Jeannette Rankin and the Women's Peace Union

by Harriet Hyman Alonso

"I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war." With these words spoken during the House of Representatives' war declaration vote in 1917, Montana's Congressional Representative, Jeannette Rankin, began her career as a leader of the U.S. peace movement. Newly elected to the House that spring, Rankin was one of the few representatives to vote against U.S. participation in World War I and later was the only member of either house to vote against U.S. participation in World War II. In the years between her two terms in the House, she fostered her pacifism by holding important organizing positions in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Women's Peace Union, and the National Council for Prevention of War.

Except for one brief period, from May to November 1929, Rankin's career has been well-documented in biographies and oral histories. During those six months, she worked as the Executive and Legislative Secretary of the Women's Peace Union, an interwar women's peace organization that campaigned for the elimination of war through a proposed constitutional amendment. Unlike the WILPF or the NCPW, the Peace Union followed the nonresistant ideology propagated by abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison and later by Leo Tolstoy and Mohandas Gandhi.

Rankin's six months with the Union proved to be a troubled time for herself and for the WPU as well. First, the Union's strict and uncompromising ideology tested Rankin's own definition of pacifism, forcing her to clarify her political goals, beliefs, and personal boundaries. Second, the Peace Union's collective style of decision making and office management conflicted with Rankin's own work style and self-image. Finally, after years of hard work and commitment, both the WPU leaders and Rankin experienced what is known today as "burnout." Both also appear to have generated false expectations about Rankin's employment with the Union, which led to additional tensions in the WPU's office. All of these factors add up to a turbulent chapter both in Rankin's life and in the history of the U.S. women's peace movement.

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Jeannette Rankin in 1918

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The Women's Peace Union was founded in August 1921 by a small group of former New York state suffrage leaders and World War I peace activists. This group of women—which included Elinor Byrns, Caroline Lexow Babcock, Gertrude Franchot Tone, and Elizabeth Ellsworth Cook—had broken away from the New York State Woman's Peace Party on the grounds that the organization's policies were not truly pacifist but were instead against only a specific war, World War I. In 1919, the women joined with Fanny Garrison Villard, the daughter of William Lloyd Garrison, to organize the Women's Peace Society, an organization intent on supporting nonresistance, that is, meeting violence with nonviolence. As nonresisters, the women pledged to actively work against all war by lobbying for legislative change to rid the country of arms, military personnel, and aggression toward other countries. The Peace Society was unsatisfactory to some women, however, because Villard, who was close to eighty years old, wanted complete financial and policy-making control. Therefore, a few of the discontented members formed yet another new group, the Women's Peace Union. Founded on the same principles of nonresistance as the Women's Peace Society but with collective leadership, the WPU promised to be the organizational answer to the women's dissatisfaction.

By 1923, the WPU's decision-making committee—the Working Committee—had formulated a political program that encompassed the women's philosophy of nonresistance. Influenced by such legal solutions to war as the World Court, the League of Nations, the Outlawry of War movement, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which committed the sixty-two signer nations to negotiations before resorting to armed conflict, Elinor Byrns, a New York lawyer educated at the New York University School of Law, drafted a resolution for a constitutional amendment. The final version read:

> Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each house concurring therein), that the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution, which shall be valid, to all intents and purposes, as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several states:
>
> Section 1. War for any purpose shall be illegal, and neither the United States nor any State, territory, association, or person subject to its jurisdiction shall prepare for, declare, engage in or carry on war or other armed conflict, expedition, invasion, or undertaking within or without the United States, nor shall any funds be raised, appropriated, or expended for such purpose.
>
> Section 2. All provisions of the Constitution and of the article in addition thereto and amendment thereof which are in conflict with or inconsistent with this article are hereby rendered null and void and of no effect.
>
> Section 3. The Congress shall have power to enact appropriate legislation to give effect to this article.[1]

From 1923 to 1926, Caroline Lexow Babcock and Gertrude Franchot Tone, both experienced suffragist campaigners in New York state, led many intensive lobbying efforts for the WPU. Finally, in April 1926, the women found a senatorial sponsor for their resolution in Lynn Joseph Frazier, the populist Republican senator from North Dakota who had opposed U.S. participation in World War I. Frazier first presented the resolution to Congress on April 23, 1926, and he continued to do so during each congressional session until 1939, thereby proving his own commitment to peaceful alternatives to international problems. The WPU's leaders and the senator maintained a close working relationship throughout this period, and Frazier helped the organization secure Senate hearings in 1927, 1930, and 1934. By 1929, when Rankin joined the WPU team, the organization and Frazier had received much publicity for their campaign to outlaw war.

Rankin's involvement with the Women's Peace Union most likely began as much as a result of overwork on the part of the most active WPU leaders as her own desire to work for the amendment. Like most peace and women's organizations in U.S. history, the WPU depended on donations and volunteer labor to keep itself alive. By early 1929, however, after six years of constant lobbying and campaigning, several of the organizers were in a state of extreme fatigue. Because of family responsibilities and the need to work or look for work during the Depression, the WPU was receiving less money and fewer volunteer hours, adding to the wear and tear on its regular workers. The age of the women was also becoming a factor. Political activism took a physical toll, and by 1929 most of the active founding members were in their fifties or sixties. During one intense lobbying campaign in 1927, Caroline Lexow Babcock complained:

> While I have not been working half as hard as last year I am going to confess to you that when I do return to Nyack I spend an absurd amount of time

1. "Senate Joint Resolution 100—69th Congress, 1st Session," April 19, 1926, Women's Peace Union Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania [WPU/SCPC].

2. Caroline Lexow Babcock to Mrs. William Hugh Fain, December 5, 1927, WPU/SCPC.

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Photograph by Edmonston, Washington, D.C.

Jeannette Rankin in about 1915

> either in bed or resting. Middle age I find is not all that it is cracked up to be. It is so disgusting to have a much greater capacity for work than ever before without the physical stamina to swing it.[2]

Unfortunately, the WPU did not have youthful leaders. Especially during the 1930s, when war and the draft seemed imminent, many of the younger pacifists were involved in the growing anti-war organizations on college campuses. In addition, many of the former suffragists simply did not trust younger, untrained activists to carry on. The older women chose to persevere in the WPU's work themselves.

Rather than recruiting and training a new volunteer to take charge of the organizational and lobbying efforts for the Union, the organization chose to look for a seasoned activist. A temporary but not unusual financial solution in the suffrage and peace organizations was proposed by Working Committee member Elizabeth Ellsworth Cook, who anonymously guaranteed the WPU $1,800, or $300 a month for six months, to "secure a trained woman to work as Washington representative and field organizer." Working Committee members Elinor Byrns and Mary B. Orr excitedly wrote to the other committee members that if the right person was chosen the committee "could then become practically an advisory committee if that is what it wishes." The successful candidate would allow the exhausted organizers the luxury of remaining involved without having to do the daily office work and the tiring lobbying. At least four people applied for the position, but Elinor Byrns was unhappy with either their lack of experience or their untried commitment to peace. She suggested that the Working Committee consider asking Jeannette Rankin if she might be interested in the position. Byrns believed that Rankin's background and ideals were compatible with those needed by the Women's Peace Union.[3]

Because Rankin had once campaigned for suffrage in New York state, it is likely that Byrns, Babcock, and Cook had known her, although none of them referred to any such relationship in their letters. It is known, however, that in 1914 Rankin had campaigned with Katherine Devereaux Blake, an active supporter of the WPU. Blake had been instrumental in convincing Rankin that women needed the vote "to get rid of war." Thanks to Blake, Rankin had developed a strong commitment to peace and had become involved in the burgeoning women's peace movement. In 1915, she had attended meetings leading to the founding of the Woman's Peace Party, which led to her vote against U.S. participation in World War I and also against the Espionage Act. Rankin had also supported the work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from its first meeting as an international organization in Zurich in 1919 and had rejected those organizations that offered unquestioning support for the League of Nations and the terms of the Versailles Treaty. For Rankin, as well as for WPU leaders, the treaty was a disaster, for by placing the full blame and punishment on Germany, the victorious nations would only foster German resentment and the potential for more war. From 1920 to 1924, Rankin lobbied for such issues as the Sheppard-Towner Bill (which provided for federally funded pre-natal and well-baby and mother clinics) and an amendment to outlaw child labor. In 1925, she accepted a position as field secretary for WILPF, and she organized and spoke for that organization for about a year. According to several of Rankin's biographers, however, she was unhappy with WILPF's poor planning and the small budget made available for her work. By the end of a year, she had quit her job and returned to Georgia, where she founded the Georgia Peace Society.[4]

3. Elinor Byrns and Mary B. Orr to Mary B. Orr, Gertrude Franchot Tone et al., February 4, 1929, WPU/SCPC. Cook, who was sales trainer at the Wall Street firm of Hemphill Noyes and Company, earned the high salary of $12,000 a year, unusual for a woman at the time.

4. See Jacqueline Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1987); Adah Donan Lindquist, "A Study of Jeannette Rankin and Her Role in the Peace Movement" (Honors Paper, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, 1971); Hannah Josephson, *Jeannette Rankin: First Lady in Congress: A Biography* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1974); Joan Hoff Wilson, "'Peace is a Woman's Job . . .': Jeannette Rankin and American Foreign Policy," *Montana, the Magazine of Western History* 30 (Winter 1980): 28-41; 30 (Spring 1980): 38-53; Kevin Giles, *Flight of the Dove: The Story of Jeannette Rankin* (Beaverton, Oregon: The Touchstone Press, 1980), 106.

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The photograph at left shows Jeannette Rankin at her farm in Georgia, probably in the 1920s. Below left, Rankin is working in the science lab at the University of Montana in Missoula in about 1900. To the right is a portrait of Rankin taken when she was running for the Senate on the National Party ticket in 1918. Below Rankin is posing with a group of women at her home in Missoula in 1912.

Photograph by Johnstons

Photograph by Mackay

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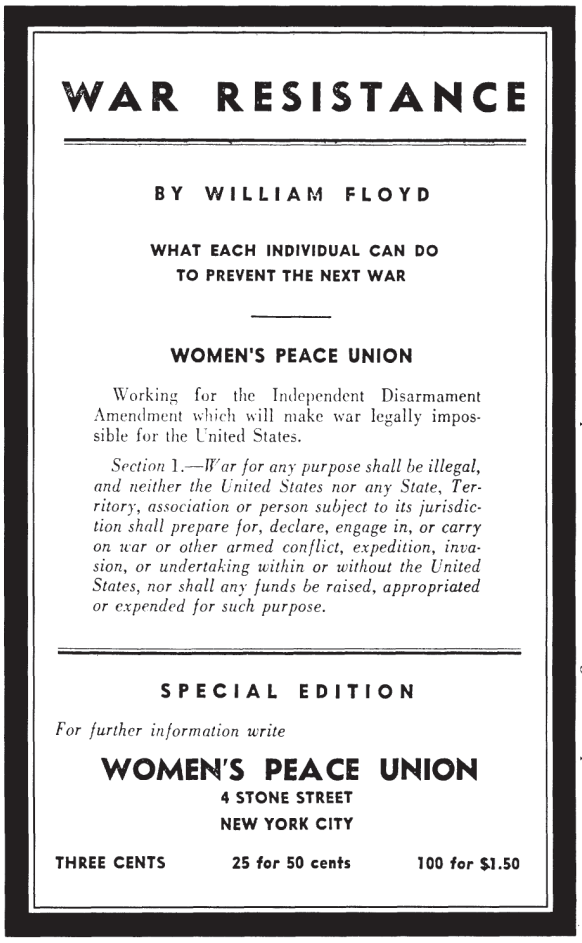
Elinor Byrns was well aware of Rankin's opposition to war, her work with WILPF, and her belief that war destroyed democracy. She hoped that Rankin might be "ready now for something more fundamental," the Peace Union's one-issue campaign to get the constitutional amendment resolution passed. In any case, Byrns believed that it was wasteful "for a person of such splendid training and conviction" to be "on a pecan farm" in Georgia rather than working with the Union. On March 18, Mary Orr wrote to Rankin that every time Union members looked "for a permanent political organizer with training and conviction" their thoughts turned to her. Rankin wired back that she was "GREATLY INTERESTED" and asked for details. For the next month, the Women's Peace Union and Rankin negotiated the terms of her employment. Byrns emphasized the "interesting . . . fascinating . . . and intellectually . . . satisfying" nature of the work while also admitting that the organization was neither large nor well-functioning and was in need of grassroots organizing to counterbalance the work being done in Washington, D.C.[5]

Orr then spelled out the terms of employment. The position was to be guaranteed for six months at $300 a month "to act as the Executive and Political Secretary of the Women's Peace Union." Orr used this catch-all title alternately with "Legislative Secretary," hinting at the unclear, all-encompassing nature of the job. Half of Rankin's time was to be spent traveling in order to lobby and organize; the other half was to be spent in New York. Although the WPU guaranteed the salary, Rankin was expected to raise her own travel funds as well as money to cover the general expenses of the organization. Orr assured her that the Working Committee would help all that they could, but she hedged about the actual amount of volunteer time that would be available. She wrote: "But it so happens that every member of the Committee is a very busy woman, holding down one or more jobs." Not one of the women could be "specifically counted upon, though it often happened that several or more can and do help."[6]

Rankin was apparently so eager to take up the work for the amendment that she did not press the WPU for a firm policy on fund raising or for a clearer job description. She wrote that she had been living in the country "long enough to be quite thrilled with the idea of getting into the 'fight' again." She even agreed with the idea of "helping" with fund raising, although she "could not accept it as part of the job." On April 25, the Working Committee voted to offer Rankin the position, expressing hope that it might



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BY WILLIAM FLOYD

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"seem desirable and possible to continue our relationship after that time." But the issue of raising money was still not resolved. On this unclear basis, Rankin accepted the position and left Georgia in early May to meet with the Working Committee in New York.[7]

As soon as Rankin arrived at WPU headquarters, she received a long list of the duties she would be assuming. Caroline Lexow Babcock suggested that she travel immediately to Washington, D.C., to meet with Senator Lynn Frazier. Babcock was particularly interested in having the amendment resolution reintroduced for the third time as soon as the congressional session opened. If Frazier agreed, Babcock recommended that Rankin then visit Senator George Norris, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, to discuss the composition of the subcommittee that would be in charge of a proposed second hearing (the first one had been held in 1927). The summer,

5. Elinor Byrns to Orr, 1929 [?], Orr to Jeannette Rankin, March 18, 1929, telegram, Rankin to Orr, March 27, 1929, WPU/SCPC; Byrns to Rankin, April 1, 1929, Jeannette Rankin Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania [JR/SCPC].

6. Orr to Rankin, April 18, 1929, JR/SCPC.

7. Rankin to Byrns, April 6, 1929, JR/SCPC; Minutes of the "Special Meeting of the WPU-Working Committee Meeting," April 25, 1929, Orr [?] to Rankin, April 26, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

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Babcock continued, was a good time to work for the amendment's support in the states of the subcommittee members, because most of the senators spent the summer months at home. The rest of the Working Committee, "thrilled by Miss Rankin's optimism," wanted her to work on getting the amendment introduced into the House as well. They thought that it would be particularly auspicious if Rankin could find a congresswoman to introduce the amendment.

The Working Committee also thought that one of Rankin's primary responsibilities should be building up the WPU's volunteer Congressional Committee. Women in each congressional district had to be identified who would be responsible for remaining in contact with their congressional and senatorial representatives. Rankin would then send frequent "multigraphed" statements and organizational instructions to these women. Most important to the members of the Working Committee, however, was that Rankin clearly understand that the Women's Peace Union wanted "only such a degree of success and rapidity of success as is possible *without any compromise whatsoever.*" Rankin had to understand that results only mattered if the principles of nonresistance and no compromise were upheld. To date, they told Rankin, the Peace Union had made considerable progress "without yielding one iota."[8]

Rankin accepted the ground rules and the projects the Working Committee had outlined and then left for Washington, D.C., driving six hours in the rain, to meet with Lynn Frazier. The senator, although not very optimistic about "a change of sentiment in the Senate," did believe that the "peace sentiment" was growing in the country. He readily agreed to reintroduce the amendment, and on May 16 he did so, creating Senate Joint Resolution 45. When Rankin visited with other senators, several gave her their usual response to the WPU's plan, that the amendment went "too far" and could not be taken seriously. But a few were friendly. George Norris agreed to a hearing if Frazier requested one, and Republican isolationist William Borah of Idaho, who had previously refused to support the Peace Union's work, even offered to serve on the subcommittee. Rankin did not report on which senators she had known personally during her two years in the House or if there was a possibility that they were simply being polite and friendly to a former colleague. It is likely, however, that at least some of Rankin's former acquaintances accepted her more readily than they would the usual WPU lobbyist, an advantage the Union had probably counted on.[9]

By mid-June, the Working Committee was so pleased with Rankin's work that they voted to finance a trip for her to address the National Education Association's conference in Atlanta. At the conference, Rankin not only spoke before a thousand women, but she also carried the message of the amendment to the Georgia state legislature. She convinced her old acquaintance, Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives Richard Russell, to allow her to speak and then asked the legislators to introduce and "memorialize" the amendment resolution, thereby asking Congress to either pass or reject it. Rankin informed the WPU's Working Committee that this new approach might serve as a model, allowing for the amendment's introduction and memorialization in every state legislature. This could increase publicity and bring the issue closer to the voting public. Rankin had made her first unique contribution to the amendment campaign.[10]

Back in her New York office, Rankin encouraged WPU members to organize grassroots letter-writing campaigns to senators. She wrote to WPU Congressional Committee member and letter-writing enthusiast Vaughn Brokaw that "these centers of interest scattered over the nation" would be the driving force "to eventually pass the resolution." She asked Brokaw and others for their personal opinions on various senators' attitudes and also for some insights into their political stands. She also asked members to organize and supervise a six-week state campaign consisting of telephone calls, postcards, short and long letters, and visits from at least six women a week to senators on the Judiciary Committee and other senators such as Charles Deneen, whom the Peace Union wanted on the subcommittee. The key elements in Rankin's approach were the sheer numbers of women involved and the volume of letters and telephone calls each senator would receive. She suggested that all letters be written in such a way that an answer was required, that follow-up letters be sent regularly, and that women write more than once if necessary to ensure results. Rankin also wrote to Union members asking them to send her the names of the state presidents of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Women's Club, the PTA, and the American Association of University Women in order to send them WPU literature. Rankin knew that her name carried a certain amount of weight, and at the end of August she wrote to WPU Working Committee member Mary Winsor that she was "progressing with some encouragement" in the five congressional districts she had singled out.[11]

8. Caroline Lexow Babcock to Rankin, May 9, 1929, Minutes of Working Committee Meeting, May 16, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

9. Lynn Frazier to Babcock, May 10, 1929, Rankin to Orr, May 25, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

10. Rankin to Babcock, July 3, 1929, Orr to Zona Gale, August 23, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

11. Rankin to Vaughn Brokaw, July 9, 1929, Rankin to Mary Winsor, August 28, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

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Although the WPU seemed to be very active and was pleased with the speeches, radio broadcasts, leafletting, and recruiting taking place in the districts, by Rankin's third month with the group some minor incidents had occurred that would eventually lead to her leaving the position. At first, Rankin's infractions were minor and generally overlooked. For example, Elinor Byrns complained to Caroline Lexow Babcock in July that the printing of a WPU leaflet had included one of Byrns's statements from the hearing where Senator Frazier had inadvertently used "I" for "we" when reading into the *Congressional Record.* Byrns deduced that Rankin had quoted Byrns's words without first proofreading them and had neglected to change the quote from a personal to a collective statement. She worried that readers would identify the nonresistant sentiment with herself rather than with the organization as a whole. As long as changes were made before more copies were printed, Byrns decided to ignore the error. Rankin also expected WPU help in writing statements, but the Working Committee expected her to take care of that work by herself. From their viewpoint, she had been hired to relieve them of such work. As one of Rankin's biographers has noted, however, the ex-congresswoman had a personal distaste for writing and probably also felt that a woman with her experience and reputation should have secretarial or at least volunteer help.[12]

A more serious occurrence took place on Labor Day. Rankin had been asked to make a speech on WEVD, a New York radio station. Unaware that her topic was to be "Labor and Peace" and not simply a discussion of the amendment, Rankin had to quickly alter her remarks to include something on labor. When she arrived at the station, she discovered that "the radio was out of commission" and she could not make the speech. In the meantime, however, the *New York Times* had gotten a copy of the talk from WEVD. The *Times* reported that Rankin was asking organized labor to "'back President Hoover in his sincere effort to reduce armament.'" Elizabeth Cook, the benefactor who had donated Rankin's salary to the WPU, was very upset by the article and asked—but did not insist—that Rankin send her a copy of the speech. Cook was upset that Rankin had suggested that the Women's Peace Union would ever have considered supporting any measure that proposed a reduction of arms. This was exactly what the Working Committee had warned Rankin about before she had accepted the position. Rankin had been instructed to represent the Peace Union only as an uncompromising nonresistant organization. Rankin responded to Cook's polite inquiry by stating that she had been quoted incorrectly, but she apparently did not send Cook a copy of the speech.[13]

As preparations began for a hearing for Senate Joint Resolution 45, more problems arose between Rankin and the WPU, primarily because Rankin made decisions without consulting the Working Committee. Caroline Lexow Babcock asked Senator Frederick Gillett to chair the subcommittee that would hear the resolution, and he accepted. In the meantime, Rankin proceeded in her own direction. She had received a letter from Senator Frazier in September in which he had stressed that there was a "world of opposition to SJR45 . . . backed by powerful influences that have plenty of money." Interpreting this to mean that the subcommittee would never sanction the resolution, Rankin suggested to Frazier that the WPU might be satisfied with a report to the Senate from the full Judiciary Committee without a hearing before a subcommittee. Rankin wrote a similar letter on October 4 to Senator Clarence C. Dill, a member of the Judiciary Committee, asking him to propose a full Judiciary Committee report at the earliest possible date. She wrote: "The Hearing of January 22, 1927 covers the ground rather completely. Unless another hearing is desired by the Committee we would be satisfied with a report." Rankin's strategy was to eliminate the hearing and obtain a report that would automatically place the resolution on the Senate calendar for possible debate by the full Senate.[14]

Rankin took her independent action even further. On October 8, immediately after hearing that Judiciary Committee Chairman George Norris had finally appointed members of the subcommittee, she called Senator Gillett. He and Dill both agreed that a report, even an adverse one, was preferable to a hearing. Senator Frazier, however, was "rather at sea" about her action, especially after his previous unsuccessful attempts in the 70th Congress to get the Peace Union's resolution off the Senate calendar and onto the Senate floor for an open debate. He wrote:

> With an unfavorable report from the Committee, of course it puts it on the calendar, but there is practically no chance of getting a record vote on it as the members would not want to go on record either voting for or against it—at least that has been their policy in the past.

Frazier favored a hearing. He thought that the political climate had changed since the Kellogg-Briand Pact was signed in 1928, making it a favorable time for the publicity and the hearing report to

12. Byrns to Babcock, July 10, 1929, Byrns to Orr, 1929 [?], WPU/SCPC; Giles, *Flight of the Dove*, 145.

13. Rankin to Elizabeth Ellsworth Cook, June 6 [?], 1929, WPU/SCPC; *New York Times*, September 3, 1929; Cook to Rankin, September 5, 1929, Rankin to Cook, September 6 [?], 1929, WPU/SCPC.

14. Lynn Frazier to Rankin, September 13, 1929, Rankin to Nelson Mason, October 1, 1929, Rankin to Clarence C. Dill, October 4, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

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Caroline Lexow Babcock

Courtesy of Katharine Babcock Fulmor

reach the general public. In light of the favorable peace climate, Frazier even questioned whether new information might not move the subcommittee to submit a favorable report.[15]

When Rankin heard this from Frazier, she must have realized that she was treading deep waters. After all, the Working Committee had told her that Frazier was to be consulted about everything, and she was well aware of the close working relationship the women had with the senator. Furthermore, as a politician herself, Rankin could not have been blind to the amount of work and care the Women's Peace Union had put into cultivating this relationship with the one senator who was continuously willing to support the resolution. With all this in mind, Rankin immediately sent word to Senator Dill to postpone reporting on Senate Joint Resolution 45, because Frazier believed that holding a hearing was a good idea. She then wrote to Frazier, changing her previous stand:

> I am glad you expressed your feelings about a Hearing. Your judgement would be right in this matter as you are in touch with the sentiment of the Senate. If it is possible to get the right material in the Hearing great good can come from its wide distribution.[16]

15. Rankin to George Norris, October 8, 1929, Rankin to Frazier, October 8, 1929, Frazier to Rankin, October 9, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

Unfortunately for Rankin, the issue did not stop there.

While in the office one day, Caroline Lexow Babcock happened to see Frazier's letters to Rankin. She called a "hasty conference" with Elinor Byrns and Elizabeth Cook and then with Rankin herself. Byrns then wrote Frazier a note informing him that the Working Committee would meet soon "to adjust everything satisfactorily." She also expressed her concern about Rankin's communication with Dill, especially because Dill was a new member of the Judiciary Committee who had had little experience with the amendment. Frazier's reply was full of relief. "I am glad that you and Mrs. Babcock agree with me that a hearing would be a good thing," he wrote. Sounding even stronger in his support of the resolution, Frazier continued: ". . . it would be well to show the great increase in sentiment for world peace, showing that the thinking people throughout the world are becoming thoroughly convinced that war should be outlawed." Frazier concluded by expressing his faith in the women's ability to plan and arrange "testimony for a hearing that will set forth the facts and the needs of humanity much better than I can."[17]

For whatever reason Rankin chose to act independently that October, the WPU found her actions to be unforgivable. Whether Rankin sincerely believed that an adverse report with a place on the Senate calendar was the best course of action or if she was simply not interested in organizing a hearing is not important here. What is important is that she had not only overstepped her bounds as far as the Working Committee was concerned, but she had also placed the Union's relationship with Frazier in jeopardy. By handling the relationship carefully, the women had succeeded in getting the senator to support their stand and their tactics, and they had always approached him before discussing their plans with anyone else. The relationship had worked well for over three years, but Rankin's approach had threatened it.

The situation was further complicated by an apparent personal conflict between Mary B. Orr and Jeannette Rankin, which in late September caused Orr, a loyal and reliable WPU leader and office organizer, to resign from the Working Committee and "all responsibilities" of the WPU. Her action was especially shocking because Orr had been involved in much of the initial negotiation with Rankin and had

16. Rankin to Dill, October 16, 1929, Rankin to Frazier, October 16, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

17. Byrns to Frazier, October 17, 1929, Frazier to Byrns, October 21, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

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The photograph at left shows a young Jeannette Rankin in her garden. Below, Rankin (with Carrie Chapman Catt to her right) is addressing the National American Women's Suffrage Association in Washington, D.C., in 1917. To the right, Rankin is shown hoisting the suffrage banner as chairman of Montana Activities in about 1913.

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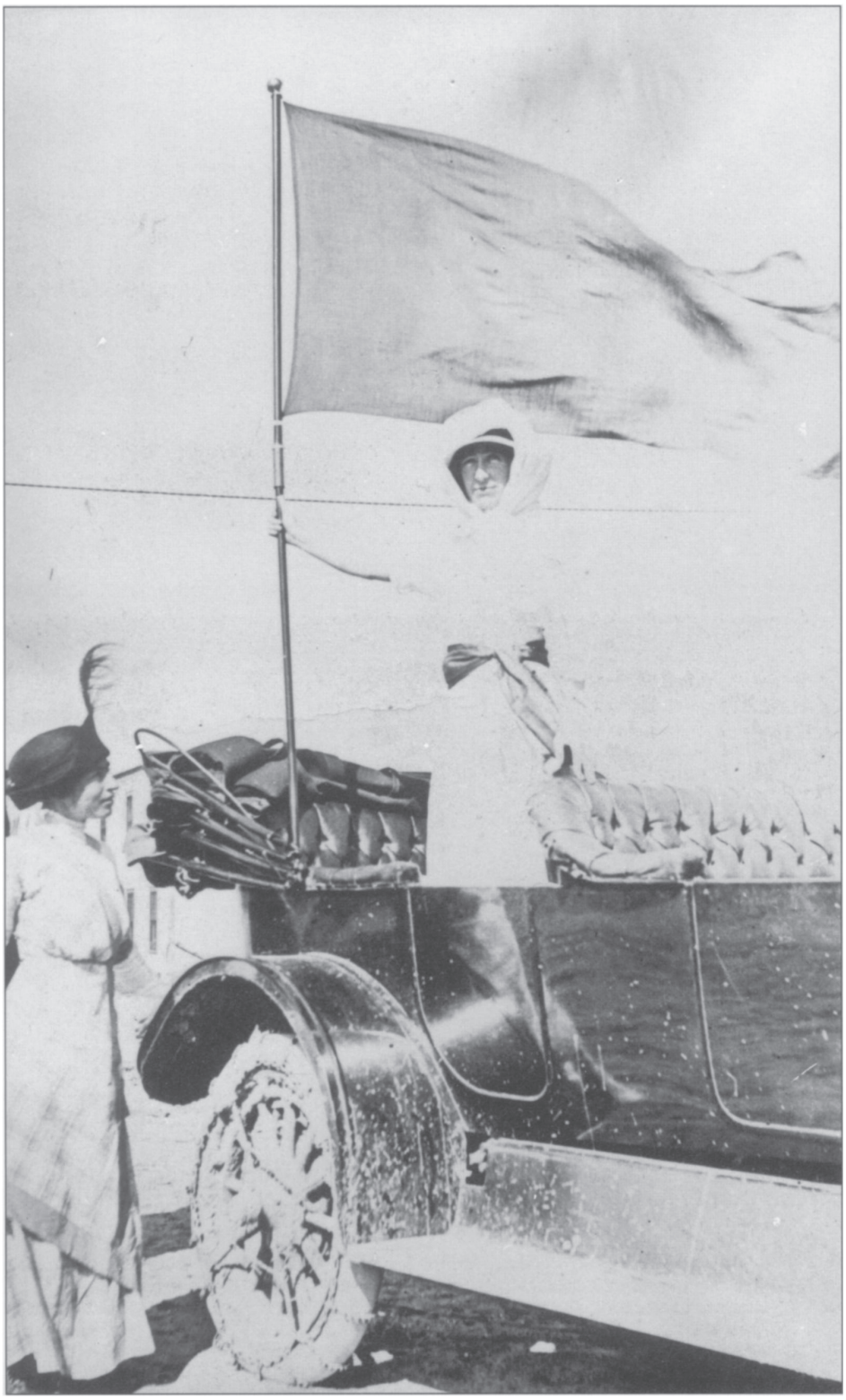

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Jeannette Rankin in her office in 1918

been so excited about Rankin's appointment. Neither Orr nor anyone else ever identified the exact cause of the conflict. Rankin did have a reputation for throwing temper tantrums when she did not get her way, and that tendency plus her disgust for "day-to-day" tasks may have resulted in friction in the office. Unwilling to confront the problem head-on, the Working Committee accepted Orr's resignation with deep regret and with the hope that she would "again feel like being in charge of the office" in the spring. By spring, Rankin's stint with the WPU would be over and Orr would have had time to recover from whatever trauma she had experienced.[18]

Jeannette Rankin's contract was not renewed, even though Mary Winsor, a wealthy Pennsylvania WPU organizer and donor who thought Rankin was "the most wonderful person" the WPU could have and wished for her employment "for several years to come," had offered at least one thousand dollars toward her salary and expenses. The Working Committee met but delayed a final decision until those members who were not present could vote. Gertrude Franchot Tone waived her right to vote, claiming that the "full story" had not yet been told. She wrote Byrns that she saw "some hitch somewhere" and could not understand how it all tied in with Mary Orr's resignation. Although Tone knew that there had been general dissatisfaction with Rankin's "deficient" reports, she simply did not believe that such a small thing could be "the whole reason for the almost unanimous vote" against her. Tone and others did not know the details of the situation. The Working Committee had kept what it considered scandalous news for the press very quiet, out of all written records, and even away from the ears of members who had not attended meetings. It is likely that only Caroline Lexow Babcock, Elinor Byrns, Elizabeth Cook, and Jeannette Rankin ever knew the whole story.[19]

On October 23, the Working Committee voted not to renew Rankin's contract. The committee also requested that Rankin cease all work on a proposed article and circular and that she not represent the Union at the National Council for Prevention of War conference unless a place on the program had already been reserved for her. Babcock wrote to Mary Winsor that those Working Committee members who had closely observed Rankin's work during her first five months agreed that they "ought not to

18. Orr to Friends/WC, September 28, 1929, Unsigned/WC to Orr, October 30, 1929, WPU/SCPC; Giles, *Flight of the Dove*, 237; Wilson, "'Peace is a Woman's Job,'" Part 1, 30.

19. Mary Winsor to WPU, June 17, 1929, Winsor to Babcock, June 27, 1929, Winsor to WPU, October 31, 1929, Gertrude Franchot Tone to Byrns, October 13, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

20. Minutes of Working Committee Meeting, October 23, 1929, Women's Peace Union Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York [WPU/NYPL]; Babcock to Rankin, October 26, 1929, Babcock to Winsor, October 30, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

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extend the agreement." She implied that Rankin did not take the appropriate action needed to help the amendment pass:

> There is not one of us who does not recognize Miss Rankin's charm, her sparkling personality and her tact, which enable her to make so many friends and establish so many contacts; her delightful, easy, platform manner, her ready address. You know her and you know the many, many qualities she possesses which make her apparently just the person we need for this cause.
>
> The difficulty is one which we could scarcely have foreseen and which those who have not observed her work from day to day could not detect. It lies in the fact that the particular things which should be done to advance the amendment and especially to organize support for it throughout the country do not get done.[20]

Rankin would not have renewed her contract with the WPU even if they had not taken that decision away from her. By October 4, she had written to Frederick Libby asking if a position he had once offered her with the National Council for Prevention of War was still available. He replied that he wished to meet with her, and by November 5 the two had come to an agreement. Rankin began working for Libby as NCPW Legislative Secretary within two weeks after leaving the WPU. She left New York on about November 15, claiming to still be interested in the amendment and in informing southern senators "that there are women working for a complete repudiation of war." Senator Frazier met with Rankin in December and wrote to Babcock that he was sorry to learn that she was no longer with the Union. He wrote: "Personally, I have a very high regard for Miss Rankin and felt that she was capable of doing good work in creating public sentiment for the resolution." Perhaps the WPU leaders had overreacted to Rankin's behavior with Frazier.[21]

After Rankin's departure, Mary Orr returned to work for the Peace Union and Caroline Lexow Babcock took over organizing the hearing held in April 1930. Rankin was busy working for the National Council for Prevention of War, and she continued to speak favorably on behalf of the amendment, although her political stands were far more compromising. As a representative of the NCPW, Rankin spoke in favor of any step taken toward disarmament and in support of U.S. participation in the League of Nations and the World Court—all unacceptable stands to the Women's Peace Union. As the world moved closer to war during the 1930s, Rankin took more and more compromising stands on the issue. When Elinor Byrns heard that Rankin had spoken in favor of neutral mediation and U.S. military preparedness at a Washington, D.C., Anti-War Mobilization rally in 1940, she wrote: "If it is true, then one can understand why she was not successful with the W.P.U." The Union women, however, never maligned Rankin in public, and even after she had left them to work for the NCPW, she lobbied from time to time for the amendment.[22]

For Rankin, the WPU was a brief experience in a long anti-war career. Her tenure with the Union was not often mentioned in oral histories unless the interviewer specifically referred to it. But in retrospect Rankin's experience with the Women's Peace Union is important to an understanding of her career. During the 1920s, the idea of outlawing war by legalistic means was prevalent in both diplomatic and peace movement circles and was echoed in the concept of the Kellogg-Briand Pact; it also united Rankin and the leaders of the Women's Peace Union. In 1925, Rankin spoke before a meeting of the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War:

> As long as war is the legal method of settling international disputes, it will at some time be used for that purpose. If we as a people recognize war as a crime against humanity, we can arouse the spiritual power of the nation.[23]

Like Senator Frazier and the WPU organizers, Rankin also believed in the right and "responsibility" of the people to determine governmental policy. Furthermore, she was of the same feminist frame of mind as the WPU leaders were. Peace, she believed, was a "woman's problem," and disarmament could "not be won without their aid." In various speeches, she stated that she did not know why men fought and women did not, nor did she understand why men considered the "temperamental pacifism of women" as unmanly. All she knew was that the only way to achieve peace was "through forbearance from fighting on the part of men as well as women." Women, she said, harking back to World War I feminist-pacifist thought, were the "contributors to civilization." Because the vote had been secured, the "emancipated woman is not going to permit her contribution to be ruthlessly destroyed by the futile man made institution of war." Women, she said, were "a vital factor in public opinion" and would make the difference between "the growth of a world

21. Rankin to Frederick Libby, October 4, 1929, Libby to Rankin, October 9, 1929, Libby to Rankin, November 5, 1929, National Council for Prevention of War Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania; Frazier to Babcock, December 20, 1929, WPU/SCPC. Rankin's work with the Georgia Peace Society was important to the Women's Peace Union, for the South, an area with few former suffragists or peace activists, produced few supporters for them.

22. Byrns to Tracy Mygatt, June 13, 1940, WPU/NYPL.

23. Van Voris, "Carrie Chapman Catt," 200.

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THE WOMEN'S PEACE UNION
OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

GREETING!

WOMEN FROM POLE TO POLE—UNITE!
SAFEGUARD AGAINST WAR.
PREPARE FOR PERMANENT PEACE.
PEACE KNOWS NO BOUNDARY.
PEACE KNOWS NO ENEMY.
PEACE HAS NO TRADE BARRIER.

WOMEN! Make war impossible by agreeing never, under any circumstances, to take part in the hideous business of man killing.

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts

at peace or . . . civilization . . . stupidly bent on self-destruction."[24]

The ideological problems between Rankin and the Women's Peace Union leaders rested in each party's commitment to nonresistance. Both Rankin and the organizers were influenced by the ideas of William Lloyd Garrison, Leo Tolstoy, and, later, Mohandas Gandhi, but none of them realized that their levels of interest were not the same. The Union leaders organized campaigns around nonresistance; Rankin did not totally encompass this belief until after World War II, when she traveled to India to seek out Gandhi. In fact, in late 1917, after her vote against war with Germany, Rankin had voted in favor of the U.S. declaration of war against Austria-Hungary, claiming that the vote was a mere technicality once war with Germany had begun. Rankin also voted for military expenditures for arms and manpower to fight the global conflict. In 1929, therefore, Rankin may have been a pacifist in her belief that war was wrong, but her tactics had not embraced nonresistance. The WPU's idealistically uncompromising stance did not allow for halfway measures, while Rankin moved toward favoring any political action that might lead to disarmament. To make matters worse, neither Rankin nor the Union leaders were willing to compromise or even discuss possible alternatives to WPU positions. In this light, Rankin's six months with the Union appear to have been a brief sojourn into a world that was more narrowly defined than her own, perhaps giving her an introduction to a philosophy that she would later seek out and absorb but that she was not yet quite prepared to embrace.

The difference in ideology probably exacerbated other problems concerning the proper strategy and tactics to be used by the WPU. Rankin's personal style also may have added to the tension. She had the reputation of being a loner, preferring the company of her immediate family to that of other women workers. The WPU's Working Committee operated as a collective, with the women often meeting over

24. David G. Fisher, *"The First Lady of Peace: Jeannette Rankin"* (Athens: Georgia Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia, n.d.), film; "Peace and the Disarmament Conference" (typescript, n.d.), Jeannette Rankin Papers, The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Jeannette Rankin, "Dear Friends," speech, September 13, 1929, WPU/SCPC.

25. Giles, *Flight of the Dove*, 167.

26. Jeannette Rankin, "Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government," interviews by Malca Chall and Hannah Josephson, Regional Oral History Project, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1974 (typescript), 273-274.

27. Wilson, "'Peace is a Woman's Job,'" Part 1, 39; Lindquist, "A Study of Jeannette Rankin," 19; Jeannette Rankin Oral History, University of California, Berkeley, 273-274.

28. Giles, *Flight of the Dove*, 140.

29. Wilson, "'Peace is a Woman's Job,'" Part 2, 43.

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lunch and frequently spending time together outside the office. In addition, Rankin, even as a suffrage leader, liked to follow her own "intuitive moods," often causing resentment and friction. This tendency may have caused part of her problem with WILPF as well, for the women there also worked in a collective mode.[25]

Rankin once claimed that the "peace people" and the suffrage people were one and added that they would not take her advice on "how to campaign and what to do." She complained that the Women's Peace Union lacked a true understanding of grassroots work and worked "from the top down" rather than in "democratic fashion." She also objected to their lobbying techniques, claiming that they differed from her own:

> They had no idea of a constituency or educating a constituency or of educating a Congressman or anything of that kind. They wanted speeches that you'd give to the Congressmen and get them in the record. Of course, I couldn't do that. . . . No use whatever—an insult to the Congressmen.[26]

Rankin's description of the WPU as a hierarchial organization was an accurate one, although it was not a clear reflection of the leaders' own organizational desires. The women had given legislative work priority on the basis of their experience in the suffrage campaign, and they sincerely believed that the suffrage amendment had set the example and the peace amendment would logically follow. Budgetary concerns and lack of woman-power prevented them from carrying their work to the local level. They depended on Rankin to broaden their base of support, but they offered her no tangible aid to advance the project. For her part, Rankin made no visible efforts to raise money, to recruit new volunteers, or to discuss with the Working Committee the advantages or disadvantages of their techniques versus her own. As a result, when she left the Women's Peace Union, the treasury held only twelve dollars and the remaining leaders felt a keen despair and sense of frustration.

As historian Joan Hoff Wilson has pointed out, Rankin as well as other western feminists may also have suffered from a feeling of resentment that they had never received total support from their eastern counterparts. Apparently, Rankin held a long-standing belief that the easterners never gave her the respect that she believed she had earned. She complained that the WPU attempted to "muzzle" her by preventing a woman of her stature and experience from making independent decisions. Rankin had similar problems with the NCPW, which she left in 1939 because Florence Boeckel, a leading force in the organization, wanted to concentrate on legislative action and Rankin thought that grassroots work was more appropriate.[27]

Rankin may also have been a victim of what is known as "burnout," a state of fatigue resulting from overwork. It is possible that this was one of the main reasons for her unhappiness and supposed erratic behavior in the WPU offices. When Rankin was hired by the Women's Peace Union to replace its own overworked and tired leaders, she may have also been nearing the same state herself. For close to twenty years, she had stomped the suffrage and peace trails for little money or recognition. While in Georgia, she lived in semi-voluntary poverty, relying on an inheritance from her father and a stipend from her brother to pull her through periods of unemployment. Her commitment to peace and social change led her to accept jobs in the movement, but they were always low-paying and exhausting, requiring days of travel and long hours. As the years passed, Rankin simply wore out. At the age of forty-nine, she left the Peace Union to work for the National Council for Prevention of War. Within four years, in 1933, she had written to Frederick Libby:

> I don't know how I could possibly spend three months traveling and survive. It is going to be very difficult for me to keep going for the three months of the Western trip. It is quite necessary for me to be at home to relax and secure courage to go out and face the cold, stupid world again. . . .[28]

The symptoms of burnout often disappear after a period of rest and introspection (which may explain the numbers of suffragists who resurfaced in the peace movement after going through a period of obscurity). For Rankin, the years following World War II provided that period of recuperation. During that time, she finally adopted the concept of nonresistance, and in 1968 she became active once again in the anti-war movement. At that time, she echoed the beliefs of her sisters in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Women's Peace Union: "I'm for immediate, total and unilateral disarmament . . . the quickest way to promote world peace is total unilateral disarmament. . . ." Forty years had passed since Rankin's brief service with the Women's Peace Union, and although she tended to forget the Union when talking about her life, the experience had become a vital part of her pacifist makeup.[29]

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