

"Fordist" compromise, therefore, there was clear evidence of the double-edged sword that state "recognition" and regulation brought with it; as Steedman argues, a vital element of shop floor input and militancy - the place where women could make their voices heard - was lost.

Trying to understand what women made of their situation, and why some were nonetheless very class conscious, is one of the challenges Steedman faces. She does make good use of oral history in some parts of the book, but there are other sections where the actual women workers, their daily work experiences, their vision of life and work and their understandings of class and gender relations are less visible. This is, in part, a result of the emphasis of the book. Because Steedman looks less at issues such as work culture, and concentrates more on union organization, inter-union battles, state regulation, etc., it is simply more difficult to place women front and centre in the narrative. For a feminist reading the book, there is also a rather depressing similarity to the beginning and end of this story, because women remain an unchanging source of underpaid labour. Perhaps, though, there was more change over time in women's consciousness, and this could have been explored and emphasized more.

These minor criticisms aside, *Angels of the Workplace* makes an important contribution to North American labour and women's history. It is a work of immense research, careful argument and significant conclusions.

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***A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I.*** Frances H. Early. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997; illustrations; xxi+ 265 pages; ISBN 0-8156-2764-5; \$22.95 (US).

***A Reconstructed World: A Feminist Biography of Gertrude Richardson.*** Barbara Roberts. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996; illustrations; xx+ 387 pages; ISBN 0-7735-1394-9; \$55.00 (cloth).

The First World War era witnessed an unprecedented convergence of ideologies - feminism, socialism, pacifism, and social gospel Christianity - which, when translated into political activism, resulted in a vibrant struggle for a better world. Two recent books offer fascinating insights into this important period of left-wing activism, through the lives of individuals and through the lens of gender. Frances H. Early's study focuses on the work of the New York Bureau of Legal Advice and more specifically, on its leaders, Frances Witherspoon (1885-1973) and Charles Recht (1887-1964). Barbara Roberts' biography of Gertrude Richardson (1875-1946) offers the story of a first-wave feminist activist and writer from England and later Manitoba, Canada.

The Bureau of Legal Advice profiled by Early existed from 1917 and offered legal advice and representation to a wide range of individuals whose speech and activity were considered "disorderly" and unpatriotic in the context of a country that was mainly pro-war. These included conscientious objectors, "immigrant aliens" threatened with deportation because of anti-war activity, draft-age men seeking exemptions, and families needing legal help to secure benefits and pay allowances. The workers with the Bureau assisted individuals who were often powerless and marginal in sorting through unsympathetic bureaucratic structures and arguing their cases. With the end of the First World War, the Bureau put its energies into a campaign of amnesty for political prisoners, an especially important goal for radical women whose menfolk were confined. Ultimately, the Bureau was committed to protecting civil liberties and free speech in a nation unsympathetic to nonconformity and dissent.

Even while offering many details surrounding the work of the Bureau, Early places this daily activity into an overall ideological

framework that motivated the individuals at the helm and that created a vibrant peace culture at odds with a more popular war-making ethos. At the same time, she gives life to people like Witherspoon and Recht, so that they are personalities and not just ideologues. As such, Early's book is biography as much as it is the history of a political movement and its organizations.

Never-married, but in a life-long relationship with companion and co-worker Tracy Mygatt, Frances Witherspoon exemplified the New Woman that emerged at the turn of the century. Born into an upper-middle class, politically prominent family and educated at liberal Bryn Mawr college, she was intellectually engaged in left-wing ideologies and drawn into public activism based on those beliefs. Already an advocate for suffrage and socialist causes, Witherspoon was drawn into the peace movement as the First World War approached. Unlike many first-wave feminists engaged in conventional reform and who supported the war effort, Witherspoon opted for radical words and deeds.

Early's study illuminates the importance of women's anti-war work, but is especially intriguing when it also illustrates gender relations within the subculture of the peace movement. Witherspoon's closest co-worker at the Bureau was Charles Recht, an ally in a common cause, yet she often chafed at his tendency to take credit for Bureau work and to patronize her own level of responsibility as head of the Bureau. Here we see patriarchal systems operating at several levels: peace activists were attempting to counter a "gendered war system" in which "state power, war-making, and manliness were linked" (p.92); at the interpersonal level, even those who struggled together against militarism were socialized with expectations regarding the respective abilities and roles of men and women. The inequalities that they experienced only "sensitized [women activists] to the plight of others who were themselves disempowered" (p.59). For her part, Witherspoon took up the case of the male conscientious objector with particular zeal, and sought to deconstruct the

notion that soldiering was intrinsically linked to manliness.

Barbara Roberts' portrait of Gertrude Richardson piques one's interest immediately because it is not just the biography of a feminist, but as the title states, it is a "feminist biography." Roberts was drawn to Richardson because of the latter's commitment to the rights of women and the cause of peace, and in "reconstructing" Richardson's life, Roberts hoped to help reconstruct the world we live in today (p. xviii). In her quest for "Gertie and the Mother-Hearts," as she refers to Richardson and comrades, Roberts spent time in Swan River, Manitoba and Leicester, England and over a ten-year period retrieved any morsel of information she could uncover about her subject. The result is a colourful and incredibly detailed volume (we learn what foods were served at suffrage picnics, for instance) about a little-known first-wave Canadian feminist. Despite an abundance of information about Richardson, Roberts creatively speculates on the gaps in her life, drawing on theoretical literature about Victorian women especially with respect to female maladies. As well, the particular interests and activities of Richardson are contextualized within the relevant social and political events of the day, so that the book has much broader usage than as just the story of an interesting woman.

Gertrude Richardson came from a working-class, left-thinking family in England. Early in her life she was drawn into the cause of suffrage and during the Boer War, into anti-war causes. Aside from organizational involvements, she expressed her opinions in poetry and in a regular column for a Leicester paper, the *Midland Free Press*. Her career in journalism continued following emigration with her mother to Canada in 1910, and over the next several decades Richardson would regularly contribute to prominent women's magazines and social democratic newspapers. Richardson was quickly immersed in the suffrage cause in Manitoba, heading the Roaring River Suffrage Association and later becoming active in the more well-known Political Equality League. Her Christian pacifism asserted itself when the First World War broke out and, in the midst of a

"sisterhood divided" over the war effort, Richardson founded the Women's Peace Crusade which was premised on maternalist ideals of women's special proclivity for peace. Like Witherspoon, Richardson focussed many of her writings on the plight of the conscientious objector.

The causes that Witherspoon and Richardson were so active in were similar, yet many aspects of their lives diverged. While Witherspoon and her colleagues lived and worked in the hectic urban atmosphere of New York City with its multitude of intersecting organizations and vibrant political culture, Richardson interacted with the peace movement mainly from her farmhouse in northern Manitoba. Yet Richardson experienced much more tumult in her personal life, including a strange, probably unconsummated first marriage and a broken second union, and repeated bouts of illness, both physical and mental, which eventually debilitated her completely. Both women put their energies into similar causes, but while civil rights was foundational for the work of Witherspoon and Recht's Bureau, Richardson's activism arose mainly from her beliefs in women's rights and the teachings of Christ.

What makes both these books particularly admirable is that, even while their main purpose is to illuminate the past, using meticulous research tools and historical methodologies, they are also inspirational. Both Early and Roberts are obviously quite enamoured with their topics and this has the effect of drawing the reader towards Witherspoon and friends and Richardson as captivating individuals and not just subjects of analysis. Both authors also identify with the political programs espoused by the people and organizations they write about; Roberts avows that one of the reasons she chose to write about Richardson was to close the disjuncture between her scholarship and her peace activism. One might ask whether such an identification would result in an uncritical appraisal, but this does not happen in either book. Both authors reveal characters that are multifaceted, flawed, and ultimately human. This certainly is the mark of good biography.

For those concerned about systemic militarism that pervades the globe today even in the absence of a world war, and about a peace movement that is fragmented and sometimes seems dormant, an understanding of the ways in which both Witherspoon and Richardson (and their colleagues) worked for peace offers hope for individual potential in opposing war. The world that each created was very much that of a "peace culture" that brought feminism, socialism, Christianity, and pacifism together in a vision of a better world. By linking such models from the past with hope for the future, Early and Roberts are both acting in the best tradition of the historian.

Frances Early is professor of history at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax and president of the Peace History Society. Barbara Roberts, who died in 1997, was professor of women's studies at Athabasca University. Published just shortly before her passing, Roberts' biography of Richardson will remain, not only a tribute to an outstanding peace leader of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also a testimony to Roberts' own brilliant scholarship and commitment to peace activism.

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### **Opposing Positions on the Canadian Welfare State**

*Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change.* Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle, eds. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; xii+329 pages; ISBN 0-8020-7618-1; \$24.95.

*Retooling the Welfare State: What's Right, What's Wrong, What's to Be Done.* John Richards. Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, 1997; appendices, tables; x+300 pages; ISBN 0-88806-420-9; \$18.95.

These volumes contribute to the debate on Canadian state policy in the era of globalization and re-structuring. The books examine women's entitlement in democratic, capitalist societies. They