regularly advertised within the local reports column of *The Suffragette*. At the same time as the WSPU was widening its concerns, other political organisations within Liverpool were taking it more seriously. The only time the LRC ever discussed suffrage, for example, came in 1913 when it passed a resolution condemning the treatment of Mr Pankhurst under the Cat and Mouse Act, recognising that the women within the union were engaged in a political struggle, the first time that such an admission had been made by a local political party.<sup>103</sup> The move back to highly public activity re-activated some older WSPU members whilst a new generation, male and female, began to involve themselves in selling the paper, holding street meetings, and running the shop, as well as direct protests such as those mentioned above. As the arson campaign was conducted in secret, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the age, class or previous WSPU involvement of its perpetrators, but its high level of success in the area, with virtually no arrests made,

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<sup>102</sup>*The Suffragette*, 27th February 1914, 6th March 1914.

<sup>103</sup>Liverpool Labour Representation Committee Minute Book, 3rd July 1913.

shows a well organised, tightly knit campaign. Based on evidence taken from the experience of the Liverpool WSPU, it is possible to reinterpret militancy not as the logical conclusion to an increasingly marginalised and sectarian political campaign, but as a carefully planned political tactic which increased the appeal of the movement by allowing women excluded from the main political sphere as represented by Westminster, to take part in their own forms of direct political action. The case of Liverpool WSPU shows that even the more violent militant actions did not deter individual women from joining its ranks. Rather, the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of militant actions, all involving a breaking of conventions, which the Union gave local women led to its becoming the largest women's organisation within the city. Again, a mixture of women participated, showing how the major key to Liverpool WSPU's success came in the ability of local activists to pitch a campaign at a level which would attract them in a vibrant campaign in which their preferred gender-orientated concerns were always a priority.

#### 6.6: Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Merseyside WSPU developed from a small group formed by suffrage activists in 1905 to the largest political organisation available to Merseyside women, with four functioning branches, able to sustain a paid organiser and public premises, whilst maintaining a high profile for the area within national suffrage politics.

I would argue that the key to its success lay in the ability of its members to pitch its activities in such a way as to match the mood of the locality and attract a wide number of participants and supporters from across a broad social base. Frequently this was achieved through following methods familiar to the local socialist parties, except that

within the WSPU women controlled *all* aspects of such campaigns. Other activities such as the theatre protests were unique to the WSPU and demonstrate its originality in finding new campaigning tactics. As new methods were never allowed to supersede the WSPU's original tactics of street meetings, a level of continuity was achieved whilst innovative techniques simultaneously ensured that fresh layers of the population were constantly being exposed to WSPU propaganda.

As stressed in the chapter, although it is no longer helpful to examine the WSPU merely in terms of the actions and policies of its leadership, a local study does not provide an alternative view of the Liverpool WSPU as an 'island' untouched by the decisions of Clement's Inn. The success of the local branch was tied in to the fortunes of the national organisation to a great extent; the position of organiser was nationally funded, for example, and ventures such as the shop, although later self-sufficient, relied on national funds to get them underway. Yet a local study does reveal that these ties were not rigid. Extreme militancy provides the best evidence of this, for whilst the Liverpool branch did engage in some of the more severe cases of arson attributed to suffragettes in England, it never allowed such actions to replace other forms of public activity completely. It must also be stressed that support for these actions, although widespread, was not universal. Whilst some members continued to support the WSPU once arson was adopted within Liverpool, other women were forced out of the local ranks by this new direction, feeling more comfortable within other suffrage organisations which will be examined in the next chapter.

The Liverpool WSPU offered local women their first opportunity to enter the public political arena as part of a large organisation which was open and amenable to all

women regardless of their class, religious or party-political allegiances. In this it was unique within Merseyside politics. It managed to attract so many different women into its ranks by successfully prioritising issues of gender, and thus managing to convince them that the franchise would deliver equal benefits to all women regardless of the differences between them, through raising the status of the female sex within the nation. It cannot be disputed that the WSPU did succeed, between 1905 and 1914, in opening up the world of public political campaigning to more women in Liverpool than any other organisation had managed to do, and that it was the only large organisation to allow women complete autonomy in selecting and directing its policies and actions.

However, a close study of the WSPU raises some broader questions about the levels and nature of women's political involvement within the Merseyside region. This chapter has shown how important the WSPU was to local women before 1914. There is a paradox between this, and the fact that the Liverpool WSPU vanished completely as an organisation in September 1914, when the National WSPU ceased to exist. At this point, the autonomy demonstrated by the local branch on previous occasions appears to have vanished. Although a small branch of the United Suffragists did appear in Liverpool, run by some of the long term WSPU activists such as Patricia Woodlock and Dr Alice Ker, it remained a small and fragmented group, never achieving anything approaching the success of the WSPU. Yet at the same time, the Women's Party, which the National WSPU became, also remained small in the city, its membership drawn from amongst women with no previous recorded connection to the WSPU. Although reasons for this will be covered in Chapter Nine, it is important to stress at this stage that there was no significant continuity of WSPU members having any activity in either of these two directions in wartime Liverpool. For some reason, the largest and most successful

women's political organisation in the area simply vanishes in 1914. Whether this was due to a general downturn in women's public political activity from the outbreak of the First World War, or whether the disappearance of the WSPU was linked to a simultaneous rise in a number of other organisations in the district will form an important question for later chapters. Also, although the WSPU mobilised women into public activity around its campaign, the extent to which it really managed to open up new avenues of political involvement to Merseyside women, who remained in the area after the WSPU itself had vanished must also be considered. An answer to this question can only be attempted when the WSPU's campaign is located alongside that of other suffrage campaigns within the city, and the input of all these political organisations re-examined in the light of national events between 1914 and 1920.

Plate Nine



Suffrage demonstration by WSPU and MLWS, St Georges' Plateau

September 5th 1908.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### OTHER SUFFRAGE ORGANISATIONS

#### 7.1: Introduction

The previous two chapters critically examine the development of Merseyside's two main suffrage societies, the militant WSPU and the constitutionalist LWSS, as examples of organisations in which women prioritised concerns arising from their gender over issues of class and party-political allegiance, with varying degrees of success. They have also demonstrated how the models of organisation these associations provided drew inspiration from both the rhetoric of separate spheres, and from the socialist model, and how the WSPU eventually superseded these two models by an analysis that presented women as a class, united by gender rather than economic circumstances.

Through both these chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate the richness of suffrage politics, as practised at a local level, and have argued that suffrage, rather than representing simply a campaign for the vote, was also a catalyst which politicized Edwardian women and drew them into the public arena. There was a steady growth of women into public political life on Merseyside as the suffrage campaign grew, a progression which this thesis traces from its beginnings with isolated women on elected boards, through the expanding work of women in political parties, into the mass membership of the local WSPU. This chapter will demonstrate that a further dimension to the suffrage campaign existing within the work of the myriad of smaller groups which sprang up around the suffrage issue. Whilst some of these developed from splits in the WSPU, others formed from larger political groups such as the Women's Liberal Suffrage Federation, providing a forum for suffrage work for women who wished to

remain primarily party political. Others such as the church societies often shared membership with larger suffrage societies. Many of these organisations formed local branches, supporting my original contention that suffrage was the one political issue which no woman with a public profile could ignore. By 1914, 44 organisations allowed writers, actresses, artists, Liberal women, Jewish women, and many more to proclaim their identity as suffragists.<sup>1</sup> However, the majority of suffrage histories still choose to concentrate on either the WSPU or the NUWSS, selecting their different campaigning methods as the main issue for historical investigation.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, it provides support for my observation that suffrage was the stimulus which persuaded many previously apolitical women to venture into public activity, and adopt a public identity as political actors. Secondly, it bears testimony to the richness of suffrage politics. It will demonstrate that the boundaries between suffrage organisations were real, but not as rigid or total at local level as they were at a national level. As Ann Morley and Liz Stanley have observed;

at the level of individual feminist women and their political actions and allegiances, the organisational divisions and sharp ideological differences that most accounts of Edwardian feminism have seized upon are, at best, only a small part of the total picture.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, even a perfunctory reading through *Votes for Women* leaves one wondering how so many historians can continue to claim that suffrage politics were narrow, centred merely on franchise extension.<sup>3</sup> I will support these observations by showing how organisations worked together at a local level, where the number of active suffrage

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<sup>1</sup>Jihang Park, "The British Suffrage Activists of 1913: An Analysis," *Past and Present* 120, 1988, pp.147-162.

<sup>2</sup>Liz Stanley with Ann Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, London, Women's Press, 1987, p.183.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid*, Chapter 6.

supporters always comprised a minority of the entire population. This will be achieved through an examination of six other suffrage organisations which co-existed with the WSPU and NUWSS on Merseyside. Through tracing the development and activities of the Women's Freedom League (WFL), Votes for Women Fellowship (VFWV), United Suffragists (US), Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA), Church League for Women's Suffrage (CLWS), and Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, I will show how, whilst the activity of some of these organisations differed significantly from that of the WSPU and the NUWSS, other organisations provided similar activities, and recruited a similar (and often joint) membership, and were more concerned with promoting alternative identities for suffrage activists than creating rival groups. Thirdly, the chapter questions the focus of suffrage historiography on the WSPU/NUWSS militant/constitutionalist split, showing how a broader range of organisations existed.<sup>4</sup> These attracted a membership which spanned this divide, and became important in their own right, making the division irrelevant. I conclude by querying the positioning of the United Suffragists in suffrage historiography, presenting this group as something more significant than a small opposition to the WSPU. This will signpost issues to be covered more fully in the chapter on the war, where the question of what happened to suffrage campaigns and campaigners from 1914 will be examined in more detail.

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<sup>4</sup>For example, Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 - 14*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974; David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts: A Study in Tenacity*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1967; Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes*, London, Michael Joseph, 1973; and Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women*, London, Faber & Faber, 1937 are mainly concerned with the policies and tactics of the WSPU, whilst Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London, Virago, 1978; Ray Strachey, *The Cause*, London, Virago, 1978 edition, first published 1928; Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1867 - 1914*, New York, Garland, 1982; and Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, have more to say about the history of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

To facilitate easy comparison between organisational approaches, and to avoid overreliance on a narrative approach, I have classified the organisations within this chapter into two broad types; 'oppositional,' constituting organisations which splintered from the WSPU and were formed with the dual purpose of achieving the franchise, and providing different forms of organisation and action than those offered by the WSPU, and 'alternative,' comprising organisations which sought to offer alternative sites for suffrage activity, whilst allowing their members to retain allegiance to other suffrage organisations. The WFL, VFWF and US I have placed in the former category, whilst the CUWFA, CLWS and CWSS fit into the latter.

The categories of 'oppositional' and 'alternative' fit comfortably within the framework of the three models outlined in my Introduction. As the examination of different organisations contained below will demonstrate, 'oppositional' organisations drew more on the sex-class analysis, and were often concerned with exploring and developing different types of militancy. 'Alternative' organisations, in contrast, often extended some aspects of separate spheres rhetoric into their organisational practice. They provided space for women to carve out different political identities for themselves, where they organised collectively to promote what they interpreted as women's special political qualities.

Five of the six organisations in this chapter will be discussed in chronological order. The study of the US, however, will come at the end of the chapter, rather than after the VFWF. Most US activity occurred after the outbreak of World War One, and the effect the war had on the women's suffrage movement altered its character as an organisation, as Chapter Nine will demonstrate. However, its origins lie with the complexity of the

politics of the women's suffrage movement between 1912 and 1914, rather than with the impact of the war on that movement, hence its inclusion as a postscript to this chapter.

Although it had an obvious home within this chapter, I have reluctantly taken the decision to omit the material which I have uncovered relating to the Men's League for Women's Suffrage. This organisation had active Merseyside branches from 1908.<sup>5</sup> Their members worked with the NUWSS, WFL and WSPU on occasions, and often held membership of mixed-sex suffrage bodies such as the Church League. Many were related to women active in the campaign. Noel Frimstone, co-secretary of Liverpool MLWS, married WSPU activist Ethel Martin. His fellow activist, Mr Bernard, had a sister in the WSPU. Socialist and Liberal men joined the League, along with many with no overt political allegiance, providing it with a broad base also reflected in its class composition. However, whilst the League contributed towards furthering the suffrage cause on Merseyside, it does not fit comfortably within a thesis whose main concern is to explore the political involvement of women, in mixed-sex organisations or otherwise. For this reason, the MLWS is not included here, although its existence and work must be noted.

## 7.2: The Women's Freedom League

The Women's Freedom League formed in October 1907 when Teresa Billington-Grieg and some supporters left the WSPU, amidst accusations of undemocratic practices, and formed an opposing organisation. As such, it fits clearly into the 'oppositional' category, an organisation which supported militancy up to a point, but aimed to present its membership with a less autocratic experience of political activity than did the

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<sup>5</sup>*Women's Franchise*, 4th June 1908. See also Plate Nine.

WSPU.<sup>6</sup>

The first Liverpool branch formed in January 1908, with the aid of Teresa Billington-Grieg and the Liverpool MLWS, who arranged what was claimed as "the largest and most successful" public meeting held in support of suffrage at the Picton Hall, and used this as a springboard to form a Liverpool WFL branch.<sup>7</sup> This meant that from January 1909 there were two militant suffrage societies organising in the city. The key question this raises for a study concerned with examining the experience of political activity for Merseyside women, concerns the differences between the practice of the two organisations. What did the experience of WFL membership offer to Merseyside women which was not already provided via the WSPU?

The main point on which the experience of membership differed arose from the physical location of the WFL branch. Although the first branch which formed in January 1909 was known as the Liverpool branch, it was situated in North of the city, in Waterloo, part of the neighbouring borough of Bootle. Other local branches remained firmly rooted in the North End, in Aintree (formed in April 1912), and Anfield (June 1914). A brief attempt to spread their work across the water and form a branch in Liscard failed.<sup>8</sup> So the work of the Liverpool Freedom League was mostly located in an area which remained largely uncolonised by the WSPU, and the branch was not directly competing for membership with another militant society, although it offered a different

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<sup>6</sup>There is as yet no major published study of the League. For details of its history, see Clare Eustance, "'Daring to be Free': The Evolution of Women's Political Identities in the Women's Freedom League 1907 - 1930," D.Phil thesis, York University 1993. Hilary Frances is also working on the history of the League at the Centre for Women's Studies, and I am grateful to her for letting me see drafts of her work.

<sup>7</sup>*Women's Franchise*, 28th January 1909.

<sup>8</sup>*Women's Freedom League News*, October 1909.

political experience to the NUWSS branch at Seaforth.

Although their branch was sited firmly in the North, the WFL did not remain there for all of its public activity. In its first year of existence, members successfully competed for the public political sphere in the city centre. Here, a slight difference in the focus of public activity can be discerned between the WFL and the WSPU. The Freedom League developed a distinctive political campaign between the Spring of 1909 and the following Winter. When comparing this campaign to simultaneous activities undertaken by the NUWSS and WSPU, it appears that the Freedom League was offering a synthesis of the methods of the two branches. The campaign involved much targeted petitioning aimed at "influential businessmen, officials on the stock exchange and the cotton exchange, shipping people, editors of newspapers."<sup>9</sup> This was consolidated by a vigorous campaign of public street meetings, held at Exchange Flags, in the heart of the business district.<sup>10</sup> This venue was public but reached a limited audience.

The large public campaign was facilitated by the presence of two WFL organisers, Miss Broadhurst M.A. and Miss Margaret Milne Farquharson M.A., drafted in to build the branch, and expected to play a similar function to WSPU organisers. Both women always mentioned their educational qualifications when speaking or writing on behalf of the League, reflecting the emphasis it placed nationally on education. As well as stressing their qualifications, League members highlighted their femininity, proudly repeating reports from *The Liverpool Courier* describing their political meetings, where;

the hats and gowns of the guests were as charming almost as the wearers.

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<sup>9</sup>*Women's Franchise*, 13th May 1909.

<sup>10</sup>Exchange Flags was also favoured by the WSPU, but they appear to have taken the idea from the WFL in this instance.

The atmosphere was as feminine as it was strenuous....No one can look at this evolutionary movement and say that the finest, most attractive women stand outside it.<sup>11</sup>

The Freedom League mixed the respectability of the LWSS with the militancy of the WSPU. Its Liverpool branch attracted a large number of teachers.<sup>12</sup> This, and the more respectable form of public campaign it created, which relied on the organisers rather than local women speakers, appears to support Leah Leneman's conclusions about the League in Scotland:

One reason for the continuing survival of the WFL may have been that it offered a home to young women who found the idea of being a "constitutionalist" stuffy, but did not want to get involved in violence.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to say that the local WFL membership were as unwilling to engage in the rougher side of public activity as the LWSS. Indeed, they were quick to acknowledge that their work in the general election campaign of January 1910 had resulted in women being "rushed up side streets and knocked about," but that they were "making great headway...in spite" of such treatment.<sup>14</sup> Although they did not participate in the more violent direct actions undertaken by Liverpool WSPU, League members were keen to support militancy, once "noting [the] certain apathy with which suffrage was discussed by the general public, owing to the temporary cessation of militant methods."<sup>15</sup> Even in the more restrictive locations of their street meetings, they faced public ridicule. Miss Farquharson assured her supporters that;

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<sup>11</sup>Extracts from *Liverpool Courier* quoted in *Women's Franchise*, 20th May 1909.

<sup>12</sup>In the local reports column of *The Vote*, 26th October 1912, it was reported that a local branch meeting was well attended despite the teachers' half term holiday, indicating that a large percentage of the membership was drawn from this constituency.

<sup>13</sup>Leneman, *A Guide Cause*, p.115.

<sup>14</sup>*The Vote*, 22nd January 1910.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid*, 26th March 1910.

[at] a meeting...held on the Exchange Flags....as [I] touched on the many injustices to women, the indomitable spirit of the women in the movement, and the lack of manhood in the men of the country when they allowed women to be so inhumanly treated as they were now in prison, the jeer dying from their faces was succeeded by expressions of interest.<sup>16</sup>

However, the jeer still had to be initially faced. This experience of public political activity was therefore only slightly different from that offered by the more numerous WSPU branches, although the WFL did not sustain its city centre campaign beyond the Summer of 1910, but retreated into branch meetings.

Politically, the WFL spanned the three main local parties, less directly than the NUWSS with its Liberal links or the WSPU with its socialist members, but successfully. Initial meetings were aimed at the Liberal Party, which, although not in control of the city council, represented a strand of bourgeois radicalism identified in a previous chapter.<sup>17</sup> Conservative opinion in Liverpool also appears to have been quite well disposed towards the League, as the reports cited from the pro-Conservative *Courier* indicate. And from November 1912, the League began to forge links with the local ILP, through the person of John Edwards, who spoke at several meetings for them whilst simultaneously promoting suffrage through Kensington ILP.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the WFL provided no separate party political identity, nor did it model its campaigning methods on any lifted from an individual party. Unlike the cross-class WSPU, the League drew its membership largely from the lower middle-class of Waterloo and its surrounding areas. However, it appeared more aware than the LWSS of the issue of class within its

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<sup>16</sup>*Women's Franchise*, 14th October 1909.

<sup>17</sup>See for example report of meeting with the Birkenhead Liberal Federation, *Women's Franchise* 6th May 1909; report of campaign around National Liberal Federation Conference, *Women's Franchise* 1st July 1909; report of President of local Liberal Federation at Mrs Despard's Waterloo meeting, *The Vote*, 16th March 1912.

<sup>18</sup>*The Vote*, 30th November 1912; 30th May 1913; 27th November 1913; 14th May 1914.

campaigns, but concentrated more on courting a working-class audience than on recruiting a working-class membership. Their work in Scotland Road, for example, was deemed worthwhile because the "populous working-class neighbourhood [had] a voting power which we can turn to our advantage on future occasions."<sup>19</sup>

So can it be argued that the WFL did not offer anything significantly different from the WSPU in the city? On one level, this is clearly the case. Indeed, it occasionally shared WSPU speakers, without criticism. Miss Marks, for example, was welcomed to the Aintree Branch in 1913 as "one of the pioneers of the militant movement in Liverpool" with no differentiation made between the methods of the two organisations.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps because of this, the WFL remained numerically small on Merseyside. In January 1910, for instance, their general election campaign was every bit as imaginative as that of the WSPU, involving public meetings, and the unique tactic of midnight gatherings to reach the tram drivers as they changed shifts. But it was concentrated only in Walton constituency, whilst the WSPU and the NUWSS both had sufficient members to campaign across the city. After January 1909, Miss Farquharson and Miss Broadhurst left Merseyside, leaving the branch without organisers. Miss Farquharson had earlier requested a fund to raise the five hundred guineas a year necessary to fund an organiser and headquarters, but the amount was obviously not forthcoming.<sup>21</sup> Thus an impossible situation was created. The influence of a full-time salaried organiser on the levels of branch activity has been examined previously in Chapter Six. Without an

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<sup>19</sup>*Women's Freedom League News*, 21st October 1909.

<sup>20</sup>*The Vote*, 13th June 1913.

<sup>21</sup>The League did have the services of Miss Muriel Matters and Miss Violet Tillard on Merseyside from January 1910 - April 1910, but this was accidental, due to the fact that they were both sailing to Australia from Liverpool, and were combining this international suffrage campaign with a smaller one in the port.

organiser, the Liverpool WFL branch could not sustain a level of activity which would allow it to expand significantly. Also recruits would not flock to it automatically if it had nothing distinctive to offer its members. This contention is supported by the fact that the League survived and grew in areas without an alternative militant society. With a smaller membership, however, funding an organiser was impossible. Without an organiser, the branch was forced to withdraw from public work in Liverpool, and concentrate on branch meetings and occasional indoor public meetings around Waterloo. Attempts to build the branch which are reported in *The Vote* repeatedly show a membership spread too thinly, with frequently repeated appeals for paper sellers and helpers. One public meeting was reported as resulting in a deficit, something never incurred by the WSPU. The existence of flourishing branches in areas where they represented the sole suffrage activity supports the contention of Liz Stanley that much militant suffrage activity was about local contacts and feminist friendships rather than stark differences in national policy.<sup>22</sup>

As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, the suffrage campaign in Liverpool became more fluid as it progressed, and sustained many groups with inter-organisational membership by 1914. It is likely that the Freedom League would have benefited from this development, as the suffrage campaign broadened into one which facilitated exploration of a wealth of simultaneous priorities such as religion, work and equal pay. In this climate, the WFL attempted a relaunch in May 1914, when it decided to form a large central Liverpool branch which would work with smaller new groups in the suburbs.<sup>23</sup> The first of these new groups was formed in Anfield in June 1914. Whilst

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<sup>22</sup>Stanley with Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup>*The Vote*, 22nd May 1914.

the experience of war prevented this new initiative from fully realising its potential, it did not stifle it completely. The contribution of the members of the Freedom League to providing a political space for Liverpool women between 1914-18 was by no means insignificant, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 7.3: The Votes for Women Fellowship

Chronologically, the second 'oppositional' suffrage organisation to form local branches was the VFWF. Although the impetus for its formation came from the expulsion of Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence from the WSPU in 1912, it was not 'oppositional' to the same degree as the WFL. However, both its existence and the nature of its activities reveal much to us about the importance of the issue of feminist friendship within suffrage campaigns, and the ability of friendship at a local level to transcend splits amongst the national leadership. For this reason I have placed the VFWV here amongst the 'oppositional' suffrage organisations, although its small shared membership with the WSPU would let it sit just as comfortably amongst the later 'alternative' ones.

When the Pethick-Lawrences were expelled from the WSPU, they were allowed to retain control over the Women's Press and its publications, including *Votes for Women* which they had edited since 1907.<sup>24</sup> The retention of the paper, which had become inseparable, in the eyes of the public, from the WSPU and its campaigns, provided them with a valuable mouthpiece through which they could have organised their supporters.

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<sup>24</sup>The details of the split, occasioned by the Pethick-Lawrences' objection to Christabel's movement towards a guerilla war type of militancy, have adequately been chronicled elsewhere. For more details, see Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, Chapter 14; Morley with Stanley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, *passim*; Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1938, *passim*; Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind*, London, Hutchinson, 1942, Chapter 10.

However, they were not interested in establishing themselves as rulers of an alternative court to Clements Inn, placing the importance of the unity of the suffrage campaign above personal and sectarian concerns. As Frederick later recalled:

It must not be supposed...that Emmeline or I either in speech or writing struck a discordant note. Our disagreement with the new militancy had been sufficiently expressed once and for all by our extrusion from the WSPU. There was no need to restate it. Our quarrel was with the government, and not with our fellow suffragists. Accordingly, in the columns of *Votes for Women* we continued to chronicle events of all kinds in the suffrage world.<sup>25</sup>

Emmeline's own account of affairs echoes this. She remembered:

Many people appealed to me to start a new suffrage organization. I considered the matter carefully and came to the conclusion that the ground was covered already.<sup>26</sup>

Rosen interprets this as a further example of the Pankhurst's stranglehold on the policies of the WSPU, and the lack of opposition they faced within it, as well as "the Pethick-Lawrences' determination to avoid schism in the Union's ranks."<sup>27</sup> Yet this was no more an example of a weak and cowed membership than it was the result of a veneer of unity imposed over a mass of discontent. An important by-product of the parting of the ways between the Pethick-Lawrences and the Pankhursts was that it forced the WSPU membership to examine the actions of their leadership. The couple, who were now outcasts, had been at the heart of the 'inner circle.' Frederick himself was acutely aware of this, pointing out:

One result of the split [was that] it forced the women of the rank and file into a fresh exercise of their own judgement....Once inside the ranks, women [had come] under the influence of the combined judgement of ourselves and the Pankhursts....When the partnership at the top was dissolved, not only had

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<sup>25</sup>Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate has been Kind*, p.101.

<sup>26</sup>Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, p.286.

<sup>27</sup>Rosen, *Rise up Women!*, p.177.

they to decide at the time whether (as *Punch* put it) they were "Peths or Panks", but, as fresh developments occurred, they had constantly to consider their position, and use their independent judgement. In this way, they took a further step in their self-emancipation.<sup>28</sup>

For many WSPU members who used their independent judgement over this issue, leaving the Union was not in question. But their choice to remain within the ranks of an organisation which they had been instrumental in creating, and whose direct militant policies they applauded, did not reflect a blind acceptance of the Pankhurst's opinion in all things.<sup>29</sup> As Liz Stanley and Ann Morley have noted, "the WSPU was both totally hierarchical at the top, and completely non-hierarchical in its every day presence in the lives of many women." They found that:

Any large scale organisation which exists on both a national and a local level - where local groups are active and involve large numbers of people - is complex and its activities are not easily summarised. Moreover, this is only due to the *formal* organisations. Cross-cutting this, at both levels, will be informal connections between people made on the basis of friendship, political analysis, social interests...This is true of the WSPU, but what has most often happened is that vast generalisations have been made about the WSPU from...the formal pronouncements of the leadership.<sup>30</sup>

It is this picture which I believe the story of the Votes for Women Fellowship in Liverpool best illustrates. Here, an organisation developed which was able to provide members with continued contact with the views and leadership of the Pethick-Lawrences and also to unite members of individual suffrage organisations together in a way which was impossible within existing organisations which distinguished them as 'militants,'

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<sup>28</sup>Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate has Been Kind*, p.101.

<sup>29</sup>As I have illustrated Chapter Six, supporting the more violent militant actions did not always lead to individuals participating in them. It was the constant variety of militant actions offered by the WSPU, coupled with the freedom given to individual women to decide how far their support and participation would go which held the key to their success.

<sup>30</sup>Stanley with Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, p.175.

‘non-militants’ or ‘Pankhurst supporters’ rather than simply ‘suffrage campaigners.’<sup>31</sup>

This was possible because although the Votes for Women Fellowship supported individual members and subscribers as well as a large network of branches, it was never really a suffrage organisation in the accepted sense of the word. Initially, it was conceived as a network, an umbrella to unite ex-readers of *Votes for Women*, and continue their association with the paper which no longer represented the WSPU. Immediately her expulsion became public, Mrs Pethick-Lawrence appealed to her readership:

My husband and I as co-editors of the paper have entered into fellowship with you, and are one with you in your bond of common purpose. It is our desire that this relationship shall be continued, strengthened and extended.<sup>32</sup>

Having highlighted the comradeship which the paper’s readers had already developed amongst themselves, a comradeship strengthened through their common membership of the WSPU, she continued:

*Votes for Women* has been deprived of the support supplied by a great organisation. That loss has to be made good in many ways. Its readers must now be brought into closer association. The sense of spiritual fellowship must be deepened, and that spirit must find practical outlet. They must share the work of bringing the paper to the attention of the general public.<sup>33</sup>

The need for such a scheme was pressing. Not only had *Votes for Women* lost the support of the WSPU, but Mrs Pethick-Lawrence was now able to reveal that it had been making substantial losses for some time. To keep it alive was of vital importance, as it not only signified suffrage to the many who saw it on sale each week, and perhaps

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<sup>31</sup>They had, after all, made frequent visits to Liverpool as speakers, and were well-known to several members of the local leadership such as Patricia Woodlock and Alice Ker.

<sup>32</sup>*Votes for Women*, 1st November 1912.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

occasionally bought it, but it represented a continuity of participation in the movement for these occasional supporters. Earlier suffrage papers such as *Women's Franchise* and *Women and Progress* had vanished when *Votes for Women*, which enjoyed organisational backing, appeared. How *Votes for Women* would survive as a non-aligned journal against the challenge of *The Suffragette* remained to be seen.

So the Fellowship grew initially from a strategy to keep the newspaper afloat. This point was to become crucial to its later development, as it meant that support for, or later membership of the Fellowship did not imply secession from the WSPU or other suffrage organisations. Indeed, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was insistent that the Fellowship was "not a suffrage society."<sup>34</sup> Instead, it aimed to boost existing suffrage work and facilitate contacts between a number of different suffrage societies.

Liverpool appeared amongst the first list of Fellowship branches published in *Votes for Women* in February 1913. Its local membership appears small, but significant, grouped around the art studio of Miss Mary Palethorpe, a longstanding local suffrage activist, who with her sister Fanny had served a term of imprisonment following their participation in the WSPU's London window-smashing raid in April 1912. Their imprisonment indicates that the sisters were not searching for an alternative field of activity due to a fear of, or a distaste for militancy. Indeed, they retained their WSPU connections with their work for the Fellowship, holding a sale for Fellowship funds in April 1913, yet designing the local WSPU fundraising Christmas card in the December

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid*, 9th May 1913.

of the same year.<sup>35</sup>

From January 1914, Miss Palethorpe made her studio in the city centre available for Fellowship meetings on Thursday afternoons. A description of the meetings, which consisted of "a reading from literature with bearing on the women's movement, followed by a discussion" supports Mrs Pethick-Lawrence's insistence that the Fellowship represented "a rallying ground for all suffragists, men and women, 'militant,' 'spiritually militant,' 'tax-resisting,' and 'constitutional' who mean business" rather than an attempt to build an alternative society with a distinct and separate identity.<sup>36</sup> The regular meetings also make it possible to identify women who continued to link themselves publicly with the Pethick-Lawrences after the split. Around the Liverpool branch, they are not readily identifiable as a group of 'dissidents' who opposed WSPU national policy constantly. Some women attending Fellowship meetings had a long level of involvement with the WSPU, such as the Palethorpes, and Patricia Woodlock, who spoke at public and private Fellowship meetings in 1914. Others, such as Mrs Imlack, had only been publicly associated with the WSPU since 1914, the later period of militancy, and yet simultaneously forged an association with the earlier suffrage paper. Still others appear willing to continue to use the talents they had discovered through *Votes for Women* in its support, such as Mrs Abraham, previously lauded by the WSPU for her sales of the paper, who in July 1913 sold the second highest number of papers

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<sup>35</sup>There is a problem of identification here, as the sisters are sometimes identified as "Miss Fanny" or "Miss Mary Palethorpe", sometimes "Miss F" or "Miss M Palethorpe", but often just "Miss Palethorpe". As the artist, it is likely that it was Mary who gave her studio for Fellowship meetings. However, both Miss Fanny Palethorpe and Miss Palethorpe appear in the same list of women who have donated money to the Fellowship in October 1913. The second Miss Palethorpe here must be Mary, indicating that both sisters continued to support *Votes for Women*.

<sup>36</sup>*Votes for Women*, 30th January 1914; 9th May 1913.

in the country.<sup>37</sup> The local Fellowship meetings, through their location and their stress on literary discussion rather than political action, also attracted the slightly bohemian circle, identified in Chapter Six, who were always on the fringes of local WSPU activity. Others demonstrate that the route into the Fellowship was not simply trodden by WSPU women seeking to retain links with the paper. Whilst *Votes for Women* continued to support militant actions, and reported the WSPU's local and national arson campaign, the Fellowship, as an umbrella organisation, was able to unite militants and non-militants in an unprecedented fashion.<sup>38</sup> Throughout Merseyside, their greatest coup was the securing of Miss Kate Riley for a meeting in 1914. She was a very active Liberal in Southport, and involved with its NUWSS, but despite these connections, the Fellowship meeting seems to have been her first appearance on a public platform in Liverpool. Hence the Fellowship also drew in women who opposed WSPU, as well as its supporters.

Whilst the Fellowship did not provide organised opposition to the WSPU, it was not simply a loose coalition. By September 1914, it was in a position to employ some local organisers, who acted as facilitators between the many co-existing suffrage organisations, bringing individuals together, whilst also continuing to support the paper. Miss Phyllis Lovell became their Liverpool organiser in May 1914. She lived in Southport (hence possibly the connection with Kate Riley), and organised several meetings in the name of the Fellowship up to the outbreak of war. Here, the advantages of the Fellowship as a coalition organisation become clear. As well as meetings in Liverpool which were largely organised and participated in by women with militant sympathies, she organised

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<sup>37</sup>The number was 188, which she achieved in June 1913. *Votes for Women*, July 11th 1913.

<sup>38</sup>Other organisations mentioned in this chapter, the 'alternative' sites, also do this, but only because an alternative focus is prioritised.

meetings in Southport in the Liverpool Fellowship's name, featuring constitutionalists like Kate Riley, and others with separate organisations such as the Church League of which she was an active supporter.

It is impossible to speculate about the length of time that the Fellowship could have sustained this pattern of public activity which relied more on women primarily active outside it doing their bit in its name when they had time. Over the Summer of 1914, it held weekly open-air meetings on Waterloo sands, and campaigned with its cycling corps, which visited local villages. Meanwhile, the WSPU matched its level of meetings, whilst fighting a vigorous campaign to combat the Home Office threat to newsagents who continued to stock *The Suffragette*, and seeking novel ways of presentation, including a boating parade for 'Suffragette Week.' As I have previously indicated, co-operation was achieved by the determination of Fred and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and their close supporters to retain an active voice in the suffrage campaign for *Votes for Women* without forcing a split in WSPU ranks. Bearing in mind the histories of previous non-aligned suffrage papers, and the increasing competition, from *The Suffragette*, and other new additions to the suffrage media, including *The Church League for Women's Suffrage Weekly Paper*, *The Vote*, and *The Free Church Suffrage Times*, *Votes for Women* could not sustain its current position indefinitely. The Fellowship was about offering supplementary activity rather than attempting to find a new direction for the suffrage campaign. When a newer organisation appeared seemed to bridge the approach of the Fellowship and that of the two main national societies, the decision was finally taken that *Votes for Women* should represent an organisation once again, and in August 1914, it became the official organ of the United Suffragists. The effect of this decision on Fellowship branches will be considered when the background

to the formation of the Liverpool US branch is considered at the end of this chapter.

#### 7.4: "Show What Our Lord has Done for Women"<sup>39</sup>

##### The Church League for Women's Suffrage

Having examined at two 'oppositional' suffrage organisations, the role of those which provided alternative sites for local activity must now be considered. The Church League for Women's Suffrage (CLWS) which formed nationally in December 1909, provides a good example of an organisation which added an extra dimension to the suffrage campaign. Although it claimed to be 'catholic' in that it was non-party and welcomed both militants and constitutionalists as members, it restrictive its membership to practising Anglicans, making it sectional in religious but not in political terms. Thus although its primary aim was the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women, it also drew in those who wished, in the words of its founder, to explore "the deep religious significance of the women's movement."<sup>40</sup>

From its founding, the organisation, which was open to men and women, drew heavily on the rhetoric of separate spheres. Many of the men involved used the issue of suffrage to promote their personal views on women's space and role within the church. There was nothing new about the association of these views with the suffrage campaign. When the Reverend Maurice F Bell stated, during the sermon of the inaugural meeting of the League that "it has always been the business of Christian women to care for the

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<sup>39</sup>Rev. J. Coop, sermon at St Catherine's Abercrombey Square, *Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, January 1913.

<sup>40</sup>Rev Claude Hinscliffe to Archbishop Davison, 3rd May. 1912, Davison Papers, W16, Lambeth Palace Library. Cited by Brian Heeney, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England 1850-1930*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p.105.

home," he was following a well established tradition.<sup>41</sup> As early as 1895, the Central Society for Women's Suffrage attempted to "remove a fear still to be found in some quarters that the women's suffrage movement is not consistent with the religious aspect of women's work and duty."<sup>42</sup> Some of the rhetoric of ministers in the Church League could have been lifted directly from the prescriptive literature around the separate spheres of men and women abundant in the mid-nineteenth century. This stressed on women's 'special' or 'superior' qualities, which meant that:

Women have a greater initial facility for worship than men....[and] will raise worship to a new place in the life of the whole church by teaching men to revere something which women most easily do.<sup>43</sup>

However, more came of their rhetoric drew on the theological belief that women had an important role to play within the church. This was not identical to men's role, but was of equal importance. As the Bishop of Hull explained, "the ministry of women is different from that of men, but there is no question of superiority or inferiority. Both are needed by Christ."<sup>44</sup> However, although some women in the movement used similar rhetoric to support their case, the League also housed more radical women who were well aware of the danger of accepting any part of the ideology of separate spheres. "Remember what were the conditions of life when the home was the only sphere allowed women,"<sup>45</sup> CLWS activist Mrs Creighton warned the movement in 1912. For many women, Christianity did not equal passivity. These members of the League were

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<sup>41</sup>Rev. M. Bell, *The Church and Women's Suffrage, Sermon before the Inaugural Meeting of the Church League for Women's Suffrage at St Mark's, Regent's Park, Thursday December 2 1909 by the Vicar, Rev. Maurice F. Bell M.A*, London, CLWS Pamphlet no. 1, 1909.

<sup>42</sup>*Women's Suffrage: Opinions of Leaders of Religious Thought*, London, Central Society for Women's Suffrage, 1895.

<sup>43</sup>Rev. William Temple, M.A., Head of Repton, speech to the Queen's Hall on "The Religious Aspect of the Women's Movement," London, The Collegium, 1912.

<sup>44</sup>Rev. J. A. Kempthorne, speech to Queen's Hall, London, The Collegium, 1912.

<sup>45</sup>Mrs Creighton, speech to Queen's Hall, London, The Collegium, 1912.

keen to affirm that despite advances in society;

it remained for Christianity to fully declare that the accident of sex is nothing, and that in the Christian Commonwealth there is 'neither male nor female.'<sup>46</sup>

The CLWS represented more than simply a way for Anglicans to demonstrate their support for women's suffrage. Christianity had long played an important part in suffrage politics, especially amongst the most militant of its adherents. During one of her many imprisonments, Emily Wilding Davison had scrawled "rebellion against tyrants is obedience to God" on the wall of Holloway, justifying her militant actions in terms borrowed from earlier Christian martyrs.<sup>47</sup> Other suffragettes often described their movement in quasi-religious terms, presenting Christian theology and suffrage rhetoric as interchangeable. Whilst acknowledging that earlier feminists had used Christian rhetoric, David Mitchell places its emergence within the WSPU in late 1912, when Christabel developed what he sees as her apocalyptic strain, and "began to pepper her pieces with selective quotes from the bible."<sup>48</sup> Yet as early as 1907, suffragettes such as Mrs Pethick-Lawrence used their religious beliefs to give impetus to their suffrage campaign, preaching to their audiences in words which would not have been misplaced at a Salvation Army meeting:

The new conception of life which has been given to us is that of the woman, possessor of her own body and soul....free to develop within herself the thought and purpose of her Maker, unsubservient to the will or desire of man....The new ideal is not only the cross, it is also the sword. "I came not to bring peace on earth, but a sword." This word, spoken by the Prince of Peace, is one of the great paradoxes of which life is full. I call upon [you], those who have vision, to take up the cross, to grasp the sword of this new conception, and with it to wage holy warfare against

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<sup>46</sup>Rev. George Williams, *Women's Rights, a Sermon*, Glasgow, Candlish Memorial U F Church, 1914.

<sup>47</sup>Emily Wilding Davison, *Votes for Women*, 3rd September 1909.

<sup>48</sup>David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel* London, Macdonald and Janes, 1977, p.213.

prejudice and custom....which enforce bondage and hold the woman's body and soul in subjection....Come and join our crusade.<sup>49</sup>

As an organisation fighting for increased participation for women in the public life of society, the CLWS appears the obvious place to look for a campaign towards the ordination of women. However, there is little evidence of an orchestrated campaign by the League around this issue. Brian Heeney sees such action as it did take as the culmination of the suffrage campaign, and locates it in the inter-war period.<sup>50</sup> Sheila Fletcher supports this, relating that Maude Royden, who was to make a 'notorious' speech on the issue herself in 1915, admitted privately that her support for women priests was 'extreme,' and warned fellow League member Ursula Roberts to tread very carefully around the subject.<sup>51</sup> Yet there was still some feeling amongst individual CLWS members that women's ordination might represent part of their demands. I shall return to this point later, during a discussion of women's ministry on Merseyside.

Although certain radical ministers in Liverpool had long associations with both socialist and suffrage politics, it was not until January 1913 that a local branch of the CLWS was formed, allowing anglicans a chance to declare themselves suffragists.<sup>52</sup> Locally as nationally, the CLWS recruited both militants and constitutionalists, as the intermingling of the single issue of the vote with broader concerns about spirituality allowed the issue of militancy to become less relevant. The WSPU's ban on extra-suffrage political activity did not extend to the Church, so its members could retain church links.

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<sup>49</sup>Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, speech at Exeter Hall 30th May 1907, London, WSPU pamphlet, 1907.

<sup>50</sup>Heeney, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England*.

<sup>51</sup>Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden, a Life*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, pp.143-4.

<sup>52</sup>*Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, January 1913. Pembroke Chapel was the main site for pulpit radicalism in Liverpool. For more details see I. Sellers, *Salute to Pembroke*, typescript, Liverpool Record Office.

Therefore, women who joined the League were claiming a public identity which proclaimed that their anglicanism was as important to them as their suffrage.

This dualism allowed the local branch to serve as a suffrage melting pot where militants and constitutionalists could work side by side. As it formed at a time when hostilities between the two camps were augmenting, it provided an important space where supporters of both sides could meet and work together. Indeed, at one stage, the Southport CLWS, forerunner of the Liverpool branch, had regular paper sales of *The Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, *Votes for Women*, and *Common Cause*.<sup>53</sup> Nationally, Heeneey has noted public concern expressed over the high number of WSPU members who joined the League:

Despite the insistence of members and leaders that the League was perfectly innocent of political aims, the *Standard* of 25 September 1913 remarked; '[since] no fewer than six members of the elected committee, including the chairman, are subscribers to the Women's Social and Political Union, a grave doubt must arise as to the real character of this outwardly respectable society.'<sup>54</sup>

Although an early attempt was made to bar "militants on active service" from membership of the Liverpool CLWS, the majority of the branch opposed this.<sup>55</sup> The activists of Liverpool CLWS were predominantly WSPU members, but this did not deter constitutionalists from involvement.<sup>56</sup> In January 1914, NUWSS activist Cecily Leadley-Brown proposed to the AGM that 'the CLWS merits the support of all Church

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<sup>53</sup>*Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, August 1912.

<sup>54</sup>*Standard*, 25 September 1913, cited in Heeneey, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England*, p.112.

<sup>55</sup>Church League for Women's Suffrage Fourth Annual Report, 1913. The first president and secretary resigned following this decision, but the remaining branch officials, drawn from militant and constitutional societies, remained in place.

<sup>56</sup>An analysis of the Liverpool members named in the *Monthly Paper* shows that of the 19 who had been associated with other local suffrage groups 9 of these had WSPU links, whilst 6 were NUWSS supporters, and 4 were involved with the Women's Freedom League.

Suffragists,' a proposal which accurately reflected the situation in the ranks of the local branch.<sup>57</sup> This denial of difference lay at its heart from its first reported meeting when Rev. J. Coop preached on Mark 1, 31:

In Christ Jesus there was 'neither male nor female'....the Church League intended to show those outside what our Lord had done for women when 'he took her by the hand and lifted her up.'<sup>58</sup>

The belief that common faith transcended policy differences between political organisations united individuals from opposing suffrage societies on Merseyside. For example, in 1914, Eleanor Rathbone, who had publicly stressed that NUWSS members should always keep their campaign in the public eye over and above that of the WSPU chaired a CLWS meeting at which WSPU supporter Mr Bernard spoke without either party appearing to feel compromised.<sup>59</sup>

The CLWS never intended to achieve the profile of the WSPU, concentrating on education amongst church members. Locally, its campaign echoed this. Membership of the Liverpool CLWS provided opportunities to share faith as suffragists, during special church services where the spiritual dimension of the movement was discussed. Members were also encouraged to hold and attend public meetings and to sell literature. CLWS public meetings, although not as numerous as those of other suffrage organisations, were no less popular. The first one attracted over 300 people to Church House to hear the Bishop of Hull declare:

There is not a parish in Liverpool.....the work of which would not collapse

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<sup>57</sup>*Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, March 1914.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid*, January 1913.

<sup>59</sup>"The recent developments of militant policy and the...reaction in public opinion to which they have led make it more important than ever that the constitutional and conciliatory methods of the National Union should be kept prominently before public attention." Eleanor Rathbone, "The Methods of Conciliation," *Common Cause*, 5th September 1911.

if there were no women workers, and it is little short of a scandal that in our church councils women who do the lions share [sic] of the church's work should not have the privilege of a vote.<sup>60</sup>

He was supported by Cecily Leadley-Brown who 'gave splendid arguments and reasons for women having the vote.'<sup>61</sup> Similar events came to characterise the local campaign.

The rise in local CLWS activity coincided with an increase in public expressions of spirituality by the WSPU. Following a national campaign, local suffragettes had participated constantly in the 'prayers for prisoners' initiative, when church services were interrupted by women praying for hunger strikers. Locally, this campaign centred on the new Lady Chapel in the Anglican Cathedral. The chapel took famous Christian women as its theme, and had a window dedicated to Josephine Butler, providing a perfect backdrop for militant spirituality.<sup>62</sup> The first protest, in January 1914, finished with a suffragette unfurling a banner declaring "I came not to send peace, but a sword." This was knocked from her hand, and the churchwardens threatened to exclude women from the Lady Chapel in future. The following week, the prayers were repeated, although the cathedral had hired six policemen and a sergeant to prevent a scene.<sup>63</sup> Such protests did not impress the local church authorities, and a WSPU deputation to the Bishop of Liverpool in April 1913 was told that rather than being willing to intervene on the subject of forcible feeding, he "declined to lift a finger to help...until...the women desisted from brawling in the churches."<sup>64</sup> Against this

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<sup>60</sup>*Votes for Women*, 18th April 1913.

<sup>61</sup>*Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Paper*, March 1913.

<sup>62</sup>For a discussion of the importance of the Lady Chapel to feminism, see *The Vote*, 11th November 1909.

<sup>63</sup>*The Suffragette*, 23rd January 1914, 30th January 1913.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid*, 3rd April 1914.

background, the local Church League allowed suffragists a space to practice their faith without renouncing their political beliefs.

The CLWS was not a radical association. It steered its membership away from issues like the ordination of women, many of its most ardent supporters concurring with the view that "the priesthood...is debarred to women...that is a permanent prohibition."<sup>65</sup> For some local women, therefore, it failed to provide the spiritual space they sought. This, they attempted to create for themselves, through the establishment of a Woman's Church in Wallasey. The church, which met in the Liscard Concert Hall, held both mixed-sex and women-only services, and was aimed at helping women who, finding the Church "like a cage.....[had] come away in sheer disgust at the attitude of the clergy towards the things which to [them] are dearer than life."<sup>66</sup> The inaugural services were held by Rev Hatty Baker, "one of the pioneer women preachers in the Congregational Church" and a co-pastor in Plymouth. She was instrumental in founding the Free Church League for Women's Suffrage, although this group was never represented on Merseyside.<sup>67</sup> As well as providing a space for women to run services, the Women's Church attempted to move away from a wholly masculine presentation of God, and explore His feminine aspects.<sup>68</sup> Women would "preach the sermons, offer the prayers, provide the music and take the collection; the whole administration [was] to be in [their]

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<sup>65</sup>Rev Maurice Bell, *CLWS Pamphlet* no. 1, 1909.

<sup>66</sup>Miss Hoy, letter to *Wallasey and Wirral Chronicle*, 14th March 1914.

<sup>67</sup>For biographical details of Rev. Baker, see *Free Church Suffrage Times*, January 1917.

<sup>68</sup>For more detail on the Wallasey Women's Church, see letter from Miss Amy Brand, *Wallasey and Wirral Chronicle*, 24th January 1914. Also, reports in *Votes for Women* and *The Suffragette*, during March 1914. For a brief discussion of how the church was received in radical freethinking circles, see E. Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1980, p.248.

hands."<sup>69</sup> The Church did attract some suffrage support, notably recruiting Miss Hoy, Wallasey WSPU secretary and treasurer, who took on the role of its treasurer, and it received publicity in *The Suffragette* and *Votes for Women*. However, it appears to have folded during the First World War, and it is likely that whilst it provided an important focus for some Christian feminists, the majority felt more comfortable within the boundaries of established religion.

Paradoxically, Liverpool CLWS was characterised by both unity and difference. It united suffragists from different organisations, providing them with common ground. This common ground allowed individuals to devise a separate identity from that provided by larger suffrage societies. They could publicly identify themselves simultaneously as anglicans and suffragists. For women already active in suffrage organisations, this added an extra dimension to their campaigning work. For others, the Church League provided a space where they could publicly proclaim their belief in suffrage politics, without having to join a separate body.

#### 7.5: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society

Catholic women on Merseyside were similarly able to unite their suffrage and religious activities within the CWSS. This society was formed in December 1910, when

two young Catholic girls....stood outside Holloway Gaol, waiting with other suffragists to welcome suffrage prisoners who were to be released that day. One of them mentioned the fact that she had been to Mass, and was hailed by the other as a fellow Catholic.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>*Free Church Suffrage Times*, April 1914.

<sup>70</sup>Leonora de Alberti, "History of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society," *Catholic Citizen*, volume XIV, no. 9, 15th October 1928, pp.77-81.

As with the other 'alternative' organisations discussed here, the CWSS formed part of a broader trend, whereby suffrage activists with concerns beyond the franchise sought to broaden out their campaigns to "other sections of the community" whilst simultaneously claiming a dual identity for themselves, as suffragists *and* members of other groups.<sup>71</sup> In the case of Catholics, this dual identity carried special significance.

As Francis M Mason has observed:

This....group sought to break down prejudices against Catholics within the non-Catholic world while concerting Catholics from the position of indifference or outright negativity towards women's suffrage. Their work....created, in the process, a Catholic feminist movement.<sup>72</sup>

The society admitted both men and women to its ranks, and linked their common struggle for the vote with wider struggles for Catholic emancipation.<sup>73</sup> Within Liverpool, a city prone to religious bigotry and conflict which often reached deeply into its political life, the organisation formed one of its earliest branches in 1912, and put down deep roots into the local Catholic community.<sup>74</sup> This branch was the second regional CWSS branch to form, and it continued to flourish throughout the war years, expanding its membership in a way unique within local suffrage politics.

Despite the peculiarities of local sectarianism, and the success which the CWSS

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>Francis M Mason, "The Newer Eve: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society in England, 1911 - 1923," *Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 52, pt. 4, October 1986, pp.620-638.

<sup>73</sup>See Joseph Clayton, *Votes for Women - the Appeal to Catholics*, London, CWSS pamphlet, n.d., which claims that "Catholic men and women are striving to get votes for women as they strove in earlier days for better government and for Catholic emancipation."

<sup>74</sup>For details of links between religion and politics on Merseyside, see P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981; John Bohstedt, "More than One Working Class: Protestant-Catholic Riots in Edwardian Liverpool" in John Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790 - 1940*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1992; Frank Neal, *Sectarian violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819 - 1914: An aspect of Anglo-Irish history*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988.

achieved amongst working-class Catholics, it cannot be simply read as another product of what John Bohstedt has identified as "*informal* politics....[where] neighbourhood concentration created the critical mass to support a full range of ethnic organizations....[and] whole networks of social organizations were attracted to the rival churches" in Liverpool.<sup>75</sup> The local CWSS branch can also be interpreted as further proof of the adaptability of grass roots Edwardian feminism, in a era when its leaderships are portrayed as rigid and unbending. The branch was founded by Miss Florence Barry, who was not a typical Liverpool Catholic. She was the educated, middle-class daughter of a Persian Catholic, Zacharie Balthazar Bahri, and his Austrian wife, Frances Jane Shroder. The Barry family lived at Birkenhead, where Florence's father was a merchant, and her mother 'devoted much of her energy and ability to relieving the poverty and distress which was all too common in a dockland city.'<sup>76</sup> Florence, active in Birkenhead WSPU, was initially unconvinced "that there was either a need or a scope for a purely Catholic women's organisation."<sup>77</sup> It is uncertain what made her change her mind, but these early doubts indicate that it was suffrage rather than sectarianism which motivated her.

Although Merseyside was obviously an important regional centre for CWSS activity, there is only fragmentary evidence of the first four years of local branch activity. The society's paper, *The Catholic Suffragist*, only began publication in January 1915. By then, Florence Barry had taken over the position of national organiser in London. However, some evidence remains of early branch activity within the CWSS Annual

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<sup>75</sup>Bohstedt, "More than One Working Class," pp.206-207.

<sup>76</sup>Nancy Stewart Parnell, *The Way of Florence Barry, 1885 - 1965*, London, St Joan's Alliance, 1973.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid*, p.8.

Reports. These show a group of women mainly supportive of the militant side of the suffrage movement. A surviving list of Liverpool's subscriptions and donations from 1912 - 13 identifies prominent militants such as Patricia Woodlock as subscribers to the organisation. However, other subscribers included anti-militants such as Jane Colquitt, the Catholic suffragist who 'adored the bible and bible stories.'<sup>78</sup> So the branch recruited both suffragists and suffragettes, at a time when divisions over militancy were at their highest. The lack of suffrage sectarianism evidenced within the CWSS possesses another interesting dimension. Although Catholic suffragists and suffragettes felt it necessary to proclaim religious affiliation as well as their suffrage activism, in the same way that CLWS members did, this did not reflect back into religious sectarianism within the larger suffrage organisations. There, Catholic and Protestant women worked side by side, without sectarian strife. This dimension of women's politics is worth stressing, as it stands in opposition to the common view, best represented by Waller, that sectarianism coloured all aspects of local political activity.<sup>79</sup>

With the publication of *The Catholic Suffragist*, activity becomes far easier to trace. Here, the CWSS appears unique as the only organisation which combined war work and suffrage up to 1918. The branch engaged in different types of welfare work, which will be covered in Chapter Nine. However, although one of the latest local suffrage organisations to form, its suffrage war work during the war displayed a degree of tenacity which other organisations were unable to match. Whilst other similar organisations had suspended suffrage work in favour of relief work, the CWSS continued to proclaim itself 'suffragist,' retaining this word in its paper until after

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<sup>78</sup>Interview with Mrs Paula Francombe, daughter of Jane Colquitt, 1st December 1993.

<sup>79</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, *passim*.

enfranchisement. Locally, it determined that it would not only do war work, but;

help to keep the suffrage flag flying that we may be powerful to get wrongs realised when peace is restored.<sup>80</sup>

This was not merely speculative talk. Although lack of specific information makes it impossible to present a full account of branch activities at this stage, the discussion of their later work in Chapter Nine indicates that they built strong roots in the local area from their formation, successfully providing an alternative dimension to both suffrage and religious activism for local Catholic women.

#### 7.6: The Conservative & Unionist Women's Franchise Association

The final 'alternative' organisation I will discuss is the CUWFA. This provided an alternative site for suffrage activity, restricting its membership to women active in the Conservative Party, and allowing its members to declare publicly their dual allegiances as suffrage activists and Conservatives. As such it co-existed with other suffrage organisations, and sometimes shared members. It was formed nationally in 1908 by the Countess of Selbourne in reaction to attempts at organisation by anti-suffragists within the party, and recruited prominent women like Betty Balfour who left the Primrose League for its ranks after her local MP voted against the franchise extension.<sup>81</sup> However, whilst opposing individual Tories in cases such as this, CUWFA members retained their Conservatism and did not attempt to orchestrate a suspension of party activity, remaining pledged not to oppose any Unionist candidates in elections, whilst agreeing not to work for any candidate who did not support suffrage. Initially, the organisation was London-based, but formed national branches from 1909. Within

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<sup>80</sup>*Catholic Suffragist*, February 1915.

<sup>81</sup>See Beatrix Campbell, *Iron Ladies: Why Women Vote Tory*, London, Virago, 1987, p.42, which erroneously refers to the Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Organisation.

Liverpool, it provided a vital space for those Conservative women who did not find the Primrose League a receptive centre. Although a suffrage organisation, it was also party political, and thus allowed Conservative women access to the sort of political training and experience available through the FS, ILP and WLF, without having to suspend their political allegiance as the WSPU demanded.

When the *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review* began publication in November 1910, the Liverpool branch was established, and furnished one of eight local reports, establishing it as an early centre of activity.<sup>82</sup> It was headed by Miss Evelyn Deakin, who was also a LWSS activist. The CUWFA was not overtly opposed to militancy, and claimed to be open to all Conservative women who wished for the parliamentary vote. However, those in its Liverpool branch who were also involved in other suffrage organisations mainly came from the LWSS.<sup>83</sup> Whilst the political opposition of the WSPU to the Liberal government may have made it attractive to Conservative women, especially when its electoral policy often worked to their party's advantage, the it demanded that its members ceased their personal political activity. Whilst the WSPU was not hostile to the CUWFA, joint membership was an impossibility. During the lifetime of the Liverpool CUWFA branch, the local Conservative Party was in the ascendancy, and controlled the City Council. Frequently positioning their organisation as respectable in the face of the city's growing radicalism, the women of the CUWFA were unlikely to participate in actions which would give

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<sup>82</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, November 1910. The report indicates that the branch was recent.

<sup>83</sup>The most notable exception that I have found to this is the case of Miss Canning, who was active in the CUWFA and the WSPU. However, her activity was not simultaneous, and she appears to have progressed from the CUWFA into the WSPU, where she undertook low level militant actions such as speaking at street meetings.

local Liberals or their press an opportunity to condemn their party. The CUWFA was comprised of women who, although seeking suffrage, were primarily united by their common political beliefs, and prioritised the issue of party politics over other concerns.

The experience of membership of the CUWFA does not appear to have differed significantly from that of the LWSS. Although the CUWFA was a campaigning organisation, it held no outdoor meetings at all on Merseyside, but, like the LWSS, spread its message through At Homes in the large drawing rooms of its members, or at indoor public meetings. The sale of literature played an important part in its campaign, showing that like the other organisations in this chapter, it was conscious of its message as representing something significantly different from the focus of other suffrage organisations. The main difference for members derived from the prioritisation of party political concerns. Women who joined the CUWFA and wore its colours of pale blue, white and gold were Conservative Suffragists, and were claiming a public identity for themselves as such. Often, their Conservatism appears above their suffragism. The vote itself, for example, is frequently claimed not as a means of raising the status of women, but as a tool to perpetuate Conservatism against the threat of socialism.<sup>84</sup> Women were by nature Conservatives, it was argued, and therefore the vote was the best way of safeguarding against a socialist government. It is unlikely that women like Evelyn Deakin, who worked closely with Women's Liberal Federation members through her NUWSS contacts, could seriously believe this, but the argument demonstrates a degree of political expediency amongst Conservative women.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>See Gilbert Samuel, "Women's Franchise: A Safeguard Against Socialism," *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review* Issue 3, May 1910.

<sup>85</sup>It is also worth reminding ourselves that this argument did carry some weight at the time, being frequently cited by socialist men as a reason to campaign against extending the franchise to women on the same grounds as it was available to men.

The existence of a separate organisation which was Conservative before it was suffragist also allowed suffrage arguments to be discussed in wider circles than those reached by the NUWSS. Not all of Liverpool's Conservative women were suffragists. Miss Deakin appears to have been pleasantly surprised when addressing a meeting of the Sefton Park Women's Conservative Association that "although no resolution was put...it was quite obvious that a large majority of those present were in sympathy with the movement."<sup>86</sup> The label 'Conservative' allowed suffragists access to their fellow party members, over other non-party suffrage groups. This was appreciated by the other Merseyside branch on the Wirral, which tried the approach of;

a suffrage chat tea at which twenty people were invited. These little gatherings are found to be most useful for raising up interest in the suffrage question, and in getting people not yet in favour to attend meetings....<sup>87</sup>

Political affiliation also allowed the women of the CUWFA to approach Conservative MPs as representatives of a party association. The Merseyside branches took full advantage of this, waiting regularly on local Conservative MPs. As part of their campaign around the Conciliation Bill, they participated with the local NUWSS petition in Mr Bonar-Law's constituency, Miss Deakin and her comrades persuading "38 out of the 50 members of the executive committee of the local Conservative Association, including the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon Secretary, Hon Treasurer and the Chairmen of 13 out of the 15 wards" to sign in support of the bill.<sup>88</sup> The branch saw this "political work as being of the utmost importance in view of the present momentous session", and also brought their powers of persuasion to bear upon Mr Rigby Swift, MP

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<sup>86</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 11, April-June 1912. Unfortunately this is the only mention I have found anywhere for separate Conservative Women's Associations on Merseyside.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid*, Issue 18, Jan-March 1914.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid*, Issue 11, April-June 1912.

for St Helens who was "much impressed with a memorial presented to him, signed by a large number of his most influential supporters."<sup>89</sup> Similar work was also carried out in the City Council, when necessary. The NUWSS campaign to have a suffrage resolution passed at this forum relied very heavily on the CUWFA to contact members of the ruling group.<sup>90</sup>

However, political affiliation could also restrict the association. As I have outlined, the prominent position of the local Conservative Party discouraged the CUWFA from participating in militancy. When they met with opposition, they quietly withdrew rather than attempting to fight their corner. In February 1914, when the CUWFA organised a block attendance at an anti-suffrage debate in Birkenhead, they griped in the *Review* that:

No verbal question being allowed, all questions had to be written with the result that many remained unanswered. The resolution against the enfranchisement of women was put to the meeting by the Chairman who declared it carried, and although many members of the audience asked for a 'count' this was refused.<sup>91</sup>

Members of more overtly militant societies would have demanded answers to their questions at this stage, rather than let such an opportunity go by. CUWFA members were less likely to risk bringing their party into disrepute by 'unfitting' public conduct. Even in their relationships with Conservative 'antis' they were keen to avoid the risk of schism. When the highly pro-suffrage MP Marshall Hall was replaced by J S Rankin in East Toxteth, the CUWFA deputation which attempted to gain his support for their cause reported that they "regret that he does not see his way clear to support the

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

<sup>90</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 7, April 1911. The resolution, moved by Miss Eleanor Rathbone, was passed successfully, by 44 votes to 19.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, Issue 19, April-June 1914.

movement" but took no further action on this. Conservative women were not about to break rank with their party over the suffrage issue, nor was it their policy to attempt to influence the selection of candidates so that only pro-suffrage MPs were put forward for election.

For the women of the CUWFA, party politics remained the priority they chose over other possible allegiances. Most of them were middle class, but it was not this factor which unified them. Indeed, they made repeated attempts to spread their message to women from different class backgrounds, notably through the work they did amongst the local Union of Women Workers.<sup>92</sup> In this, they tried to reach women across class divides as Conservatives rather than as women. Although membership of the CUWFA was limited to women, they took advantage of the pioneering work done by Forwood in establishing working class Conservatism as a force in Liverpool in the previous century, securing invitations to speak to Liverpool's WMCA's.<sup>93</sup> Here again party politics rather than class or gender provided the unifying bond. The lack of participation by CUWFA members locally in militant actions flowed from a desire to preserve the respectability of the ruling local political party coupled with the strength of the local WSPU branch which allowed Conservative women like Miss Canning to be militant if they were prepared to forfeit their party identity. The presence of a CUWFA branch which co-existed successfully with the LWSS, despite an overlap in methods and membership, serves as further testimony to the variety of political positions which composed the suffrage campaign in Liverpool, and to the political choices available to women who chose to fight publicly for the vote.

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<sup>92</sup>The National Union of Women Workers received good coverage within the *Review*, see for example the article by Lady Laura Riding, Issue 15, April-June 1913. For local details, see Chapter Three.

<sup>93</sup>See Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, for details.

### 7.7: The United Suffragists

The final organisation I will cover in this chapter is the United Suffragists. Chronologically the last of the six organisations formed, much of its activity occurred during the war years, and will be dealt with in Chapter Nine. However, for its role then to be understood fully, it is necessary to devote some time to an explanation of its origins. The existence of the US has been glossed over until recently by historians who preferred to present the Pankhurst's conversion to nationalism and support for the war as total.<sup>94</sup> Those who do mention it highlight its small size, and the lack of public activity it engaged in, presenting it as the work of an unrepresentative groups of dissidents, seeking to create another, less militant opposition to the WSPU.<sup>95</sup> The confusion around its aims is extended to its origins; Harrison identifies it as a progression from the VFWF, formed some time since 1912; Morley and Stanley locate its formation in June 1914, whereupon "soon after...*Votes for Women* became its official newspaper."<sup>96</sup> Part of this is due to historical accident. The United Suffragists formed in February 1914, six months before the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>97</sup> The effect of the war upon women forms a central part of the 'conclusion' of many suffrage histories. The experience of women during wartime has been an important part of British women's history, used both by feminist historians such as Holton, Liddington and Norris and Wiltsher, who focus largely on women's anti-militarism, and also by non-feminists including Mitchell who find in women's war work further proof for their

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<sup>94</sup>For instance David Mitchell, *Women on the Warpath: The Story of the Women of the First World War*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, mentions only the Independent WSPU.

<sup>95</sup>See for example Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987 p.228, and Rosen, *Rise up Women!* p.224.

<sup>96</sup>Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries*, p.251. Stanley with Morley, *The Life and Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, p.83.

<sup>97</sup>*Votes for Women*, 6th February 1914.

rejection of the suffrage campaign as a serious political strategy which helped to win the vote. Even those historians who do recognise that "the United Suffragists represented more than a disgruntled group of former WSPU activists squeezed out of the inner circle" pass swiftly on to an analysis of the war years without pausing to consider exactly what the group represented.<sup>98</sup>

A brief reading of the history of the United Suffragists as explained by its protagonists in *Votes for Women* reveals it as having the intent and the potential to develop an important new direction in suffrage politics. It declared itself as open to men and women "irrespective of membership of any other society, militant or non-militant."<sup>99</sup> However, it was also seeking to recruit "those suffragists...who have not hitherto joined any suffrage society," believing that there were large numbers of people in this position who were "ineffective" in contributing to the cause due to their isolation.<sup>100</sup> This point is supported by the large numbers of supporters previously identified who were still joining organisations such as the CLWS and CWSS in Liverpool in 1914 as well as the better established WSPU and NUWSS, indicating that there were still fresh layers to bring into the movement's ranks. Indeed, some of its original founders appear to have fallen into this category, according to Mrs Pethick-Lawrence who was "most interested to see" the membership of "the Hon Phyllis and the Hon Audrey Coleridge, daughters of the judge who had sentenced my husband, Mrs Pankhurst and myself in the conspiracy trial."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.128.

<sup>99</sup>*Votes for Women* 6th February 1914.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup>Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, p.303.

As I have demonstrated, the key to the survival of the VFWF locally lay in its fluid interpretation of the divisions between local societies, and its ability to allow individuals to bridge these divisions. Often, this was due to individual contacts and feminist friendships, but these were eased by a political perspective which raised the vote as a common aim above divisions based on tactics or affiliations of class or politics. Rather than present an opposition to the WSPU, the US was inspired by the success of such umbrella tactics, recognising that they were essential if the WSPU was not to be dismembered by an increasingly authoritarian state response to militancy. Whilst Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was keen to point out that she and her husband "had foreseen that the adoption of more drastic militant policy [would force] the WSPU into underground channels" she did not outrightly condemn the tactics.<sup>102</sup> Instead, she explained that the United Suffragists was essential as an aid to such tactics, as well as necessary for those constitutionalists who felt increasingly marginalised by their chosen methods of campaigning:

Now, it is absolutely essential to the welfare of the whole movement that as the militant section is driven underground there should arise a strong intermediate party, occupying a position between the revolutionary section and the party of peaceful persuasion - an intermediate party determined of front, strong of action, politically militant and ready if need be to challenge oppression - yet with a stable organisation that remains above ground and intact for constitutional agitation.<sup>103</sup>

The US was therefore an "intermediate suffrage party" intended to pursue similar work to the VFWF, but on a larger, and more co-ordinated scale.

Local branches of the US formed from its inception, but these initially remained London-centred. In Liverpool, the VFWF continued to meet. Although Dr Helena Jones

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<sup>102</sup>*Votes for Women*, 10th July 1914.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

visited the area in April 1914 and held a series of meetings in the name of the US, no local branch formed as a result. However, the VFWF began a vigorous campaign of open air public meetings in the Summer of 1914, and appears to have been developing stronger political aims than simply sharing fellowship and building a feminist paper, as a result of the US campaign nationally. Other Fellowship branches continued to meet throughout the country, mirroring the Liverpool pattern.

As I have observed, a coalition organisation could not continue indefinitely alongside the larger more vigorous suffrage societies. Aware of this, the United Suffragists underwent what amounted to a relaunch in the period from June to August 1914, when it was decided to pass *Votes for Women* over to the society. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, who was retaining editorship of the paper, also agreed that "the British section of the Votes for Women Fellowship will at the same time become merged [into the US]....to strengthen the great middle party of suffragists that is growing up to occupy the wide field that separates the revolutionary party from the party of pure propaganda."<sup>104</sup> This decision was taken some months earlier, at a time when nobody could have foreseen that August 1914 would be a significant date in suffrage history for another reason altogether, that of the outbreak of war.

The dislocating effect of war upon the many suffrage societies cannot be underestimated. Leah Leneman quotes one example in the observation of Scottish WFL member Eunice Murray who recalled "The WSPU....left all their organisers unpaid, several applied to me for help to get them to their various homes."<sup>105</sup> Added to this, the problematic

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<sup>104</sup>*Votes for Women*, 14th August 1914.

<sup>105</sup>Leneman, *A Guide Cause*, p.209.

nature of communications during wartime made any new initiative difficult to sustain. This may be one explanation why the US did not form a Liverpool branch until March 1915, although the VFWF kept meeting, and indeed met alongside it. The achievements of this branch will be covered in more detail in the final chapter.

### 7.8: Conclusion

This chapter shows the richness and diversity of the women's suffrage movement. The many different approaches and concerns of the organisations covered here evidence a broad range of concerns beyond the single-issue campaign for the franchise which was the *raison d'être* behind their formation. The advantage of a local study becomes obvious here, as it allows a far greater number of organisations to be studied and compared against each other over a period of time, in detail which would be impossible to reproduce at a national level.

Throughout these three chapters on suffrage, I have tried to move away from writing the type of suffrage history which simply concentrates on the more spectacular actions women took to achieve the franchise.<sup>106</sup> Although I have mentioned some fairly sensational local events, I have been more concerned with presenting the suffrage organisations as political organisations, with an agenda which placed the franchise alongside wider explorations of women's political role. At grass roots level, the main focus of this inquiry has been an attempt to interpret the success which organisations had at politicising women, through providing access to the public political sphere. Sometimes, the effect could be quite subdued, as in organisations such as the LWSS

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<sup>106</sup>See for example Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, Midge McKenzie, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, New York, Vintage Books, 1988, and Marian Ramelson, *Petticoat Rebellion: A Century of Struggle for Women's Rights*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1972.

which drew heavily on the ideology of separate spheres, and concentrated on providing special space for women within mainstream politics, where their 'superior influence' could be exercised to greatest effect. Here, women were still allotted a particular space within organisations which was seen as 'female' aside from the 'male' mainstream. Yet even this could be extremely radical in certain contexts, especially as in the church work shown in this chapter, or in the work of the CUWFA which succeeded in providing space for Conservative women, something the Primrose League had failed to do on Merseyside. On other occasions, the politicising effect of suffrage organisations was quite apparent, most obviously within the WSPU. This organisation removed the novel quality of women's public campaigning from the local political environment. From 1905 to 1914, women bedecked in WSPU colours became a familiar site on Merseyside streets, addressing crowds, selling papers, or utilising more novel methods to keep themselves in the public eye.

Together, the suffrage organisations drew unprecedented numbers of women into the public political sphere. Many of these women were new to any form of political activity. Others had previous experience within political parties or trades unions. For them, the suffrage years represented a period of time when they increased their public activity for new organisations, whilst attempting to retain loyalty to earlier ones. Working within organisations where women took all major positions and policy decisions showed clearly the inadequacies of other political organisations in this direction. However, the suffrage movement also allowed women to ignore these, by providing them with opportunities to carry out their own work elsewhere. Chapter Eight will examine some of the solutions attempted by women whose political loyalties were divided by their suffrage activism through a detailed examination of their work within

the Liberal and socialist parties during this time.

Although these chapters have highlighted the success suffrage organisations achieved in terms of increasing women's access to the public political sphere, they have done so on a rather short term basis. Their main focus has been between 1900 - 1914, or shorter in the cases of the organisations which did not form branches until 1910 or later. The key question which this thesis must demand of suffrage organisations is what opportunities they provided for women in the long term. This will be partly dealt with in Chapter Nine which will highlight the political experiences of Merseyside women during the First World War. There, the paradox of the collapse of the WSPU, undoubtedly the organisation which provided the greatest political opportunities for the largest number of women of those discussed here, will be considered. Also, the chapter will examine how strong the sex-class analysis was when placed under the pressure of wartime, and look at the extent to which women drifted back to groups based on class or religious similarities when faced with the harsh reality of a wartime economy. The later work of those suffrage organisations which continued during the war years will also be presented at this stage, to counter the impression that all suffrage work ended in August 1914, with the LWSS, US and especially the CWSS figuring largely.

Plate Ten



Nessie Stewart-Brown, leading Women's Liberal Federation member.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### LATER PARTY POLITICAL ACTIVITY, 1905 - 14

#### 8.1: Introduction

In Chapter Four, I examined the role played by women in Liverpool's political parties prior to 1905 and explained that the most obvious sites for women's activities were within the Liberal and socialist parties, the history of Conservative women being largely dealt with through their main organisation, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Four concluded in 1905, the year that the WSPU formed its first Liverpool branch. In this chapter, I will examine the roles played by women within the Liberal and socialist parties from 1905 - 14, as the WSPU and other suffrage organisations grew in the area. I will show how the increasing prominence of the suffrage question often forced women with political loyalties to make difficult choices between their personal wish for enfranchisement, and the official stances of their parties on this issue. This will be demonstrated both within the work of the local Women's Liberal Federation, which eventually split over the Liberal government's repeated attempts to avoid the issue in Parliament, and also within the socialist parties, where women attracted to the WSPU found themselves forced to make often painful choices between their allegiance to men and women of their own class within their party, and the WSPU directive that they cease from party political activity until the vote is won. As within previous chapters, the use of a local study will enable these choices to be closely highlighted, as well as drawing attention to occasions where individual women felt able to circumnavigate them, buoyed up by support networks of close friendships and political camaraderie,

rooted firmly within their locality.

8.2: "I am Tired of Working for Liberals when Liberals will do Nothing for Women"<sup>1</sup>

Liberal Party Women 1905 - 14

Earlier consideration of the activities of women in the Liverpool branches of the Women's Liberal Federation stopped in 1904, at a time when the party was declining locally, but paradoxically enjoying national ascendance. This situation was to continue for the next decade, covering what Waller explains as the "slide towards extinction of the Liberal Party in Liverpool...[until] even where no Labour candidate stood, it was in opposition to Labour-Socialism that a Conservative candidate principally addressed himself."<sup>2</sup> It is vital to remember this when examining the activities of women within the WLF. Not only did they have to retain support for a government which was increasingly at odds with their own political philosophies, they also had to ensure that they did nothing which could leave them open to accusations of furthering their party's local destruction. This retention of party loyalty became steadily more difficult for the Liverpool WLF as many of its leaders increased their links with, and work for suffrage organisations thus feeling most acutely the injustice of working for a party which more and more frequently acted as 'the enemy.'

By 1905, there were four WLF branches on Merseyside: Wavertree, West Toxteth, East Toxteth and the new branch at Birkenhead. Wavertree and West Toxteth were under the leadership of Mrs Stewart-Brown, and were to remain so for the next decade. The local association had just lost branches at Kirkdale and Walton, but was to form new

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs Charles Morrison, *Liberal Federation News*, November 1911.

<sup>2</sup>P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.230.

ones at Waterloo and West Derby by 1906. So for most of the period covered by this chapter, there were six active branches within the district, showing that the WLF was neither expanding nor contracting, but was retaining existing membership and developing a continuity of leadership.<sup>3</sup>

The WLF, as illustrated in Chapters Three and Four, provided direct political experience for its members. Women continued to stand for as Liberal candidates for election to the Board of Guardians. However, this often resulted in the WLF losing some of its best workers. In January 1905, for example, Miss Japp resigned the Chair of East Toxteth WLF "to the great regret of all, [due to] pressure of work" as a Guardian.<sup>4</sup> Yet although having a Guardian as a branch member often meant more work for other members, local Liberal women were extremely proud of their achievements in this direction. In October 1910, Mrs Ellis was presented with a bag, a purse and a cheque by her Association, West Toxteth, "in acknowledgement of her services to the Liberal Cause and of her valuable public work on the Board of Guardians during the last 20 years."<sup>5</sup> She also received a bouquet and a private presentation from her friend, Miss Brunner. This illustrates the different ways in which men and women within the Party viewed political work. Within the surviving Guardians' records, women leave the Board with no mention of their work by their male political comrades, excepting those rare occasions when they die in office, where etiquette demands a minuted tribute. The personal nature of the gifts and their presentation shows that women were more willing to be supportive of other women, and to publicly acknowledge political work through

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<sup>3</sup>There was also an intermittent branch at Wallasey, and two new branches, discussed below, which formed from a split in the WLF. See Appendices Five and Six.

<sup>4</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, January 1905.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, November 1910.

gifts which underlined their femininity.

Since the 1890s, local Liberal women had taken an active part in electioneering, a trend which continued to develop, and was highlighted within the pages of *Federation News*. This work was given an added edge with the 1907 decision that women could stand as candidates in Municipal elections. Liberal women felt a special pride in this decision, as Patricia Hollis explains:

Not only had a Liberal government been returned, but John Burns, long a sympathizer with the women's cause, had become President of the Local Government Board....[the Women's Local Government Society sent] their letter of congratulations to Burns....with....their prayer that local government would finally adopt their bill of allowing women to stand for all local authorities.<sup>6</sup>

Within Liverpool, a special effort was now made by the WLF to involve local women in municipal elections as the part of government in which they had both influence and equality. Resolutions had been sent to National Council by the area, demanding more votes for women in municipal elections.<sup>7</sup> Mrs Stewart-Brown was a staunch campaigner for the extension of women's role in municipal politics. She chose the subject of "qualification of women in local government elections" for her speech at the AGM of Wavertree WLA in October 1906, and devoted much of her campaigning to ensuring that women were registered in order to utilise their new powers fully, and also educated as to how to use them. Although increasingly involved in suffrage campaigns, as the next section will discuss, it was for Liberalism as much as for feminism that she desired these changes:

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<sup>6</sup>Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865 - 1914*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987, p.392.

<sup>7</sup>Waterloo AGM, 1906, proposed by Mrs Stewart-Brown. See *Women's Liberal Federation News*, October 1906.

Every step in advance which had been made to improve the condition of women had....been made by the Liberal Party. Conservative legislation had retarded their powers which had now been regained and enlarged under the Liberal government,<sup>8</sup>

she informed local women. Her views were supported by other prominent local WLF members such as Miss McConnell who addressed East Toxteth WLA on "Why women should work and vote in the Municipal Elections" in August 1908, and showed "how well the Liverpool women had voted, and the difference they made in Municipal elections."<sup>9</sup>

Yet although the local Liberal Party was willing to stand women candidates in Guardian's elections, and use the remarkable organisational talents of WLA members to further their own political ambitions, they were less willing to give women any opportunity to serve as councillors. And, when they did, they were seldom elected, often facing stiff opposition from Conservatives in Tory wards. The local Party marked women's eligibility to stand by selecting Miss Ellen Robinson and Miss Georgina Crosfield for West Derby ward in 1907. Both women failed. Occasional similar bids by women to secure election as Liberals were also unsuccessful. Whilst they received support from the wider Liberal media in the city, they were also promoted more for their novel than their political value, as this extract from the *Daily Post* regarding Miss Johnson's 1910 candidature for Abercrombey shows:

[She] was one of the little group of women who started the WLA in Abercrombey. She worked to obtain lady Poor Law Guardians when there were none in Liverpool....[she] is a good and ready speaker who can stand heckling as she has the facts at her finger ends....She suggested that....the appointment of female sanitary inspectors, and the inspection of lodging houses,.....and of unsanitary property were branches of municipal work which

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<sup>8</sup>Mrs Stewart-Brown to Wallasey WLA, 12th November 1907. *Women's Liberal Federation News*, December 1907.

<sup>9</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, September 1908.

called for some supervision on the part of women.<sup>10</sup>

The Liberal Party still adhered to its doctrines of separate spheres. Within Liverpool, with its long tradition of municipal duty amongst the leading families, women who had previously undertaken philanthropic work could extend the special qualities of their sex to advantage within the municipal arena. However, although comparisons were drawn between housekeeping and local government finance, areas such as the local budget were deemed to be outside their province.

Within this climate, some local women with Liberal sympathies attempted to secure independent election, as women rather than as Party members. The WLA was not as strict about this as the socialist parties, and there appears to have been no organisational pressure brought to bear upon women who wished to act in this way, or to support others who did via canvassing. In November 1908, Mrs Allan Bright, a loyal Party woman, informed Birkenhead WLA that;

at the next election it was to be hoped that some women would stand independently of Party Politics so that they could specifically look after the interests of women and children.<sup>11</sup>

In this instance, she was directly referring to attempts to elect WLA member Mrs MacIver to Birkenhead Council. Although the candidate failed, her campaign attracted support from local WLAs who clearly felt that their interests were not represented as thoroughly as they would wish by men of their own party.

The local WLAs continued to support independent women candidates, most famously through their work to aid Eleanor Rathbone's election as Liverpool's first woman

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<sup>10</sup>*Daily Post*. n.d. cutting from miscellaneous cuttings relating to the 1910 November municipal elections, Town Clerk's Cuttings Books, Liverpool Record Office.

<sup>11</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, January 1908.

councillor. So obvious were her WLA links, with Liberal PLG Miss Japp as her election committee secretary, that the *Conservative Courier* ran an article under the headline "Is Miss Rathbone Independent?" demanding;

if elected, will she remain a party to herself, or will she be officially counted amongst the Liberals? How is it that in the list of Liberal meetings sent [to us] Miss Rathbone's meetings are included? This significant recognition....is not consistent with [her] posing as an independent candidate.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst Eleanor Rathbone had strong Liberal links through family and upbringing, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Five, I believe it would be stretching a point to describe her as a Liberal. Indeed, on the matter of suffrage, she stood in advance of the party, stating as early as 1905 that it should become a test question at elections, and that she would exhort "all women workers to refuse to work for candidates who would not support the enfranchisement of women," a position the WLF was anxious to avoid.<sup>13</sup> Her strong support from the WLAs in Liverpool is explained through the personal networks she had built up in the NUWSS, and through the desire of many WLA members to ensure "that the interests of women should be directly represented by someone of their own sex."<sup>14</sup> In their strong desire for same sex representation, Liverpool's women Liberals continued to appropriate the language and ideology of separate spheres and use them for their own ends. Yet although their philanthropic sympathies led them occasionally to debate issues such as the position of women workers, the majority of their political work was carried out amongst women of their own class.<sup>15</sup> Bound by the conventions of this class, they were unable to move beyond

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<sup>12</sup>*Liverpool Courier*, 28th October 1910.

<sup>13</sup>Eleanor Rathbone to Wavertree WLA, *Women's Liberal Federation News*, March 1905.

<sup>14</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, election address for 1910 campaign, Rathbone Papers X1V. 3. 3, Liverpool University Library.

<sup>15</sup>The subject for discussion at West Toxteth AGM was "Women Workers in the East End of London." *Women's Liberal Federation News*, April 1911.

them to engage in behaviour which was seen as 'inappropriate' or 'unladylike.' This restricted the WLF, and it remained an organisation for Liverpool's middle classes, unable to extend beyond this by attracting a mass membership. As the suffrage question began to dominate local women's politics, this left the WLF somewhat marginalised, and whilst membership figures do not massively slump prior to the First World War, their lack of growth underlines the WLF's failure to capitalise on suffrage by attracting new layers of women members. Although there was a continuity of activity within the Liverpool WLAs between 1905-14, and they continued to offer political experience for women: but this was often limited because on occasions such as elections women had to compete directly with men.

#### 8.2.i: Liberal Women and the Suffrage Issue

From 1905 until the outbreak of war, the question of parliamentary franchise began to dominate the national WLF. This trend was replicated and augmented within the Liverpool branches. Partly its prominence came from the close links that developed between the WLAs and the local branch of the NUWSS, where there was a large overlap of membership. An additional factor came through the person of Nessie Stewart-Brown, who held prominent positions both in the WLF and the NUWSS throughout the period, and was involved in determining much of the national WLF policy on suffrage. This section, therefore, will concentrate on the way in which the WLAs reacted to the question of suffrage between 1905 - 14. It will argue against the contention of Claire Hirshfield that there was amongst "party affiliated women [a] willingness to subordinate the suffrage issue to party loyalty," by examining instances where support for suffrage caused women to prioritise their links with non-Liberal

women in suffrage organisations at the expense of their support for party policies.<sup>16</sup> And finally, it will argue that when the suffrage campaign was at its height, the opportunities it provided for women to gain access to the public political sphere by far exceeded those of any party political grouping, even when such opportunities were provided in the name of an organisation such as the WLA.

Claire Hirshfield sympathetically outlines the dilemma faced by many Liberal women following the electoral victories of 1905 and 1906:

With the Conservatives in power....there appeared no good reason for....the WLF to refrain from bashing the government at every opportunity for its failure to enact a suffrage bill. But the Liberal victory in the general election of 1905 and its landslide of 1906 confronted them....with an inescapable dilemma. To attack a Conservative government required little courage, but to turn their fire upon the Liberal Party which they had loyally served implied that gender must take precedence over politics, a choice too painful for many to make.<sup>17</sup>

Initially, Liverpool's WLA members attempted to keep up the pressure on their party. In February 1905, West Toxteth branch declared;

the committee firmly believes that the return of Liberalism means the securing of religious and personal liberty, a series of reforms for the benefit of the working-classes, and *above all the extension of the franchise to women.*<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Mrs Stewart-Brown was less keen to slacken the attacks on anti-suffrage MPs than Hirshfield believes a Liberal woman would be. Typical is this speech to Wallasey WLA, when she warned members to remember;

the necessity for Liberal women to work more energetically now that they had a government in power sympathetic to their aims. She said that they

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<sup>16</sup>Claire Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892 - 1914," *Gender and History*, vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 1990, pp.173-197.

<sup>17</sup>Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

<sup>18</sup>Mrs Ellis to West Toxteth AGM, 23rd February 1905. *Women's Liberal Federation News*, March 1905. My italics.

must not allow the government to go out of office before they had dealt with women's suffrage.<sup>19</sup>

In such perceptions, the local WLAs were not out of step with the national association. In November 1906, the EC decided to open up a special suffrage fund, and set up a scheme for suffrage work within the federation. It is likely that part of the impetus for this came in response to the rise in prominence of the WSPU. At the WLF AGM of 1906, Lady Carlisle had stressed that she wanted the Federation "to be disassociated in the public mind from those misguided zealots (militants)."<sup>20</sup> However, some WLF members were becoming increasingly attached to the WSPU as it appeared to be doing something for the cause, whilst their own government did less and less. Liverpool WLA members, whilst remaining publicly silent on the issue, must have been severely embarrassed by the scenes which greeted Campbell-Bannerman at the Sun Hall in January 1906. Having refused to answer suffrage questions in London in December 1905, he had pledged his intent "to deal with the question on an early date." The *Labour Leader* made good political capital from this. "As Liverpool is a stronghold of the Women's Movement, he will doubtless redeem this promise when he goes there on January 9th" it reported.<sup>21</sup> The meeting was interrupted, and women thrown out for asking "if the Liberal government will give us the vote."<sup>22</sup> This was the first outbreak of suffrage militancy in Liverpool, and the WLA must privately have queried whether their Prime Minister could have prevented it by answering the question for which he

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<sup>19</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, January 1907.

<sup>20</sup>Women's Liberal Federation Annual Report, 1906.

<sup>21</sup>*Labour Leader*, 29th December 1905.

<sup>22</sup>See *The Times*, 10th January 1906. Fuller descriptions also come in the local press for that date, and in Chapter Six.

must have been prepared.

The increase of militancy and the growth of the WSPU forced the WLF to tighten their suffrage policy. As I have previously indicated, Liverpool WLAs were deeply involved in these debates through the presence of Mrs Stewart-Brown on the EC. Unlike some of her fellow EC members who felt that the rise of the WSPU was "effecting a revolution which neither the Women's Suffrage Society nor the Women's Liberal Associations....have ever achieved," she initially felt it was ruining all she had worked for within her party.<sup>23</sup> In November 1907, she seconded an EC resolution which condemned both present disturbances at political meetings, and the subsequent banning from them of Liberal women. This was lost, an amendment condemning the banning of *all* women being passed, but Mrs Stewart-Brown's original motion underlines effectively where the main part of her opposition originated. A loyal party woman, she was progressing slowly through its ranks, sharing platforms with leading Liberals, and being the first woman elected to Liverpool Liberal Federal Council. The more that militancy became directed against the Liberal Party, through interruptions of meetings, and also through the election policy of the WSPU with its insistence that suffragettes should 'keep the Liberal out', the more marginalised women would become within the party. So great was the extent to which Mrs Stewart-Brown prioritised party loyalties over those of gender that she was still a voice of dissent when the WLA finally made suffrage a test question in 1908, holding to the belief that a Liberal woman should work for a selected party candidate, no matter what his stance on this issue.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Eva McLaren, quoted in Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

<sup>24</sup>Women's Liberal Federation Annual Report, 1908.

Within the Merseyside area, the NUWSS was taking over much of the ground traditionally worked by the WLF. As I have stated, much of the membership of the two organisations was shared, this becoming increasingly obvious at the level of management. Hence, of the twelve officer and secretary positions provided by Liverpool WLAs in 1909, a third were filled by women who were also active in the NUWSS. Mrs Stewart-Brown, whose prolific chairmanship (sic) of branches has been noted, was also active on the WLS EC, the EC of the Lancashire and Cheshire WLF federation, and the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of the NUWSS. Such duality of activity meant that despite frequent assertions that the Federation was not simply a suffrage organisation, it was increasingly becoming one. Indeed, by 1910, the Liverpool WLAs appear to have discussed little else but suffrage. The *Federation News* for this period notes the subject arising time after time, in many different guises. At Wavertree in June 1910, Mrs Solly (Mrs Stewart-Brown's sister, resident in South Africa), told the branch that she "regretted that the franchise had not been extended to the natives under the new government [in South Africa], although Cape Colony, as a whole was favourable to the step."<sup>25</sup> Miss E. C. Greene discussed suffrage when giving the vote of thanks to Eleanor Rathbone at East Toxteth in October 1910. John Lea, East Toxteth parliamentary candidate, informed the branch there that the ward "would have been won for the Liberals [in January] if women could vote," and by November, Wavertree WLA passed a resolution "pledging the association to try to assist in securing parliamentary candidates....who should be in favour of Women's Suffrage."<sup>26</sup> Such moves were bound to broaden the outlook of the Associations beyond party political issues. As suffrage increasingly dominated WLA meetings, the local branches helped to organise

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<sup>25</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, August 1910.

<sup>26</sup>All details of meetings from *Women's Liberal Federation News*, January - December 1910.

a large suffrage demonstration at St Georges' Hall in July 1910, joined by the ILP, the CUWFA and the NUWSS, and Mrs Edwards, socialist and Fabian activist, gave her "Spiritual Side of the Women's Movement" lecture to East Toxteth Branch in December 1910.

As Claire Hirshfield has demonstrated, the failure of successive Liberal governments to grant franchise extension caused increasing strain between the WLF and its parent party. Within Liverpool, dissent became apparent before the second general election of 1910, when Miss Greene had "begged suffragists to consider before they stood aside from Liberal work, not withstanding the bitter feeling roused by the non-passing of the Conciliation Bill."<sup>27</sup> At this stage, I would argue that the close ties between the Liverpool NUWSS and the WLAs made it easier for individual women involved in both organisations to avoid making a choice as to where their loyalties lay, allowing them to choose different sites for their activities. This may explain why it was not until November 1911 that Mrs Stewart-Brown gave the first public indication that she was losing patience. At a meeting at Wavertree Town Hall called to acknowledge the 16 years' service she had given the WLF, she offered no contradiction when Mrs Charles Morrison "said she was tired of working for Liberals when Liberals would do nothing for women, and she would no longer work for any political party until justice was done to women."<sup>28</sup> Mrs Morrison actually ran as a candidate in the Guardian's election the following March, so her public activity did not cease as dramatically as this threat indicates. Yet the public nature of the declaration should have served as a warning that even the most loyal women had tired of equivocating between their personal stance on

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<sup>27</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, November 1910.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, December 1911.

suffrage, and the official stance of the party whose name their association carried.

Mrs Stewart-Brown continued to oppose militancy at every possible opportunity, whilst supporting all measures to get Liberal MPs to vote for suffrage amendments. In January 1912, she used her position on the Liverpool Liberal Federal Council to move a motion supporting the attempts of Lloyd George to bring a women's suffrage amendment to the Manhood Suffrage Bill. Even when this failed, she continued to view the militant alternative as "the deplorable tactics of an extreme but small section of woman suffragists and [hope] that Liberal women would not on that account be any less active in furthering the Cause by constitutionalist means."<sup>29</sup> Her position was echoed locally by Mrs Jones who warned Waterloo WLA that "if some [suffrage] amendment is not incorporated....large numbers of Liberal women will be unable any longer to support the Liberal Party."<sup>30</sup>

Finally, in 1913, the Federation was unable to remain united. The Speaker's ruling which removed the latest attempts to get a Reform Bill through the Commons meant that "the loyalty of many women to the party was finally strained beyond repair."<sup>31</sup> More radical women in the party attempted to re-introduce a resolution to the WLF annual conference moved by Tunbridge Wells WLA, which stated that local WLAs should be mandated to withhold any assistance to anti-suffrage candidates.<sup>32</sup> The resolution

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<sup>29</sup>Mrs Stewart-Brown, "Presidential Address to the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations, 13th March 1912." *Women's Liberal Federation News*. April 1912.

<sup>30</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, December 1912.

<sup>31</sup>Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

<sup>32</sup>An initial attempt to pass this in 1912 had been defeated when the Liberal Cabinet, panicked by what in effect would be a strike of WLAs, decided to make a concession on the form of pledging support for the White Slave Traffic Bill, a pet concern of many prominent WLF members. For more details, see WLF Annual Report, 1912. Also Claire Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

failed, but its supporters responded by launching the Liberal Women's Suffragist Union, whose objective was "to educate Liberal women to work harder for suffragist Liberals and to refrain from working for anti-suffragist Liberals."<sup>33</sup> The LWSU was presented as a voluntary organisation, and membership did not necessarily entail leaving the WLF. However, through the Summer of 1913 there was a steady haemorrhage of WLAs from the WLF, with 68 associations, and 18,000 members leaving up to 1914.<sup>34</sup>

Nationally, Hirshfield informs us, many of the women who left the WLAs were drifting into the Labour Party as a natural home for radical suffragists, and the LWSU was considering following NUWSS electoral policy and offering help to individual Labour candidates. The scarcity of middle-class socialists on Merseyside made this an unlikely step for local Liberal women. Liverpool WLAs managed to avoid the choice between one party and another, through the close links which they had always maintained with the NUWSS. Hence, individual women were able to work for Labour candidates in elections by channelling their work directly through the NUWSS, and working as suffragists rather than as Liberals, a policy which does not appear to have caused them any difficulty, especially as they continued to work for Liberals who supported suffrage. There was also an alternative direction for their work through the auspices of the Women's Citizen's Associations, which have been discussed in the chapter on the NUWSS. Yet the suffrage tensions were not totally absent from the district. In June 1913, Mrs Stewart-Brown, one of the original opponents of making suffrage a test question, finally parted company with the official WLF position. In a letter addressed to all WLAs affiliated to the Lancashire and Cheshire Union, she announced her

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<sup>33</sup>Eleanor Acland, *Women's Liberal Federation News*, August 1913.

<sup>34</sup>Claire Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith."

resignation from the Presidency of that body, declaring "I cannot remain president of an organisation of Liberal women some of whom even now continue to work for anti-suffrage candidates, as I feel that by so doing they are retarding the advance of true Liberalism."<sup>35</sup> This was not, she was keen to explain, a final parting. "I shall continue to speak and work for Liberalism....my resignation does not mean that I am severing my connection with the party for which I have worked hard and unceasingly for twenty-five years. But I think I can now serve it better 'in a position of greater freedom and less responsibility.'<sup>36</sup> This was a coded way of expressing her desire to be free to criticise the party in public, which she was to do quite effectively within the pages of *Common Cause*.

Mrs Stewart-Brown did not simultaneously resign her Chairmanships of Wavertree, Waterloo or West Toxteth WLAs. Indeed, she was reelected to all of these in 1914, indicating branch approval of her actions, although approval was not unanimous. Organised opposition to her call for a more progressive policy came mainly from Mrs Robert Durning Holt, and her supporters within the West Derby Women's Liberal Association. Mrs Holt retained the Presidency of this association, and also inaugurated Liverpool Central Women's Liberal Association in May 1914. This attracted fifty members, "its membership open to all Liberal women who approve of the policy in assisting the Liberal Party in the constituencies without exacting a pledge to support women's suffrage or refusing to assist the candidate if her were unwilling to give such a pledge."<sup>37</sup> A similar branch was formed in Wavertree Garden Suburb, attracting

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<sup>35</sup>*Women's Liberal Federation News*, July 1913.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, June 1914.

thirty-two women. It is likely that many of these came from Mrs Stewart-Brown's three branches, as their combined membership fell by 81 from 390 in 1913 to 309 in 1914, this figure almost matching the total membership for the two new branches.<sup>38</sup> Yet the numbers who remained by far outweighed the numbers leaving, suggesting that the majority of Liverpool's women Liberals were no longer willing to subordinate the demands of their gender to the ambitions of their party.

As the few historians who have studied the WLF in any depth have been quick to notice, one of the things which differentiates the association from its contemporary the Primrose League is the way in which it provided women with an opportunity to organise autonomously in associations which were inaugurated, staffed and run by other women. Indeed, this distinction was particularly strong within Merseyside, where the stress on working-class Toryism through the working men's clubs had resulted in the League's official positions being taken by men. Yet as an auxiliary organisation to a political party whose parliamentary wing was wholly male, the WLF was forced increasingly to make compromises. Initially, women such as Mrs Stewart-Brown, who had gained much public political experience through her work for the Federation, were willing to make these compromises. The WSPU was not an option for them, due to its persistent attacks on the government, whilst the NUWSS, with whom they had close involvement, offered little of significant difference in the way of experience. It was the constant failure of Liberal MPs to deliver on the suffrage question which finally forced Liberal women in Liverpool to abandon blind party loyalty in favour of suffrage work. Even on this they preferred to direct their work through the WLAs whenever they could, altering rather than abandoning the associations which they had painstakingly built over

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<sup>38</sup>All figures drawn from WLF Annual Reports. See Appendix Six.

the past two decades.

### 8.3: Socialist Women and the Suffrage Challenge

More than the WFL, the socialist parties found themselves challenged by the emergence of the WSPU. Their model of organisation for women, which saw sex as analogous to class, was deeply threatened by the sex-class analysis of the WSPU which allowed women to set their own political agendas. In this section, I will look in detail at how socialist parties were affected by this challenge. I will also demonstrate how in Liverpool the socialist roots of the WSPU, often presented as transient by historians, were deep reaching, and possessed undeniable longevity.

Liverpool's socialist culture outlined in Chapter Four continued to flourish in the years leading up to the outbreak of war, although its history between 1905 and 1914 cannot be classified as continually ongoing. Socialism gained its first municipal electoral successes during this time, although a parliamentary seat remained elusive, and some municipal losses followed. The ILP, Fabian Society and Trades Council continued to grow, along with independent societies and Clarion groups. The Transport Strike of 1911 established syndicalism within the city, and it became a stronghold of the newly formed British Socialist Party, successor to the SDF, which formed a significant national challenge to the ILP in the years immediately prior to the First World War.

Women continued to find space within these groups, broadly within the areas of education, agitation and organisation outlined in Chapter Four. However, the emergence of the WSPU from within the ILP was to offer them further alternative sites for their activity. Whilst historians as diverse as Andrew Rosen and Jill Liddington have

acknowledged the shared roots of the ILP and WSPU, both feel that such links were soon abandoned to attain greater political independence for the latter.<sup>39</sup> David Mitchell even goes so far as to claim that the WSPU, whilst recruiting "mostly working-class supporters" at its initial meeting, aimed for political independence from the start.<sup>40</sup>

Recently Sandra Holton has challenged the totality of such separation, stating;

there is some evidence....that provincial branches of the WSPU often continued to work closely with their local ILP despite [Christabel who] increasingly sought to disassociate the WSPU from Labour politics.<sup>41</sup>

Holton also believes that further local studies will provide fuller understanding of these links, something my work on Merseyside confirms.<sup>42</sup>

Liverpool socialists first saw the WSPU as part of the ILP. In November 1903, they could read in Julia Dawson's Women's Column in *The Clarion* that "some women members of Manchester ILP have formed a committee for the promotion of women's suffrage."<sup>43</sup> A letter from Rachel Scott in the same edition gives more details, and firmly locates the WSPU within the ILP. Some prominent ILP members were hostile to the new movement, notably John Bruce-Glasier, who warned that faced with the "miserable individualist sexism" of the Pankhursts, "the ILP will not stir a finger more than it has done for all the woman suffragists in Christendom."<sup>44</sup> Opposition also came

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<sup>39</sup>See Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper, 1864 - 1946*, London, Virago, 1984, p.140, and Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 - 1914*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p.30 for their interpretations of these links.

<sup>40</sup>David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, London, Macdonald and Janes, 1977, p.48.

<sup>41</sup>Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.36.

<sup>42</sup>Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.163, note 28.

<sup>43</sup>*The Clarion*, 13th November 1903.

<sup>44</sup>John Bruce-Glasier, diary, 18th October 1902. Glasier Papers 1.2, Liverpool University Library.

in Liverpool, notably from local anti-suffrage ILP member Herbert Rose who declared that he was "sorry to see some of our foremost men lending themselves to a movement which is opposed in every way to democracy" by supporting the WSPU's call for the franchise on the same basis as it was awarded to men.<sup>45</sup> However, Rose was not typical. Many of the Liverpool leaders supported the WSPU, and his criticism is directed as much at them as at national figures. Support also came from Julia Dawson. She later switched to a pro-adult suffrage stance, but initially found much to praise in the WSPU, especially in its Women's Charter. She felt all socialist women should support its call to "boldly assert their claim to an equal share with men in the results of the labour struggle."<sup>46</sup>

The socialist press first presented the WSPU as a Manchester movement, to receive national support rather than membership. In January 1904, having covered many WSPU activities, Julia Dawson still referred correspondents interested in suffrage to the London Central Society for Women's Suffrage. Liverpool women were ideally situated for close contact with the WSPU. Christabel Pankhurst first spoke in Liverpool in March 1904, addressing Central ILP on "Labour Representation for Women." She was followed by Teresa Billington, who addressed a series of meetings on subjects such as "Women and Economics" following the 1905 ILP congress in Liverpool. These assured local women that the ILP would provide the political emancipation they sought, the *Labour Leader* reporting that at one of them;

half the audience consisted of ladies who were greatly delighted by the vision of the future for women depicted as issuing inevitably from the

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<sup>45</sup>*The Labour Leader*, 27th January 1905.

<sup>46</sup>*The Clarion*, 1st January 1904.

tendency of the time.<sup>47</sup>

It is likely that many of the early contacts came through ILP activist Alice Morrissey.<sup>48</sup> She was friendly with the Pankhursts and Hannah Mitchell, and her name was soon to become synonymous with suffrage in Liverpool.<sup>49</sup> Yet within the ILP, although she was to hold several senior positions, including the post of secretary for 1907 - 8, and representing the organisation on the LRC, the first woman to sit on this body, much of her public recognition came for secondary roles. In a series of detailed articles which charted a resurgence of ILP activity within Liverpool in the early 1900s, the *Labour Leader* enthusiastically reported:

The Socialist Socials, held on Sunday evenings....[which] have been the means of securing a large number of new members for the party....The thanks of the members of the branch are due to Mrs Morrissey and the committee of ladies who have looked after the creature comforts of the members and friends.<sup>50</sup>

Whilst such activities took on a political dimension when carried out in the name of the ILP, they can hardly be said to offer women a distinct role within the political world, or to offer a critique of, or challenge to Edwardian concepts of gender divisions. Rather, they reflect a continuation of the auxiliary role that women were so often forced into by the socialist parties, as shown in Chapter Four.

Alice Morrissey left the LWSS in 1905, claiming that no woman socialist could consider

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<sup>47</sup>*Labour Leader*, 10th February 1905

<sup>48</sup>See Appendix Ten for biographical details on Mrs Morrissey.

<sup>49</sup>For details of her friendship with WSPU leaders, see Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, London, Virago, 1987 edition, first published 1968. To illustrate the extent to which she was identified with suffrage in Liverpool, see *Porcupine*, 19th January 1907, which remarked that during a large political meeting held in Liverpool, "even Mrs Morrissey refrained from speaking on the equality of the sexes."

<sup>50</sup>*Labour Leader*, 21st April 1905.

"remaining in such an undemocratic, middle-class body."<sup>51</sup> Closer links between the WSPU and the ILP allowed women active in both bodies to take suffrage work as the main focus of their socialist work. This was certainly the case with Mrs Morrissey, whose appearances on public platforms for the WSPU were complimented by her frequent addresses to ILP branches on "Women's Enfranchisement."<sup>52</sup> She was often joined by other women socialists such as Mary Bamber, who found that speaking on suffrage, which was becoming an increasingly debated issue within the socialist movement, allowed them a public platform which was not as readily available to them when they attempted to speak on other issues. For Mary Bamber, suffrage, which she always supported from the sidelines, never became a main political priority.<sup>53</sup> However, her gender allowed her public space within the movement to speak on this issue, and once introduced as a speaker through the medium of suffrage, she was soon addressing meetings on other issues.<sup>54</sup> Other women retained their socialist activities whilst becoming more prominent within the WSPU. Mrs Morrissey continued as ILP secretary, and rep. on the LRC. Yet her main appearances at ILP meetings, along with other socialist suffragettes like Emma Hillier, Hattie Mahood and Patricia Woodlock, were to debate and obtain support for the suffrage issue.

This was soon to prove to be a double-edged sword. The WSPU offered these women activists more than the ILP was doing, in that it gave them a chance to select their own

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<sup>51</sup>*Ibid*, 21st April 1905. For details of her departure from the LWSS, see Chapter Five.

<sup>52</sup>See weekly listings columns of *The Clarion* and *The Labour Leader* for more detail.

<sup>53</sup>See Bessie Braddock's descriptions of her childhood involvement with the suffrage movement, which met with her mother's approval. Bessie Braddock & Jack Braddock, *The Braddocks*, London, Macdonald & Co, 1963.

<sup>54</sup>She was the only woman to address Liverpool's May Day Rally of 1907.

agenda, and guaranteed them space as speakers, whilst within the ILP they always had to compete with men. As far into the WSPU campaign as March 1907, the *Labour Leader* was continuing to praise Mrs Morrissey, not for her work as ILP secretary, or for her activities amongst the fledgling Women's Co-op Guilds in Liverpool, but for her skill with "catering arrangements."<sup>55</sup> By contrast, the WSPU acknowledged her as an agitator, orator, organiser, and for her two terms of imprisonment, a martyr. Historians of the early suffrage movement state that events of the Cockermouth by-election of April 1906, where Christabel Pankhurst publicly distanced the WSPU from the ILP campaign, excluding Mary Gawthorpe from WSPU platforms until she refrained from speaking on ILP platforms, posed stark questions of loyalty for women such as Mrs Morrissey. From this time they either supported WSPU policy and refrained from party political activity until after the vote was won, or retained their party loyalties, hence making themselves ineligible for WSPU membership.<sup>56</sup> I have argued within Chapter Six that this policy had the result of freeing women to prioritise gender concerns, whilst also leading to an electoral policy which was clearer than that of other suffrage bodies. Whilst still holding to this argument, I now wish to use the early WSPU career of Alice Morrissey to demonstrate that for women who felt their suffrage and their socialism to be so tightly bound together as to be indivisible, another alternative was possible; they could simply ignore the pressures, and continue as activists within two organisations.

The most specific example of such a path being followed on Merseyside can be seen in the activities surrounding the Kirkdale by-election of September 1907. The close-run contest between Boilermakers' secretary John Hill and Unionist Charles M'Arthur came

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<sup>55</sup>*Labour Leader*, 6th March 1907.

<sup>56</sup>See Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, pp.70, 85.

at a time when Labour was buoyant following national by-election successes, and rising in municipal politics. The 'names' of the socialist movement who appeared at some of the hundred open air meetings, such as Henderson and MacDonald, "designated this the biggest fight in Labour's history," and clearly expected victory.<sup>57</sup> Officially there was no work for WSPU members to do in this contest, no government candidate being involved, but socialist women found opportunities for public political work as the *Labour Leader* explained:

Much good and useful work has been done by women. Mrs Bruce Glasier in particular...was one of the most effective speakers taking part...Other women workers who assisted by addressing meetings were Mrs Morrissey, Mrs Cooper, Mrs Cobden-Sanderson and Mrs Bamber....In canvassing and other necessary work in connection with the contest the women workers were [also] very much in evidence.<sup>58</sup>

The *Leader* used the presence of Mrs Morrissey as a stick with which to beat the newly formed Women's Freedom League which had stated that its founders trusted neither "Liberal, Tory or Labour politicians."<sup>59</sup> The paper proclaimed;

we know of many hitherto members of the WSPU who are resolved to work definitely with the ILP for the return of labour members pledged to support their cause. The presence of Mrs Cobden-Sanderson and Mrs Morrissey on Mr Hill's platform this week is an indication of this fact.<sup>60</sup>

What it was unable to predict at this stage was the extent to which these 'hitherto' members would be able to retain their connections with both organisations. Throughout 1907, Liverpool ILP branches had hosted many WSPU socialists as speakers. Miss Labouchere, a founder Liverpool WSPU member and daughter of one of Liverpool's

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<sup>57</sup>Cited by Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism* p.233. For details of the optimistic atmosphere surrounding the campaign, see John Bruce Glasier, letter to Elizabeth Glasier-Fraser, 20th September 1907. Glasier Papers 1.i. 1907/18, Liverpool University Library.

<sup>58</sup>*Labour Leader*, 27th September 1907.

<sup>59</sup>*Labour Leader*, 27th September 1907.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.* As I have noted in Chapter Six, Mrs Morrissey was not a 'hitherto' member, but retained WSPU connections despite her work for Hill.

first socialists, spoke at Wavertree on "The Relation of the ILP to Women's Suffrage" in February. Patricia Woodlock told of her "Experiences in Holloway" in July, and Australian suffragette Mrs Martel addressed the Clarion Club in the Summer.

This material indicates that whilst WSPU links with the ILP may have slackened nationally as the Union grew, in local areas it was possible for them to remain, often through individuals whose deep-rooted joint loyalties allowed them to retain its original socialist perspectives. Militancy, the multi-faceted suffrage phenomenon discussed in detail in Chapter Six, provides one explanation as to why so many of Liverpool's socialists continued to support the WSPU. As Chapter Four has shown, public militancy was always a tradition within Liverpool socialism. This continued in this later period, when WSPU militancy often reflected socialist actions. Originally many ILP members supported suffrage militancy, agreeing with Katharine Bruce-Glasier that it;

carried many leagues forward the claim of woman's right to share in all the greater and deeper efforts for the uplifting of mankind.<sup>61</sup>

On Merseyside many early acts of suffrage militancy were committed by socialist women. Alice Morrissey's first arrest was in June 1906 when she and her husband were ejected for heckling at a Liberal rally in Manchester. The *Labour Leader* made much of this attack on two prominent socialists. However, whilst such support began to wane nationally as WSPU militancy increased, it was always forthcoming from Liverpool socialists. In January 1912, John Edwards, on opening the WSPU's new offices, reminded his audience that "since the advent of militancy, the suffrage movement [has]

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<sup>61</sup>*Labour Leader*, 1st January 1909.

improved by leaps and bounds."<sup>62</sup> Helen Jollie, the organiser who invited him, continued to cement links between the WSPU and local socialism until the outbreak of war. Complaining to socialists of the City Council's refusal to hire Picton Hall for suffrage meetings as the WSPU was not 'respectable,' she declared "respectability [has] never been the claim of any reformer of any age," echoing the earliest sentiments of local socialists.<sup>63</sup> Less militant suffrage societies received less sympathetic coverage from Liverpool's socialist press. Covering an NUWSS meeting in January 1914 at which Conservative suffragist Cecily Leadley-Brown claimed "that the Tory Working Men's Associations were in earnest about women getting the vote," the *Liverpool Forward* mocked her position;

the audience politely refrained from smiling, [but] now Miss Leadley-Brown has mentioned the fact, we shall be aware and look out for it.<sup>64</sup>

However, as previously hinted, there was a negative side to this. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, the WSPU in Liverpool extended far beyond an ILP auxiliary organisation. Socialist women who did retain their political involvement whilst active in the WSPU found the latter increasingly took up more of their time and energy as they were not restricted to a small part of its work. Increasingly, the dual work they undertook developed a single focus, and their activities within the socialist groups were undertaken as suffragettes. So Alice Morrissey's appearances for the ILP became increasingly limited to suffrage topics. Similarly, on the Trades Council, Miss Hackey, TC delegate and WSPU activist developed a high profile through moving suffrage motions. Hence she was perceived on the Council not as a woman trade unionist of as

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<sup>62</sup>*Liverpool Forward*, 17th January 1913.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid*, 7th March 1913.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid*, 9th January 1914.

a delegate of her members, but as a suffragette, despite the fact that the WSPU had no affiliate status to the TC. As general support by local socialists for the WSPU increased public political activities for women within socialism, it paradoxically contributed to their continued marginalisation. Women had been "women comrades," restricted as caterers or collectors. Now they added socialist suffragette to their list of roles, again remaining slightly apart from full party activity.

One possible antidote to this may have come through the development of a strong women's section in Liverpool. However, as Sam Davies has recently revealed, by the inter-war period "the organisation of [Labour] women in the city was not well advanced," and it was not until the mid 1920s that Women's Sections began to develop in the city.<sup>65</sup> The Women's Labour League, predecessor of these, had no presence within Liverpool, excluding a branch at Edge Hill which only survived for a matter of months in 1913-14.<sup>66</sup> There was initial hostility from within the ILP to the idea of a Women's Labour League, many being afraid;

that the new organisation will hurt the ILP or will take away the energies of the women from the work they are already doing side by side with the men.<sup>67</sup>

Within Liverpool, the women who would have been obvious candidates for dividing their political energies between mixed socialist activities and work for the Women's Labour League were already deeply involved in the WSPU, making work in a third

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<sup>65</sup>Sam Davies, "Class, Religion and Gender: Liverpool Labour Party and Women, 1918 - 1939" in John Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790 - 1940*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1992, p.219.

<sup>66</sup>Christine Collette, *For Labour and For Women: The Women's Labour League, 1906 - 18*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989, Appendix 2. See also *Liverpool Forward*, December 1912.

<sup>67</sup>Margaret MacDonald in *Labour Leader*, 16th March 1906.

organisation both unnecessary and largely impossible. By contrast, the Women's Labour League enjoyed limited success at Wallasey where Claire Stallybrass formed a branch in 1906 which remained active until the League's demise.<sup>68</sup> Unusually amongst Merseyside socialists, Mrs Stallybrass was convinced of the necessity for anti-militancy, and believed in adult rather than woman suffrage. She therefore channelled her suffrage work through the NUWSS. The lower levels of public activity achieved by NUWSS members locally, as described in Chapter Five, possibly allowed her more time to devote to WLL activities. That other active Wirral socialist women Helah Criddle and Hattie Mahood do not appear to have undertaken activities for the WLL, focusing their work through other socialist groups and the WSPU would appear to support this. So whilst the WSPU and the WLL were by no means hostile to each other, they were incompatible on Merseyside, the former leaving little free time for women who might otherwise have found a political home in the latter. Within the WSPU, socialist women found a natural home. They were able to retain the political perspectives they developed through socialism using militant techniques such as rowdy street corner meetings. Their continued joint socialist activity shows that their class perspective also remained an important part of their work. However, the WSPU gave them the opportunity to prioritise gender issues, often by working with women of a different class or political affiliation. More importantly, it also allowed women to completely set their own agenda, to determine the direction of an organisation and to take all its official positions. Within the WSPU they no longer had to compete with men for positions, as continued to be the case within the socialist groups.

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<sup>68</sup>Collette, *For Labour and for Women*, Appendix 2.

#### 8.4: Women Socialists Within Their Parties

The rise of the WSPU gave women another role within socialism. However, not all of Liverpool's women socialists became active suffragettes. For some women, although they never publicly criticised the WSPU, socialism remained the entire focus of their political work. As in the earlier period, they continued to struggle against male perceptions and definitions of their political role, but set against the fuller range of opportunities provided for women by suffrage organisations, this contrast became increasingly marked. The socialist view of women which refused to see anything in the position of their gender other than a parallel with class oppression, was becoming increasingly less attractive to women who looked to socialism to provide emancipation through political activity. A marvellous example of the local socialist view of women can be found in this extract from the *Labour Leader*. The paper recounts events surrounding an accident to a workman outside St Georges' Hall:

...a pretty girl [came] forward to see if she could be of any assistance....The ambulance was late....and the working men....started grumbling 'if he was a rich man they would have sent something soon'  
The girl, who had....shown her sympathy looked the speaker bravely in the face.  
'Just remember this accident and what you have now said when the elections come round' she said gently. 'Vote for the Labour Party and the Socialists, and turn the men out who are responsible for making the workers wait.'<sup>69</sup>

This was the sort of role socialism offered local women. The girl, whose attractiveness is her main feature, appears as a ministering angel from the crowd, and tends the wounded man. Her public speaking comes in a gentle tone, and she is applauded for her bravery in daring to address the men at all. Her socialism is a natural extension of her nurturing femininity.

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<sup>69</sup>*Labour Leader*, 20th September 1907.

Such ideal versions of socialist womanhood permeate the language of Liverpool socialism through this period. In 1912, local socialist organisations again began a joint publication, *The Liverpool Forward*, which had a "Woman's World Column" as a regular feature. The content of this column received outraged criticism from local women, including Miss Norton, who wrote:

Surely there is some mistake. The woman's column! Mock turtle soup! Velvet soup! Sponge cake! It can't be that the writer thinks he has catered properly for women's needs.<sup>70</sup>

Whilst D. Mason added:

Why this implied restriction of woman's sphere?...Do not give subtle encouragement to the tradition that the world of thought, of politics, is a world where women have no place.<sup>71</sup>

The column slightly modified its content as a result of such criticism. However, the fact that the criticism was necessary indicates that women continued to be marginalised within socialism, despite their efforts within the parties.

Such ideology continued to have resonance in the opportunities socialism offered women for public political activity. I have already commented on the restriction of topics offered to women speakers at this time. Practical experience was also limited. With the exception of Alice Morrissey, women appear to have taken no high profile office even in the smaller socialist branches.<sup>72</sup> This is repeated by the new British Socialist Party, active on Merseyside from 1911. It had managed to build seven branches before appointing two women, Hetty Myer and Mary Claire, to the relatively lowly positions of literature secretary and lecture secretary for Liverpool East branch. The BSP was at

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<sup>70</sup>*Liverpool Forward*, 11th May 1912.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid*, 18th May 1912.

<sup>72</sup>*The Labour Leader* and *The Clarion* carried fairly regular lists of ILP, SDF and Socialist Society branch secretaries.

odds with many other local socialists. They had taken over Kensington Socialist Society, and were referred to as "our opponents" by members of the Clarion Club.<sup>73</sup> Yet on the question of woman's public political role, the party appears to be in step with other local groups, and did not offer anything new

The majority of socialist actions by women in this period appear to have been on the periphery of party activity, channelled through non-aligned socialist societies or groups. Kensington Socialist Society had attempted to form a woman's circle in January 1911, and this met with initial success, although it faded by October, when the Society was taken over by the BSP. More significant was the woman's group which met at the local Clarion Café from 1906. The Café had been relaunched in that year as part of an attempt to enlarge the local Clarion Club. Julia Dawson was quick to point out to local women that;

woman is....just as much a part of society as man is and ought to be treated as such. Which will I trust be regarded as a general invitation to the women of Liverpool to help in any work undertaken by the club, and to make use of it.<sup>74</sup>

Socialist women began meeting in the club on Tuesday afternoons. Following approaches by a Ladies Committee, it was agreed to half the subscription rates for women wishing to use the Café as a club from 1s to 6d, reflecting their lower economic status. This appears to have helped to attract members, and the Tuesday meetings, which consisted of a formal paper from 3pm, and tea at 4pm ran for a number of years. The subjects provided by the club were wide-ranging. In 1908, for example, papers included Mary Bamber on "The Feeding of School Children," Margaret Bondfield on

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<sup>73</sup>*The Clarion*, 24th November 1911.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid*, 21st December 1906.

"Woman's Place in Social Evolution" and Hattie Mahood on "The Licensing Bill." The speakers were not always socialists. Miss Chubb, of the NUWSS, delivered a paper on "Economic Competition between Men and Women."<sup>75</sup> However, despite the wide range of topics, the Clarion Club still placed restrictions on women's participation. The papers were all from invited speakers, who were all established as public speakers through other organisations. The Club does not appear to have encouraged women to take the first steps into public speaking on its platforms. Also, all the meetings were small, and indoor. Whilst the club allowed women to tackle a broader range of subjects than usually came their way, the opportunity to discuss them was reserved for those who were free to attend on Tuesday afternoons.

The Fabian society allowed women more space than any of the other socialist organisations, if they were willing to work in the role of educators. As Chapter Four indicates, women always enjoyed equal membership to men within the Liverpool Fabian Society. Yet they never achieved the same numerical strength as men, nor an equal representation on the local executive.<sup>76</sup> As with other socialist groups, Liverpool's Fabian women lived within rigidly defined gender boundaries, as this extract from the 1909-10 Annual Report shows:

Women members are doing quiet and good work as members of 'After-Care Committees' for feeble minded children, voluntary relief committees, and in promoting and strengthening the life and work of women both as wage earners and mothers. There is a large untilled field of women's work in many directions which would be at once socially helpful and helpful to this society, and an extension of activities of this character is earnestly looked for

This was not all lip service. The seventh tract published by Liverpool Fabian Society

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<sup>75</sup>All details of meetings taken from *The Clarion*.

<sup>76</sup>See Liverpool Fabian Society, Annual Reports.

was on *Women Voters and Municipal Elections*, and they did "target women of all classes" within it. However, little was done outside of this, and it appears to have been largely up to individual Fabian women to push for a wider role. For those who did manage to transcend the definitions of women's work within the society, its particular form of education could offer them the opportunity of public political involvement on an unprecedented scale.

The Clarion Club used educational meetings as a way of promoting fellowship between socialists, but for Fabians, education was paramount. As advocates for socialism, the Society was most concerned with providing expert speakers on particular subjects. This resulted in women being able to lay claim to certain areas as exclusively theirs, due to their gender. An examination of the subjects covered by women speakers indicates this, and shows that other external factors affected their position within the society.

From 1909-10, there were a total of one hundred and fifty six Liverpool Fabians, of whom thirty-six were women. However, out of a list of seventeen lecturers, only two were women, highlighting the difficulties women had in achieving prominence even at a local level. The two women concerned, Mrs Billinge and Mrs ME Edwards, between them gave 18 out of the society's 81 lectures that year, a total of 14.58%. Both were well advanced in local Fabian and socialist circles. Mrs Billinge was an early woman member of the Liverpool FS EC. She was also active in the Labour Party. Mrs Edwards was the second wife of John Edwards, Fabian Society President and ILP co-founder. She was Dutch, and had translated John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* into her native language.<sup>77</sup> Mrs Edwards was also a suffrage activist, although she

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<sup>77</sup>See her own entry in Fabian Summer School's visitors' book, Summer 1912.

joined no organisation until linking with the United Suffragists in the war. The range of groups which she and Mrs Billinge addressed show how the Fabian Society provided a wide audience for those women who were active in its ranks, and allowed them to present themselves as political activists at a variety of locations. Evidence from the next years shows that as the Society advanced, so did its women. By 1911-12, 26 of the 143 lectures given, (37.18%) were by Mrs Edwards and Mrs Billinge. By this stage, the subjects they took were broadening out. Mrs Edwards tackled "Edward Carpenter", previously a topic of her husband's, and Mrs Billinge spoke on "Organisation." However, the traditional gender view of issues resulted in Mrs Billinge also adding "Motherhood" to her repertoire, whilst Mrs Edwards looked at "The Driving Force of the Women's Movement."

So in the field of education, the Fabian Society's view of itself as a facilitator for the broader socialist movement, supplying expert speakers on certain subjects, led to its providing real opportunity for political activity for those women who were willing or able to become speakers. Sometimes lack of self-confidence could hold the women back. In a directory of Fabian Speakers in Liverpool, one woman stated that she was only willing to address small societies.<sup>78</sup> Yet, as socialist women involved in the WSPU discovered, the role of subjects which they were allowed to attempt remained at best limited.

### 8.5: Conclusion

Both Liberal and Socialist politics continued to provide an important arena for women's political activity on Merseyside in the years up to the First World War. However, I

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<sup>78</sup>Circular from Liverpool Fabian Society, Fabian Society Papers, Nuffield College, Oxford.

would argue that both failed to meet the challenge posed by the rise of suffrage organisations in the region in different ways. Liberal women faced an uncomfortable paradox, attempting to retain support for a government which was increasingly dismissing their own demands for equality. As women active in party politics, the public denial of their right to full equality by their male leaders placed unbearable demands upon their loyalties, and made it virtually impossible for them to attract the support of women newly politicised through suffrage. Socialist women were finding the sex-class analysis of the WSPU (which gave them political control) much more attractive than the position of their own party which claimed to see gender oppression as equal to class oppression, but increasingly subordinated the former to the latter. The more they became involved with the WSPU, the more their marginalisation within socialism was thrown into stark relief.

As suffrage organisations continued to expand in the city, it is unlikely that women loyal to either political party could continue to ignore their growth indefinitely. However, the outbreak of the First World War radically altered this political picture. The largest suffrage organisation locally collapsed, whilst the smaller groups rapidly altered the main focus of their work. Political parties faced different challenges both locally and nationally, as the war altered local and national government. Women within these parties shared in these challenges, and continued to develop their work, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Plate Eleven



Women Workers marching to a lion in the Park, Manchester, 1917.

Women war workers at Birkenhead, being reviewed by Lloyd George  
and Women's Party 'General' Flora Drummond, September 1917.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE WAR

#### 9.1: Introduction

Previous chapters have ended abruptly in August 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War. Whilst part of the aim of this chapter is to argue the case for a certain continuity in women's political activity during the war years, a continuity which followed the gradual development of such activities outlined in earlier chapters, the war's effects cannot be denied. For a port such as Liverpool, this effect was immediate. The docks saw their share in national imports rise from 25% in the three years before the war to 33% in 1915 - 20.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of troops poured into the city, causing worries about the morality of local girls, and murmurings of the need for a new Contagious Diseases Act. Some 13,500 locals fell victim to the war.<sup>2</sup> Many more joined the fighting, leaving vast gaps in the local labour force, often filled by women. The "wider range of occupations available and higher rates of pay" meant that the local female workforce was loath to go back into traditional areas such as service in 1918.<sup>3</sup> The occasional sightings of German submarines less than five miles off the coast gave war a certain immediacy on Merseyside.<sup>4</sup> The sinking of the *Lusitania*, which precipitated anti-German riots throughout England, had a harsher edge as most of the crew who went down with the ship were local. Even the most violently chauvinistic

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<sup>1</sup>P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.271.

<sup>2</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.270.

<sup>3</sup>Pat Thane, *The Foundations of the Welfare State*, Longman, London, 1982, p.126. See Chapter Five "The First World War and After" for further details of this.

<sup>4</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, Chapter 16.

Merseysiders would have agreed with Rosa Luxemburg's observation that it was;

a foolish delusion to believe that we need only live through the war, as a rabbit hides under the bush to await the end of a thunderstorm, to trot merrily off in his old accustomed gait when all is over. The world war has changed the conditions of our struggle, and has changed *us* most of all.<sup>5</sup>

For many women, the change was immense. The extent of this war, and the amount of resources it required were unprecedented. Braybon has questioned whether women really moved into the workplace en masse at this time, concurring with I. O. Andrews that the *public* nature of many of the jobs they undertook gave this impression, but this underestimates the importance of the new vision of women's work which impinged on the public's consciousness during the war years.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary war writers dwelt increasingly on this 'new' face of British womanhood:

She is wonderful and war-work has done her good...the sense of being somebody of importance in the world, doing something of consequence, have made a better woman of her...in this war the daughters of Britain seem to have found themselves....Doing a national service of immense importance has infused such a spirit of self-respect into British women as we have never known before.<sup>7</sup>

Writing from an anti-war perspective, feminist peace campaigner Madeleine Zabriskie

Doty noted that in London;

women fill vacant places. Soldiers' wives can pay rent and buy clothes. Women occupying men's places spend twice what they did formerly. Girls run elevators, punch tickets and act as post office clerks. Outside one store a girl in high boots and rubber hat and coat calls taxis.<sup>8</sup>

Often, these highly visible changes were born of the result of economic necessity, rather

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<sup>5</sup>Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*, New York, Merlin Press edition, n.d., first published 1915.

<sup>6</sup>I. O. Andrews, *The Economic Effects of the World War upon Women and Children in Great Britain*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1920, cited in G. Braybon, *Women Workers and the First World War*, London, Routledge, 1989, p.45. More general works include Arthur Marwick, *Women at War 1914 - 1918*, London, Fontana, 1977; Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-War Britain*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>7</sup>Hall Caine, *Our Girls: Their Work for the War*, London, Hutchinson & Co, 1916, p.94.

<sup>8</sup>Madeleine Zabriskie Doty, *Short Rations: An American Woman in Germany 1915 - 16*, London, Methuen & Co, 1917, p.39.

than a collective desire amongst women to alter their social position. This chapter, rather than dwelling on the public face of women's war work in "men's" jobs, will examine the efforts of women who explicitly viewed their collective public actions during the war as part of Mrs Fawcett's instruction to "prove [themselves] worthy of citizenship whether [the] claim is recognised or not."<sup>9</sup>

On Merseyside, by 1914, the 'sex-class' model of organisation developed by the WSPU appeared to have been most successful in mobilising women, attracting women away from the socialist model. Meanwhile, organisations such as the NUWSS participated in little public activity. The war provided a great challenge to existing women's organisations. This chapter questions how successfully the three models of organisation central to this thesis stood up to this challenge, examining those which dissolved, those which adapted to the new social situation, and some new women's organisations which formed as a direct result of the war.

The chapter is divided into four sections, looking at new and existing women's organisations. As the suffrage organisations contained the highest female membership prior to 1914, it will focus mainly on the way they responded to the war. Section One outlines the transformation of the WSPU into the Women's Party, and examines the actions and influence of this body on Merseyside. Section Two looks at what I have chosen to describe as 'auxiliary' war work, that is, work which has direct bearing on the war economy (relief work) or arises from the wartime situation (the agitation for Women's Patrols), but is not necessarily actively pro-war. Section Three examines the

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<sup>9</sup>Mrs Fawcett, cited in Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, Virago, 1988 edition, first published 1928, p.338.

work done by organisations which attempted to continue suffrage campaigning between 1914 - 18. Section Four concludes the chapter, showing how although the war brought some direct material changes for local women, many of the actions in which they involved themselves showed a large degree of continuity with the pre-war women's organisations to an extent which many commentators have chosen to ignore.<sup>10</sup>

## 9.2: "That Patriotism Which has Nerved Women"

Although events in Europe had pointed towards the possibility of war for some time, its abrupt arrival in August 1914 caught European politicians off guard. Russian, Bolshevik leader Alexander Shlyapnikov wrote that "events unfolded so rapidly that they took the organized workers by surprise" whilst in Britain, Lloyd George thought warnings in July were "alarmist and could not be substantiated by the official reports he was receiving."<sup>11</sup> Suffrage organisations were similarly unprepared for the event. Andrew Rosen has commented that "due to the lack of significant extant documentation, it is not possible to fully account for the course taken by the WSPU during the first week of August 1914."<sup>12</sup> Whilst lack of evidence does present a problem, the remaining fragments present a picture of total confusion which is likely to be accurate. The final local report for Liverpool WSPU appeared in *The Suffragette* of 7th August 1914, the

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<sup>10</sup>Asquith's famous remark on the death of Edith Cavell, that "there are thousands of such women, but a year ago we did not know it", is often quoted by historians such as Mitchell in an attempt to argue that it was the war, rather than any feminist campaign, which altered public opinion, and secured the vote. Strachey, whilst dismissing the phrase as "self-revealing", feels that the war "startled men of all kinds into forming a new and more favourable judgement of the female sex." See Strachey, *The Cause*, p.348.

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Shlyapnikov, "The Working Class of St Petersburg and the War", translated and reproduced in John Riddell, ed, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents 1907 - 16*, New York, Monad Press, 1986, p. 127. Paraphrase of conversation between Lloyd George and feminist pacifist Rosika Schwimmer, quoted in Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War*, London, Pandora, 1985, p.14.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women! The Militant Suffrage Campaign of the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903 - 14*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, p.247.

last copy of the paper to appear. In it, Helen Jollie reported that despite the government's move to cut the paper's circulation by pressurizing newsagents into dropping it from their shelves on pain of prosecution for incitement as the arson campaign continued;

the only effect [this] has had in Liverpool has been to increase the sale. A sympathiser has ordered four quires weekly for the next few weeks and is having them distributed from door to door.<sup>13</sup>

The unfortunate sympathiser must have been severely out of pocket, as Liverpool did not see a copy of *The Suffragette* again until 1915 when it re-emerged, without its suffrage content, before being renamed *The Britannia*. Helen Jollie vanished from the district after the outbreak of war, presumably suffering the fate of the many WSPU organisers referenced by Leah Leneman, who had to borrow their train fare to get home.<sup>14</sup>

With no local organiser, and no national paper to co-ordinate events, the WSPU's collapse must have left a tremendous vacuum in the area, especially as it occurred as the Union approached its second peak locally. Much has been made of the total capitulation by the Pankhursts and their supporters to a chauvinistic war effort. Visiting London in 1915, Madeleine Doty was horrified that:

The government's newest ally is Mrs Pankhurst....One day as I passed Trafalgar Square, it was crowded. Mrs Drummond from the foot of the monument was pleading for volunteers...."We have given up our fight for the vote...today is the time for sacrifices"....These suffragettes have betrayed the woman's cause.<sup>15</sup>

However total this capitulation may have been nationally - Doty identifies the

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<sup>13</sup>*The Suffragette*, 7th August 1914.

<sup>14</sup>Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, 1991, p.209.

<sup>15</sup>Doty, *Short Rations*, p.41.

Pankhurst's supporters as "a portion of the militant suffragettes", and the picture of continuing mute support is questioned severely by other historians including Wiltsher, Stanley and Morley, and Rosen - Liverpool's WSPU branches did not reinvent themselves as instantly pro-war.<sup>16</sup> Instead, whilst some members drifted into other organisations, or concentrated their efforts within the alternative locations they had simultaneously developed, such as the Church Leagues, the majority ceased traceable public activity with the demise of the Union.

This point is essential to interpreting what role the Women's Party - the chauvinistic incarnation of the WSPU - performed on Merseyside. Although the WP had a fairly high level of activity locally, none of its activists had any links with the old WSPU branch. Indeed, when *The Suffragette* reemerged after an 8 month absence in April 1915 no local woman was available to write a report on the consideration, by Liverpool City Council, of the appointment of women tramdrivers. *The Suffragette* became *The Britannia* in October 1915, but it was not until September 1917 that Liverpool figured in its columns again, when the WSPU extended its industrial campaign to women war workers in the area. The magnitude of the change which the Union had undergone became apparent when Lloyd George visited Birkenhead to receive the freedom of the borough. His previous visits to the area led to some of the most imaginative local suffrage protests.<sup>17</sup> This time, in marked contrast, he met row upon row of women workers, who;

realise[d] what the PM has done and tried to do for the cause of victory....He reviewed the military guard of honour, and, accompanied by General Flora

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.* See also Rosen, *Rise Up Women!*, pp. 252 - 4; Stanley with Morley, *The Life & Death of Emily Wilding Davison*, pp. 180 - 3; Anne Wiltsher *Most Dangerous Women*, *passim*, for further details of the opposition the Pankhursts' faced to their actions from within the WSPU.

<sup>17</sup>See Chapter Seven.

Drummond, also reviewed the women war workers, the value of whose services to the defence of the nation he recognised so early in the war.<sup>18</sup>

The following week, *The Britannia* announced that "the industrial campaign in Liverpool and District is to be actively pursued in the coming months" and that an organiser, Miss Cynthia Maguire sought volunteers to help with the work, which included "a great meeting in the Sun Hall to be addressed by Miss Christabel Pankhurst."<sup>19</sup> Miss Maguire had no previous recorded involvement with the WSPU. The comparatively late date that the Liverpool branch 'resumed' activity, indicates that she, and the majority of her branch were new recruits. In November 1917, the announcement came that the WSPU would henceforth be known as the Women's Party. Miss Maguire became its Liverpool organiser. Her branch continued activity in the area until after the end of the war.

The Women's Party stood behind a twelve point programme devised by Christabel, comprising an awkward mixture of anti-German rhetoric, feminist demands and socialist ideals. The call for "a fight to the finish with Germany" headed the agenda, but the necessity of equal pay and maternity benefits, and for new housing estates with co-operative housekeeping and communal kitchens was also stressed. Pacifism, and especially the women's peace movement, which contained several former suffrage allies, was condemned as a German trick. The anti-pacifist oratory was particularly strong on Merseyside. Miss Maguire explained:

Pacifism...[is] one of Germany's favourite weapons at the moment. Her one aim [is] to coax or coerce the allies into an inconclusive peace while she [is] still mistress of mid-Europe.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>*The Britannia*, 14th September 1917.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, 9th November 1917.

This theme became one of the main tenets of the Women's Party. A series of "War 'til Victory" meetings were held at the dock gates. Further publicity was occasioned by a large meeting with Mrs Pankhurst at Central Hall. David Mitchell, who emphasises the middle-class nature of the WSPU throughout its history, claims that the Women's Party had only a "bourgeois message....a weird mixture of Lloyd George rhetoric and Tory reaction."<sup>21</sup> Whilst I have previously highlighted the broad class base of Liverpool WSPU,<sup>22</sup> it must be conceded that its reincarnation in the Women's Party drew only from the city's bourgeoisie. Dock gate meetings and addresses to branches of the Women's Co-Op guild were aimed purely at spreading the anti-pacifist message amongst the city's working-class rather than recruiting them into the ranks of the Women's Party. Indeed, whilst Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst appeared at many free mass meetings for Liverpool WSPU between 1904-14, the Women's Party now restricted their audience, offering mainly reserved seats at 2/ 6d, 1/ or 6d.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Women's Party recruited some local women into its ranks in 1918, they were new to suffrage politics, and represent no continuity with earlier WSPU activity. Miss Maguire's local reports also fail to capitalise on the WSPU's long standing local tradition. In February 1918, she announced that "weekly indoor meetings for members and friends have also been arranged" and that "many new members have joined the Women's Party."<sup>24</sup> "Offers of help in paper selling [and] assisting with outdoor meetings" were also solicited from the new members, leaving no sense of women

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<sup>21</sup>David Mitchell, *Women on the Warpath: The Story of Women in the First World War*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1966, pp. 76, 78.

<sup>22</sup>See Chapter Six.

<sup>23</sup>*The Britannia*, 25th January 1918, and 26th October 1917.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, 22nd February 1918, and 15th February 1918.

drawing on a longer standing local tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Following the passing of the Women's Vote Clause in January 1918, the Women's Party submerged itself in campaigning for the anticipated General Election. Now, Bolshevism became the target for much of the Pankhursts' attacks. This represented a further severance of local tradition as Liverpool WSPU retained some links with the local socialist movement. The new political direction diminished opportunities for women to undertake political work on their own terms. It led to the WP supporting Mr Catheray, the seaman's candidate, who was standing on an Anti-Bolshevik platform. Mr Catheray addressed no broader feminist concerns on his platform. Rather, the campaign was an excuse for the Women's Party to put some of its more extreme jingoism across, informing dockers that they should ignore the Bolshevik menace, and concentrate instead on the war effort:

England...as an island country depended upon its sea power, and the Germans would give a good deal to secure what they termed the "Freedom of the seas,"<sup>26</sup>

typifies the content of election speeches. This lack of emphasis on women's issues was not confined to the discourse around elections. When a strike broke out at an aeroplane factory in Aintree, the Liverpool Women's Party were at the forefront of a campaign to persuade the men to return to work:

We women intend to put an end to shop steward control, and we will abolish the Bolshevik element which is undermining our industrial life. If we are going to fight the Germans in trade we can only succeed by encouraging increased production and by killing the present 'ca'canny' policy of British industrialism,<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, 1st March 1918.

<sup>26</sup>Joan Dugdale at Strand Road Docks Bootle, reported in *The Britannia*, 5th July 1918.

<sup>27</sup>*The Britannia*, 8th November 1918.

Mrs Drummond informed the *Liverpool Evening Express*, following a public meeting at which she and Miss Maguire declared that "nothing justifies strikes in wartime."<sup>28</sup>

Such themes appear to call into question the extent to which the Women's Party could in any way be described as a 'feminist' organisation. Certainly, most historians who chronicle its progress fail to discern anything other than extreme jingoism within its rhetoric. Yet when branches are studied closely within a locale, a strange mixture of jingoism and feminism emerges which can be traced back to some of the arguments which were developing in the WSPU's later period as a suffrage organisation, when they developed the argument that women, through their common gender, represented a class.<sup>29</sup> As the WSPU had argued that the sex war was to replace the class war, it follows that its anti-Bolshevism should be tempered with essentialist arguments relating to women's role in the fight against the distraction of class war. At a meeting in Liverpool in February 1918, Mrs Pankhurst told supporters that "there was a situation indeed to be saved....Many were wondering how six million women would use political power....Her hope was that women were going to shoulder responsibility and save the situation."<sup>30</sup> The local press responded enthusiastically to this departure, even going so far as to demand support for a scheme of co-operative housekeeping after the war, "to make the conditions of home life tolerable and to save the potential mothers of the race."<sup>31</sup> Against a perceived threat of post-war revolution, feminist demands suddenly made economic sense. The Women's Party began to hold women-only meetings,

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

<sup>29</sup>For a fuller discussion of this point, see my Introduction.

<sup>30</sup>*The Britannia*, 15th February 1918.

<sup>31</sup>*Liverpool Courier*, cited in *The Britannia*, 15th February 1918.

deriving from its belief that women held the key to the future of the nation.<sup>32</sup> However, although promoted through the local press, its impact was sparse amongst local women. Its level of meetings never matched that of the WSPU at its peak. Furthermore, the activities which it offered to local women - the chance to speak on public platforms, to take part in elections on behalf of male candidates, to organise large public meetings and to sell a newspaper in the street - although new when first offered by the WSPU, were common to all political groups by 1918. The imaginative element which constituted such a vital part of the local WSPU campaign, and the ability to build an organisation from a wide class basis, were both missing from the local Women's Party. Although there were other elements to its philosophy, for the most part it centred around 'War til Victory' campaigns. Hence an allied victory contained within it the seeds of the Women's Party's destruction.

### 9.3: Auxiliary War Work

Whilst the Women's Party has provided some of our more enduring images of women's activities during the Great War, the auxiliary work performed by many other women's organisations has also been highlighted as something which;

opened out new opportunities and altered conditions for women which brought in turn gradual acknowledgement of the right - and need - for women to move from the private to the public sphere of activity....a great cultural leap.<sup>33</sup>

This section examines some of the auxiliary work done by Merseyside women during the First World War. I use the word 'auxiliary' to imply an association between this

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<sup>32</sup>This view was, as may be expected, restricted to women who shared their point of view. Particular vilification was reserved within *The Britannia* for women trade union leaders, who held out for extra wages during the war, or even for those who refused to work for half pay.

<sup>33</sup>Diana Condell and Jean Liddiard, *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War 1914 - 18*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p.21.

work and the war, rather than in any way to indicate that women's work was secondary or subordinate. 'Auxiliary' must not necessarily be read to mean supportive. Whilst some of the work described in this section was essentially aimed at supporting the war effort in whatever way, other work was inspired by feminist concerns to alleviate the suffering of women during the war. This section comprises case studies of the work of three separate organisations - the Civic Service League, the Women's Patrols, and the NUWSS - which identify and highlight such differences in motivation. It also begins to examine the extent to which feminism as a philosophy was overcoming differences between the three models of organisation during the war years.

### 9.3.i: The Civic Service League

The best example of a society which carried out relief work through jingoistic motivation was the Ladies' Branch of the Liverpool Civic Service League, which altered its initial character during the First World War. This society rigorously followed 'separate spheres' doctrine. It was non-party in theory, although many of its aims, and its members were anti-socialist. Like many organisations which existed solely to promote a subordinate position for women, the Ladies' Branch purported to support the status quo, yet paradoxically brought women into public activity, albeit in very narrowly defined ways. The League formed in August 1911, as a response to middle-class fears occasioned by the Transport Strike.<sup>34</sup> It was established as 'A permanent organization of Citizens willing to assist the Authorities in preserving the health, safety and well-being of the City in time of need'. A list of initial members shows what sort of need its founders had in mind. All Special Constables, workers at the Lister Drive Power

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<sup>34</sup>See Margaret Cole, "Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department," in A. Briggs & J. Saville, eds, *Essays in Labour History 1886 - 1923*, London, Macmillan, 1971, p.266.

Station, and members of the Lord Mayor's Civic Service Corps 'who have recently given service' (during the strike) were automatically members. Others could join, on application.

The League's inaugural meeting called for a women's branch. It was;

not expected that [this] will be very heavily called upon, but the experiences of the past strike have shown that it is very desirable to have a competent body of women workers whose services could be relied upon in an emergency.<sup>35</sup>

Early members were middle or upper-class women. Although they did not have to declare political affiliation, two, Evelyn Deakin and Mabel Fletcher, were highly active Conservatives.

Records show that as each Lady Mayoress took office, she became President of the Ladies' Committee, and that although the men's section met and kept its membership up, only the women's branch was called on to perform any duties. The outbreak of war meant that the League increased its prominence overnight. This initially led to trouble within the Ladies' Branch, which began to organise without the knowledge of the current Lady Mayoress. She in her turn had responded to the national crisis by following an idea of NUWSS member Dr Mary Davies, and founding the Mayoress' Information Bureau, later the Women's War Service Bureau. The Lady Mayoress explained the dispute between the Women's War Service Bureau and the Civic Service League Women's Branch. The latter was organising ambulance classes, and forming working parties. Gambier Terrace, home of the Women's War Service Bureau, she saw as "the centre for the needlework department because it is the Lady Mayoress' Bureau

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<sup>35</sup>Minutes of the Preliminary Meeting of Liverpool Civic Service League Women's Branch, September 1911. Liverpool Record Office.

founded for the express purpose of dealing with the many new questions that have arisen owing to the war."<sup>36</sup> As part of this, to avoid friction caused by two organisations 'competing' for relief work the League was given a room at Gambier Terrace. Miss Glynn was in charge, and all garments made by the League were directed to her there, and put into the common stock of the Bureau, unless directed for a special destination, in which case they were sent out at once. Further friction came when the men's branch set up its own depot in Bold Street which was "worked by the ladies, though not by members of the Ladies' Committee of the League."<sup>37</sup>

Such problems surrounding relief work were commonplace during the war. One of the worst cases concerned attempts to place such work on a county basis, so that Liverpool relief went to soldiers from all over Lancashire, which Liverpool workers felt would diminish the links between home and the front. The problems underline the importance of relief work to many who undertook it, who felt it to be an equal substitute for active service. In the case of the Civic Service League, the war service of the Women's Branch increased the standing of women within this organisation, culminating in their being awarded a place on the previously male General Committee to cover women's issues in January 1915. For the majority of women who worked with the League, this was their tentative step into public activity, and the war had served as the catalyst to persuade them to take it.

Within local feminist organisations, the war also prompted changes in direction. As new questions colonised the political agenda, women from the NUWSS, CLWS, CUWFA

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<sup>36</sup>Statement (Copy) in Liverpool Council of Women Citizens Papers, Liverpool Record Office.

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

and CWSS began to work closely together on issues of relief work. Here, the motivation for undertaking the work was not jingoism, but a combination of three things: a feminism drawn from separate spheres rhetoric, which had long prioritised the caring side of female nature; the desire to prove worthy of citizenship, which had developed through the Women Citizen's Association; and the need, born of decades of organised campaigning, to continue to do something. In this climate, the local branches of the NUWSS, CLWS, CUWFA and CWSS began to work closely together, often with other women's organisations such as the NUWW, in several of the new organisations which formed during the war. The next section will examine the common work undertaken by two similar organisations, showing how different models could form from similar motives and roots.

9.3.ii: "Women of Tact and Sympathy are Needed to Help in this Great Work"<sup>38</sup>: The Scottish Women's Hospitals Association and the Movement for Women's Patrols

Frustration born from feelings of exclusion characterises the memoirs of many women who became active in relief work during the war. One of the most painful accounts is of Dr Elsie Inglis who visited the head of the Royal Army Medical Corps in September 1914, to ask;

his advice as to how she could best place her knowledge and skill as a surgeon at the disposal of her country. [He] replied "Dear lady, go home and keep quiet."<sup>39</sup>

Faced with such attitudes, Dr Inglis, who was also Hon Sec of the Scottish NUWSS federation, used her position to form the Scottish Women's Hospitals Association, which

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<sup>38</sup>Liverpool Women's Patrols leaflet, Legge Papers.

<sup>39</sup>Millicent Garret Fawcett, *What I Remember*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1924, p.219.

set up, funded and largely staffed three units in France, two in Serbia and one in Russia.<sup>40</sup> NUWSS networks gave it warm support on Merseyside. Birkenhead WSS held weekly sewing parties for SWHA hospitals, whilst in Liverpool, Mrs Stewart-Brown organised a series of fundraising meetings, which she felt served the dual purpose of raising money whilst interesting "a large number of Liverpool people in....the work of the national union."<sup>41</sup> The local campaign also benefited from the work of Dr Frances Ivens at the Abbey de Royaumont in France. Miss Ivens was a member of LWSS, and chairman of the local CUWFA branch, and both these organisations carried details of her work in their local reports columns. The personal link helped boost their fundraising efforts, and when she was awarded the Croix de Guerre, local women were justifiably proud of her links with the area.

Mrs Stewart-Brown founded a local SWHA branch in Liverpool in February 1917. Its "influential and representative" committee included the Lord Mayor, Bishop and French Consul.<sup>42</sup> The organisation offered the chance of direct involvement in war to women with medical qualifications. However, non-specialists were confined to a supporting role. Donations at local meetings were most impressive, totalling £3,000 in the first three months of its work although many of the larger donations of £50 or more were way beyond the reach of many local women.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, although it is possible

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<sup>40</sup>See Strachey, *The Cause*, p.347. For more details on the Scottish Women's Hospitals, see Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton*, London, Women's Press, 1990; Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant*, J M Dent, London, 1935, both *passim*; Antonio De Navarro, *The Scottish Women's Hospital at the Franc Abbey of Royaumont*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1917; M. Lawrence, *Shadow of Swords: A Biography of Elsie Inglis*, London, Michael Joseph, 1971.

<sup>41</sup>*Common Cause*, 24th December 1915.

<sup>42</sup>*Common Cause*, 27th April 1917.

<sup>43</sup>Figures from *Common Cause*, 27th April 1917, reported as raised between 6th February when the branch was formed, and 14th April when the target of £,3000 was achieved.

that some women did find their medical careers enhanced through the work that they did during the war, others such as Miss Ivens had achieved great success in this field before they went, and were merely carrying on an existing role.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the women who went out as nurses, a traditional role was being followed. Yet the war also allowed women to form organisations which grew out of feminist concerns for the welfare of young women, whilst simultaneously challenging and extending women's prescribed role.

In port cities such as Liverpool, Bristol and London, campaigns for women's patrols were initiated as concern arose about young girls being attracted in increasing numbers to the lights, noise and glamour of the large army camps which housed troops waiting to go to the front. The First World War gave women opportunity to move into the traditionally male field of policing in an organised manner. Although Liverpool appointed its first woman police officer, Mrs Hughes, in April 1914, here as in the rest of Britain it was the experience of the war which opened the force to numbers of women, although it would be some time before they would gain official recognition or status.<sup>45</sup>

The process which led women into policing activities during the war was a disparate one. This was neither a question of simple equality with men, nor a lucrative career opportunity suddenly available to women as the nation became willing to draw on their

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<sup>44</sup>Miss Ivens, for example, gave up her job as Chief Surgeon at the Stanley Hospital for Women.

<sup>45</sup>*Common Cause*, 17th April 1914. The Home Office approved women police in 1918, but women did not attain the full powers of male constables until 1922, due to the wording of successive Police Acts which referred to 'fit men', and it was not until 1930 that the Home Secretary standardised pay and defined duties for women police. Full equality came much more recently. See Sandra Jones, *Policewomen and Equality: Formal Policy vs Informal Practice?*, London, Macmillan, 1986.

reserves of labour. The initial Women's Patrols which led to the Home Office granting formal recognition to women police at the end of the war were unpaid volunteers, often acting from political motives. As such, they provide an interesting example of political activity. They attracted women from varied class backgrounds, who were united by a particular feminist morality, and a belief in single-sex collective action. On Merseyside, they also provide some threads of continuity of feminist campaigning during the first world war.

The Defence of the Realm Act held special significance for feminists who saw within its clauses (especially the 40D clause which promised powers of compulsory detention for prostitutes, and became the focus of a national campaign), a return to the days of the Contagious Diseases Acts. However, there was a belief amongst some feminist activists that the best way to combat this was to undertake the action of policing women themselves. The *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review* explained in 1915:

Girls who are over excited by the abnormal conditions caused by the Great War flock to places where [soldiers] are stationed. The thought that some of these very men will perhaps lay down their lives in defence of their country has a fearful fascination for them....But it is clear these places are not where girls should spend their leisure hours, and by doing so they run into grave moral danger....[We feel] that to try and combat this evil and withdraw the girls from the danger zone is indeed women's work.<sup>46</sup>

Two organisations formed with the express intention of policing girls themselves. One, the Women Police Volunteers, which developed into the Women's Auxiliary Service, was initially set up in London to aid Belgium refugees, and does not appear to have spawned a Liverpool branch. It is the second organisation, the Women's Patrols, which will be examined here.

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<sup>46</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 23, April-June 1915, p.22.

Braybon and Summerfield claim that these early women police 'also had a distinctly upper-middle-class image'.<sup>47</sup> However, both local and national evidence somewhat contradicts this. The work of the Women's Patrols, in Liverpool and nationally, was co-ordinated by the National Union of Women Workers. It was felt that this would give them a position of authority amongst working-class girls, as this anecdote illustrates:

In a certain district some rough girls were discussing the [Patrol] Organiser....and said "Oh! she's nothing but a woman Copper from London." The Club girls indignantly repudiated this, saying "She aint, she's a working woman like us; she's got it [the NUWW badge] on her arm to show she's a friend to us girls"<sup>48</sup>

Within Liverpool, the NUWW branch was run by Mrs Allan Bright and Mrs Alfred Booth. They helped co-ordinate the initial plan for Women's Patrols in Liverpool, with Miss M. H. Cowlin, based at the War Service Bureau, co-ordinating the efforts. Merseyside hosted several temporary camps for soldiers, and the movement for Patrols was supported by diverse feminists from the WLF, the NUWSS, the CUWFA and the NUWW. They wore no uniform save for an armband which carried the NUWW badge. As elsewhere, the Liverpool Patrols were registered with the Head Constable, and linked into the local police, giving them official status. Two leaflets about this campaign show that the Liverpool campaign was modelled directly on the London/national one. Women involved had to be over 27 before they could register, and they always went out in pairs.<sup>49</sup>

The Women's Patrols were anxious to provide girls with an alternative to camp

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<sup>47</sup>Gail Braybon & Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars*, London, Pandora, 1987, p.45.

<sup>48</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association Review*, Issue 23, April - June 1915.

<sup>49</sup>Miscellaneous material on Women's Patrols, Liverpool Council of Women Citizens' papers, Liverpool Central Library.

following rather than simply condemning their activities. On some occasions, as well as warning girls whose behaviour is 'unsuitable' they would "put them in touch with local societies. clubs or friendly visitors." It is likely that it is the social life at the clubs, rather than any identification with the organisers as "working women" which attracted girls in large numbers, especially considering the lack of success achieved by the NUWW locally.<sup>50</sup>

The clubs were well supported, and involved their membership in their organisation.

A young member of the Wirral club, Margaret W, explained that her club;

started near a camp is succeeding well and the girls themselves helping to insist on the Rule being well kept - that they remain half an hour in the club after the bugle has called the men back to camp.....

However, she felt that this would not continue into the Summer:

My point is....that in the immediate future, ie Spring and Summer no power on earth will keep either girls or men in any club room however attractive....So many of the girls come from homes where there is only one living room - a tired (and therefore cross often) father and of course they want to go out - most of them having to sit at machines all day.<sup>51</sup>

The Women's Patrols and the BWTA took this up, and held open air concerts with tea canteens on New Brighton Promenade to take the place of the Club in the Summer. After the war, when the debate on women police became prominent within local councils, the work of the Women's Patrols was frequently cited as proof of what women could do for women in this manner. In this case, the war did alter things dramatically for women, allowing them to use the situation to extend their public role through the high levels of street work the Patrols involved. In Birkenhead, they achieved so much success that the CUWFA branch enthusiastically reported:

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<sup>50</sup>See Chapter Three.

<sup>51</sup>Undated letter from Margaret W., Papers of the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens, Liverpool Record Office.

A police Auxiliary Detachment has been formed with the approval of the Head Constable, and about 40 women are being drilled and disciplined under the captaincy of Mrs Stanley Clarke...to assist the police in cases of emergency, and to turn out whenever called upon. They wear a smart blue uniform, and are most keen and enthusiastic. What they most appreciate is the strict military discipline enforced, and the thorough organisation.<sup>52</sup>

Mrs Clarke the local CUWFA chairman, had been a member of the local Women's Patrol group since its inception.

### 9.3.iii: Other Auxiliary War Work

Other aspects of relief work in Liverpool did not involve women in new organisations, but were filtered through existing societies, or coordinating bodies, often former suffrage organisations. Unlike the WSPU, other suffrage societies had a less definite view on what their role should be. The CUWFA, NUWSS and CLWS all ceased active suffrage campaigning during the war, but continued to meet as organisations, and focused on relief work as something which they could do collectively during the conflict. The CUWFA and CLWS effectively ceased functioning as suffrage societies. The CUWFA dropped "Franchise" from its *Review* in January 1915, as the paper increasingly only covered women's war work. Birkenhead CUWFA offered their services to the Mayor, and worked with the NUWSS to get a workroom providing employment for small dressmakers, many of whom were in great distress due to the war. Between 30 and 40 women were taken on, with more as outworkers, and the minimum trade board rate (3d per hour) was offered, plus a long lunch hour. Schemes around women's work took up much of their energies. The branch was careful not to appear to be taking men's jobs, stating it was only;

in this great crisis [that] women have been called upon as citizens to take their place in serving their country....that care would be taken not to

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<sup>52</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 26, January-March 1915.

disorganize the genuine labour market, but urged all women of leisure who could to register, especially those who have been in some employment previous to their marriage, as they were particularly asked for.<sup>53</sup>

The class dimension which had always characterised CUWFA work remained. The workroom was only for working-class women. Local 'ladies' helped by sending their out of date clothes for remodelling.

The public work of the Liverpool CLWS was less organised. Some members took "sewing for the soldiers and [paid] for it to be done by women needing the work" whilst others were "sewing and knitting for friends who have enlisted."<sup>54</sup> To retain a sense of corporate identity, the national committee reminded "all members to wear their badges when doing any public work."<sup>55</sup> Some joined the Emergency Corps, and others the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association, but the war caused something of a membership crisis locally. The stress which the CLWS always placed on individual spirituality made it difficult for the branch to function as a unit when its members were stretched in different directions. Much of its work now comprised individual prayers for war victims. A few stalwarts repeatedly urged "suffragists to make their organisation as strong in numbers and finance as possible in order that the voices of women may speak with force and power in the social and industrial settlements necessary after the war."<sup>56</sup> However, the Annual Report of 1916 stated that "little direct suffrage work has been done owing to the pressure of other duties caused by the war."<sup>57</sup> They stopped

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<sup>53</sup>*Ibid*, Issue 23.

<sup>54</sup>*Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Review*, October 1914.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*, September 1914.

<sup>56</sup>Miss Janet Heyes, *Church League for Women's Suffrage Monthly Review*, May 1916.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*.

supplying the local press with a column of suffrage news and comments, reducing their local profile further. Such events serve to remind us how difficult it was to retain any form of organisation during the social disintegration caused by the war.

The work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Associations was one area which "claimed many" away from the CUWFA, and the CLWS.<sup>58</sup> The NUWSS and the CWSS were also involved in this. Realising the limits of official organisations attempting relief work on a large scale, they initiated local clubs for relatives of servicemen. Wirral Suffrage Society initiated a "Tipperary Club" early in 1915. Unlike the overtly moralistic girls' clubs mentioned previously, the Tipperary Club had no hidden agenda behind its aim of "brightening the lives of women" who were most directly affected by the absence of men during the war.<sup>59</sup> Its membership comprised "soldiers' and sailors' wives, mothers and sisters", whose sixpenny membership cards each season entitled them to "a cup of tea and biscuits,...an entertainment....games and dancing", and occasional short talks.<sup>60</sup> Much more important than any of the single things offered by the club was the opportunity which it gave women to meet together and share their fears and experiences, in a woman-only space, whose respectability protected them from any of the accusations of disloyalty to which wives of servicemen often laid themselves open if seeking an active social life during their husband's absence.

In Liverpool, identical work was undertaken by the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society

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<sup>58</sup>*Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association Review*, Issue 26, March 1915.

<sup>59</sup>*Common Cause*, January 17th 1916.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

through its "Women's Patriotic Club" which met twice weekly on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at Burlington Street. Feminism, philanthropy and relief work intermingled in the work of the club. CWSS members staffed it, and the women attending were provided with a welcome break from their daily work through entertainments, outings, and music as well as "advice as to the care of children."<sup>61</sup> The clubs serve as examples of woman-centred relief work, which were aimed at lifting the burden of war that fell on women, rather than directly supporting the war effort.

### 9.3. iv: The NUWSS and the War

Once the WSPU collapsed, the NUWSS became the largest suffrage organisation on Merseyside. Sandra Holton has observed that the war showed "the continuing strength of the suffrage organisations...[through] their ability to rise above the inevitable social and political dislocation that followed [its] outbreak."<sup>62</sup> This, she claims, was "especially true of the National Union" where Mrs Fawcett initially saw relief work as a means of uniting those women in her organisation who were broadly in favour of the war, and those who were becoming increasingly involved in the feminist peace movement.<sup>63</sup> On Merseyside, relief work was initiated immediately after the outbreak of war, and allowed women to continue public activity without taking either a pacifist or a jingoistic stance. In addition, the NUWSS also continued its work amongst local women to develop and foster a sense of citizenship, a task which it had initiated with the formation of Women Citizen's Associations before the war.

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<sup>61</sup>*Catholic Suffragist*, January 1916.

<sup>62</sup>Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy, Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900 - 1918* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.130.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.* For a full outline of the development of feminist pacifism in Britain during the First World War, see Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*.

Initially, the NUWSS did not organise its own relief work. Instead, members responded individually to a call issued by the Lady Mayoress for volunteers to staff a central bureau at Gambier Terrace. The organisation was impressive. Eight rooms dealt with all aspects of relief work, from cutting and sewing of garments to rolling bandages, and organising distributions.<sup>64</sup> *Common Cause* reported that "most of the local woman suffragists seem likely to be absorbed in this work."<sup>65</sup> Although the work was not in itself radical, LWSS members were fully aware of its potential. "Liverpool women are losing no time in showing themselves worthy of citizenship, whether their claim be recognised or not" reported a local worker, highlighting a theme which was to be repeated throughout the duration of the war.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst the Bureau continued to co-ordinate efforts of relief work of the types highlighted above, the LWSS simultaneously initiated some of its own campaigns, which, although they could be classified as being aimed in support of the war effort in that they were not overtly pacifist, were more concerned with the feminist aim of alleviating the suffering which war placed upon the women of a nation than with augmenting the flow of men to the front.<sup>67</sup> The Wallasey and Wirral Women's Suffrage Society used the increased opportunities for social work provided by the war to initiate a maternity centre and babies' welcome in the town. This venture, supported by the medical officer of health, was an immediate success, and dealt with 107 babies in its first four months. As well

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<sup>64</sup>*Common Cause*, 14th August 1914.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup>Sandra Holton points out that the London Society aimed its war work as providing women workers in order to free men to join up, and at working in munitions factories, and associated war trades. See Holton, *Feminism and Democracy*, p.132. Also Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*, London, Virago, 1988 edition, first published 1928, p.340.

as providing medical examinations for the babies, and advice to their mothers on childcare and feeding, the welcome offered direct practical help:

It supplies dried milk at cost price, and when really necessary dinners are provided for nursing and expectant mothers at greatly reduced prices.<sup>68</sup>

This work was so successful, that it was eventually taken over by the Public Health Department, as an essential part of their wartime work.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst these examples show the NUWSS on Merseyside engaged in feminist relief work, the more overtly patriotic members of the NUWSS soon realised that;

in addition to the work needed to support the fighting forces there was another great task for women to carry on....conserving the resources of the country.<sup>70</sup>

Patriotic Housekeeping, a scheme through which all women involved in running a household, could feel they were making a direct contribution to the war effort as important as those being made in France, was born. The idea, which was rooted in the LWSS' middle-class membership, came from Cecily Leadley-Brown, who directed it through her work on the Women's Industrial Council. Inspired by a leaflet from the Board of Trade urging all to moderate their consumption of meat, she was struck by "the happy idea of an exhibition," and inaugurated a sub-committee to organise one.<sup>71</sup> The sub-committee drew from the WCA, BWTA and similar women's groups, but "as practically all those interested were active members of the NUWSS, it was unnecessary

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<sup>68</sup>*Common Cause*, 16th April 1915.

<sup>69</sup>*Common Cause*, 23rd March 1917.

<sup>70</sup>Strachey, *The Cause*, p.345.

<sup>71</sup>Report by Elizabeth Macadam on the Liverpool Patriotic Housekeeping Exhibition, *Common Cause*, 20th August 1915.

to invite representatives from that body."<sup>72</sup>

Arrangements for the Patriotic Housekeeping Exhibition demonstrate how far Liverpool

NUWSS kept its organisational channels intact throughout the war:

Fifty thousand handbills were printed and widely distributed, largely by house-to-house distribution, by....the WCA, and partly through meetings and gatherings of women....Coopers [grocers]...printed at their own expense 30,000 more copies....and distributed these to all their customers, both over the counter and by delivery....A lady artist, a member of the committee, designed most effective posters...which were...placarded over the city on sandwich-men....[and] carefully drawn up daily advertisements were inserted in the local press.<sup>73</sup>

The exhibition itself covered a myriad of themes. The BWTA offered statistics on the evils of drink, whilst the vegetarian society provided cookery demonstrations and recipes, including "the patriotic sausage....a sausage guiltless of pork."<sup>74</sup> Hay-box (a fuel-saving device) cookery, shoe-making and repairing were demonstrated, and lectures provided on topics from "spending and saving in wartime" to child welfare. The exhibition highlighted how the LWSS retained its class perspectives. To one meeting;

all patriotic servants were invited. The programme was specially arranged for their benefit, and an appeal made in the press to mistresses to set them free to come.

The "maids" who made up the "crowded attendance" listened to Mrs Allan Bright talk on "Patriotic Housekeeping and Domestic Servants."<sup>75</sup> The Union received some criticism locally for this, not from those who felt that dispensing with domestic service altogether might be advanced as an alternative form of wartime economy, but from individuals concerned that the exhibition should "get the right class of people." Their

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<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*

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

response was explicit:

This is a campaign among all classes of the community. What perhaps gratified us more than anything else was to see women of all classes drawn together by the great interests which all women have in common, the home and all that concerns its welfare, and the desire to serve the country in its time of need by the strictest economy.<sup>76</sup>

Here, it is clear that certain women in the LWSS were developing a gendered view of patriotism, in which the home, the natural heart of women's activity according to the proponents of separate spheres, became an integral part of war, with allied housewives fiercely guarding the country's resources. This gendered view, whilst not threatening to demolish existing class barriers, was able to transcend them through creating a common location for activity, based on gender, so that patriotic housekeeping could be practised in one's own kitchen or in that of one's mistress.

Whilst all these examples provide us with interesting views of what Liverpool suffragists did during the First World War, they reflect national trends much more than the LWSS activity described in Chapter Five. However, although the dislocating effect of the war led to a greater conformity, as smaller policy differences were set aside for the war effort, the leadership of the Liverpool branch was unable to give up completely the emphasis which it had placed on the importance of education in developing the role of women as citizens upon the outbreak of war. Initially, national policy was to suspend its demands for full political equality, and concentrate instead on proving that women were worthy citizens, that they could be relied upon when the nation was facing a crisis. By June 1916, this was beginning to be questioned by Eleanor Rathbone, who was anxious that the stress on war work was jeopardising her idea for a national network of Women Citizens' Associations:

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

Most suffragists are obeying a sound political instinct which tells them that the present time is more suitable for exercising such functions of citizenship as are open to them than for actively pushing their demand for fuller rights. But it is possible to follow that instinct too far and to allow absorption in the tasks of the present to lead to a culpable neglect of the duty of preparing for the future. I believe that many of our societies are, in fact, making this mistake.<sup>77</sup>

Whilst Eleanor acknowledged that suffrage societies were overwhelmed by the volume of war work that they had undertaken, she stressed that the WCAs could play a valuable role in ensuring that women who were entering directly into public life at this time, and through such entries "had discovered themselves to be citizens for the first time" should have their "newly aroused consciousness...captured, fostered and directed....[to] become a permanent source of strength to the feminist movement."<sup>78</sup> In attempting to gain support from those who she knew would cut across her argument on the grounds that it distracted from the war effort, Eleanor simultaneously demonstrated that, whilst the LWSS had retained its mainly middle-class composition throughout the war years, there had been more success at recruiting across classes through the WCAs. She felt that working women could approach a WCA, whilst they may be "shy of offering themselves as workers to organisations controlled mainly by the well-to-do", and quoted a Liverpool woman citizen, who "confided to the Secretary that to her one of the charms of the Association was 'that there were no ladies in it - at least, none of the sort you have to dress up for.'<sup>79</sup> Through the WCAs, such women could be won to suffrage, along non-party lines.

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<sup>77</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, "Women Citizens' Associations" *Common Cause*, 30th June 1916. In a footnote to her own article, Eleanor explains that it was written "before the rumours about a possible Redistribution Bill threatened to bring the question of the Suffrage into the sphere of immediate practical politics."

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

As I have previously stated, the potential of war work for developing a gendered concept of citizenship amongst women was immediately noticed by the LWSS, and continued to play an important part in the motivation, and, more explicitly the justification which they provided for their work. In August 1916, when it appeared likely that a suffrage bill would be placed before the House, they participated in a joint meeting with the CWSS, CLWS and CUWFA at which Mrs Fawcett pointed out that whilst the government was willing to discuss "the immediate enfranchisement of soldiers and sailors, on the grounds of service to their country...women could not allow their service to the country...to pass unrecognised."<sup>80</sup> Here, the equation of women's war work with men's is an obvious one, and could be interpreted as opportunistic. Yet the opportunities war presented for breaking down concepts of citizenship as they had been gendered within the Victorian era, and recreating them to include women had been recognised long before this by the LWSS. In *Common Cause* in January 1915, Eleanor Rathbone sneered openly at the idea that during invasion, women should;

hide in [our cellars]...until...some elderly male civilians and policemen can...herd us...out of the zone of danger.<sup>81</sup>

The suffrage campaign, she argued, had taught women not to accept this role. Working through the Women's Citizens' Association, women were now educated to a point where they were no longer willing to be passive:

In so extreme a national emergency...if there are any functions which can usefully be performed by women, then women have a right to claim these...even if it should mean breaking down the masculine tradition.<sup>82</sup>

Here, the exploration and development of a female citizenship becomes the prime

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<sup>80</sup>*Common Cause*, 18th August 1916.

<sup>81</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, "In Case of Invasion," *Common Cause*, 1st January 1915.

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

concern. Although it is contextualised within the boundaries of wartime emergency, there is discussion of returning to the "masculine tradition" once the national emergency is over. Eleanor continued with this theme the following year, when she tackled the question of the possibility of the franchise still being exclusively male:

Nor is it only upon questions specifically affecting their sex that women have a right to be heard....Have they no interest in the future economics and fiscal system of the country....Must the influence of women, the traditional qualities of women count for nothing in repressing any spirit of national vindictiveness and in bringing about saner and sweeter relationships.<sup>83</sup>

Drawing on the rhetoric of separate spheres, Eleanor Rathbone developed a concept of post-war citizenship that would contain feminine as well as masculine characteristics, for the benefit of all.

Other leading members of the Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society used the war to reconstruct ideas of citizenship. Nessie Stewart-Brown was particularly concerned that what she saw as the internationalist dimensions of feminism should be understood by the new women citizens. Her long standing commitment to international feminism, and her extensive European travel led to her and her husband being detained in Germany at the outbreak of war. Upon her return, she joined up with fellow Liberal Alison Garland, and became chairman of the International Relief Committee which Miss Garland inaugurated in Liverpool on the outbreak of war. This committee consisted of "English, French and German women, all working together harmoniously to relieve the undeserved distress of the many wives of foreigners in this city."<sup>84</sup> Mrs Stewart-Brown briefly complained in *Common Cause* of the attitudes of some women who refused to contribute

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<sup>83</sup>*Ibid*, 18th August 1916.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid*, 6th November 1914.

to the Committee because German women would be helped by their efforts, but stressed that these were in the minority. Furthermore, she added:

I am proud to think that amongst the number of those who withhold their 'mites'...because we assist the wives or families of Germans in their dire need, there have been no members of our local WSS....our women suffragists...[have] the Charity which is not bounded by Nationality, and theirs is a movement which embraces all women, of whatever class, creed or race.<sup>85</sup>

Such an effort cannot have been easy to sustain. The attitude towards Germans and other foreigners in Liverpool during the war was not welcoming. Following the *Lusitania's* sinking, "wrecking two hundred German shops on Merseyside occupied three days....enemy aliens were interned for their safety."<sup>86</sup> The task of raising money which might be accused of going directly to aid the German war effort could not be indefinitely sustained. However, local LWSS feminists were unwilling to give up their stance, and found another avenue for its expression in the Liverpool Committee for the Study of International Relations. This body began with "an informal conference of 5 people called by the LWSS."<sup>87</sup> Its secretary, Mrs E. V. Burns, took over the secretaryship of the LWSS in March 1916, emphasising the links between the two bodies, and its meetings were constantly covered in *Common Cause*. The committee aimed to "work chiefly through existing organisations" in its work of "educating public opinion," although it admitted that it would be "impossible...to expect 'impartiality' in the lectures about a subject which touched such depths of feeling."<sup>88</sup> Education, so long the keystone of LWSS policy, was again at the fore in this new departure.

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<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.272.

<sup>87</sup>*Common Cause*, 2nd June 1916.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

Rather than representing a new departure during the war years, it is possible to view the emphasis that the LWSS in various guises was placing on a new construction of citizenship as a continuation of policies and directions which had been in place since at least 1911.<sup>89</sup> Such continuity put the Liverpool branch in a strong position when it faced the challenge of finding a new role for itself after the vote was won, something which will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

#### 9.4: Keeping the Suffrage Flag Flying

Although the many types of relief work outlined above characterised most of the war work of local suffrage organisations, some bodies attempted to continue suffrage campaigning. Recently, historians such as Stanley and Morley, and Wiltsher have questioned the extent to which the outbreak of war called a final halt to all suffrage campaigning. Smaller groups such as the United Suffragists, the Independent Suffragettes and the Suffragettes of the WSPU have been identified, and their part in the franchise struggle, "thinking it right to continue suffrage propaganda through the war" has been reclaimed.<sup>90</sup> As Chapter Seven indicates, the United Suffragists did not yet have a branch on Merseyside. This section will follow their work in the war, and also look at other activities by suffrage organisations which attempted to sustain a wartime campaign.

Initially, the Votes for Women Fellowship branch suffered the same dislocation that struck every political organisation following the sudden outbreak of war. Phyllis Lovell reported on 25th September 1914 that the branch was running a local Women's

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<sup>89</sup>The date of the establishment of Liverpool WCA. For more discussion on this and the way it fits into a tradition of suffragist politics locally, see Chapter Five.

<sup>90</sup>Heading of the monthly *Suffragette News Sheet*.

Emergency Corps, and had also recommenced paper sales, indicating a small interruption in work.<sup>91</sup> This appears to have been its last action, and there was no local report again until March 1915 when a branch of the United Suffragists was formed following "a meeting of all of those who are anxious to keep up suffrage work in Liverpool."<sup>92</sup> Miss Isabel Buxton, CLWS and WSPU activist, became its secretary. An appeal was immediately issued, that "all who are ready to help in the work of the branch...to communicate with her."<sup>93</sup> Other WSPU activists with no recorded connection to the Fellowship, including early members Miss Marks and Miss Broughton, rallied round, as well as some members who had no recorded connection with any suffrage organisation up to this point. Paper sales were again initiated, and a fund opened to display a poster at Lime Street Station. The branch began to work quite closely with the local Women's Freedom League which had begun a slight resurgence in Liverpool prior to the outbreak of war. Interestingly, it also retied the close links with the local socialist movement which characterised the early days of Liverpool WSPU. Meetings were held at the Clarion Café again. John Edwards became a familiar speaker, and his wife joined the society. Rekindling socialist connections also brought the US into contact with wider ideas on women's position in society, and soon meetings on equal pay, were being held as part of the campaign.

The United Suffragists were also instrumental in initiating a Suffrage Club on Merseyside. This was formed in October 1915, and met weekly at the Theosophical Society's rooms in Colquitt Street. Many club members were ex-WSPU activists.

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<sup>91</sup>*Votes for Women*, 25th September 1914.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid*, 12th March 1915.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid*.

However, it was also extensively used by the CWSS. When the Suffrage Club opened, this society had its own offices in Colquitt Street, and was fighting strongly to retain its identity as a suffrage organisation. It continued to proclaim itself 'suffragist', retaining this word in its paper until after enfranchisement. "The burden of war falls heavily on women, and we hope all will help to keep the suffrage flag flying that we may be powerful to get wrongs realised when peace is restored" the Liverpool branch noted in the second issue of *Catholic Suffragist*.<sup>94</sup> This was not merely speculative talk. Paper selling was seen as "the chief means....[to achieve] the necessity of keeping the society together at this time."<sup>95</sup> Paper sales grew throughout the war, reaching around 230 a month.<sup>96</sup> The CWSS saw the club as an opportunity "for members of every suffrage society to meet on common ground for discussion and social intercourse at various events."<sup>97</sup>

Sadly, little else is known of the club's later work, which continued at least until February 1918.<sup>98</sup> Its significance must not be overemphasised. For every Merseyside woman who visited the club on Monday evenings, many more remained at home, either undertaking personal war work, or doing nothing which would fit my definition of political. Yet its mere existence is testimony to the work of local women who were determined not to let their suffrage fight go, simply because the WSPU had collapsed and the country entered into international conflict. The work was difficult. Many

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<sup>94</sup>*Catholic Suffragist*, February 1915.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid*, Liverpool Branch Report, October 1915.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid*, September 1915.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid*, November 1915.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid*, 25th February 1918.

longterm local activists were now leaving the area, either for family reasons as in the case of Dr Alice Ker, VP of the US branch until her departure for London in October 1916, or to undertake their own active service such as Nurse Lupton who went to work in France. The refusal of the Pankhursts to release funds or membership records to women who wished to carry on the WSPU's original work meant that for the second time, Annie Marks and Ada Broughton were building up a movement from nothing. This time, without a national body of the size of the WSPU to back them, the local campaign was very small, and remained so. Whilst it can only really be placed as a footnote to the preceding chapters on suffrage campaigns, it merits attention, representing a strand of independent militant suffrage activity on Merseyside which never developed any tendency towards blind allegiance to a national leadership.

#### 9.5: Conclusion

This chapter has identified some of the work undertaken by Merseyside women in political organisations during the First World War. Much of the focus here has been on the suffrage organisations. Their combined membership surpassed other political bodies by August 1914. However, the totality of their collapse at this stage raises important questions about the long term success of a 'sex-class' model of organisation. I have indicated some of the different forms of relief work undertaken by local women, at home and abroad, and examined some of the interpretations which could be placed upon this work, in an attempt to move away from a reading which interprets all relief work as pro-war. I have also showed some of the ways in which war work stretched the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for women, showing how much of this stretching was being undertaken by women with a long history of involvement in such campaigns, and hence placing their actions within a picture of broad continuity rather than one of

dramatic change. Through such evidence, I have attempted to construct an argument which both acknowledges and challenges the "commonplace that World War One marked a watershed in world history and that Europe was never the same again."<sup>99</sup> I have acknowledged it through evidencing situations where the war broke down old boundaries between different models of organisation, or those which surrounded ideologies of women's public space, such as through the work of the Women's Patrols or the Civic Service League. At the same time, I have attempted to challenge this view of war, through indicating continuities in the involvement of individuals, and in their concerns, especially through the discussions surrounding a new construction of citizenship, undertaken by Eleanor Rathbone from within the Liverpool WCA. The concrete outcome of such discussions will be taken up in the concluding chapter.

This chapter has deliberately not examined the work undertaken by women in the various sections of political parties during the war years. This is because the parties were all involved in an electoral truce during this period, and hence much of the normal public work undertaken by women, around local elections, was suspended. The majority of local political activists routed their work through relief work during the war, and have been referenced above. One small exception comes in the work of the local Women's Labour Association, formed in the later years of the war. This, and the limited work which was undertaken by the Women's Liberal Association up to 1918, will be dealt with briefly in the final chapter of the thesis, where the overall levels of success of the varying models of women's political involvement identified in the first chapter will be questioned, in the light of their achievements from 1890.

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<sup>99</sup>Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cecily Hamilton*, p.137.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION: "THE ERASURE OF A WAY OF LIFE"

By 1920, Merseyside women had seen their situation and their region undergo several permanent changes. Physically, the locality had expanded: improved cross-river transport opened up the Wirral, whilst new districts to the East and West had been incorporated into the city boundaries.<sup>1</sup> The local political map also altered. In 1918 the extension of the parliamentary franchise to "all adult males after six months' residency, and to many women aged over thirty" (specifically women "on the local government register, or who were wives of men on the local government register"), increased the electorate to 344, 816, four times that of 1911.<sup>2</sup> The number of parliamentary wards in the city rose from 9 to 11 to accommodate this. Organisations began to separate more into 'Liverpool' and 'Wirral' groups, reflecting the enlarged constituencies. Liverpool also underwent more subtle alterations. Many of the 'old families' whose influence has been mentioned throughout this thesis, were finding that heavy taxes combined with changing social mores were curtailing their lifestyles. Explaining this "decline of Liberal plutocracy," Waller argues that the period from 1919 saw an irrevocable decline in such influences locally, affecting those local Liberals who had long found their social status sufficient to secure them a position in local society. "The erasure of a traditional way of life" occurred, as values such as deference gave way to a new social order.<sup>3</sup> Position was no longer enough to secure political power.

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup>P. J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Social and Political History of Liverpool, 1869 - 1939*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1981, p.281. Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900 - 1918*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.150.

<sup>3</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.277.

Women were equally affected by these changes. Many who had devoted much of the previous two decades to suffrage campaigning were now enfranchised, and taking their place in the new political order, although there was never a significant local campaign for the franchise on equal terms. Some women also found their social position altered. Along with the politics of deference, domestic service was decreasing, with many girls finding positions for themselves in the new service industries, or in professions as teachers or clerks.<sup>4</sup> However, this was only one side of the coin. Unemployment, which characterised much of British society in the inter-war period, bit early on Merseyside. By 1921, the local branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement was organising regular demonstrations to mobilise the estimated ninth of the population seeking work.<sup>5</sup> Women suffered both from unemployment, and from strong local feeling that they had taken men's jobs.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, they were often enthusiastic participants in the many riots and mobilisations which surrounded local unemployment, although more often due to the problems they faced balancing the household budget than in defence of their jobs, their involvement representing a continuity of women's control of the domestic sphere.<sup>7</sup> Whilst occasional "girl strikers" appear in the memoirs of unemployed activists, their accounts of the leaders and heroes

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix Four. Also, G. Anderson, "A Private Agency for White-Collar Workers Between the Wars: A Study of the Liverpool Clerks' Association, 1918 - 39," *International Review of Social History*, vol. XXXI, 1986, pp.19-39.

<sup>5</sup>Jack & Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks*, London, Macdonald, 1963, p.31 and *passim*. Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles 1919-1936*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1977 edition, first published 1936, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup>Braddock & Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>K. Cowman, "Riots against the Means Test on Merseyside," B.A. dissertation, University of Keele, 1987.

of the events remain largely male-dominated.<sup>8</sup>

This thesis has examined the relative achievements of three models of women's political involvement over thirty years. It has compared the various opportunities for political involvement they offered local women, by examining organisations which drew upon these models in their political practice. Much of the material highlights small victories, although I have constantly attempted not to overestimate their importance in any long-term sense, drawing attention to the fact that many triumphs, especially within trade unionism, were short-lived. However, at this stage, with thirty years of women's political activities outlined, it is essential to attempt to analyze how these models fared over a longer period of time, to see if any conclusions can be drawn as to which were the most successful.

A third of this thesis has concerned itself with the women's suffrage campaign on Merseyside, and shown how the 'sex-class' model of organisation developed within the WSPU proved most attractive to local women between 1905-14. The exclusion of men within this model brought women unprecedented opportunities for political experience, as they were able to completely control their activities.<sup>9</sup> The mass campaign which the WSPU delivered on Merseyside brought large numbers of women into the public eye for the first time. Simultaneously, it also brought its participants into contact with many other women from different class, religious and political backgrounds, through its claim

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<sup>8</sup>Jim Arnison, *Leo McGree; What a Man, What a Fighter*, London, Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians pamphlet, 1980, p. 21. See also Tony Lane, "Some Merseyside Militants of the 1930s," in Harold Hinks, ed, *Building the Union: Studies of the Growth of the Workers' Movement on Merseyside*, Liverpool, Toulouse Press, 1973, and Joe Rawlings, *Stormy Petrel: Struggle or Starve*, unpublished typescript, Ruskin College, Oxford.

<sup>9</sup>See Appendix Nine.

that gender was as important a factor as any of these. Yet this major reason for its success concealed the seeds of its own destruction. The WSPU was correct to assume that gender *was* a unifying factor when women were united around an issue such as their exclusion from the franchise which affected all women. However, they appear to have been naive in underestimating the appeal of other political loyalties once the franchise disappeared from the centre of their campaign. When the WSPU ceased its suffrage work, it ceased to function on Merseyside. Some of its activists attempted to work in other suffrage societies, as Chapter Nine has shown. Others returned to their church or party-political work. However, the majority of them stopped any public political work at this time. They appear to have been largely attracted to the single-issue politics of the WSPU, drifting away when nothing similar replaced them. Susan Kingsley Kent has recently claimed that the devastating effect the war had on the national psyche rang the death knell for 'sex-class' politics:

In the aftermath of the Somme...of Passchendaele, a conflict between the sexes could not be tolerated; it conjured up images of the battlefield horrors that so gripped the country's imagination.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst agreeing with Kent's conclusions, I would argue that the Merseyside evidence places the origins of the demise of sex-class politics firmly in the pre-war setting. Although it can be traced from the WSPU's collapse, it had been inevitable all along. Much of the WSPU's success came from its ability to locate its campaign for the franchise amongst an extremely broad base of local women. This presented suffrage as a unifying factor, but paid scant attention to the differences amongst the women it was uniting. Now the "utter chaos" which characterised post-war Liverpool threw these differences into stark relief.<sup>11</sup> The totality of the collapse of sex-class politics on

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<sup>10</sup>Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter-War Britain*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>Braddock & Braddock, *The Braddocks*, p.31.

Merseyside is seen in 1919, when Christabel Pankhurst's failure to secure nomination for the safe parliamentary seat of West Derby was barely noticed.<sup>12</sup> This was overshadowed by the 1919 police strike, during which an estimated 95% of the recently unionised Liverpool force came out, amid great support from local workers.<sup>13</sup> The Riot Act was read in the city, an event which was repeated throughout the next decade. The class war had superseded one between 'sex-classes,' and women were once again polarised. Ideas about the unity of gender had little to say to the working-class women of Merseyside who found their lives open to the scrutiny of the women (and men) on the local Public Assistance Committee, nor to those middle-class women whose political work on the boards of guardians led them to the PAC.

Evidence from the activities of women during the First World War mentioned in Chapter Nine seemed to indicate that, following the submerging of the sex-class model, separate spheres ideology was influencing the most successful Merseyside women's organisations. It was clearly an important factor in much of the relief work channelled through organisations ranging from the WLF and the LWSS through to the CWSS. All these organisations stressed women's 'special' contribution to the war effort, relying heavily on gender stereotypes which portrayed women as the non-combatant, nurturing sex. During the war, it was being reconstructed through the WCAs, as they struggled to develop a gendered concept of citizenship which would allow enfranchised women to play a full role in post-war reconstruction. Members consciously used the war to argue for gendered citizenship, claiming that through "this great crisis, women have been

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<sup>12</sup>Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism*, p.283.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Taaffe & Tony Mulhearn, *Liverpool: A City that Dared to Fight*, London, Fortress Books, 1988, p.27. See also Ron Bean, "Police Unrest, Unionization and the 1919 Strike in Liverpool," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume XV, 1980, pp. 633 - 653.

called upon as citizens to take their place in serving their country."<sup>14</sup> Such attempts fit comfortably with Susan Kingsley Kent's claims that;

postwar society sought above all to re-establish a sense of peace and security in an unfamiliar and insecure world. The most fundamental step in that direction appears to have been an insistence upon gender peace; a relationship of male-female complementarity in which women did not compete with men in the public sphere.<sup>15</sup>

Again, I would say that Merseyside concurs with Kent's conclusions, but for different reasons. This type of relationship, where women and men both shared the public sphere through controlling certain aspects of it, did not develop from an urge to reconstruct a peaceful society from the ruins of the First World War. It had long been sought by the LWSS and Liverpool's WCAs as they attempted to draw feminists away from class and sex conflict. The WCA continued it throughout the war, attempting to broaden out and recruit women from slightly wider class divisions than they had initially targeted, as Chapter Nine has explained.

The work of the Liverpool WCA in this direction, whilst representing continuity with its pre-war direction, also demonstrates attempts to tackle the wider problem of how democracy could be engendered in the post-war period, with a quasi-equal franchise. As Johanna Alberti has explained, an important strand of post-war feminism came from the 'new feminism' expressed by certain members of NUSEC, who sought a "redefinition of equality" in which "women's interests were defined in some way

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<sup>14</sup>Mrs Stanley Clarke, Birkenhead CUWFA secretary, *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*, Issue 23, July - September 1915.

<sup>15</sup>Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, p. 113.

different from those of men."<sup>16</sup> Eleanor Rathbone was explicit about this, reprimanding the NUWSS council for their attempts to limit the organisation to "a union of certain persons who happen to share not only [a view on women's political emancipation], but a number of beliefs about other questions." A successful feminist organisation, she felt, would have to provide a meeting place for women who could deny their difference, and focus on the common concerns of their gender:

Those of us who would wish to work for other ends can do so through other agencies....It would not be statesmanlike [sic] nor indeed....honourable to wreck a great union....in order that it may achieve a particular [political] end<sup>17</sup>

After the war, Liverpool WCA accepted the limited franchise as a victory. It attempted no further campaigning around the equal franchise issue, probably as much of the local membership would have been enfranchised under the bill, being over the age of thirty.<sup>18</sup> Instead, members continued to address the problem of how to unite a significant local body of women together, in an organisation which would allow what they continued to stress was women's unique influence to be felt through all levels of the state. They attempted this through the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens, a body "composed of representatives of practically all women's societies in the city," ranging from the Women's Co-op Guild, through the Mothers' Unions to the WCA, which would "give public expression.... upon questions specifically affecting the interests of women."<sup>19</sup> Its stated objective;

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<sup>16</sup>Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914 - 28*, Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1989, pp.164, 163.

<sup>17</sup>Eleanor Rathbone, letter to NUWSS Council, *Common Cause*, 21st May 1915.

<sup>18</sup>See Chapter Five for a discussion of the limited nature of LWSS recruitment.

<sup>19</sup>Liverpool Council of Women Citizens/Liverpool Women Citizens' Association joint statement of aims, 1919, Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Papers.

to organize and strengthen the existing Women Citizens' Association, by helping it to start [new] branches....and by assisting [it] to carry out on a larger scale....its declared objects,<sup>20</sup>

situates the WCA as central to the new body. The WCA continued to place political education at the heart of its work, and attempted to create a breed of 'women citizens' for public office on Merseyside. The scope of this extended in 1920 when the organisation pledged its intent:

To secure the return of Women Members to Parliament, on Local Governing Bodies, Hospital Boards and all other bodies where their assistance would be beneficial.<sup>21</sup>

However, as with the 'sex-class' model, party politics caused such attempts to increase women's presence and influence in public politics to break down. In October 1921, LCWC secretary Miss Eskrigge, spoke about the forthcoming local elections:

She pointed out that the three parties happened to be represented [by women] and made an earnest appeal for workers [for each candidate].<sup>22</sup>

The idea was that women united in the WCA could separate to work for women candidates representing their preferred political parties, then re-unite in the WCA, and count each election as a victory. What would have happened if women candidates had been opposing each other in the same ward is not clear, but an indication came in 1922 that women's interests were not necessarily all that other women would represent once party politics intervened. Mrs Stewart-Brown had been selected to fight the parliamentary constituency of Waterloo for the Liberal Party. At the start of the campaign, she was ferociously attacked by Janet Harrison for her attitude on a forthcoming Divorce Law Reform bill:

As an old woman's suffragist, can she seriously contemplate opposition to

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Annual Report 1919-20.

<sup>22</sup>Liverpool Council for Women Citizens, Minute Book, October 1920.

the principles of Lord Buckmaster's Bill?<sup>23</sup>

demanded Harrison. Mrs Stewart-Brown attempted to fight her corner on gendered lines, but was unable to prevent party politics from colouring her argument:

If women voters do not support me on the ground of my long services to the women's suffrage movement, I must abide by the consequences of my views....*Mrs Harrison, if I mistake not, is already an active worker on behalf of the Conservative candidate.*<sup>24</sup>

Again, political affiliations were to prove stronger than ties of gender, and many women who still sought political activity followed Mrs Stewart-Brown's route back into their parties. The Council of Women Citizens may have begun with the intention of uniting all local women, its records indicate that its main activists were ex-NUWSS supporters from the WCA.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, by the 1930s, the Council was so distanced from local politics that it was unable, at one of its meetings, to draw to mind the names of local women councillors.<sup>26</sup> Whilst women who went back into party politics still attempted to prioritise women's issues there, this was done increasingly within a party context. The idea of a gendered concept of citizenship which would allow women access to certain areas of political life because they were women could make little headway against the appeal of party. This is best evidenced through Eleanor Rathbone's attempts to enter parliament as an Independent candidate. Although the WCA enthusiastically supported her campaign in East Toxteth in 1922, the electorate rejected her in favour of a party-affiliated candidate. It was only within the limited and specific electorate of

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<sup>23</sup>Unidentified press cutting, Jan/Feb 1922, Liverpool Women Citizens Papers.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, my italics.

<sup>25</sup>Liverpool Council of Women Citizens Papers.

<sup>26</sup>LCWC minutes, June 1937. The names are filled in in a different hand and ink in the minutes.

the Combined English Universities that her campaign was to meet with success in 1929.<sup>27</sup>

With the increased prominence of class politics in inter-war Liverpool, the socialist model of organisation fared slightly better. The local LRC had continued to support women's trade union activities throughout the war in ways similar to those evidenced in Chapter Three. However, during the war, they had added a political dimension to this work, in their efforts to recruit women not simply into trade unions, but into the Labour Party. Many of these came about as a result of earlier efforts by socialist women; for instance, the Garston Bobbin Works, where Mary Bamber had unionised the largely female workforce prior to the 1912 strike, requested permission to open a workplace Labour Party branch in 1915.<sup>28</sup> The absence of men during the war also led to greater opportunities for women. Mrs Hardcastle, ILP delegate to the LRC since 1912, secured election as poor law guardian for Wavertree in March 1915, and "assured the committee that she would do her best to carry the banner of Labour" in her work there.<sup>29</sup> A slow increase in the numbers of women active on the LRC continued throughout the war, culminating in three women receiving EC nominations in 1918, a local record.

However, socialist women still found that the model of organisation which was offered to them was, in practice, controlled by men, and that their activities were often marginalised as a result. Chapters Four and Eight both identified the lack of a branch of the Women's Labour League in Liverpool as indicative of the lack of opportunities

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<sup>27</sup>Mary Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone* London, Victor Gollancz, 1949, p.129.

<sup>28</sup>Labour Representation Committee Minute Book, September 1915.

<sup>29</sup>*ibid*, March 1915.

offered to local women by socialism, and placing the local experience at odds with the European model from which it drew much of its political inspiration. By 1918, there was a Women's Labour Association active in Liverpool, which subsequently led to the formation of Women's Sections by 1922.<sup>30</sup> Yet despite the LRC's apparent wish to encourage women to become involved, it still refused to grant them any degree of autonomy. In June 1918, Mrs McArd of the Women's Labour Association was called before the LRC's EC and reprimanded, as the association;

submitted an a/c for literature and [the] secretary took strong exception to them having ordered literature without bringing the matter before the EC. Such actions were liable to overlapping as in this case the secretary had secured 1000 copies of the same leaflet for the women's use.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst the worry about overlapping, which could cause unnecessary financial outlay, may have been valid, this nevertheless identifies the feelings many socialist men held regarding women's involvement. Although the LRC were not attempting to deny women the opportunity of selecting their own campaigning literature, they would not provide them with the necessary financial autonomy. Also, there was no criticism of the male secretary for unilaterally deciding which campaigns the Women's Labour Association would wish to be involved in.

Pat Thane has recently argued that although "male dominance in the [inter-war Labour] Party is unquestionable," it is still important to include "women who chose to work for feminist as well as for other goals in a mixed-sex organisation" in an analysis of inter-

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<sup>30</sup>*ibid*, September 1918. See also, Sam Davies, "Class, Religion and Gender: Liverpool Labour Party and Women, 1918 - 1939", in John Belchem, ed, *Popular Politics, Riot and Labour: Essays in Liverpool History 1790 - 1940*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1992, pp.217-246.

<sup>31</sup>LRC EC minutes, June 1918.

war feminist politics.<sup>32</sup> The local example of Merseyside strongly supports this. Here, one thing the socialist model succeeded in providing for women was the opportunity to take public political office, first on the boards of guardians, then through municipal and parliamentary politics. It is true that the numbers of women who benefited from this were extremely small. Sam Davies has found that only 8% of all Labour's candidates for municipal office between 1905 and 1937 were women, but this figure was still higher than that for the Liberal (4%) or Conservative (3%) parties.<sup>33</sup> Davies also highlights women's poor chances of receiving a safe nomination, reckoning a success rate of below 10%.<sup>34</sup> Although she was selected before the Second World War, it was not until 1945 that Bessie Braddock became Liverpool's first female labour MP. Yet in terms of enabling women to gain access to the public political arena, the socialist model delivered more over the long term than the initially more successful 'sex-class' analysis had done. Socialist women were able to build political careers through the party, although on nothing approaching the scale it offered to men.

Looking at the careers of women in other political parties on Merseyside in the 1920s and beyond, it is possible to discern an expansion in the influence of the socialist model beyond its obvious forum of socialist parties. Both the sex-class model which placed women against men, and the concepts of difference developed within 'new feminism' which sought separate space for women's particular political concerns, were in decline. Elements of the underlying concept of the socialist model, which stressed the commonality of women's and men's interests within the context of public politics, can

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<sup>32</sup>Pat Thane, "The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906 - 1945," in Harold L. Smith, ed, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1990.

<sup>33</sup>Davies, "Liverpool Labour Party and Women," pp. 241 - 243.

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

be seen clearly within both the Liberal and the Conservative parties in the inter-war period. Women were attracted to both these parties, beginning to see themselves as Liberals or Tories first, and women second. The Women's Liberal Federation, whose membership had declined prior to and during the First World War, began to slowly revive.<sup>35</sup> Although no local figures are available for Conservative women's sections during the same period, national figures show a rising female membership, and it is possible to infer a similar trend, as both parties witnessed a slow but steady increase in the number of women candidates they put forward for municipal office.<sup>36</sup> It must be remembered that these increases were tiny in comparison with the numbers of male candidates coming forward. Between 1934 and 1938, when 10% of all municipal candidates were women, this figure still only represented 43 women compared with 380 men.<sup>37</sup>

If we are to conclude from this that the socialist model provided the most successful form of organisation for women seeking political activity, it would appear to represent a limited victory. However, when compared with the declining success of the attempts to create a gendered citizenship in the same period, it must be acknowledged that organisation along party political lines allowed women to create the largest impact in local politics. This supports the recent claim by Martin Pugh, that it was the divisions of issues such as social class (which increasingly characterised inter-war politics on

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<sup>35</sup>Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914 - 1959*, Hampshire, MacMillan, 1992, Table 5.6, p.140. See also Appendix Six.

<sup>36</sup>Conservative women rose steadily from 1% to 6% of all candidates from 1919-23. Liberal women increased by an identical number, but peaked at 10% between 1919-32. See Davies, "The Liverpool Labour Party and Women", pp.241-2. For national figures, see Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, Table 5.4, p.125.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.* Davies also provides figures for "Other Women Candidates", but does not indicate their status. Many of them would still have been standing as party candidates representing minority parties.

Merseyside) that "continued to frustrate the emergence of any large and unified movement for women."<sup>38</sup>

Dale Spender has argued that one of the reasons for the historical division of feminism into two distinct 'first' and 'second' waves is the separate foci of its concerns.<sup>39</sup>

Earlier this century, the women's movement was *public*....the public women's movement *was* political pressure....it was public figures, public meetings, public voices....But from the outset, the current women's movement went private.<sup>40</sup>

I would wish to take this further within the confines of Merseyside, to argue that this separation between public and private occurred after the First World War, as female political activists increasingly looked towards different sites for their activity. The origins of this can be traced back to the pre-war formation of the WCA, whose attempts to construct a gendered citizenship led them to devote much of their energies to educating local women about a wider political world, showing how areas such as home life had a political dimension rather than simply concentrating on municipal and parliamentary concerns.<sup>41</sup> That much published work concerning Merseyside women in the inter-war period takes as its subject matter concerns such as the family economy, women's work and domestic violence would appear to support this.<sup>42</sup> Further work still needs to be done investigating the concerns of the individual organisations which

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<sup>38</sup>Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, p.313.

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, Olive Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First Wave Feminism'*, Brighton, Wheatsheaf, 1986.

<sup>40</sup>Dale Spender, *There's Always Been a Women's Movement this Century*, London, Pandora, 1983, pp.142-3.

<sup>41</sup>For example, the Patriotic Housekeeping campaign of World War One, mentioned in Chapter Nine.

<sup>42</sup>Pat Ayers and Jan Lambertz, "Marriage Relations, Money and Domestic Violence in Working Class Liverpool, 1919 - 1939," in Jane Lewis, ed, *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850 - 1940*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986; Jo Stanley, *Women at Sea: Four Liverpool Stewardesses in the 1930s*, Liverpool, privately published, 1987.

constituted the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens, to see how far they managed to extend their ideas of citizenship between the wars.

However, whilst sensitive to the presence and influence of the work of the WCAs, my explicit purpose within this thesis was to study women in organised political bodies on Merseyside, restricting my investigation to "those organisations where a formal act of membership was required."<sup>43</sup> In the light of this, it must be acknowledged the Merseyside area witnessed a decline in feminist politics in the inter-war period. The large combined membership of the suffrage organisations did not find a new home either in the WCA, or in the (slightly) reconstructed political parties. Instead, many of the most active women disappeared completely from public life. The reasons for this are varied; Hattie Mahood gave up the WSPU, socialism and Pembroke chapel following a breakdown in health in 1912.<sup>44</sup> Dr Alice Ker left the area. Cecily Leadley-Brown continued some work with the WCA, but concentrated mainly on her career in law.<sup>45</sup> More difficult to explain, but also more common, is the route taken by Patricia Woodlock, who went from addressing two to four public meetings a week, to participating in no recorded political activity for the remainder of her life.<sup>46</sup> Many of her fellow suffrage activists followed the same route out of activity from 1918. It would appear that the suffrage campaign possessed a unique appeal, which was not to find its equal between the wars. There are no obvious answers as to why this should be so, but

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<sup>43</sup>Introduction.

<sup>44</sup>Pembroke Chapel Minute Book, 21st April 1912.

<sup>45</sup>Article on "Liverpool Women who Take Control", *Liverpool Daily Post*, n.d. cutting (some time during World War Two), Liverpool Women Citizens' Association Papers.

<sup>46</sup>She was still living in Liverpool in 1931 according to *Kelly's Directory*, but I have been unable to trace details of her later life, or her date of death.

the Merseyside evidence does point to certain explanations. A large reason for the success of the WSPU locally lay in the style of campaign which it offered. The variety and novelty of the many elements which composed suffrage militancy possessed a unique attraction which no other organisation matched. Similar campaigning styles have been attempted up to the present time, through organisations such as CND and the National Abortion Campaign, and have succeeded in uniting a disparate membership behind one demand for a short period of time.<sup>47</sup> Single-issue politics, whether in the sex-class model of the WSPU or in modern campaigns, can do this through denying difference, whilst the socialist model and separate spheres acknowledge and celebrate it.

Although my focus on public political activity has shown a decline in women's participation after the First World War, I do not wish this to be interpreted simply as the end of the story. Running throughout this thesis has been the conviction that an important degree of political power, within a democracy, rests within the elected institutions of the state, its parliament, municipal authorities, and other governing bodies. I have demonstrated how Merseyside women demanded access to these bodies, and slowly penetrated them, culminating in their part in achieving the parliamentary franchise. Whilst their influence remained small, it gradually increased as the three main political parties, the main vehicles for achieving power, became more open to women members. In 1927, Liverpool elected its first female Lord Mayor, and in 1945 its first woman M.P. Women were able to achieve full political participation in all areas.

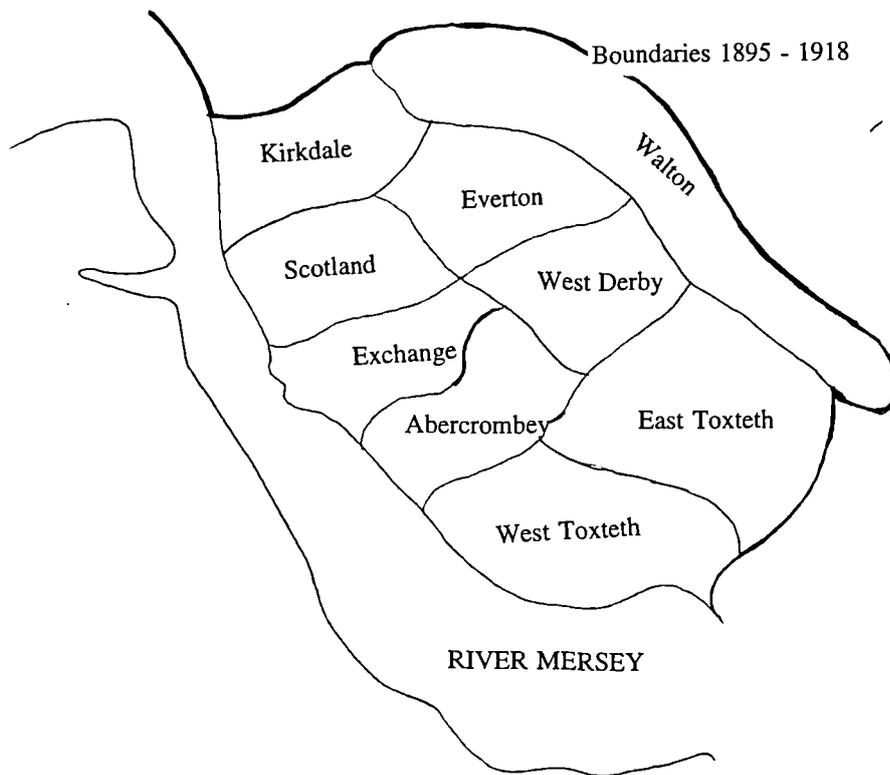
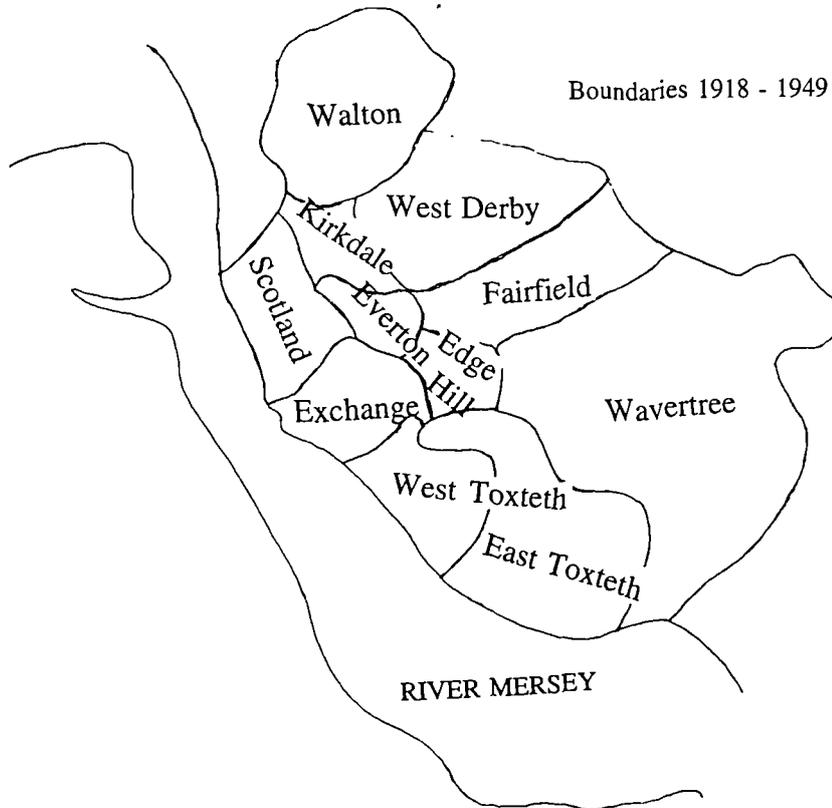
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<sup>47</sup>For example, the cross-party coalition of women who organised around the Alton Bill in 1987.

Whilst there is still a temptation to consider such examples as 'tokens,' especially as women are still a minority amongst Merseyside MPs today, this has not been my intention. Rather, I cite them as inheritors of a longstanding local political tradition, in which women always played an important role, albeit one for which they frequently had to battle against men. As the Introduction states, the purpose of a local study is not to create an alternative total picture. Rather, I believe that this work throws further light on our understanding of the results of nationally developed theories about the nature of women's political involvement as they were carried out in a local context. Although further local studies need to be undertaken before any larger conclusions can be drawn, I feel that the Merseyside evidence serves to broaden our understanding of what political involvement meant to the many women who undertook it between 1890 and 1920.

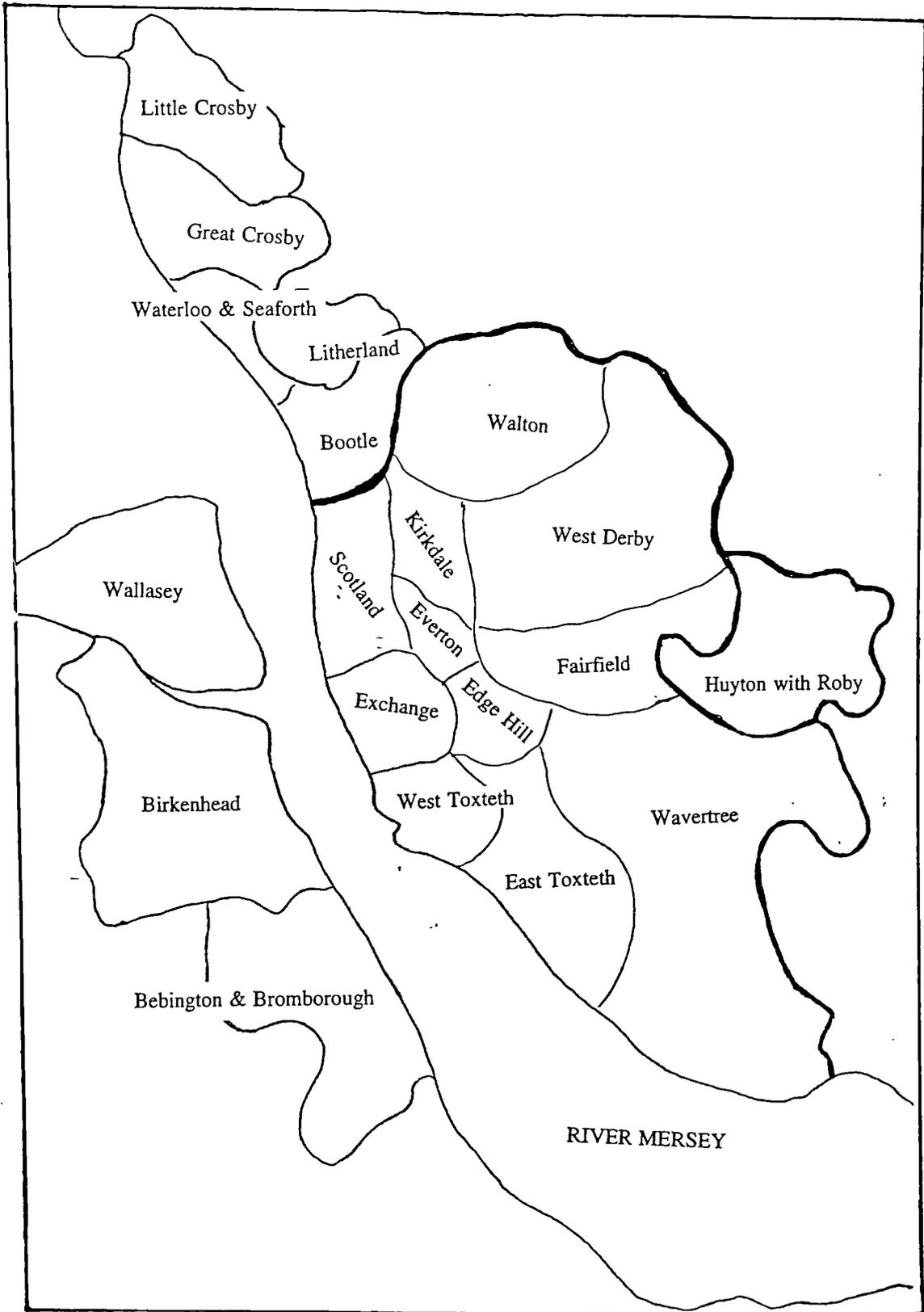
APPENDIX ONE

Boundaries Of Liverpool Parliamentary Constituencies  
From 1895



APPENDIX TWO

Municipal Borough Boundaries, c.1920, Showing  
Location Of Liverpool Parliamentary Constituencies



### APPENDIX THREE

#### Parliamentary Constituencies And Municipal Wards From 1895

CONSTITUENCY	WARDS WITHIN CONSTITUENCY
Abercrombey	Abercrombey, Great Georges, St. Peters, Castle Street.
East Toxteth	Granby, Princes Park, Sefton Park East, Sefton Park West (part of).
Everton	Everton, Netherfield, St. Domingo (part)
Exchange	Vauxhall, Exchange, St. Annes.
Kirkdale	Kirkdale, Sandhills, St. Domingo (part).
Scotland	North Scotland, South Scotland.
Walton	Anfield, Breckfield, Fairfield, Wavertree West, West Derby (part).
West Derby	West Derby.
West Toxteth	Brunswick, Dingle, Sefton Park West (part).

## APPENDIX FOUR

### MAIN OCCUPATIONS OF LIVERPOOL WOMEN, 1891 - 1921

OCCUPATION	1891	1901	1911	1921*
Local Government Officers	131	1184	1849	467a
Nursing, Midwifery, Medical	1059	1508	1692	2705
Teaching	3443	3589	3594	3377
Civil Service, Telegraph etc	216	631	873	1406
Stationers, Publishers, Newsagents etc	874	2259	3237	1905b
Literature, Science, Art, Music & Drama	813	1138	1201	1104
Commercial & Legal Clerks	492	1739	3237	11353
Chemical Manufacture	263	1472	1806	1053
Textile Manufacture	1163	2078	2320	1016
Drapers, Textile Dealers	1003	2564	3415	-c-
Tailoresses	2444	3121	3604	3481
Milliner, Dressmaker, Staymaker, Seamstress, Shirtmaker	9751	9745	9178	4840
Other Clothing Makers	821	366	414	655
Coffee/Eating House Keeper, Publican	1217	3397	5514	1711
Food Manufacture & Dealing	3173	7088	10075	4027d
Domestic Service	19978	23835	20562	16191
Charwomen	4343	5345	5866	5499
Laundry/Washerwomen	2177	3521	3139	2089
Other Domestic Service	2618	650	2045	3614e

Source - Occupational Tables, Census Returns 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921.

For 1921, the classification of occupations varies significantly from previous years, therefore, the final column can only be read as indicative of trends.

- a) Figure for clerks only.
- b) Figure no longer includes stationers.
- c) No longer listed separately.
- d) Figure does not include sellers.
- e) Includes waitresses.

There are some 10343 shop assistants recorded in 1921, a figure which would include the missing stationers, drapers, and food sellers.

## APPENDIX FIVE

### Founders And First Officers Of Merseyside Women's Liberal Federation Branches

BRANCH	YEARS ACTIVE	FOUNDING PRESIDENT & SECRETARY
Liverpool	1890 - 1901	Mrs Holt, Miss Thorburn
West Derby Reforms*	1891 - 1902 1906 - 1915	Mrs Stewart-Brown, Mrs Wade Mrs R Durning-Holt, Miss C Jones
E. Toxteth Reforms	1892 - 1913 1918 - 1919	Mrs Lamport Ellis, Miss E C Greene Mrs F Robinson, Miss E C Greene
W. Toxteth	1892 - 1919	Mrs W B Bowring, Mrs J Muirhead
Walton	1892 - 1904	Miss Meade-King, Miss Roberts
Birkenhead Reforms	1893 - 1895 1905 - 1919	Mrs G Atkin, Miss Billson Mrs G Atkin, Miss Heaton
Everton	1893 - 1901	Miss B C Lloyd
Waterloo Reforms	1893 - 1895	Mrs Solly
Reforms	1895 - 1897	Mrs Weld-Blundell
Reforms	1900 - 1902	Mrs Wallis, Mrs Rawlins
Reforms	1903 - 1904	Mrs Rathbone, Miss H Rea
Reforms	1906 - 1919	Mrs Muspratt, Mrs W Lang
Tranmere	1895 - 1896	Miss F Embleton
Wavertree	1896 - 1919	Mrs Stewart-Brown, Mrs H Morris
Kirkdale Reforms	1898 - 1900 1902 - 1905	Mrs Langford, Mrs Lowden Mrs Tracey, Miss Hannah
Wallasey Reforms	1899 - 1902	Mrs Ross Brown, Miss Shilston
Reforms	1903 - 1904	Mrs Tomkinson, Mrs Longbottom
Reforms	1906 - 1908	Mrs W H Lever, Mrs H E Callie
Reforms	1910 - 1911	Mrs Raffles Bulley
Reforms	1918 - 1919	Mrs J W Callie, Mrs H W Williams
Central	1914 - 1919	Mrs R Durning-Holt, Miss W Ryan
Wavertree Suburb	1914 - 1916	Mrs White, Mrs Austin

Source - Women's Liberal Federation Annual Reports.

\*Reforms denotes branches which collapsed and were relaunched.

APPENDIX SIX

Membership Of Merseyside Women's Liberal Federation  
1904 - 1920

YEAR	EAST TOXTETH	WEST DERBY	WEST TOXTETH	B'HEAD	WATERLOO	WAVERTREE	L.POOL CENTRAL	WAVERTREE SUBURB	WALLASEY	TOTAL
1904	208		160			126				494
1905	220		161	350		120				851
1906	256	105	175	343	176	146			130	1331
1907	267	90	169	306	168	150			140	1281
1908	262	61	150	300	186	140				1099
1909	293	60	160	300	205	150				1168
1910	312	75	150	300	160	180			25	1202
1911	330	76	150	290	130	150			25	1151
1912	338	60	150	247	150	150				1095
1913	289	70	150	216	120	120				965
1914	-	70	134	244	105	120	50	32		755
1915	-	72	120	200	105	120	72	32		721
1916	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1917	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1918	290		120	200	100	108	70		110	998
1919	103		100	100	86	60	30		100	599

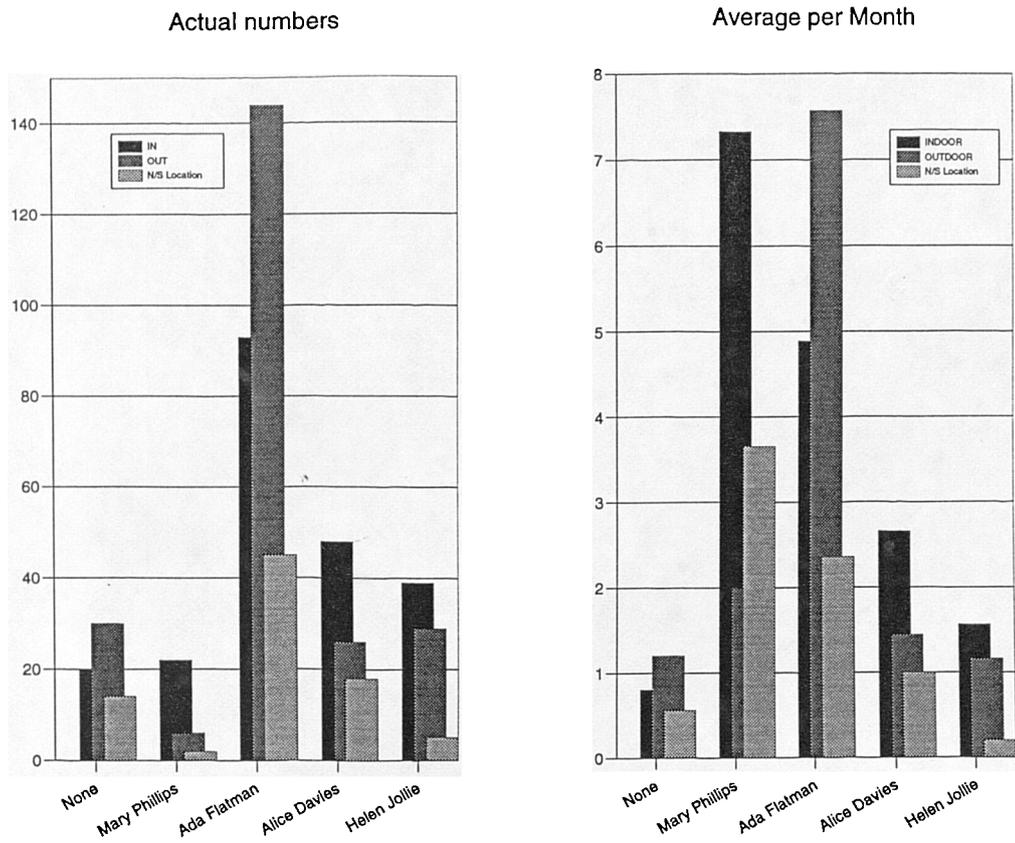
Source \_ WLF Annual Reports.

Gaps marked "-" indicate occasions when no figures were returned. The Women's Liberal Federation produced no Annual Reports for 1916 or 1917.

Other gaps indicate periods of time when branches were not functioning.

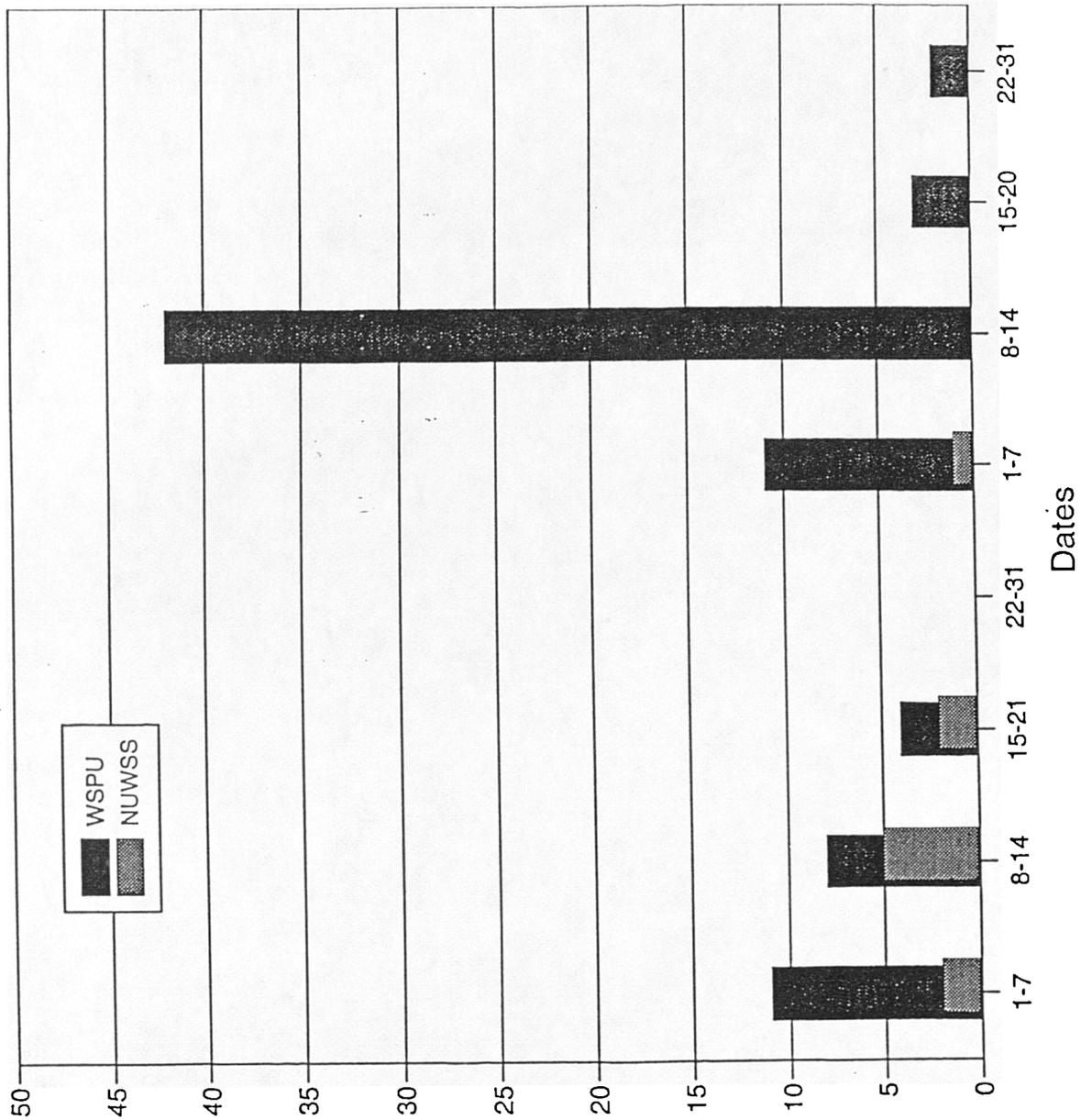
## APPENDIX SEVEN

### Comparison Of Numbers & Location Of Public Meetings Held By The Four Paid Organisers Of Liverpool WSPU, 1905 - 1914



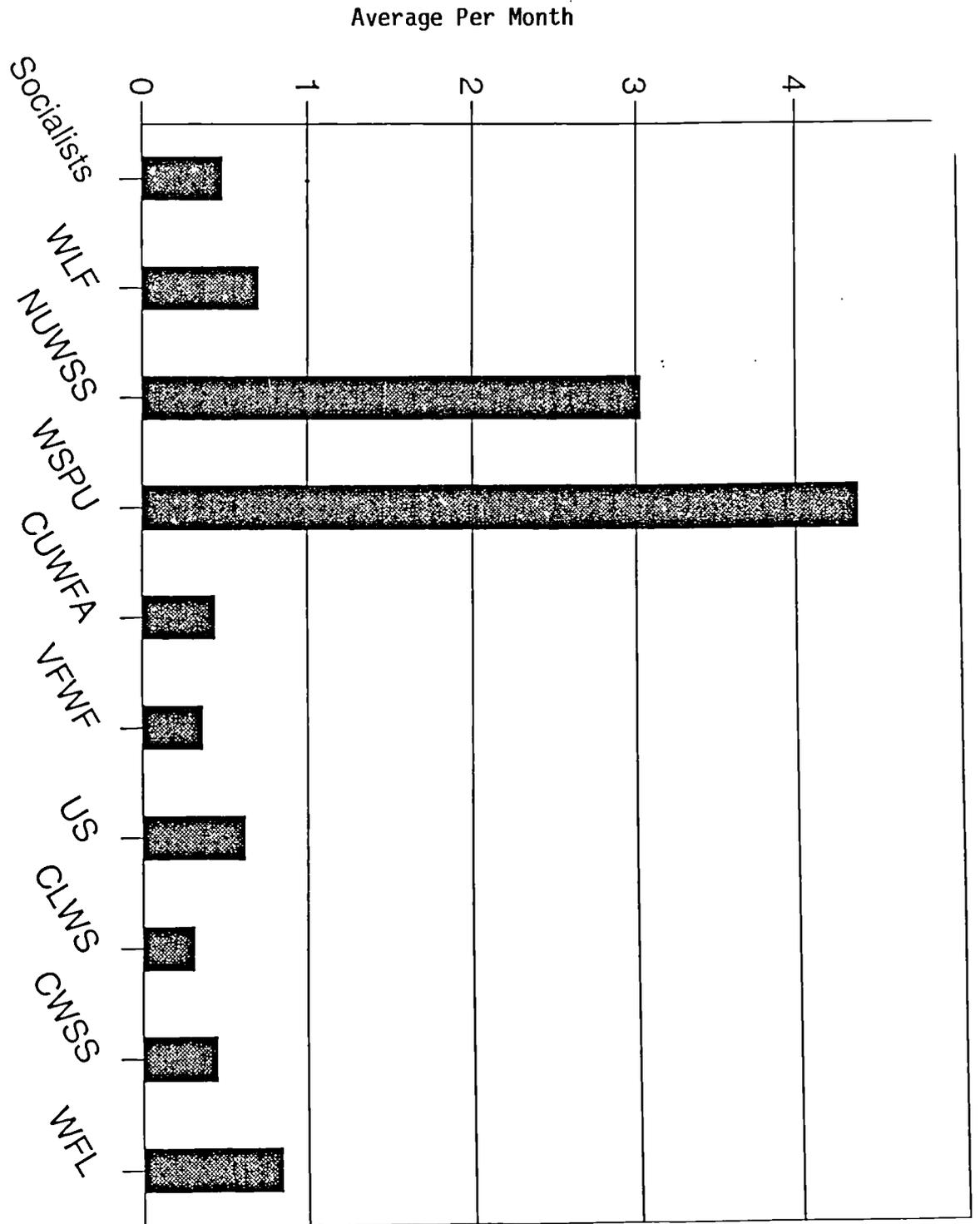
## APPENDIX EIGHT

**Comparison Of Number Of Public Meetings Held By  
 LWSS & Liverpool WSPU During The  
 General Election Campaign December 1909 - January 1910  
 Advertised In The Suffrage Press**



APPENDIX NINE

Comparison Of Number Of Meetings Featuring Women  
Speakers Held By Merseyside Political Organisations  
1890 - 1920



## APPENDIX TEN

### BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS<sup>1</sup>

#### NESSIE STEWART-BROWN (Mrs)<sup>2</sup>

Nessie Muspratt was born in 1865, the daughter of Dr E. K Muspratt, a chemical industrialist and Vice Chancellor of Liverpool University. Dr Muspratt was a strong believer in the education of women, and sent Nessie and her sister Julia (Mrs H Solly) to Cheltenham Ladies' College. Both girls completed their education on the continent, where their parents were extensive travellers, then took courses at Liverpool University.

Nessie was interested in a broad range of social concerns, from animal welfare (she was an early member of Liverpool RSPCA) to women's suffrage. In 1888, she married Egerton Stewart-Brown (b. 1862) a local barrister, and member of a prominent banking and mercantile family. He developed her interest in Liberal politics, at her own admission, although her parents and sister were active Liberals, and her brother, Sir Max Muspratt, was later to become a Liberal MP. Nessie held many positions in the Women's Liberal Federation. In Liverpool, she formed two branches of this association, and held official positions in two others. She was an EC member from 1892 until 1914, and was Vice-President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations from 1908 until 1913, when she resigned due to the insistence of some members on continuing to work for anti-suffrage candidates. However, she was no separatist in her political life, and in 1911 she became the first woman elected onto

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<sup>1</sup>These two women were both high profile suffrage and party-political activists, in different organisations. Their biographical details appear here as they are central to many different chapters, but would interrupt the flow of the text.

<sup>2</sup>Sources: *The Times* obituary, 28th April, 1958; *Common Cause*, 1909-19; *Women's Liberal Federation News*, 1893-1919; *The Liverpoolian* January 1936; Women's Liberal Federation Papers; Sarah Tooley, *Ladies of Liverpool*, Liverpool, n.p., 1895; E. K. Muspratt, *My Life and Work*, London, John Lane, 1917.

Liverpool Liberal Federal Council. Women's suffrage was the other major focus of her political activity. She was an active member of Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society, speaking at several local meetings as well as in London. She was also a founder member of the Liverpool Women Citizens' Associations in 1911.

During the First World War, Nessie worked hard for Anglo-German conciliation, something she attributed to her German education. She also helped set up a Liverpool branch of the Scottish Women's Hospitals Association, and worked in various other relief causes. After the war, she was briefly a city councillor, a position she resigned to help her (unsuccessful) campaign as Liberal parliamentary candidate for Waterloo in 1919. She continued to work for a variety of causes in Liverpool, including the Liverpool Council of Women Citizens, and the National Council of Women (formerly the Union of Women Workers) of which she was local president. She was also an active local magistrate. She left the city at some point following the death of her husband, and died in 1958.

### **ALICE MORRISSEY (Mrs)<sup>3</sup>**

Alice Morrissey was a leading light in socialist and suffrage circles in Edwardian Liverpool. She was married to John Wolfe Tone Morrissey, the first socialist to achieve elected office in Liverpool, and together they undertook a wide range of left-wing activities. Alice's many branch positions included sitting as ILP delegate to the LRC between 1908 - 9, and Liverpool ILP secretary for 1907 - 8. She spoke at several local

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<sup>3</sup>Sources: Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, London, Virago, 1987 edition, first published 1968, *passim*; *Labour Leader* 1905-12; *Liverpool Forward*, 1912, *Votes for Women*, 1908-12; *The Suffragette*, 1912. Obituaries: *Votes for Women*, 22nd November 1912; *The Suffragette*, 22nd November 1912, *Labour Leader*, December 5th 1912; *Liverpool Forward*, November 1912.

socialist meetings, as well as undertaking extensive national propaganda tours both alone and with her husband. In addition to this, she was active in the local Women's Co-operative Guild, and helped to found its Toxteth branch.

Despite continuing her socialist activity until her death, it was as a suffragette that Alice was to become best known on Merseyside. Initially, she had been a member of the LWSS. However, she left this organisation after a very public argument with Eleanor Rathbone during the 1905 AGM, and founded the Liverpool WSPU. She served two imprisonments for suffrage activities, the first following a rally at Belle View, Manchester, in the Summer of 1906, and the second after incidents in London in February 1907. She spoke at countless WSPU meetings locally, and also promoted the WSPU to other socialist organisations during her socialist speaking tours, such as the one on her trip to Belfast in June 1908. Although never a paid worker for the Union, she acted as its temporary organiser from January to March 1911, following the unexpected resignation of Ada Flatman.

Alice Morrissey died unexpectedly following a short illness in November 1912. Her funeral was attended by representatives of the many socialist bodies she had been involved with, and also by WSPU officials. The large service, at which the Red Flag was sung, was jointly conducted by her brother-in-law, a Catholic priest, and also by the radical local Baptist minister Herbert Dunnico, as testimony to the lack of sectarianism which characterised much of her life.

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