

Participation in the war effort opened up new opportunities for previously marginalized groups who then gained concessions from the State

The idea that war acted as an opportunity for previously marginalised groups and then encouraged States to make concessions to these groups is flawed. This essay, by analysing the conditions for women, the poorer workforces and the socially vulnerable, will show how States did little to address their underprivileged conditions as a result of war. The evidence used will specifically counter Arthur Marwick's theory that the experiences of war acted as an opportunity that led to social concessions for women and, instead, support Bessel's theory of 'normalisation.' Bessel argued that, upon armistice, governments attempted to return societies to pre-war conditions as a means to achieve stability.

The case for a much greater protected labour force as a result of war is also controversial. The theses of Mayer and Maier recognise that whilst States may have conceded some power to labour forces across Europe during war, this was short lived as the old advocates of pure capitalism retrieved superiority over workers soon after war. This argument is supported by the analysis of Andrew Shonfield, who argued that even in 1965 'old fashioned capitalism' still existed.¹ There is also a shortage of evidence to suggest that war inspired governments to adopt increased responsibility for marginalised groups. This implies that social welfare was developing unrelayedly to war. Whilst there is ample documentation suggesting which social attitudes and expectations changed during war, there is little empirical evidence showing that this amounted to marginalised groups gaining concessions from the State.

There is a consensus that women received an undeniable opportunity to enter the work place during World War One. However, the apparent surge in female employment

¹ Marwick, p. 77.

within previously male dominated professions often came at the expense of a decline in female employment in previously female dominated professions. For example, between July 1914 and April 1915, in London and Berlin, female employment increased 95% in the metal work industry in return for a 44% decrease in the printing industry.² These figures also question whether States themselves afforded women the opportunity to work. Jean-Louis Robert argued that initial surges in female employment preceded State intervention so in fact it was the private sector, not governments, offering employment to women.³ This does not deny increased female employment during war but it does limit the argument that war acted as a watershed moment for the participation of women in the workplace and that war-governments themselves were responsible for this participation. The theory of the workplace as an opportunity is also debatable. For many women, work was dangerous, exhausting and altered social lives. An Italian, Angiolina Boschis, recalled how before war women would dance, whilst during war ‘we laughed and smiled a lot less.’⁴ So whilst there is clear evidence of female participation in the workplace during war, this cannot be considered an opportunity.

Ute Daniel suggests that ‘[Women got] emancipation on loan’⁵ rather than received it permanently as a result of war. This is evident in the apparently improved conditions of female employment during war then the large reversal of this progress after war. In France in 1916, Albert Thomas- First Minister of Armament- created *Le Comité du travail féminin* to ensure the integration of women into the workplace, whilst in 1917 legislation was introduced, overseeing the creation of breast feeding rooms in factories.⁶ The inclusiveness of such legislation was short lived as it could only apply when women were in the workplace.

² Table 5.8 in Lawrence, p. 159.

³ Robert, p. 254.

⁴ Bravo, p. 93.

⁵ Daniel, p. 188.

⁶ Bonzon, pp. 185-86.

When governments tackled demobilisation women were forced out of employment as quickly as they had entered it. Women suffered the heaviest reversal of employment in government-owned industries. In London, by April 1919 nearly 80% of women who had worked in government-owned factories during the war had lost their job, whilst in Paris, within the same period; almost 50% of women who had been employed in munitions factories were no longer working.⁷ This is a clear example of governments returning women to their pre-war status. Gail Braybon highlights that before war it was accepted that once women were married they would leave the work place, this same policy applied equally after war.⁸ German government decrees, immediately after the war, removed all women, who were not dependent upon their income, from the work place to make room for returning soldiers.⁹ Arthur Marwick would counter these statistics with the argument that war changed social and gender expectations which increased the demand that eventually led to government concessions.¹⁰

This is evident in the unwillingness of women in Germany to return to domestic service. A labour exchange report in June 1919 revealed that 1,730 women were unemployed in Danzig, and by August, it was 2,155 unemployed despite a high demand for domestic servants.¹¹ Although attitudes may have changed during the war, namely the recognition of women as a gender capable of work, there is little evidence to support that States acted on these changes – hence Danzig’s rising female unemployment. In fact governments in Britain, France and Germany keenly sought out the reversal of female employment to solve the problem of demobilisation. All of this validates Ute Daniels’ claim that women only received social emancipation for a brief time. It would seem true, for employment, that women only gained concessions from the State when it suited the State – notably during war – and once

⁷ Table 7.3 in Cole, pp. 215-16; Ibid. p. 211.

⁸ Braybon, p. 150.

⁹ Bessel, p. 99.

¹⁰ Marwick, pp. 29-32.

¹¹ Bessel, p. 103.

these needs were fulfilled – notably war production – the pursuit of gender equality in employment was abandoned.

The comparison of France and Britain in particular reveals that women did not receive the vote as a direct result of war. Suffrage movements across Europe did see war as an opportunity to further the cause for female enfranchisement. Millicent Fawcett argued that women must ‘show themselves worthy of citizenship’ during war.¹² This, however, did not mean women automatically received the vote, or that when they did, it was a result of the female war effort. Whilst in 1917, Herbert Asquith made direct reference to the war effort as a reason for enfranchising women in Britain; suffrage was achieved for only a minority of women in 1918.¹³ Susan Grayzel suggests that failure to acknowledge all those women under the age of 30 undermines the argument that British parliament awarded female suffrage as a result of the war effort – if the war effort alone were the cause of female enfranchisement, then all those who had contributed would have received recognition.¹⁴ This implies ulterior motives. In the same speech, Asquith makes reference to the ‘preponderance of female as compared with male voters,’ which would suggest that Asquith’s opinion was shaped by how best to win votes. In fact, in Russia, the first belligerent nation to enfranchise women in July 1917, initial proposals of democracy demanded that Bolsheviks offered the vote to as many people as possible to gather as much chance of success as possible.¹⁵ Asquith was also speaking in 1917, when Britain was still reliant on a disciplined female workforce. Therefore, officials offered incentives, such as suffrage, to maintain a disciplined workforce that they may not have intended to honour.

¹² Grayzel, p. 102.

¹³ Herbert Asquith, April 1917, ‘Female Suffrage Speech,’ House of Commons, cited in Oram, G. (ed.) *HIH255 Course Documents*, Swansea University, 2012.

¹⁴ Grayzel, p. 103.

¹⁵ Grayzel, p. 104.

As for France, the Senate recognised women's participation as a love for 'partie' rather than an audition for suffrage.¹⁶ Instead, much like the demobilisation crisis, women were charged with responsibility for tackling the perceived depopulation crisis. A series of pronatalist legislation, including punishment directed at prohibiting abortion,¹⁷ adhered to the 'normalisation' theory that women should return to their pre-war status as home bearers. Grayzel argues that the strength of suffrage movements before war, in Britain and France, determined the speed at which governments conceded suffrage after war.¹⁸ This would suggest that universal suffrage may have been achieved without war and may even have been delayed by war. Although this is speculation, it further undermines the advocacy of war as an opportunity to achieve universal suffrage. What is clear, as proved by all countries, is that female rights did not improve dramatically after war. Even in countries where the right to vote was conceded, women were continuously under-represented. *The War and Women Suffrage* noted in 1915 that there were no women representatives to debate social legislation effecting women and 'the exclusion of women from political life is, therefore, not a smaller, but greater injustice in time of war.'¹⁹

Government dependence on home-front labour led to greater State intervention in all countries during the First World War. Whilst it is true that this led to improved working conditions for previously marginalised workers during the war, John Gray noted how his brother exchanged 'his wage of a few shillings a week for one of several pounds'²⁰ as a result of wartime employment, recognition of these labour forces was not a lasting legacy of war. Arthur Marwick highlights the importance of Article 247 in the Treaty of Versailles in revealing an ideological change regarding the recognition of workers as a result of war.²¹

¹⁶ Hause, p. 103.

¹⁷ Hause, p. 108.

¹⁸ Grayzel, p. 105.

¹⁹ *The War and Women Suffrage* (London: NUWSS, 1915) in Grayzel, pp. 151-53.

²⁰ John Gray (1938) in Bonzon, p. 173.

²¹ Marwick, pp. 126-27.

That Marwick stresses an ‘ideological’ change would suggest that intentions did not lead to implementation. Point 7 of this article states ‘the principle that men and women should receive remuneration for work of equal value.’²² Yet in Britain, women’s average income was half that of men still in 1960.²³ Point 3 of this article states ‘the payment to the employed of a wage adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of life as this is understood in their time and country.’²⁴ Yet in Britain for twelve years after war the cost of living was higher than average real wages.²⁵ In France, Patrick Friederson argued that employees suffered a 20% drop in real wages during war and when these recovered in line with inflation, the severe housing shortages and rationing offered no real improvement in life conditions.²⁶ Both pieces of evidence reveal that Article 247’s intentions did not result in real changes for workers.

Both Mayer and Maier have constructed thesis’ stating that whilst war dented class structure for a short while, old regimes managed to retrieve control. This is seen most clearly with the success of industrialists and officials who fought to revive pre-war capitalism and reduce the State intervention experienced during war. The return of this capitalism for most of post-war Europe also argues against increased State recognition of Trade Unions as evidence of improvements for the marginalised work forces. For example, whilst in France the threat of strike from *Confederation Generale du Travail* achieved the eight-hour working day in April 1919.²⁷ This was overshadowed by the concessions made by the State in favour of employers rather than employees. The ‘Programme of the union of Economic Interests’ (an Employers Organisation in France) made several demands to Paris after the war, including opposition to all State interference, ‘in the running of private undertakings’ and administrative decentralisation ‘in face of the advance of national and regional initiatives’.

²² Treaty of Versailles Article 427.

²³ Table for Women’s median full-time earnings as a percentage of men’s in Routh, p. 58.

²⁴ Treaty of Versailles Article 247.

²⁵ Aldcroft, p. 352.

²⁶ Friederson, p. 240.

²⁷ Cole, p. 202.

The French government yielded to these demands ostracising workers again. The French Minister of Armaments, Louis Loucheur, discarded Trade Union in hopes of continued labour cooperation with the government by vetoing the use of State contracts as a method to aid transition of demobilisation, favouring private entrepreneurship instead.²⁸ Even in Germany, where the recognition of Trade Unions was strongest as a result of the Stinnes-Legien agreement,²⁹ by the mid-1920's Trade Union membership suffered a sharp decline as a result of its failure to combat the consequences of hyperinflation.³⁰ Whilst there is no doubt that workers gained greater recognition during war, this did not lead to continued State concessions. In fact much of the recognition achieved during war was undone as a result of old elites fighting to preserve social structure.

The argument that war either increased the speed of government concessions regarding welfare reform or somehow strengthened it can be dispelled by the continued extension of legislation long after war and the ground-breaking legislation before war. Joanna Bourke argued that 'Identifying changes as accompanying or following war does not necessarily mean that they were caused by war.'³¹ This is true of many reforms in the aftermath of war that were simply an extension of pre-existing welfare. For example, in Austria, 'Workmen's Compensation' developed during the period of 1887 to 1894; it was extended again in 1917 and was not completed until 1928. This shows a process of legislative growth that spans beyond any direct causation of war. In fact, several countries introduced ground-breaking legislation before the war. For example Italian 'Social Insurance' was opened to all sexes in 1913 whilst 'married women may join without needing the consent of their husband, and minors without the authorization of whoever exercises the paternal

²⁸ Cole, p. 204.

²⁹ Cole, p. 202.

³⁰ Bessel, p. 101.

³¹ Bourke, p. 26.

authority or guardianship...'³² The British National Health Insurance Act, introduced as early as 1911, accounted for 'all persons of either sex, whether British subjects or not.'³³ The Austro-Hungarian Empire had introduced compulsory Health Insurance by 1888. The comparison between belligerent and neutral countries also offers no obvious disparity in welfare reform. For example, Sweden and Great Britain introduced similar State subsidies for house building only two years apart at the end of war, yet one country had fought in war and the other had remained neutral. This evidence suggests that welfare reform was occurring irrespective of war. The flood of social reform in the half century following World War Two further supports this argument. Ultimately, not only is there a dearth of evidence to suggest war directly caused direct increased welfare reform, there is sufficient evidence to suggest welfare reform was expanding regardless of war.

The magnitude of war inevitably altered all groups in every society. Conversely there is little evidence to suggest that States made a considerable effort to continue or consolidate these changes. In fact, as Bessel suggests, across Europe there was a period of 'normalisation' during the inter-war period. Consequently, war acted neither as a watershed opportunity for women to find employment, nor as a catalyst in bringing about entrenched gender equality in employment. The same can be said of war's impact on women achieving suffrage. In no country throughout Europe did women achieve suffrage dependent on their participation in the war effort. In France, for example, it would take another World War until this change became permanent. As for working men vulnerable to the ruthlessness of laissez-faire capitalism, whilst they may have been ushered back into work at the expense of women, the workplace they re-entered was no more protected than before war. The old industrialists of the nineteenth century ensured governments returned to an unrestricted capitalist system overwhelming any strengthening of Trade Unions. Much like suffrage movements, the

³² Italian Social Insurance in *World War I Total War and Social Change: Europe 1914-1955*, p. 18.

³³ British National Health Insurance Act in *World War I Total War and Social Change: Europe 1914-1955*, pp. 39-45.

expansion of social welfare pre-dated the war and was not completed until long after, revealing the lack of influence war had on encouraging governments to initiate welfare reform. Whilst World War One had devastated Europe, States after the war were not significantly more sympathetic to the improvement of previously marginalised groups, and in many cases States actively returned these groups to their marginalised status.

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