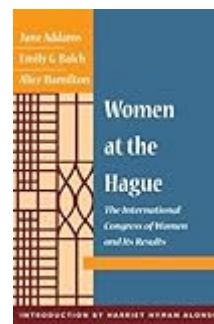


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jane Addams, Emily G. Balch, Alice Hamilton. *Women at the Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. x1 + 91 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02888-5; \$12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07156-0.



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“Cannot the Women Do Something about This War?”

The plaintive cry of World War I soldiers to their nurses, begging them to do more than simply attend to their wounds, motivated the participants in the 1915 International Congress of Women to strive for a peaceful solution to global conflict (p. 60). The accounts of three of those participants, who had already become leading figures of the Progressive Era in the United States, are republished in this slim volume, along with an outstanding introduction by CUNY history professor Harriet Hyman Alonso. This book will make an excellent primary source reader for a variety of history courses and should be a “must read” for scholars of early twentieth-century U.S. history. The direct applications of this book are two-fold. One is to enhance an exploration of the antiwar movement surrounding World War I. The essential thesis of Addams and her colleagues was that war was an evil which should be avoided at all costs. Through the Hague conference, they sought to internationalize that position and develop a framework by which future armed conflicts could be avoided. The second area in which this book will be quite useful is a study of the women’s rights movement of the 1910s. The participants in the International Congress of Women raised many is-

ues which would quickly be adopted by the suffrage movement in the United States. Among these was the belief that women would provide a more peaceful attitude towards world affairs than their male counterparts. As Alice Hamilton observed, “Those nations are committing race suicide and impoverishing their children and grandchildren, and they know it, yet they seem to be unable to find any way to end it. They do not need us [women] to encourage them to keep on, but it may be that they need us to help them find a way out” (p. 26). One might also include this book in a seminar-style course in which students explore comparative protest movements in an international context—considering both women’s rights and antiwar movements (among others) from a variety of perspectives.

There are three significant aspects to the book. First, in a well-written introduction to this new edition, Harriet Hyman Alonso profiles the authors and the International Congress of Women. She then provides a descriptive analysis of the texts, including an exploration of the language used by the three women. Finally, she explores the future peace activities of Jane Addams, Emily Balch,

and Alice Hamilton. The articles themselves form the body of the work. Addams and Balch each wrote three, while Hamilton contributed a single article. Each of the articles is journalistic in tone, as they were originally intended for publication in newspapers and magazines. Later in 1915, all seven articles were published under the same title as this new edition. The audience for the original articles may be somewhat difficult to discern. Obviously, educated women were one potential target for the reports. On the other hand, the authors were clearly writing to persuade a larger American audience of the need for peace, as the United States was still two full years removed from entry in to World War I, and of the validity of the women's peace movement. As such, the tone of the articles is less informative than it is persuasive. Beneath the surface, there is a broader message in these articles from Europe. First of all, the authors reaffirm the traditional antiwar position that women have espoused in earlier conflicts. Secondly, there is a preview of the leadership position played by women in the later protest movements of the twentieth century. Finally, the arguments presented against the war parallel the argument that would be presented by many of the same women in favor of broader equality for American women.

To best understand the nature of the articles presented in this book, one must appreciate the complimentary nature of the antiwar movement and the women's suffrage movement during the Progressive Era. Both of these movements rejected the dominant theory that women were not suited for leadership positions. Instead, leaders of both movements (often the leadership groups overlapped) argued that women were best suited to redeem the errors caused by male-dominated regimes. In developing the antiwar position, women such as the participants in the Hague conference adopted many of the same arguments as their pro-suffrage counterparts. Among the most notable of their strategies was a desire to internationalize the movement. In this regard, many of the women may have taken as their inspiration the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, held in London.

When the female delegates to this convention were excluded, they began preparations for their own women's rights conference—eventually held at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Women in both movements also emphasized their roles as mothers. Describing why she saw protesting the war as a vocation for many women, Jane Addams explained, “so women, who have brought men into the world and nurtured them until they reach the age for fighting, must experience a peculiar revulsion when they see them destroyed” (p. 61). As the Progressive Era dawned, women saw the new opportunities they were given as an opportunity for growing influence. Women's leaders began an effort to use public opinion in their favor as they campaigned for full suffrage and for equal voting rights. As war clouds gathered over Europe, many suffrage leaders feared a setback to their cause. Others saw the need for women to step forward and provide a different perspective than that of the imperialistic and calculating rulers of the world's great powers. Many of the women looked to the example of the American Civil War, in which women served valiantly as nurses and focused on raising and protecting their families. At the same time, many felt an obligation to maintain “moral witness against all violence” (p. viii). It was in the latter spirit that Adams, Balch, and Hamilton set out for Europe in 1915 and that U.S. Representative Jeannette Rankin cast her famous “Nay” vote against the 1917 Declaration of War.

This new edition of the essays by Addams, Balch, and Hamilton will be an important asset to historians and students of the Progressive Era alike. Harriet Hyman Alonso's introduction provides valuable background information and expertly sets the context for the essays. Each of the thought-provoking essays supplies the reader with an insight into the antiwar efforts of the World War I era and calls the attentive reader to reflect on the state of world affairs in general. Although it is a slim volume, *Women at The Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results* is an important one, and merits a place on reading lists and bookshelves.

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