

Women and Politics in the Interwar Period: Sources from *Time and Tide*

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Articles and letters in the centenary issue of the political and literary magazine *Time and Tide* are useful material for British domestic politics in the interwar period, particularly on the changing role of women (including the 1928 franchise act) and reactions to the international situation in the 1930s.

Newspapers and Magazines

1. Time and Tide



The weekly magazine *Time and Tide* was established in 1920 by the Welsh industrialist and feminist Margaret Haig Thomas, Lady Rhondda. Rhondda had been a suffragette and was imprisoned for arson in 1913. The magazine was aimed for a broad, if intellectual, audience. It was closely linked to the Six Point Group, which was founded by Lady Rhondda in 1921.

a) 'Notes on the Way by Lady Rhondda', February 9 1935 (11-12), extract:

To take few concrete examples, I choose, if I can get them, such people as St. John Ervine, T. S. Eliot, G. D. H. Cole, Ralph Bates, Helen Fletcher, Raymond Postgate, Roderick Random, Professor Laski, Wyndham Lewis, Gerald Heard, Cicely Hamilton, Patrick Thompson, E. M. Delafield, Odette Keun, Louis Golding, E. M. Forster, Aldous Huxley, Ellen Wilkinson, Walter Lippmann, Norman Angell and Winifred Holtby, because I find them honest, stimulating and entertaining writers. It seems to me to matter very little whether I happen to hold exactly the same views as they do, or even whether, on some matters, I hold distinctly opposed views. With some of them, with the two last named, for example, I almost always agree. With some of them it seems to me that I scarcely ever agree.

Activity:

Look up six of the names mentioned on the internet and list beneath their name what they wrote, their general political outlook and what (if any) causes they espoused.

Think about reputable sources, i.e. what sources you should cite / use as evidence in an essay.

Assess whether Lady Rhondda is right in her assertion that she chooses writers with different opinions.

The Changing Role of Women in the 1920s and 1930s

1. Political and Legal Rights

a) The Equal Franchise Act 1928

'A Rainbow Procession. Saturday Afternoon July 3' and Advert, June 18 1926 (28).

A Rainbow Procession

Saturday Afternoon July 3

DETAILS are now available of the main scheme of this dramatic demonstration. Finding themselves hampered politically, exploited industrially, restricted professionally and debased domestically women are coming together again as women, to demand equal rights. Practical, as always, they are making this demonstration not only a thing of multitudes, but a thing of beauty. Each section will have its own colours and the marshals are to carry rainbow colours so that the whole vast effect will be coloured as a rainbow, distinct and definite, but all harmonious.

[. . .]

Mr. Baldwin promised to enfranchise these women during his Government's reign. Time is slipping by and he makes no move. The "under 30s" and the "over 30s" are not too pleased at having to remind Mr. Baldwin, as they have done, so often and at now having to rub it in by means of demonstration. The type of stupid politician who, mole-like, says "there is no demand," will, after July 3, be silent. If he does not see it and hear it for himself he cannot fail to hear of it.

All the old arts and long practice are co-operating in this united effort of women, organised and unorganised, party and non-party, old and young, trained and untrained, skilled and unskilled, professional and domestic, manual worker and brainworker; only the non-worker, the idler, the parasite have no share in it. **[June 18, 1926]**

Activity:

Stanley Baldwin, Leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister, supported equal franchise but needed to persuade members of his own party.

Using your own knowledge, list the reasons for and against the Conservative Government giving women the equal right to vote all men over the age of 21. Why do you think the bill passed in the Commons in 1928?

b) The Six Point Group

'The Six Point Group', January 1923 (4-5)

Extract:

Whilst the objects for which the Group stands are actually of importance to every citizen in the country, they particularly and specifically affect women as women. Matters of special concern to women fall naturally into two groups, since there are two separate capacities in which women to-day stand in a special class. There is the group of reforms which affects women as mothers, and the group which affects them as wage earners. Or to put it in another way—there are the reforms which are concerned with the better protection of children, a matter which is of the gravest concern to every person, but which since the rearing of children is the special profession of so many women, is one on which women tend to have especially strong and definitely thought-out views—and there are the reforms which are grouped round the question of equality of status for men and women, most of which especially affect women in their capacity as wage earners.

The Six Point Group demands:—

1. Satisfactory legislation on child assault.
2. Satisfactory legislation for the widowed mother.
3. Satisfactory legislation for the unmarried mother and her child.
4. Equal rights of guardianship for married parents.
5. Equal pay for teachers.
6. Equal opportunities for men and women in the Civil Service.

Question:

Historian Jane Robinson has written that:

'If NUSEC was the progressive but well-mannered daughter of the NUWSS, the Six Point Group, two years younger, was ruder and louder – the natural successor to Emmaline Pankhursts militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).'

Jane Robinson, *Ladies Can't Climb Ladders: The Pioneering Adventures of the First Professional Women*, London: Doubleday, 180

What do you think Robinson means by this statement? Use the source above and your previous knowledge of the campaign for women's suffrage 1903-1918 to inform your answer.

2. Sex and the Body

a) Birth Control

Letter: The Population Problem, Naomi Mitchison July 6 1928

THE POPULATION PROBLEM

SIR,—It seems probable that after your admirable series of articles on population and the problem of contraception, many of your readers will be willing to consider an idea for their practical co-operation in solving some of the difficulties which confront anyone interested in birth control.

It is clear that birth control is already practised by large numbers in all classes; it is going to have profound effects of all sorts on the well-being of the community. Yet, up to now practically no scientific study has been made, either of the comparative advantages of different methods, or of the effects of the practice as a whole. The one thing that is clear is that no perfect method has been found, at once efficient, simple, æsthetically satisfactory and cheap. A good deal of laboratory work is being done on the subject now, but the ultimate test of any method must be made on healthy men and women living normally together.

There must be a large number of intelligent and public-spirited married couples who want to have children—or more of them—and to whom, although they are willing to space them by the use of contraceptives, the advent of a child sooner than was intended would be a serious difficulty. These people could co-operate with the scientific workers by employing certain indicated contraceptives, old and new, and by keeping very careful records of all relevant facts in connection with their use. It is clear that reliable records can only be obtained from such people. Obviously this is a matter almost entirely for women: they take most of the precautions and all the essential risk. Can a sufficient number be found, each willing to help for a few years, to put this idea into practical form?

Will anyone who is interested write in the first place to me? There are first-class doctors, men and women, willing to give a good deal of time to practical investigation. They are in close touch with the research workers and understand as much as is, up to now, understood by anyone about contraceptive methods. When there are sufficient volunteers to make a start, they will be put in touch with these doctors, under whose direction the whole scheme will be carried out.

I will of course treat any communications in the strictest confidence.—
Yours, etc.,

NAOMI MITCHISON. **[July 6, 1928]**

Questions:

In the 1920s birth control clinics were opened by Marie Stopes in London and Mary Stocks in Manchester. How might birth control and access to it make a difference to the role of women? Thinking about health and welfare in the period, what issues did women face with regard to having a family?

b) Changes to women's clothes and fashion

Advert: The corset belt, February 27 1932 (30)



the freedom of modern woman

ON page ii of cover will be seen a charming drawing by Miss Anna Zinkeisen which is intended to symbolise the freedom of modern woman. The Charnaux corset belt has been specially designed to foster this freedom in so far as it is within the capacity of a corset to do so.

The Charnaux corset belt is made from an 'Anotex' product, a wonderful material made by a new patented process which eliminates all the old objections to the use of rubber for corsetry.

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February 27, 1932

Activity:

Compare women's clothes and underwear from the 1920s and 30s to those in the 1900s and 1920s. List the changes in shape, freedom of movement, hem line, waistline etc. Do the changes reflect changes in the role of women? Or are some features still similar?

c) Amy Johnson's breakthrough

Miss Amy Johnson's Flight', May 24 1930 (2-3)

'Miss Amy Johnson's Flight'

If it had been said before Miss Amy Johnson's historic flight that a young and inexperienced woman would successfully follow in the track of Mr. Hinkler, one of the most daring and experienced of male pilots, we have no doubt that the majority of people would have laughed ; especially as Miss Johnson had only an ordinary flying-school course and sixty hours' of air experience and no experience at all of long- distance flying. Her achievement is indeed remarkable and significant.

What Miss Johnson has done any young woman of like qualities—and there are hosts—can do. It is a question of a certain breakdown, conscious or unconscious, of mental barriers—a release from the conventional idea that piloting an aeroplane is in the first place a job for the man, and that the endurance and skill and mental balance needed for a flight of 12,000 miles over distant and dangerous lands and sea, can never be found in the female and are essentially and inevitably the prerogative of the male. The important and significant aspect of Miss Johnson's flight is that she has demonstrated once again that the sex division between male and female is absurd and obsolete, that both have to be regarded in the first place as individuals, and that there is no activity in the modern world that the one is less qualified to under- take than the other. **[May 24, 1930]**

Activity:

There is more information about Amy Johnson and her engineering ability [here](#).

Assess whether Amy Johnson was ground-breaking as an engineer and a pilot. Think about whether her achievements were typical of women in work at that time or celebrated because they were unique. Did she break through perceived physical and biological barriers too?

You could consider how aviation and travel by plane was considered in this period too.

Challenges to Stability

1. The Threat of Fascism

- a) 'The Revolt Against Internationalism—German Variety by Cicely Hamilton', September 20 1930 (9-10).

This first extract follows Hamilton's observation that the German press is mainly anti National Socialist and her conversations with some Germans, who tell her that this is because the press is 'Jewish owned':

Race with them [the National Socialists] is everything—the German blood; thus only those in whose veins flows German blood are held worthy of German citizenship. Their programme demands, further, that all Jews and non-Germans are to be removed from positions of public authority and trust; it is even proposed that all Jews and non-Germans who have made their home in Germany since the outbreak of the war should be bidden to depart forthwith.... In the light of this more than drastic programme, is it to be wondered at if the Jewish-owned Press hits back?

In this second extract, Hamilton concludes that the National Socialist movement is anti-feminist and a masculine 'fighting party'. In an article the next month Hamilton warned of the threat to German democracy of the National Socialist party and of its militarism:

In conclusion: National-Socialism is anti-feminist. The Hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth] is a purely masculine business—no room for girls in its ranks; nor has its parent organisation much use for womenfolk, young or old, save as obedient followers. Adolf Hitler, their leader, has said as much in public; theirs was a fighting party, he declared, and therefore essentially a man's. It is true, there is a Women's Order of National-Socialism and I have even heard mention of a Maiden's Order; it is true, also, that the Women's Order voices its loyalty in the pages of a weekly paper. A nice Brown Shirt boy once pressed a copy on me—I am sure he thought I should like it. It is a humble little weekly, exhaling domestic subjugation of the pre-franchise era . . . A very humble little weekly.

Investigating the evidence:

How does the idea of the 'Jewish owned press' fit into Anti-Semitism? [Think about other examples of anti-Semitism at the time].

What tone does Hamilton take in writing about the Hitler Youth? Why does she take this tone for her readership do you think?

How valuable do you think this is as a record of what is going on in Germany in 1930?

b) Ellen Wilkinson on the 'Nazi Terror'

Letter: The Nazi Terror, Ellen Wilkinson, April 15 1933 (17).

THE NAZI TERROR

SIR,—The natural astonishment and indignation of decent people against the unprovoked attacks of the Nazi storm troops on inoffensive fellow-citizens has somewhat obscured the tragedy that has overtaken so many educated German women.

The Fascist leaders have never disguised their disapproval of the independent woman worker. Captain Goering has defined woman's sphere as being the home, and her chief occupation the recreation of the tired warrior... two activities that may be somewhat difficult to reconcile. In the wholesale clearance of Jews and Socialists from any official positions, many women have lost their posts as doctors, teachers, public officials of all kinds, particularly in Berlin, where the Socialist municipality had carried its ideas of equality into practical effect by encouraging the employment of women in responsible positions.

But non-Jewish women not connected with any political party have also been compulsorily retired, and their places filled by men. Very few women are included in the lists sent by the Nazi local leaders to the Chancellor in response to his demand for trustworthy Nazis to fill the vacated posts. What women are included have been so for such positions as nurses and baby-welfare attendants, which could not be filled by men.

So great is the terror in Germany at the moment, and so vindictive the punishment on anyone suspected of complaining to foreigners, that any observer has to be careful with names and addresses, but the list of women of repute dismissed from their posts is already a long one. The unknown must number many more.

While it is quite impossible in present circumstances for foreigners to intervene in individual cases, it surely is the duty of the various women's organisations in this country, irrespective of party or religion, to make a very emphatic protest against unfair discrimination against women as workers.

The liberties of women in this country, as of others, have been too hardly won, and are even now too precariously held, for it to be safe to allow the case of the German women to go by default.

I am, etc.,
ELLEN WILKINSON. [April 15, 1933]

Questions:

What was the National Socialist policy with regard to women? [Think about Children, Church, Cooking]. Why might Ellen Wilkinson be alarmed by this?

How much do you think her attitude reflects changes to the role of women in British society at this time?

2. The responsibility to act

a) Spain and Writers

'Letter: Aid for Spanish Intellectuals', Sylvia Townsend Warner, May 7 1938 (18)

AID FOR SPANISH INTELLECTUALS

SIR,—From Madrid, Langston Hughes writes:

Sometimes a meal consists largely of bread and of soup made with bread. Somebody is sure to repeat an old Spanish saying, "Bread with bread— food for fools." Then we all laugh. One of Franco's ways of getting back at Madrid is to broadcast daily from his radio stations at Burgos and Seville the luncheon and dinner menus of the big hotels, the fine food the Fascists are eating and the excellent wine they drink.

This is an appeal for money to send food to loyal Spain. There have been many such appeals, and it is to the credit of England that they have been answered. But this is a different appeal. It is an appeal for those men and women, loyal to their country, who are teaching in schools and barracks, nursing in hospitals, making drugs and anaesthetics in laboratories, carrying on researches in science, and preserving libraries and works of art. Their contribution to keeping up the spirit of the people and to mitigating the agonies of war has been of inestimable value.

Let us send them what reinforcements we can: the material reinforcement of such things as food and tobacco; the mental reinforcement of a gesture of friendship and admiration. Please send your money to: Spanish Intellectuals Fund, Writers Association, 23, Haymarket, London, S.W.1.

I am, etc.,

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER. [May 7, 1938]

Activity:

Look up the political affiliations of Langston Hughes and Sylvia Townsend Warner?

What other writers do you know of who published and campaigned on the Spanish Civil War? Do they share similar affiliation to Hughes and Warner?

How does this letter indicate the cultural response within Britain (and internationally) to the war and the rise of both fascism and communism?

b) A plea from a 'provincial lady'

E. M. Delafield was best known for her *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, which was serialised in the magazine. Gently ironic, this letter is written in the same style.

Letter: Hospitality for Jewish Refugees, E. M. Delafield December 31 1938 (18)

HOSPITALITY FOR JEWISH REFUGEES

SIR,—May I, as a Provincial Lady, make the following suggestion to others ? Most provincial households have at least one guest room that could be offered to one or two Jewish refugees in need of rest and country quiet, for a month's hospitality or more.

As my own guests, although applied for, have not yet been allotted to me, I propose to deal frankly with the difficulties that will naturally occur to the mind of every housewife.

It will be possible to ask for guests able to speak English. It will also be reasonable to suggest that Christian, or non-practising, Jews would be easier to entertain than those requiring special catering. It is probably advisable to state a definite length of time for which hospitality is available.

Even so, the plan will undoubtedly mean extra work, added expense, a considerable sacrifice of time—possibly grumbling from the less imaginative members of the household—perhaps trouble with the maid—or maids—and additional difficulty in the already complicated business of running a small home today.

There is one consideration, and so far as I know one only—that disposes of all these objections. Are we going to wait to help those who have lost everything, and have suffered unspeakable cruelty and injustice, until we can do so with no slightest possibility of inconvenience to ourselves? If so, we shall wait a long time.

Offers of hospitality can, I believe, be made to Mrs. Ormerod's office at 5, Mecklenburg Square, London, W.C.1.

I am, etc.,

E. M. DELAFIELD. **[December 31, 1938]**

Question: What had happened in Germany and Austria in November 1938? What difference did this make to the British public's perception of Nazi Germany? Why might Delafield's letter appeal to readers?

What might its limitations be? Think about where it is published, its readership, and Delafield's writing.