

**"TO SUFFER AND TO SERVE": BRITISH MILITARY DEPENDENTS,  
PATRIOTISM AND GENDER IN THE GREAT WAR**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**McMaster University**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (1997)  
(History)

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: "To Suffer and To Serve": British Military Dependents, Patriotism and Gender in the Great War.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 298

## ABSTRACT

During the Great War, the dependents of all servicemen in each branch of the British Armed Forces became theoretically eligible for maintenance at public expense. In August 1914, only a fraction of all Army wives and no Navy wives were eligible for allowances or pensions; by November of that year all were entitled to some level of assistance. The organisational chaos caused by the Liberal Government's decision to grant "universal" benefits to dependents sparked an extensive press campaign and inspired the formation or expansion of a large number of charitable agencies. 1915 and 1916 witnessed attempts on the part of the Asquith Liberal Government and the Asquith Coalition Government to respond to these expressions of concern with a series of half measures. By the summer of 1916, however, the issue had been complicated by the looming problems of reconstruction and predictions of the collapse of the system under the demands of millions of demobilised servicemen. Before the resignation of Asquith in December 1916, the Ministry of Pensions Act was passed. Thus, between August of 1914 and December of 1916 the system had been completely transformed from a disparate, and limited trickle of maintenance for a select few to a widely dispersed benefit controlled by the state.

The accelerated pace of social policy in this arena has attracted some attention particularly from feminist historians who describe this system as the cornerstone of the gendered British welfare state. In illuminating some important issues in the debate over these benefits, this approach has obscured others. While it is crucial to understand the roots of inequity in the British welfare state, too narrow a focus has tended to obscure continuity in practice and theory and minimise the impact of contemporary attitudes on the development of these policies. This thesis counteracts the tendency of feminist historians to apply presentist models by demonstrating that charities and governmental agencies responsible for the welfare of servicemen's dependents owed as much or more to traditional Liberal, Conservative and patriotic conceptions of poor relief as to New Liberal ideals of state

responsibility. As well, by focusing on the process of decision making at the highest levels of government, this thesis demonstrates the heterogeneity of people and ideals influencing the formation of policy in this period.

Both pragmatic and theoretical concerns inspired the drive for reform in this arena. During the Great War, the traditional role of women as the first victims of any war had been partially superseded by the necessity to convince them of their centrality to the war effort. Some perceived the moral and physical power wielded by women in wartime as a promise, others as a threat; both sides of the debate used the treatment of servicemen's wives and widows as a bulwark for their arguments. Servicemen's wives and widows fit neatly into the dichotomy of the female role in wartime; their image could be used to promote an idealised form of passive female bravery and to counteract the "masculinising" tendencies of the war. The ubiquity of such images contributed to the conception of these women as inherently "deserving" of public maintenance. Through the examination of such images, this thesis demonstrates the link between the vagaries of public opinion and the often haphazard formation of social policy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Richard Rempel, my thesis supervisor in the Department of History at McMaster University, deserves a large portion of credit for the completion of this thesis. His astute and knowledgeable criticism has been instrumental in determining both the content and presentation of my work. He has provided me with a model of scholarly erudition and enthusiasm for the past six years.

I would like thank many other members of the McMaster History Department for their support and interest. Dr. Harvey Levenstein and Dr. Ruth Frager have unfailingly fulfilled their various duties as members of my committee. Dr. Wayne Thorpe, Graduate Chairman, has gone above and beyond his duty on my behalf. Finally, I must thank Wendy Benedetti and Vi Croydon, who patiently untangled my occasional bureauractic snarls.

A number of graduate students in Canada and the United Kingdom also deserve my gratitude. Louise Mussio of McMaster's History department and Tina Moffat of McMaster's Anthropology department have provided me with true and steady friendship as well as challenging debate for seven years. I must also thank Janis Lomas, of the University of Staffordshire in Stoke-on-Trent, UK and Sara Posen of Simon Fraser University for their contributions to this thesis in the form of references, information, criticisms and encouragement.

My mother, Patricia MacIsaac and my sister Dr. Susan MacIsaac have inspired me with their intellectual and emotional strength as well as their unswerving belief in the importance of ideas and education. My father, William MacIsaac, my brother, Jefferson MacIsaac and my brother-in-law, Barry Klein, have continually set a high standard of discussion and debate which is always tempered by humour, comprehension and understanding. My nieces Lauren and Julia constantly remind me of the power of language and the joy of learning. My new family, the Taylors, have welcomed me into their haven by the water and distracted me from the

pressures of school and work.

My husband, Gregory Taylor, has listened to innumerable drafts of this thesis and provided an invaluable perspective on the ideas contained in it. His discipline, his sense of humour and his exemplary devotion to his own work, have given me the strength and stability to do my best.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Pearl Yanish in return for serving as an example of strength, conviction and commitment to principle.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>SSFA</b>	Soldiers' and Sailors' Families' Association
<b>RPF</b>	Royal Patriotic Fund
<b>NRF</b>	(Prince of Wales') National Relief Fund
<b>GCPRD</b>	Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress
<b>OFF</b>	Officers' Families' Fund
<b>COS</b>	Charity Organisation Society
<b>WEWNC</b>	War Emergency: Workers' National Committee
<b>WCG</b>	Women's Co-operative Guild
<b>NUWSS</b>	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
<b>WSPU</b>	Women's Social and Political Union
<b>BMA</b>	British Medical Association
<b>PRC</b>	Parliamentary Recruiting Committee
<b>CCNPO</b>	Central Committee for National Patriotic Organisations
<b>BEF</b>	British Expeditionary Force



**Prologue:  
Official and Charitable Provision Before the Great War**

The period of the Great War witnessed the full bureaucratisation of the administration of pensions and separation allowances for the dependents of servicemen. But when the war began in 1914, even the most nominal of payments and pensions were limited to a small number of wives and families whose relationship to a soldier or sailor had been officially recognized; the many wives and widows who were unrecognized by the War Office and Admiralty, in an effort to discourage marriage amongst enlisted men, were at the mercy of relatives or Poor Law Guardians if they were unable to derive support from their spouses or from a private income. Despite the rising popularity of the military and the corresponding increase in concern for the families of servicemen in the late nineteenth century, the outlook for the officially unrecognized military wife was grim.

Women have always been a part of military life. Soldiers and sailors have always married and begotten children with or without official sanction. From its earliest days, the Standing Army was forced to deal with ever present problem of wives, children, widows, orphans, camp followers and other women who attached themselves to the troops.<sup>1</sup> The officially recognized wives of rank and file British Army soldiers were often forced by tradition and economic hardship to perform duties as laundresses, cooks, nurses and even, in some cases, prostitutes. The day to day menial work of the garrison, barracks or temporary encampment usually fell to the women

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<sup>1</sup> N. St John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady: The Army Wife and Camp Follower since 1660* (London, 1988), 3.

associated with the troops. For obvious reasons, the sailor's wife had less to do with the day to day life of the Navy and the conditions of her life were very different. However, on the eve of the Great War, many or even most women and children who were dependent on a soldier or sailor were likely to encounter conditions of impermanence, insecurity and possible destitution. Despite official discouragement from War Office and Admiralty brass who believed that the demands of family life were incompatible with the conditions of military life, soldiers and sailors insisted on marrying, conceiving children and raising families, often in the face of enormous logistical and economic difficulties. A disparate group of charities attempted to alleviate the conditions of married life for military dependents; nevertheless, before 1914, the soldier or sailor who took on a wife and family encountered an array of problems unknown in civilian life.

The history of separation allowances within the Navy is a relatively straightforward one. Before the autumn of 1914, separation allowances for Naval dependents simply did not exist. In the opinion of the Admiralty, sailors were in receipt of good wages and should have been able to support wives and families with those wages. The Admiralty invited sailors of any rank to make voluntary allotments to their families via free postal orders or through the Admiralty Paymaster.<sup>2</sup> The Admiralty kept a record of all legitimate marriages amongst the ranks but, unlike the War Office, had no legal right to make a compulsory stoppage of a sailor's pay for an abandoned wife or child. All support for the Naval dependent was voluntary and individual; the Admiralty trusted its sailors to care for their families in good

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<sup>2</sup> "Memorandum: Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress. September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184.

conscience.<sup>3</sup>

The history of pensions within the Navy is much more complex. An overlapping and occasionally confused system of private charities and official institutions cared for the dependent families of sailors killed in "warlike operations". In 1694, the Royal Greenwich Hospital was established by Queen Mary as an in-patient and out-patient facility for disabled sailors and their relatives as well as some widows and orphans of deceased sailors. The Hospital was also responsible for the distribution of education grants to the needy children of deceased officers and a compassionate fund for their general needs as well as a school for a select number of naval orphans.<sup>4</sup> A broader system of charity was set up in 1732, based on enforced deductions from officers' wages and some Parliamentary funds. Those widows who could prove that they were destitute received grants which were decided individually on an annual basis through a compulsory means test overseen by the trustees of the charity. In 1836, responsibility for the payment of pensions to officers' widows moved to the Admiralty and the test of poverty was abandoned.<sup>5</sup> Officers' mothers over the age of fifty and Officers' children were also potentially eligible for a Royal Bounty of one year's wages on the death of the family breadwinner. Other ranks of the Navy were not covered under any state pension scheme until the South African War (1899-1902). Before that time, the Royal Patriotic Fund (RPF), a private organization founded during the Crimean War (1854-56), provided a fairly wide system of grants and pensions to the widows and children of men killed

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<sup>3</sup> "Memorandum: Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress. September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184.

<sup>4</sup> "Records of the Greenwich Hospital Compassionate Fund." PRO: ADM 22

<sup>5</sup> Admiralty Pension Records. PRO: ADM 6/332-402.

on active duty.<sup>6</sup> During the South African War, the Admiralty instituted official pensions for the widows of seaman and marines and the pension scales fixed at this time were still in place in August of 1914. The payments ranged from five shillings(5s) per week for the childless widow of a "Class I"<sup>7</sup> sailor to eleven shillings (11s) per week for the widow of an "Class IV" officer with one child.<sup>8</sup>

Before 1914, the Army's limited form of separation allowance or ration allowance was available only to a soldier who had married "on-the-strength" of his service. The practice of both limiting the number of men who were officially allowed to marry and allowing the officially recognized wives of soldiers to accompany regiments on tours of duty had originated as early as the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> The "Married Establishment" existed in various forms in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century but was officially decreed by Royal Warrant in 1848. The system of application for permission to marry after a designated number of years of service in the Regular and Reserve Armies meant that any soldier who married without that permission did so outside the sanction of the Army, thereby forfeiting whatever benefits might be available for his dependents.<sup>10</sup> A survey conducted by the War Office in 1800 determined that 93,000 men in the Guards Brigade had 5500 wives and children and 1450 widows and orphans between them. Over half of these women frequently claimed poor relief

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<sup>6</sup> Records of the Royal Patriotic Fund. (Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation after 1903). PRO: PMG 74/160. See M. Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge,1984), 92-3.

<sup>7</sup> "Class I" constitutes the lowest ranks of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

<sup>8</sup> "Memorandum: Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." PRO: MH 57/184.

<sup>9</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> "War Office Memorandum." August 1914. PRO: MH 57/194.

from the parish and charitable institutions.<sup>11</sup>

During the period of Army reform which followed upon the Crimean War, the Army laid down the official rules governing "on-the-strength" marriage. These regulations were still in place at the beginning of the Great War in 1914. All staff sergeants were allowed to marry with official permission. Fifty per cent (50%) of other sergeants and forty per cent (40%) of all other ranks were allowed to marry with official permission. That permission was granted after the soldier had amassed seven years of service, two good conduct badges and savings amounting to five pounds sterling.<sup>12</sup> In practice, permission to marry was granted to approximately six (6%) to ten (10 %) per cent of the army. <sup>13</sup> If a soldier chose to marry and raise a family without official sanction, his wife and children were considered not to exist in terms of separation allowance or pension. Soldiers could try to support their "off-the-strength" families on their own but the small remuneration of Army life, as opposed to the more lucrative Navy pay, made this possibility untenable. Without an independent income or generous relatives, the "off-the-strength" wife and children or widow and orphans were forced to fall back upon the Poor Law Guardians or other forms of charity for relief. <sup>14</sup> If she were able to obtain "outdoor relief", the family stayed together. However, the stringent standards of Victorian and Edwardian poor relief meant that the local Poor Law Guardians sent many able-bodied but destitute "off-the-strength" wives of soldiers to the workhouse and removed any

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<sup>11</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> V. Bamfield, *On the Strength: The Story of the British Army Wife* (London, 1964), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Trustram illustrates the class/rank distinctions regarding marriage by giving this general rule for the Victorian Army: "Subalterns must not marry. Captains may marry. Majors should marry. Colonels must marry." Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*. 194.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

children from their care.<sup>15</sup>

Even “on-the-strength” wives often found that the necessities of life were often difficult to obtain although Regimental charity, overseen by the wives of officers in each regiment, became more common throughout the nineteenth century. On a small scale, the wives of officers were often able to provide employment, nourishment, education and even medical care for the “on-the-strength” wives of regiment. This period witnessed the establishment of a system of Regimental schools for the children of soldiers and medical wards for wives and children<sup>16</sup>, always, of course, for those whose existence was officially recognized. Charity for the “off-the-strength” wives of soldiers was rare.

“On-the-strength” wives of rank and file soldiers often performed certain functions, many of them menial, within garrisons, barracks and temporary encampments. Occasionally, the more stable and reliable of soldiers’ wives would work as maids and nurses to the families of Officers.<sup>17</sup> When troops were ordered abroad in the first half of the nineteenth century, up to and including the period of the Crimean War, a small number of lucky wives were permitted to join the soldiers in order to perform essential duties as laundresses, cooks and maids of all work in the barracks and bivouacs.<sup>18</sup> Among the rank and file, the selection was made by ballots drawn from a hat. At the docks, each wife took a slip of paper which declared whether she was “to go” or “not to go”. If she was “to go” she packed the family’s trunks onto

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<sup>15</sup> See P. Thane, “Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England.” *History Workshop Journal*. 6(1978), 29-51.

<sup>16</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O’Grady and the Colonel’s Lady*, 130. By 1870, there were 20 000 children in the Army’s 172 Regimental schools at home and in the colonies.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*,70.

<sup>18</sup> Officers’ wives often accompanied their husbands on tours of duty but at private expense.

the ship or other mode of conveyance and went on a half-ration while her children went on a third-ration if they were under seven and a quarter-ration if they were older than that.<sup>19</sup> Women who were “not to go” received a small “travel allowance” of up to two pence per mile, to enable them to return to their home parishes and obtain poor relief from the local Guardians.<sup>20</sup> Before 1867, for those left behind there was no provision beyond this travel allowance, unless the soldier could arrange to provide for his family from his own small pay. However, after he had outfitted himself for battle, there was little left of the original meagre salary.<sup>21</sup>

The Crimean War was the last in which any “on-the-strength” wives accompanied their husbands into battle. During that war, many “off-the-strength” and “not to go” wives and families somehow managed to make their way over to the Continent and join their husbands’ regiments rather than face separation and the real possibility of starvation at home. Many amongst the hundreds of women who had officially and unofficially accompanied their men, died of cholera, typhoid, the cold or starvation. After the Army had decamped for Varna, two hundred women were forced to stay behind at Scutari, finding shelter in the cellars and sewers under the barracks; these women were eventually rescued and given shelter by Lady Alicia Blackwood and her husband who, at the instigation of Florence Nightingale, set up a house for the women abandoned by the Army in Scutari and cared for them at personal expense until each was returned to Britain.<sup>22</sup>

Partly as a reaction to the events of the Crimean War, Army officials

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<sup>19</sup> Bamfield, *On the Strength*, 41-6.

<sup>20</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O’Grady and the Colonel’s Lady*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

barred all wives and children from joining troops on active duty in 1856. Instead, the War Office introduced the first form of separation allowances known as the "ration allowance" in 1867. The "ration allowance" intended to support "on-the-strength" wives of troops stationed abroad, was deliberately set at subsistence levels in order to prevent the exploitation of soldiers and the depletion of public coffers by unscrupulous wives. The War Office and Cabinet raised the ration allowance for the first time in 1871 and again in 1881 at which time the allowance, now referred to as a "separation allowance", was extended at a decreased scale to troops stationed in the United Kingdom. During the South African War, the scales were raised again and apportioned in a descending scale based on rank.

Housing for soldier's "on-the-strength" families was essentially non-existent until the mid to late nineteenth centuries. The regiment permitted a limited number of "on-the-strength" wives and children to live in the soldiers' barracks; often these families would conceive and rear children within a tiny space marked off from the dormitory by a blanket or sheet. The Guards, followed by some Hussars regiments, were the first to provide separate quarters at mid-century. In 1860, Queen Victoria herself demanded that the Army provide housing for "on-the-strength" families and, by the early twentieth century, separate lodging for officially married soldiers had become Army policy.<sup>23</sup>

Rates of separation allowance established at the time of the South African War were still in place at the beginning of the Great War in August of 1914. <sup>24</sup> The weekly payments ranged from approximately seven shillings

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<sup>23</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 69.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum: "Navy and Army Widows and Orphans' Pensions. Allowances to Other Dependents and Disablement Pensions." PRO: CAB 37/121.



(7s) per week for a private's wife to approximately sixteen shillings (16s) per week for a warrant officer's wife. Children were allowed up to two shillings (2s) per week, regardless of rank. Soldiers also made a compulsory allotment of around one-third of their pay and were permitted to allot voluntarily up to three-quarters of that pay. Members of the Territorial Armies received a bounty of five pounds sterling (£5) upon joining up and Reservists who were called up could authorize an allotment to their dependents of up to twenty shillings (20s) in advance of their pay.<sup>25</sup> In theory, soldiers had a multiplicity of ways in which to provide for their "on-the-strength" families. All rates were decided by Royal Warrant in the case of the Army and Order-in-Council, in the case of the Navy although an Act of Parliament established the administrative apparatus necessary to carry out the Warrants and Orders-in-Council.<sup>26</sup>

If a soldier were killed on active duty, only "on-the-strength" wives, of course, were entitled to any sort of compensation before 1914. The pensions and grants they received came from a bewildering variety of sources. In the late nineteenth century, some charities were set up for the widows and orphans of servicemen who were not cared for by any other source but the lack of an organized system of accounting for servicemen's dependents made their impact minor. In the eighteenth century, from 1708 onward, those "on-the-strength" wives who qualified for pensions were often given assistance by the War Office in the form of a contributory fund. The War Office placed two fictitious men in each troop and then distributed the "bequests" of these false names to the widows of men killed on active service.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum. "Scales of Relief to Dependents." PRO: MH 57/194.

<sup>26</sup> A. Richardson, *Family Income Support. Part 4.* (London, 1984), 63. This system of amendment would remain in place until 1977 after which time changes to rate of pension or separation allowance were made by Parliamentary legislation.

In actuality, the Army Paymaster had deducted the funds from the pay of officers in each regiment.<sup>27</sup> Dr. James McGrigor, chief surgeon to Wellington's troops in the early nineteenth century, instituted a "Benevolent Fund for Widows and Orphans" which operated until the late nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> The widows of officers who were killed in the line of duty received the "Queen's Bounty" after 1806, which consisted of a yearly annuity ranging from fifty pounds (£50) for a colonel's widow to sixteen pounds (£16) for an ensign's widow.<sup>29</sup> A "compassionate fund" for the children of deceased officers was also in existence.<sup>30</sup> In 1858, Colonel John Drouly made a bequest in his will, underwriting the costs of a fund to pension off officers' "on-the strength" wives. This fund was in place until 1892<sup>31</sup> at which time a more official scheme of pensioning was in the works.

During the South African War, the War Office and the department of the Army Paymaster General took responsibility for the pensions of all "on-the-strength" wives. From this point on, the deceased serviceman's rank was accounted for only in scale of payment, not in eligibility.<sup>32</sup> The scales established at this time were still in place in August of 1914. The payments ranged from five shillings (5s) per week for the widow of a private or corporal with no children to twelve shillings (12s) per week for the widow of a warrant officer with one child.<sup>33</sup> Pension and separation allowance rates

<sup>27</sup> War Office Pensions Records. PRO: WO 24/3090-3108.

<sup>28</sup> St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> War Office Compassionate Fund Records. PRO: WO 24/771-803.

<sup>31</sup> War Office Pension Records; Drouly Bequest. PRO: WO 23/105-112.

<sup>32</sup> Records of the Army Paymaster General. PRO: PMG 74.

<sup>33</sup> That is, ten shillings per week for the widow plus two shillings per week for each child up to four children. Memorandum: "Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." PRO: MH57/184. The inadequacy of these pay scales would become a source of outrage in the media and amongst the public in the first months of the Great War.

for the rank and file soldier or sailor were roughly equivalent to the rate of Old Age Pensions, set in 1908 at five shillings (5s) per week for an individual over the age of seventy and seven shillings, six pence (7s/6d) for a couple.<sup>34</sup>

The increase in scales of assistance for the officially recognized wives and families of soldiers and widows of sailors was, in part, the result of growing public interest in the exploits of soldiers and sailors and, by extension, their families. This interest was motivated by a number of factors, including press accounts of the glorious exploits of the British military in the Crimean and South African Wars and the newly romanticized image of the serviceman, particularly the soldier. Before the latter half of the nineteenth century, many Britons had little but contempt for the Army. Most believed that the Army had been drawn from the very dregs of society and to associate oneself with it in any way would draw social shame and humiliation. Depictions of the military campaigns of the citizen's army in the Crimean War, the Sepoy Mutiny and the South African War became increasingly flamboyant, however, "adding a new lustre to the reputation of the army."<sup>35</sup> While it was still apparent that military garrisons and barracks, such as the one at Aldershot, were rife with vice and licentiousness, the image of the soldier and sailor had undeniably improved by the end of the nineteenth century. The British soldier or sailor became the embodiment of masculinity and patriotism.<sup>36</sup> The popularity of the Army and Navy was reflected in the larger quasi-militarisation of British society, a tendency

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<sup>34</sup> OAP was also non-contributory but was available only for those individuals with an income of less than twenty-one pounds (£21) per year. *The History Today Companion to British History* ed. Juliet Gardiner and Neil Wenborn (London, 1995), 565.

<sup>35</sup> See: E. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*. (London, 1980), 97-160.

<sup>36</sup> S. Heathorn, "' Home, Country, Race:' The Gendered Ideals of Citizenship in English Elementary and Evening Continuation Schools, 1885-1914." Unpublished paper, presented at the Canadian Historical Society 1996, 27.

exemplified by the formation of large numbers of paramilitary youth organisations, such as the Boys' Brigade, and other "juvenile citizen armies".<sup>37</sup> Both the militarisation of British society and the concomitant upsurge of nationalism in the late nineteenth century were stimulated in part by an increasing sense of threat to the preservation of the British Empire. The necessity of a strong, standing Army and the national significance of this body were reinforced by growing anxiety with regard to national security, prompted by the increase in German imperial activity, particularly in Africa and that country's efforts to build its Navy in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup>

Official inquiries into the state of the military in Great Britain such as the Cardwell reforms of the late 1860's and early 1870's<sup>39</sup> and the Hartington Commission Reports of 1889 and 1890<sup>40</sup> focused public attention on the necessity for changes to the structure and administration of the Army. Cardwell's reforms in particular affected the status of military dependents by first instituting the short service clause<sup>41</sup> which, in practice, prevented many men from officially marrying at all during their period of service and

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<sup>37</sup> J. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London, 1977), 17.

<sup>38</sup> See: I. Lambi, *The Navy and German Power Politics, 1862-1914* (Boston, 1984) especially Chapter 14 "The Challenge to Britain", 269-286.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Cardwell was the Secretary of State for War from December 1868 to February 1874 and was responsible for such famous army reforms as the abolition of purchase, the localization of the Home Army and the centralization of military administrative duties under the Secretary of State for War. See: Spiers, *The Army and Society*, 177-200.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-225. The Hartington Commission was instituted by the Duke of Cambridge in 1888. Their recommendations included a defence commission composed of Cabinet Ministers as well as soldiers and sailors, better practical communication between the War Office and the Admiralty and the abolition of the post of Commander in Chief. Their recommendations for reform were not acted upon by the Conservative Salisbury Government but their campaign in the press raised public awareness regarding problems within the military establishment.

<sup>41</sup> Short service meant six years with the colours and six years in Reserve.

second, by altering the "Bastardy Clause" of the Mutiny Act which had previously allowed enlisted soldiers to escape responsibility for the maintenance of their illegitimate children. After 1873, the War Office required soldiers to contribute a small amount to the maintenance of their families and any illegitimate children proven to be their own.<sup>42</sup>

As a result of the newly romanticized image of the Army, public interest in the reform of military administration and developing respect for the individual soldier there was increasing attention to the welfare of the soldier's family. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, individual philanthropists and private groups established a network of charitable agencies intended to safeguard the rights or ameliorate the often wretched living conditions of the soldier's and the sailor's family. Myna Trustram, in *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (1984) attributes the increase in public attention to the plight of the serviceman's family to the combined impact of the changing role of the army and the evolution of the "domestic welfare ideology."<sup>43</sup> The Victorian emphasis on the family as the backbone of society and the fervour of Evangelicalism provided the context and justification for charities devoted to the "deserving" military dependents' needs. Concern regarding the living conditions of servicemen's dependents inspired the formation of a wide ranging but too often ineffectual group of charities devoted to their needs. These groups included the Central Association for the Aid of the Wives and Families of Soldiers Ordered to the East, the Officers' Families Fund, the Royal Homes for Officers' Families, the Lloyd's Patriotic Fund and the *Daily Mail* Fund

<sup>42</sup> St. John William, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 131. See Also: M.A. Crowther, "Family Responsibility and State Responsibility in Britain Before the Welfare State." *Historical Journal* . 25, 1(1982); 138.

<sup>43</sup> M. Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 4.

amongst others.

The confusion and ineptitude of the overlapping and often ill-organized efforts to help the families of servicemen was serious enough to warrant the attention of a Select Committee in the House of Commons, known as the "Marlborough House Committee", in the spring of 1900. Chaired by Lord Justice Henn Collins, the Committee heard evidence from the managers of funds and societies intended for the families of servicemen. The Committee's report to Arthur Balfour then First Lord of the Treasury, included a diagnosis of the ills of charitable effort. Chief amongst those ills was the "general lack of knowledge and want of agreement as to standards."<sup>44</sup> The Committee recommended that a strong central committee be instituted to control the growth of these groups and to superintend their management. As well, the Committee instructed Parliament to consider the possibility of giving public pensions to the widows of servicemen, otherwise, the continuing inequality and confusion of charity would continue. <sup>45</sup>

Foremost amongst these charitable groups in the latter half of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth centuries, were the aforementioned RPF and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association (SSFA), an independent charity based on the popular principles of case work and self help.<sup>46</sup> These two agencies took upon themselves a significant portion of the burden of responsibility for welfare of military dependents, filling the considerable lacunae left by the often meagre efforts of government

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<sup>44</sup> *Report of the War Relief Funds Committee*. 28 May 1900. PRO: MH57/196.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* After the South African War ended in May of 1902, however, interest in the plight of military dependents died down and the proposals of the Marlborough House Committee were more or less ignored.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion on the nature of philanthropy in during the Victorian period, see: F.K. Prochaska, "Philanthropy" in the *Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*. Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1993), 357-391.

agencies. Like government agencies, however, charitable agencies were not anxious to encourage soldiers and sailors to marry and their efforts were usually directed to ensuring the welfare of “on-the-strength” rather than “off-the-strength” wives and families. If an “off-the-strength” wife was particularly deserving and visibly destitute, she might receive some assistance from a charitable agency but, for the most part, Government and charitable agencies considered her maintenance to be the responsibility of the Poor Law Guardians.<sup>47</sup>

The SSFA was founded in 1885 by Colonel James Gildea, who had also been treasurer of various other “Patriotic Funds” intended for the families of Territorials. Gildea made his first appeal for funds in *The Times*, counting on public interest in the dispatch of troops to Egypt after the siege at Khartoum to ensure donations to his new society.<sup>48</sup> The regulations of the SSFA were founded on the belief that no government agency could establish the same level of personal contact with the families of servicemen. An individual, personal relationship between the organization and the recipient was maintained through a series of visits by a single, usually female, middle class caseworker who also undertook to ensure the moral worth and respectability of the individual in each case. Gildea based the policies of the SSFA on those of the Charity Organization Society, founded in 1869 and grounded in the principles of 1834 Poor Law by which pauperism, or incorrigible reliance on the state or private organisation, was judged to be a “moral condition.” The founders of the COS were concerned not only to alleviate the conditions of poverty but rather to use charity “as a means of creating an ethical society” as Jane Lewis has described it. Case work

<sup>47</sup> Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 172.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-82.

transacted between individuals was an important part of their philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Like the COS, the SSFA employed a large number of middle and upper class women as social workers, in the belief that such "friendly visitors" would fulfill an educatory function and serve as "living links" as between donors and receivers.<sup>50</sup>

During the South African War, the SSFA distributed several hundred thousand pounds in relief and by August 1914, had instituted a wide ranging network of local committees and were better prepared than any other organization of the time, including the War Office and the Admiralty, to cope with the sudden demand for both separation allowances and relief. Consequently, the beleaguered War Office and Admiralty requested that the SSFA take charge of the distribution of separation allowances to all military dependents and to provide temporary relief to any military wife not in receipt of other aid.

The Royal Patriotic fund was established by Queen Victoria, at the height of the Crimean War in the autumn of 1854 and was intended to provide privately funded grants to war widows. Motivated by "a just sense of the sacred rights of those who fall in their country's service"<sup>51</sup> the Royal Patriotic Fund was run by an aristocratic committee under advisement from the military administration of the Army and Navy. Local Committees of the RPF undertook the collection of applications and the physical distribution of grants while the Paymaster General of the Army was put in charge of

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<sup>49</sup> J. Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organization Society Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869* (London, 1995), 11.

<sup>50</sup> "Friendly Visitors" was the term used before 1890; after 1890, the work of female visitors was referred to as "casework" or "social work". These terms were interchangeable. Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector*; 34-35.

<sup>51</sup> Royal Commission of the Patriotic Fund. 7 October 1854. PRO: PMG 74/160.



accounting for the use of the collected sums.<sup>52</sup> In its first year, the RPF collected over one million pounds sterling in donations and provided grants to nearly fifteen hundred war widows and eighteen hundred orphans.<sup>53</sup> Like the SSFA, the RPF intended its grants and pensions to be contingent upon the respectability and moral worth of the recipient; “profligate conduct”, idleness or any behaviour “dishonouring the memory” of a war widow’s fallen husband could justify the discontinuation of a pension or the withholding of a grant.<sup>54</sup> By August of 1914, the RPF was a well established institution, with a broad base of distribution. The War Office and the Admiralty would use that established base of extensive donation and distribution for the first two years of the war, to ensure that all military widows and orphans received their official pensions and grants.

These two charities, the SSFA and the RPF would become central to the administration of pensions and allowances during the first eighteen months of the Great War but they represent only the largest national organisations devoted to the welfare of military dependents. Their efforts were supplemented by a network of disparate organisations, such as the Officers’ Families Fund (OFF) and the Central Association for the Aid of the Wives and Families of Soldiers Ordered to the East amongst others, with a wide variety of political, social and religious agendas. On the eve of the Great War in August of 1914, Great Britain had a scattered, complex and confused system of maintenance for the families of servicemen. The War Office and the Admiralty had avoided taking on the full burden of responsibility for the welfare of military dependents through an obscure set of arcane rules for

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<sup>52</sup> Royal Commission of the Patriotic Fund. 7 October 1854. PRO: PMG 74/160.

<sup>53</sup> First Annual Report: Royal Patriotic Fund. 15 June 1855. PRO: PMG 74/160:2.

<sup>54</sup> Rules by Which the RPF is Administered. 12 May 1879. PRO: PMG 74/160:5.

eligibility and an extensive network of private charities willing to fill in the considerable gaps in public funding. The limited number of military dependents who actually qualified for public support or charity received their grants and allowances from a disparate and bewildering variety of sources. When Liberal Prime Minister, Herbert Henry Asquith made his announcement in the House of Commons on 10 August 1914 regarding the Liberal Government's plan to provide separation allowances and pensions to all "on-the-strength" and "off-the-strength" army wives<sup>55</sup>, he called upon a far-flung administrative system without a centralizing agency to take on an enormous amount of highly publicized work. Under the circumstances, the collapse of that system and the subsequent public outrage was unsurprising.

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<sup>55</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*. . Vol. LXV. 10 August 1914, 2299. The Cabinet also proposed that the Admiralty institute separation allowances and pensions for all ranks and entered into negotiations with that department in the fall of 1914.

## Introduction

Between 1914 and 1917, the disparate functions of governmental departments, official, quasi-official and unofficial agencies were organised under an entirely new Ministry of Pensions. Prior to the formation of the Ministry, however, the Asquith Liberal (1908-1915) and later Coalition Government (May, 1915-December 1916) made a series of incremental reforms to the system of separation allowances and pensions. This was done to stave off what was seen as an unwarranted intrusion not only into voluntary and individual efforts but Departmental affairs as well. What seems to some to be an inevitable progression from private to public was in fact a torturous and haphazard process spurred on by the interplay between politics and public opinion, the compromises arising from politically ambiguous attitudes toward state expansion, and contradictory conceptions of gender, family and the female role in wartime. To understand how the political, social and economic anomaly of a "rights-based, universal" benefit system could occur at this embryonic stage of the welfare state, an exploration of the complex relationship between the "old" of voluntary ideals and the "new" of collective responsibility is necessary. Rather than simply ascribing the development of statist legislation to the influence of New Liberalism or socialist Labour assumptions, this thesis will examine the significantly important role of other forces which are often neglected in analyses of the origins of the welfare state. These include political forces such as traditional Liberalism, Tory paternalism and working class patriotism in conjunction with the social and economic pressures of gender and class.

Studies of women in the Great War have proliferated in the past twenty years; indeed, it is impossible in this limited space to list more than a few examples from the wide variety of sources in this field. Works such as David Mitchell's *Women on the Warpath: The Story of the Women of the First World War* (1971) which emphasised the "militarism" of individual women and women's groups during the Great War have been supplanted and supplemented by more subtle and sophisticated gender analysis. This earlier tendency to portray British women as the proponents of a jingoistic, bloodthirsty patriotism has been overthrown by works such as Ann Wiltshire's *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (1985), Jo Vellacott's "Feminist Consciousness and the First World War." *History Workshop Journal* (1987), Jill Liddington's *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (1989) and *Gendering War Talk* (1993), a collection of articles edited by Angela Woollacott and Maud Higgonet. The wartime work experiences of women and the ramifications of female participation in non-traditional sectors of the economy have been explored in such works as Gail Braybon's *Women Workers and the First World War: The British Experience, 1914-18* (1981), Braybon and Penny Summerfield's *Out of the Cage* (1987) and Angela Woollacott's *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (1995). The role of nurses in the Great War has been explored by Lyn MacDonald in *The Roses of No-Man's Land* (1980) among others. In the past ten years, feminist historians have begun to dissect the nature of gender identity during the Great War in such works as Claire M. Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64* (1990), Susan Kingsley Kent's *Making Peace:*

*The Reconstruction of Gender in the Interwar Period* (1993) and Sharon Outditt's *Fighting Forces and Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (1994).

The social history of the Home Front and the impact of the war on women and families has been examined by historians from Arthur Marwick in *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (1965) to Jay Winter in *The Great War and the British People* (1986) and Deborah Dwork in *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1908-1918* (1987), among others. However, despite the advances in the social history of the war and increasing interest in the interplay between gender and the formation of government policy with regard to women, the development of separation allowances and pensions for British servicemen's wives has not been studied as extensively as one might expect. A number of general sources on social policy or the Great War such as Bentley Gilbert's *British Social Policy, 1914-39* (1970) G. Wootton's *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change, 1917-1957* (1963) or Marwick's *The Deluge* have included references to this system as exemplary evidence of the expansion of the British state during this period.<sup>1</sup> But only two historians, Myna Trustram and Susan Pedersen, have published detailed studies which reflect the political, economic and social significance of private and public benefits for military

<sup>1</sup> A body of less scholarly, popular works in this field also exists. These are usually more "personal" works such as V. Bamfield, *On the Strength: The Story of the British Army Wife* (London, 1964) or N. St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady: The Army Wife and Camp Follower since 1660* (London, 1988) and sponsored histories of certain charitable organisations such as D. Blomfield-Smith, *Heritage of Help: The Story of the Royal Patriotic Fund* (London, 1992). These works serve as an excellent fund of information and interest to the historian but are of less interest as a source of analysis. The topic has also been explored in some unpublished dissertations such as Janis Lomas' "Justice not Charity: War Widows in British Society from the Great War to Present Day." (University of Staffordshire, 1996).

dependents. In their different ways, both Trustram and Pedersen focus on the ways in which this system serves as a marker for changing attitudes toward women, family, citizenship and the role of the state in the lives of individual Britons.

Trustram in *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (1984) examined attitudes toward state maintenance and private charity for servicemen's dependents in the late nineteenth century. In her view, the "Evangelical ideal" of the family and the "domestic ideology" of Victorian society<sup>2</sup> were primarily responsible for the upsurge in concern over what was perceived as the sordid, licentious and vice-ridden life of the servicemen and, by extension, the miserable existence of his dependents. According to workers in the SSFA and other charitable agencies, soldiers needed to be brought into line with Victorian moral codes; their redemption could be accomplished most effectively through the virtuous influence of family.<sup>3</sup> Many private charities such as the SSFA and the RPF were anxious to demonstrate that the wives of servicemen were among the "deserving" poor as defined by the 1834 New Poor Law<sup>4</sup>. The idealised view of the serviceman's family was bolstered by the late Victorian atmosphere of patriotic pride in Empire and increasing fascination with the exploits of the Army as depicted in the more sensational elements of the press.<sup>5</sup> Work for

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<sup>2</sup> M. Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge, 1984), 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Broadly defined, the 1834 Poor Law was based on the distinction between the deserving poor which included those citizens who were unable to work for a variety of reasons and the undeserving poor for whom relief in any form besides work would be demoralising. The 600 Poor Law unions set up by 1834 Act of Parliament also used the workhouse and bare subsistence rates as a form of "less eligibility" to ensure that relief was never more profitable or enjoyable than wages and work.

<sup>5</sup> Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 182.

the serviceman's family, according to Trustram, carried a "two-fold stamp of patriotism and benevolence".<sup>6</sup> However, not only did the regulations of the Army place strict limits on the form and dispersal of charity, particularly to "off-the-strength" wives or widows, but the manner in which many of these families lived and the character of the women who married soldiers of the rank and file<sup>7</sup> restricted even sympathetic groups and individuals from providing the kind of assistance necessary to genuinely improve the overall living standard of family life in the services.

Apart from some brief comments in her epilogue, Trustram's important work does not extend beyond the South African War. This gap has been partially filled by Susan Pedersen, whose "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War." *American Historical Review* (1990) explores the "virtually unnoticed" significance of the system of separation allowances during the Great War.<sup>8</sup> Her analysis provides a useful exposition on the role of this system as a point of departure in the formation of the British welfare state. According to Pedersen, the Great War's expanded and bureaucratised system of separation allowances for servicemen's dependents was the first decisive articulation of the ideal of the family wage. The gendered nature of the post World War II Beveridgian welfare state resulted directly from the early conceptions of dependency and citizenship defined by this first "rights-based, universal" system of public maintenance.<sup>9</sup>

Pedersen's efforts to place separation allowances and pensions in the

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<sup>6</sup> Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 182.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> S. Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War." *American Historical Review*. 95(1990), 985.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 984.

larger context of the gendered welfare state is part of the movement among feminist historians to explore critically the gendered assumptions underlying both the regulations of the welfare state and the work of post-war historians of that welfare state such as T.H. Marshall and Richard Titmuss. Prior to the 1970's, historians of the welfare state, whose primary concern was to examine the impact of class on definitions of citizenship, entirely ignored the potential for gender and gendered assumptions to influence the formation of policy. This omission has been rectified by feminist historians such as Pedersen, Pat Thane, Jane Lewis, Seth Koven, Sonya Michel, Theda Skocpol and numerous others. But the first article to challenge the assumptions of Marshall and Titmuss regarding the nature of the relationship between the welfare state and the family was Laura Oren's "The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England, 1860-1950." (1974). In this article, Oren criticized the assumption of policy makers and historians that resources are shared equally within a family. Her research demonstrated that, in fact, male heads of the household controlled and consumed a disproportionately large portion of funds, food and other goods; thus, the use of the "family wage" to evaluate wages, benefits, relief or charity was of little use as this concept did not address the unequal distribution of resources within the family.<sup>10</sup> The need to "disaggregate the family"<sup>11</sup> as Jane Lewis has called it, has continued to operate as the central principle in feminist histories of the welfare state.

While certain basic principles govern the work in this field, feminist analysis of the welfare state has existed as a discipline long enough for

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<sup>10</sup> L. Oren, "The Welfare of Women in Labouring Families: England, 1860-1950." in *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, ed: M. S. Hartman, L. Banner (London, 1974), 226-244.

<sup>11</sup> J. Lewis, "Welfare States: Gender, the Family and Women." *Social History* 19:1(1994), 38.



controversies to develop and schools of thought to distinguish themselves. These controversies concern such crucial issues as the role played by women and the ideals of maternalism in the formation of government policy<sup>12</sup> as well as the economic significance of unpaid work by women.<sup>13</sup> Of primary significance to this thesis is the debate over the role of politics and individual political administrators in the formation of policy. Theda Skocpol's "polity-centred" analysis of welfare state formation in the United States addresses the tendency among feminist scholars in this field, such as Koven and Michel, to treat politicians and political processes as "agents of other social interests {rather than} actors in their own right".<sup>14</sup> According to Skocpol, the use of gender as the sole category of analysis is likely to provide only a fragmentary picture of the development of social policy though gender and gender relationships must always be taken into account in any analysis of welfare state policy.<sup>15</sup>

Pedersen's work is intended to fall within the category of polity-centred analysis in that her aim is to identify the link between the legislative process, political loyalties and gendered conceptions of dependency. She sees the institution of "universal, rights-based" allowances as a "victory for Labour and Liberal representatives of working men"<sup>16</sup>. In more general terms, it was a victory of statist, male forces in political circles over voluntarist, female

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<sup>12</sup> See the articles by Pat Thane, "Women in the British Labour Party and the Construction of the Welfare State, 1906-1939." and S. Koven, "Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914." in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed: S. Koven and S. Michel (London, 1993) for examples of conflicting interpretation in this field.

<sup>13</sup> B. Hobson, "Solo Mothers, Social Policy Regimes and the Logics of Gender." *Gendering Welfare States*. ed. Dianne Sainsbury (London, 1994), 171.

<sup>14</sup> T. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (London, 1992), 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship." 993.

forces in charitable circles.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the shift to a gender-based model of welfare was supported, albeit unintentionally, by some feminists and women in Labour Party circles who mistakenly viewed this legislation as a system of payment for motherhood rather than an avenue for the state to act as a “surrogate husband” and breadwinner. According to Pedersen, the unusual economic, social and political circumstances of the war made it possible for bureaucrats and members of what she implies was a statist alliance within Parliament to expand not only governmental benevolence but governmental control over the families and, more specifically, the wives of servicemen. As the first historian to focus exclusively on the socio-political significance of separation allowances to the embryonic welfare state, Pedersen has established the foundations of study in this arena. The research in this thesis is built upon the foundation laid by her valuable work but is also intended to rectify some essential flaws in her presentation of evidence and to both clarify and expand the socio-political context of her arguments.

Pedersen’s efforts to ground her arguments in the political discourse of the time are undermined by the numerous large and small inaccuracies contained in her use of evidence from the period. While, in theory, she adheres to a form of polity-centred analysis, the political characters of individual administrators and Members of Parliament remain obscure, as do the subtle political groupings within parties. This tendency toward ambiguity weakens her determination to link political philosophy to support for welfare reforms. Pedersen uses the terms “Labour” and “Liberal” conjunctively to refer to a poorly defined progressive grouping within Parliament, the individual members of which are rarely named. Indeed, Pedersen does not

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<sup>17</sup> Pedersen, “Gender, Welfare and Citizenship.” 991.

specifically name any Liberal Members of Parliament who supported the extension of state control over separation allowances as a rights-based benefits, although there were a number of Liberal back-benchers, such as James Hogge or Jonathan Samuel, who vociferously defended the right of servicemen and their families to publicly funded, properly administered and financially adequate pensions and allowances. Those Labour Members of Parliament and Cabinet members who are presented as representatives of Pedersen's vague Liberal-Labour grouping, such as George Barnes<sup>18</sup> or G.H. Roberts, are actually better representatives of conservative or patriotic Labour Party opinion.<sup>19</sup> Pedersen's vagueness regarding the exact nature of political groupings within Party and Parliament results from her implicit assumption that all Members of Parliament and bureaucrats who supported the expansion of the state did so for similar reasons. The source of this inaccuracy is undoubtedly Pedersen's simplification of the ideology or

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<sup>18</sup> As Chapter 5 of this thesis will show, Barnes eventually became the first Minister of Pensions in 1916 and the first regulations of his Ministry reflected the essential conservatism of his approach to social welfare by incorporating many Victorian, traditional Liberal and Old Tory notions of the importance of the class hierarchy and the desirability of individual self-help. As Barnes put it in his autobiographical account of this period, "after all, there are ranker and then there are rankers."

<sup>19</sup> J.O. Stubbs, "Lord Milner and Patriotic Labour, 1914-1918." *English Historical Review* 87(1972), 736. As members of the Socialist National Defense Committee organised by Victor Fisher and Viscount Milner to "combat the pernicious and pestilential piffle of the Pacifist cranks" within the Labour movement, Barnes and Roberts were closely allied with the cause of social imperialism in which a firm commitment to war aims was combined with a paternalistic interest in the well-being of the masses. Indeed, neither Barnes nor Roberts remained in the Labour Party after 1918. Barnes resigned from the Party just prior to the Armistice and then conducted an independent campaign as an unswerving Anti-Bolshevik, declaring himself the enemy of class warfare. Roberts resigned in 1918 as well and later ran as a candidate of the short-lived coalitionist National Liberal Party, eventually joining the Conservative Party in 1923. *Who's Who of British Ministers of Parliament*. Vol. III, 1918-45 (Sussex, 1979), 304.

ideologies of Edwardian and wartime Liberalism<sup>20</sup>. She over-estimates the depth to which New Liberalism, with its emphasis on social reform and the necessity for a strong but benevolent state presence, had penetrated the working conscience of the institutional Liberal Party<sup>21</sup>.

The assumption that the ideals of New Liberalism “had been accepted by most Liberals and Labourites”<sup>22</sup> by 1914 is unsubstantiated by evidence from the period. Indeed, a variety of political historians such as J.R. Hay and Duncan Tanner, have demonstrated the essentially conservative nature of Liberalism and Liberal reforms in this period.<sup>23</sup> Even those historians who posit the centrality of New Liberalism to Liberal philosophy in this period, admit that progressive ideas regarding poverty and poor relief had not influenced the workings of the Poor Law Guardians by 1914.<sup>24</sup> This branch of government operated on Victorian notions of self-help, individual responsibility, less eligibility in rates, discrimination on the basis of moral

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<sup>20</sup> As Duncan Tanner has shown, even before the war, the Liberal Party was a coalition of sorts. Tanner has identified four broad streams of thought within the Liberal Party at the time of the Great War. These are the Liberal Imperialists, the Radical Businessmen, the Religious Radicals and the Secular Radicals. The work of L.T. Hobhouse, an ideologue of the New Liberalism, would have provided the ideological framework in part for the Secular Radical wing of the Party but did not dominate politics at the centre or even in most constituency organisations according to Tanner. See: D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*. (Cambridge, 1990), 25/341.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Pedersen’s close juxtaposition of the ideas of Hobhouse with Roberts’ views on separation allowances implies a close connection between the statism of New Liberalism and the statism of a conservative Labour Party M.P. However, even a brief inspection of Roberts’ political views and activities reveals that as an ally of Milner and the eventual Chief Whip to the Conservative Party in 1923, Roberts is an unlikely candidate for inclusion in a progressive alliance.

<sup>22</sup> Pedersen. “Gender, Welfare and Citizenship.” 994.

<sup>23</sup> See: J.R. Hay, *The Origins of Liberal Welfare Reforms, 1906-1914*. (London, 1975) and Tanner. *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918*. The work of Peter Clarke in which New Liberalism was identified as an ideology and presented as a potential force for change within the Party has been controverted by the work of numerous historians such as Tanner or Hay.

<sup>24</sup> See P. Clarke. *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), 119-124.

worth and the sanctity of the work ethic. That the values of 1834 still governed poor relief at the time of the Great War has been attested to by numerous historians, including Rachel Vorse who points to the lasting importance of the categories of "deserving" and "undeserving" in 1914, part of the Victorian legacy of 'individualistic' moral distinctions. According to Vorse, the tendency of historians to distinguish between "collectivism" and "individualism" in this period overlooks the common fund of ideas shared between reformers or progressives and traditionalists or conservatives.<sup>25</sup> Some Liberal Party members who allied themselves with progressive groups were often still unable to overcome their fears of the endemic pauperism which might result from overly liberal regulations in poor relief.<sup>26</sup>

As a corollary to her misunderstanding of the progressive alliance, Pedersen neglects to examine Conservative/Unionist support for the extension of benefits to servicemen's wives and families.<sup>27</sup> Hence, Pedersen, and feminist historians generally, neglect to consider the tradition of social reform, the Disraelian legacy embodied in such things as the Workman's Compensation Act enacted by the Salisbury Government in 1897. Even if the Conservative Party as a whole could no longer boast a reputation as the party of social reform by 1914, individual members of that Party certainly

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<sup>25</sup> R. Vorse. "Vagrancy and the New Poor Law in late-Victorian and Edwardian England." *English Historical Review*. 92(1977), 80-81.

<sup>26</sup> As Chapter 1 of this thesis will demonstrate, Herbert Samuel, the first wartime President of the Local Government Board, was a confirmed traditional Liberal in matters of poor relief, despite his avowed commitment to the principles of New Liberalism in other arenas. According to Bernard Wasserstein, Samuel's recent biographer, Samuel's adherence to traditional Liberal principles of poor relief was prompted by his fears for the endemic pauperism which would inevitably result from the removal of constraints on state funded relief. See: *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford, 1992), 167-170.

<sup>27</sup> See: M. Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1935*. (Oxford, 1985) for an overview of the nature of Conservative ideology, the relationship between "Old Toryism" and social reform and the cultivation of mass appeal among Conservative leaders from the Victorian to the interwar period.

perpetuated the traditions of reform through state intervention. Conservative Cabinet members such as Walter Long were intimately involved in both private and public committees and affairs. As Chapter 3 of this thesis will show, the first Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances (1914-15) was a three party coalition, as was the more effective Cabinet Committee on Pensions (1916) examined in Chapter 5. In fact, the second Cabinet Committee, responsible for the drafting of the Ministry of Pensions Act of late 1916, did not have any members who identified themselves as New Liberals.<sup>28</sup>

There are further oversimplifications in Pedersen's use of evidence that, while not quite as significant, do tend to weaken her arguments. Of particular note is Pedersen's overly sharp dichotomy between public and private in the pre-war and wartime periods. She sets up an exaggerated though not entirely false opposition between what she defines as the male public, "statist" sector and the female private "voluntarist" sector. In a broad sense, this gendered breakdown does reflect a tendency towards female participation in private charities and their exclusion from governmental positions. However, Pedersen does not consider either the participation of various individuals in both public and private organizations nor does she analyse the significance of tensions and feuding with and between private organisations. As well, Pedersen's breakdown between public and private does not take into account the interrelationship between political and

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<sup>28</sup> That committee was instigated by Walter Long, a paternalistic Old Tory responsible for drafting the National Service Acts in 1916. The committee was composed of Long, Arthur Henderson, a cooperationist Labour Party member, and Reginald McKenna, a traditional Liberal. Indeed, the single most important moving force behind the creation of the Ministry of Pensions was the collaboration of Long and Henderson who convinced Asquith and the rest of Cabinet of the necessity for the Asquith Coalition Government to control the pensions and allowance process.

philanthropic elites in this period. The implication throughout Pedersen's article that Government Departments pursued further expansion against the wishes of private charities is unsubtle. As Chapter 5 of this thesis will show, some privately run groups such as the Women's Co-operative Guild were very much in favour of bureaucratisation, while some Government Departments, particularly the Admiralty, aggressively resisted the notion of incorporation into a single centralised state agency.

Using a similar form of polity-centred analysis, this thesis is intended both to supplement the solid scholarship of Pedersen's work and offer a corrective to some of her political misrepresentations. A complex system of political loyalties beyond the progressive alliance of Liberals and Labourites influenced the formation of social policy for servicemen's dependents during the Great War. In this thesis, I will identify some of those political forces which tend to be neglected by historians who assume that New Liberalism alone provided the impetus for state expansion in this direction. However, while political machinations are central to our understanding of social policy, both political ideals and practices must be analyzed with reference to the larger matrix of social, and economic pressures. Government documents from this period show clearly that high level political decisions in this arena were driven by the necessity to satisfy public opinion and the desire to cultivate not only the mass appeal of the various parties but also general acquiescence to governmental war aims. In turn, public opinion and support for the war effort was shaped by popular assumptions regarding an often confused sense of national responsibility and corresponding conceptions of gender and the female role. In determining the relationship between the public expression of feeling and high level political decisions,

even the most minute workings of government are often of significance and only detailed, empirical research into the specifics of political loyalty and the relationship between social forces and the legislative process will suffice.

The research in this thesis is intended to show that the formation and regulations of the Ministry of Pensions are significant not only as a point of departure in the history of the welfare state but as a demonstration of the continuity of Victorian Liberal and Conservative ideas regarding the dangers of universality in state benefits. A tendency on the part of some historians of the welfare state to make too sharp a delineation between public and private results in a depiction of the British state as a monolithic collection of civil servants and politicians who aggressively pursued the expansion of their various functions; however, such a depiction does not take into account the reluctance on the part of many Liberal members of Cabinet and the House of Commons, including Asquith himself, to institute any sort of centralised government agency to deal with pensions and allowances in the first two years of the war. Indeed, the incremental reforms of the Naval and Military Pensions Act of October 1915 were intended to stall the onset of centralisation by instituting the Statutory Committee, an ill-defined body based on an uneasy mixture of public and private. By the time the Ministry of Pensions was instituted by the Asquith Coalition in late 1916, the resistance of traditional Liberals had been worn down by the need to cultivate mass appeal and by dire predictions of future chaos upon demobilisation. The final decision to form a central government body to deal with allowances and pensions smacks of resignation, even defeat rather than triumph for Asquith and his Liberal colleagues in Cabinet. The rather narrow analytical base used by Pedersen will be expanded in this thesis to include the treatment of sailors'



as well as soldiers' wives and the widows of all servicemen. Hence, this thesis also encompasses the workings of Government Departments and private charities responsible for the welfare of these groups. The stance taken by Admiralty officials and the role played by members of Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation are of particular significance to any political and social analysis. In many instances, their stated views provide further evidence of the general desire on the part of many politicians, bureaucrats and charitable workers to preserve a mixed economy of public and private endeavour.

Pressure to move away from that mixed economy came both from within the Cabinet and, more nebulously, from the voting public. Long and Henderson, who formed an Old Tory/coalitionist Labour alliance<sup>29</sup>, eventually convinced the reluctant Asquithian Liberals to recognize the necessity of reform in this arena. In order to accomplish their task, Long and Henderson not only had to convince Liberal members of Cabinet of the necessity to expand governmental machinery but the heads of various Governmental Departments which asserted their right to remain independent of a proposed Board or Ministry. In order to assuage the concerns of both Liberal and Conservative members of Cabinet and Parliament as well as the heads of Government Departments, charitable workers and the general public, Long and Henderson incorporated many traditional notions of poor relief into the first regulations of the Ministry, thereby placating those who feared for the work ethic and moral fibre of servicemen and servicemen's families.

The establishment of supposedly needs-blind, universal benefits at a time when the administration of poor relief was governed by conservative

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<sup>29</sup> A more moderate but politically similar version of the Milner/Roberts/Barnes alliance.

moral notions seems astonishing; even the distinctive circumstances of wartime cannot quite explain it. General antipathy to the possibility of pauperism was ameliorated by the inclusion of regulations which continued to distinguish between those wives/widows who were "deserving" and those who were "undeserving". Any collectivist sentiments behind the formation of the Ministry of Pensions were mitigated by the desire to ensure that only those wives/widows who lived up to a certain moral standard would receive benefits from a paternalistic state. Rather than obviating the traditional categories of poor relief, the Asquith Coalition, guided by Long and Henderson, simply reversed the process of eligibility for servicemen's dependents; that is, this particular groups of citizens was, for the period of the war at least, deserving until proven otherwise. The burden of proof lay with the state but that state continued to enjoy the right to discriminate on the basis of moral worth until 1961.

But Long and Henderson's desire for broader state powers on behalf and their willingness to incorporate traditional notions of poor relief to reassure a skittish Liberal government does not provide a complete explanation for the decision to bureaucratise the administration of pensions and allowances. In order to fully explain this decision, this thesis also addresses the impact of the less easily defined and complex social pressures of gender and class which made the decision to centralise and extend state powers politically expedient. The Asquith Liberal and Coalition Cabinets recognised the crucial wartime significance of this issue; they could hardly ignore it, given press and public attention to their actions in this arena. As one of the most significant issues on the Home Front in the first two years of the Great War, the treatment of servicemen's dependents was rivalled only

by the plight of Belgian refugees.<sup>30</sup> Both causes were similar in terms of the economic, social, psychological and political functions of charitable endeavour in wartime. But advocacy of the rights of servicemen's dependents and work on their behalf was even more clearly prompted by a contradictory, contemporary understanding of the wartime role of women within the family, society and the state. That ambivalent conception was the result of a dichotomous desire to sustain the traditional role of women as the primary victims of war and the centre of the home and hearth while at the same time, capitalising on the fact that women could perform their traditional nurturing function as well as "men's work" and thereby be intellectually, emotionally and physically central to the successful execution of the war. This thesis demonstrates the connection between the rhetoric of support for the war itself and the rhetoric of support for military dependents by grounding that rhetoric in the struggle both to exploit and contain female participation in the war effort.

Between the autumn of 1914 and the spring of 1917, the condition of servicemen's dependents and their treatment at the hands of Government became, for many groups and individuals, synonymous with the support for the war itself and patriotic sentiment. The wives, widows, children and orphans of servicemen were the focus of public sentiment for three years, until their perceived plight was supplanted in the public imagination by the treatment of returning and disabled servicemen. The bravery of servicemen's

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<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the social, political, religious and economic role of Belgian refugee relief, see P. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York, 1982).

dependents<sup>31</sup> in the face of sacrifice and deprivation became a running theme in the press; the image of the "girl I left behind me" was a popular one and public interest in the issue became almost obsessive, judging by the number of editorials, cartoons, postcards, popular songs and other forms of patriotic literature devoted to the subject of servicemen's wives and widows.

In a broad survey of literature from the war, including official propaganda and the popular press as well as the more commonly used women's press,<sup>32</sup> feminist historians such as Kingsley Kent or Beddoe have identified a "shift" or an "abrupt change"<sup>33</sup> in the image of women from a prewar emphasis on active models and equal rights feminism to a wartime acceptance of a secondary role and victim status which would eventually lead to a post-war emphasis on maternal or "separate spheres" feminism<sup>34</sup>. What actually occurred was closer to a duality or a dichotomy in which two contradictory perceptions of women held sway. While images of women in non-traditional occupations and roles such as that of munitions girl or ambulance driver did become popular during the Great War, traditional images of women as wives, widows, mothers, sisters and daughters were equally popular. Indeed, such images were used prolifically in order to counter balance the "masculinising" potential of non-traditional images. During the Great War, propagandists, writers, artists and the general public entertained a number of often conflicting ideas about women and war. Some

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<sup>31</sup> Fathers, brothers and other close family were often eligible for separation allowances and pensions under Army and Navy regulations but, as this thesis will explain, public attention was almost entirely focussed on the situation of female dependents, that is wives and widows and, to a much lesser extent, mothers and sisters.

<sup>32</sup> Such as *Common Cause*, *Jus Suffragi* and *Women's Dreadknought* for example.

<sup>33</sup> D. Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars* (London, 1989), 10- 13.

<sup>34</sup> S. Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, 1993), 140-141.

of these ideas were more traditional or passive, some were more progressive and active, and some were based on a paradoxical combination of both. To posit a mass alteration towards a single conception of women is unsupportable; instead, this thesis offers an attempt to identify a number of conflicting stereotypes of women as well as the tenuous bridge occasionally formed between them.

The first and most straightforward explanation for the tone of public opinion lies in the confluence of two factors: first, the rising popularity of the Military and the Navy throughout the nineteenth century and second the removal in August 1914 of the constraints which had always limited charity or even sympathy toward off-the-strength wives. The popularity of charitable work in the SSFA, the RPF and NRF as well as the rising demand for government action on this issue can in part be attributed to the above. As well, the demands of total war were extensive in terms of government expansion, recruitment and civilian involvement and are partially responsible for the rapid evolution of social policy regarding servicemen's families in this period. The practical problems of recruiting exacerbated the already troublesome problem of what to do with or about the "off-the-strength" wives and families of soldiers and created a similar but less pressing situation regarding the far less numerous families of sailors. The enormous casualties of the Great War in comparison to wars before and after it meant that the number of dependents permanently in the public charge increased dramatically with each battle. The central role of the citizen soldier in the Great War created a new set of problems for the administration of pensions and allowances; the traditional division between the self-supporting gentleman officer and his penurious men as well as the division between the

condition of their families, were blurred by the mixed economic origins of new recruits.

As well, concern for and work toward the welfare of military dependents served as an outlet for frustrated patriotism, particularly on the part of middle and upper class women. According to the daily newspapers, periodicals, unofficial propaganda and government propaganda of the time, the question of the day was "What Can I Do?" and the answer, more often than not for the first year of the war, was to care for the dependents of servicemen on active duty. Lord Kitchener himself directed the British public to offer their homes to servicemen's wives and children; his response to "patriotic offers of assistance" was released by the Press Bureau in September of 1914 and published widely.<sup>35</sup> For those individuals who were reluctant supporters of the British war effort, defence of the rights of military dependents and work for their welfare fell easily within the realm of "sane patriotism" espoused by many progressive and left-wing individuals such as the members of the War Emergency: Workers' National Committee<sup>36</sup> and the Women's Cooperative Guild. In fact, those who refused to support the war at all and remained pacifists were also often strong advocates of the rights of military dependents. Sylvia Pankhurst worked among servicemen's families in the East End of London despite, or perhaps because of, her rejection of British war aims.<sup>37</sup> To groups and individuals concerned about eugenics, such as the National Council on Public Morals<sup>38</sup> or the War Babies

<sup>35</sup> "Take Care of Soldiers' Families." *Daily Mail*. 4 September 1914, 2.

<sup>36</sup> For a definition of "sane patriotism" see: R. Harrison, "The War Emergency: Workers' National Committee, 1914-20." in *Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923*. ed. A. Briggs and J.Saville (New York), 211-259.

<sup>37</sup> S. Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England during the World War* (London, 1917).

<sup>38</sup> This was a leftist group whose national executive included the Fabian Beatrice Webb.

and Mothers League<sup>39</sup>, the progeny of soldiers and sailors were intended to replace their fathers and thereby safeguard the future of the British race. The condition of these children and their mothers, therefore, was of crucial importance; separation allowances and pensions would be an investment in the future, insurance against the effects of privation.

But the intensity of public opinion on this issue cannot be entirely accounted for by the explanations offered above. Attitudes toward the welfare of military dependents can only be understood fully by reference to contemporary attitudes toward gender and family. Trustram links the developing sympathies of nineteenth century British society to the growing dominance of the "domestic ideology" and the Victorian belief in the sanctity of the family. The Victorian conception of women as the centre of the family contributed to the growing sympathy for the plight of both on the strength and off the strength wives of soldiers.<sup>40</sup> In the Great War, as Pedersen has pointed out, the conception of women as inherently dependent was central to the extension of allowances and pensions. The assumption behind this policy was, in part, that the wives and widows of servicemen would not be capable of caring for themselves or their families in the absence of their breadwinners. As such, these women were perceived to be the first and most important victims of the dislocations of war on the Home Front, vulnerable because of their sex to privation and need. Their individuality and thus, the validity of their citizenship was undermined by increasing acceptance of the principle of the family wage. In this way, separation allowance and pensions demonstrated a generalised belief in the weakness of women and their inability to function without men. This view is amply

<sup>39</sup> This was a right-wing, "businesswomen's" organisation.

<sup>40</sup> Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 1-9.

supported by manipulative propaganda and patriotic literature of the time in which women and children were depicted as the true primary victims of war, passive in the face of privations and potential violation. The passivity and weakness of women and children made them more vulnerable to the horrors of war than the brave and stalwart men pursuing the war effort at the Front. The demand for separation allowances and pension is rooted, in part, in this conception of the traditional female role as the helpless victim of the dislocations of war. Both pro-war and anti-war propagandists drew upon the Victorian ideals of femininity and the role of women within the family in order to justify and support their particular stand on the war and the role of women in that war.<sup>41</sup>

However, even a cursory survey of patriotic literature from the Great War yields a plethora of examples which seem to contradict the above characterisation of the female role in wartime. As Angela Woollacott has pointed out in her recent study of female munitions workers, despite the tendency of feminist historians such as Braybon and Wiltshir to reject the traditional interpretation by Mitchell, Marwick and others of the Great War as a "woman's war", many women viewed their own participation in the war effort as significant and important on both an individual and national level. The necessity for female participation in non-traditional sectors of the economy had become clear by the summer of 1915; even before that, numerous sources called upon women to "allow" their husbands, sons and

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<sup>41</sup> The Victorian conception of womanhood, that is, as a dependent, concerned to serve others, bound to the private sphere of home and family, has been well explored by feminist historians in the 1980's and 1990's. Carol Dyhouse in *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1981) for example, argues that the sexual division of labour within the family combined with the relatively conservative nature of formal education for girls helped to reinforce a passive ideal of femininity which crossed class lines.



sweethearts to enlist in the military or navy, to offer their services and money on the Home Front and their crucial moral support to a righteous war. The war could not be carried on without feminine approval, the authors of propaganda and patriotic literature proclaimed. Indeed, many of these sources claimed, women were naturally more fervent than men in their support for war as the result of their role as the potential victims of an invasion and their sensitivity to suffering as the bearers of human life. Their strength and willingness to endure privation and risk violation stemmed from their inherent weakness as the primary victims of any war. This paradoxical understanding of the female role in wartime rested on a tenuous bridge between two contradictory perceptions of women as both the principal sufferers and the most ardent supporters of a war.

The wives and widows of servicemen served propagandists well as depersonalised symbols of this form of idealised female, that is passive, bravery; unlike many other women who became national symbols, such as munitions workers and land girls, servicemen's wives embodied both sides of the female dichotomy in wartime<sup>42</sup>. Despite the reluctance of some wives and widows to behave in a manner befitting national martyrs, military wives and children provided stirring yet uncontroversial, patriotic copy. Their image could and was used extensively, most often as a reminder and a source of guilt to the less patriotic. Recruiting agents and propagandists promoted the possibly erroneous belief that women had final say in a man's decision to enlist and, as such, had the potential to be either a stumbling block or the most effective recruiting agents possible. They could be either victims or heroines, or they could be both at the same time, helpless when

<sup>42</sup> Nurses were the only other group which came close to embodying both sides of the feminine ideal for propagandists.

left behind by husbands whom they had nobly "allowed" to enlist.

As well, as nurturers and homemakers, women could understand the impact of war and would work hard for victory, even if it meant abandoning that home to preserve it. When women began to take on employment in traditionally male sectors of the economy, the serviceman's wife served to reinforce traditional sex roles as a model of deeply feminine sacrifice and the symbolic keeper of the hearth and home. The anonymous serviceman's wife served the purposes of conservative propagandists who wished to avoid the resumption of the "sex war" after the conflict had ended. Her image was useful in counteracting the "masculinisation" of women through their participation in non-traditional occupations. As Braybon and Beddoe have shown, such traditional images of femininity, intended to contrast with more recent and more powerful, active images of women, helped to facilitate the transition back to the home after the war and limit the gains made by female citizens who remained throughout and after the war, second-class citizens.

The universality of dichotomy underlying conceptions of gender is demonstrated by the range of sources which promulgated this view of women, from the pacifist Helena Swanwick and the members of the No Conscription Fellowship to the Liberal Imperialist Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the members of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. Artists, writers, singers and speakers from across the political spectrum were willing to draw upon traditional images of women as the victims of war in order to justify or place limits on their particular vision of the current female role. Fawcett alluded often to the "special misery" of women in order to bolster

support for broadening the parameters of the female role in wartime;<sup>43</sup> women were particularly vulnerable therefore they must also be particularly strong. Swanwick<sup>44</sup> declared that women were natural pacifists because of their traditional role as the victims of war and their understanding of the sanctity of human life. Horatio Bottomley declared that soldiers' and sailors' wives were the "true heroines of Armageddon"<sup>45</sup> ; their passive heroism surpassed that of nurses on the front lines, munitions workers and Land Girls. The PRC urged women to "say go" and warned them of their potential fate at the hands of the Hun if they used their strength to dissuade rather than persuade.

The use of the serviceman's wife as a depersonalised symbol of passive, female bravery in wartime was instrumental in effecting a differentiation between the economic rights of this group and those of other citizens in Britain during the Great War. The serviceman's wife and children constituted a special class in wartime with special privileges, that is, the right to be considered deserving until proven otherwise and thus privileged to receive maintenance from public funds. The extension of these benefits represented the Asquith Liberal Government's attempt to purchase one of the most crucial commodities of a citizen's war, that is, female acquiescence, and at the same time satisfy public demands that they minister to the needs of the most pitiful but deserving members of society. This distinction had its roots in the ambivalent conception of the female role in the Great War, a role which was contradictory as a result of enormous confusion regarding

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<sup>43</sup> M. Garrett Fawcett, "Women's Work in Time of War." *Manchester Guardian*. 12 October 1914, 7.

<sup>44</sup> H.M. Swanwick, *Women and the War* (London, 1915), 21.

<sup>45</sup> H. Bottomley. "The True Heroines of Armageddon." *Everywoman's* 5 August 1916, 223.

conceptions of gender and fear of the long term impact of female participation in public life. The policies formed by the Asquith Government, the Asquith Coalition and the Lloyd George Coalition were, as government documents show, motivated in large part by the pressures of public opinion and the overwhelming sympathy of the public for the "plight" of the serviceman's family. In turn, the perception of that plight was formed by the confused, often illogical and emotional understanding of gender roles in wartime.

The effect of press attention on the acceleration of social policy during the Great War is not difficult to ascertain; Cabinet memos, public statements and speeches as well as correspondence between politicians involved in the system of administration contain ample evidence as to the political expediency of reform in this arena. But in order to understand what was behind the sudden increase in interest and public anger with regard to official treatment of military dependents during the first two years of the Great War, it is necessary to examine a far broader range of material than has traditionally been customary for feminist historians of the British welfare state. The representative body of examples used as evidence in this thesis, covers a wide range of material, from officially produced pamphlets, posters, books and articles, to independent and spontaneous individual expressions of support for the war found in books, newspapers and periodicals. In the past, feminist historians have relied too heavily on the women's progressive press and, as a result have come up with a limited vision of women in wartime. Kingsley Kent, for example, focuses specifically on feminism and feminist writers in order to explicate contemporary understanding of gender.<sup>46</sup> My thesis offers a corrective to that vision by expanding the basis of

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<sup>46</sup> Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, 3.

analysis to include as many elements of propaganda and patriotic literature from as many political viewpoints as possible, thereby demonstrating not only the broadly based consensus regarding gender but the complexity of the ideas underlying that consensus.

Often it is difficult to separate independent patriotic literature from official literature because of the wide ranging influence of various official individuals and organisations. British propaganda in the Great War was far ranging in its distribution and strong in its effect. Propaganda organisations and producers played a seminal role in the evolution of the "idea war". What they produced was highly experimental, occasionally creative, often persuasive and sometimes ludicrous, but its impact was undeniably profound. It is tempting to judge many of the popular images of Great War propaganda by more sophisticated and subtle standards of presentation, thereby relegating them to the realm of "kitsch" and ignoring their iconic functions. The largely untapped potential of images to persuade and influence public opinion was only just beginning to be explored and the reading and viewing public had yet to develop strong resistance to manipulative imagery and text.

Identifiable official propaganda came from a variety of agencies during the Great War. When the war began, there was no central agency to coordinate the production of propaganda and, like many government functions during this period, the production of propaganda was the responsibility, often self - assumed of several different governmental departments and sub-departments. Despite this internal confusion and occasional ineptitude, a staggering amount of patriotic material was published and circulated during the war by official agencies. These agencies

included the newly created Wellington House, run by Charles Masterman<sup>47</sup> whose job was to convince neutral countries and the dominions of the justification for Britain's participation in the war, and distribute a certain amount of domestic propaganda as well. Masterman's method was to enlist the aid of well known writers such as Arnold Bennet, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and Mrs. Humphry Ward, academics including the entire Oxford History faculty, as well as newspaper editors such as the Unionist J.L. Garvin and the Liberal J.A. Spender. These writers, academics and editors, whose viewpoints spanned the political spectrum, then "independently" produced works of a patriotic nature supporting governmental war aims.<sup>48</sup> The bureau at Wellington House was intended to serve as a centre for wartime propaganda production and, to some extent, Masterman was able to accomplish this goal. However, the claims of Masterman's agency to central control were contested by other governmental departments and agencies. Some of these, such as the War Office and the Foreign Office, had been concerned with the dissemination of information in previous wars while others, such as the Press Bureau, were newly formed at the beginning of the Great War.<sup>49</sup>

Among the most prolific of the governmental agencies was the Parliamentary Recruiting Agency (PRC), a cross-party committee instituted in the first month of the war under the stewardship of the Liberal and

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<sup>47</sup> Masterman was a Liberal M.P., Secretary of the Treasury, Chair of the Joint Committee of the National Health Commission and Supervisor of Propaganda at Wellington House. He was also a member of the Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress and the executive of the NRF.

<sup>48</sup> M.L. Sanders and P. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18* (London, 1982), 41-2.

<sup>49</sup> C. Lovelace, "British Censorship during the First World War." in *Newspaper History from the 7th Century to the Present Day*, ed. G. Boyce, J. Curran and P. Wingate (London, 1978), 315.

Conservative Chief Party Whips. By January 1915, the PRC had produced thirteen million leaflets and one million posters. Over two hundred different posters were circulated in the first two years of the war, based on themes identified as “responsibility, legitimacy, hate, comradeship and interrogation.” The PRC often used images of women in its propaganda, usually intended to induce various manifestations of guilt and aimed at both men and women.<sup>50</sup>

Unofficial propaganda or patriotic literature came from a wide variety of sources. The Central Committee for National Patriotic Organisations (CCNPO), intended initially as a centralising body for the myriad patriotic organisations which had sprung up in the first months of the war, eventually became one of the most important and active among the abundant numbers of amateur organisations.<sup>51</sup> Between August 1914 and December 1916, the CCNPO organised fifteen thousand rallies involving two hundred and fifty speakers.<sup>52</sup> Their lecturers were often well respected intellectuals and writers.<sup>53</sup> In addition, individuals, commercial enterprises, and institutions not directly allied with any of the above named organisations and agencies often produced patriotic literature and goods independently, in the form of books, pamphlets, postcards, sheet music, as well as in performances, lectures and speeches .

The most extensive source of patriotic literature during the Great War, however, was undoubtedly the press, that is, daily and weekly newspapers

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<sup>50</sup> P. Dutton, “Moving Images? The Parliamentary Recruiting Committee’s Poster Campaign, 1914-16.” *Imperial War Museum Review*. 4 (1989), 44.

<sup>51</sup> Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 45.

<sup>52</sup> CCNPO *Report, 1914-16*. London: Buck & Wootton, 1917; 4-5. Imperial War Museum Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, 27.

as well as periodicals. Some editors and publishers were actively recruited by Wellington House, such as John St. Loe Strachey of the *Spectator*, a Unionist publication,<sup>54</sup> but many others simply took it upon themselves to act as private propagandists on behalf of the government's war aims. Many editors were willing to publish articles which were critical of certain governmental directives throughout the war but few were willing to question the essential premises or wisdom of the war itself.

The use of materials outside the traditional boundaries of feminist history makes it possible to establish a broader, more representative understanding of conceptions of gender and femininity during the war, particularly in terms of the confusion and anxiety over the nature of female participation in the Great War. The popular press tends to fall outside of the source base of feminist history but the images and ideas contained within even the most jingoistic of publications are crucial to any understanding of widespread conceptions of femininity. The confusion and anxiety of sexual identity during the Great War has yet to be fully explored as a result. The dilemma inherent in the female role in the Great War was instrumental to contemporary views regarding the Asquith Government's treatment of servicemen's dependents; thus, the development of legislation in this arena cannot be explained without detailed reference to the construction of gender as manifested by popular images of the Great War.

The images drawn from unofficial sources of propaganda were reinforced by the emerging machinery of official propaganda; these two forces were instrumental in focusing public attention on the "plight" of servicemen's dependents and in provoking outrage on behalf of this group in

<sup>54</sup> M.L. Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War." *Historical Journal*. XVIII: 1(1975), 120.



the first two years of the war. Ironically, however, the use of the serviceman's wife or widow as a symbol of passive female bravery and as a counter balance to the more recent, active images of women in non-traditional occupations after 1915, would eventually undermine the position of this group in later legislation. In 1916, when predictions of the administrative chaos which would be attendant on reconstruction began to outnumber reminders of the current administrative chaos, public sympathy shifted to the imagined plight of the returned serviceman. This shift was reinforced by the formation of the first ex-servicemen's lobby groups in late 1916 and by the focus on issues of reconstruction as symbolised by the formation of the Committee on Reconstruction in 1916. The administration of pensions and allowances for servicemen's dependents was subsumed under the larger problems of pensions and allowances for returning servicemen and the future nightmare of administration in that field. The rights of this group would remain a secondary consideration not only from 1916 to the Armistice but beyond. The secondary status of widows and orphans in terms of Ministry of Pensions activity in the last two years of the war and beyond, reflected the secondary political, economic and social status of women in the interwar period; the movement back into the home after 1918 as well as the secondary status of widows and orphans as a political pressure group, was facilitated, ironically, by the use of the serviceman's wife and widow as an image of idealised female service and as a passive, secondary citizen whose rights and responsibilities were determined by her relationship to another citizen rather than by her individual claims to recognition and reward.

**SECTION I:**  
August to December, 1914

**Chapter 1:  
State Benefits and Private Charity at the Beginning of the Great War,  
August to December 1914**

Despite the promises of the Liberal Government, the first six months of the Great War brought widespread hardship, resulting largely from inadequate and outmoded pay scales and the confusion of administration in the War Office and Admiralty. In order to alleviate this hardship and to support the collapsing bureaucracy, the Asquith Cabinet called upon the services of the SSFA and the RPF in order to utilise the network of local committees and coordinated administration which had been established by these charities in the prewar period. Despite efforts on the part of the War Office and the Local Government Board to control the expansion of charities devoted to the welfare of servicemen's dependents, the first six months of the war witnessed the rapid expansion of private charities of this type. Thus, the Government's decision to provide benefits to all families of soldiers and eventually sailors resulted not in the immediate extension of state apparatus, but, ironically, in the removal of constraints on private charity and in frenetic efforts on the part of charities to fill the gaps in official provision. The decision to shift responsibility for the welfare of servicemen's dependents onto established charities was a pragmatic one but had ideological overtones as well. Throughout 1914 and 1915, the Asquith Liberal Government and his later Coalition would strive to preserve the mixture of public and private endeavour that had constituted efforts to maintain the

dependents of servicemen. Apart from the demands of some relatively left-wing Labour groups such as War Emergency Workers Committee that the Liberal Government immediately establish full state apparatus and a minimum of a pound a week to fulfill their responsibilities to servicemen's dependents, expressions of public opinion in the press and in the House of Commons tended toward guarded acceptance of the necessity for private intervention. Demands for change tended, at this time, toward a raise in rates and more effective organisation of the mixed economy rather than wholesale shift to Governmental responsibility. However, while the members of the SSFA and RPF were lauded for their patriotic efforts as well as their benevolence, impatience with what was perceived as Liberal stalling began to heighten as it became clear that the war would not be over by Christmas. In some cases, public anger took the form of harsh criticism of these private organisations but the largest portion of opprobrium was reserved for the Liberal Cabinet. Pressure from within the House of Commons and in the press made it imperative for the Asquith Liberal Government to at least raise the rates of separation allowances and pensions in November of 1914 as a testimony to their desire to find a solution to the administrative crisis.

As of 10 August 1914, the wife and family of every soldier on active duty was theoretically eligible for some level of assistance from the government. Faced with the task of providing and distributing separation allowances to the dependents of career soldiers at all ranks, Territorials, Reservists and Volunteers, the administrative machinery of the War Office proved inadequate. Because the Navy did not provide a separation allowance to sailors or marines until November of 1914, the same problem did not exist at the Admiralty. Its administrative machinery expanded

gradually as the Liberal Government instituted an entirely new programme of maintenance in the first year of the war. The War Office, however, was inundated with the claims of soldiers' dependents. Asquith's announcement meant that the War Office was faced with two immediate and difficult tasks. First, it had to identify, locate and assess the claims of existing "off-the-strength" wives, a formidable challenge. Second, it had to ensure that the families of all new recruits were registered and received appropriate funds. Unfortunately, the War Office administration lacked the necessary tools for the job. Without adequate funds or appropriate guidelines for processing applications, assessing claims and distributing money, the War Office was incapable of coping with the demand.

To begin with, the British Army had had kept no record of the numerous "off-the-strength" marriages which had taken place in the years prior to 1914. It was well known, however, that "off-the-strength" marriages and the economic, social and moral problems attendant upon it, were a serious consideration for the Army administration. In the spring of 1914, Margaret {May} Tennant, a well known labour activist, chair of the Industrial Law Committee and later chief advisor on women's welfare in the Ministry of Munitions, had presented the results of an enquiry to the House of Commons. Tennant's enquiry was conducted amongst the troops stationed in Aldershot and London. With a committee of assistants, all of whom were involved in regimental charity in one way or another, Tennant was concerned to examine and establish the extent, conditions and effect of "off-the-strength" marriage in the British Army. <sup>1</sup>

In her report, Tennant stressed the unreliability of estimates

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<sup>1</sup> "Report of an Enquiry by Mrs. Tennant Regarding the Conditions of Marriage off the Strength." Command 7441. *British Sessional Papers*. vol. li, 741-51.

concerning the number of existing "off-the-strength" wives. Different official supplied conflicting estimates as soldiers and their families often went to great lengths to deceive military officials as to their marital status. Many established their families in nearby towns and continued to live in barracks themselves, requesting frequent "sleeping out" passes in order to visit their wives and children. According to Tennant, however, it was important to gain greater knowledge of this phenomenon because "in no case were those numbers negligible while sometimes they were considerable."<sup>2</sup>

In her report, Tennant examined the effect of "off-the-strength" marriage on the soldier, the soldier's family and the Army itself, concluding that "off-the-strength" marriage was indeed a problem for both individual soldiers and the Army as a whole. The character, reliability and fighting ability of the individual soldier was likely to be impaired by "off-the-strength" marriage for several reasons. First, soldiers could not actually afford to keep families and were usually forced to share rations, which meant that their health and the health of all family members suffered. Second, the lodgings affordable to soldiers' families were often squalid and located in insalubrious sections of the city to which the barracks were attached. A soldier often came into contact with the unsavoury characters who populated such areas and might be tainted morally and intellectually by these associations.<sup>3</sup> As a result of his decline, the soldier became a less effective fighting machine and a less trustworthy employee. Third, "off-the-strength" marriage" hampered the

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<sup>2</sup> Tennant, "Report on Off-the-strength Marriage." 742.

<sup>3</sup> The town of Aldershot which had expanded after the establishment of a huge Army encampment just outside of it in the early 1850's was considered to be particularly dubious as a setting for a soldier's family. "Off -the-strength" wives of soldiers had set up a shoddy and temporary camp referred to as the "West end" and the town itself had quickly become a "sexual paradise" for locals and soldiers. See: St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*, 131.

Army's mobility in that soldiers were reluctant to uproot and move families frequently. When they did so, the sheer numbers of camp followers often proved an "embarrassment" to the troops.<sup>4</sup>

Tennant was concerned to establish that "off-the-strength" or "improvident" marriage was harmful, not only to the soldier and the Army itself but to the women and children who were drawn into this subterranean world. In her report, she described the "drawn and hungry" look of "off-the-strength" families and testifies to the "inferior physique"<sup>5</sup> of the "off-the-strength" child.<sup>6</sup> "Off-the-strength" wives were usually unable to find work and even respectable women declined under the conditions of this life. Most insidious were the "forced marriages" amongst soldiers brought about by premarital pregnancies. These women were often brought back to the soldier's home village or town after his years of service were over; thus, their immorality and lax habits became local problems.<sup>7</sup>

Like the War Office administration, Tennant believed that "off-the-strength" or "improvident" marriage should not be encouraged both for practical and moral reasons. She suggested the abandonment of sleeping out passes and the prohibition of the practice of carrying rations home to families. At the same time, however, Tennant also recommended that the Army deal more fairly with existing "off-the-strength" families by introducing cheap

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<sup>4</sup> Tennant, "Report on Off-the-strength Marriage." 743.

<sup>5</sup> Tennant, "Report on Off-the-strength Marriage." 744.

<sup>6</sup> Her depiction of the physical condition of "off-the-strength" families evokes contemporary fears for the future of the British Army in particular and the British race in general in the post-Boer War period. The physical unfitness of potential recruits in the Boer War had incited widespread dismay over the "physical deterioration" of the British people and the corresponding threat to Empire and national character. See G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley, 1971), 42-43.

<sup>7</sup> "Appendix II" to "Report on Off-the-strength Marriage." 750.

lodgings near the barracks as well as classes in needlework, childcare and housekeeping for some of the more deserving members of this group. Tennant hoped to install an internal system of COS and SSFA style case work on the Army, with the introduction of "health visitors" and the provision of labour exchanges for women.<sup>8</sup> As well, she proposed the minimal extension of the Married Roll to allow a few more rank and file soldiers and a larger number of sergeants and non-commissioned Officers. to marry with permission and financial support from the Army. She also suggested that a "Candidate's List" be drawn up and that soldiers with seven years of service be given permission but not financial support to marry. The soldier's inclusion on that list would be based on his good character and any departure from good conduct could be punished by his removal.<sup>9</sup> Most significant amongst Tennant's suggestions was her insistence that indiscriminate charity would prove to be a pernicious influence on soldiers and their "off-the-strength" families.<sup>10</sup> Charitable groups and individuals who persisted in rewarding "improvident marriages" with money, goods and lodgings contributed to the decline in character of soldiers and "off-the-strength" families by allowing them to evade both Army regulations and honest work. Her reservations with regard to charity for officially unrecognised families epitomise the often self-imposed limitations placed on late nineteenth and early twentieth century efforts to alleviate the conditions of "off-the-strength" marriage. The categories of "off-the-strength" and "on-the-strength" corresponded roughly to the Poor Law of 1834's distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor particularly with regard to the fear of

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<sup>8</sup> Tennant, "Report on Off-the-Strength Marriage." 744.

<sup>9</sup> Tennant, "Report on Off-the-strength Marriage." 746.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 743.



inducing immorality as an inevitable byproduct of incorrigible pauperism.

Tennant's report attests to the extent of "off-the-strength" marriage as well as the social, economic and military difficulties engendered by this practice, immediately prior to the Great War. Even before the provision of separation allowances to "off-the-strength" families and the massive influx of recruits in the first few months of the war, the War Office and various charitable agencies associated with the Army had had difficulty coping with the problem of "off-the-strength" marriage. The demands of war, Asquith's announcement in the House of Commons and sudden, intense media and popular scrutiny complicated and compounded the difficulties which became insuperable.

#### The War Office, the Admiralty and the Liberal Cabinet

In the first weeks of war, the Liberal Cabinet and the War Office focussed their attention on the problems of supplying separation allowances to all eligible wives, families and dependents; the administrative difficulties involved in this process presented some of the most significant political, economic and social domestic dilemmas in the first two years of the Great War. As aforementioned, the Navy had no system of allowance as yet; sailors were offered only a month's pay in advance upon enlistment or call-up.<sup>11</sup> Separation allowances for the Navy were not instituted until November of 1914 at which time the Admiralty was better able to cope with the much more limited demand on their administrative machinery and coffers. Pensions within both the Army and the Navy were required only later in the war as casualties began to be registered in the fall of 1914 after the

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<sup>11</sup> *House of Commons: Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. LXV. 6 August 1914, 2062.

Battle of Mons and 1st Ypres. Thus, the War Office and the Cabinet were required only to furnish eligible wives with their entitled funds but even this requirement taxed the administrative capabilities of the War Office to its utmost. The rush to enlist and the "delirious enthusiasm" of the first months of the war in a huge influx of men in the service. By the end of August 1914, there were three hundred thousand new recruits and by November of 1914, over one million men had enlisted in the various branches of the Army.<sup>12</sup> At the outbreak of the war only fifteen hundred wives were on the Army Pay Office books; within the month of August, that number had risen to over two hundred thousand.<sup>13</sup> The problems of "off-the-strength" marriage, as described by Tennant, were suddenly of epidemic proportions.

Two weeks after the war began, the Paymaster General claimed that funds amounting to twelve thousand pounds had been supplied to all Reservists' wives, providing that the Reserve unit and/or Regular Army officers had sent in the married roll to the Paymaster's office. The families of Territorials, the Army stated, should have been supported initially out of the five pound (£5) bounty issued by the local County Association on enlistment. Families of soldiers in Kitchener's New Army could receive an advance of ten shillings (10s) while their claims to separation allowances were being investigated. Soldiers were given forms requesting information with regard to their marital status; these forms were to be forwarded by the soldier to his wife who would then submit the form to the War Office along with her full name, her husband's regiment, marriage certificate and birth

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<sup>12</sup> J.M. Winter. *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, 1986), 74.

<sup>13</sup> G. Wootton, *The Politics of Influence: British Ex-Servicemen, Cabinet Decisions and Cultural Change, 1917-57* (Cambridge, Mass, 1963), 18.

certificates for children.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the War Office claimed, apart from those “off-the-strength” in the Regular Army, the families of soldiers should have been provided for by some means. If not, they were urged to report to the local offices of the SSFA. Individual failure to seek out charity was not the fault of the War Office.<sup>15</sup>

This effort to salvage the reputation of the Army and the War Office masked the administrative upheaval facing both government agencies and charities in the first few months of the war. Complaints from various sources began to circulate regarding the irregularities of the registration and distribution process. The difficulty of locating and registering “off-the-strength” wives was complicated by the necessity of ascertaining the validity of each claim. The requirements for eligibility were based on the legality of the marriage, the date of the marriage<sup>16</sup> and the acquiescence of the soldiers who were required in most cases to furnish the details of marriages themselves and to agree to underwrite the cost of allowances with an adequate allotment from their pay.

That allotment was a minimum of five shillings and ten pence (5s/10d) a week for the wife of a sergeant or any rank above plus one shilling and two pence (1s/2d) a week for each child.<sup>17</sup> For any rank below sergeant, the minimum allotment was three shillings and six pence (3s/6d) for a wife and seven pence (7d) for each child. This allotment could not exceed nine

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<sup>14</sup> War Office: Marital Status Form. PRO: MH 57/184:12.

<sup>15</sup> Local Government Board Report. “Issue of Separation Allowance to Families.” August 1914. PRO: MH 57/194:2.

<sup>16</sup> Only marriages made before 14 August 1914 were considered valid. “War Office Memorandum: Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service.” September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:13

<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of allowances and pensions, a “child” was considered to be a boy under fourteen and a girl under sixteen.

shillings and four pence (9s/4d) without the soldier's express permission. A compulsory stoppage of three shillings and six pence (3s/6d) could be made from the pay of any soldier who left his legitimate family destitute.<sup>18</sup>

**Minimum Compulsory Allotment for Soldiers' Wives  
(August 1914)**

Rank	Wife per week	Child per week
Sergeant & Up	5s/10d	1s/2d
Below Sergeant	3s/6d	7d

This allotment was added to the official separation allowance supplied by the War Office. The scale of these allowances, paid in quarterly instalments, dated from the period of the South African War (1899-1902) and ranged from fifteen shillings and nine pence (15s/9d) a week for the wife of a Warrant Officer to seven shillings and seven pence (7s/7d) for the wife of a Private. Children received one shilling and two pence (1s/2d) per week regardless of the father's rank and a motherless child received two shillings and four pence (2s/4d) a week, again regardless of rank. Families living in London received a six pence (6d) per day supplemental allowance to compensate for higher cost of living in the city.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> War Office Memorandum. Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:13.

<sup>19</sup> War Office Memorandum. Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:13.

**Army  
Separation Allowances, August 1914**

Rank	Wife per week	Child per week
Warrant Officer	15s/9d	1s/2d
Quarter Master-Sergeant	14s/7d	1s/2d
Colour Sergeant	9s/4d	1s/2d
Sergeant/Corporal/ Private	7s/7d	1s/2d

This meant that a soldier's wife with no income apart from her separation allowance would receive from twenty-one shillings and seven pence (21s/7d) per week to eleven shillings and one pence per week (11s/1d) depending on the rank of her husband. Yearly incomes ranged from fifty-five pounds, sixteen shillings and four pence (£55/16s/4d) to twenty-eight pounds, sixteen shillings and four pence (£28/16s/4d).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> By comparison, recipients of the Old Age Pension, enacted in 1908, received a non-contributory pension of 5s per week. OAP was available only to people over 70 with an income of less than £21 per week. *History Today: Companion to British History*, 565.

**Total Minimum Income  
Army, August 1914**

Rank	Wife/week (total)	Wife/year (total)
Warrant Officer	21s/7d	£55/16s/4d
Quarter-Master Sergeant:	20s/5d	£53/1s/8d
Colour Sergeant	15s/2d	£39/8s/8d
Sergeant/Corporal Private	11s/1d	£28/16s/4d

In 1913-14, the average annual earnings of all employed men and women in Great Britain was eighty pounds (£80), ranging widely from the salary of a High Court judge at five thousand pounds (£5000) to that of a charwoman at thirty pounds (£30).<sup>21</sup> Thus, the income of a wife of a Warrant Officer, assuming that she had no private funds, was around twenty-five pounds (£25) below the national average, roughly equivalent to the income of a semi-skilled male manual labourer. The wife of a Colour Sergeant, Sergeant, Corporal or Private, on the other hand, earned less than half of the average national income, less than the income of an unskilled male manual labourer but roughly equivalent to that of an unskilled female manual worker.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, any soldier could allot up to three-quarters of his often minimal pay to supplement the separation allowance, a practice which would leave his wife and family somewhat better off. In addition, the allowance was not means tested which meant that those families whose members

<sup>21</sup> P. Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (St. Albans, 1977), 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

worked or who received any sort of private income would still be entitled to the same allowance and allotment. For some families, the departure of the "breadwinner" and the arrival of a separation allowance could leave the remaining family members slightly better off than they had been before. Even if a separation allowance, pension and/or allotment was slightly or even somewhat less than prewar wages, the redistribution of resources within the family upon the absence of husband and father could mean a larger portion of food for children and mother as well as more comfortable and healthier living arrangements.<sup>23</sup> Of course, in order for a family to be even marginally better off, a wife or other dependent relative had to prove that she was in fact eligible for separation allowance or pension and then, actually receive the money to which she was entitled. The bureaucratic confusion involved in ascertaining eligibility and distributing payment meant that many wives, mothers and other dependents went without their entitled monies in the first eighteen months of the war, and even beyond. The rollbooks of the SSFA consisted primarily of women who had been judged by that organisation to be entitled to allowances but had been denied them for various bureaucratic reasons; the SSFA and the RPF usually provided grants and advances in these instances until the case was settled.

The administrative problems involved in the registration and distribution of Army separation allowances were exacerbated in the autumn of 1914, as casualties began to mount after setbacks in the Battles of Mons (23

<sup>23</sup> A. Davin, "Food in Poor Households in Late Nineteenth Century London." *History Workshop Journal*, 41 (1996), 173. See also. A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor, Home School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London, 1996), 24-25. Most feminist historians of the welfare state point to Magdalen Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, (London, 1913), a survey of the living conditions of families in Wandsworth as firm evidence for the unequal distribution of resources within the family, evidence which contradicts Seeborn Rowntree's influential *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (1901) which treated the family as an aggregate unit.

to 26 August) , the Marne (6 to 14 September) and 1st Ypres (12 October to 22 November). Those "off-the-strength" wives who were eligible for separation allowances also became eligible for pensions in August of 1914. Both the War Office and the Admiralty granted pensions to all widows of soldiers and sailors killed in action or by disease while on active duty. The widows of ex-servicemen who died within seven years of sustaining a wound in action were also granted pensions. These pensions, unlike separation allowances, would not cease with the end of the war but would continue as an expense for at least another fifty years.<sup>24</sup>

The range of award was similar for both the widows of soldiers and the widows of sailors. Widows, whose sailor husbands had died in the course of warlike operations or from wounds sustained during those operations, were granted pensions ranging from two hundred pounds (£200) per year for a Captain's widow with no children in Class A<sup>25</sup> to thirteen pounds (£13) a year or five shillings (5s) a week for the widow of a Class IV marine. Within the Army, the awards ranged from two hundred pounds (£200) for a colonel's widow with no children<sup>26</sup> to thirteen pounds (£13) for a private's widow with no children<sup>27</sup> . Pensions were increased by up to twenty-four pounds (£24) per year for each orphan at the highest ranks to five pounds, four shillings (£5/4s) or two shillings (2s) per week at the lowest. <sup>28</sup> The amount of the award varied within each rank, depending on the nature of the death,

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<sup>24</sup> Cabinet Memo: "Pensions: Actuarial Report." September 1914. PRO: CAB 37/121: 110.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Generally, pensions for officer's relatives were expressed as a yearly salary while the pensions for the rank and file were expressed as a weekly wage, reflecting class distinctions in the expression of income.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum: Government Assistance for the Families of Men in Naval and Military Service." September 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:13.

<sup>28</sup> Cabinet Memo. "Pensions: Actuarial Report." PRO: CAB 37/121:110.



with the highest award going to the families of those servicemen killed in action.

### Army Pensions, August 1914<sup>29</sup>

Rank: Officers	Wife: annual			Child: annual		
	Top	Mid	Low	Top	Mid	Low
Colonel	£200	£150	£100	£24	£20	£16
Lt. Colonel	£180	£135	£90	£24	£20	£16
Major	£140	£105	£70	£21	£17/10s	£14
Major (Medical Corp.)	£180	£135	£90	£24	£20	£16
Captain	£100	£75	£50	£24	£20	£16
Lieutenant & Second Lieut.	£80	£60	£40	£15	£12/10s	£10
Rank & File	Wife: weekly			Child: weekly		
Class I		10s			2s	
Class II		9s			2s	
Class III		7s/6d			2s	
Class IV		6s			1s/6d	
Class V		5s			1s/6d	

<sup>29</sup> The widow of Field Marshal or a General did not automatically receive a pension on the death of her husband. The same holds true for the highest ranks in the Navy.

## Navy Pensions , August 1914

Rank:Officers	Wife: annual		Child:annual	
	Class A	Class B	Class A	Class B
Captain	£200	£150/140	£24	£20
Lt. Commander	£120	£100	£24	£20
Lieutenant	£80	£60	£21	£17
Sub-Lieutenant	£60	£50	£15	£12
Rank & File	Wife: weekly		Child: weekly	
Class I	9s		2s	
Class II	7s		2s	
Class III	6s		1s/6d	
Class I	5s		1s/6d	

Based on the original assessment of average annual income, that is, eighty pounds (£80) per year, a Colonel's widow would live reasonably well on her pension. If she were childless and had no private funds, her income would be roughly equivalent to that of a man in the professional or managerial class and considerably higher than most annual salaries earned by working women. The childless widow of a private or a Class IV sailor if she were to rely solely on her pension, would live far below the level of even an unskilled female manual worker.<sup>30</sup>

The inadequate levels of separation allowance and pensions for servicemen's families did not go unnoticed in the autumn of 1914. Members of Parliament and private citizens expressed their anger frequently and at length with regard to the insufficiency of separation allowances and pensions. Despite governmental fears that a rise in the scale of allowances might inspire demands for similar increases in Old Age Pensions and Workman's

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *The Edwardians*, 24. Further information regarding the buying power of pensions and allowances is contained in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Compensation and insistence on the long-term "sanction of use" in the scale of allowances<sup>31</sup>, a raise was instituted in November of 1914. Efforts to retain the five shilling (5s) minimum were in vain. This set of reforms also saw the initiation of separation allowances for the wives and families of sailors.<sup>32</sup> Before that time, the various branches of government responsible for separation allowances and pensions as well as the Cabinet were more concerned with the problems of entitlement and dispersal and were not prepared until November of that year to deal with the more involved problems of scale. Within the upper reaches of government, reluctance to alter the scheme was overcome by the knowledge that it was "politically impossible" to avoid making changes as "public opinion demand{ed}" them.<sup>33</sup> Because the rates and structure of separation allowance or pensions were under Royal Warrant rather than jurisdiction at this time, the Cabinet and the relevant governmental agencies had almost total control over any changes instituted.<sup>34</sup> In November of 1914, the Liberal Cabinet altered the scale of allowances and pensions for the Army and created an initial system for the Navy.

The improvement in scales at this time was not dramatic and many wives at all points in the pay scale could very well have been living in

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<sup>31</sup> Confidential Memorandum. "Navy and Army Widows and Orphan's Pensions. Allowances to other Dependents and Disablement Pensions." October 1914. PRO: CAB 37/121:120. As aforementioned, scales had been in place since the South African War.

<sup>32</sup> "Allowances and Pensions in Respect of Seamen, Marines and Soldiers and their Wives, Widows and Dependents." Cd. 7662. 9 November 1914. *British Sessional Papers*. vol. lii: 199-203.

<sup>33</sup> Confidential Memorandum. 22 September 1914. PRO: CAB 37/121:110.

<sup>34</sup> Richardson, *Widows Benefits*, 63.

relative penury, depending on the a husband's prewar income<sup>35</sup>. Under the new scale, rates for the childless wife of a Private or Corporal were raised from seven shillings and seven pence (7s/7d) per week to nine shillings (9s) per week while rates for a wife with four children were raised from eleven shillings per week(11s) to eighteen shillings and six pence (18s/6d) per week. Added to this was a guaranteed allotment of three shillings and six pence per week (3s/ 6d). Thus, the total weekly allowance minimum was now twelve shillings and six pence (12s/6d). While this increase did not radically improve the lot of most servicemen's wives, it was better than the original five shilling basis that the Cabinet had hoped to institute. As well, separation allowances for the wives and children of sailors were set at the same time. In addition to a minimum of twenty shillings (20s) per month allotment, sailors wives were given allowance ranging from six shillings per week for a Class I sailor with no children to thirteen shillings for a Class IV sailor with four children.

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<sup>35</sup> The problems of "relative deprivation" and efforts to institute a "sliding scale" which would recognize the class distinctions between and even within ranks, would become a crucial issue in the negotiations of the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances, struck in the autumn of 1914. The issues involved in ascertaining relative deprivation and the political alignments in the debate over this question are covered in Chapter 3. See also W. Runciman who explained the concept of relative deprivation as the recognition that social and economic expectations are conditioned by individual frame of reference and that "poverty is the best guarantee of conservatism." W. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (London, 1966), 9.

Pensions for all ranks in both the Army and the Navy were raised at this time. In fact, rates were equalized in both Army and Navy from this point on. The minimum weekly scale for the dependents of servicemen who died of wounds within seven years of discharge or of disease while on active service was raised from a minimum of three shillings (3s) per week to a minimum of seven shillings and six pence (7s/6d) per week for a widow of the lowest ranks with no children to twenty-two shillings and six pence (22s/6d) per week for a widow of the highest ranks with four children.<sup>36</sup>

**Army and Navy  
Pensions, November 1914**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Widow</u>	<u>+ 1 Child</u>	<u>2 Child.</u>	<u>3 Child.</u>	<u>4 Child.</u>
Class a (Navy) V (Army)	7s/6d	12s/6d	15s	17s/6d	20s
Class b (Navy) IV (Army)	8s	13s	15s/6d	18s	20s/6d
Class c (Navy) III(Army)	8s/6d	13s/6d	16s	18s/6d	21s
Class d (Navy) II (Army)	9s	14s	16s/6d	19s	21s/6d
Class e (Navy) I (Army)	10s	15s	17s/6d	20s	22s/6d

<sup>36</sup> "Allowances and Pensions in Respect of Seamen, Marines and Soldiers and their Wives, Widows and Dependents." Cd. 7662.

The improvements in Army and Navy pensions left servicemen's widows at the lowest ranks somewhat better off and again, the Asquith Cabinet's desire to keep pensions and allowances at a minimum of five shillings per week was overcome; public opinion on the issue was only partly satisfied, however. Changes to the rates of pension and allowance addressed only part of the problem and the confusion of bureaucracy and the potential for mismanagement remained. The role of the charities, that is, the NRF, the SSFA and the RPF would remain central throughout 1915 and even into 1916 as the Asquith Liberal and later Coalition Governments attempted to maintain a mixture of private and public responsibility for the welfare of servicemen's dependents.

### The Response of Charity

Enthusiasm for war and the desire to express that enthusiasm through patriotic effort engendered the creation of numerous charities in the first few months of the war. Patriotic citizens, particularly patriotic middle class women, were urged to contribute their time, money and labour to ensure the survival of the dependents of those men who were brave enough and strong enough to take the King's shilling in time of war. Working for the SSFA or another of the myriad charitable organisations which were established or reactivated in the first months of the war quickly became the vogue as an outlet for the often frustrated energies of patriotic women eager to demonstrate their fervent support for the cause. For others, the wartime necessity of provision for servicemen's dependents was an extension of

peacetime paternalistic or maternalistic and voluntarist benevolence. For groups and individuals whose support for the war effort was tentative, such as Margaret Llewellyn Davies<sup>37</sup> at the Women's Co-operative Guild (WCG) or Ramsay MacDonald<sup>38</sup> at the War Emergency: Workers' National Guild (WEWNC), advocating the cause of proper care for the dependents of servicemen as an acceptable form of war service and a demonstration of their "sane patriotism." Still others, such as the National Council for Public Morals or the War Babies and Mothers League, saw the cause as one of moral and physical race regeneration, a necessity in light of the slaughter in the trenches.

The Local Government Board, the War Office and the Admiralty attempted to stem the development of an even more unregulated and overextended system of relief for the relatives of servicemen by instituting a chain of official, quasi-official and unofficial relief agencies which fell under at least a modicum of governmental control. For the first year and a half of the Great War, the Government Committee for the Prevention and Relief of Distress (GCPRD), administered by the Local Government Board, played an important role in centralising official, quasi-official and private efforts to relieve distress amongst military dependents. The GCPRD was initially intended to counter war-related distress among civilians but ended up coordinating relief for military dependents as well, in lieu of an officially

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<sup>37</sup>Llewellyn Davies was the daughter of a Christian Socialist minister. She acted as the General Secretary of the Women's Co-operative (formed 1883) through which office she worked for reform of divorce laws, suffrage and improvements in maternity and infant welfare especially amongst the working class. *Europa Biographical Dictionary of British Women*, 258.

<sup>38</sup>Ramsay MacDonald was the son of a Scottish servant. A Fabian, a member of the Independent Labour Party after 1894, he was one of 28 Labour MP's elected in 1906. He resigned as Party Chairman in 1914 as a result of his determination to retain a pacifist stance.

designated centralising body. At the quasi-official level, the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund (NRF) was funded entirely by private donations but was a Government initiative. This organisation maintained strong official ties to the GCPRD and was administered by a mixed executive of politicians and private philanthropists. Those relief agencies which were incorporated into governmental operations for the first eighteen months of the war can also be considered quasi-official although their ties to government were less obvious than in the case of the NRF. The Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation (RPF) was responsible for the dispersal of government grants and pensions to widows in addition to continuing their own private relief efforts. The SSFA was responsible for distributing separation allowances as well as various other aspects of welfare work for servicemen's wives and families. The work of these official designated groups was supplemented or, as some claimed, infringed upon, by a plethora of local and national organisations, some of which had sprung up on the declaration of war, others of which had a long and venerable history. The Post Office Relief Fund, the *Daily Express* Shilling League, the War Babies and Mothers' League and numerous others were created in the fall of 1914 to cater to the needs of servicemen's families. Others, such as the Officer's Families Fund (OFF) were reactivated or revived by the demands of the new war. In addition, a significant number of preexisting groups with a more general political, charitable or administrative role, such as the Friends of the Poor, the British Medical Association, the WCG and the WEWNC, chose to provide some form of relief or to agitate for proper scales of allowance as their wartime mandate.

In 1914, the system of state poor relief, covered under the Poor Laws and administered by an ill organised network of Poor Law Guardians, was



based on the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor as well as the principle of "less eligibility". Women constituted the majority of adult recipients of relief in the Victorian and Edwardian period<sup>39</sup> and were particularly vulnerable to the often arbitrary, even chaotic workings of the Poor Law system. According to Pat Thane, the heavy representation of women amongst the ranks of poor relief recipients in the Victorian and Edwardian period, can be explained by their longer life expectancy, limited opportunities for work and primary responsibility for the welfare of children.<sup>40</sup> Despite the efforts of the Poor Law Guardians to enforce the obligation to maintain,<sup>41</sup> many women were abandoned and left destitute. Because of local reluctance or inability to provide "outdoor relief"<sup>42</sup>, women were often forced to choose between subsistence and family, as they were not allowed to bring their children into the workhouse or were automatically considered unfit if unable to support their families.<sup>43</sup> The many women who fell through the enormous cracks of state relief were provided for by a system of charity dominated by the COS philosophy of "moral regeneration" as monitored and reinforced by "casework." A similar relationship existed between the officials of the Armed Forces and the SSFA and RPF; those dependents who fell through the cracks of the official system of separation

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<sup>39</sup> P. Thane, "Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England." *History Workshop Journal*. 6(1978), 29.

<sup>40</sup> Thane, "Women and the Poor Law." 34-37.

<sup>41</sup> Crowther, "Family Responsibility and State Responsibility in Britain before the Welfare State." 132.

<sup>42</sup> M.A. Crowther, "The Workhouse." *Proceedings of the British Academy*. 78(1992), 183-195. "Outdoor relief" refers to money or goods provided to families or individuals residing within their own homes or at least outside the workhouse. "Indoor relief" refers to relief provided within the workhouse or poorhouse system. The workhouse system was "intended to restore essential social values previously undermined by indiscriminate outdoor relief."

<sup>43</sup> Thane, "Women and the Poor Law." 39.

allowance and pension became the charge of one of these organisations. The difference, of course, was that the SSF and the RPF, prior to the Great War, hesitated to help the "off-the-strength" families of servicemen for fear of disrupting the regulations of the army with, as Tennant called it, "indiscriminate charity". Those families of soldiers and sailors who were ineligible for state relief or charity from the SSFA or RPF ended up back in the civilian relief system beginning with the Poor Law Guardians and continuing on through the chain of less discriminating charitable groups.

From the inception of the Great War, the idea of servicemen's dependents on Poor Relief became repugnant to a broad variety of politicians and private citizens. While the Poor Law remained "in reserve" for both civilian and military victims of the dislocations of the war, new official and quasi-official charitable bodies were instituted which, in effect, created a more subtle series of distinctions between the inherently deserving poor including servicemen's dependents, the occasionally deserving poor, such as the temporarily unemployed and the undeserving poor, such as the habitual pauper. The GCPRD was the principle official organisation dedicated to relieving distress caused by war. Appointed by Asquith on 5 August 1914, the GCPRD was a bureaucratic organisation administered by the Local Government Board<sup>44</sup>, responsible for the relief of civilian distress as a result of the war. However, it ended up playing a significant role in the administration of relief for military dependents and the distribution of separation allowances and pensions throughout 1914 and into early 1915. The NRF, a charitable organisation created in the first week of the war, was

<sup>44</sup> The Local Government Board was a centralised, administrative body designed to oversee local government; its responsibilities were wide-ranging but it dealt primarily with poor relief and public health measures. The head or President of the Local Government Board was also a member of the Cabinet.

responsible for the relief of both civilian and military dependent distress. But like the GCPRD, the NRF was forced to concentrate its energies on relieving the distress of military dependents and administering separation allowances and pensions. The SSFA received funds from the NRF to relieve distress amongst the wives of soldiers and was also called upon by the War Office to oversee the distribution of allowances in the first months of the war. The RPF held the same responsibilities toward the widows of servicemen.

Herbert Samuel, chair of the GCPRD and a "New Liberal" was the recently appointed President of the Local Government Board.<sup>45</sup> When the war began, he was ordered to put aside all ordinary business of the Board and concentrate on the anticipated problems of the relief. Asquith had instituted the GCPRD in order to oversee all relief measures in Great Britain, thereby limiting the number of independent and potentially conflicting organisations. Samuel was "strongly of the opinion that there ought not to be a large number of organisations, either central or in the localities overlapping one another and confusing each others' efforts."<sup>46</sup> Thus, all appeals for funds were to be made to the central committee of the GCPRD, the members of which would make a decision regarding the validity of the claim. Along with the provision of aid for Belgian refugees after September of 1914, these duties became the primary tasks of the committee.

The members of the original central committee were selected from a range of political parties and organisations.<sup>47</sup> Some of these were then

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel had been offered the more prestigious post of Presidency of the Board of Trade in January 1914 but had requested the Presidency of the Local Government Board instead because of the greater opportunity for reform in terms of the Poor Law and Public Health. See: Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, 153.

<sup>46</sup> Correspondence. Herbert Samuel to Arthur Ponsonby (Secretary: Buckingham Palace). 5 August 1914. PRO: MH 57/183:2.

<sup>47</sup> "GCPRD: List of Members." PRO: MH 57/183:1.

appointed to head local sub-committees throughout Great Britain. As well, the GCPRD established a Central Committee on Women's Employment, consisting entirely of women.<sup>48</sup> Samuel even included John Burns, the former, ineffectual head of the Local Government Board, a decision he would regret later.<sup>49</sup> The committee also included Walter Long<sup>50</sup>, Charles Masterman, Ramsay MacDonald<sup>51</sup>, May Tennant, Sidney Webb,<sup>52</sup> and Wedgwood Benn<sup>53</sup>. The WEWNC requested a seat on the committee for a representative of organised labour but were refused. Samuel justified this decision with the statement that he wanted to maintain a relatively small central committee and at any rate had already appointed various members of the WEWNC, such as MacDonald and Webb, to his committee.<sup>54</sup>

Despite his initial reluctance to add to the confusion of local government by instituting yet another network of local authorities, Samuel

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<sup>48</sup> H. Samuel, "Government Measures on War Distress." *The Nineteenth Century*. 78(November 1915), 1119.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel characterised Burns' work as the Chair of the London Sub-committee as directed "not for the prevention and relief of distress, but for the prevention of relief of distress." *The Nation*, organ of the "New Liberal" school of political thought claimed that Burns, who had been appointed to the Local Government Board as a gesture to Labour in 1906, had made it the "most conservative office in the Government". As quoted in, Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats.*, 113. See also: Samuel, "Government Measures on War Distress." 1123.

<sup>50</sup> Long, an experienced Conservative M.P. and a powerful Unionist after 1906. He and his wife were heavily involved in both private philanthropical efforts and later official administration regarding the welfare of military dependents. He took over as President of the Local Government Board in May of 1915 with the inauguration of the Asquith Coalition.

<sup>51</sup> Ramsay MacDonald was the former leader of the Labour Party who had recently been replaced by Arthur Henderson.

<sup>52</sup> Webb was a well known Fabian and Labour theoretician as well as member of the National Council on Public Morals and the WEWNC.

<sup>53</sup> Benn was a Liberal M.P. (Labour after 1927), a radical non conformist and chair of the NRF. He enlisted in the Army in October of 1914 and would later refuse a post as chief whip in the Lloyd George Coalition in order to continue his military service, for which he was eventually decorated.

<sup>54</sup> Correspondence: J.S. Middleton (Sec. of the WEWNC) to Herbert Samuel. 21/25 August 1914. PRO: MH 57/183: 4.

saw no alternative to creating a system of sub committees. Existing Town Councils and Poor Law Guardians were incapable of properly administering relief in the proportions necessary. As well, they were unable to command and efficiently use the necessary services of thousands of volunteers. Accordingly, cities and boroughs, that is, districts with a population over twenty-thousand, were invited to form local sub-committees, composed of representatives from organised labour, philanthropic organisations and local authorities, to work under the aegis of the central committee. Within a few days, over three hundred committees were set up. Their duties included establishing the extent and nature of local distress, averting the sudden stoppage of local industry, coordinating all relief agencies in the locality, and keeping a register of all families needing assistance. Local committees communicated this information to the central committee at regular intervals.<sup>55</sup>

Although he declared himself a proponent of social reform and the extension of the powers of state in social life, Samuel's "New Liberalism"<sup>56</sup> was tempered by his belief in classic Liberal concepts of poor relief such as less eligibility and the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor.<sup>57</sup> Despite his association with prominent New Liberals such as Hobhouse<sup>58</sup> and Fabians such as the Webbs, Samuel retained an ideological attachment to the ideal of individual accountability and a distaste for pauperism, at least in the case of Poor Law administration. Local Committees were advised that

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<sup>55</sup> Samuel, "Government Measures on War Distress." 1117-1118.

<sup>56</sup> See: P. Weiler, *The New Liberalism: Liberal Social Theory in Great Britain, 1889-1914*. (New York, 1982), 194. See also: Clarke. *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 153-154.

<sup>57</sup> Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life*, 167-70.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 28 - 46.

the best way to provide relief for civilian distress was to furnish the unemployed with other work for wages. Money was to be given only as a last resort.<sup>59</sup> In addition, only those citizens who were unemployed as a direct result of the war would receive money; habitual paupers would not be maintained by the GCPRD.<sup>60</sup>

Samuel's distaste for the idea of unfettered relief and his fears of encouraging habitual pauperism were not uncommon among bureaucrats, philanthropists and others involved in the administration of relief in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His concern for the work ethic of the civilian whose employment had been curtailed by the war was similar to the concern expressed by many individuals and groups working with the dependents of servicemen. May Tenant's report on the "off-the-strength" family contained caveats which reflected her certainty that indiscriminate charity was not only distasteful and wasteful but morally reprehensible in that it encouraged the pursuit of an unproductive lifestyle and the attraction to vice. Similar sentiments were often expressed in the House of Commons and in less predictable places.

The position of servicemen's dependents was a difficult one in terms of the rules governing charity from the GCPRD.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the GCPRD was not strictly intended to deal with these cases and Samuel made a concerted effort to distinguish between the civilian recipients of poor relief and the dependents of servicemen who, for whatever reason, had yet to receive their allowances or pensions. While those civilians whose economic lives had been disrupted by the war may possibly have been deserving, the GCPRD

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<sup>59</sup> Samuel, "Government Measures on War Distress." 1118.

<sup>60</sup> GCPRD "Regulations." November 1914. MH 57/184: 2.

<sup>61</sup> GCPRD "Circular to Local Committees." 3 November 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:6.

considered that servicemen's dependents were inherently deserving, as long as those dependents could prove their legitimate marital or familial ties to a soldier or sailor on active duty. As a result, Samuel issued instructions to local Poor Law Guardians that the families of servicemen should be referred not to Poor Law Guardians for relief but to the NRF and should not be recorded as having received poor relief from local Guardians. If their names were on the rolls of the Poor Law Guardians, they should be removed as soon as their eligibility for allowance or pensions was proven.<sup>62</sup> Whatever money they had received from Poor Law Guardians would be immediately repaid by a grant from the NRF.<sup>63</sup>

Edward, the Prince of Wales<sup>64</sup> founded the NRF on 6 August. His appeal "to the hearts of the British people", was released to the media and published widely. In it he enjoined his subjects to "stand by one another" to supply "generous and ready support" in order to allay the "considerable distress among the people of this country least able to bear it."<sup>65</sup> The Queen made a similar appeal on that day on behalf of the "National Fund set up by {her} own dear son." She appealed particularly to women "who are ever ready to help those in need, to give their services and assist in the local administration of the fund."<sup>66</sup>

In order to synchronise the workings of the NRF with those of the

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<sup>62</sup> GCPRD "Circular to Local Committees." 19 August 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:14.

<sup>63</sup> *House of Commons: Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. LXVI. 27 August 1914, 166.

<sup>64</sup> Edward, the eldest son of George V, had been Prince of Wales since 1911 and served as an Army Staff Officer throughout the Great War. He ascended to the throne in January 1936 as Edward VIII, abdicating after a year at which point he was named Duke of Windsor.

<sup>65</sup> "Appeal by the Prince of Wales." 6 August 1914. Imperial War Museum Archives: Women's Collection, Benevolent Organisations, 8/RI. 24.

<sup>66</sup> "An Appeal by Queen Mary." 6 August 1914. Imperial War Museum Archives: Women's Collection, Benevolent Organisations, 8/RI. 24.

GCPRD, Samuel made sure that some GCPRD executives, including Charles Masterman and Walter Long, were also on the board of the NRF. The executive committee of the NRF, chaired by Benn, also included Arthur Balfour, former Conservative Prime Minister and Arthur Henderson, Labour Party Secretary and M.P.. While the NRF collected its own funds, the control and allocation of those funds was actually in the hands of the GCPRD.<sup>67</sup>

The Prince of Wales' own regiment, the 1st Life Guards, made the initial donation of eighteen thousand pounds on 7 August 1914. Overall, donations exceeded two hundred and fifty thousand pounds on that day, the first day after the fund's inauguration.<sup>68</sup> The NRF collected over one million pounds in the month of August alone and by December of 1914, had received over four million pounds in private donations.<sup>69</sup> These donations ranged from large cash gifts to a wedding ring, a silk handkerchief<sup>70</sup> and fifty thousand eighty pound cheeses from the Government of Quebec.<sup>71</sup> Various private organisations staged charity events, such as theatre matinees, dog shows and even boxing matches, the proceeds of which were donated to the NRF. One Sunday in mid-August was set aside by all churches in each denomination as war relief day and donated all collection proceeds to the NRF.<sup>72</sup> To solicit donations, the NRF sold Christmas cards in 1914, published sheet music and distributed patriotically illustrated certificates to its patrons.

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<sup>67</sup> *House of Commons: Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. LXVI, 11 September 1914, 841.

<sup>68</sup> "Prince of Wales' Fund: Over £250 000 subscribed." *The Times*. 8 August 1914, 6.

<sup>69</sup> "The Prince's Fund." *The Times*. 1 December 1914, 5.

<sup>70</sup> "The Prince's Fund." *The Times*. 12 August 1914, 3.

<sup>71</sup> GCPRD Memorandum. "To Local Representatives." 28 October 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:9.

<sup>72</sup> National Relief Fund. "Report up to 31 March 1915."



The NRF used the four million pounds collected in private donations during the first five months of the war primarily to supplement inadequate or replace delayed separation allowances and pensions. Initially, the NRF had been intended to provide civilian relief as well but the heavy demand for relief of distress on the part of military dependents made this goal next to impossible. Grants to widows and orphans were distributed through the aegis of the RPF; allowances and grants to wives and children were distributed through the SSFA.

The work of the SSFA has been well documented by women's historians such as Pedersen, Kingsley Kent, Trustram and Dwork as well as the historians of the welfare state such as Graham Wootton and Marwick. According to Trustram, the policies of the SSFA were based on the belief that private philanthropy was motivated by motives of generosity and genuine concern; it was therefore "ennobling and purifying to the recipient."<sup>73</sup> It also attested to the good character of the recipient. Visits from caseworkers, usually middle class women who were intended to provide a good example to their charges,<sup>74</sup> ensured that the wives of sailors and soldiers did not fall into states of complete moral degradation. Many of the volunteers, such as Eleanor Rathbone, were suffragists or former suffragists whose mission had a "feminist tint."<sup>75</sup> Support for the work of the SSFA was often voiced in *Common Cause*, originally the organ of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) under the editorship of Helena Swanwick<sup>76</sup>, who suggested early in the war that the entire work of relief of distress was a

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<sup>73</sup> Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 183-4.

<sup>74</sup> Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship in Britain during the Great War." 993.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 995.

<sup>76</sup> Until the split in the NUWSS in early 1915.

"branch of the public service which could well be administered entirely by women."<sup>77</sup> The extensive system of local committees instituted by the SSFA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries meant that they were able to monitor military dependents fairly closely, despite the heavy casework load in the early months of the war. By 1915, the SSFA had over nine hundred branches staffed by over fifty thousand workers.<sup>78</sup>

Administered by Hayes-Fisher, the organization's Vice-President, the RPF is less well documented but of equal importance to the SSFA. The RPF ran primarily on well invested private donations. The committees of the RPF, which included such people as Colonel Sir James Gildea, founder of the SSFA and Lieutenant Frederick Stopford, a representative of the War Office, administered numerous funds for the maintenance of servicemen's widows. The size of allowance or grant was decided "according to {the widow's} station in life" with preference going to those widows whose husbands had given good service during various wars.<sup>79</sup> The range of funds administered by the RPF included the "Russian Fund" for widows and orphans of the Crimean War, the "H.M.S. Captain Fund" for widows to the "Soldiers' Effects Fund" which distributed the unclaimed balances of soldiers who had died intestate.

When the war began the RPF had approximately seven thousand widows, orphans and others on permanent allowance, with an expenditure of around sixty five thousand pounds per year. Their allowances ranged from seven shillings per week for the widow of a Private to nine shillings per

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<sup>77</sup> *Common Cause*. 28 August 1914, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship." 992.

<sup>79</sup> Royal Patriotic Fund. "Abstract of General Principles." Appendix to "Tenth Report for 1913."

week for the widow of a Sergeant Major or Chief Petty Officer.<sup>80</sup> In the first eight months of the war, the RPF continued its allowances to prewar clients and made additional one-time grants to over eight thousand widows and over fifteen thousand children.<sup>81</sup> These grants were generally in the range of five pounds for widows and one pound for an orphan. Although there were a number of "honorary agents" who acted on behalf of the RPF throughout Great Britain, this organisation was lacking the well established system of local committees enjoyed by the SSFA. As a result, Hayes-Fisher and the central committee were forced to rely upon the SSFA and, in some cases the COS, to assist in distributing grants.<sup>82</sup>

The experience of past wars in which the "desire of the public to deal generously with the widows and orphans of those who have lost their lives in the service of their country"<sup>83</sup> gave rise to the overlapping of relief services for military dependents, convinced Samuel and the GCPRD to limit the number of relief organisations dedicated to military dependents to the two officially designated private charities. Despite these efforts, the number of relief agencies dedicated to military dependents or counting military dependents amongst their recipients mushroomed both locally and nationally. Occasionally, groups such as the British Medical Association which administered a programme of free medical attendance and prescription medicine to military dependents beginning in October 1914, initiated entirely new branches of service.<sup>84</sup> Others, such as the Friends of the

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<sup>80</sup> Royal Patriotic Fund. "Tenth Report for 1913."

<sup>81</sup> National Relief Fund. "Report up to March 1915." Imperial War Museum Archives. Women's Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/RI. 24.

<sup>82</sup> Royal Patriotic Fund. "Eleventh Report for 1914."

<sup>83</sup> War Relief Funds Committee. "Report." 28 May 1900. PRO: MH 57/196:2.

<sup>84</sup> GCPRD Memorandum. "To Local Committees." 10 October 1914. PRO: MH 57/184:10.

Poor, merely made the patriotic gesture of extending their existing services to military dependents.<sup>85</sup> Many of them offered money, clothing, shelter, employment training and other forms of material and “emotional” assistance to military dependents. Some were aimed at a specialised clientele such as the employees of certain organisations, unwed mothers or the families of officers, while others were intended to cater to all military dependents.

The Post Office Relief Fund was one of the earliest of the new private, national and specific organisations. It was instituted within a week of the beginning of the war and was intended to relieve the NRF of all charges in respect of Post Office employees who had enlisted.<sup>86</sup> In the first year of the war, the Post Office Relief fund had distributed nearly one hundred thousand pounds in relief to thousands of wives, widows, children and orphans of employees who had enlisted.<sup>87</sup> Wives and widows received twelve shillings and six pence per week (12s/6d) plus an extra six shillings (6s) for each child. As well, the Post Office offered employment training to widows, subsidised education to orphans and distributed Christmas gifts and grants to all children of enlisted employees.<sup>88</sup>

The War Babies and Mothers’ League, another private, national and specific organisation, was intended to provide food, clothes, work, homes for children, adoption services, nursing and admission to hospital for the anticipated plethora of girls and women bearing servicemen’s children out of

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<sup>85</sup> “Patriotic Suggestions.” *The Times*. 7 August 1914, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Post Office Relief Fund. “Memorandum.” 1914. Imperial War Museum. Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/ Rl. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Post Office Relief Fund. “Statement of Account.” August 1915. Imperial War Museum. Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/Rl. 24.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.

wedlock.<sup>89</sup> Their mission was based primarily on certain popular wartime notions about eugenics<sup>90</sup>, namely the belief that the children of soldiers and sailors were the progeny of the best and the bravest of British men. Allowing them to starve would deprive the next generation of its most fit members. Donations and personal service to the War Babies and Mothers League would “ensure a new man and womanhood born of this war that the mother country might be proud of.”<sup>91</sup>

The Officers’ Families Fund, founded in 1899 during the South African War by the Marchioness of Landsdowne and reactivated in 1914, was intended to relieve distress amongst the wives, widows, children and orphans, particularly the daughters, of officers in the Army. In the first two years of the war, the OFF extended charity to nine thousand officers’ dependents could show that they suffered pecuniarily as a result of the death of their family breadwinner. Relief was offered in the form of money, shelter, clothing and education subsidies for children.<sup>92</sup> Officers’ families were offered relief as well from the Royal Homes for Officers’ Widows and Daughters, established in 1899 as an offshoot of the SSFA. This organisation maintained a number of building throughout Great Britain to serve as subsidised or rent free residences for penurious dependents of deceased Major

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<sup>89</sup> War Babies and Mothers League. “Leaflet #1”. 1914. Imperial War Museum. Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8: Rl. 85.

<sup>90</sup> The study and promotion of eugenics was at its height in the first twenty years of the twentieth century particularly amongst middle class radicals such as C.W. Saleeby, or in the case of the National Council for Public Morals, Beatrice and Sidney Webb. See: L. A. Farrell, *The Origins and Growth of the English Eugenics Movement, 1865-1925* (New York, 1935), 283-293.

<sup>91</sup> War Babies and Mothers League. “Leaflet #2.” 1914. Imperial War Museum. Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/Rl. 85

<sup>92</sup> Officers’ Families Fund. “Report of Work. 1914-16.” Imperial War Museum. Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/Rl. 24.

Generals, Majors, Captains, and Lieutenant-Colonels.<sup>93</sup>

Organisations with a more general agenda, particularly those devoted to the concerns of the working class often considered the advocacy of proper allowances for military dependents as their wartime mandate. The WCG, the The London Trades Council (LTC) and the newly formed WEWNC considered the issue of relief or state provision for military dependents to be an overwhelmingly significant cause. Prior to the war in the summer of 1914, the WCG, headed by Margaret Llewlyn Davies, had advocated a generalised scheme for maternity welfare particularly for working class mothers. After the war began, they continued their quest for the establishment of maternity care centres under the control of the Local Government Board but added the "demand for adequate allowances and pensions" to their resolutions. It was clear to Llewelyn Davies that this form of advocacy would be "Guild's greatest contribution to the problems of the war."<sup>94</sup>

The LTC and the WEWNC were allied in the call for adequate allowances and pensions. At a conference in early November 1914, the two groups formed a series of resolutions to be presented to the House of Commons Select Committee. These resolutions included demands for the establishment of a separation allowance for the dependents of sailors as well as soldiers, a minimum separation allowance of one pound (£1) per week for every wife and at least three shillings and six pence (3s/6d) for children, the extension of allowances to unmarried mothers of the children of servicemen and pensions equal to separation allowances and. Most significantly, they urged that the state take full responsibility for the administration of the above

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<sup>93</sup> J. Gildea, *History of the Royal Homes for Officers' Widows and Daughters* (London, 1918).

<sup>94</sup> Women's Co-operative Guild. "Report on Work during the War." Imperial War Museum. Women's Collection: Benevolent Organizations 8/ RI. 85

requirements.<sup>95</sup>

### Conclusion

Despite governmental assurances to the contrary, many eligible wives and children of servicemen went without their entitled benefits in the first three months of the war. The Asquith Liberal Cabinet publicly declared its willingness to reform the system in the direction of greater bureaucratic responsibility but, in reality, were reluctant to make any significant changes to the traditional system of assessment and distribution. The War Office, inundated with claims from the wives of newly enlisted men, was unable to cope with the unprecedented demand for allowances and called upon an official and semi-official chain of newly created and preexisting charities to undertake a large portion of the work involved in assessing claims and distributing money. By capitalising on the enthusiasm for war, particularly on the part of middle class women, the Liberal government perpetuated the confused and complicated system of private and public administration which had developed in the nineteenth century and which would continue into the first two and half years of the war.

It is tempting to characterise the so-called "needs blind, rights based" provision of separation allowances and pensions as an early manifestation of the principle of universality and the precursor to the British welfare state. Viewed as such, decisions to extend or amend the provision of allowances and pensions seem astonishing, entirely out of rhythm with the prevailing ethos of both public and private relief. Despite their initial reluctance to

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<sup>95</sup> War Emergency: Workers' National Committee and the London Trades Council. "Resolution." November 1914. National Museum of Labour History Archives. WNC/ADD/2/79.

increase rates and their historical aversion to reform in the area of state benefits and relief, the intensity of public pressure and scrutiny made it politically expedient, if not absolutely necessary, for the Asquith Government to at least raise rates to subsistence level by November of 1914. The issue of servicemen's and servicemen's dependents' rights was closely related to support for the Asquith Liberal Government's war aims and to support for the war in general. Ignoring demands for reform in this arena could have had severe political repercussions for the Liberals. But by adhering to traditional categories of poor relief and avoiding a full-scale incorporation of the duties of ascertaining eligibility, dispersing funds and considering individual cases, the Liberals were able to limit true reform and yet appear to be pursuing changes for the better in this arena. As the following chapters will show, the course of change to the system of separation allowances and pensions during the Great War was influenced by a number of forces both within and outside political circles. Long term conservatism within Cabinet and Parliament made it imperative for the Asquith Liberals to avoid making wholesale changes which would commit the state to full responsibility for the welfare of servicemen's dependents while at the same time satisfying the demands of a cross party group of M.P.'s, Labour groups, the press and private citizens for extensive reform. On both sides, opinions on reform arose from a complex combination of attitudes toward patriotism, race, gender and class rather than clearly defined adherence to a specific ideological course.



Chapter 2  
**"What the Women Can do":  
 Servicemen's Dependents and the Female Role  
 August to December 1914**

Women of England, yours how hard the task,  
 Service from you how difficult we ask!  
 Glorious to stand against the leaden hail  
 Splendid the onrush and the charging cheer.  
 Yet glorious, to, to check the coming tear;  
 The doubt by night, to stifle through the day;  
 The deep alarm not outwardly betray.  
 Oh, dull expectancy that finds not vent!  
 O, silent anguish that will not lament!  
 Oh, mad uncertainty from dawn to eve!  
 Oh, worse to wait than battle to receive!  
 Heroes are ye, who but the sob repress,  
 Your victory dumb is victory no less!<sup>1</sup>

War and Redefinition

The first six months of the Great War was a period of exploration, expansion creation and redefinition in nearly all aspects of military life and political life and in many aspects of civilian life. The demands on government and citizenry were not only numerous and exhausting, they were also ambiguous and difficult to articulate. It was clear that much work and sacrifice would be expected from the Liberal Government, the Army and the Navy, from extra-parliamentary political and charitable organisations

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<sup>1</sup> S. Phillips, "Women and War." *Windsor Magazine*, November 1914, 698.

and from individual Britons. The exact nature of that work and sacrifice had yet to be defined, however. In the first six months of the war, politicians, military leaders, governmental strategists, press and propaganda agencies, social and political activists and individual writers sought to advise eager patriots as to the nature of the political, social and economic changes involved in the redefinition of official and unofficial wartime roles.

In the upper reaches of the political establishment, Asquith and his ministers struggled with a refractory tradition of individualism, voluntarism and minimalist state ideas of liberalism, traditions which conflicted with the emerging necessity to expand governmental authority and abandon his traditional methods of governing. The Defence of the Realm Act or D.O.R.A.,<sup>2</sup> first put forward and passed in the week following the declaration of war, extended the reach of government into private business and the press in order to ensure "public safety".<sup>3</sup> The Asquith Government closed military areas to aliens, forbade trade with the enemy and requisitioned merchant ships for the transport of the armed forces.<sup>4</sup>

The traditional roles of the Royal Navy and the British Army underwent emergency modification after the dissatisfying, confused and bloody battles of 1914. Britain, in August of 1914 was "anything but a nation in arms", with only a well trained but small and underequipped Army<sup>5</sup> and an admittedly famous but perhaps over-confident Navy. The Royal Navy, headed by First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill and First Sealdord

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Bone, *Beyond the Rule of Law: Aspects of the Defence of the Realm Acts and Regulations, 1914-1918*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. McMaster University, 1994, especially 157-213.

<sup>3</sup> A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London, 1965), 36-38.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-45* (Oxford, 1965), 4.

<sup>5</sup> E. Spiers, "The Regular Army in 1914." in *Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, ed. Ian Beckett (London, 1985), 57.

Admiral Fisher, greeted the war with aggressive enthusiasm, certain of their position as the traditional cornerstone of military might. Despite the staunch popular belief in and fascination with the power of the Navy, the Cabinet became convinced by Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener's assertion that the war in Europe would not be won by sea-power but rather by the deployment of huge numbers of ground troops on the front lines of the continent. Thus, the Royal Navy was "left with role of chaperone".<sup>6</sup> Churchill and Fisher refused to accept their assigned role as protectors of the home base and patrollers of sea routes, but were forced to admit by December of 1914 that any aggressive or offensive behaviour on the part of the Navy appeared to mean heavy casualties at the hands of German underwater technology. After the sinking of three armoured cruisers off the coast of Holland in September and the bitter Battle of Coronel off Chile in November, the Royal Navy was forced to reassess its traditional strategies and carefully consider its role in "amphibious warfare".<sup>7</sup>

The British Army, represented at this point by the British Expeditionary Force or B.E.F. under the command of Field Marshall Sir John French, made its way tentatively into the front lines of France and Belgium in the Autumn of 1914. In the fall of 1914, the B.E.F.'s leadership was ill-composed and disorganised. Communication between the upper reaches of administration and the troops themselves was disjointed and often incoherent. The Battle of Mons and the ensuing Retreat in August and September, the relative "moral triumph" of the Battle of the Marne and the bloody 1st Ypres, were the result of the British Government's plan, if it can

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<sup>6</sup> J. M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-18* (London, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> B. Ranft, "The Royal Navy and the War at Sea." *Britain and the First World War*. ed. J. Turner (London, 1988), 59.

be called that, to assist the French Fifth Army and thereby explore the possibilities for B.E.F. involvement in the fighting.<sup>8</sup> Kitchener, one of the few officials to predict a long war, used his enormous power as the Secretary of State for War to create an entirely new fighting force, the "New Army", attracting over two million volunteers in the first eighteen months of the war to this new and untested organisation.<sup>9</sup> The British public's conception of battles changed perforce. The traditional conception of battle as a geographically and temporally limited struggle which ended with an obvious victory or loss as predicated on individual acts of heroism was altered out of recognition by the onset of trench warfare.<sup>10</sup> The reorganisation and expansion of the British army under Kitchener combined with the development of new strategies and plans in response to exploratory battles of 1914 meant that "the old army was gone past recall."<sup>11</sup> A redefined force would take its place not only due to organisational changes but because the B.E.F. would be virtually annihilated by the end of 1914.

Outside the established seats of power, extra-parliamentary political organisations were forced by the war to evaluate their political, social, economic and ethical ideals. The reappraisal and readjustment of loyalties was particularly intense and difficult for some labour and women's groups whose traditionally pacifist mandates began to seem irrelevant or even dangerous. Despite Ramsay MacDonald's efforts to establish the Labour Party as the pacifist or neutralist "fulcrum of opposition to the government" in August of 1914, the overwhelming majority of the Labour Party

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<sup>8</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 25-30.

<sup>9</sup> P. Warner, *Kitchener: The Man Behind the Legend* (London, 1985), 174-5.

<sup>10</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 12.

membership chose to follow the lead of Arthur Henderson who advocated cooperation with governmental war aims. Only the small Independent Labour Party retained a pacifist mandate. The Parliamentary Labour Party's decision to support the war was cemented by late August's "electoral agreement" between the the Unionist Party, the ruling Liberals and the Labour Party, part of a wider agreement which took into account the pressing political necessities of wartime and the need for appearance of unanimity on the issue of war aims.<sup>12</sup>

Some women's groups, such as the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) undertook the responsibility for raising and maintaining support for the war with a zeal that surprised many observers. Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst abandoned or at least postponed the fight for the vote in order to work for the war effort in cooperation with the Liberal Government they had heretofore lambasted in the press and in public. As "arch-patriots"<sup>13</sup>, they made speeches and wrote articles which serve as textbook examples of fervent, often bellicose and xenophobic propaganda. For the constitutional suffragist organisation, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the choice was not quite so clear. The decision to support the war, as articulated by Liberal imperialist Millicent Garret Fawcett, then president of the NUWSS, would be protested and opposed by the minority internationalist and pacifist wing of the party, represented by Helena Swanwick and Catherine Marshall. Until the end of 1914 at least, the two sides were able to find an uneasy truce and a solution to the question of the future of the suffrage movement by devoting their

<sup>12</sup> C. Howard, "MacDonald, Henderson and the Outbreak of the War, 1914." *Historical Journal*. 20(1977), 871-891.

<sup>13</sup> J.Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain Since 1820* (Syracuse, 1989), 87.

organisation primarily to relief work<sup>14</sup>.

### The Redefinition of the Female Role in Wartime

As these examples have shown, the British Government's declaration of war and the ensuing upheaval of the last five months of 1914 spurred widespread changes in ethos and practice on the part of politically, socially and economically diverse groups. The manner in which various governmental propaganda agencies and the press defined the female role in the first six months of the war must be understood in this context of overall redefinition. As it became obvious that the war would require the extended absence of millions<sup>15</sup> of men, the role that women might play, both on the Front lines and the Home Front, took on crucial significance; in the first six months of the war, women would explore and begin to expand the parameters of that role.

The initial response of the press and propaganda agencies regarding their conception of appropriate and desirable roles for women in war reveals a surprising level of consensus. For the first year of the Great war, the duties of women in wartime were deemed to be those of the nurturer and caregiver; a broader role in a more active capacity was occasionally referred to obliquely but on the whole that role was held in reserve, even by the

<sup>14</sup> S. Holton, *Feminism and Democracy Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-18* (Cambridge, 1986), 131. See also: J. Lewis, "Feminist Consciousness and the First World War." *History Workshop Journal*. 23 (1987), 81-101.

<sup>15</sup> By the end of the war, 6,146,574 men would serve in the various branches of the service. 722,785 would be killed and 1,676,037 would be wounded. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 73.

women's progressive press. Women were required to be nurses, charity workers, ambulance drivers, recruiting agents and moral guardians, roles which would not "defeminise" them and which drew heavily upon their supposedly natural inclinations toward the preservation rather than the annihilation of life. The "invasion of women" into non-traditional sectors of the economy did not occur until late in 1915 after the passing of the Munitions of War Act in July of that year. Thus, for the first year of the Great War, propagandists concentrated on convincing women of the intellectual and emotional rather than the material worth of their commitment to their war. Sources ranging from the *Morning Post*, organ of the "officer class", to *Common Cause*, organ of the constitutional suffragist movement, played upon this theme of woman as the bearer and protector of human life. Ironically, however, female sensitivity to the destruction of human life was also a woman's weakness in wartime. A broad range of sources drew upon and promulgated the idea that women suffered greater mental and physical anguish in wartime and that, as a result, their sacrifice and bravery was even more laudable. Female courage was perceived to be a much more complex phenomenon than male courage, judging by the patriotic literature of the Great War.

In *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Maternalism in Britain since 1820* (1989), Jill Liddington has described the "maternalist" ideas behind the anti-militarism and internationalism of women's groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Women such as Helena Swanwick and Catherine Marshall<sup>16</sup> who maintained a pacifist stance during the Great War were proponents of the belief that women suffer more than

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<sup>16</sup> Liddington. *The Road to Greenham Common*, 90.

men in wartime because they “ ‘ pay the first cost on all human life’ ”. Their sensitivity to human pain and their innate respect for life would or should make women “instinctive pacifists”. Anti-war arguments directed at women also drew upon popular notions of eugenics as in the works of Charlotte Gilman; Gilman claimed that war in general and conscription in particular eliminated the fit and left the unfit to perpetuate the race.<sup>17</sup>

The split in the ranks of the NUWSS over the question of support for the war became official in early 1915; but even prior to that official split, the smaller, internationalist, anti-war side was represented by Helena Swanwick<sup>18</sup> the most powerful of intellects among the anti-war feminists. Swanwick became closely connected with the dominant antiwar organisation, the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) which campaigned for open diplomacy, national self-determination and arms reduction. She contended that women had no enemies<sup>19</sup> and that,

{ Two pieces of work for the human family are peculiarly the work of women: they are the life-givers and the home-makers. War kills or maims the children born of woman and tended by her; war destroys ‘woman’s place’ - the home.<sup>20</sup>

In a talk given in early 1915 at the Central Hall in London, Catherine

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<sup>17</sup> Liddington. *The Road to Greenham Common*, 89. According to Liddington, these arguments were most popular amongst anti-war activists in the first months of the war, growing unfashionable in 1915.

<sup>18</sup> See Holton. *Feminism and Democracy*, 134-5. for a description of Swanwick’s and Marshall’s position on the war and their participation in the formation of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

<sup>19</sup> H.M. Swanwick. *Jus Suffragii*. 1 October 1914.

<sup>20</sup> H.M. Swanwick. “Women and the War.” (London, 1915) 2.



Marshall<sup>21</sup> echoed Swanwick's sentiments. According to Marshall, the very fabric of women's lives was torn by the horrors of war which was "pre-eminently an outrage on motherhood and all that motherhood means."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Marshall proposed that diplomatic relations would be of an entirely different character if these things were controlled by women. Women were more likely than men, she declared, to find some other way to settle disputes than by force. According to Marshall, the female sense of the "human family" would make such a tragedy as the Great War an impossibility.<sup>23</sup>

The nationalist, pro-war side was represented most strongly by Millicent Garrett Fawcett. During the Boer War Fawcett, a Liberal imperialist, had countered Emily Hobhouse's famous report on the parlous state of Boer women and children in British concentration camps in South Africa.<sup>24</sup> When the Great War began in August of 1914, Fawcett supported British war aims against the protests of the internationalist, pacifist faction headed by Swanwick and Catherine Marshall within the NUWSS. The "iron heel of German militarism" was a threat too great to be ignored, according to Fawcett. The postponement of women's emancipation was the supreme

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<sup>21</sup> Marshall was an active member of the Women's Liberal Association and the NUWSS, later moving to the Labour Party and the pacifist movement, notably the UDC. See: J. Vellacott. *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall* (Montreal, 1993), especially 186-192.

<sup>22</sup> C. Marshall. "Women and War." (1915) in *Militarism Versus Feminism: Writings on Women and War*. ed: J. Vellacott & M. Kamester (London, 1987), 40. This was a talk prepared by Marshall but delivered by Maude Royden, another pacifist suffragist.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall. "Women and War." 40.

<sup>24</sup> See. Liddington. *The Road to Greenham Common*, 49-53. Hobhouse described the conditions in the camps as a "wholesale cruelty", documenting the deaths of tens of thousands of women and children. When Fawcett journeyed to Cape Town to make the same inspection six months after Hobhouse, she was part of what was dubbed the "White washing commission." sponsored by the War Office.

sacrifice involved in preventing the world wide domination of the Hun.<sup>25</sup> Swanwick's contention that women were instinctive pacifists was countered with Fawcett's belief that "Women's instinct to preserve life is strengthened by the sacrifice of war."<sup>26</sup>

Within the suffrage movement, both anti-war and pro-war writers and activists appeared to have absorbed and made use of the traditional view that women and children underwent particular suffering during wars because of their vulnerability and sensitivity to human suffering. For the anti-war internationalists, this sensitivity to human suffering meant that women would instinctively work for the prevention of war. For the nationalists, this meant women would work for victory. Thus, both factions within the NUWSS had absorbed and accepted a particular view of female nature although they disagreed as to the manifestation of that nature. This particular view of female nature was also at the basis of much patriotic literature and propaganda of the period. The potential torture, defilement and murder of "helpless" women and children at the hands of the Hun was the popular theme in recruitment propaganda of the time; the PRC urged men to enlist in late 1914, claiming that "the Germans who brag of their 'CULTURE' have show what it is made of by murdering defenceless women and children".<sup>27</sup> The *Penny War Weekly* in September of 1914, showed the "German Version" of "Women and Children First", explaining that "In Aerschot, in Belgium, women with babies in their arms and little children clinging to their skirts were seen in front of the German forces, pushed

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<sup>25</sup> Fawcett, *What I Remember*. 221.

<sup>26</sup> "The Care of Mothers and Babies." *Common Cause*. 4 September 1914, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Parliamentary Recruiting Committee: Poster #29. Mills Research Collections: McMaster University.

forward to act as a shield for their advance guard."<sup>28</sup> Fighting the Hun meant protecting not only Belgian or French but British women and children from such treatment. The universality of these assumptions regarding women, promulgated as they were in such politically and intellectually disparate publications as *The Times*, the *Penny War Weekly* and *Jus Suffragii*, or the *Spectator* and *Common Cause* as well as in government propaganda, indicates that a common fund of ideas regarding women in war existed and apparently was accepted and exploited by feminists, Labourites, Liberals and Unionists.

The paradox of the feminisation of the war effort lay in the efforts of patriotic literature to reconcile two apparently contradictory images of women as both the passive victims and courageous heroines of war. Men were urged to fight the war and protect their vulnerable wives, mothers and sisters from the violence and deprivation attendant upon an invasion by the Huns. At the same time, those wives, mothers and sisters were warned that, although they were non-combatants, the successful execution of the war would rest upon their contribution; they must not only preserve life but risk it as well in order to save themselves and others. These two roles were reconciled through a deceptively simple idea; that is, that the physical and emotional weakness of women which made them the objects of the war effort would serve also as the motivating force behind their enthusiastic pursuit of victory. According to the patriotic literature of the time, the larger share of the responsibility for recruiting and morale boosting was in the hands of women. The "special misery" suffered by women in wartime, that is, sensitivity to the loss of human life combined with vulnerability to

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<sup>28</sup> *Penny War Weekly*. Vol. 1, #3. 15 September 1914, 1.

violation, privation and general physical suffering, gave them a form of moral superiority over men. Because of this alleged moral superiority, women possessed the imperative. Thus, paradoxically, the weakness of women became their greatest strength.

The complexity of attitudes toward women in war in 1914 and 1915 has, as yet, been understated. The confusion of sexual identity in wartime has received a certain amount of attention in a number of interesting studies by feminist historians of this period. The most recent and relevant of these studies is *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* by Susan Kingsley Kent. While the shift in role models for women has been noted by other historians of the period such as Tylee, Braybon and Beddoe, Kingsley Kent actually devotes over half of her 1993 work to examining alterations in notions of gender during the Great War. The complete transformation of feminist understanding of masculinity and femininity as a result of the upheavals of war was manifested, for Kingsley Kent, in the distinction between prewar and post-war feminism, more specifically, in the acceptance of the ideology of "separate spheres" on the part of "new feminists" of the interwar period. The "inextricable intertwining" of sexuality and war<sup>29</sup>, combined with the reestablishment of traditional, even "reactionary" gender roles as Britons "sought to return to a quieter, happier, more ordered time"<sup>30</sup> led to the abandonment of the "radical critique" of prewar anti-separate sphere feminism in favour of a "nervous hesitation between equality and difference".<sup>31</sup> In this post structuralist analysis of the language of gender during and after the war, Kingsley Kent is concerned to

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<sup>29</sup> Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, 140.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

demonstrate the submersion of the women's movement into the recurring predominance of a difference-centred discourse as well as the complicity of the feminist movement in this shift.

But the linear progression identified by Kingsley Kent and others in their analyses of the impact of war on perceptions of gender was not actually a shift as such but a duality, an attempt on the part of a diverse group of writers, journalists, artists, politicians, political activists and others to present two co-existing but contradictory images of women, thereby preserving and extending the more traditional, difference based view of gender roles in wartime. As such, conceptions of femininity during the Great War combined an established, older understanding of women and war with the more recent precedents set by the prewar women's movement. As this thesis will demonstrate, a wide spectrum of pro-war and anti-war writers, including many in the women's movement, drew upon traditional views of women in order to justify a particular conception of the female role. While it could be said that some equal rights feminists such as Fawcett or Swanwick "reverted" to traditional ideas of gender in their support for or arguments against the war, many prewar anti-suffragists or conservatives, such as Horatio Bottomley, began to use feminist or "progressive" concepts of an active role for women, grafted onto more traditional ideas in order to curry female support for the war or for other, less straightforward motives.

As Jo Vellacott has pointed out, Kent's tendency to exaggerate the "purity" of prewar, equal-rights feminism as opposed to postwar "separate spheres" feminism stems from a biased criteria for that which is truly "feminist". Vellacott, in her review of Kent's book, claims that Kent has ignored the many compromises made by prewar suffragists who had long

abandoned the fight for the vote on "the same terms as men".<sup>32</sup> Kent's assertion that feminists were engaged in a "sex war" in the early twentieth century and abandoned that war in favour of the Great War, does not take into account the arguments put forward by a number of those prewar feminists that women could bring "a missing quality or experience to...public life."<sup>33</sup> As this thesis demonstrates the argument that women were somehow innately inclined either to support or oppose the war effort, depending on the views of the writer or speaker, was a common one, not only in feminist circles but in general. The tendency to view women as distinct in their approach to war argues for the existence of a long-standing common fund of ideas regarding the nature of womanhood, ideas which were shared by a surprisingly diverse group of people.

Some feminist historians have recognised the existence of a basic contradiction in conceptions of the female role in the Great War, although the implications and full extent of this paradox have not yet been explored. In "Roles and Images of Women in World War I Propaganda.", Michelle Shover attempts to show that government - produced images of women were "manipulative", part of an attempt to enforce traditional sex roles while capitalising on the feminine potential to fill wartime needs of public policy. The "neat and revealing" contradiction between traditional passive images and more recent and necessary active ones was the result of governmental "role management" rather than "role recognition."<sup>34</sup> But Shover ignores an important aspect of the paradox in perceptions of the female role by limiting

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<sup>32</sup> J. Vellacott. "Review of Susan Kingsley Kent's *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain.*" *American Historical Review*. 19(1995), 904.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 904.

<sup>34</sup> Shover, "Roles and Images of Women in World War I Propaganda." 469.

her study to officially produced propaganda and ignoring the popular press and the women's progressive press. In even a cursory examination of the popular press and of periodicals and magazines aimed at "progressive" women, such as the NUWSS organ *Common Cause*, it is clear that the paradox of the female role was not created in the imagination of the members of the PRC, the Press Bureau or even the mysterious body of the "government" as a whole. The perception of women as the main victims of any war was indeed contradicted by a newer and more expedient view of women as the active, public participants in the war effort. This paradox served the purposes of government policy makers but it also reflected the desires of women's groups to extend the parameters of the female role while justifying their participation in and support for a bloody conflict with another nation.

Admiration and exhortations regarding the bravery of women were common in propaganda and in the press from the beginning of the war. Enlisting and maintaining female support for the war was a crucial element in both the official and unofficial campaign for the war effort. Female heroines of the first months of the war included women who had escaped from German occupied territory when the war broke out in August of 1914, nurses who ventured into the front lines to care for the sick and wounded, ladies who contributed time, money, materials and work towards the well being of the soldier and sailor, and most significantly for our purposes, the soldier's or sailor's wife and children as well as the women who devoted themselves to the well being of these dependents.

The soldier's or sailor's wife in many ways epitomised the victim-heroine of patriotic literature and propaganda. Her role as martyr to the war

effort was the result of both her tremendous strength in making the heroic sacrifice of "allowing" or even urging her husband to enlist, thereby risking her own security and that of her children, and of her ultimate weakness which made it impossible to care for herself or her children in his absence. In the public imagination, the serviceman's wife was somehow simultaneously both the keeper and the kept. The general outcry for adequate separation allowances and pensions which were perceived to function both as deserved reward and necessitous maintenance was based on this dichotomised perception of women, a perception that was reflected in and reinforced by the patriotic literature of the time. The images of women which appeared in the material produced by official, semi-official and unofficial propaganda agencies cannot be divorced from deeply rooted contemporary notions of female nature. These notions would be instrumental in the formation of the policies that governed their lives.

The issue of government treatment of military dependents was a popular subject during the first six months of the war. From August to September of 1914, newspapers and periodicals concentrated on praising the efforts of charitable workers in organisations such as the SSFA and the RPF. While harsh criticism had yet to be levelled at Asquith's Government for failing to provide properly for the dependents of servicemen, several newspapers and periodicals issued warnings to the Government to the effect that the British people would not tolerate less than adequate provision for the families of servicemen. Asquith had promised to care for all qualified dependents and was given some time to fulfil these promises. By October of 1914, however, the patience of the public had apparently begun to fray and the Asquith administration began to come under fire for their "mishandling"



of the procedure as did the administrative bodies of the NRF and the SSFA. Public expectations in this matter, as is reflected in the popular press, were high. Tolerance for governmental bungling or charitable shortfalls was minimal.

### Women and War in Patriotic Literature

In the first six months of the war, "service" for women had a limited definition. According to the patriotic literature of the time, women were best suited for their traditional but central roles as nurses, benevolent workers, recruiting agents and the guardians of both morale and morality. As yet, women were not encouraged to volunteer for less traditional work on the land, in factories or in business world. "Inspirational" literature of the first six months of the war included numerous book length, first hand accounts of women's adventures on the front lines as nurses or as civilians caught unaware in German territory in the first stages of the war, laudatory articles in newspapers and periodicals regarding all women or individual women performing essential services at home and daily columns and special features suggesting ways in which women could "do their bit" on the Home Front. A body of literature involving the experiences of women in the war zone emerged, including female adventure stories such as Gertrude Lloyd's *Adventures of an Englishwoman on the Front Lines* (1914) and Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland's *Six Weeks At the War* (1914). As well, a slew of articles in magazines such as the 18 August 1914 *Daily Express* article on "What the Women Can do" and the 9 October 1914 *Common Cause* article on "How to Help - and not Hinder" directed women on the Home Front to

worthy patriotic activities and praised the efforts of those already involved in the war effort.

In the new genre of female adventure stories which became popular in the first year of the war, the characterisation of women even in their first hand accounts illustrates the dichotomous understanding of female bravery and heroics in the face of personal danger. While the heroics of women were sometimes depicted as the result of such non-gendered characteristics as class, intelligence and nationality, the thought of a woman behind the lines or at the Front automatically held extra suspense, even titillation for readers. A woman, particularly a British woman of virtue, was forced to protect her inherently vulnerable self from the threat of the Hun with an often spectacular demonstration of bravery. In the past, historians, such as David Mitchell and Arthur Marwick identified this new genre as the expression of a new sense of worth amongst women, inspired by the crucial contribution they made to the war. Women were “inflated by the wind of patriotic romanticism purveyed by the press” and “became a gigantic mutual admiration circle.”<sup>35</sup> Claire Tylee has more recently developed the analysis of female consciousness during the war, claiming that women saw the war as a time to demonstrate their heretofore unappreciated capacities by “gate crashing the forbidden zones.” Hence, the first hand accounts of their activities towards that end were intended as evidence of their ability to make a significant contribution to the war effort and as inspiring or guilt-inducing tracts directed at other, less adventurous women.<sup>36</sup>

According to Tylee, however, the “blood thirsty” nature of many of these works and the criticism levelled at women for their lack of

<sup>35</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 47.

comprehension of the true horrors of war<sup>37</sup>, must be understood as the inevitable result of contemporary attitudes towards women. Because of their frailty and helplessness, women were to be protected from both the knowledge and the experience of the true horrors of war. Chivalry demanded that accounts of war must be edited so as to avoid shocking or terrifying the gentle female spirit. Photographs and text regarding warfare were cleansed by official order and the vilification of those who decried the war effort convinced many women that the war not only necessary but glorious. Protected from the horrors of war, they could hardly be expected to fully realise them.<sup>38</sup>

The first examples of literature depicting female bravery in the face of danger on the war front appeared within the first months of the war. Prominent amongst the adventurous female figures of the first weeks of the war was the accidental heroine, women trapped behind the lines, such as the *News of the World* female passengers on the boat at Folkestone, "handing out water and caring for wounded British heroes who performed magnificently against the Germans."<sup>39</sup> The "spirit of adventure" and "vicarious" appreciation of the glories of war<sup>40</sup> were well demonstrated in Gertrude Lloyd's *An Englishwoman's Adventures in the German Lines*

<sup>37</sup> Tylee cites works such as Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That*. (1929) as an example of bitterness directed at women for their fervent support of the Great War. On leave from France after the Somme, Graves encountered "war-madness" in England which made the country "worse than France." In *Good-Bye to All That*, Graves included excerpts from *The Morning Post* to illustrate his sense of the gulf between civilians and servicemen, particularly female civilians and male servicemen. These documents included a letter from "A Little Mother" of "common soldier" castigating pacifists. R. Graves, *Good-bye to All That*, Revised Edition (London, 1957) 201-205. See: Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 55. See also: P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London, 1975), 216.

<sup>38</sup> Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 55-58.

<sup>39</sup> *News of the World*. 23 August 1914, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, 20.

published in 1914. In it she describes the behaviour of the German Army in the village of Manha where she was trapped upon the invasion of Belgium in the summer of 1914. Even though she wonders "what use am I, even if murder is being done? I a woman, defenceless, alone?"<sup>41</sup> her behaviour in captivity and under intense questioning by the "Uhlans" is nothing short of heroic. After she is placed under arrest and accused of espionage by the Germans, she responds to their frowns, shouts and the "fists thrust in {her} face" with the assertion that "In England, ladies do not spy." and the patriotic cry of "England über alles!"<sup>42</sup> After refusing to bow down before them, she feigns illness and they allow her to escape to her own room where she eats some incriminating notes which had been hidden under her hat. Unable to prove her guilty of anything, the Germans release her and she escapes to England. The events she has witnessed and the rough treatment of the villagers has convinced Lloyd that "on the just or the unjust side, in war as in life, it is always the woman who pays."<sup>43</sup>

Such isolated incidents aside, in the first months of the Great War, the most popular female heroic figures were the nurses of the V.A.D. and the Red Cross. Tributes to their bravery began to appear in the fall of 1914, at which time the Duchess of Sutherland published her memoirs entitled, *Six Weeks at the War* (1914). The Duchess sailed for France within three days of the beginning of the war and attached herself to the *Société de Secours aux Blessés*, a branch of the Red Cross. She travelled to Belgium with a group of nurses, stopping in the border town of Namur which had begun to fill up

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<sup>41</sup> G. Lloyd, *An Englishwoman's Adventures in the German Lines*. (London, 1914), 88.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

with refugees in flight from the German advance.<sup>44</sup> The war, Sutherland believed, was necessary for "Germany's deliverance from an age of darkness"; in support of this belief, she documented the treatment of Belgians at the hands of the "Prussian war machine" claiming that Belgium "suffered the cruelty that only a conqueror like the Prussian conceives."<sup>45</sup> After the Germans captured Namur, Sutherland was forced to face General von Bulow and demanded that he ensure the safety of her ambulance. Though she admits "to accept the favours of my country's foe was a bad moment for me", Sutherland did not hesitate to make further demands of the German commandant, including eventual permission to leave Namur for Maubeuge on the front lines.<sup>46</sup>

In October of 1914, the *Windsor Magazine* published an admiring article about the history and wartime activities of the Red Cross in which Sutherland's branch, the *Société de Secours aux Blessés*, was described as a "useful, patriotic outlet for the emotions of women".<sup>47</sup> This article, accompanied by numerous photos of British and European nurses and ambulance drivers, including one of the Duchess of Sutherland arriving at Namur, proclaimed the bravery of Red Cross workers and documented their courage amongst the horrors of war. The women of the Red Cross have shown "the greatest and most fervent devotion" even though they "have suffered not only from chance bullets, but from war's outrage."<sup>48</sup> This bravery has meant that "never has the glory of the Red Cross shone so bright

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<sup>44</sup> L. MacDonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (London, 1980), 40-41.

<sup>45</sup> M. Sutherland, *Six Weeks at the War* (London, 1914), xii-xiv.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-3.

<sup>47</sup> M. Morrison, "The Red Cross Society: Its Past History and Present Work." *The Windsor Magazine*. October 1914, 686.

<sup>48</sup> "The Red Cross Society." 691.

as in this war, for the risk is so infinitely greater."<sup>49</sup>

If they could not demonstrate spectacular courage at the Front or behind enemy lines, British women were advised that they could demonstrate their patriotism and their bravery on the Home Front. From the beginning of the war, daily newspapers and periodicals carried numerous columns and articles intended to inspire patriotic service amongst women. The duties of women on the Home Front, according to the press and to government propaganda of the time, were to form the moral backbone of the country and embody the new "spirit of service"<sup>50</sup>. They were to act as charitable guardians and benefactors of servicemen and of civilians whose lives had been dislocated by the war. They were to provide physical, verbal and monetary support for the war effort and, significantly, they were to operate as unofficial recruiting agents for the British Army and Navy. The honour of individual men and women as well as the honour of the nation rested on these efforts.

In "War Service at Home" published in *The Nineteenth Century* in the fall of 1914, the new "spirit of service" was described as having been embodied by the newly formed "Women's Emergency Corps." The Women's Emergency Corps, was founded initially to organise the volunteer movement and as an attempt to stop the overlapping of volunteer services. By November of 1914, the Committee, working in co operation with the National Relief Fund, the Red Cross, Refugee Assistance Committees, maternity centres, health societies and other organisations, had received and registered three thousand offers of service, fifteen hundred of which were

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<sup>49</sup> "The Red Cross Society." 691.

<sup>50</sup> "War Service at Home." *The Nineteenth Century*. November 1914,113.

placed.<sup>51</sup> According to *The Nineteenth Century*, women were “haunted” by the conviction that somewhere there is a “chance to do just this which I so need to have done.” Workers were sent to obvious posts, helping Belgian refugees and military dependents, for example, and to less obvious ones, such as teaching English soldiers elementary French and German, a service which made a tremendous difference to a soldier’s efficiency, indeed “to {his} very chances of survival.”<sup>52</sup> In this article, the anonymous author contends that “there is a battlefield in Britain, as a well as in Belgium and France.” The members of the WEC “have reminded us that we at home, with all the comforts and resources of civilisation at our call, must not show less skills, less kindness, less mercy to comrades than do those war-worn soldiers at the Front.”<sup>53</sup>

“Public work,” that is, various forms of volunteer and charity work, “is an important form of patriotic behaviour,” the jingoistic *Daily Express* lectured its readers on 18 August 1914. In an article entitled, “What the Women can do,” readers were informed that women were indeed “doing their share” in innumerable small ways. Even though they could not fight, women were part of the army of volunteer workers without whom the war effort would crumble<sup>54</sup>. The *Daily Mail*, in a column entitled “Women’s Part in the War.” abjured women to utilise their innate skills as “supporters of trade and providers of comfort”<sup>55</sup>.

Because the British Army and Navy were entirely volunteer until March 1916, levels of recruiting were a constant concern, particularly for the

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<sup>51</sup> “War Service at Home.” *The Nineteenth Century*. November 1914, 1113-14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1118.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1122.

<sup>54</sup> “What the Women can do.” *Daily Express*. 18 August 1914, 2.

<sup>55</sup> “Women’s Part in the War.” *Daily Mail*. Beginning 1 September 1914, 7.

War Office, in the first year and a half of the war.<sup>56</sup> According to propaganda and patriotic literature, women had ultimate control over a man's decision to enlist. Wives and mothers held particular power, but all women, especially "the pretty ones",<sup>57</sup> were capable of persuading a man to do his duty and enlist for service in the war. Most men, this literature implied, were either afraid to abandon their wives, families or sweethearts or were afraid to risk everything for king and country. In the first instance, women could reassure men as to their continuing devotion and pride in sacrificing their men; in the second, men who failed to do their duty could be shamed into enlisting by the withdrawal of affection or outright censure on the part of women.

In the first week of September, Baroness Orczy, well known author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, published her "appeal" to the women of Great Britain in several daily newspapers. She urged women to sign her "pledge", thereby vowing to encourage the men she knew to join the colours and help his country. Her pledge was "the answer to the question plaguing patriotic women; that is, 'What Can I Do?'"<sup>58</sup> The *Daily Mail* advised women to use their influence carefully and always for the good. Even if a woman couldn't "knit or nurse", she was always a "potential recruiting agent." Her "greatest weapon is her tongue," but she must learn to use it "skillfully, for every woman who goes about with a downcast countenance is aiding the enemy." The anonymous author of this piece ended with a stern but stirring warning to the "Women of England! For the love of our Empire we must hide our sorrows. Our tears must be wept in private, our doubts and

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<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> "The Chance to Play the Game." *Daily Express*. 1 July 1915, 2.

<sup>58</sup> "Baroness Orczy's Appeal." *The Times*. 4 September 1914, 2.



fears must be locked tightly in our hearts.”<sup>59</sup>

In their presentation of this view of female influence over male recruiting, the press echoed the content and implication of governmental appeals to women. The PRC published a leaflet in the fall of 1914, in which women were chided for convincing their men to avoid answering the call. In it, the PRC claimed that “The men of Britain have answered in large numbers to their country’s call. But there are still many of them who might have come forward...who have been held back by their women folk.” Women were to “urge {their} men to respond to the call.”<sup>60</sup> The infamous and apparently anonymous poster addressed to “the Young Women of London,” made a similar, somewhat crude appeal, asking, “Is your ‘Best boy’ wearing Khaki? If not, don’t you think he should be? If he does not think that you and your country are worth fighting for - do you think he is worthy of you?” The Young Woman was warned that if her “young man neglects his duty to his King and Country, the time may come when he will neglect you.” She was advised to “think it over - then ask him to Join the Army To-day.” A poster circulated by the Recruiting Committee of the town of Alford and surrounding villages, urged women to “bring your men” and girls to “bring your Best boys” to a recruiting rally intended to convince men to “repel the Mad Dog of Europe.”<sup>61</sup>

All citizens, but particularly women, who wished to demonstrate their patriotism were encouraged to undertake a further task. When war broke out, the condition of military dependents became a public trust,

<sup>59</sup> “What Women are doing in the War.” *Daily Mail*. 3 September 1914, 7.

<sup>60</sup> “Women and the War.” PRC Leaflet #23. 1914. McMaster University: Mills Library, Research Collection.

<sup>61</sup> Local Recruiting Committee Poster: Alford and Vicinity. 31 August 1914. Mills Research Collection: McMaster University.

according to patriotic newspapers and magazines of the time. Women were encouraged, by the Government and the press, to offer their services to one of the many charitable agencies devoted to the welfare of the serviceman's wife and children. In early September of that year, Lord Kitchener replied to "patriotic offers of assistance". He suggested that those citizens, particularly female citizens, who wished to help the war effort could do no better than to give housing or help in kind to the families of servicemen who had been called up or who had enlisted.<sup>62</sup> The Press Bureau released his request on 3 September 1914 and on 4 September, the London dailies had published and distributed it. "The idea," gushed the *Daily Express*, "breathes the best spirit of brotherhood." "The Whole country" it was claimed, "is eager to perform some national service...to the anxiously patriotic there has been made a common sense proposal."<sup>63</sup>

The work of women in the SSFA, the RPF, the WCG, and other organisations which had taken on the care of military dependents as their wartime mandate, was lauded in the press. The *Daily News and Leader*, a Radical Liberal paper, offered a highly rhetorical observation to the effect that,

Rachel no longer weeps for her children and will not be comforted...  
All the world looks with admiration and affection at the recruit in khaki but the work of women is done unseen and in silence.  
Thousands have volunteered to look after the wives and children of men gone to the war.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "Take Care of Soldiers' Families." *Daily Mail*. 4 September 1914, 2.

<sup>63</sup> "E's Left a Lot of Little Things Behind 'im." *Daily Express*. 5 September 1914, 2.

<sup>64</sup> "The Women Mobilised." *Daily News and Leader*. 14 August 1914, 3.

Every child born into privation and every mother who went hungry, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, was one more casualty of the war. It was the "patriotic duty" of all citizens to ensure that the losses are curtailed.<sup>65</sup> "Charity is admirable," the *Daily Express* observed and, "it is the duty of the nation to see that the dependents of its soldiers and sailors shall be more than adequately cared for."<sup>66</sup> In the earliest days of the war, Fawcett used *Common Cause* to urge women to make a "resolute effort and self sacrifice to help our country." by using their influence as "examples of steadfastness." The most important service for women "is to see that proper provision is made for those called to naval or military service, to their dependents."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "A Patriotic Duty." *Manchester Guardian*. 6 October 1914, 6.

<sup>66</sup> "Matters of Moment." *Daily Express*. 12 August 1914, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Common Cause*. 7 August 1914, 6.

### Images of Military Dependents

The first six months of the war witnessed an explosion of interest in the welfare of the wives, children and other dependents of servicemen. The fate of military dependents had attracted similar, though less intense interest and scrutiny in the latter half of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, especially during the Crimean War and the South African War.<sup>68</sup> During the South African War what was by comparison a relatively limited expansion of charities devoted to the welfare of military dependents occasioned the formation of a House of Commons Committee to inquire into the desirability of regulating these overlapping services.<sup>69</sup> However, the level of interest in this period was limited in comparison to the near obsession on the part of Britons in the period of the Great War. Along with work on behalf of Belgian refugees<sup>70</sup> the condition of military dependents was the most popular Home Front issue of the first six months of the war.

This escalation of interest in the private and public care of military dependents was due to several tangible and intangible factors. Concern for the welfare of the military dependent was the result of the practical factors

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<sup>68</sup> Trustram describes the concern for and work on behalf of military dependents in the Victorian period as the result of a confluence of social and political changes. The burst of patriotism occasioned by the Crimean War and other campaigns was compounded by the emerging Victorian "bourgeois ideal" of marriage, the new desire to uncover the causes and extent of poverty as a possible means of alleviating it and the emerging principle of the family wage. See: Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Report of the War Relief Funds Committee*, 28 May 1900. PRO: MH57/196.

<sup>70</sup> See: P. Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England During the Great War* (New York, 1982). In fact, there were certain similarities between the portrayals in patriotic literature of Belgian refugees, particularly female ones, and the portrayal of military dependents. Attitudes toward both groups reveal deeply rooted conceptions about charity and sex roles as Cahalan has ably demonstrated in his study of the society that so enthusiastically received the refugees of the Great War.

discussed in Chapter 1. The British tradition of philanthropy, stimulated by the laissez faire economics of the nineteenth century and the concern amongst all classes with "respectability"<sup>71</sup>, included limited forms of charity to the families of servicemen throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Organisations such as the RPF, the SSFA and others were rooted in the middle and ruling class sense of responsibility for the well being of military dependents. These forms of charity were, however, proscribed by the rules governing on-the-strength and off-the-strength marriage in the Army and by the insularity of the Navy.<sup>72</sup> Individuals and groups interested in the welfare of military dependents were repeatedly warned not to interfere with the rules governing marriage in the military; as Tennant stated in her 1914 report, only months before the beginning of the Great War, the restrictions of military life "must be untempered by contradictory charity."<sup>73</sup>

When Asquith announced that the Liberal Government was prepared to do away with the distinction between "on-the-strength" and "off-the-strength" wives, he effectively removed the proscriptions on charity towards those groups. Additionally, the confusion regarding notions of deserving and undeserving poor amongst the ranks of "off-the-strength" wives was relieved in a sense. All military dependents were deserving until proven otherwise, his announcement implied. The concern with character and supervision did not immediately decline, as is evinced by the police supervision of servicemen's wives in the fall of 1914 and the closely observant case-work of the SSFA. However, the suspension of official

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<sup>71</sup> See Prochaska, "Philanthropy." 357-391.

<sup>72</sup> See "Prologue" for further definition and examples. As well, see Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*.

<sup>73</sup> Tennant., "Report on Off-the-Strength Marriage."

concern regarding inappropriate incentive to marry and reproduce removed or at least severely reduced prewar inhibitions with regard to their maintenance at both public and private expense. Public concern with the well-being of this group underwent vast expansion as a result.

The unprecedented demands for enlistment in the Great War meant that the problems associated with mobilisation increased exponentially. The incidence of poverty amongst the wives and children of servicemen on active duty was clearly visible to many people, particularly in the cities and in garrison towns. The extent of this poverty shocked the British; patriotism demanded that the situation be remedied. That thousands of wives and children of servicemen should suffer as a result of their provider's commitment to duty and country was intolerable to most people and the Asquith administration risked public vilification by ignoring or underestimating the incongruity. Much of the patriotic literature regarding military dependents centres on Government iniquity in demanding service without offering compensation.

The less tangible factors affecting attitudes toward military dependents were rooted in gendered conceptions of the wartime role for women, as defined in the press and in patriotic literature in the first six months of the war. These factors were related to the common fund of belief regarding the particular vulnerability of women and children to the rigours of war. The sense of responsibility towards military dependents evinced in the press and the popularity of charitable endeavour devoted to ensuring their welfare, was rooted in the above principle. The wives and children of soldiers and sailors were the ultimate, faceless yet immediate and local victims of the dislocations of war. These concerns sharpened when casualties began to be

registered after at the end of August 1914. In the public imagination, the wives and widows of servicemen became heroines themselves because they had used their moral imperative as women to persuade rather than prevent their men from joining the colours.<sup>74</sup> The military dependent, thus, was the epitome of the faceless female victim-heroine of the Great War.

As well, the demand for manpower and the resistance to the idea of a conscript army, meant that groups and individuals dependent upon recruiting had to find a way to eliminate the tensions between duty to family and duty to country. It was commonly believed that many men who might have considered enlisting were unwilling to do so if it meant abandoning their families to the ministrations of haphazard private and public agencies. Articles in newspapers and magazines warned the government that recruitment figures were certainly lower than they would be if the Government could promise that the families of men on active duty would be adequately maintained. Certain forms of patriotic literature and propaganda of the time were intent upon reconciling two conflicting sets of responsibilities, one of which was to family and the other to country. The first, according to patriotic literature of the time, could not be fulfilled without the second. Having a slacker in the family, even one who stayed away from the Front from a sense of duty rather than cowardice, was a shameful thing. A man who had not done his duty to country could not adequately do his duty to family. On 4 September 1914, *The Times* ran an editorial in support of changes to the structure of pensions and separation allowance administration. The editor supported the position that, "The State

<sup>74</sup> A very small number of sources made the cynical suggestion that wives might directly prevent their husbands from enlisting although, of course, this possibility was implied in some measure by constant abjurations to women to do their duty as recruiting agents.

undeniably owes a duty to those who come forward voluntarily to defend it; and it may well be that before long it will be confronted with the necessity of recognising that duty on a large scale.”<sup>75</sup> “Whatever happens,” a further editorial which ran the next day, “the families of servicemen must not be left in the lurch.”<sup>76</sup> It was “preposterous”, an article in the *Spectator* proclaimed, that wives should be kept waiting for their money for a month or more.<sup>77</sup> The situation was particularly distressing, according to the *Spectator*, considering the bravery displayed by the men who enlisted or were called up from the Reserves and their forbearing wives. One had “only to see the men and talk to the women,” to realise that the ideals of service were alive and well.”<sup>78</sup> The *Daily Express* reported on 2 September 1914, that it continued to receive hundreds of letters in support of Members of Parliament of all political persuasions who demanded that the scale of allowances to military dependents be raised and the system of distribution rationalised.<sup>79</sup> The *Daily Express* was itself involved in charitable work for military dependents; its “workers’ guild” comprised by members of the newspaper’s staff were eager to “take their share in caring for the wives and children of our soldiers and sailors at the front...”. This duty was common to all, the editors proselytised, “We owe the wives of our fighting men a debt. Let us acknowledge it by rendering to them that kindly service which their situation demands.”<sup>80</sup> In an article in *Common Cause*, members of the NUWSS declared it a “scandal that men who are making so much personal

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<sup>75</sup> “Editorial.” *The Times*. 4 September 1914, 9.

<sup>76</sup> “Answering the Call.” *The Times*. 5 September 1914, 9.

<sup>77</sup> *The Spectator*. 12 September 1914, 15.

<sup>78</sup> *The Spectator*. 19 September 1914, 15.

<sup>79</sup> *Daily Express*. 2 September 1914, 2.

<sup>80</sup> “The Workers’ Guild.” *Daily Express*. 12 November 1914, 2.



sacrifice for their county should at the same time, in many instances, have to sacrifice the well-being of their families"<sup>81</sup> In October of 1914, *Common Cause* correctly observed that, " A growing section of public opinion is awakening to the unsatisfactory position of many dependents."<sup>82</sup> and reminded its readers that "the press is on the watch."

Surely, as Swanwick stated in *Common Cause* ,

It is reasonable to expect that every woman who has given up the man who supports her for active service in her country's defence will be cared for and saved from destitution - the least that she has a right to expect from it.<sup>83</sup>

Excerpts such as these represent popular sentiments during the first six months of the war. When the war began, the warnings and demands were general rather than specific. A range of newspapers and magazines made it clear to the Asquith administration that the British public expected much of the Government when it came to the care of military dependents. Exactly what they expected was, as yet, not quite clear; it took several months of fighting for the demands to become specific. Originally, admiration for the patriotic effort of groups such as the NRF, the SSFA and the RPF was widespread, but as it became obvious that this disorganised chain of charitable funds were being allowed to carry the burden of maintenance for the Liberal Government, and that any changes to the system of distribution or the scale of allowance and pension was to be incremental, the tenor and specificity of the complaints increased.

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<sup>81</sup> "How the Nation Treats the Soldier's Family." *Common Cause*. 21 August 1914, 6.

<sup>82</sup> "Patriotism in the Back Streets." *Common Cause*. 2 October 1914, 8.

<sup>83</sup> "State Recognition of Sailors' Wives." *Common Cause*. 25 September 1914, 5.

It has been shown that the War Office did not have the administrative infrastructure necessary to cope with the burgeoning demand for separation allowances and pensions. The NRF, the SSFA and the RPF were enlisted to aid in the funding and distribution of allowances and, eventually, pensions. These organisations received praise for their patriotic efforts in the first month of the war; criticism of the Government and of the charitable system was virtually non-existent until October of that year, two months into the war. Until that time, newspapers and magazines published largely laudatory articles about charitable work for military dependents.

Criticism of these organisations emerged in late August and escalated in September and October of 1914. The first accusations of neglect and disorganisation were directed primarily at the SSFA by the conservative press, particularly *The Times*. An editorial in *The Times* from 24 August 1914, contains some of the first accusations levelled at the SSFA. This editorial defended the NRF, claiming that the disorganised methods of distribution were the fault not of the centre but of the periphery; serious "gaps in organisation" at the SSFA were responsible for any mistakes which were made in the process.<sup>84</sup> The "limited machinery" of the SSFA made it impossible for them to fulfil their role as agents of the Government.<sup>85</sup> The job of distributing allowances was simply too large for the the SSFA and instead of an efficiently managed bureaucracy, the wives of servicemen were in the hands of "a lot of women, fussing together."<sup>86</sup> The "confusion of charity" was noted in the *Review of Reviews* in November of that year; the

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<sup>84</sup> "The Administration of Relief." *The Times*. 24 August 1914, 7.

<sup>85</sup> "Soldiers' Wives in Distress." *The Times*. 3 September 1914, 2.

<sup>86</sup> I. Beresford-Howe. "A Lot of Women, Fussing - Together." *The Saturday Review*. 24 October 1914, 17.

“sane man” it was stated, “would dearly like a little less chaos in the manner of these appeals to his charity.” The nation’s important work was being done by a “hundred and one self-elected committees engaged in a go-as-you-please scramble.”<sup>87</sup> *The Nineteenth Century* praised the peace-making effect of charitable endeavour in which

individualists of the sternest school stand in the firing-line with the Fabian Society; peers join hands with members of the Independents Labour Party and the serried ranks of suffragists fall in behind the government.

but warned that “all these committees and separate agencies need cohesion.” In particular, the SSFA was criticised for lacking “an efficient local centre.” “Great uncertainty still prevails,” amongst the members of the SSFA, “as to the principles and methods on which ...allocation is to be made.”<sup>88</sup>

Some newspapers and periodicals tended to target less the SSFA than the NRF and the Asquith administration for serious criticism. The *Manchester Guardian* defended the work of the SSFA, claiming that the vagaries of separation allowances distribution are entirely the fault of the War Office and the Liberal Government, rather than the SSFA. The SSFA “have endeavoured to fill in the gaps”<sup>89</sup> left by the inadequacy of governmental compensation and should not also be expected to bear the full burden of public complaint as well<sup>90</sup>. The NRF had only themselves to blame for not recognising that relief should “savour as little of alms as

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<sup>87</sup> “The Confusion of Charity.” *Review of Reviews*. November 1914, 25.

<sup>88</sup> “War Funds: Co-ordination or Chaos.” *The Nineteenth Century*. 76(October 1914), 737.

<sup>89</sup> “The Lot of Soldiers’ Families.” *Manchester Guardian*. 16 October 1914, 6.

<sup>90</sup> “The Work of Relief.” *Manchester Guardian*. 10 October 1914, 2.

possible.”<sup>91</sup>

Behind much of the criticism of War Office and Admiralty policy regarding the families of servicemen was the conviction that without adequate scales and a guaranteed distribution process for military pensions, recruiting for the Army and Navy would decline and eventually cease. The belief that women held the moral imperative and consequently could operate as unofficial recruiting agents has been amply demonstrated. The opposite held true as well in patriotic literature; that is, that rather than convincing their men of their national duty, women could use their moral imperative to convince their breadwinner and protector to abandon his duty to country, in favour of his duty to his family. The reconciliation of these two duties was a consistent theme in patriotic literature. Some patriotic literature actually gave men the credit for making this important decision, portraying the decision as an extremely difficult one, given the ineptitude and inadequacy of governmental and charitable efforts on behalf of servicemen’s dependents.

“Men will naturally ask” several questions when considering joining up, a War Office advertisement in *The Spectator* pointed out. After, “How long will I have to serve?” came “What will happen to my Wife and Children?” according to the advertisement. Potential recruits were reassured that their wives would receive an adequate separation allowance through official channels and if these allowance was for any reason inadequate or not forthcoming, their wives could turn to the SSFA for extra help.<sup>92</sup> A similar advertisement which ran in the *Daily Express* was altered in November of that year. The words, “Separation Allowances are Issuable at

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<sup>91</sup> “The Work of Relief.” *Manchester Guardian*. 10 October 1914, 2.

<sup>92</sup> “Your King and Country Need You.” *The Spectator*. 5 September 1914, 8.

once." were added to the initial wording of the text.<sup>93</sup>

It was "no craven spirit," which held many men back from recruiting the *Daily Express* declared; there were thousands of "men eager to fight who have not the heart to demand that mothers, wives and children should face the winter on a starvation income."<sup>94</sup> Men hung back because of "thoughts of wife and children left behind." Recruiting statistics would be greatly improved if these concerns could be mollified; higher pensions and allowances would serve this function.<sup>95</sup> It would be much easier for the War Office to get recruits, *Common Cause* pointed out, if they would consider the cruel position men are often put in when forced to choose between the call to duty and duty to family.<sup>96</sup> "The man who leaves wife and children must leave them with sufficient to live." The *Daily Mail* stated, "Clear away this sacrifice and we may appeal for sacrifice on national grounds."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> "Your King and Country Need 100 000 More Men." *Daily Express*. 11 November 1914, 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Daily Express*. 26 August 1914, 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Daily Express*. 9 November 1914, 5.

<sup>96</sup> *Common Cause*. 4 September 1914, 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Daily Mail*. 4 September 1914, 5.

## Conclusion

The principles underlying appeals and exhortations on behalf of military dependents had their roots in the newly emerging conception of appropriate roles for women in war. This conception, which must be viewed in its contemporary context of widespread political, social and economic redefinition in Great Britain, was the result of a superimposition of more recent ideas of expanding, active roles for women as promulgated by the women's movement on the traditional, passive female role as the victim of war. This paradox served both the purposes of the women's movement and the Asquith Government. By maintaining traditional ideas about women as the victims of war, feminists such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett were able to justify the active involvement of women's groups and individual women in an armed conflict. At the same time they were able to explore and expand the parameters of the prewar female role in society. That role was forcibly extended by the demands of war and government policy but was facilitated by the prewar activities of many progressive women's groups determined to find a public role for women.

The ambivalence of this image was reflected in patriotic literature of the time in which women were portrayed as both protected by and central to a successful execution of the war. Without the work of brave women in the Red Cross, in the VAD and in relief organisations, the war would surely be lost. Moreover, women were the moral backbone of the nation and if they broke down and refused to "allow" their men to volunteer or obey call-up orders in the reserve, the British army would face a massive deficit in manpower and certain defeat at the hands of the Huns. The paradox of

weakness and strength which was at the core of ideas regarding women in the first six months of the Great War also underlay conceptions of relief for military dependents, the ultimate victim-heroines of the war effort. The issue of support for military dependents, along with the provision of charity for Belgian refugees, was one of the two most important Home Front issues of the first six months of the war. The end result of the press campaign and of the repetitive injunctions in patriotic literature regarding the still ill-defined "public" duty toward military dependents was to place the Asquith administration in a tight corner.

**SECTION II:**  
January to December, 1915



### Chapter 3

#### **The Select Committee and the Naval and Military Pensions Act 1915**

Supported by a network of charities, the War Office and the Admiralty struggled through the chaotic autumn of 1914 establishing a nominal working relationship between the many branches of a cumbersome operation. The awkward system of combined private and public endeavour was functioning even if it was not functioning well. As a result, the attention of the press and public shifted to the role of high level government with the formation of a Select Committee in the House of Commons in November 1914 and the tabling of a significant Bill in the summer of 1915. The voluntary sector had carried a significant share of the burden for the Asquith Administration in 1914 but the current situation could not continue indefinitely. In the first six months of 1915, the Asquith Government and the first Coalition Government considered their options in regard to improving the current system of separation allowances and pensions but made no real advance on these issues until the passing of the Naval and Military Pensions Act in the autumn of that year. Even the passing of this Act did little to alter the basic administration of pensions and allowances. The whole of 1915 was largely a period of deliberation and a hiatus from change following upon the tumultuous last months of 1914.

With the first shock and confusion of war over, Cabinet members, MP's, quasi-official Committee members, civil servants and other participants

in the high level administration of pensions and separation allowances were forced to consider issues which were more subtle than the initial, basic ones of dispersal and entitlement. Policy makers began to focus on such issues as the recognition or institution of class distinctions in provision and the desirability of a continued separation between public and private means of funding. The workings and recommendations of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Pensions and Grants, struck in November of 1914, and the much disputed clauses of the Naval and Military Pensions Act of the summer and fall of 1915, were official attempts to institute stop gap measures which would placate the various clamouring sections of angry public opinion. At the same time, the Act was intended to prevent the submersion of charitable, voluntary schemes into governmental responsibility for the maintenance of servicemen's families.

The new subtleties and complications of the debate surrounding dependents' pensions and allowances in 1915 reflected increasingly sophisticated adaptation to the conditions of wartime on the part of British politicians and the British people. Any hope for a short war was relinquished in the winter of 1915 as Britons braced themselves for a long and bloody conflict. Although the full impact of war was still largely unrealised on the Home Front, the mounting casualties as well as the new Zeppelin raids which began in December of 1914 brought the horrors of war somewhat closer to home. The battles of 1915, Neuve Chapelle (10 to 12 March 1915), Festubert (15 to 27 May 1915) and Loos (25 September to 8 October 1915), resulted in huge casualty lists and negligible advances, an incongruity which dismayed and disheartened the British public. <sup>1</sup> The German sinking of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 36.

*Lusitania* in May of 1915 sparked anti-German riots in England, deepening public resolve to defeat the Huns. This xenophobia increased public frustration and anger with the Asquith Administration and with Asquith himself who, many people believed, was not pursuing the war with sufficient vigor.<sup>2</sup> A public campaign of vilification was launched against Asquith and gossip about his personal and social life became commonplace.<sup>3</sup> The fiasco of the British naval attack on the Turks in the Dardanelles and the losses at Gallipoli<sup>4</sup> taught another brutal lesson to the Admiralty and the War Office regarding the folly of mounting an exciting but ill planned and executed offensive based on an underestimation of the enemy's powers of resistance.

By mid-1915, the British armed forces had been depleted by 75,000 dead and 380,000 wounded, a total of over 450,000 casualties.<sup>5</sup> The loss in manpower in the Army and the Navy combined with lower enlistment rates sparked widespread concern regarding "slackers" in the summer and fall of 1915. The original enthusiasm of the working classes who had comprised the majority of recruits in the early months of the war was abating and even those who were willing and able were increasingly found to be unfit for service as a result of social deprivation.<sup>6</sup> Enlistment figures fell from the hundreds of thousands per month of the first months of the war to the tens of thousands. In February 1915, 87, 896 men enlisted in the armed forces and in September of that year only 71, 617 as compared to over 300, 000 in August

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<sup>2</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins, *Asquith*, 378-9.

<sup>4</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 41-47.

<sup>5</sup> J. Stevenson, *Britain, 1914-45* (London, 1984), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Winter, "The Army and Society." 197-201.

of 1914. 7

The agitation for compulsory service increased throughout 1915, culminating in a "blaze"<sup>8</sup> of fierce anger in the autumn. The Asquith Coalition, formed in late May of 1915, responded to the demands of public opinion by taking a middle course. The "Derby Scheme", which Arthur Marwick has called a "shot gun wedding between the fair maid of Liberal idealism and the ogre of Tory militarism",<sup>9</sup> was overseen by Lord Derby, who was in fact an advocate of compulsion. It was intended to preserve the voluntary principle while at the same time introducing a greater moral and legal pressure into a male citizen's decision to enlist. Under the scheme, men of military age were required to "attest" as to their willingness to serve in the armed forces. Those men with identifiable national or personal duties which could not be abandoned were given "exemptions" by the various tribunals established by the Local Government Board. Eight hundred and forty thousand single men and one million, three hundred and five thousand married men had attested by January 1916, at which time the increasingly storm-tossed Asquith Coalition introduced compulsory military service.

The combination of stalemate and loss on the Western Front with the rather more splendid failure of the Dardanelles offensive had resulted in a serious lack of public confidence in the original Asquith Government and forced its reconstruction into a rather disunified coalition<sup>10</sup>. The Asquith Coalition Government (May 1915 to December 1916) was composed of a

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<sup>7</sup> Beckett, "The British Army 1914-18: The Illusion of Change." 101.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Turner, "British Politics and the First World War." 120.

loosely knit group of representative Liberals, Conservatives and a few Labourites, including Liberal Lloyd George at the newly created Ministry of Munitions, Liberal Reginald McKenna at the Exchequer, Conservative Leader Andrew Bonar Law at the Colonial Office, Conservative Arthur Balfour at the Admiralty, and Labourite Arthur Henderson at the Board of Education. Asquith, according to John Grigg, was a capable and efficient politician whose "wait and see" attitude toward the formation of policy was insufficient to meet the semi-democratic demands of wartime policy and governing.<sup>11</sup> As Asquith's stock tumbled with the public, Lloyd George continued his ascendancy, starting with his role at the newly created Ministry of Munitions and a series of powerful and politically significant speeches.<sup>12</sup>

On the Home Front, the Asquith Coalition faced the problem of manpower shortages, exacerbated by the indiscriminate recruiting of the first months of the war<sup>13</sup> and the fear on the part of the strong trade union movement of the "dilution" of the formerly male labour pool in the factories. The "shell crisis" of the spring of 1915 had emphasised the inadequacy of ammunition supplied to the troops on the continent. Prompted by the crisis in manpower, Lloyd George, acting in his capacity as the new Minister of Munitions, approached the head of the formerly militant suffrage organisation the "Women's Social and Political Union" (WSPU) Emmeline Pankhurst and urged her to mount a women's campaign for service in war related industries. With two thousand pounds of government money,

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<sup>11</sup> J. Grigg, "Lloyd George and Ministerial Leadership in the Great War." in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience in the First World War* (Toronto, 1988), 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 56.

Pankhurst organised the "Women's right to serve" march on 17 July 1915.<sup>14</sup> By the end of 1915, resistance on the part of employers and unions to the "dilution" of the work force had been overcome by necessity and women were being hired to fill positions in traditionally male occupations, particularly in munitions factories but also in the civil service, business, railways and municipal tramways.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the crisis of manpower, the realities of war had yet to be entirely realised by those individuals on the Home Front in Great Britain. However, the massive casualty lists resulting from the ill-fated military experiments of 1915 brought home a glimmering of what victory on the continent might cost the British people in human lives. In a more direct fashion, the menace of Zeppelin air raids did much to enlighten the civilian populace as to the physical and emotional horrors of modern warfare. Zeppelin raids, focussed primarily but not entirely on coastal towns, began in December of 1914 and reached their peak as a threat in October of 1915.<sup>16</sup>

It was in this climate of growing war weariness, anxiety, retrenchment and reassessment that the Select Committee on Pensions and Grants pondered the Asquith Government's and later the Asquith Coalition's policy options with regard to the dependents of servicemen. Reluctant to abandon the principles of voluntarism but anxious to preserve their position in the face of massive public demand, the Government prevaricated. As with the Derby Scheme, they attempted what would eventually prove to be an unsuccessful compromise between public and private by creating a quasi-

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<sup>14</sup> Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> A. Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley, 1994), 91-6 & 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 137.

official statutory body with ambiguous duties and tenuous public funding. In coming to this decision, the Select Committee interviewed several dozen witnesses, all of them involved in some way with official agencies or benevolent societies devoted to the care of servicemen's dependents. The recommendations resulting from their deliberations on this evidence were an uneasy mixture of public and private endeavour. If the Derby Scheme was a "shotgun marriage" between laissez faire Liberalism and militaristic Toryism, then the Statutory Committee was the bastard child of similarly tenuous wartime alliances, born of the Asquith Government's desire, in 1915, to maintain its distance from the full responsibility of care for servicemen's families and the growing public demand that the state step in and make full repayment on its debt to wives, widows and orphans.

### The Select Committee on Pensions and Grants

The Select Committee, consisting of George N. Barnes (Labour), Reginald McKenna (Liberal), David Lloyd George (Liberal), T.P. O'Connor (Irish Nationalist/Liberal), Austen Chamberlain (Conservative) and Andrew Bonar Law (Conservative), was struck on 18 November 1914 in the House of Commons. Select Committees at that time played a role similar to that of a present day Royal Commission or Governmental Inquiry and could be of a temporary or semi-permanent nature. They were created to consider specific questions of policy, usually those having to do with issues of public expenditure, parliamentary procedure of legislation. These committees were restricted to inquiry and recommendation. Their powers were limited to

sending for witnesses, papers and records. They were required to make intermittent reports to Parliament and could appoint sub-committees to carry out inquiries on more specific question pertaining to the investigation.

The Select Committee on Pensions and Grants, which sat for close to a year, from November 1914 to October 1915, was appointed to "consider a scheme of Pensions and Grants for men in the Naval and Military services wounded in the present War and for the widows, orphans and dependents of men who have lost their lives."<sup>17</sup> As a matter of course, given the closely connected nature of the two systems, the members of that Committee would also examine questions pertaining to the administration of separation allowances. Upon the initial proposal to strike a Committee, the ensuing debate was dominated by William Hayes Fisher, Vice Chairman of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation and an old Tory in the House of Commons and by politically representative members of the proposed Committee. Hayes Fisher, whose organisation had taken on a significant proportion of responsibility for the widows and orphans of deceased servicemen in the current war, registered his dissatisfaction with the recommendations put forward in a White Paper issued by the War Office, Admiralty and Cabinet in October of 1914 and demanded to know whether the Committee intended to address questions of allowance and pension as they pertained to Officers in the Army and Navy as well as the rank and file. He pressed for a level of objectivity in the deliberations which would take place, expressing the conviction that it would be "tragic indeed if one portion of the House or one party were to try to compete for the favour of the country by advocating some form of increased pensions."<sup>18</sup> As to the possibility of a central agency intended to oversee

<sup>17</sup> *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*. 18 November 1914. vol. LXVIII, 444.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.



the current extended operations of the pensions and allowance system and to ensure a measure of fairness and "equality" across the board, Hayes Fisher, rather predictably, recommended the RPF as one of the oldest and most significant of the relief agencies operating at the time.

George Barnes<sup>19</sup> declared his intention to push for the £1 per week minimum. This minimum of a pound a week had been advocated by various Labour groups, most significantly the WEWNC<sup>20</sup> and the Miners' Federation. Barnes allied himself with the media, particularly the *Daily Citizen* the national Labour daily.<sup>21</sup> The increased interest in the plight of the widow, orphan or other dependent was designated as an improvement; however, as Barnes reflected angrily, the improvement had only come about "when we...ceased to draw our soldiers from the poorest and least articulate section of the community and ...[began] to draw them from the homes of the better-to-do and those who make public opinion."<sup>22</sup> He declared his concerns to be with the matter of an increased scale, greater expediency in granting and distributing money, liberality with regard to disablement pensions and the extensions of rights under the scheme to mothers and sisters. As was common, his demands were tempered with highly wrought nationalist imagery befitting a representative of patriotic labour. Barnes

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<sup>19</sup> Barnes was Labour MP for Glasgow, former Chairman of the Labour Party (1910), a former official of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and one of the principal activists for Old Age Pensions between 1906-8 as well as for National Health and Unemployment insurance before 1911. He was a representative of the more conservative wing of the Labour Party. *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals.*, vol. I. ed. J. O. Baylen (London, 1988), 63-68.

<sup>20</sup> See: Harrison, "The War Emergency Workers' National Committee, 1914-20." 211-59.

<sup>21</sup> Until its financial collapse in 1915.

<sup>22</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons.* 18 November 1914. vol. LXVIII, 461.

ended his speech with the expressed hope that,

we shall open our hearts and our purses and make such generous provision as will carry a message to our defenders now at the front as will stiffen their arms and gladden their hearts in the knowledge that, if they are maimed, they may at all events be sure of a decent living and that if they fall, the country will be good to those they leave behind.<sup>23</sup>

Bonar Law,<sup>24</sup> the second Select Committee member to speak, took credit for making the initial suggestion to form an inter-party Select Committee. In a speech in the Commons on 11 November 1914, Bonar Law had suggested that the Government draw up a "very small" committee, representative of all parties" to consider the "one of the most important things that this Government and this House {has} to decide."<sup>25</sup> The valour of British women, particularly soldiers' and sailors' wives with regard to the possibility of poverty and loneliness was inestimable, Bonar Law declared, stating,

from the homes throughout the land, from the castle of the noble and cottage of the poor and lowly, there has gone forth the manhood to defend our shores, leaving but the womanhood with heart assailed by doubts and fears, but with steady, resolute determination to do her share and her duty in the world and so encourage the loved ones from who she has parted and strengthen the nation in its purpose. Of these we may say, 'they also serve who only stand and wait.'<sup>26</sup>

In a more pragmatic vein, Bonar Law, a conscriptionist, claimed that the

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<sup>23</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 18 November 1914, vol. LXVIII, 470.

<sup>24</sup> Bonar Law had been Conservative Party Leader since 1911 and became Colonial Secretary in Asquith's Coalition in May of 1915. He was to be Chancellor of the Exchequer under Lloyd George after having played a central role in the formation of the Lloyd George Coalition in late 1916.

<sup>25</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 18 November 1914, vol. LXVIII, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

current system of separation allowances and pensions served as a check rather than a boon to enlistment. Men had to know that their dependents would be cared for under any circumstances.<sup>27</sup> In his address of 18 November 1914, Bonar Law had expressed the hope that the Asquith Government would accept and act upon any recommendations made by the Select Committee and reiterated his belief that “we have no right to expect these great sacrifices on the part of these men unless we ourselves are, in our own way, bearing a share of the sacrifice which we ask them to undertake.” The present Government was guided not by this principle, he claimed, but by the desire to get as many men as possible at the cheapest possible rate. Given the Asquith Government’s statements as to their liberal intentions, Bonar Law’s allegation was a telling blow.<sup>28</sup>

Asquith defended the liberality of governmental schemes, in particular that scheme laid out in the November 1914 White Paper.<sup>29</sup> In his address, however, Asquith cautioned the Committee members to temper their generous impulses with the caveat of the “permanent burden” which would be cast upon the resources of the country.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, it was important for everyone to remember that provision on a scale which would allow the childless widow of a soldier or sailor to live a life of leisure would benefit no one, including the individual recipients. “We all have to work - or at least we ought all to work - in our different spheres and different degrees.” Asquith cautioned the House. Too high a scale in the wrong capacity could undermine the energy and ethics of individual recipients and

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<sup>27</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, 11 November 1914, vol. LXVIII, 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, 18 November 1914, vol. LXVIII, 471.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 1 for further details on Cd. 7662.

<sup>30</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*, 18 November 1914, vol. LXVIII, 475-7.

in that sense be hardly a generous gesture. He asked the Committee to remember that the scale currently in place was “not merely more liberal than any scale we have been accustomed to in the past in this country, but ... almost immeasurably more generous than the scale that prevails in any other country.”<sup>31</sup> The fear of pauperism and the threat to the work ethic of servicemen’s dependents was the thread that connected Asquith’s ostensibly generous recommendations; his cautious promises with regard to the amount and extent were intended to serve the usual dual purpose of calming the fears of traditional Liberals and skeptical Conservatives/Unionists while demonstrating the commitment of the Liberal Party to recognition of the “rights” of military dependents.

As in the later Cabinet Committee on Pensions, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Conservative/Unionist Party, in this case represented by Barnes and Bonar Law, played a central role in setting the political tone of the Select Committee. The other four members of the Select Committee, Austen Chamberlain, Reginald McKenna, T.P. O’Connor, David Lloyd George did not address the House at the initial debate, but it is not difficult to ascertain their stand on the various issues. As Bonar Law’s colleague<sup>32</sup> and the former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, Chamberlain was bound to align himself with the Conservative criticism of the current system and to defend whatever Conservative principles were enshrined in it. By contrast, McKenna, as the Liberal’s Home Office Secretary and Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, represented the official policy makers in defence of the Asquith administration’s official line as presented in the debate by Prime Minister Asquith. Thomas O’Connor, an Irish journalist, founder of

<sup>31</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 18 November 1914. vol. LXVIII, 477.

<sup>32</sup> In fact, Bonar Law proposed that Chamberlain be included as a member of the Committee.

various penny weeklies and radical newspapers and a moderate Nationalist with strong ties to the Liberal Party, played a subordinate, indeed nearly invisible, role in the formation and workings of the Committee but could be counted on to weight the balance of opinion firmly in favour of the Asquith Government's official policy.

The Select Committee was intended to address three basic questions with regard to pensions and allowances. First, they were to consider the question of an established minimum rate for widows, wives and disabled soldiers; that is, what could be considered the minimum amount sufficient to maintain either a single woman, man or a family? Second, should that minimum be a flat rate supplemented by charity or out of public funds, or should it be decided by a sliding scale, based on the prewar income of a given serviceman and his family and the level of comfort to which they had been accustomed? Third, how should these questions of rates and supplementation be decided in the future and should an official or quasi-official body be designated to deal in a judicial capacity with the inevitably complex questions of policy in this matter? The Select Committee met regularly between the end of November 1914 and the middle of April 1915.

The form of the meetings from included extensive examinations of witnesses who had either requested a hearing, such as certain representatives of charitable organisations, or had been summoned such as Sir Charles Harris from the War Office. The witnesses were a politically wide ranging group, from Hayes Fisher to the socialists Mr. and Mrs. A.B.. Swales on behalf of the Committee of West London Co-operative Society and the Women's Labour League.<sup>33</sup> In all, twenty-two witnesses testified over the

<sup>33</sup> "Second Special Report." Select Committee on Pensions and Grants. *British Sessional Papers*. vol. iv, 90-267.

space of three and a half months including Dr. T. MacNamara, Liberal Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Mr. H. Barrow and Mrs. M. Matheson of the Birmingham Citizen's Committee, the Hon. J.E. Rayner, Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Eleanor Rathbone, Chair of the SSFA in Liverpool, Seebohm Rowntree, author of *Poverty, a Study of Town Life* (1901) and *How the Labourer Lives* (1913), and Helena Swanwick<sup>34</sup> head of the anti-war, internationalist faction of the NUWSS. Some of the witnesses were grilled quite relentlessly by the Committee. In particular the representatives of official policy and administration, that is, Harris and MacNamara, were questioned closely by the Bonar Law, Chamberlain and Barnes. Other representatives, such as Swanwick, were put on the defensive, forced to justify their appearance before the Committee and explain why they were qualified to speak on the questions at hand. <sup>35</sup>

Harris was the first witness on 26 November 1914 and as a representative of the War Office was forced to explain and defend the collapse of the War Office's administrative machinery in the first six months of the war. In questioning Harris, Chamberlain concentrated on the question of scales and rates, introducing what would become part of the Conservative contingent's central focus, that is, the idea of a sliding scale, intended to take into account the prewar income and standard of living of the disabled soldier, wife, widow and family. Harris, defending the War Office's indecisive stance on this question of allowances and pensions based on prewar income, claimed that both systems involved awkwardness. A flat rate was perhaps unfair in many ways since it would leave some recipients far better provided

<sup>34</sup> Swanwick was accompanied by Celia Rackham, one of the first female factory inspectors in Lancashire and the president of the Cambridge COS.

<sup>35</sup> The following information is taken from the "Second Special Report on Pensions and Grants." *British Sessional Papers*. vol. iv, 90-267. unless otherwise noted.

for than had been previously the case and others on the verge of relative penury; however, a sliding scale involved massive administrative expense. As well, determining the characteristics of each particular case would involve a good deal of the time of individual clerks and caseworkers and the process was subject to arbitrary or mistaken assessments. Bonar Law took up the question of sliding scales again, later in Harris's testimony, emphasising Chamberlain's initial point with regard to the "levelling" effect of continuing the flat rate system which failed to discriminate based on prewar income.

Barnes gave Harris some uncomfortable moments with his questions regarding the War Office circular released in October of 1914. This circular had requested that some Army wives voluntarily remit their allotments in order to ease the crushing expenses of the War Office and the burden upon their husbands. Barnes vented his own wrath and spoke on behalf of others who were angered by what was viewed as callousness on the part of the War Office<sup>36</sup>, asking "Is this a fair document to send to a woman whose husband is away fighting for his country?" Harris responded that compulsory allotments were no longer really needed since separation allowances were deemed adequate to maintain families of soldiers on active duty. He claimed that the request had been intended to help those men on active duty who did not have enough money for their daily expenses rather than to ease any burden on the War Office coffers. Besides, Harris pointed out, wives had to agree to the remittance as the War Office was certainly not circulating an ultimatum to these women.

<sup>36</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the circular had received much criticism from relief committees particularly because many women took the circular to be an "ultimatum" rather than a "request". "Soldiers' Wives: Allotment of Pay: War Office Circular." *Manchester Guardian*. 17 October 1914, 10.

Barnes also grilled the next witness, Dr. MacNamara of the Admiralty, who appeared on 30 November 1914. At the time of MacNamara's appearance before the Committee, the Admiralty's system of separation allowances for dependents was in its fledgling state though their pension system was somewhat more fully developed and organised than the Army's. Navy dependents were cared for by voluntary allotment, seventy thousand of which were being paid at the time of MacNamara's testimony. Barnes questioned MacNamara closely with regard to the "conditions under which we have been taking men into the {armed forces} recently"; he asked MacNamara if he didn't think that "the nation owes something to the women", given that the Government was certainly not discouraging married men from enlisting, no matter what the official line might be. MacNamara agreed with Barnes as to the necessity of providing for families of servicemen but defended the voluntary allotment system as being more efficient even than the War Office's separation allowance because of the long history, tradition and liberality of the Admiralty. McKenna, speaking in defence of Liberal policy and administration, asked MacNamara to elaborate as to the difficulty of comparing the two branches of the British armed forces, particularly with regard to the nature of rank within each organisation. MacNamara agreed, explaining that within the Army, most of the rank and file were at the lowest rank, that of private, while in the Navy, new sailors quickly rose from their initial enlistment rank of Ordinary Seaman, to the next, that of Able Seaman. As a result, the majority of soldiers were at the first rank possible while the majority of sailors were at the second. The incongruities between the Navy and the Army made it difficult, McKenna pointed out, to come up with a universal system for all the armed forces.



MacNamara agreed firmly with that assessment.

Dr. Marion Phillips, a journalist, Fabian, and Labour representative on the Kensington Borough Council, had been one of the investigators under the Royal Commission on the Poor Law in 1907-8<sup>37</sup>. She testified on 3 December 1914 as one of the first unofficial witnesses to appear before the Committee and certainly the first Labour representative to appear. Before her appearance, Phillips had submitted an affidavit, detailing the expenses of a family as she estimated them, based on her observations in visiting the families of the poor. She recommended the Labour minimum, that is, one pound (£1) per week. In response to questions from McKenna and Bonar Law, Phillips responded that a family in a low rent district could possibly survive on thirty to forty shillings per week but that many things would have to be omitted from their expenses in that case, such as membership in Friendly Societies, payments for insurance, fuel or savings. Phillips objected to a pension or allowance based on prewar wages; she pointed out that many enlistees would have been in receipt of very irregular wages before the war and any amount based on that irregular wage would be insufficient to maintain a family. The practice, at any rate, was unfair on principle in that it rewarded equal service with unequal return. Phillips also objected to the administration of pensions and allowances being placed permanently in the hands of military organisations, such as the War Office and the Admiralty, and suggested that Old Age Pension Boards would be appropriate bodies to deal with pensions and allowance administration while the Education Authority could be brought in to administer money intended to support children or orphans. Not surprisingly, Phillips' assertions received support

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<sup>37</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of British Women*, 326-7.

from Barnes and were challenged by the rest of the Committee who apparently felt that her claims as to amounts sufficient to maintain were exaggerated, if not extravagant.

Eleanor Rathbone, Chair of the Liverpool Branch of the SSFA and J.E. Rayner, Lord Mayor of Liverpool and Chair of the Citizen's Committee, appeared before the Committee on 11 January 1915. Contrary to Pedersen's characterisation of Rathbone's testimony in which Barnes is portrayed as her principal antagonist<sup>38</sup>, the striking feature of her testimony is, in fact, her complaints regarding the ineptitude of another local, privately funded charity, the Liverpool Citizen's Committee. Her "vitriol" as Pedersen terms it was primarily expended upon J.E. Rayner, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool and chair of the Citizen's Committee. In addition, Pedersen does not mention the congruity between Bonar Law's and Rathbone's opinions on the institution of a sliding scale for pensions and allowances.

As chair of a predominantly female organisation, Rathbone, a well-known proponent of family endowment and a suffragist<sup>39</sup>, argued for greater female participation in official deliberations and administration with regard to pensions and allowances. She charged that men had an inferior understanding of the domestic details central to an understanding of a given family's economic situation. Rayner disagreed with Rathbone's assumption that men were inept in this matter. He argued that the public anxiety and controversy had undermined the work of the two committees. Upon questioning by Bonar Law, Rathbone described the work of the SSFA in Liverpool, which handled between seventeen and eighteen thousand servicemen's' wives' and widows' cases, attempting to discover what the

<sup>38</sup> Pedersen. "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship." 993-4.

<sup>39</sup> See: J. Lewis, "Eleanor Rathbone and the Family." *New Society*. 27 January 1983, 137-40.

families' prewar income had been and gearing their charity toward that. Bonar Law was impressed by Rathbone's description, pointing to the significance of this heretofore unknown evidence and claiming that the SSFA in Liverpool had practically instituting a new scheme of separation allowances, similar to the sliding scale system that he himself advocated.

The Citizen's Committee, represented by Rayner, presented data compiled by the Liverpool SSFA regarding six thousand of the seventeen thousand cases on the books of that organisation. The SSFA had determined that of the six thousand cases, over fifty per cent of the enlistees had been labourers of some sort before the war, earning from twenty to twenty-four shillings a week.

**Occupation of Clients  
Liverpool SSFA Files  
6000 Cases**

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Dock Labourers	958	16%
Other Labourers	2226	37 & 1/4%
Sailors/Firemen	787	13 %
Employees of Public Bodies	435	7 & 1/4%
Artisans & Shopkeepers	1089	18%
Clerks, etc.	226	3 & 3/4%
Regular Servicemen	279	4 & 3/4%

**Wages of Clients  
Liverpool SSFA  
6000 Cases**

<u>Wages</u> (shillings per week)	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
under 20s	1743	29%
20-24	1872	31 & 1/2%
25-30	1426	23 & 3/4%
31-35	366	6%
35-40	320	5 & 1/4%
over 40	279	4 & 3/4%

The figures presented by the Liverpool SSFA were reinforced by the testimony and affidavit presented by the Birmingham Citizen's Committee. In their evidence, the Citizen's Committee, represented by a Mr. Barrow and Miss Matheson, declared that over fifty per cent of enlisted men<sup>40</sup> were skilled tradesmen and the proportion was even higher amongst newly enlisted men. Recruits were being drawn from the better section of the working classes, they claimed, which meant that the primary motivation for enlistment was patriotism and a sense of duty rather than starvation or any desire to capitalise on the "bounty" of the state. Many of the wives of skilled workers were skilled themselves, in trades such as sewing, shoe working and milling.

The Birmingham Citizen's Committee also provided further evidence to support their contention that the scale of allowance in effect at the moment was insufficient to maintain a wife or widow with three children. They detailed the expenditures of a widow with three children under fifteen. She received a small pensions, supplemented by relief, a total of seventeen shillings a week, the minimum weekly amount for a widow with three children under the scale proposed in Cd. 7662. Her expenditure without provision for clothing, emergencies, savings or leisure would be as follows:

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<sup>40</sup> This term includes newly enlisted men, reservists, territorials and regulars.

**Birmingham Citizen's Committee**  
**Weekly Expense Chart**  
**Widow with three children under 15**

Item	£	s	d
Rent		6	
Coal/gas		2	
Meat/veg.		3	
Milk		1	2
Groceries		3	7
Soap/firewood/etc.		1	
State Insurance			3
	0	17	0

Mrs. A. B. Swales of the London Co-operative Society and the Women's Labour League, also provided examples of family expenditure, in this case to show that the WEWNC demand of a minimum of one pound a week was not only reasonable but necessary. Rather than a minimum for subsistence, Swales provided her assessment of the minimum amount necessary for a decent standard of living based on experience with and observation of workers' families.

**London Co-operative Society  
and Women's Labour League  
Weekly Expenses for Average Family**

Item	Provinces			London		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
Rent (average)		6			9	
Coal		2			3	
Lighting		1	4		2	
Travel		-			2	
Clothing		3	6		3	6
Insurance		1			1	
Sewing Machine		1	6		1	6
Firewood			2			2
Milk			10 1/2		1	2
Butter		1	2		1	2
Cheese			8			9
Tea			8			9
Oatmeal			4 1/2			4 1/2
Flour			6			6
Soap			5 1/2			5 1/2
Potatoes			7			7
Vegetables			1			1
Bread		3			3	
Pudding			6			6
Cocoa			4			4
			1 5 9 1/2			1 13 10
With Butcher's meat and husband's pocket money						
		1	15 2		2	1 2

Swales also listed the standard of living available to a childless widow who received nineteen shillings and twelve pence a week, an amount close to that of the largest pension available to a women under Cd. 7662.<sup>41</sup> Her estimate did not account for wartime inflation.

**London Co-operative Society  
and Women's Labour League  
Weekly Expenses of a Childless Widow**

Item	£	s	d
2 rooms		6	6
light		1	3
coal		1	3
clothing		2	
doctor/insurance			6
Food			
sugar			2 1/2
milk			10 1/2
tea			5
cheese			4
flour			3
Soap and Candles			3 1/2
Potatoes and Vegetables			7
Butter			7
Meat		1	9
Meal, rice etc.			6
Bread		1	3
Sundries		1	2 1/2
		-----	
		19	12

Swales recommended a minimum of a pound (£1) a week for a widow or wife and at least three shillings and six pence for each child (3/6).

<sup>41</sup> A widow could receive as little as 7/6 per week, depending on the rank of her husband and the manner of his death.

"Allowances and Pensions with respect to the Wives and Families of Servicemen." Command 7662. 9 November 1914. *British Sessional Papers.*, vol. iii: 466.



Hayes Fisher submitted a minimal report on the history and administration of the RPF to the Select Committee<sup>42</sup> in January of 1915, making his case for the creation of an official or quasi-official body designed to oversee the pension and allowance system and act as a liaison between private and public organisations. The RPF, Hayes Fisher argued, would be the perfect organisation upon which to build that quasi-official committee, as its administrative characteristics would easily lend themselves to incorporation into a combined private and public system of maintenance. The Royal Patriotic Fund was “democratic”, responsible to the Government and could quite easily institute greater representation by adding Labourites and women to its roster of committee members. Hayes Fisher argued against any suggestions that the Government should be entirely responsible for the maintenance of servicemen’s dependents as the formality and rigidity of Government service needed always to be relieved by the human element and close personal interaction of private, voluntary organisations. He pointed to the thousands of letters expressing support for the RPF as evidence that public opinion was “unanimous” in desiring that the RPF’s services to widows should be continued regardless of the universality of governmental maintenance. The grants and benefits offered by the RPF to the widows of servicemen provided a channel for the stream of public sympathy and operated as the nation’s tribute to the courage and bravery of its armed forces.

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<sup>42</sup> The members of the Select Committee would have been at least somewhat familiar with the nature and administration of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation as it had been operating as a quasi-official organisation involved in the distribution of widows’ pensions since the beginning of the war. See Chapter 1 for further details.

## Reports and Recommendations

In their first report, issued in February of 1915, the Select Committee sanctioned most of the increases recommended by Cd. 7662 with only a few reservations. The Committee recommended that there be a greater increase in pensions for widows and that no distinction should be made between women married before or after enlistment; in addition, they agreed that no pension or allowance should fall below a minimum for wives of twelve shillings and six pence (12s/6d) per week, including allotments and a minimum for children of five shillings (5s) per week.<sup>43</sup>

### Select Committee Special Report #1 Comparison of Recommendations with Command 7662

	White Paper Cd. 7662			Slct. Cttee.		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
Widow with no children	7		6	10*		
with one child	12		6	15		
with two children	15			18	6	
with three children	17		6	20	6	
with four children	20			22	6	
Orphans - (first 3 in family)	5			same		
over three	4			same		

\* Widow's Pension increased to 12/6 at 35 years of age & 15s at 45 years of age.

<sup>43</sup> 5s /wk was recommended for the first child and then 3/6 for the second and 2s for each child after that.

In July of 1914, the average expenditure for a working class family had been twenty four shillings and eleven pence (24s/11d); by the end of the war, that rate had increased to forty-seven shillings and three pence (47s/3d), a rise of ninety per cent. By the time the Select Committee had released its first report, retail food prices had increased by thirty-two per cent (32%) which rather undermined the rate increases suggested in their report and later implemented by the Asquith Coalition. Thus, even for women receiving separation allowances or pensions, working for extra money or petitioning charitable associations for supplementary grants was inevitable.<sup>44</sup> As well, children of servicemen's families might be put to work and could bring in extra income which would supplement the basic minimum allowance of pension.

In terms of administration, the Committee made a vague recommendation in their report as to the establishment of a body "with discretion to frame schemes". The Prince of Wales National Relief Fund (NRF) would be invited to take care of supplementary grants which would bring all dependents up to a minimum standard of living. As yet, no mention was made of the possibility of instituting a sliding scale, though the Committee were careful to point to the desirability of maintaining a mixed public and private system.

The Committee's Second Special Report, published in April of 1915, made no mention of scales or recommendations for alteration in administration of the system; however, many of the witnesses who testified before the Committee made specific reference to the limited amounts currently being offered to those citizens who had made the sacrifice of a

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<sup>44</sup>Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 117-119.

family breadwinner and of the inadequate resources purchasable by these limited amounts. A number of the witnesses, namely Phillips and the Swales, pressed for the one pound minimum, a demand which had become by this time the ideological lynch pin of the Labour view point on this issue.

There were, however, several recommendations offered with regard to the administration of pensions and separation allowances. The Select Committee used this report to recommend that the "special body" referred to in the First Report should be the RPF. This special body would be referred to as "Statutory Committee" as constituted by an Act of Parliament. It was to consist of twenty-five members, including twelve appointed by the Crown, two representatives of Labour and two women. The Crown would appoint the Chair and provide that official with an annual salary payable from Parliamentary funds. The functions of the Statutory Committee would be first, to decide questions of fact and scale with regard to pensions payable to dependents other than wives and children. Second, they would be responsible for administering the supplementation from private funds such as were possessed by the RPF, the NRF and others. Third, they would have judicial capacity with regard to claims and forfeitures such as in the case of a dispute between two claimants.

The Third Special Report from the Select Committee was presented to Parliament in September of 1915, while the Bill governing the constitution of the Statutory Committee, the "Naval and Military Pensions Bill" was under review by committee in the House of Lords. By the autumn of 1915, the growing numbers of returning soldiers and sailors who were maimed, impaired or more subtly damaged by their service had sparked growing interest in their welfare and concerns regarding separation allowances and

pensions had already begun to be absorbed into the debate on this issue. It had become obvious to many that men could die of their wounds many years after seeing action and that, hence, the current limitation of seven years after discharge was inadequate and unfair. In this brief Report, the Committee recommended that the rules governing the hierarchical categories of pension as determined by manner of death be made more elastic to encompass a broader range of service related pensions for widows and orphans. In the Navy, the highest pensions would go those dependents of men who were killed in action or died close upon action of wounds sustained in drowning, destruction of ships or other violent deaths. The next category of pension would be to those families whose breadwinner had died of a disease directly attributable to wounds related to service and the last would include those deaths from disease injury or accident not under class one or two. For the Army, the rules were similar, with deaths in categories one and two being attributable to action in the field. <sup>45</sup>

### The Naval and Military Pensions Bill

When McKenna introduced the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in the Commons in June 1915, its contents led to arguments which would remain unresolved through three readings and nearly five months of debate. The most fiercely debated clauses of the Bill, particularly those related to the involvement of the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation and the ill-defined source of funding for the proposed Statutory Committee, were seen by both

<sup>45</sup> "Third Special Report." Select Committee on Pensions and Grants. *British Sessional Papers*. vol. iv: 268.

sides as compromises which undermined the legitimacy of their case in different ways. Some Members of Parliament, such as Jonathan Samuel, Liberal MP for Stockton-on-Tees, and James Hogge, Liberal M.P. for East Edinburgh<sup>46</sup> and a small number of Lords, such as Viscount Devonport<sup>47</sup> saw the involvement of a quasi-official agency in what should have been an entirely public service as a setback in the movement towards state responsibility for the very deserving dependents of servicemen. A number of MP's, such as Conservatives Sir Henry Craik<sup>48</sup> and Gerald Hohler and many of the Lords, such as Viscount Midleton<sup>49</sup> objected to the relative exclusion of all voluntary agencies except the RPF from the Statutory Committee along with the provision of a relatively large portion of public funds to a quasi-official body without clear responsibilities to Parliament. These significant clauses were seen as both an encroachment upon the British tradition of philanthropy and voluntary endeavour and a hasty, ill-conceived measure which could establish a dangerous precedent for any future balance of public and private relief work. While the criticism of the backbench MP's in Hogge's group or Unionists such as Hohler served primarily as an annoyance and source of delay in the Commons, the debate

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel and Hogge were members of a relatively small group of backbench Liberal M.P.'s who consistently gave voice to concerns regarding legislation governing the administration of pensions and allowances. Under the direction of Hogge, a former associate of Seebohm Rowntree, this group generally argued for full governmental responsibility in this arena. Hogge would later become the President of the National Federation of Discharged Soldiers and Sailors.

<sup>47</sup> Viscount Devonport (Hudson Ewbank Kearley) was a businessman and a former Liberal M.P. for Devonport.

<sup>48</sup> Craik, Conservative M.P. for the University of Glasgow/Aberdeen, was a civil servant and writer who would eventually be appointed as a member of the executive of the Statutory Committee.

<sup>49</sup> Viscount Midleton (William St. John Brodrick) was a former Conservative M.P. for West Surrey, the former Secretary of State for War in the Salisbury/Balfour administration and the leader of Irish Unionists.

in the Lords had the potential to stall this piece of legislation entirely, a fact of which the Asquith Cabinet was well aware.

The relative depoliticization of this issue and the cross-party coalitions formed to defend either charities or governmental actions tended to obscure political divisions in this debate. Instead, members of both Houses tended to view the issue from a stand determined by personal involvement in the various sectors of official, semi-official or unofficial welfare agencies, sometimes in surprising ways. Hogge's involvement with the growing movement to defend the interests of ex-servicemen explains his vociferous opposition to the governmental half-measures imposed by the Bill. Viscount Devonport's former involvement with the RPF made him sceptical as to the merits of that organisation and its proposed role in the Statutory Committee while Hayes Fisher's ongoing involvement in the RPF led him to promote its interests and defend the centrality of its role.

The Bill, based on the recommendations of the Select Committee, consisted of eight clauses, all dealing with the establishment of a body to frame schemes for the implementation of quasi-official system of supplementary pensions and allowances for the dependents of servicemen. In addition, that body would create and maintain programmes for the maintenance, training and employment of disabled soldiers and sailors and their dependents as well as coping with any questions or problems forwarded to them by the War Office, Admiralty, Cabinet or any other governmental agencies involved with the administration of benefits for members of the armed forces and their families. This body, namely the "Statutory Committee", would be formed upon the existing RPF, using the administrative structure of that corporation as its nucleus. In addition to the

Executive Committee of the RPF, the original Bill called for a core group of ten individuals who would be appointed by the Crown, two representatives of women and two representatives of the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund (NRF), making up a membership of twenty-six with a quorum of five. The Crown would appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair for the Committee, both of whom would be paid a yearly salary from public funds. These two along with the twenty-six member executive would be supported by a network of local committees which would collect disseminate and provide information and administer the Committee's affairs in the various boroughs, towns and counties.<sup>50</sup>

When the Bill was presented in the Commons, the principle concerns had to do with the source of funding for the proposed committee and the payment of the Chair and Vice-chair as well as governmental participation in framing regulations governing the supplementation of pensions and allowances. The lack of clarity in delineating the machinery by which these funds would be provided and distributed caused consternation amongst MP's, particularly Hogge's group. The same concerns would be voiced, even more loudly and vehemently in the House of Lords in July of that year. "They {the Committee} have not got a brass farthing!"<sup>51</sup> Hohler declared in debate on the bill on 30 June 1915, yet the Statutory Committee would be expected to administer highly expensive programmes. Hogge and Samuel questioned the source of this money. The RPF had some money remaining in its privately collected European War Fund and the NRF was still relatively healthy but

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<sup>50</sup> This clause would eventually prove to be the downfall of the Statutory Committee as Cyril Jackson, appointed as the first Vice-Chair of the Statutory Committee was unable to implement local committees quickly or efficiently enough to satisfy a 1916 Cabinet Committee formed to study the issue.

<sup>51</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 30 June 1915, vol. LXII, 1858.



there was general concern as to what would happen when the private and voluntary subscriptions to these funds dried up, as they inevitably would with either the conclusion or the extended duration of the war. Apart from the salaries of the Chair and Vice-chair, no public money were specifically promised to the Statutory Committee but, of necessity, these would have to be forthcoming if private funds failed to cover their expenses.

Other concerns and eventual amendments to the Bill dealt with representation, both official and unofficial, on the committee. A number of M.P.s, particularly from the Unionist or Conservative party objected to the exclusion of the SSFA as a sign of indifference and ingratitude on the part of the Government and attributed this exclusion to an undeclared desire to undermine the voluntary principles of that organisation. Others, such as Hogge and Samuel, objected to the stated minimum number of women, declaring that two would be treated by the future Committee as a maximum rather than a minimum and that a looser requirement, contained in the phrase "some women", would stimulate greater representation and participation on their behalf.

By the time the Naval and Military Pensions Bill reached the House of Lords, at the end of July 1915, several amendments had been moved to alter some of its original clauses, in an effort by Cabinet to reduce the delay in passing the bill through the House of Lords. The proposed Statutory Committee was reduced from twenty-six members to twenty-five members, "some" of whom, rather than the original "two" would be women. Either the Vice Chairman or the Chairman would have a paid position but not both. The Cabinet, in collaboration with the various Government Departments and agencies dealing with pensions and allowances, would form regulations

for the dispersal of supplementary grants and allowances as well as for the training, employment and maintenance of disabled soldiers, rather than leaving the framing of such schemes to the Executive of the Committee. The representatives of various Government Departments and Agencies would include one each from the Treasury, the Army Council, the National Health Insurance Department, the Local Government Board, the Local Government Board of Scotland and the Admiralty; in addition, the ten appointed representatives of the Crown would be expanded to twelve, to include two representatives of the parliamentary Labour Party. The Asquith Coalition Cabinet refused to yield to the urging of some MP's to leave the work of separation allowance to the SSFA because that group was too disorganised and, more importantly, because of the controversy which might be engendered by the confluence of both local SSFA and Statutory Committees competing for public support in the same borough or town.<sup>52</sup>

When the Bill reached the House of Lords, the consternation was predictable. For the most part, the Lords concentrated on amendments to those parts of the Bill which might have a detrimental effect on the delicate balance of public and private endeavour in the field of relief for servicemen's dependents. As Lord President of the Council in the House of Lords, the Marquess of Crewe<sup>53</sup> pointed in his opening speech of the debate to three areas of concern. First, the exclusion of the SSFA from the work of the Statutory Committee was an ongoing source of controversy. The Marquess of Crewe, a strong Liberal, had received a deputation from the SSFA on 22

<sup>52</sup> "Confidential Cabinet Memo." D. Lloyd George to Cabinet. 23 August 1915. PRO: CAB 37:133/8.

<sup>53</sup> The Marquess of Crewe (Robert Offley Ashburton Crewe-Milnes) was a Liberal, the former Secretary of State for India, and the current President of the Board of Education who would eventually resign with the demise of the Asquith Coalition in December of 1916.

July, the day before he made his comments regarding this organisation in the House of Lords. This deputation headed by Colonel Gildea, founder and Chairman of the SSFA, stated their views on the Bill as it stood at that point, their main demands being the elimination from the Bill of references to separation allowances, the continuation of the services of the Association with regard to the supplementation and regulation of separation allowances and statutory representation on the proposed Statutory Committee.<sup>54</sup> "Why," asked Lord Crewe in his address to the House on the following day, "does the Bill exist if the SSFA can do the work?"<sup>55</sup> Viscount Midleton agreed with Crewe's assessment, declaring,

It would be absolutely impossible to substitute for it any body which could prove itself in the next twelve months as sympathetic, as careful and as acceptable to those with whom that association has had to deal. I am not one of those who have stood up in this House of what are called "Women's Rights," but I do think that the business qualities, the sympathy and the philanthropy which thousands of ladies have shown in this connection has gone a long way to prove their fitness for such public work.<sup>56</sup>

The exclusion of the SSFA from the work of the Statutory Committee would continue to be a focus of controversy within the House of Lords until the fall of that year, at which point the Lords were convinced to rescind their demands that the work of the SSFA be preserved in the Bill if other of their amendments regarding funding and representation were allowed to stand.

Viscount Devonport, a former Executive Committee member of the RPF, objected to the fact that this particular organisation had been chosen to

<sup>54</sup> Gildea, *Historical Record of the Work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*, 185-6.

<sup>55</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords*. 23 July 1915, vol. LXI, 632.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 634.

form the nucleus of the new Committee, stating his belief that the RPF, until this infusion of government confidence and possible money, had been "moribund". He expressed fears, common to a large number of the Lords, regarding the tenuous connections between Parliament and the RPF, claiming that the only past link had been a limited yearly report to the two Houses. A significant number of the Lords shared Devonport's doubts regarding the sagacity of the Coalition Government in choosing the RPF as the organisation on which to base their new Committee. The principle fears, evident throughout debates in both the Commons and the Lords, but particularly prevalent in the speeches of the Lords, involved parliamentary responsibility and money. Many were concerned about the advisability of handing over what could amount to five million pounds sterling by the end of the war to a quasi-official organisation without clear links to the Government or suitable advisors in Parliament. Although there was no indication in the Bill itself that public money would be forthcoming to the Committee, it was obvious to everyone involved that such an endeavour could not function without an infusion of public money. No machinery existed to control or distribute those sums of public money and anything which could be created quickly enough to fund the Committee might eventually undermine the traditions and rules of the Exchequer.

Doubt in the veracity of the findings of the Select Committee on Pensions and Grants was implicit in the arguments and amendments offered by the Lords. Devonport voiced the practical fears of many of the Lords when he pointed to the relative haste with which a finding had been handed down by the Committee on a question which could determine the nature of State funding for quasi-official organisations. He doubted "whether the men

called to sit upon {the Select Committee} were in a position in that tremendous time in our nation's history to give to the evidence that came before them the kind of attention that another Committee less heavily burdened with other work could have given."<sup>57</sup>

After amendments which compelled the Statutory Committee to make full disclosure of all financial transactions to the Treasury, ensure full representation of a number of governmental departments and the SSFA on the Executive Committee as well as a number of minor changes in wording, the Lords passed the bill on 29 September 1915 and returned it to the Commons where it was passed on 10 October 1915 amid little controversy. The Lords had held up the bill for nearly three months while they studied it and moved many unsuccessful and some successful amendments which, perhaps ironically given the general determination in that house to preserve the voluntary principle, strengthened the ties between Government and the Statutory Committee by demanding that that Committee make full financial disclosure to the Exchequer on regular intervals and by increasing official representation.

### The Reaction of Charities

The reactions of the three charities most closely involved in the administration of separation allowances and pensions reflected their ties with the Government or the lack thereof. The RPF, as has been demonstrated, had been chosen to play a significant and central role in the new authority set up under the aegis of the Select Committee's Reports and the resulting Bill;

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<sup>57</sup> *Parliamentary Debates. House of Lords.* 23 September 1915. vol. LXII, 235.

consequently, their reaction to the proposed Committee was one of satisfaction. As could be expected, however, the executive and members of the SSFA did not react well to the proposals of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill. Although they were provided with representation on the proposed Statutory Committee, the processes which had been under their control since the beginning of the war were to be incorporated into the duties of that Committee. On 13 July of 1917, Colonel James Gildea, representing the SSFA, submitted a "protest" from his organisation, to the members of the House of Lords. The protest was also distributed to every working member of the SSFA in Britain. In it, Gildea outlined the Executive Committee's objections to the Bill. In addition to the articles presented by their deputation to Lord Crewe, the Executive Committee of the SSFA objected to the "scant courtesy" with which their organisation had been treated by the Government in the framing of this Bill, given that organisation's quick and efficient response to duty with the onset of war. "We might reasonably have anticipated," Gildea pointed out in his organisation's written protest, "that the Government, if not prepared to express any gratitude for a national service voluntarily rendered, would at least have considered it desirable to take the Association into their confidence when framing the scheme now before the public."<sup>58</sup>

Although, according to the views of the SSFA, the Bill presented to Parliament "travel{ed} some way beyond the scope of the Commons' Committee Reports"<sup>59</sup>, Gildea and his Committee claimed to have no objection to the Bill itself and accepted that it was necessary for the

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<sup>58</sup> Gildea, "A Protest from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association." 13 July 1915, in *A History of the Work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*, 181.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

Government to create a central authority to control and administer the supplementation of pensions. Their requests, he claimed, would not change the substance of the Bill and could be offered as amendments to the existing clauses. He asked that the Commons and the Lords make a distinction between the administration of pensions and that of separation allowances, leaving the SSFA to continue the work of supplementing or replacing separation allowances, rent subsidies and special grants to the wives and families of servicemen on active duty. Secondly, Gildea and the Executive Committee regarded the inclusion of only two representatives of the SSFA as on the Statutory Committee as inadequate and requested "statutory representation" on the central Committee itself and on all of the proposed local subsidiary committees as well.<sup>60</sup>

But the primary concern of the Executive Committee and of all of the working members of the SSFA, according to Gildea, was purportedly for the beneficiaries of that organisation's voluntary work. Unless the SSFA were included as local representatives of the Statutory Committee, the inexperience and bureaucratic concerns of the committee would be in stark contrast to the personal nature of the work prior to the institution of the Committee. Furthermore, even if the SSFA had statutory representation on the Executive and subsidiary Committees, the possibility of neglect and misadministration during the initial formation of the new system could be devastating. "The process of mastering what must, in many cases, be found to be voluminous records, will involve a task of considerable magnitude," Gildea warned, and thus, "The position of the unfortunate beneficiaries during the period when the new agency is learning its work can well be

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<sup>60</sup> Gildea, "A Protest from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association." 187.

imagined.”<sup>61</sup> All of the problems which would be incumbent upon such an alteration in the current system were the result of “the impolicy of changing horses in the middle of a stream”<sup>62</sup>, according to Gildea. At a very critical period of the war, the Government had decided to start chopping and changing a system which had only begun to function properly. Certainly, he admitted, the functions of various departments and organisations could be better administered, but the time for improvement and experiment was not at hand.

As a quasi-official charity administered by a board which included a number of important political figures<sup>63</sup>, the NRF acquiesced quickly to the proposals of the Select Committee and the consequent Bill. The board’s members, however, did express concern as to the difficulties inherent in the administration of a sliding scale, noting that the Committee had moved toward that idea in their recommendations. The NRF recommended, by contrast, that a flat rate would be better, even if that rate were well above the minimum subsistence level but also recognised that there needed to be special supplementary allowances to counter differences in the degree of sacrifice on the part of a family whose breadwinner had gone to the colours. The Committee agreed to make over five million pounds of its existing fund, if necessary, to offset the cost of those special allowances on the part of the Statutory Committee, but would continue to bear the costs of other schemes such as the supply of drugs in connection with the scheme of free medical

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<sup>61</sup> Gildea, *A History of the Work of the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association*, 183.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> These included Arthur Henderson, Charles Masterman of Wellington House, the Duke of Devonshire and Hayes Fisher of the RPF as well as the wives of important political figures such as Pamela McKenna.



attendance for dependents of soldiers and sailors.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

By late 1914, individual citizens, the press and the Government in Britain had begun to recognise the likely prospect of a long, bloody conflict which could involve hundreds of thousands of casualties under these circumstances, the administration of pensions and allowances took on a new aspect. The confusions and nominal organisation of the current system could not be allowed to carry on for years. The initial complications of the separation allowance and pension system had begun to be complicated by the necessity to provide pensions, grants, training programmes, employment and other forms of assistance to returning, disabled soldiers and their families. The situation could only worsen as the war dragged on. In addition, if the Asquith Coalition wished to contemplate the institution of conscription, or even a modified version of compulsion such as the Derby Scheme, public anger as to the lack of proper provision for the families of soldiers and sailors would no doubt intensify if that Government allowed voluntarist, private and quasi-official groups to shoulder a large part of the burden for a non-voluntarist Army and Navy. These considerations were instrumental in increasing agitation for the removal of anomaly and confusion as well as what was perceived by the press to be the "taint of charity" from schemes of relief for servicemen's dependents. Public

<sup>64</sup> Minutes: Meeting of Prince of Wales National Relief Fund, 20 May 1915. Imperial War Museum: Women's Collection. BO8/RI. 24.

impatience with Government bunglings and charitable half measures heightened in 1915 as the Asquith Government and later Coalition scrambled to satisfy the demands occasioned by a lengthening war effort and increasingly less sanguine predictions for the future.

## Chapter 4

**“The Kitchen is the Key to Victory”:  
The Serviceman’s Wife and The Invasion of Women  
1915**

This murder of a good woman, this deed of devilry, cries louder than all the gallant men slaughtered on the battlefield. The humble daughter of an English vicarage will stand out as a radiant figure, representative of all that is best in British Womanhood, of what is most chivalrous and magnanimous in the British character.<sup>1</sup>

While the Select Committee on Naval and Military Pensions and Grants deliberated throughout 1915, the demands for fair and adequate compensation for the dependents of servicemen increased in tenor and specificity. The “taint of charity” became anathema to all but the most conservative newspapers and while many defended the work of groups such as the NRF, the RPF and the SSFA, the call for full state responsibility as expressed through the popular press grew louder. It had become apparent that the war which was to have been “over by Christmas”, would continue indefinitely with increasing numbers of enlistees and casualties as well as a correspondingly large number of wives, children, widows and orphans. Both the Government’s continuing dependence on the voluntary system and the possible future imposition of conscription sharpened the public’s anxiety and anger with regard to the treatment of servicemen’s dependents; a government with any conscience, it seemed to many, could neither ask nor

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<sup>1</sup> C. Sarolea, *The Murder of Nurse Cavell* (London, 1915), 31.

demand that a man risk his life without consideration for the "little things he left behind him."<sup>2</sup> During the muddle of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill, read and passed during the summer and autumn of 1915, public indignation mounted. The conditions of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill proved to be only temporarily acceptable to the British public and the delay and muddle introduced by petty bickering and deliberate stalling of the Bill in the House of Lords and the Commons caused immediate, widespread consternation.

2 → An increasingly sentimental image of the serviceman's family developed within the context of deepening anxiety in official and unofficial circles regarding the erosion of traditional gender roles. As the second year of the war approached and the public witnessed the beginning of the "invasion of women" into traditionally male arenas, the attempts to reconcile the traditional passivity of women with their active, necessary participation in the war effort became more important as well as more sophisticated. The boom in women's employment in the factories began in the summer of 1915 with the passing of the Munitions of War Act and the active recruitment of women by the new Ministry of Munitions, established in May of 1915 with Lloyd George as the first Minister.<sup>3</sup> In the spring and summer of that year, women took jobs at the rate of 21 700 per month.<sup>4</sup> Government agencies and the press were quick to seize upon the propaganda potential inherent in the work of munitions girls, female tram conductors and other women involved in traditionally male arenas of employment as well the increasingly heroic efforts of nurses, VAD's and ambulance drivers at the front.

<sup>2</sup> " 'E's Left a Lot of Little Things Behind 'im." *Daily Express*. 5 September 1914, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 89-93.

<sup>4</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 17.

However, as Braybon and Woollacott have noted, the praise for women's work in non-traditional occupations was often tempered by concern for its long-term effects on the health of race, male employment and the female role.<sup>5</sup> The surge in female employment in late 1915 spurred the efforts of official and unofficial propagandists to preserve the traditional passive nature of women in wartime. The possible "defeminisation" of women caused by their assumption of non-traditional duties and the potential demand on their part for a larger share in public life after the war frightened governmental propaganda agencies and private propagandists concerned about a resumption of the "sex war" and the future of the British race. Between July 1914 and July 1918, the number of women workers increased from 5 966 000 to 7 311 000. Moreover, 891 000 out of 1 590 000 new jobs for women were in industrial occupations.<sup>6</sup> This expansion was short-lived, however as by November 1919, over 775 000 women had left their wartime jobs and by 1921, the number of women in the workforce was 2% less than it had been in 1911.<sup>7</sup> Women were dismissed from their wartime jobs and urged to resume their "proper place" after the Armistice. The popularity of traditional images of womanhood and femininity throughout the war would eventually facilitate this transition and help to reinforce the second class economic, political and social status of military dependents and war widows in 1917 and into the interwar years.

Unofficial propagandists, such as Horatio Bottomley, began to pay closer attention to the expanding capacities of women in war. Their

<sup>5</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 117-131. See also: Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, 48.

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 campaign was assisted by the establishment of a number of new, war-centred, middle and low brow publications such as the *Sunday Pictorial* and the *Penny War Weekly*. The *Sunday Pictorial* established by press baron Alfred Harmsworth, Baron Northcliffe, in 1915, published a column by Bottomley and articles such as "Motherhood, the First Duty of Women." by Austin Harrison<sup>8</sup>, editor of the *English Review*. In the same issue, "Mobilising Women for War Work." Emmeline Pankhurst declared that "war {was} the chance women {had} been waiting for" to demonstrate their dignity and fitness for public duty.<sup>9</sup> Other periodicals, such as Bottomley's own *John Bull*, *News of the World*, *The Penny War Weekly*, and *Everywoman's Weekly*, made similar juxtapositions, occasionally in the same article. Women were reminded by the PRC that "The Kitchen {was} the Key to ← 1 Victory."<sup>10</sup> regardless of their other, seemingly more direct contributions. As women began to take over "men's jobs" in 1915, patriotic writers in various official and unofficial capacities stepped up their efforts to tout the importance of hearth, "home duties" and child bearing, defining the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour in traditional terms while simultaneously praising the contributions of land girls and munitions workers on the Home Front, as well as FANY's ambulance drivers, Red Cross nurses and V.A.D.'s. on the battlefield.

Neither extravagant praise for the contribution made by women to the war effort, nor an emphasis on the importance of home, hearth and the future of the British race were easily reconciled, however, with the apparent

<sup>8</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*. 21 March 1915, 5. Harrison was an intellectual and journalist, the son and biographer of the Frederic Harrison, a well known Victorian journalist, political reformer and the foremost promoter of Comtean Positivism in Great Britain.

<sup>9</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*. 21 March 1915, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Poster: Parliamentary Recruiting Agency, 1915. Property of the Imperial War Museum.

economic suffering of servicemen's dependents. Many groups and individuals were, of course, deeply concerned about the injustice and ingratitude of a government which asked everything of its citizens and gave inadequate compensation in return but the central focus on the issue of separation allowances and pensions in 1915 was not wholly, or even largely altruistic. As a symbol, the serviceman's family had become extremely useful to propagandists who feared the worst with regard to the "invasion of women". The soldier's or sailor's wife served well as a symbol of womanly, which meant essentially passive, forbearance and strength, offering a corrective to the emerging symbolic value of the munitions girl and the female ambulance driver. The image of the serviceman and his wife bent over the crib of their child countered the photograph of the jaunty, adventurous female motorcycle messenger, reminding women of the sanctity of their role as the bearers of the next generation and the feminine inspiration of the Tommy in the trenches. The visual messages regarding the preservation of traditional femininity were reinforced by numerous articles in the press, decrying the masculinisation of women and the resulting chaos of gender roles. Throughout 1915, the intensity of the demand for alleviation of suffering on the part of the serviceman's family and criticism of hesitant governmental efforts in that direction corresponded with both the protestations of admiration for women as a whole and the increased anxiety regarding the degradation of the family, the boundaries of femininity, the future of the race and the possible resumption of the suffragists' "sex war".

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## Woman At the Wheel

In the last six months of 1915 the dichotomy of the female role in wartime was sharpened by the assumption on the part of women of much more clearly defined war roles as well as traditionally male duties. The original, instinctive female role as a nurturer in a variety of capacities and the moral backbone of the cause was expanded to include more direct participation in the war effort through munitions work and other forms of physical labour. The responsibility of women to operate as unofficial recruiting agents for the armed forces was still invoked. For example, *Daily Express* judged women to be " keener about the war than the men. They are more susceptible to the tales of its horrors and more impressed with its perils. They have more to lose and more to dread." As a result of this susceptibility women were urged to take a vow to the effect that, "I am willing to act as a recruiting agent and will do my best to get at least one recruit."<sup>11</sup> Periodicals such as the *Sunday Pictorial* still urged women to use their moral imperative to bolster the voluntary system, inspiring them with various photographs and illustrations of the "fair recruiting agent"<sup>12</sup>. As well, the PRC in 1915 distributed one of its most famous posters depicting two women and a male child, clasping hands as they watched a battalion of soldiers march to war. The caption was, "Women of Britain say - 'Go!' "<sup>13</sup> Other government propaganda continued to emphasise the persuasive capacity of women, such as the newspaper advertisement offering "Four Questions to the Women of

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily Express*. 1 July 1915, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*. 6 June 1915, 14.

<sup>13</sup> "Women of Britain say- 'Go!' ". Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster. Property of the Imperial War Museum. 1915.



England", two of which were "Do you realise that one word 'Go' from you may send another man to fight for our King and Country?" and "Do you realise that the Safety of your Home and Children depends on our getting more men now?"<sup>14</sup> Responsibility for the strength or weakness of the recruiting movement was still, supposedly, in the hands of women, but they now had other duties as well, in the foundry and at the Front.

Patriotic writers and government agencies recognised the value of those new duties for propaganda purposes. The *Vivid War Weekly*<sup>15</sup> presented inspiring photos of women "gladly doing their bit for the Old Country."<sup>16</sup> and of "Society Ladies learning to make shells."<sup>17</sup> The PRC circulated a poster in late 1915, using the image of a "munitions girl" pulling on her coverall with the now ubiquitous slogan, "She's Doing Her Bit."<sup>18</sup> "Ev'ry Girl Is Doing Her Bit." was the phrase of the day, popularised in song :

We need to snigger about the ladies in a friendly way  
 We'd call them all the weaker sex but what a change today.  
 For girls are doing the work of men, no matter where you go.  
 So when you see the lady window cleaners you will know

Every girl is doing her bit today<sup>19</sup>

Photographs and illustrations of women as tram conductors and, of course, as "Lloyd George's Munitions Girls"<sup>20</sup> were extremely popular in late 1915.

<sup>14</sup> *News of the World*. 17 January 1915, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Formerly the *Penny War Weekly*.

<sup>16</sup> *Vivid War Weekly*. 24 July 1915, 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Vivid War Weekly*. 7 August 1915, 3.

<sup>18</sup> "She's Doing Her Bit." Parliamentary Recruiting Agency Poster. 1915. Property of the Imperial War Museum.

<sup>19</sup> B. Lee. "Every Girl is Doing Her Bit." *News of the World*. 18 September 1915, 11.

<sup>20</sup> This was the title of Monica Cosens' 1916 autobiographical account of an upper middle class woman on the factory floor. See: M. Cosens, *Lloyd George's Munitions Girls* (London, 1916).

The phenomenon of female participation in non-traditional economic sectors was one of the most famous legacies of the Great War.

As well, the exploits and bravery of nurses, V.A.D.'s and ambulance drivers at the Front were common currency. According to the patriotic press, the nurses of the Red Cross and their V.A.D.'s performed some of the most heroic feats of the war, giving lifebelts to wounded servicemen trapped aboard a sinking ship<sup>21</sup> and carrying wounded men to safety across enemy lines<sup>22</sup>. Sharon Ouditt, in her 1994 study has described the British nurse as a "kind of a female St. George" with "eyes uplifted, inwardly grieving yet externally serene and efficient." Their image was "iconographic." according to Ouditt's analysis.<sup>23</sup> Their contribution to the war effort was catalogued in such works as Mary Francis Billington's *The Roll Call of Serving Women*. (1915).<sup>24</sup> Such books, the *Army and Navy Gazette* declared in June of that year, would provide a much needed, inspirational "account of what mothers, wives and daughters {were} doing whilst their nearest and dearest {were} fighting for the cause of righteousness and justice."<sup>25</sup> To "no one has the war brought such a change of thought, work and atmosphere" as to women, the *Nation* claimed, and there was "little if any need to enumerate the ways in which women had 'done their bit' since the war called them."<sup>26</sup> Woman was "at the wheel" declared the *Daily Express* in July of 1915.<sup>27</sup>

The development of propaganda written by Horatio Bottomley about women serves as an excellent illustration of the sharpening dichotomy of the

<sup>21</sup> *Vivid War Weekly*. 11 December 1915, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Vivid War Weekly*. 21 August 1915, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces and Writing Women*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> M.F. Billington, *The Roll Call of Serving Women*, (London, 1915).

<sup>25</sup> *Army and Navy Gazette*. 24 June 1915,6.

<sup>26</sup> *The Nation*. 23 October 1915,12.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Express*. 19 July 1915, 5.

female role. Bottomley, a perilously self-made financier, would-be millionaire, scurrilous journalist and shameless self-promoter, used his rhetorical gifts to establish his place as the most important unofficial propagandist of the Great War. When the war broke out in August of 1914, Bottomley drew upon his reputation as a "man of the people", established by a variety of tenuous legal "triumphs", his journalistic excesses in *John Bull* and the *Municipal Journal*, and his tenure as a Liberal MP for South Hackney<sup>28</sup> to create a lucrative career as a pro-war orator and writer. His first rally at the London Opera House, six weeks into the war, attracted a queue of twenty-five thousand people for five thousand seats.<sup>29</sup> Bottomley was held in such esteem by segments of the population during the years of the war<sup>30</sup> that the *Daily Mail* proposed, in July of 1915, that he be included in the Asquith's Coalition Cabinet.<sup>31</sup> His career as the wartime "voice of the people" was hugely successful.

His weekly *John Bull* became the chief organ of his pro-war views regarding women. Until the autumn of 1915, Bottomley confined himself to a limited and relatively restrained elucidation of the role women would play in the conflict. He congratulated the Women's Social and Political Union, the Pankhurst-administered militant suffragette organisation, for putting aside their differences with the Asquith Government to perform such necessary services as bandage rolling.<sup>32</sup> Poetry such as "The Woman's Part" rather dutifully portrayed women as the courageous but essentially passive

<sup>28</sup> See: A. Hyman, *The Rise and Fall of Horatio Bottomley: The Biography of a Swindler* (London, 1972).

<sup>29</sup> Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Bottomley was later convicted of fraudulent solicitation on behalf of the War Loan and Victory Bonds campaign in 1922.

<sup>31</sup> G. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, 210.

<sup>32</sup> "Bull's Eyes." *John Bull*. 22 August 1914, 9.

participants in war, with verses such as,

For her is neither tear nor sigh  
 Nor faint'ring at the fond good-bye  
 But words in which the truth shall burn  
 God be with you till you return

and,

The woman, like the man is strong  
 in face of danger and of wrong  
 Her eye serenely clear and bright  
 sees only victory in the fight  
 when just and noble is the cause  
 she does not bid her man to pause,  
 But sternly stills all vain alarms  
 and helps him buckle on his arms.<sup>33</sup>

But in the summer of 1915, Bottomley signalled in *John Bull* what generally was to be new thrust of his propaganda regarding women. In 2 "Where is the Woman?", from 17 July 1915, Bottomley declared that the period of passive participation in the war was over and that "to make a pudding and bear a baby {was} not the sole end of a woman's existence in 1915." "The sisterhood," he declared, "want{ed} something new, something that {was} vital with the spirit of the times and they {were} going to get it." Women or rather the rhetorical figure of "Woman" was to become a "Kitchener in crinoline".<sup>34</sup>

Three months after writing "Where is the Woman?" in *John Bull*,

<sup>33</sup> "The Woman's Part." *John Bull*. 5 September 1914, 7.

<sup>34</sup> "Where is the Woman." *John Bull*. 17 July 1915, 6.

Bottomley began to publish a column in *Everywoman's Weekly*, a new periodical aimed at lower middle class and middle class women. *Everywoman's Weekly*, in circulation from March of 1915 to February of 1921 was one of a very small number of women's magazines established during the war; like most of them, it did not survive too far beyond the armistice.<sup>35</sup> Billed as "the woman's paper that was different", *Everywoman's Weekly* combined features on sewing, cooking and economy such as "How I Manage on £1 a Week."<sup>36</sup> with war news relating to women, articles on women's war work and mildly emancipatory ideas. Their demands, or polite requests, never extended to the franchise. The emphasis was on "organisation" for female labourers and the "State's responsibility" to care for woman workers who would lose their jobs at the ends of the war. Their stance could be described as pro-female and pro-labour, for the first two years of the run, but certainly not radical, democratic or in any way proto-feminist. Their emphasis on the war was occasionally shallow, as in "The Confessions of a War Bride" which asked the somewhat callous question, "Is it better to be a spinster or a widow?"<sup>37</sup> However, serious articles regarding the situation of servicemen's dependents and the recognition of the female contribution to the war effort appeared relatively frequently. The theme most often in evidence was the glorification of motherhood and the care of the child as "The Nation's Greatest Asset."<sup>38</sup> In January of 1917, the magazine was retitled *Everywoman's*<sup>39</sup> and the serious, war-centred articles

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<sup>35</sup> P. Braithwaite, *Women's Magazines: The First 300 Years* (London, 1995), 31.

<sup>36</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 15 May 1915,13.

<sup>37</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 14 August 1915,11.

<sup>38</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 27 March 1915,5.

<sup>39</sup> The magazine was published as *Everywoman's* between 12 February 1916 and 5 February 1921.

were dropped in favour of a greater domestic concentration and even more highly wrought praise for the mothers of the nation.

Bottomley's column ran in *Everywoman's Weekly* from 2 October 1915 to 23 December 1916, at which time it was dropped from the new format, judged, undoubtedly, to be too war-centred. Bottomley's "straight from the shoulder talks" were paternal in tone, even condescending. As in most of his speeches and articles, complex ideas regarding gender, public and private roles for women, pacifism and "the sex war" were distilled into simple, easily remembered slogans and apparently self-evident truths. In them, he exhorted "woman" to throw herself into work for the war but cautioned her repeatedly to retain her essential femininity and avoid being repugnant to real men by aping the coarser habits of that sex. Bottomley occasionally defended the idea of a larger public role for women but it was a role which was to be hedged around by male chivalric notions, notions which would protect women from the coarse and rough aspects of life - such as voting or employment. The guiding principle of Bottomley's inspirational "talks" was that "men reason - women *believe*." <sup>40</sup> Thus, the faith of the nation in the rightness and necessity of the war effort was dependent upon the courage of the female sex.

The themes in his columns covered most of the popular sentiments of the day. In "Be Your Own Heroine" Bottomley gave women a "creed" to recite in which they were to state that "the influence of woman has largely created civilisation and every man is fighting for woman." as well as "mine is the hardest part, however." In "The Cradle is Mightier than the Sceptre." Bottomley urged women to reproduce and to raise children fit to replace the

<sup>40</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 9 October 1915;15.

lost generation of war heroes and ensure the survival of the race. It was greater he stated, to "give the nation a quiverful of arrows than to write the noblest poems or paint the grandest pictures." Bottomley capitalised on contemporary fears regarding declining birth rates and the effect of death in the trenches on the quality of the British population.<sup>41</sup> Women would win the war, Bottomley believed, and their responsibility for the success of the war effort would not go unrewarded once the fight was over; the "nonsense of the sex war" would not be revived, he stated because women would be given their rightful place in the public order, with full rights and privileges of the citizens they had proven themselves to be. Nevertheless, women were to remember to "Hitch {their} Apron Strings to a Star" in the knowledge that "home duties were war duties" and that the nation which allowed the degradation of home and hearth and the defeminisation of its womanhood had nothing left to fight for.

Similar messages were conveyed in articles and photographs heralding the value of preserving femininity in the face of wartime demands on women. The *Sunday Pictorial*, published Austen Harrison's "Motherhood, The First Duty of Women" in its second issue. In this article, Harrison reassured women that even if they did not vote, sit in Parliament or hold positions of public power and trust, their participation in the reconstruction of Great Britain after the war was assured as only women could bear the future citizens of the Empire. In addition, the war had demonstrated two things: the "courage of men and the moral fortitude of women", characteristics which would be highly significant for the future of the race. The moral fortitude evinced in women's work for the war effort

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<sup>41</sup> See: Farrell, *Origins and Growth of the English Eugenics Movement*.

demonstrated their ability to produce children in the mould of the fallen heroes of the war, thereby giving them the capacity to render the most important of national services.<sup>42</sup>

Ruby Ayers, the briefly famous author of numerous, light "escapist" novels<sup>43</sup> made the same assessment of the true female role as distinct from the current, anomalous one. In her *Sunday Pictorial* article, "What Shall it Profit a Woman?" Ayers conceded that it was indeed necessary for women to be involved in traditionally male sectors of the economy and that, in fact, many women would go with their men to the trenches if they were allowed to do so. The strength and courage displayed by women who had entered into non-traditional occupations in their zeal to further the war effort was highly laudable and Ayers congratulated them for their willingness to suspend their fears and inhibitions for the duration of the war. However, she questioned not only the likelihood but the desirability of continuing this blurring of gender roles after the war, predicting the loss of "old-fashioned womanliness" in this case. "Is there a woman," she asked, "who doesn't believe that the best part of being a woman is having a man to look after her?" Women who insist on retaining their wartime freedom would find that they had unconsciously undone all the help they had given during the war by undermining the British character with their neglected homes and tired selves. <sup>44</sup>

In accordance with the effort to preserve traditional boundaries of

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<sup>42</sup> "Motherhood: The First Duty of Women: The Biological Crisis of the Next Decade." *Sunday Pictorial* . 21 March 1915,13.

<sup>43</sup> Ayers was a household name during the Great War and in the interwar period but the popularity of her novels did not endure. *The Europa Biographical Dictionary of British Women*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> "What shall it Profit a Woman? If she Gains Liberty and Loses Love?" *Sunday Pictorial* 30 May 1915,11.



femininity, attempts were often made on the part of official and unofficial photographers to soften the harsh image of a young woman in trousers, operating a large piece of machinery, hoisting a bag of coal over her head or driving a motorcycle. Women in non-traditional occupations were often photographed in traditionally feminine postures to emphasise simultaneously their underlying unsuitability for these masculine roles and the corresponding depth of their courage in undertaking them for the duration of the war.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, patriotic writers repeatedly made the point that the decision to allow women into the factories and into tram station ticket booths was one of dire necessity. Regardless of their efficiency or skill, women were doing "men's work". The Central Committee for National Patriotic Organisations (CCNPO) made sure to emphasise in their suggested lecture outlines, that "women must do men's work and set men free to fight or to do other work that women cannot do."<sup>46</sup> As Woollacott has shown, normal gender restrictions were indeed set aside but only for the duration of the war.<sup>47</sup> Any anxiety regarding the erosion of sex roles was to be tempered by the knowledge that the situation was temporary, the result of international crisis - an accident, not a design.

While women "doing men's work" presented a serious problem to those propagandists concerned to combat the "ill effects" which might be contingent upon a masculinisation of the female role, the work of the nurse on the Front lines, even the female ambulance driver and motorcycle messenger was easier to feminise, because of the secondary, supportive and

<sup>45</sup> For examples of this type of photography see: D. Cordell & J. Liddard, *Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War, 1914-18* (London, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> CCNPO "Outline of a Popular Lecture on "The War and How to Win it." 1915. Imperial War Museum Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 89

nurturing aspects of their jobs. Despite the physically and emotionally draining nature of the work done by women at the Front, and the immense strength needed to sustain their duties<sup>48</sup>, nurses, even female surgeons to a large degree, were recognisable female figures who left the bayonetting to men and mopped up the blood, soothed the wounded and said prayers over the dead after in the background. By ministering to men on the front lines, nurses had placed themselves in danger but that danger was counterbalanced by the supposed reluctance of any "civilised" nation purposefully to injure or kill a non-combatant, particularly a female non-combatant in the role of caregiver. Nurses had "sacred immunity."<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the admiration expressed for nurses and other women at the Front was tempered by the secure assumption on the part of the British reading public, that their sex protected them from real harm.<sup>50</sup> The shock amongst that same public at Nurse Edith Cavell's execution by the Germans was all the greater as a result of that complacent belief. Cavell was daughter of a country vicar and the matron at a Brussels hospital<sup>51</sup> who was arrested in August of 1915 and executed in October of 1915 by the Germans. The fact that she was actually guilty of helping Belgian soldiers to escape into Allied territory was irrelevant to British official and unofficial propagandists.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The work of VAD's and nurses was a "far cry from the old myth of the ministering angel." as Lyn MacDonald has put it, but most people on the Home Front had little idea of the horrors endured even by non-combatants at the front. L. MacDonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (London, 1980), 11.

<sup>49</sup> C. Sarolea, *The Murder of Nurse Cavell*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> That femininity could, of course, be a source of danger, as attested to by the purportedly systematic rapes of the female Belgium refugees.

<sup>51</sup> See: R. Ryder, *Edith Cavell* (London, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> As Cate Haste points out, a good deal of information regarding Cavell's actual crime - that of helping two hundred and fifty men make escape across enemy lines through an underground network - was withheld from the public. Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, 89-90.

Germany had shown its barbarity and total lack of understanding of gentlemanly warfare by deliberately shooting a woman but what was even worse, an "angel of mercy" who had followed her womanly instinct to save life.<sup>53</sup> Her strength, fortitude and defiance were extraordinary but she was remarkable and useful to propagandists chiefly because of her gender.

The execution of Edith Cavell prompted a mixed outpouring of nationalistic pride, anger, sorrow and vows of vengeance for the cold blooded killing. The symbolic power of Cavell's death is attested to by the erection of a statue in her likeness, which still stands today near Trafalgar Square in London. The statue bore as an inscription, a significantly incomplete quotation from Cavell's last words in which she declared that "Patriotism is not enough." Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government completed the inscription in 1924, adding her full message, "Patriotism is not enough: I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone." In between the erection of that statue and the addition of the full inscription, Cavell's name and likeness was invoked on innumerable occasions as a symbol first of German barbarity and second of female bravery and vulnerability.

Her "murder" was evidence that the Germans had "fully carried out their plan of frightfulness,"<sup>54</sup> according to Charles Sarolea in *The Murder of Of Nurse Cavell*, (1915). The Germans had "staggered humanity" with their acts in the past, they had "bombed, sunk, ruined, destroyed, gassed, ravaged, insulted and tortured" and it seemed they had sunk to their lowest depths in the first year of the war; however, the Allies "had miscalculated the resources of their ingenuity and the strength of their brazen hearts."<sup>55</sup> With

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<sup>53</sup> Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, 139-142.

<sup>54</sup> Sarolea, *The Murder of Nurse Cavell*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid; 9.

the murder of Edith Cavell, the Germans had committed a crime "which deprives the onlooker of all powers of speech, and beyond which human perversity cannot reach."<sup>56</sup> This crime was particularly disgusting to civilised people because Cavell had "revealed herself, both in her life and in her death as one of the noblest women who ever trod God's earth." Sarolea attributed the German crime to their "schadenfreude", the peculiarly German derivation of joy through the infliction of suffering.<sup>57</sup> Reprisal for the murder of Cavell, according to Sarolea, would take the form of an "increased determination to gather in our millions around the European banner, to do what in us lies to hasten the final consummation which shall deliver the world forever from the curse of Prussianism." The British tradition of "chivalry" demanded it.<sup>58</sup>

Cavell's execution was also useful as foreign propaganda to convince the U.S. to join the Allied war effort. In order to demonstrate the importance of Cavell's story to the Allied cause, the CCNPO circulated a reprint of James Beck's *The Case of Edith Cavell: A Study of the Rights of Non-Combatant's* originally published in the *New York Times* in December of 1915. After its publication in the *Times*, the CCNPO claimed, Beck's article was reprinted in "nearly every language of the civilised nations."<sup>59</sup> According to Beck, the Germans freely admitted that they would not spare women, "no matter how high and noble {their} motive may have been." No distinction between men

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<sup>56</sup> Sarolea, *The Murder of Nurse Cavell*, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Of course Sarolea did not mention that shortly after Cavell's execution, the French executed two German nurses for similar crimes and under similar circumstances; little was made of these executions by German officials. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, 18-19.

<sup>58</sup> Sarolea, *The Murder of Nurse Cavell*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> "Preface." to J. Beck, *The Case of Edith Cavell: A Study of the Rights of Non-Combatants* (London, 1916), 3.

and women could be found in the Prussian military code, Beck stated, a sign of the barbarity of that nation. But by executing Cavell, the Germans had done great damage to their war effort in terms of international support as the women of the world would now unite against the common foe of Prussian militarism. To end, Beck called upon the "women of America and the world" to "honor the memory of this martyr of {their} sex, who for all time will be mourned."<sup>60</sup>

In November of 1915, the Nurse Cavell Memorial Fund was instituted and a variety matinee featuring thirty-nine performers at the London Hippodrome was planned as a fundraiser. In the Souvenir Booklet from the matinee, the director, Frank Wallace declared his unwillingness to dwell on the tragic side of Cavell's fate and declared it,

sufficient to say that whilst in the strict letter of any law it is permissible for a belligerent to destroy the life of any individual man, woman or child who is endangering the security of his forces, commanders of armies have hitherto acted with humanity in dealing with women, realising their defencelessness and their helplessness against force.<sup>61</sup>

### The Soldier's Fond Farewell

Images of the serviceman's wife served as the perfect medium for conservative propagandists who wished to invoke the sanctity of motherhood and the ideal of passive, feminine courage for women. The reading public were refreshed by patriotic literature depicting the wives of

<sup>60</sup> Beck, *The Case of Edith Cavell*, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Souvenir Booklet. *The Nurse Cavell Memorial Fund Matinee*. 15 November 1915. Imperial War Museum Archives.

soldiers and sailors as martyred saints and became indignant at accusations of drunkenness, extravagance and licentiousness on the part of these martyrs. The "moral panic" over the lax habits of servicemen's wives in the early months of the war and the brief experiment in police supervision<sup>62</sup> of servicemen's wives has been well explored by historians such as Pedersen. But the scholarship on this highly revealing period in the Great War must be balanced by an examination of the outrage generated by that experiment, outrage which is of equal significance to our understanding of the ambivalence with regard to images of womanhood. The press reacted angrily to the suspicions of government and police and proclaimed its continuing belief in the ideal of the serviceman's wife and widow. A "wholly unnecessary degree of attention" had been paid to the "unwarrantable charges" levelled at the wives of servicemen, the *Army and Navy Gazette* claimed in early 1915;<sup>63</sup> the police had overreacted and overreached themselves and were paying the price in public relations through similar reports in *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian* and other dailies and periodicals.

Public interest in the Select Committee's deliberations and the clauses of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill remained intense. As it stood, the "system was indefensible" *The Times* declared during the Select Committee's deliberations.<sup>64</sup> Of all the subjects dealt with in the House of Commons, the *News of the World* claimed during the Lords' deliberations on the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in the autumn of 1915, "none {would} excite more sympathetic interest than {those} relating to state

<sup>62</sup> Pedersen, "Gender, Welfare and Citizenship during the Great War." 996.

<sup>63</sup> *Army and Navy Gazette*. 30 January 1915, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times*. 11 January 1915, 3.

provision for families of those who have fallen in the country's service."<sup>65</sup>

Conservative publications such as *The Times* and *News of the World* were more or less in accord on this particular issue with such politically divergent publications as the Fabian *New Statesman* and the liberal *Manchester Guardian*. During the deliberations of the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances, periodicals such as the *New Statesman* and *Fortnightly Review* took it upon themselves to issue criticisms and warnings to the Committee and the Asquith Government. In January of 1915, the *New Statesman* offered the following assessment of the current system, identifying four main problems. First, the Asquith Government made "promises it could not fulfil. This is a deplorable thing in any case: in dealing with the more helpless classes and on a matter so vital...the blunder is unpardonable." Second, "The system is hopelessly complex and very dilatory." Third, "There is no clear principle behind the system." Fourth, "The language of Army orders is lax." The Committee was urged to create a system of greater simplicity and clarity and to hand over the working of that system to civil rather than military authorities who were obviously incapable of handling it. The *New Statesman* strongly suggested that the Asquith Government "Let the War Office run the war and civilians will look after the affairs of peace."<sup>66</sup>

The complexity and confusion of the current system of pensions and allowances to dependents of servicemen was usually described in the press as a betrayal of the men and women who had willingly risked all and received little in return. Some criticisms of the system, however, were based on more practical and urgent concerns, the most common of which was the effect of

<sup>65</sup> *News of the World*. 7 November 1915, 6.

<sup>66</sup> *New Statesman*. 9 January 1915, 8.

an inadequate system on the health of voluntary recruiting. As the war dragged on and recruits grew more scarce, the problem of inadequate separation allowances and pensions became a crisis. *The Fortnightly Review* identified the inadequacy of the system as one of four main hindrances to recruiting under the voluntary system, along with poor living conditions for recruits, ignorance in small towns and villages of the progress of the war and the obsession with sport. No one, the *Review* stated, "would wish...that the dependents of those who have suffered permanent injury or who have lost their lives in the service of their country should suffer great hardships thereby and it is expected that the Pensions Committee set up by the Government will deal generously with the cases that come before it."<sup>67</sup>

After the publication of their Reports and the reading of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in Parliament, the Government came under some criticism regarding the contents of each but, on the whole, the press offered tentative support to the notion of a Statutory Committee as long as it would indeed operate as a centralising force for the extended system. While some publications, such as *The Contemporary Review* and the *Manchester Guardian*, asserted that what was needed was a national system run by a ministry,<sup>68</sup> most were willing to entertain, at first, the possibility that a quasi-official agency and a host of local sub-committees could fulfil the necessary requirements toward proper organisation. In the late summer and early autumn of 1915, criticism was directed primarily at the House of Lords for delaying a crucial piece of legislation.<sup>69</sup> It was "a shame that a small

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<sup>67</sup> *Fortnightly Review*. February 1915,225.

<sup>68</sup> *The Contemporary Review*. September 1915,35.

<sup>69</sup> The Statutory Committee would eventually become the target of intense criticism in the press in 1916 when the confusion of its administration became obvious.



number of irresponsible peers," could hold up such crucial legislation, the *United Services Gazette* complained. It was "a serious matter to hang up the extra money the provisions of the Bill {were} intended to carry to the needy dependents who have fully given their breadwinners to the state without stint or complaint." It appeared that "Certain classes seem to believe that they have a prescriptive right to have a hand in the handing out to their poorer brothers and sisters."<sup>70</sup>

The political, economic and patriotic arguments for an adequate system of allowances and pensions for the wives and widows of servicemen were accompanied by more emotional appeals and sentimentalised images. In June of 1915, the *Westminster Gazette* printed a pathetic poem by G.M. Faulding in which the heroine stoically accepts her fate as a war widow:

When my Jim went to Flanders  
And left me here alone  
My thoughts of him were  
like mists about me blown.

Now when the boys march back from landing  
with flag and fife and drum  
There's many a maid will cry for joy  
To see her hero come;  
but I shall stand there dumb.  
For my Jim stays in Flanders  
Where the graves are by the sea;  
my thoughts of him are long thoughts  
that the winds blow mistily  
He will not come to me.<sup>71</sup>

These women were the "true heroines of Armageddon", Horatio

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<sup>70</sup> *United Services Gazette*. 5 August 1915, 10.

<sup>71</sup> G.M. Faulding, "Jim." *Westminster Gazette*. 10 June 1915, 3.

Bottomley declared, (women who waited at home for word regarding the fate of their loved ones. Separation allowances and pensions were nothing more or less than just, a "nation's thanks expressed in terms of its purse."<sup>72</sup> As the Select Committee deliberated, they were warned that the "nation demand(ed) better pensions for the dependents of servicemen."<sup>73</sup> These press images were reinforced by the increasingly large distribution of sentimental postcards, depicting the "soldier's fond farewell" and doggerel poetry such as "Waiting for you."

My thoughts are ever with you  
Where ever you may roam.  
I wish you health and safety  
And a quick return to home.

This poetry was accompanied by the image of a young woman, standing by a fire, with a letter in her hand, presumably from the young soldier pictured in the postcard's inset.

In order to soften, feminise and thereby excuse the participation of women in non-traditional arenas, propagandists occasionally made a reconciliation of the two roles by pointing out that women who ventured onto the shop floor to make shells were also, in many instances, the wives and widows of servicemen or future wives and mothers. Propaganda was directed at the wives, sweethearts and mothers of servicemen; "Make us as proud of you as you are of him" a Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster requested in the summer of 1915.<sup>74</sup> "One of the most wonderful

<sup>72</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 18 October 1915,13.

<sup>73</sup> *United Services Gazette*. 27 May 1915, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Parliamentary Recruiting Committee: Poster #119. 1915. Mills Research Collections: McMaster University.

things in the world had happened," Harold Martin declared in *The Girl He Left Behind Him (The Story of a War Worker)* published in 1915 on behalf of the YWCA Canteen Campaign, "love had got into the factory and was driving the machines." <sup>75</sup> In "Vox Clamantis", a poem attached to Martin's pamphlet, John Oxenham described the munitions girl as motivated by the fact that "Our men are risking their lives out there,/And we at home must do our share." Indeed, as Hilda Love pointed out in her *Sunday Pictorial* article of October 1915, war work in non-traditional capacities would make women better wives and would hardly deflect them from the natural course of love, marriage and child bearing. Women would not picture themselves as "head of the shop floor," she asserted, but they did picture themselves as the "head of a small house"; love and marriage were still the treasured dreams of the shop floor girl. Moreover, having worked in a man's world, women would be less demanding of the material comforts of life, having a deeper understanding of what it cost a man in labour and time to provide for his wife and family.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> H. Martin, *The Girl He Left Behind Him (The Story of a War Worker)* (London, 1915), 7.

<sup>76</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*. 10 September 1915, 12.

## Conclusion

In 1915, the division between men's and women's work appeared to be disintegrating as the Asquith Liberal and Coalition Governments broke down the final barriers to female participation in traditionally male sectors of the economy. The wartime "invasion of women" into male arenas had begun. However, as some historians such as Braybon, Woollacott and Beddoe have pointed out, that invasion had only a short term benefit for the emancipation of women and their employability outside of traditionally female occupations. Certain images of women in official propaganda and in the patriotic press were instrumental in ensuring that any gains made by women in those arenas were temporary as official and unofficial propagandists made sure to counteract the "defeminisation of women" with tributes to traditional femininity. The bravery, strength and fortitude of women who ventured into traditionally male occupations was extraordinary precisely because of their traditional delicacy and timidity. According to many unofficial and official propagandists, women would undoubtedly much rather be making babies and puddings than operating a complex piece of machinery but they were willing to sacrifice their true, womanly goals temporarily for the sake of the war effort and their men at the Front. Patriotic writers and artists praised "woman" extravagantly in 1915 for doing her bit but cautioned her against allowing that "bit" to forever alter her essential nature as the giver and nurturer of life.

In the effort to reinforce and retain traditional sex roles, unofficial and official propagandists drew heavily upon the image of the serviceman's wife as the anonymous female model of essentially passive fortitude and strength

and the inspiration of the Tommy in the trenches. Postcards, posters, songs and poetry paid tribute to the women who "have given their all/ Husbands and sons to the battle, lest the faith of an Empire fall./Well have they borne their burden and paid the bitter cost,/This is the women's message in the name of all they have lost."<sup>77</sup> In the context of both highly wrought patriotic praise for women at the Front and in the factory, as well as the corrective rhapsodies regarding the sanctity of family and traditional femininity, the issue of financial support for the families of servicemen intensified in sentimentality and fervour. Public interest in the findings of the Select Committee and the recommendations of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill was unrelenting, as the press and the public repeatedly warned the Asquith Liberal and Coalition Governments that anything less than generous and fair treatment of servicemen's families would be intolerable.

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<sup>77</sup> M. Peterson, "The Women's Message." Leaflet #26. Parliamentary Recruiting Committee. 1915. Imperial War Museum Archives.

**SECTION III:**  
January, 1916 to May, 1917

## Chapter 5

**The Statutory Committee  
and the Ministry of Pensions  
1916 to 1917**

The year 1916 witnessed a series of political and military watersheds. The falling away of Liberal attempts to maintain "business as usual", the imposition of military conscription, the embarrassment of the Grand Fleet in the Battle of Jutland and the slaughter of men on the Somme initiated a new phase of the war at home and at the front. Demands in the press and from the public for reform of the pensions and allowances system had forced the Asquith Coalition to draft and pass the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in late 1915 and in the following twelve months, the members of the Statutory Committee would labour to preserve a chaotic intermingling mixture of private and public endeavour. But instead of satisfying the demands of public opinion, the haphazard nature of the Statutory Committee would exacerbate the problems of administration and polarise the heretofore subtle distinctions of opinion on the issue of expanded state involvement in pensions and allowances.

The establishment of the Statutory Committee led to a break in the apparent consensus over the treatment of servicemen's dependents. In official circles, some formerly moderate Labourites, such as Arthur Henderson and other, less predictable supporters such as the Conservative Walter Long, began to push for greater state intervention, citing the demand for "one pension authority" in the media and amongst the public.

Representatives of the major charitable organisations, such as Hayes Fisher, began to organise against the dangers of further state involvement and attempted to curry support for the compromise of the Statutory Committee. The fear of "universality" and inveterate pauperism which had always governed the relief of poverty in Great Britain not only prompted the Asquith Coalition to stall in this period with a temporising Act of Parliament but also spurred the establishment of a few new charities devoted to servicemen's dependents. These charities were dedicated to preserving the class distinctions between officers' wives or widows and the wives or widows of the rank and file as well as the work ethic of the wives or widows of working class servicemen; as such, they represented anxiety about the future effects of bureaucratisation and the tenacity of traditional principles which had governed the relief of poverty in the past.

These fears were, in part, justified by the drive for bureaucratisation in the autumn of 1916. In late 1916 and early 1917, the administration of pensions and separation allowances for the Army and Navy underwent the final stages of transformation into a wholly bureaucratic process under the aegis of the new Ministry of Pensions headed by Barnes, one of the original members of the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances<sup>1</sup>. Because of the concurrence of the two events, that is the inauguration of the Lloyd George Coalition and the creation of the new Ministry, it is easy to assume

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3 for details on this Committee and Barnes' career.



that the latter was the sole result of the former.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly, the programme of the new Ministry after January of 1917 was influenced heavily by Lloyd George's drive for "national efficiency" and the growing acceptance, even demand, for state intervention into previously private arenas of endeavour. However, the initiative for bureaucratisation and centralisation of the administration of pensions and allowances had begun under the Asquith Coalition, in the fall of 1915 and the process had reached its final stages by December 1916. The Government had accepted, albeit reluctantly, full responsibility for the dependents of servicemen but the incorporation of many of the members and indeed of the functions of the Statutory Committee meant that many early characteristics were retained. The Statutory Committee represented the Asquith Coalition's early determination to maintain the primacy of philanthropic, private organisations in the administration of pensions, part of their general reluctance to abandon the traditional conceptions of poverty and the fear of "pauperism" which governed Liberal poor relief and the strength of the old Tory philosophies of philanthropic administration. The strength of these fears and the ambivalence of many politicians and members of the public with regard to notions of entitlement and rights-based state maintenance meant that many

<sup>2</sup> The wrongful assumption that Lloyd George was responsible for the creation of the Ministry of Pension - and hence for one of the first "pathfinders" in the future British Welfare State - is commonplace. Lloyd George's role in the Liberal social reforms of 1908-1911 qualifies him for the title of pathfinder for the British welfare state but his role in the administration of pensions and allowances was nominal throughout the Great War and he had virtually no involvement in the actual process of bureaucratisation. This misunderstanding is illustrated in the address given in 1977 by Steven Orme, the Minister of Social Security in James Callaghan's Labour Ministry, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Ministry of Pensions. In his address, Orme told his audience that Lloyd George "founded the Ministry of Pensions in order to assure the nation that nothing would be left undone for the welfare of the returning soldier." "Appendix D" to *A Short History of Pensions*. Unpublished material: Ministry of Pensions. 1982 (first produced in 1972.)

of the rules and regulations regarding "moral worth" and labyrinthian tests of eligibility were incorporated into the workings of the new Ministry. The Ministry of Pensions Act of December 1916 did not signify the eradication of traditional Liberal administration of the Poor Law; instead, it enshrined the position of servicemen and their dependents as the only inherently deserving members of long term state maintenance.

In general, 1916 was a pivotal year in the history of the Great War. The "psychological defeat" of the Somme which occurred between 1 July and 18 November 1916, had been preceded by the embarrassment of the Battle of Jutland and the dispiriting death of Kitchener in June of that year. The repercussion of events in the arena of war, combined with massive inflation, strike actions, political upheaval, the conscription crisis and a poor harvest undermined morale on the Home Front. The battles of 1915 had demonstrated that the Germans could withstand the French and British armies. The realities of a long term "war of attrition" had begun to declare themselves. The massive casualty lists of 1916, caused primarily by the drawn out and bloody Battle of the Somme, struck individual towns and regions forcefully, as the "Pal's Battalions" of Kitchener's New Army replaced the nearly extinguished BEF in the field. The men who had joined together would fight together, Kitchener had pledged, which meant that they would also die together. The suffering at home was all the more intense for being localised when a battalion such as the 18 Northumberland Fusiliers, drawn from the shop assistants of Newcastle and Gateshead, registered their casualties. The legacy of this suffering was the inescapable knowledge that "the war could threaten with death the manhood of a whole

nation.”<sup>3</sup>

Admiral Jellicoe, commander of the British Grand Fleet, caused consternation and embarrassment in the spring of 1916 by adhering to his long held defensive strategy. On 31 May 1916, the first major confrontation between the German High Seas Fleet and the British Grand Fleet in the North Sea resulted in few gains for the British as Jellicoe and Admiral Beatty, his second in command, failed to follow up on their initial advantage by allowing the German High Seas Fleet to escape. The inability or unwillingness to follow through on their initial gains revealed the scope of mismanagement in the ranks of the Navy. The inertia was gross and widespread, the “fault of the Navy’s system and traditions rather than that of one man.”<sup>4</sup> The trauma of the Battle of Jutland was followed closely by the death of Kitchener four days later. Despite his ailing reputation amongst politicians, Kitchener still enjoyed huge popularity on the Home Front and his death aboard the HMS *Hampshire* enroute to a mission in Russia caused widespread grief and trepidation regarding the conduct of the war.<sup>5</sup>

The Battle of the Somme which lasted throughout the summer and autumn of 1916 represented the transference of Allied military dominance from the French to the British, the result of the strategic decision made at the Chantilly Conference to deliver the war into the hands of “Westerners”.<sup>6</sup> The offensive, a turning point in popular conceptions of warfare, resulted in more than four hundred thousand British casualties and gained “little ground at great cost”<sup>7</sup> as the infantry of the New Army’s Battalions struggled

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<sup>3</sup> J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London, 1978), 285.

<sup>4</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War*, 51-58.

<sup>5</sup> Bourne, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-18*. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 214-220.

<sup>7</sup> D. French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914-16* (London, 1986), 59.

across no-man's land behind an ineffective artillery attack. Because of inexperience, inadequate equipment and poor planning, the Army's artillery had failed to obliterate the well-protected German machine gunners, some of whom had dug themselves in to a depth of thirty feet. These gunners emerged as soon as the artillery barrage lifted and began to fire at the long lines of marching British soldiers. The "great offensive" in the headlines of newspapers was greeted with joy on the Home Front until the cost in human life became clear. Casualty lists rolled in and even those communities largely unaffected by the slaughter could not help but be aware of the huge numbers of grievously wounded soldiers transported from the field hospitals of France to the convalescent hospitals of Great Britain.<sup>8</sup>

The effects of the psychological defeat of Jutland and the Somme were exacerbated by political upheaval on the Home Front. Asquith had installed firm Liberals in the most significant Cabinet posts, such as Reginald McKenna<sup>9</sup> at the Exchequer. Nevertheless, there was little unity amongst the members of the Asquith Coalition Cabinet and even the most firm supporters of Liberal principles economics could not prevent the decline of "business as usual". The national effort, coordinated and eventually controlled by various governmental departments, to provide the military with the resources necessary to achieve victory would reach its climax under the Lloyd George Coalition in 1917 and 1918. However, the movement towards this climax began under the Asquith administration.<sup>10</sup> The process of governmental expansion can be traced to the imposition of the McKenna

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<sup>8</sup> MacDonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land*, 162-3.

<sup>9</sup> McKenna was a long term advocate of free trade and a strong supporter of *laissez faire* economics as well as an opponent of conscription.

<sup>10</sup> D. Sweet, "The Domestic Scene: Parliament and People." in *Home Fires and Foreign Fields: British Social and Military Experience during the Great War*, 10.

duties in the September 1915 budget. These duties included a 50% tax on excess profits and a 33 1/3% tax on luxury items such as automobiles and watches.<sup>11</sup> The gradual imposition of universal conscription in early to mid-1916 furthered the movement away from the principles of voluntarism and small government.

The Derby Scheme, offered as a compromise to ward off conscription, had failed in the autumn of 1915. When the scheme closed on 11 December 1915, the initial figures indicated that it had failed to provide the Army with its required manpower; the final figures offered days later "doomed voluntarism".<sup>12</sup> "We seem to be on the brink of a precipice," Asquith wrote, "The practical question is, shall I be able...to devise and build a bridge?"<sup>13</sup> Some objections to conscription amongst members of the House of Commons and the Cabinet were based on larger political and ethical questions. Some like Sir John Simon, Home Secretary and the only member of the Cabinet to resign as a result of the passing of the "Bachelor's Bill" in January of 1916, saw conscription as an incursion upon the British tradition of voluntarism. Others, such as McKenna and the Liberal Walter Runciman at the Board of Trade, saw conscription as economically dangerous. Both questioned the viability of a scheme that would draw men from crucial manufacturing jobs on the Home Front thereby devastating Britain's export industry and causing a flight from pound. Moreover, if Great Britain's manpower were concentrated on the Western Front, who would supply the munitions to support a conscript army?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> R. J.Q. Adams and P. Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900-18* (London, 1987), 133.

<sup>13</sup> R. Jenkins, *Asquith* (London, 1964), 386.

<sup>14</sup> Adams & Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, 142.

Overriding these objections, Asquith introduced the "Bachelors' Bill" on 5 January, 1916. The Bill had passed through all stages by 27 January. Unmarried or widowed men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, without dependent children, would be drafted into national service. Men who were employed in work of national importance or could claim undue hardship as a result of family duties or ill health were exempted. Exemption on the basis of conscientious objection had been added after Simon had resigned.<sup>15</sup> At the instigation of Long<sup>16</sup>, the local tribunals which had been established under the Derby scheme were given statutory power and the responsibility for assessing individual claims to exemption from compulsory service.<sup>17</sup> The political consequences of the first Military Service Bill were less severe than Asquith had feared as McKenna and Runciman rescinded their threats of resignation, deciding to stay in office in an attempt to defend the principles of *laissez faire*; however, the results of the Act were disappointing. The exemptions listed under the Bachelors' Bill actually kept more men out of the Army than the voluntary system had done and the demands for manpower on the Western Front were not met. Agitation began in the House of Commons and amongst the public for the compulsion of married men as well.

The Bill for universal conscription was presented to the House of Commons in April of 1916, on the day after the Easter Rebellion in Dublin. Although the rising was eventually put down and a negotiated peace made

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<sup>15</sup>T.C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-19* (Fayetteville, 1981), 89-105.

<sup>16</sup> As President of the Local Government Board, Long had been instrumental in drafting the Bills for compulsory service.

<sup>17</sup>Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-19*, 84.

between the Ulster Unionists and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the agreement arranged by Lloyd George angered many Unionists who imposed a veto on the proposed partitioning of Ireland. The terms of the agreement also shocked some Liberals who saw the process as a "sell out" to Ulster<sup>18</sup>. Anger and fear regarding the Easter Rising combined with anxiety over the surrender of the BEF to the Turks at Kut in Mesopotamia<sup>19</sup> created a patriotic atmosphere in the House receptive to the passing of the second National Service Bill.<sup>20</sup> Despite the lack of resistance to the Bill in the House of Commons, Asquith's reputation and popularity rapidly declined after its passing as it seemed clear to most people that he had capitulated on this issue. The severity of the attacks on Asquith in the press and in the House of Commons damaged his confidence and vitality <sup>21</sup> and although he would stay in office for another seven months after the passing of conscription, that seven months was "not a reprieve but a stay of execution."<sup>22</sup>

One of the most ardent supporters of compulsory service was Lloyd George who moved from the Ministry of Munitions to become Secretary of State for War upon the death of Kitchener in early June of 1916. He had threatened to resign if Asquith did not impose universal conscription and took the lead in "harrying" conscientious objectors, a stand which may have enhanced his wartime popularity but which ultimately "drove another nail in the coffin of his radical reputation."<sup>23</sup> In the autumn of 1916, Lloyd George forced the final crisis for the terminally ill Asquith Coalition by

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<sup>18</sup> Turner, "British Politics and the Great War." 122.

<sup>19</sup> Bourne, *Britain and The Great War*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Jenkins, *Asquith*, 395.

<sup>21</sup> Adams & Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, 166.

<sup>22</sup> S. Koss, *Asquith* (London, 1976), 207.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 54-55.

proposing the formation of a new War Council with himself at the head, rather than Asquith. In the ensuing battle, Lloyd George enjoyed a groundswell of popular support as well as the cooperation of Bonar Law and numerous backbench Conservatives and Unionists. Despite the support of the Cabinet, Asquith's resignation, intended as a manoeuvre to force acquiescence from Lloyd George, backfired. Anti-Asquith feeling, sustained by Andrew Bonar Law, Conservative Leader in the House of Commons, allowed Lloyd George to form his own Coalition Government on 7 December 1916, at the request of the King.<sup>24</sup>

Upon the formation of his new Coalition, Lloyd George promised and delivered a complete reconstruction of the government, beginning with the creation of a new War Cabinet, consisting of five members: Lloyd George himself, Bonar Law, Viscount Milner, Arthur Henderson and the Earl of Curzon. In the various new departments and ministries Lloyd George installed numerous specialists and businessmen in his efforts to utilise the often overlooked entrepreneurial and economic expertise of these groups.<sup>25</sup> He is often credited with creating five new departments as well, Labour, National Service, Food Control, Shipping and, of course, Pensions.

In 1916 and early 1917, the crisis of Asquithian Liberalism had come to a head; even those who had supported Asquith realised in the course of 1916 that his leadership meant "certain and moderate disaster" while Lloyd George's leadership would mean either "absolute disaster or success".<sup>26</sup> The climactic tone of events in 1916 also brought the controversy over the administration of pensions and allowances to a critical point; Henderson and

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<sup>24</sup> Sweet, "The Domestic Scene." 13.

<sup>25</sup> M. Pugh, *Lloyd George*. (London, 1978), 117.

<sup>26</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 185.



Long realised that the issue of pensions and allowances had to be dealt with not only in the immediate context of wartime distribution and eligibility but in the long term, once peace had been achieved and servicemen began to return. Concerns over the confusion of long term pension administration were stimulated by the formation of the Reconstruction Committee in January of 1916 and by the early stirrings of organisation in the ex-servicemen's movement in September of that year.<sup>27</sup> Long and Henderson began to argue for the bureaucratisation of pensions and allowances, pointing to the muddle which could result once large numbers of men began returning from the Front, claiming their compensation from the State.

### The Statutory Committee

The creation of the Statutory Committee in late 1915 and the dogged attempts to maintain its existence throughout 1916, reflected the determination of Asquith, his official supporters and many individuals amongst the ranks of benevolent workers to support the primacy of private endeavour and voluntary effort in the face of wartime demands. Long term repugnance toward the idea of "impersonal" state maintenance and fears for the effect of such maintenance on the morale of the beneficiary forced stalling on the issue; ambivalence regarding the notion of "entitlement" undermined the public outcry for a single pensions authority until late in 1916. The Coalition's decision to allow the Treasury to advance one million pounds to the Statutory Committee in the spring of 1916 was a paradoxical

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<sup>27</sup> Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, 45-8.

attempt to prop up a tottering private system by strengthening its dependence on parliamentary funds, an attempt that mirrored the frustration and anxiety of many Liberals at the demands of total warfare.

The duties of the Statutory Committee were essentially those of the RPF and the SSFA; that is, its members were instructed to consider the "exceptional circumstances"<sup>28</sup> in the families of servicemen and make special one time grants or weekly allowances to supplement existing government maintenance. The Executive of the Statutory Committee consisted of twenty-seven members including Crown appointed individuals and representatives from various government departments as well as the RPF and the SSFA. Relying on information from local committees in all regions of Great Britain, the central Committee would "fill in the gaps" left by the administration of the War Office and the Admiralty thereby serving as a centralising force between various agencies of administration and distribution.<sup>29</sup> Exceptional circumstances included permanent ill health, large families, an exceptionally high cost of living due to geographical location, and, most significantly, the difference between prewar income and current income from allotments, pensions or allowances.

The regulations by which the Committee awarded supplementary grants were intended to preserve both the "personal element" assumed to be an inherent part of voluntary charitable endeavour and the class distinctions attendant upon a policy of relative deprivation. As Janis Lomas has pointed out, the class distinctions involved in the implementation of a "sliding scale" of supplementation contradict the assumption made by historians such

<sup>28</sup> Correspondence: Lt. Colonel Welby (Secretary to Statutory Committee) to the Treasury. 6 May 1916. PRO: T1 12033/5767/16.

<sup>29</sup> A. Griffith-Boscawen. "Activities of Government Departments during the War." 28 October 1917. PRO: PIN:15:1393

as Arthur Marwick, that legislation governing pensions and allowances had a levelling effect with regard to class in the immediate post-war period. Instead, the social and economic distinctions between a colonel and a sergeant was recognised not only in the amount of pension each received but in the standard of living to which it was assumed his wife or other dependents would be accustomed. The Statutory Committee and indeed, the later Ministry of Pensions, implemented measures preserve those distinctions, even if it meant using charity to do so.<sup>30</sup> By preserving the principles of voluntarism, those members of the Asquith Coalition, such as McKenna and Runciman, who were intent on preserving traditional liberal principles of poor relief could avert the potential danger of "universalism". The War Office statement to the Cabinet on the administration of naval and military pensions in the summer of 1916 made the case succinctly: "Any system of one self-contained department to deal with all kinds of pensions will endanger elasticity and militate against economy."<sup>31</sup>

The anomalous nature of the Statutory Committee was attested to by the intense controversy caused by its function and source of funding in the first six months of 1916. During debates over the passing of the Military and Naval Pensions Bill in the summer and autumn of 1915, many members of both Houses of Parliament had voiced their concern over the ill defined nature of this committee and, more particularly, over the dangers of providing Parliamentary monies to a body without representation in or accountability to a government department. The confusion and anger of these debates remained unresolved even after the Bill had passed despite the

<sup>30</sup> J. Lomas, "Justice no: Charity: War Widows in British Society, 1914-1990." (Ph.D. Diss., University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, 1997), 52.

<sup>31</sup> War Office Note on the Administration of Naval and Military Pensions. July 1916. PRO: CAB 37: 146/30.

amendment which required the Committee to report directly to the Treasury. Various newspapers and periodicals, ranging from *The Spectator* to *Common Cause* echoed these sentiments. Other, less respectable publications, in particular Horatio Bottomley's *Municipal Journal*, openly declared a "vendetta" against the Statutory Committee, demanding first and foremost, the abolition of the paid office of Vice-Chairman of the Committee. Wrangling between the Executive of the Statutory Committee and the Exchequer over funding had not been resolved by June of 1916 as the Coalition Government could not decide on the proper source or amount of government funding appropriate for such a body.<sup>32</sup> The Coalition Government, made nervous by a recalcitrant McKenna at the Exchequer, requested that members of the Statutory Committee raise as much of their funds through donation as possible<sup>33</sup> while the Statutory Committee claimed that the demands of administration required guaranteed public funds.<sup>34</sup> The role of the Statutory Committee was ill-defined, particularly in regard to its official or quasi-official position. Eventually, after a long and acrimonious debate in both the House of Commons and between the members of the Statutory Committee and the Treasury, the decision was made to issue one million pounds from the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom by an Act of Parliament. <sup>35</sup>

The composition of the Committee was equally anomalous. At its head was the Prince of Wales as Chairman, an appointment which reinforced the private, charitable nature of the enterprise. The Prince stated

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<sup>32</sup> Notes: Deputation of Statutory Committee Executive to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. 29 June 1916. PRO: T1 12003/34065.

<sup>33</sup> Memo: Treasury to Statutory Committee Executive. 1 June 1916. PRO: T1 12003/34065.

<sup>34</sup> Correspondence: A. Welby (Secretary) to Treasury. 6 May 1916. PRO: T1 12033/5767/16.

<sup>35</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 23 March 1916. Vol. LXXVII, 499-500.

that it was,

satisfactory to know that we shall be able to deal sympathetically with the cases of widows and dependents of Soldiers who may need more individual treatment than can be given under the necessarily somewhat rigid system of Government departments.<sup>36</sup>

His Royal Highness warned against abandoning the private and voluntary nature of work for the dependents of servicemen, suggesting that it was the job of the Statutory Committee to "see that this good work is not lost but rather adjusted and developed."<sup>37</sup> According to the Prince, the voluntary efforts of the RPF and the SSFA represented the "truest form of neighbourly kindness"<sup>38</sup> without which the ministrations of the state seemed cold and impersonal. The retention of a royal patron emphasised for the public and for the Coalition Government that the Statutory Committee was not a governmental department nor was it directly responsible to government since it was considered improper for a member of the royal family to serve under a Minister.<sup>39</sup> His role as the figurehead of the organisation served as a symbolic link between the private endeavours of groups such as the RPF and the SSFA, groups which also held representation on the Committee.

The real power in terms of the administration of the Committee lay in the hands of the Vice-Chairman. Cyril Jackson, the first Vice-Chairman was

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<sup>36</sup> Address: The Prince of Wales to the Statutory Committee. 17 January 1916. As quoted in Gildea. *Historical Record of the Work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Address: The Prince of Wales to the Statutory Committee. 17 January 1916, 192.

<sup>38</sup> Address: The Prince of Wales to the Royal Patriotic Fund, 1 February 1916. As quoted in Gildea. *Historical Record of the Work of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*, 194.

<sup>39</sup> Memo: W. Hayes Fisher (Executive Member of Statutory Committee) to Cabinet. 25 February 1917. PRO: PIN 15: 1007/2.

the chief inspector of the Board of Education as well as a member of the London County Council and a settlement worker who had acted as an investigator for the Poor Law Commission of 1906. An advocate of municipal reform and a strong believer in voluntary associations, Jackson had served on numerous commission and committees on unemployment, relief works and child labour before becoming the Vice-Chairman of the Statutory Committee. This office was a controversial one; the fact that he was paid a somewhat generous annual salary of seventeen hundred and fifty pounds roused the ire of some MP's and some members of the press and public. In the spring of 1916, a coalition of borough councils, including the boroughs of Stepney, Finsbury, Battersea, Shoredith, Bethnal Green, Chelsea and Islington in London and Stoke Newington outside London, lodged formal protests against the creation of the office and the extravagance of the salary in the "present national circumstances". Stewart M. Samuel (Bart.) the Conservative M.P. for Whitechapel, associated himself with the above protest by letter to the Treasury, as did C.W. Richards, chairman of the Committee for War Savings.<sup>40</sup> Though these protests had no immediate effect, they helped to undermine the already shaky reputation of the Statutory Committee.

The other members of the Committee included ten other Crown

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<sup>40</sup> Letters of Protest: County and Borough Councils to the Treasury. PRO: T1 11994/32502.

Nominees, including G.N. Barnes<sup>41</sup>, Sir Henry Craik<sup>42</sup>, Beatrice Webb<sup>43</sup>, and Lord Cheylesmere<sup>44</sup>. The Royal Patriotic fund had six representatives on the Statutory Committee, including William Hayes Fisher<sup>45</sup>, J.E. Rayner<sup>46</sup> and Pamela McKenna.<sup>47</sup> There were two SSFA representatives and seven government representatives from the departments of the Treasury, the Admiralty, the War Office, the National Health Commission, the Local Government Board<sup>48</sup>

The members of the Statutory Committee, in consultation with local committees to be established by 30 June 1916, were to serve as a court of appeal or a tribunal for those dependents who claimed to be unfairly treated by the state. Its role, in the words of Craik, was to serve as an "experiment" in expanding "by the rules of generosity and equity, the hard and fast rules

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<sup>41</sup> Barnes, a Labour M.P. was one of the original members of the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances which formulated the Naval and Military Pensions Bill. See Chapter 3 for more details. He would later become the first Minister of Pensions in December of 1916. See: A. Griffith-Boscawen. "Activities of Government Departments during the War." PRO: PIN15:1393.

<sup>42</sup> Sir Henry Craik was a civil servant, politician and writer who began parliamentary life at the age of sixty in 1906 as a Conservative M.P. for the University of Glasgow/Aberdeen seat.

<sup>43</sup> Beatrice Webb, social reformer and Labour theorist, was involved with the charitable endeavours of voluntary groups and the state administration of pensions during the Great War. As one of the authors of the 1909 minority Poor Law Report, she was considered to have an understanding of the nature of poverty and subsistence levels of maintenance.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert Eaton, Baron Cheylesmere was a retired Major General of the Grenadier Guards with a long term interest in regimental welfare. He was the chair of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help society and the Vice chair of the Red Cross Society in Britain. His politics were conservative.

<sup>45</sup> Hayes Fisher was the premier power in the Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation and its unofficial representative in Parliament. See Chapter 3 for further details of his involvement in the RPF & D. Blomfield-Smith. *Heritage of Help: The Story of the Royal Patriotic Fund*. (London, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Rayner was the Lord Mayor of Liverpool and one of the witnesses to appear before the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowances in 1915. See Chapter 3 for more details.

<sup>47</sup> Pamela McKenna was the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

<sup>48</sup> There were three representatives of the Local Government Board, one each from England, Ireland and Scotland.

that are binding upon the officials.”<sup>49</sup> Despite the “magnitude and generosity” of the pension system, William Hayes Fisher stated in the same debate, it was necessary to supplement those sums. It was unfortunate but unavoidable, he stated, that every widow was entitled to the same pension “no matter what her social conditions or position or the state of her health, or the rent of the house, or whether she had ever been capable of work or had worked.”<sup>50</sup> The inefficiency and “impersonality” of this system would be ameliorated by the work of the Statutory Committee; its members would deal with the subtleties necessarily omitted from the work of governmental departments. The idea of flat rates without the leavening agent of supplements was anathema to the members of the Statutory Committee and to many politicians and Cabinet members of the Liberal and Unionist parties<sup>51</sup>. A universal rate at a guaranteed subsistence level without supplement or grant on the basis of social position and need would throw the established economic system completely out of order. Not only was it difficult or even impossible to determine what that subsistence level was considering wartime inflation<sup>52</sup> but, more significantly, many women who had been extremely poor before the war might suddenly find themselves to be the recipients of an income far above that of their neighbours and family while many middle class women could find themselves in destitution or at least genteel poverty. The Statutory Committee was to adhere to a policy of “relative deprivation” thereby preserving the necessary distinctions.

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<sup>49</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 23 March 1916. Vol. LXXVII, 494.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>51</sup> Labour M.P.'s and supporters, such as Ramsay MacDonald and Dr. Marion Phillips supported universal flat rates but Henderson, as the Labour representative in the Cabinet, did not explicitly support this demand.

<sup>52</sup> Inflation had tripled the cost of living in some areas of Great Britain. See: Marwick, *The Deluge*, 125-6.



The above mentioned conditions and subtleties formed the basis of Statutory Committee regulations and guidelines. Based on information from local committees, they had the power to grant supplements to separation allowances or pensions, grant separation allowances where these were not available, make advances against separation allowances or pensions and make temporary allowances in necessitous cases. The size or continuity of those supplement and grants would be determined by income from separation allowance, allotments, allowances from employers, private and charitable income, regimental or local charity and casual earnings. The cost of living with regard to rents would also be taken into consideration. Childless widows were required to work whenever possible although widows with young children would not be forced to work.<sup>53</sup> In making these considerations, the Committee would take over the work of the RPF, the SSFA and the NRF.<sup>54</sup>

The Statutory Committee's scheme for supplementary pensions was based on percentages of prewar income. A widow with no children would be entitled to a total of at least fifty percent of her husband's<sup>55</sup> prewar income. A widow with one to three children should have at least sixty percent and a widow with more than three children should have at least sixty-six and two thirds percent. The minimum levels ranged from twelve shillings and six pence per week for a widow with no children to two pounds per week for a widow with more than three. That means that widow with no children whose husband had a prewar income of twenty-five shillings per week and

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<sup>53</sup> Report of the Finance Sub-Committee of the Statutory Committee. 6 May 1916.

PRO: T1 12033/5767/16.

<sup>54</sup> Report of the Finance Sub-Committee of the Statutory Committee. 23 May 1916.

PRO: T1 12003/34065/16.

<sup>55</sup> Or other household breadwinner.

who was in receipt of a pension of ten shillings per week would receive an extra two shillings and six pence per week to bring her up to fifty per cent and a minimum of twelve shillings and six pence.<sup>56</sup>

**Statutory Committee  
Supplement Guidelines**

	Percentage of Number of Children	Minimum/week pre-war income	£	s	d
Widow	0	50%		12	6
Widow	1 to 3	60%		17	6
Widow	3 or more	66 2/3%	2		

In the spring of 1916, the local committee of Cheshire submitted a number of case histories to the Statutory Committee as representative examples. Mrs. Mary Ann Davies, the wife of a soldier in Ellesmere Port had two children and was currently living on an income of one pound, four shillings and nine pence per week which placed her in the category of poor but not destitute. Her husband's prewar income had been four pounds per week or two hundred and eight pounds per year which placed them firmly in the middle class. By contrast, Mrs. Margaret Spilsbury of Altrincham, the wife of a soldier with one child, had a current income of only twenty shillings and nine pence; however, her husband's prewar income, as near as could be determined was approximately thirty shillings. Thus, the decrease in her wartime income was not extreme and her destitution was merely a

<sup>56</sup> Report of the Finance Sub-Committee. 6 May 1916. PRO: T1 12003/34065/16.

matter of degree.<sup>57</sup> These cases were intended to illustrate the inequitable nature of a flat rate pension scheme which could not be adjusted to reflect the standard of living to which individual recipients had been accustomed.

The Executive of the Statutory Committee, based in London, were to be supported by a network of Local War Pensions Committees, one in each county and each town of over fifty thousand inhabitants. Jackson informed the local committees that they were to fund themselves as much as possible from donations and local rates.<sup>58</sup> The knowledge that local committees would not be in receipt of public funding despite the "exorbitant" grant of one million pounds to the Statutory Committee<sup>59</sup> might explain the lethargic local response to Statutory Committee initiatives in the spring of 1916. It became clear by May of that year that the 30 June deadline for the formation of local committees was not realistic. Many local committees<sup>60</sup> had sent schemes which were not in accord with the guidelines circulated by the central Committee. Even worse, a significant number had simply failed to respond.<sup>61</sup> By November of 1916, there were only three hundred Local War Pensions Committees set up in Great Britain and twenty nine in Ireland. Nearly nine hundred of the twelve hundred committees operating under their auspices were actually local committees of the NRF, SSFA and RPF.<sup>62</sup> The Statutory Committee itself was operating with a relatively limited staff of sixty persons, twenty of whom were volunteers or whose services had

<sup>57</sup> Specimen Cases: Cheshire Local Committee to Statutory Committee. March 1916.  
PRO: T1 12033/5767/16.

<sup>58</sup> Memo: C. Jackson to Local Committees of the Statutory Committee. June 1916. PRO: T1 12003/34065.

<sup>59</sup> The sum was viewed as extravagant by the press and some members of the House of Parliament. See Chapter 6 for more details.

<sup>60</sup> These were local committees of the RPF, SSFA and NRF.

<sup>61</sup> Memo: Jackson to Local Committees. June 1916. PRO: PIN15 337/3.

<sup>62</sup> Memo: Jackson to Pensions Committee. November 1916. PRO: PIN15 337/7.

been “temporarily lent” by various government departments. The only permanent appointment was that of Accountant, at a salary of four hundred pounds per year.<sup>63</sup>

By May of 1916, the Statutory Committee had appointed six local inspectors and one chief inspector at salaries of two hundred pounds and three hundred pounds per year respectively. These inspectors were required to perform a means test in each individual case of award and administer extensive questions to claimants. As well, they were required to examine the accounts of local committees and ensure that these committees were following the guidelines laid out by the Statutory Committee.<sup>64</sup> Despite the efforts of these inspectors, the Statutory Committee’s system was functioning in only the most minimal sense by the summer of 1916, hampered by anomaly at the national level and the unwillingness or inability to cooperate the local level.

The rationalising capacities of the Statutory Committee had failed to materialise. Indeed, the Committee had not only perpetuated the chaos of administration but had added to it. By November of 1916, pension and separation allowance administration at the local level was even less uniform than it had been at the passing of the October 1915 Naval and Military Pensions Act. Added to the chaos of officialdom which divided the duties of pension and separation allowance administration between over half a dozen offices or institutions was the quasi-official bumbling of an ill defined Central committee served by similarly quasi-official local committees and a mixture of charities and benevolent societies, some of which, like the NRF, were themselves quasi-official and poorly defined. By the time Cabinet members

<sup>63</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 9 August 1916. vol. LXXXV, 1074.

<sup>64</sup> Memo: A. Welby to Treasury. nd (probably April 1916). PRO: T1 12003/34065.

Arthur Henderson (Labour) and Walter Long (Conservative) had begun to demand an official investigation in the summer and autumn of 1916, the Statutory Committee had already begun to look terminal. It was the victim not only of a vitriolic press campaign and attacks in the House of Commons but its own inertia, disorganisation and unwillingness to desert the principles of voluntarism despite its state funded status.

### The Response of Charity

The establishment of the Statutory Committee resulted in the inclusion of some charitable groups, such as the RPF and the NRF, and the exclusion of others, most particularly the SSFA. Despite the ties to officialdom maintained by all three of these groups, only the RPF, perhaps because of its parliamentary representation in the person of William Hayes Fisher<sup>65</sup>, was chosen to form the administrative nucleus. According to the initial conception of the Statutory Committee, the duties of the NRF and the SSFA were to be absorbed into the work of the Statutory Committee. In the case of the former, the objections were muted; as a semi-governmental body with an executive committee which included the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer<sup>66</sup>, the NRF was easily absorbed. The members of the SSFA, however, were not pleased at the absorption of their duties. The addition of

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<sup>65</sup> Hayes Fisher was a Conservative M.P. also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board, a junior Ministerial position which would afford him a central position in negotiations over the future of the Committee during the formation of the Ministry of Pensions.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting : National Relief Fund. May 1915. Imperial War Museum Women's Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8: Reel 24. Pamela McKenna was also a member of the executive of the Royal Patriotic Fund after 1915. Royal Patriotic Fund: Twelfth Report (1915) *British Sessional Papers, 1916*. vol. xiv, 477.

two representatives of their organisation on the Statutory Committee did not alter their sense that the SSFA had been slighted.

In his address to the annual meeting of the SSFA in September of 1916, Lieutenant General Edmund Elles, a member of the SSFA Executive Committee, expressed the anger of the Association at both the lack of governmental recognition of their war service and the workings of the Statutory Committee. "I cannot say the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association liked the business," he stated, "I think they did not." Although the government had "brushed aside this Association with what we think, perhaps, was scant courtesy and no very great gratitude"<sup>67</sup>, the members of the SSFA knew that the work they had done was essential to victory. The Asquith Coalition's lack of gratitude for the services rendered by the SSFA was reflected also in Captain Wickham Legg's decision to reject the position of Secretary to the Statutory Committee, a position offered to him in May of 1916 by Cyril Jackson. Despite the perquisites and national importance of the salaried position, Legg decided his current work on the executive of the SSFA was of "paramount importance" in comparison those duties proffered by a paid position on the executive of the Statutory Committee.<sup>68</sup>

The comments of Colonel James Gildea, the founder of the SSFA, expressed somewhat smug satisfaction at the inability of the Statutory Committee to administer its affairs with efficiency, particularly with regard to the formation of local committees. In March of 1916, the Statutory Committee "having no organisation of any kind and finding itself in difficulties," asked the SSFA to step in and direct the work of two hundred of

<sup>67</sup> Lieut.-General Edmund Elles. Address to the Thirty-First Annual Meeting, 5 September 1916. as quoted in Gildea. *Historical Record of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*, 207.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

its own branches toward filling the gap left by the inefficiency of the Statutory Committee.<sup>69</sup> The funds for the workings of the SSFA's branch committees would be supplied out of the one million pound grant given to the Statutory Committee by the Asquith Coalition Government despite, as Gildea noted ironically, "the chief reason stated by the Government for depriving the Association of its war work being the impossibility of entrusting a Voluntary Body with Public Funds."<sup>70</sup> The SSFA executive agreed to help, regardless of the "great inconvenience occasioned by the work" and counted on the "public spirit" of its members to animate their work for the Statutory Committee.<sup>71</sup>

Despite government attempts to centralise the administration of pensions and allowances in 1916, the numbers of charities devoted to the welfare of military dependents continued to expand. The centralisation of the process meant only that the new charities were increasingly specialised in their objectives, their work directed specifically at housing for slain or disabled officers' families or the provision of home work for needy war widows. In 1916, at least three charities were added to already burgeoning roster of benevolent societies for military dependents; these were the Jutland Fund, the Officer's Families Housing Fund and the Milton Home Industries Fund. Each of these catered to specific segments of the dependent population and all of them were based on traditional, relatively Conservative principles governing the provision of charity.

The Jutland Fund, founded and headed by Lady Beatty, whose husband had been second in command of the British Fleet at the Battle of

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<sup>69</sup> Gildea, *Historical Record of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association*, 197-198.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

Jutland, opened in August of 1916. Her idea of state duty "towards the children of dead heroes," was "In a nutshell...: Feed them, clothe them, educate them. If we fail in these three essentials, we fail in our trust toward the gallant men who have so nobly laid down their lives for us."<sup>72</sup> The fund provided supplementary pensions to the widows of sailors who had died at Jutland and helped to educate their orphans. Grants were not good, Lady Beatty declared, because the widows merely "frittered them away." Widows and mothers needed to be able to count on a weekly or monthly sum; "moreover, the feeling of surveillance the monthly letter and cheque gives has a good effect."<sup>73</sup> Although some of her statements might indicate that Lady Beatty belonged to the closely observing school of regimental charity, she claimed that there was "no stigma of charity attached to the help we give," because "{the recipients} know that the money has been sent in for their use as a tribute to their husbands' heroism."<sup>74</sup>

The Housing Association for Officers' Families was similarly conservative in its policies and processes. The fear of universality which prompted the establishment of the more "personal" Statutory Committee with supplementary powers rather than the more practical government department or ministry also prompted the formation of charitable concerns such as this one. Founded in late 1916, the Housing Association was dedicated, like the Officers' Families Fund<sup>75</sup> to preserving, in a close and personal fashion, the distinctions between the widows and orphans of officers

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<sup>72</sup> Pamphlet: Jutland Fund for Widows and Orphans. 1916. Imperial War Museum, Women's Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/ Reel 36.

<sup>73</sup> Pamphlet: Jutland Fund for Widows and Orphans. 1916. Imperial War Museum, Women's Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/ Reel 36.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> See Chapter 1 for a description of the work of this group.



and those of the rank and file. Its royal patroness was Queen Alexandra and its Vice-Presidents included Asquith, the Earl of Derby, Austen Chamberlain, Arthur Balfour and Admiral Jellicoe. Its executive was equally prominent socially and even more conservative politically, listing Lady Dorothy Long<sup>76</sup> and Viscount Milner<sup>77</sup> among its members. It was founded with the intention of providing "suitable" accommodation in flats and houses at low rents for the widows and orphans of slain officers and the families of disabled officers; in 1916-1918, they received nearly thirty thousand pounds in donations and negotiated for a number of houses as well as a block of flats in Hampstead.<sup>78</sup>

The original appeal for funds on behalf of the Association was made by the brilliant but arrogant former Conservative M.P. , former Viceroy of India and Lord Privy Seal, the Earl of Curzon who stated that ,

The Council now records its deep gratitude to those who have so freely supported its labours and trusts that the multiplicity of calls on the public for worthy charities...arising out of the war will not dim their sense of obligation to help...those who have lost their natural protectors.<sup>79</sup>

A donation to the Housing Association would be a "splendid memorial to a fallen friend," Curzon declared, " a worthy monument to the heroes of the

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<sup>76</sup> Mrs. Walter Long was, obviously, Walter Long's wife.

<sup>77</sup> Viscount Milner was a Conservative Imperialist, the former High Commissioner of South Africa after the Boer War , who introduced as many of his devoted young Milnerites into key Cabinet and Civil Service positions as possible between 1916 and 1918, thereby creating an extensive power base for himself and his political allies. He was a strong supporter of state intervention hence his role as the President of the pro-conscription National Service League during the war. See: J. Marlowe. *Milner: Apostle of Empire*. (London,1976), 257-306.

<sup>78</sup> Report: The Housing Association for Officers' Families, 1916-18. Imperial War Museum, Women's Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

nation.”<sup>80</sup> Harold Begbie, a prolific pro-war propagandist, added his own appeal for the Association with his story of “The Captain’s Lady”. What becomes of the Captain’s lady? he asked, “The government, duly grateful for husband’s sacrifice on the altar of patriotism, gives her a hundred pounds a year with a little something extra for the baby.” at which point she, “shifts for herself, gives up her home and servants.”<sup>81</sup> In line with its efforts to preserve the distinctions between officers and men, the Housing Association would endeavour to ensure that the Captain’s lady, unused to “shifting for herself” would receive cheap housing in a flat or house “suitable” to her station in life.

At the other end of the scale, fears for the work ethic of the widows and orphans of the rank and file prompted the formation of the Milton Home Industries Association, Portsmouth in 1916. The temptations of idleness or dependence upon the state and charity on the part of war widows was anathema to many people across the political spectrum<sup>82</sup>; in Portsmouth, a group of women formed the Milton Home Industries Association which would farm out “appropriate” work to the widows of soldiers and sailors in order to enable those widows with large families to supplement their pensions without leaving home and to provide “congenial mental and manual occupation” to those who might otherwise become a

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<sup>80</sup> “An Open Letter from the The Earl Curzon of Kedleston on behalf of the Housing Association for Officers’ Families.” 1916. Imperial War Museum, Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

<sup>81</sup> H. Begbie, “The Captain’s Lady.” on behalf of the Housing Association for Officers’ Families. 1916. Imperial War Museum, Women’s Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

<sup>82</sup> In fact, Helena Swanwick and Celia Rackham, representing the NUWSS as witnesses before the Select Committee on Pensions and Allowance, proposed a similar scheme of retraining and employment for the wives and widows of servicemen. See: “Second Special Report on Pensions and Grants.” *British Sessional Papers*, 1915-16. vol. iv, 90-267.

burden on the state. The scheme was approved by the Statutory Committee in 1916.<sup>83</sup>

The efforts to entrench private, voluntary and personal service via the establishment of charities devoted to specific classes of military dependent reflected the growing fear of impending universality occasioned by the public's demand for "one pension authority" and calls for the removal of the "taint of charity". The creation of the Cabinet Committee on Pensions in September of that year reflected the clamouring of public opinion for a solution to the administrative problems encountered by the dependents of servicemen; the creation of new charities reflected the fear that that solution would involve the transferal of voluntary effort to a government department and the eradication of the good done by benevolent societies in the first two years of the war.

### The Committee on Pensions

The Cabinet Committee on Pensions was formed in September of 1916 at the initiative of two Cabinet members at opposite ends of the political spectrum whose interests in the administration of pensions and allowances converged in similar convictions regarding the necessity for reform through the establishment of a single pensions authority. They were Walter Long, a staunch Conservative who had taken over from Herbert Samuel at the Local

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<sup>83</sup> Pamphlet: Milton Home Industries, Portsmouth, 1916. Imperial War Museum, Women's Collection, Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

Government Board in May of 1915<sup>84</sup> , and Arthur Henderson, the wartime leader of the Labour Party and Paymaster General after August of 1916.<sup>85</sup> Both men were aware of the high level of public anger regarding the perceived inequities of the system, having received deputations and dealt with angry individuals as governmental representatives and as executive members of various benevolent societies. Both were anxious to reform the existing government policy to conform to a more rational and efficient model through the long overdue introduction of a single pensions board or government department. Long began to advise Cabinet of the necessity for such an inquiry in the early spring of 1916, only months after the establishment of the Statutory Committee; Henderson joined his campaign in the autumn of 1916. , Asquith appointed the Committee at the end of September, as a result of the circulation of Henderson's urgent Cabinet memo of 19 September 1916. Along with McKenna, Henderson and Long would interview only three witnesses, one each from the War Office, the Admiralty and the Statutory Committee, and submit a decisive report to Cabinet within two weeks.

Long was an "extreme protectionist"<sup>86</sup> whose solidly Conservative policies and adherence to the Disrealian tradition of responsible Tory paternalism constituted a departure from the traditional Liberalism of his

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<sup>84</sup> Long was an experienced M.P. who had been in the House of Commons since 1880. He had had held various Cabinet posts in the Salisbury and Balfour administrations was also the leader of the Irish Unionists in Parliament after 1906. He joined the Asquith Coalition at its inception in May of 1915.

<sup>85</sup> Henderson was originally placed at the Board of Education as the sole Labour representative in the Asquith Coalition Cabinet; the position was honorary as Henderson had no experience or knowledge of education. By August of 1916, Henderson had convinced Asquith to move him to the more active and powerful office of Paymaster General. See: F.M. Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester, 1989), 50-51.

<sup>86</sup> Taylor, *English History*, 40.

predecessor, Samuel.<sup>87</sup> Long was also a member of the National Relief Fund executive<sup>88</sup> and his wife was one of the founding members of the Housing Association for Officers' Families, the aforementioned, deeply conservative charity. In his memo of 6 March 1916, Long advised the Cabinet that a committee on pensions should be formed immediately, composed of Members of Parliament who had not previously been responsible for the administration of pensions and allowances.<sup>89</sup> He stated that the Admiralty agreed with him on this matter<sup>90</sup> and was anxious to rid itself of the system of overlapping authorities by instituting a central agency of administration. There was much at stake in this matter, according to Long. It was not an exaggeration, he claimed, "to say that the financial security of the state and the very existence of thousands of the best and most deserving of men and women largely depends on the order of pensions and separation allowances."<sup>91</sup> Long reiterated his points in a memo of 11 April 1916, drawing the attention of Cabinet to a series of deputations to his office on the part of various citizen's groups, most notably the Association of Poor Law Unions who complained of the lack of coordination between regulations and practice in the administration of pensions and allowances. "These representations," Long stated, "will... serve to illustrate some of the defects of the existing system and additional evidence of the growing dissatisfaction

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<sup>87</sup> Samuel was associated with the "New Liberal" school of politics but, according to his biographer, Bernard Wasserstein, had retained an attachment to traditional Liberal views, particularly with regard to poor relief. Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel*, 167-70.

<sup>88</sup> Report: National Relief Fund. 1915. Imperial War Museum Women's Collection. Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

<sup>89</sup> Long suggested this in order to avoid bias which is ironic considering his own and Henderson's active involvement in charities and on semi-official committees.

<sup>90</sup> Long's claim was something of an exaggeration, if not an outright fabrication as the Admiralty would resist the incorporation of their duties into a Ministry or Department until the final stages of the passing of the Bill in December of 1916.

<sup>91</sup> Memo: W. Long. to Cabinet. 6 March 1916. PRO: CAB 37:144/14.

with the present system."<sup>92</sup>

In September of 1916, Henderson circulated his own memo detailing the defects of the system. It was his duty, he stated, to call attention to the unsatisfactory situation of administration and to direct the Cabinet to three main points of dissatisfaction: the delay in paying pensions, the lack of uniformity in awards and the overlapping and consequent wastefulness of the machinery. He blamed the three main problems on the separation of powers within government bureaucracy. Too many different departments, Henderson declared, had control of various aspects of the system. The public and parliamentary consensus was in favour of a single pensions board dealing with all aspects of administration. The dissatisfaction had been expressed not only in debates in the House of Commons but in communications received by Henderson in his capacity as the Chair of the Chelsea Commission.<sup>93</sup> Henderson was also on the executive of the National Relief Fund from the beginning of the war<sup>94</sup> and had joined the executive of the RPF in 1915.<sup>95</sup>

Henderson's memo served as the final catalyst for the formation of the committee and on 27 September 1916, Asquith appointed Henderson, McKenna and Long to inquire into the process by which the Coalition government could establish a Pensions Board or Department. <sup>96</sup> The Committee represented the wartime composition of the Asquith Coalition, consisting of a firm Conservative intent on establishing protectionist policies

<sup>92</sup> Memo: W. Long to Cabinet. 11 April 1916. PRO: CAB 37:145/26.

<sup>93</sup> Memo: A. Henderson to Cabinet. PRO: CAB 37:155/30. The Chelsea Commission was the institution responsible for the administration of pensions for wounded soldiers.

<sup>94</sup> Report: National Relief Fund . 1915. Imperial War Museum: Women's Collection: Benevolent Organisations 8/Reel 24.

<sup>95</sup> Report: Royal Patriotic Fund. 1915. Cd. 8026. *British Sessional Papers, (1916)* vxxxii, 23.

<sup>96</sup> Prime Minister's Note. 27 September 1916. PRO: PIN 4:111/1.

and adhering to benevolent paternalism, an equally firm, individualist, Liberal in the process of bending to the wartime necessity of state intervention and a co-operative Labour leader whose support for the war had neutered dissent amongst Parliamentary Labour M.P.'s. Their first meeting was on 28 September 1916 at the offices of the Local Government Board. All three members were strongly of the opinion that there should be one department or Pensions Board; thus, their goal became not to explore the possibility but to find the most direct route to establishing the reality.<sup>97</sup> The agreement amongst three such politically divergent members of the Coalition demonstrates the level of consensus amongst the Cabinet regarding the necessity, if not the desirability, of establishing a governmental department or board to centralise and rationalise the pensions and allowance process.

The three witnesses examined by the committee in the two weeks of its existence were Henry Forster<sup>98</sup>, on behalf of the War Office, Hayes Fisher, on behalf of the Statutory Committee and the Local Government Board and Dr. T.P. MacNamara,<sup>99</sup> on behalf of the Admiralty. Hayes Fisher was the first witness at the committee's meeting on 3 October 1916. He quickly proclaimed his own support for the idea of a central agency in the form of a pensions board, pointing to the waste of time, money and labour expended in a poorly organised and unstandardised process. The lack of coordination

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<sup>97</sup> Minutes of Meeting: Cabinet Committee on Pensions. 28 September 1916. PRO: PIN4:111/2.

<sup>98</sup> Henry William Forster was a Conservative M.P. for Sevenoaks, the former Lord Commissioner for the Treasury in Balfour's administration (1902-05), and the current Financial Secretary to the War Office. He was appointed Governor General of Australia after the Great War.

<sup>99</sup> T.P. MacNamara, a Canadian who came to England at an early age, was a schoolteacher, the editor of *The Schoolmaster* and the former president of the National Union of Teachers. He was the Liberal M.P. for North Camberwell, had previously been the Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board and had served as Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty since 1908. He would later be the Minister of Labour in the post-war Lloyd George Government.

between the Admiralty and the War Office was at the root of the problem, Hayes Fisher maintained, and the remedy was to establish a board consisting of members from both Departments as well as from the Treasury. The Army should have four representatives, he stated, the Navy two and the Treasury three. As well, the board should have three panels each with its own Treasury representative. Most significantly, Hayes Fisher argued that the Statutory Committee should operate as an advisory body, his attempt to safeguard the survival of his own creation in its present form.<sup>100</sup>

Forster, as a representative of the War Office, announced that the War Office would gladly acquiesce in any plan to create a central agency. The Ministry was willing to hand over the administration of both pensions and allowances, although the administration of long service pensions might remain amongst that department's duties. However, if the Committee saw fit to transfer all War Office powers to the new agency, there would be no objections.<sup>101</sup>

The Admiralty, however, was not quite so malleable. Dr. MacNamara stated his objections forcefully to the Committee, making it clear that the Admiralty did not accept the criticisms of its administration offered by Henderson and Long. The accusations of delay, inequity and neglect could be applied to the administration of pensions and allowances through the War Office, MacNamara claimed, but the Navy had firm control of its own offices. The problems lay not with the overlapping powers of the Admiralty and the War Office, he argued, for the two had duties which were entirely separate and could not possibly be confused. Instead, the overlap in administration and the resulting problems were the fault of private charitable

<sup>100</sup> Minutes of Meeting: Cabinet Committee on Pensions. 3 October 1916. PRO: PIN4:111/3.

<sup>101</sup> Report: Cabinet Committee on Pensions. 13 October 1916. PRO: CAB 37:157/30.



agencies, the members of which insisted on interfering in what should be a purely military and naval concern. To remove the duties of the Admiralty with regard to pensions and allowances would prove a "disastrous sterilisation of the function which we are all proud to carry out." The scope of the Admiralty's duties was much more limited than that of the War Office, MacNamara claimed, describing the Navy as "only a little domestic family circle." All of the work regarding pensions and allowances was "done by men who are fully imbued with fine sentiment that our responsibility towards the sailor does not close when he is laid aside and broken or when he has passed away." If the duties were to be placed in the hands of an impersonal Governmental department, he warned, the effect on morale would be debilitating.<sup>102</sup>

The Committee on Pensions filed its report with Cabinet on 13 October 1916. In that report, Henderson, Long and McKenna recommended the transfer of War Office but not Admiralty powers to the proposed Government Department. In this report, the Committee allied itself with MacNamara's position on the exclusion of Admiralty powers, declaring that the problems of administration were the province of the War Office and that interference with Admiralty control of pensions and allowances would "materially affect the efficiency of the Navy". The Committee also endorsed Hayes Fisher's recommendations regarding the role of the Statutory Committee, recommending that their local committees be maintained in order to play an advisory role and to coordinate local efforts.<sup>103</sup>

The publication of their report ended two weeks of inquiry into the

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<sup>102</sup> Memo: MacNamara to Cabinet. 2 October 1916 (in preparation for meeting of 3 October 1916). PRO: P/N4:111/7.

<sup>103</sup> Report: Cabinet Committee on Pensions. 13 October 1916. PRO: CAB 37:157/30.

issue. Compared to the large number and wide variety of witnesses interviewed by the House of Commons Select Committee in 1915, the Cabinet Committee's roster of three made it clear that they were less interested in exploring the ramifications of this issue than establishing the route by which centralisation and bureaucratisation of the process could be achieved. Their goals were specific, the variables subtle. The Cabinet Committee was intent on establishing centralisation but not at the cost of alienating the three official and quasi-official powers that currently controlled the disparate administration of pensions and allowances. A true coalition, Henderson, Long and McKenna attempted to please everyone involved. Public opinion demanded a minister; the War Office requested to be relieved of the burden of duties; the Admiralty demanded autonomy and the Statutory Committee asked simply to continue to exist. In their effort to appease everyone and offend no one, the Cabinet Committee succeeded - for the interim. However, the attempt to draft a bill based on these recommendations would founder as M.P.'s in the House of Commons declared the compromise to be unworkable.

### The Ministry of Pensions Bill

Henderson presented the first "Board" of Pensions Bill on 14 November 1916. As the name implies, this Bill, which would be substantially amended by the time it was actually passed in December of that year, called for the establishment of a Pensions "Board" rather than a Ministry with Henderson as President and MacNamara, Forster and Hayes Fisher as members. The Board would take over the powers of the Chelsea Hospital Commission, the Army Council, the Secretary of State for War Department and the Statutory Committee, in so far as those powers related to Parliamentary monies. This left the Admiralty's duties and the advisory and some of the administrative capacities of the Statutory Committee intact. Henderson described the limited number of local committees which had been established by this time as valuable resources for both advice and local coordination.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the responsibility for separation allowances would be left to the War Office, as this function was considered short term; the transfer of a power which would terminate at the end of the war was too disruptive to contemplate.<sup>105</sup>

In this Bill, the Statutory Committee was retained as an advisory body; some members of that Committee, particularly Jackson and Hayes Fisher, were relieved by the inclusion of this clause, having campaigned vigorously to preserve at least some of their powers. In October and November of 1916, following on the publication of the Cabinet Committee's Report, both Jackson and Hayes Fisher had requested a series of meetings with Henderson.

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<sup>104</sup> Report: Cabinet Committee on Pensions. 13 October 1916. PRO: CAB 37:157/30.

<sup>105</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 14 November 1916. vol. LXXXVII; 639. The War Office would also maintain responsibility for long service pensions.

Prior to the presentation of the Bill in Parliament, Jackson had wrung a promise from Henderson that the Statutory Committee would remain an independent body left with sufficient public funds to carry out its original duties.<sup>106</sup> Placing the Statutory Committee under a minister would change its whole character, Jackson claimed, and the process would lose the advantage of the Presidency of the Prince of Wales.<sup>107</sup>

Jackson's arguments against the dissolution of the Statutory Committee were based on his assessment of the public concern, even hysteria over the issue of pensions and separation allowances. While he owned that the Statutory Committee had not established local committees as quickly as had been expected by Parliament and the public, he declared that the expectations placed on that committee had been unrealistic and that the abolition of the Statutory Committee had, illogically, become necessary to satisfy the unreasonable "public outcry for one Pension authority".<sup>108</sup> The public outcry, Jackson alleged, was the result of two things: the increased cost of living occasioned by the demands of war and the creation of a new Army. The days of the independently monied officer class and destitute rank and file were over and the Army was being drawn from all classes. Consequently, the old levels of allowance and pension were now inadequate. The breakdown of the Army machinery in the face of new demands had occasioned anger in the press while the constant pressures of public opinion had exacerbated the problems of administration. Wrangling and stalling in the House of Commons had increased the tenor of the debate, resulting in the current threat to the existence of the Statutory Committee. Jackson argued that the

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<sup>106</sup> Memo: C. Jackson to the Statutory Committee. 11 November 1916. PRO: PIN 15:337/8.

<sup>107</sup> Memo: C. Jackson to the Statutory Committee. 24 October 1916. PRO: PIN 15:337/7.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Pensions Board would be more valuable if it dealt with principles rather than administration, a policy also advocated by Hayes Fisher.

In a memo to the Cabinet, Hayes Fisher pointed out that expectations had been raised amongst soldiers and sailors that the Statutory Committee would make necessary supplements to their pensions and allowances. The exclusion of the Admiralty could mean that the Pension Board would become the focus of conflict if individual soldiers, sailors and dependents had yet another avenue for appeal, beyond the two departments. In fact, the Board could easily become an *ipso facto* Court of Appeal to decide questions of fact with regard to the award and distribution of allowances and pensions.<sup>109</sup>

The whole subject was full of difficulties according to Hayes Fisher. What, for example, would be the function of the Statutory Committee, assuming its existence was preserved? Would it receive state funds? Would the position of Vice-Chair continue to be a salaried one? What would be the relationship of the Statutory Committee to the Pensions Board, the Admiralty or unofficial benevolent societies for that matter? Would the Civil Liabilities Committee<sup>110</sup> which had been established in 1916 in order to deal with the pension claims of disabled servicemen, continue to exist? What would the relationship be between the Local Government Board and the Pensions Board?

The Government had also to consider, Hayes Fisher stated, the position of the Prince of Wales. As royal patron and President of the Statutory Committee, the Prince could not be retained in his capacity if the Statutory Committee became subject to a government department. The Prince had had to be cajoled in the first place to take the position and, in his

<sup>109</sup> Memo: Hayes Fisher to Cabinet. 24 October 1916. PRO: CAB 37:158/9.

<sup>110</sup> Hayes Fisher was also the Chairman of the Civil Liabilities Committee.

acceptance speech, had raised the hopes and expectations of the Statutory Committee's potential claimants. If the Statutory Committee were to be dissolved, the Government would have to "be careful to give no encouragement to the idea that the Statutory Committee, over which the Prince of Wales presides, has been in any way a failure." The issue would require great tact and diplomacy on the part of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. The only way it could be solved and dealt with properly, Hayes Fisher declared, was through "hearty cooperation" between the Statutory Committee and the Pensions Board.<sup>111</sup> Henderson, McKenna and Long had listened to the arguments of Jackson and Hayes Fisher and their concerns were reflected in the composition of the first Board of Pensions Bill.

On its presentation in the House of Commons, the first Board of Pensions Bill caused a great deal of debate. Objections to the Bill centred on the exclusion of the Admiralty's duties from those to be absorbed by the Pensions Board, the nature of a "board" versus a bona fide government department and minister and the retention of the Statutory Committee as an advisory body with public funds. The criticisms occasioned by the introduction of the Board of Pensions Bill on 14 November 1916 were offered primarily by Hogge's group, the same group of mostly Liberal, backbench MP's who had been highly critical of the Naval and Military Pensions Bill in 1915. Henderson defended the Bill on behalf of the Coalition Government and the Pension Committee. Hayes Fisher and Henry Craik defended it on behalf of the Statutory Committee and MacNamara and Forster defended the controversial points regarding the exclusion of Admiralty dealings and War Office long service pensions. The debate was an angry one in which

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<sup>111</sup> Memo: Hayes Fisher to Cabinet. 24 October 1916. PRO: CAB 37:158/9.

Henderson was at one point advised by an anonymous member to burn the Royal Warrants establishing the scale of allowances and pensions.<sup>112</sup>

Sir Ellis Griffith, Liberal MP for Anglesey, questioned the nature of a “board” versus a ministry and asked Henderson to explain whether all four members of the Board would have equal authority or whether executive authority for decision making would be vested in the President, namely Henderson. He stated that there should be one person in charge of all aspects of the administration of pensions and allowances, rather than four “half timers” whose duties elsewhere might cause them to neglect the singularly important duties at the Board of Pensions. He also questioned the advisability of excluding the Admiralty from the functions of the Board and leaving the distribution of supplementary separation allowances and pensions in the hands of the Statutory Committee.<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Samuel echoed Griffith’s concerns, arguing that the size of the Board was worrisome to many who felt that the questions involved in the administration of pensions and allowances were too important to be decided by only four men.<sup>114</sup>

Hogge concentrated on the latter points introduced by Griffith, pointing to the confusion which could be engendered by leaving some pension functions, specifically long service pensions<sup>115</sup> in the hands of the War Office and all pension functions in the hands of the Admiralty. The separation of duties was particularly irrational as the Admiralty would maintain a representative position on the small but powerful Board of

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<sup>112</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 14 November 1916. vol. LXXXVII, 648.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 649-660.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.

<sup>115</sup> As opposed to disability or widows’ pensions, for example.

Pensions. Why should the Admiralty have representation on the Board, Hogge asked, if they refused to cooperate with its functions? The lack of efficiency and rationality in this affair, Hogge stated, had undermined public confidence in the Asquith Coalition's handling of the administration. The President of the Board would need to address the public's crisis of confidence.<sup>116</sup>

Craik defended the retention of the Statutory Committee in the Bill, but declared his dissatisfaction with the lack of executive authority vested in the Board. The Government was about to bring in one more organising body which would result in no more coordination than before, Craik argued. Instead, the institutions involved in the process needed a single non-political body with executive powers to coordinate their efforts.<sup>117</sup>

When the Bill was offered for a second reading a week later, its controversial clauses were not substantially altered. In the words of Hogge, the House of Commons was "not one step forrader." The mess, he declared, would only be greater if the Bill was passed.<sup>118</sup> The long debate occasioned by the second reading of the Bill centred on the same points concerning the Admiralty, the Statutory Committee and the definition of a "board". The determination of the House of Commons to reject the controversial clauses convinced Henderson and Hayes Fisher to withdraw the Bill and amend some its most central clauses, offering it in a significantly altered form on 4 December 1916, at the height of the moribund Asquith Coalition's final crisis.

From this point on, the Bill was referred to as the "Ministry of

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<sup>116</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 14 November 1916. vol. LXXXVII,661-68.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 673-6.

<sup>118</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 21 November 1916. vol. LXXXVII, 1334.



Pensions Bill". A government department with a single member of cabinet as its minister would take over the powers of all government agencies involved in the administration of pensions and allowances, including the Admiralty. The responsibility of long service pensions would remain in the hands of the War Office and the Admiralty, however, and the Statutory Committee would be retained as an advisory body while its local committees would service as civic organisers and advisors to the national department.<sup>119</sup> An attempt was made by Conservative M.P. Major Terrell to amend the Bill by reverting from a "ministry" to a "board" thereby undoing the principle behind the alterations made by Henderson and the Pensions Committee<sup>120</sup> Angered by this attempt to undermine his Bill, Henderson called attention to the fact that the Pensions Committee had merely responded to what it believed to be the tenor of debate in the House of Commons by altering the Bill and that Terrell's attempted amendment was a backwards step in the nation's progress towards a centralised administration. The amendment was defeated; support for the essence of the Bill as altered by the new clauses was sound. It passed with a few minor amendments after a brief debate on 4 December.<sup>121</sup> It received Royal Assent and passed into law on 22 December 1916.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 4 December 1916. vol. LXXXVIII, 687-88.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 688.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 736.

<sup>122</sup>A. Griffith-Boscawen. "Activities of Government Departments during the War. 28 October 1918. PRO: PIN 15:1393.

### The Ministry of Pensions

Between 4 and 22 December 1916, there occurred a series of political events of crucial national significance. The Ministry of Pensions became a reality at approximately the same time as the Lloyd George Coalition. Henderson, originally slated to be the new Minister of Pensions, wrestled with his conscience when asked to join the new Cabinet as its main Labour representative. As a long-time Asquith supporter and a trades union activist, Henderson was reluctant to participate in what appeared to be a largely Conservative administration. He overcame his reluctance, recognising the benefit his high profile might have for the reputation of the Labour Party.<sup>123</sup>

When Henderson joined the War Cabinet, the Pensions portfolio passed to G. N. Barnes, another Labour M.P. who had been a member of the original Select Committee on Pensions and had maintained strong interest in the issue throughout the war. Despite their political alliance, Henderson and Barnes were not notably in agreement on many issues; indeed, Henderson had referred to Barnes' brief leadership of the Labour Party in 1910 as a "conspicuous failure."<sup>124</sup> However, Barnes had supported Lloyd George in his rise to power and as a result was one of six Labourites rewarded with cabinet positions in December of 1916.<sup>125</sup> Barnes' plans for the Ministry were realised quickly. In the first weeks of 1917, he called together a meeting of all involved official parties and created a new Warrant for the Army and an Order in Council for the Navy in which scales were raised, and "alternative pensions" were introduced, The minimum for widows and orphans was

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<sup>123</sup> Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson.*, 61-2.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>125</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of Modern British Radicals.*, 66.

raised from ten shillings to thirteen shillings and nine pence (3s/9d) per week and the "vicious principle" by which earnings affected pension flat rates abolished. In April of 1917, Barnes also improved pensions for officers' widows and established an education allowance for orphans.<sup>126</sup>

At the request of Jackson and Hayes Fisher, Barnes organised a series of meetings between the executive members of the Statutory Committee and officials of the Ministry of Pensions. Despite the fact that the Statutory Committee's members received assurances in January and February 1917 of their continued survival under the new Ministry, the position of the Committee was, according to Barnes, "anomalous".<sup>127</sup> In a meeting in January of 1917, Barnes, Arthur Griffith-Boscawen<sup>128</sup>, Jackson, Hayes Fisher and others from the Statutory Committee agreed unanimously to the following points. First, that the Statutory Committee would continue to make additions to minimum flat rate pensions on behalf of the Ministry. Second, the ministry would communicate with local committees through the Statutory Committee.<sup>129</sup> Third, the Statutory Committee would arrange for a hearing on any general matter considered significant by the Ministry. Fourth, the Statutory Committee would have unfettered control of its own staff. Fifth, the regulations made by the Statutory Committee would be passed by the Ministry before being submitted to the Treasury.<sup>130</sup> Hayes Fisher told the Statutory Committee that its existence was assured not only because of the recent agreement between the Ministry of Pensions and the

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<sup>126</sup> Griffith Boscawen. "Activities of Government Departments during the War." PRO: PIN 15:1393.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Griffith-Boscawen was the first Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions.

<sup>129</sup> Barnes reserved the right for direct communication however.

<sup>130</sup> Conference Notes: Ministry of Pensions and Statutory Committee. January 1917. PRO: PIN 15:1107/3.

Committee, but also because the members had been appointed for three years, appointments which could not easily be rescinded. As well, the salary of the Vice-Chair could not be revoked; if the Ministry chose to dissolve the Committee, it would necessarily forfeit Jackson's salary for the duration of his proposed appointment. "There seems to me," Hayes Fisher stated,

no difficulty in creating a large sphere of useful activity, influence and discretion for the Statutory Committee and various sub-committees and I cannot help thinking that those committees composed as they are of gentlemen and ladies of the wide experience and broad sympathy would be more popular and more judicial than any that could be set up within a Governmental Department, particularly at a time like this when a higher trained staff is so difficult to obtain.<sup>131</sup>

Despite these assurances of indispensability, the Statutory Committee remained a thorny problem for the Ministry and the Lloyd George Coalition. The "agitation in the newspapers"<sup>132</sup> blamed by Jackson for the downfall of the Statutory Committee became too much for the Coalition Government; its ill defined public and/or private nature conflicted with the character of "national efficiency" in the process of being established by the Coalition. By April of 1917, Jackson had realised the terminal situation of the Statutory Committee, admitting that the time had arrived for their functions under the Naval and Military War Pensions Act (1915) should be transferred to the Minister of Pensions. "There is very cordial feeling between the Committee and the Minister," Jackson claimed, however, the committee had decided that "the present position is an anomalous one and the functions shared between the minister and {the Statutory Committee} should in the future be

<sup>131</sup> Memo: W. Hayes Fisher to the Statutory Committee. 17 February 1917. PRO: PIN 15: 1107/3.

<sup>132</sup> Correspondence: C. Jackson to Minister of Pensions. 20 July 1917. PRO: PIN 15:1109/1.

best carried out by {the minister} alone.”<sup>133</sup> The process of bureaucratisation and centralisation was finalised in the summer of 1917 with the dissolution of the Statutory Committee by Order in Council and by a Parliamentary Act.

On 16 August 1917, the Bill dissolving the Statutory Committee was passed by Parliament and received Royal Assent; all duties of that organisation passed to the Ministry. The distribution of any remaining donations was placed in the hands of the RPF, the original nucleus of the Statutory Committee. The Local Committees set up by the Statutory Committee would become agents of the Ministry of Pensions.<sup>134</sup> The main object of the change, according to the Bill was:

to meet the general objection which has been expressed to the transfer of large powers to deal with grants of a difficult character, and liable to raise more controversy than ordinary grants under definite regulations, to a body not under the control of and not represented in Parliament.

There were other significant “objections as well, namely:

that this body... is primarily a charitable body, whereas the grants in question are not of an entirely charitable nature but contain an element (sometimes a large element) of claim upon the public, ie. they often meet ‘rights’ which, owing to the variety of human circumstances, it has not been found practical or desirable to express in regulations.

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<sup>133</sup> Correspondence: C. Jackson on behalf of the Statutory Committee to the Minister of Pensions. 19 April 1917. PRO: PIN 15:1109/2.

<sup>134</sup> Draft of a Bill to Dissolve the Statutory Committee and the Transfer of Powers to the Ministry of Pensions. August 1916. PRO: PIN 15:1108/2.

## Conclusion

By the time the Asquith Coalition had accepted the necessity of a single pensions authority, the theory and practice of pension and separation allowance administration had reached a point of crisis. It had become clear that even if the Government could claim satisfaction with the Statutory Committee as a centralising body, the return of increasing numbers of demobilised servicemen was bound to place an unbearable strain on an already precarious system. The Statutory Committee could not cope with the demands of servicemen's dependents and it was certainly not going to be able to cope with those of ex-servicemen as well. Under different circumstances, the Statutory Committee could have been an appropriate and acceptable wartime compromise. However, by the summer of 1916, the anomaly of a quasi-official body with public funds run by the former executive of a private charity and headed by the Prince of Wales was simply too much for many politicians, and for members of the public. The press stepped up its demands for a single pensions authority and the removal of the "taint of charity" throughout 1916, protesting at the inability or unwillingness of the Asquith Coalition to recognise the sacrifice and service of both servicemen and their dependents.

If not for the intensity of public opinion on this issue or the general consensus in the patriotic press, the Asquith Coalition would probably not have been able to make the tremendous conceptual leap involved in the creation of a separate Ministry for the administration of a social benefit. There is a wide disparity between the historical perception of Asquith as the last largely *laissez faire* Prime Minister and the creation of a state department

devoted to the administration of a "rights-based" social benefit; as a result, most historians of the period have simply assumed that the Ministry of Pensions had to be a minor segment of Lloyd George's overall plan for relatively extensive state intervention. Attributing the formation of the Ministry to the Asquith Coalition Government seems to detract from this received wisdom. Some historians of the period, such as Peter Clarke, have disputed the view of Asquith as the unswerving proponent of traditional Liberalism but the administration of pensions and allowances cannot be explained as the result of new Liberalism and progressive notions of poor relief.

Traditional Liberal notions of poverty and poor relief still governed the administration of the Poor Law at the time of the Great War. The system was not a "definite departure from national customs" as Eleanor Rathbone declared in 1916.<sup>135</sup> Fears of epidemic pauperism, the British political elite's traditions of philanthropy and the sacred ideal of the work ethic prevented modification of the conception of poverty as a curable evil rather than an inherent aspect of industrial capitalism. The adherence to traditional Liberal principles in the administration of poor relief would, on the surface, make the transition from the early war's mixture of private and public to a Ministry of Pensions even more surprising. However, the Asquith Coalition was able to concede the necessity of a Ministry of Pensions and eventually acquiesce to its formation because that Ministry was, in many ways, still bound by those traditional notions of poverty. No one, not even the paternalist Long or the mildly collectivist Henderson proposed to do away with the foundational categories governing the extension of state maintenance. The "taint of

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<sup>135</sup> *Common Cause*. 25 February 1916, 611-12.

charity" would remain thoroughly if somewhat less visibly embedded in the administration of pensions and allowances, hidden by the tacit assumption that all ex-servicemen and all servicemen's dependents were "deserving" - until they proved themselves otherwise.



Chapter 6  
**"The Married Man's Muddle":  
Patriotism, the Press and the Ministry of Pensions  
1916 to 1917**

The establishment of the Reconstruction Committee in early 1916 symbolised the shift in focus of governmental policy in the second half of the Great War. By the time the Ministry of Pensions had been instituted in December 1916, the debate over the rights of military dependents had largely been subsumed into the looming issue of pensions and other forms of assistance for ex-servicemen. Indeed, the impetus of fear regarding the administration of dependents' benefits and ex-servicemen's benefits after demobilisation was a crucial factor in determining the direction of policy for the Asquith Coalition until its collapse in the first week of December 1916. In political terms, 1914, 1915 and the first half of 1916 marked the apex of propaganda regarding women in general and servicemen's wives in particular. The propaganda value of wives and widows had peaked in 1915 and while their image still had some power in the fight to preserve traditional femininity, the increasingly stale issues surrounding their maintenance needed a fresh infusion of indignation. Ex-servicemen's organisations, the first of which were formed in September of 1916, asserted the primacy of male concerns in this arena and provided the final, most significant spurt of political, economic and social energy which fuelled the

Ministry of Pensions Act. The decline of the emotional power of female images and the concurrent final development of the Ministry of Pensions was more than a coincidence. It was only with the subordination of concern for servicemen's dependents and the upsurge of concern for disabled servicemen themselves that the Asquith Cabinet found the impetus to fully bureaucratise the pension and the separation allowance process.

The use of the serviceman's wife or widow to maintain traditional ideas of femininity and the feminine role helped to focus public concerns on the needs and rights of this group in 1914 and 1915. By 1917, however, it had become clear that those same images had also helped to reinforce and legitimise the secondary status of women with regard not only to the formation of policy in this arena but on a general level as well. By shifting the focus of the debate to the needs of returning servicemen, a category which implicitly included wives and children, proponents of a single pensions authority were able to strengthen their case and heavily influence the policy direction of the Asquith Coalition. While the needs of wives and children were implicitly addressed in the debate over pensions for ex-servicemen, dependents' claims to state maintenance began to be overshadowed in mid to late 1916 and was clearly secondary by the beginning of 1917, foreshadowed the secondary political status after the establishment of the Ministry of Pensions and, indeed, in the interwar period.<sup>1</sup> The significance of gender and public perception in the formation of policy is attested to by the concurrence of the shift in the debate with the relatively quick and effective workings of the Committee on Pensions and the Ministry of Pensions Act. The efficiency with which Henderson and Long conducted hearings and

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<sup>1</sup> See Lomas, "Justice not Charity." Chapter 3.

drafted legislation is astonishing, particularly in comparison with the rambling testimony to the 1915's Select Committee on Pensions and the temporising qualities of the Naval and Military Pensions Act. In February of 1916, Eleanor Rathbone called the system of separation allowances and pensions the "greatest experiment the world has ever seen" in an effort to encourage continued concern for servicemen's dependents as an independent group but her endorsement did little to revive the steadily declining interest in the rights of this particular group.

Throughout 1916, there was continued confusion over gender and feminine identity in the face of wartime demand. However, the tone of articles directed at women had changed and the demands on women had become much more specific in terms of the actual work in factories, on the land and in the civil service. Such items as the *Nation*'s suggestion that half of the Asquith's Coalition Cabinet should consist of "practical ladies" without whom "the war could not have continued for a twelve month"<sup>2</sup> became far less common than articles, editorials and images aimed at encouraging women to take on specific roles, enjoining them to do their bit at home, in the factory, or on the land. Although the women's Land Army was not organised until July of 1917, official and unofficial efforts to persuade both female labourers to pursue "patriotic" employment on the land and reluctant farmers to actually employ them increased throughout 1916 as the crisis in agriculture worsened.<sup>3</sup> In 1916, the Boards of Trade and Agriculture circulated a poster informing British women that French women "are doing all the work of the farms even where the shells are bursting close to them" and asking Englishwomen to "help their country with as good a heart." In

<sup>2</sup>*The Nation*. 26 February 1916, 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Ouditt, *Fighting Forces and Writing Women*, 50-53.

February of that year, Lord Selborne as head of the Board of Agriculture, appealed to women to "Contribute to victory" by working on the land.<sup>4</sup> Although the increase in the numbers of women working on the land was not huge<sup>5</sup> and agricultural work did not involve the public imagination in quite the same way as munitions work, images of women wearing the overalls and performing such "masculine" duties as lifting hay, cutting timber and driving teams of horses nevertheless contributed to fears of a breakdown in traditional gender roles.

The growth of female participation in the agricultural sector inspired more bad poetry such as the "The Plough Girl" in the 6 May issue of *The Spectator*, a poem written in dialect by Florence M. Wilson, a tribute to the female agricultural worker. The country girl in Wilson's poem does her duty in the fields in her husband's place, stating that she "wudn't wish him back, for the gun that fits his han'/Luks better than an ould plough'd do".<sup>6</sup> But the producers of propaganda and patriotic literature were, of course, careful to balance their odes to the expansion of female participation in the war with more traditional imagery; the Plough-girl went willingly to the fields, but she left "behind the sweetest dhreams she's iver had."<sup>7</sup> *Common Cause* declared that farm work for women meant emancipation from petticoats, adding that the boots and smocks considered appropriate for work on the land symbolised strength and freedom for women.<sup>8</sup> But more conservative

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<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Ouditt, *Fighting Forces and Writing Women*. 53.

<sup>5</sup> In July of 1914, there were approximately eighty thousand women working in the agricultural sectors; by July of 1918, a year after the formation of the women's Land Army, there were one hundred and thirteen thousand. A. Marwick, *Women at War: 1914-1918* (London, 1977), 101.

<sup>6</sup> *The Spectator*. 6 May 1916, 575.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Common Cause*. 28 January 1916, 547.

publications, such as the *Sunday Pictorial*, reassured readers that war work would not "spoil" women by masculinising them. Rather, men's work would make her a more sympathetic, loving and communicative wife who, though she would gladly retire from the noise and dirt of the factory or farm when her husband, sweetheart or father returned from the war and would always bear that knowledge of the "man's world" which would allow her to understand the nature of her breadwinner's labours in that world.<sup>9</sup>

Horatio Bottomley continued his series of columns in *Everywoman's Weekly*, a serial which encouraged women to retain their femininity in the face of wartime demands by combining articles on household science, decorating and child rearing with editorials praising women's war work in factories and on the land. Bottomley at first resisted the idea of women on the land, stating in April of 1916 that women "must not become field drudges", doing work that could harm their ability to bear and raise the next generation. Women would not be kept on as workers after the war was over anyway and thus had nothing to gain from their drudgery.<sup>10</sup> As the agricultural crisis worsened by November of 1916, however, Bottomley had come to refer to women on the land as the "backbone and mainstay of the country", urging them not to quit because their "country need {them}."<sup>11</sup> Bottomley's reversal of opinion on this issue epitomised the importance of expediency versus concern over the "sex war"; pro-war propagandists such as Bottomley recognised the pragmatic necessity behind allowing women to perform traditionally male duties in order to free men to join the colours but emphasised the desirability of traditional roles for women.

<sup>9</sup> I. St. John, "Does War Work Spoil Women?" *Sunday Pictorial*. 15 October 1916, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Everywoman's Weekly*. 1 April 1916, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Everywoman's*. 11 November 1916, 11.

Nostalgia for the “normality” of peacetime gender roles was a persistent theme throughout 1916. While certain rules of dress and occupation had been relaxed for the duration of the war, stern warnings were issued as to the continued importance of ladylike conduct. After the formation of the Women’s Land Army, the handbook issued to its members instructed them to remember that while “You are doing a man’s work and so you’re dressed rather like a man... you should take care to behave like a British girl who expects chivalry and respect from everyone she meets.”<sup>12</sup>

As George Mosse has pointed out in *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormality in Modern Europe* (1985), even those women who ventured into the front lines, such as nurses and ambulance drivers, or those women who were doing “men’s work” on the Home Front, were generally depicted as fulfilling a “natural” female role in a secondary capacity, the passive counterpart to contemporary redefinitions of an increasingly aggressive masculinity.<sup>13</sup> In the last two years of the war, propaganda and patriotic literature began to reflect a sense of the “new man” who was supposed to have been created by the sacrificial rigours of the Great War. Not only did British propagandists and patriotic writers embrace the rejuvenated stereotypes of masculinity, according to Mosse, but works by writers of the first order, such as Rupert Brooke, promulgated and reinforced the popularity of the ideal during and after the war.<sup>14</sup> The resurgence of the masculine ideal encouraged the tendency to dilute tributes to female participation in the war effort with images of traditional, passive femininity.

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<sup>12</sup> As quoted in Marwick, *Women and War*, 101.

<sup>13</sup> G. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985), 128.

<sup>14</sup> Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 121.

In fact, the increasing power of the image of the returned soldier or sailor relegated women permanently to a secondary position.

Despite their demonstrated strength, women were still the weaker sex, a perception underlined by War Office propaganda in early 1916 which encouraged men to believe that conscription in the Army would save "our Women from worse than death" and "our Children from murder."<sup>15</sup> Government photographs depicting women on motorcycles in the RAF, as coke-heavers in a factory or as cattle drivers were balanced by equally ubiquitous images in official and unofficial propaganda which depicted women in their traditional roles as wives and mothers, "silently doing their duty at home."<sup>16</sup> Female munitions workers were said to "lavish all the passion of motherhood on their gleaming brood of shells."<sup>17</sup> The recently established tradition of National Baby Week during which women were encouraged to fulfil their glorious duties as wives and mothers and cautioned against the dangers of hard manual labour in the factories or in the fields, continued into 1916. Braybon identifies the phenomenon of Baby Week as part of the campaign on the part of a politically disparate group of authorities to enforce traditional sex roles and refers as an example to the Baby Week Council sponsored essay contest for children in 1916 in which the set categories were "Why I should Kill that Fly' for boys and "How I mind the Baby." for girls.<sup>18</sup>

This type of propaganda served to reinforce the idea of "natural" role for women and reassure anxious citizens that the expansion of the female

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<sup>15</sup> *News of the World*. 28 February 1916, 6.

<sup>16</sup> *News of the World*. 2 January 1916, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Express*. 4 September 1916, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 124-5.

role was nothing more than the temporary byproduct of the dislocation of war. In the introduction to *Women War Workers* published in early 1917, Lady Jellicoe reminded readers of the importance of the sacrifice made by wives and widows. "Of all the parts played by women in this war," she claimed "surely none is harder than this."<sup>19</sup> Efforts to enforce and utilise traditional images of women and emphasize their role as the primary victims of war extended to the debates over the imposition of National Service in late 1915 and early 1916. The decision to extend conscription beyond the "Bachelor's Bill" and to require National Service of married men was a controversial one, hotly contested by members of the House of Commons and various sectors of public opinion. While Walter Long assured the country that the government would be careful to conscript single men before married men<sup>20</sup>, the reaction of the press indicated that few accepted these reassurances. The *United Services Gazette* declared that these were empty promises and that while "married men were willing enough" to be conscripted, those with responsibility to family should not have to "pay a price for their patriotism."<sup>21</sup> The *Army and Navy Gazette* referred to a "growing feeling of injustice" amongst married men and the general public regarding "pledges which have not been kept."<sup>22</sup> The "Married Man's Muddle" became a source of indignation in the spring of 1916, as the impossibility of accepting single attested men before married men became clear. The National Service League, the most significant unofficial

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<sup>19</sup> G. Stone, *Women War Workers: Accounts Contributed by Representative Workers of the Work Done by Women in the More Important Branches of War Employment* (London, 1917), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons*. 24 January 1916; vol. LXXVIII, 930.

<sup>21</sup> *United Services Gazette*. 16 March 1916, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Army and Navy Gazette*. 4 March 1916, 9.



organisation operating as a force behind conscription, attempted to ameliorate anger at the conscription of married men by offering, for the price of a shilling, a medal in the shape of a heart with the word "Sacrifice" engraved on it to any women who had a relative or sweetheart engaged in fighting.<sup>23</sup>

The imposition of National Service in the winter and spring of 1916 affected the use of female images in propaganda, most obviously with regard to the role played by women in a man's decision to enlist. The PRC's campaign to encourage women to "show {their} love for {their} country by persuading menfolk to go"<sup>24</sup> was obsolete, as was the PRC itself. Female images were still used to induce guilt in reluctant conscripts, however; in questioning by military tribunals, conscientious objectors were often asked whether they felt guilt regarding their unwillingness to protect the most helpless members of society, that is, women and children, from the horrors of war. *The Tribunal* was the journal of the No-Conscription Fellowship, a society formed in late 1914 by Archibald Fenner Brockway, the editor of the Independent Labour Party's *Labour Leader* and Clifford Allen, secretary and business manager of the official Labour party newspaper *The Daily Citizen*.<sup>25</sup> The NCF's goal was to protect the rights of conscientious objectors should National Service be instituted.<sup>26</sup> As part of their campaign, the NCF published the testimony of various anonymous applicants for exemption for exemption from service. One of these applicants, upon being asked if he was

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<sup>23</sup> L. MacDonald, *1914-1918: Voices and Images of the Great War* (London, 1989), 125.

<sup>24</sup> Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Poster #55. (1915) Mills Research Collection, McMaster University.

<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> J. Rae. *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service, 1916-1919* (London, 1970), 91.

“not prepared to protect {his} mother and sister from the enemy”, denied that war “does protect women and children.... What is the result? You have thousands and thousands of widows and orphans. If that is protecting women and children, I’ll have nothing to do with it.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the individual male citizen’s duty to protect his own women and children and the women and children of others did not become obsolete with the imposition of National Service. The same held true at the national, official level. The issue of separation allowances and pensions for servicemen’s dependents did not entirely die out in 1916 as it was still important for propogandists to convince individual servicemen and the British people that fulfilling one’s duty to one’s nation was not equatable with abandoning one’s duty to family. In fact, the issue of allowances and pensions for dependents took on an added dimension in 1916 as the Asquith Coalition used examples of their “improvements” to the system of administration in this arena to render the sometimes bitter pill of conscription more palatable to sections of the British reading and voting public. While National Service somewhat confused the issue for some of the more conservative elements of public opinion, in that it was not always clear whether a conscript or a volunteer was more deserving of state maintenance, certain elements in the press began to agitate more firmly for more sweeping changes to the allowance and pension system, calling for the institution of a single pensions authority. The imposition of National Service, however, did not actually help to focus public attention on the individual rights of servicemen’s dependents; instead, the nature of the debate contributed to the growing tendency to treat separation allowances and pensions as little more

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<sup>27</sup> *The Tribunal*. 23 March 1916, 3.

than one facet of the serviceman's compensation.

In the summer and autumn of 1916, sacrifice by women began to take back seat to that made by men. In 1914 and 1915, the problems of servicemen's dependents and their economic plight was one of the most visible and moving results of the war on the Home Front. But by 1916, particularly after the casualties of the Somme, the physical sacrifices made by hundreds of thousands of men began to register in the public psyche and the state's redress for that sacrifice took priority over the needs of dependents which would, it was assumed, be addressed by any policy covering the needs of ex-servicemen. The needs of returning servicemen was clearly the focus of newspaper articles in this period. The *Daily Express* called for the costs of pensions and employment schemes to be borne by the Chancellor of the Exchequer; "only in this way," it was stated, "can the State discharge its liability to the disabled man."<sup>28</sup> Even articles devoted to women were increasingly focused on the returning soldier or sailor. The *Daily Mail* offered the opinion that women worried about their chance for marriage, given the predicted post war shortage of eligible men, should consider "wifing the maimed" and declared that many young girls would be glad to devote their lives to caring for a disabled serviceman.<sup>29</sup>

The submersion in late 1916 and 1917 of women's claims to separation allowance and pensions into the issue of adequate compensation to returning servicemen is not particularly surprising, given the sudden leap in casualty figures for servicemen in this period. Awareness of the individual physical costs of war on the part of soldiers and sailors on active duty was heightened in this period and helped to narrow the focus of public attention. The

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Express*. 15 July, 1916, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Mail*. 25 August 1916, 6.

casualties of the Somme, in particular, changed the attitude of the British toward the war in both practical and emotional terms. In practical terms, the need for some kind of centralised bureaucracy to cope with the future flood of returning wounded servicemen became even more urgent. Not only were men being killed and wounded in huge numbers, the manner in which many met their death or sustained physical damage was new and shocking. In emotional terms, the unavoidable realisation that "war could threaten with death the young manhood of a whole nation" marked a turning point in attitudes toward war in general and the current European War in particular.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Keegan. *The Face of Battle.*, 271-285.

**Comparison of Casualties in France, 1915 & 1916**  
**Expeditionary Forces**  
**(includes B.E.F., British Regular Army and New Army) <sup>31</sup>**

	<u>1915</u>		<u>1916</u>	
	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Other Ranks</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Other Ranks</u>
January	241	6 099	568	9 758
February	559	8 402	569	11 807
March	992	20 690	820	16 989
April	1 003	23 334	843	17 339
May	2 508	57 004	941	19 730
June	875	19 769	1 141	25 486
July	664	15 049	7 770	164 567
August	573	13 277	2 813	56 631
September	2 341	26 554	4 457	86 360
October	1 054	23 377	2 484	51 282
November	416	7 918	1 818	33 361
December	<u>553</u>	<u>10 281</u>	<u>509</u>	<u>10 180</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>11 779</b>	<b>231 754</b>	<b>24 733</b>	<b>503 490</b>

As people on the Home Front began to assimilate the horrors of modern trench warfare and to calculate the human cost, public anger was redirected to the plight of the serviceman himself. That anger was stimulated by widespread frustration at the inadequacies of the temporary and partial solution offered by the Naval and Military Pensions Act. By the time Henderson and Long had begun to move toward a new Committee in the late summer and early autumn of 1916, the temporary and limited acceptance of the clauses of the Naval and Military Pensions Act was at an end. When it became public knowledge that the Statutory Committee had been unable to institute a workable system of local committees and, as a result, had been

<sup>31</sup> War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London, 1922), 253-271.

forced to rely upon the services of the local committees of existing charitable organisations such as the SSFA and the NRF, the issue exploded into a final condemnation of the Coalition government's treatment of the question. The "taint of charity" as applied to ex-servicemen and their dependents was anathema in the face of governmental promises to maintain this deserving group during the forced absence of family breadwinners. In the fall of 1916, the Coalition Cabinet, at the prompting of Henderson and Long, formed the final Committee on Pensions of the Great War, admittedly in order to respond to the overwhelming demand for action on this question. The Statutory Committee was forced, as a result of the provisions of the Ministry of Pensions Act in January of 1917, to forego its role in the administration of pensions and allowances, a result that was accepted with great bitterness by many members of the Executive of that Committee.

Both Long and Henderson had recognised, as early as March of 1916 in Long's case, that the public demand for a single pensions authority or at least a centralisation of the administration of pensions and allowances, could not be ignored. In his memo to Cabinet on 11 April of 1916, Long described how he had received a series of representations from various groups and individuals, most recently the Association of Poor Law Unions who had come to complain of the lack of coordination between the practices of the Admiralty and the War Office. The "illogic" of the system was the source of anger and frustration for many individuals and groups, Long pointed out to Cabinet, stating that "These representations, made to me by public bodies which are brought into daily contact with the wives and families of numbers of soldiers and sailors, will at any rate serve to illustrate some of the defects of the existing system and for additional evidence of the growing

dissatisfaction with the present system." He recommended the establishment of a Cabinet Committee to study the question and establish the route for reform.<sup>32</sup> Henderson reinforced Long's description of public anger with the question in September of 1916 when he joined Long's campaign to institute a Committee. Unrest regarding the question was at a peak, Henderson claimed, "numerous indications" had reached him in his role as the Chair of the Chelsea Commission, "from local authorities, labour organisations...from MP's belonging to all parties together with private letters from influential members of the public." The "irritation and sympathy" on the part of the of the general public with regard to this question made it imperative that the Coalition proceed on the road to reform in order to quell growing dissatisfaction.<sup>33</sup> After the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee on Pensions had been drafted into a Bill, amended and passed into law in December of 1916, the Minister of Pensions, Barnes was forced, despite assurances to the contrary, to dissolve the Statutory Committee by the spring of 1917. Jackson, vice-chair of the Statutory Committee, blamed "agitation by newspapers and a small number of local authorities" for the demise of the Statutory Committee." The Statutory Committee had not been given a chance to establish itself, he claimed, before the power of the press and the negative segment of public opinion had undermined it with the Cabinet, M.P.'s in the House of Commons and the general public. <sup>34</sup>

The agitation to which Jackson referred was not confined to a few or even a number of newspapers and serials but was represented by a politically disparate group of publications. The unanimity expressed by publications

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<sup>32</sup> W. Long. "Cabinet Memo." 11 April 1916. PRO: CAB 37: 145/26.

<sup>33</sup> A. Henderson, "Cabinet Memo." 19 September 1916. PRO: CAB 37: 155/30.

<sup>34</sup> C. Jackson, "Correspondence: to Sir Matthew Nathan." 20 July 1917. PRO: PIN 15:1109/1.

ranging from Horatio Bottomley's *Municipal Journal* to the Fabian *New Statesman* demonstrates the relative lack of debate on this question and the near consensus as to the necessity for a reform in the bureaucratic management of pensions and allowances. A minority of publications, most notably the conservative *Morning Post*, defended the role of voluntary charitable organisations, such as the SSFA in the administration of pensions and allowances, demanding that the "while the war continues the present local organisations...be left to carry on the work which they have so patriotically undertaken for the past eleven months and which they have accomplished to the satisfaction of the country."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, the necessity to institute some sort of centralizing bureaucratic entity with clearly defined public function and duties had become clear to the Asquith Coalition Cabinet and large sections of the press by the middle of 1916.

In the "yellow press", the *Municipal Journal* launched a year long campaign, beginning in the spring of 1916, against the Statutory Committee and the "taint of charity" caused by the inclusion of private charitable organisations in what should be a wholly bureaucratic, nationally supported endeavour. An editorial in the *Municipal Journal*, declared that "the distribution of public money by privileged and irresponsible organisations is repugnant to popular sentiment in days like these."<sup>36</sup> Of all the subjects discussed in the House of Commons, the *News of the World* stated in March of 1916, none would excite greater public sympathy than the issue of pensions for the families of fallen servicemen and the government would do well to be warned by the levels of public interest and emotion surrounding

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<sup>35</sup> *Morning Post*. 15 July 1915, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Municipal Journal*. 15 June 1916, 3.



this issue.<sup>37</sup> The *Sunday Pictorial* described the “urgent need for a Pensions Minister” stating that the “old machinery has broken down and efforts to fix it, such as the Statutory Committee, have been unworkable.”<sup>38</sup>

Bottomley’s other hyper-patriotic publication, *John Bull*, carried a warning to the newly instituted Lloyd George Coalition in “Soldiers’ Starving Wives”. *John Bull* reminded the Lloyd George Coalition of the nation’s duty to the wives, widows, children and orphans of servicemen, stating, “These women and their children should not be insulted by charity: In the name of the nation, as their men have been taken from them, it is the nation’s duty to see that they want for nothing!”<sup>39</sup> When the Statutory Committee was dissolved in the spring of 1917, the *Municipal Journal* took credit for the downfall of the Committee, stating that the “the objects of our twelve month campaign have been achieved” that is that the “administration of War Pensions is being gradually but nonetheless surely removed from the humiliating atmosphere of charity.”<sup>40</sup>

More responsible publications ranging from *The New Statesman* and to *The Contemporary Review*, *The Times* and *The Spectator*, carried similar, if less highly rhetorical warnings for the Asquith Coalition with regard to public intolerance of further stalling on this issue. *The New Statesman*, described the confusion of administration and the fate of the individual who falls into the hands of the current bureaucracy. The new local machinery to be set in place by the Statutory Committee could not as yet be judged as it did not exist, *The New Statesman*; however “it must be

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<sup>37</sup> *News of the World*. 26 March 1916, 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*. 15 October 1916, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *John Bull*. 16 December 1916.

<sup>40</sup> *Municipal Journal*. 20 June 1916, 4.

confessed that the central arrangements are terribly muddled." Soldiers and sailors and their families "enjoy{ed} a...multiplicity of pay and pension authorities, each having its own establishment, each having to go into the case afresh, each having to make its own arrangements for payment, and each, accordingly multiplying the chances of confusion and delay." It was no wonder that "that the nation is far from being satisfied that its wishes are being carried out" with regard to the administration of pensions and allowances.<sup>41</sup> "Instead of removing the inequalities of the scale pensions", the *Contemporary Review* declared,

The Statutory Committee has only increased them. It is easy to see how dissatisfaction will increase, and we shall have the unedifying spectacle of sordid criticisms of the treatment of our returning soldiers and sailors, and of the widows and dependents of those who have fallen.<sup>42</sup>

It must be noted, however, that although criticism of the system of pensions and separation allowances was broad, it was not deep. Only a handful of journalists and activists considered the long term effects of a single pensions authority on the nature of the British state. Outside of Labourite and Social Imperialist circles, very few politicians, writers, or activists suggested widespread or deep changes to the nature of state responsibility for civilians or the removal of constraints on poor relief in general. Promotion of the rights of servicemen's dependents was very rarely, if ever, the result of a generalised ideological commitment to increased state responsibility. If anything, speeches and articles on the subject tended to demonstrate the

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<sup>41</sup> *The New Statesman*. 5 August 1916, 414.

<sup>42</sup> *The Contemporary Review*. October 1916, 483.

power of attachment to the ideals of personal responsibility and the historical reverence toward philanthropic endeavour in Britain. Even those people who took a strong interest in the issue concentrated their energies on rationalizing and extending the existing system rather than proposing a new modus operandi for the already beleaguered British state.

### Conclusion

The decision to create a Ministry of Pensions was undoubtedly influenced by the force of public opinion in the first three years of the Great War. The press "vendetta" against the Statutory Committee was instrumental in convincing the Asquith Coalition that a centralised agency for the administration of pensions and allowances was necessary not only to buy female acquiescence to the war but public acquiescence, particularly after the imposition of National Service in early 1916. The importance of this issue was clear to key members of the Asquith Coalition and other official figures. Henderson and Long pointed to the generalised irritation and anxiety regarding the administration of pensions in 1916, citing the overwhelming demand for a single pensions authority as the central reason for the formation of the Committee on Pensions and the drafting of the Ministry of Pensions Act in the autumn of 1916. Jackson unequivocally blamed the press and "hysterical" public opinion for the demise of the Statutory Committee.

The force of public opinion in this period was prompted by the long term concern for the welfare of servicemen's dependents, a key issue on the

Home Front for the first two years of the Great War. Early in 1916, that issue which by now had lost some of its initial fascination for the press and the public received new impetus from the growing realisation that the long term impact of war service pensions would pose serious problems for an already over-extended system without a properly centralising body. Returning servicemen and the claims they rightfully made on the funds of the State became the focus of articles in the press and the motivating factor in the upsurge in public opinion at this time. Servicemen's dependents were shifted from primary to secondary importance in the debate over the provision of state benefits. The primacy of ex-servicemen's concerns was stimulated by the passing of the National Service Act, the increasing visibility of returned soldiers and sailors and fears for the future of pension administration under the umbrella of the anomalous Statutory Committee.

After 1916, it seems clear that the potential of an expanded female role in wartime was less emancipatory than women such as Fawcett had hoped at the beginning of the war. By limiting or eliminating the role played by women in a man's decision to enlist and by focusing attention on servicemen's rights, the institution of National Service helped to reinforce the traditionally secondary status of women in war. As well, the willingness on the part of women, including those in the feminist or progressive movement, to embrace the dichotomy of the female role in wartime in order to pursue expanded participation in a number of non-traditional arenas, would eventually serve to cement their secondary status by encouraging the maintenance of traditional images of femininity to counteract "masculinisation". The subordination of servicemen's dependents in the media and unwillingness to recognise their independent claims was,

ironically, reinforced by the continuation of traditional images of femininity to which the use of their image had made a significant contribution.

## Conclusion

Prior to the Great War, the division between on-the-strength and off-the-strength wives and children of soldiers in the British Army limited the amount of charity, if not the amount of concern, which could be directed towards their welfare. Although their numbers were much smaller and their plight less visible the families of sailors were equally neglected. Groups such as the SSFA, the RPF and the official agencies designated to care for the families of soldiers and sailors were bound by the desire and/or the necessity to uphold the rules of the Army and Navy administration in order to avoid encouraging the rank and file soldier or sailor to marry and procreate "irresponsibly". While throughout the nineteenth century, the reputation of the Army in particular improved immensely and concern for the families of soldiers increased in tandem, the prohibition on charity towards those soldiers who had married without leave from the War Office or those sailors whose wives did not "exist" by the statutes of the Admiralty, limited the extent of public sympathy. The distinction between "on-the-strength" and "off-the-strength" wives mirrored the British Poor Law's distinction between the deserving and the undeserving recipient of relief and most charity workers or interested individuals were reluctant to or incapable of discarding these categories. When Asquith did away with the distinction between the two types of Army wives and established separation allowances for Navy wives, he designated all servicemen's dependents as deserving. His action

unleashed a flood of emotional rhetoric directed at private and public agencies and frenetic activity on behalf of this group.

The intense concern and activity on behalf of military dependents between 1914 and 1917 was, in some measure, the result of altruism and the traditional responsibility felt by the British middle and upper classes toward their less fortunate compatriots, particularly towards those who had been marked as unequivocally worthy by the state. As well, the practical concerns of wartime made it impossible for governments or private citizens to ignore the condition of military dependents; as one of the most visible signs of the dislocation of the war, their evident poverty was an immediate, obvious and, more importantly, a soluble problem at a time when most people were unsure as to exactly what the role of a patriot actually was.

As a domestic, social problem the condition of military dependents was rivalled only by interest in the condition of Belgian refugees throughout 1914 and 1915. Opinions regarding exactly what needed to be done differed from medium to medium and individual to individual but the general consensus remained until 1917. While private agencies such as the SSFA and RPF were to be lauded for their contribution, the Government needed to take on the full burden of restitution and maintenance from private agencies in this instance or risk the censure of an avid public. By 1916, stalling on this issue was intolerable to the British public particularly given increasing concern with regard to the ability of current administrative apparatus to handle the justified future demands of returning servicemen. By 1917, a full Ministry of Pensions, as initiated by the Asquith Coalition and instituted by the Lloyd George Coalition, was in place. The formation of such a Government Department which might normally prove abhorrent to the

majority of MP's and civil servants was made palatable by the traditional basis of the legislation whereby the "worthiness" or the "unworthiness" of the serviceman's widow, as well as other regulations such as the continuation of the "sliding scale" of pensions, preserved the traditional distinctions of nineteenth century poor relief.

But the demand for recognition of the "rights" of servicemen's wives and widows, was more than a response to a practical problem. The war, particularly in the beginning, had dislocated the lives of many people, such as women or men working in the luxury trades. The Government was certainly not urged, for the most part, to care for the needs of unemployed lace makers or miners although private charities and "work rooms" were established to care for such victims of the war economy. The demand for full Government maintenance of all servicemen's dependents was rooted in the contemporary conception of wartime femininity. As Trustram has amply demonstrated, the increasing interest in the soldier's family in the nineteenth century was a the result of the Victorian emphasis on the sanctity of the family and a particular understanding of the role of women within the family. In a similar fashion, the provision of separation allowances and pensions as a universal benefit was the result of contemporary understanding of the female role in wartime; that is, women were both the passive but brave victims of the dislocation of wartime and the heroines of the homefront who told their men to go no matter what hardship might result for themselves and their families.

Through the inclusion of a broader spectrum of the press and government produced propaganda than is traditional in feminist history, the research in this thesis has demonstrated the universality of ambivalence



and anxiety with regard to acceptable wartime roles for women. As well, the recurrence of certain dichotomous images and the manner in which those images were employed in a politically disparate variety of publications shows the widespread desire to exploit the opportunities of war in order to either expand conceptions of femininity or capitalise on that expansion. But in order to reassure the British reading public that the parameters of the female role could contract once normal social and economic conditions prevailed, the various Government Departments responsible for propaganda and numerous publications concerned with the "woman question" persevered in the use of traditional images of femininity.

As the war continued and the "invasion of women" began in 1915 fears began to surface regarding the long term political, social and economic impact of the "loss of femininity". The serviceman's wife served as a convenient model of traditional, passive female bravery in the face of an altered female role. Until 1917, at which time the serviceman's wife was supplanted by the disabled or returned serviceman himself as the ultimate symbol of the sacrifices of war, the depersonalization of the serviceman's wife contributed to her inclusion in a special class of citizens with distinctive economic rights.

In the past this important facet of wartime social policy has been ignored by historians who have concentrated on class and politics rather than gender as the arbiter of citizenship in the welfare state. More recently, feminist historians have partially rectified this neglect by incorporating gender into the evaluation of welfare benefits and examining the ways in which social pressures as well as political pressures affect the formation of policy. It is important, however, as Skocpol has pointed out, to avoid moving too far in the direction of gender analysis to the detriment of our

understanding of the function of class, economics and politics in the lives of women. The economic position of a serviceman's female dependents during the Great War was determined by the inter-relationship of politics and class which in turn were guided by the gendered notions of citizenship discussed above.

At the grass roots level, agitation for changes to the system of separation allowances and pensions during the Great War was not driven by a specific ideology. Instead, appeals for humane and just treatment of servicemen's dependents were prompted by emotion and the desire to express patriotic intentions. Even those private citizens and politicians who were most fervently in support of large scale reforms rarely expressed a broader ideological commitment to greater state responsibility. The popularity of this cause transcended ideology; a surprising number of politicians, journalists and private citizens pressed the Liberal and Coalition Governments to assume full responsibility for the welfare of servicemen's dependents without expressing a desire for the extension of state powers in general. In the end, the decision to fully bureaucratise the administration of pensions was forced upon the Asquith Coalition Government by practical economic considerations and by the necessity to cultivate mass appeal rather than that Government's commitment to extend the powers of certain departments. Thus, in terms of the general populace, the issue of separation allowances and pensions for servicemen's dependents in the Great War was indeed political but it was very rarely ideological.

The movement toward greater state responsibility had a slightly stronger ideological component at the level of Parliamentary and Cabinet decision making but even at this level, policy decisions tended more towards

ad hoc manifestations of the current political climate. When ideology did play a role in governmental decision making, it was not the moribund "progressive alliance" of Liberals and Labourites which moved legislation forward in Cabinet and Parliament; instead, servicemen's dependents found their most vociferous champions in strong Conservative-Unionists such as Walter Long, cooperationist Labourites such as Arthur Henderson and obscure, back-bench Liberals such as James Hogge and Jonathan Samuel. On the whole the powerful members of the Liberal Party, including those members, such as Lloyd George, who might possibly be considered to be the progenitors of New Liberalism, took a neutral stance on the issue. The Liberal Cabinet and later the Liberal faction in Cabinet took care to avoid making any changes to the system of separation allowances and pensions which might imply a greater responsibility on the part of the State and were vigilant in preserving the central role of private charities until relatively late in the war. Even then, credit for "statist" legislation must be given to the powerful combination of Long and Henderson who forced the issue forward in the fall of 1916.

The policies and opinions of the first Minister of Pensions, George Barnes, embodied the conservative statism which drove the bureaucratisation of pensions and allowances throughout the war. A Labour M.P., Barnes had strong ties to social imperialist groups and when he took over the Pensions portfolio he gave free rein to his vision of state incursion into the lives of individual citizens. The original policies of Barnes' administration set the tone for future activity in this Ministry by incorporating traditional charitable regulations which discriminated on the basis of class, gender and moral "respectability". The relative harshness of

these initial policies reflected the contemporary belief that those groups which distributed benefits, be they private or public, had not only the right but the responsibility to investigate certain things before deciding eligibility. First, the recipient of those benefits had to conform to an established economic and moral code. Second, and more importantly for our purposes, the distribution of funds should not upset the "social balance" by either lowering or raising an individual recipient to an income bracket inappropriate to his or her class. Both the incremental reforms of the Asquith Liberal and later Coalition Governments and the supposedly wholesale reform of the Ministry were tempered by the traditional considerations of late nineteenth and twentieth century poor relief. If the bureaucratisation of pensions and separtion allowances does indeed serve as an early reference point for the formation of the British welfare state, then the incorporation of conservative notions of philanthropic responsibility and the ill-defined nature of the commitment to increased public responsibility has also helped to define the manner in which current welfare systems operate.

### Epilogue: 1918 and Beyond

By the time the Ministry of Pensions was instituted in January of 1918, nearly five million wives and children were receiving separation allowances while their husbands, fathers and other family breadwinners were on active duty and nearly six hundred and fifty thousand were receiving pensions. Of course, the numbers of separation allowance recipients began to fall throughout 1918 and 1919 but the number of widows and orphans continued to climb. At the end of the war, there were nearly one million widows and orphans in Britain plus two hundred thousand other dependents who were entitled to some level of benefit from the British Government and would continue to be so entitled until remarriage, the age of majority or death. Indeed, despite the prominence of wounded servicemen's claims to pension rights in the interwar years, in 1920 there were over one million five hundred thousand widows and children receiving pensions compared to just over one million disabled servicemen.

The dichotomy of the female role as both victim and heroine in wartime helped to shape the policies which governed their lives both during and after the war. During the war, the wives and widows of servicemen benefitted from the usefulness and pervasiveness of their image and the popularity of their cause. But once their cause had been supplanted by the admittedly more compelling problem of what to do with returned servicemen, the rhetoric of traditional femininity which had been sustained by the "example" of the serviceman's wife, actually had a detrimental effect on their treatment at the hands of late Governments. Widows of the Great War often led lives of penury and hard, galling work. Many whose pensions

were insufficient or, in some cases, non-existent, were forced out of the wartime work they had found in traditionally male arenas and into more traditional, less well paying occupations, particularly in domestic service. The class distinctions and hierarchical supplementation inherent in the organisation of private charities and the military and navy were not obliterated or even largely ameliorated by the regulations of the Ministry of Pensions; instead, the Ministry operated on a similar fear of universality and the ideal of "worthiness" and incorporated many of the proponents of these ideals into their workings, particularly through the medium of the Special Grants Committee founded in 1917 after the dissolution of the Statutory Committee. The treatment of widows and orphans after the Great War was the result of their secondary status in terms of political influence, economic clout and organisational power.<sup>1</sup> Even before women began to be "turfed out"<sup>2</sup> out of traditionally male occupations to make way for returning servicemen, the wife, child, widow and orphan had been supplanted by the serviceman himself as the principle claimant on public sympathy and the public purse.

Concern for the wives, children, widows and orphans of servicemen flared up dramatically in the first two years of the Great War and died out just as rapidly after the implementation of the Ministry of Pensions in early 1917. It is, in some senses, understandable that the needs, or the potential needs, of ex-servicemen began to eclipse those of dependents, particularly since the latter were often considered to be synonymous with the former.

Nevertheless, the contrast between the highly wrought rhetoric of concern

<sup>1</sup> I am deeply indebted to Janice Lomas of the University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, both for much of the information contained in this epilogue and for her interpretation, advice and comments regarding that information.

<sup>2</sup> Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty*, 13.

for servicemen's dependents and the growing indifference to their fate is a vivid one. Again, the reasons for this apparent indifference are both straightforward and subtle. First, the problems of dispersal were considered to be solved with the formation of the Ministry. Even if this were in fact not the case, the debate surrounding the administration of pensions and separation allowances for dependents had become somewhat stale and the entitlements of returning soldiers and sailors offered a fresh patriotic cause. As well, the growth of ex-servicemen's organisations after 1917, peaking with formation of the British Legion in 1921<sup>3</sup>, helped to focus attention on the returning soldier or sailor as an even more visible manifestation of the costs of war.<sup>4</sup> Between 1919 and 1920, nearly four hundred thousand men were discharged; at one point nearly fifty thousand per day were passing through the dispersal stations of the military and the Navy.<sup>5</sup> While the numbers of male claimants was considerable, the demographic impact of the war in its creation of a large number of relatively young widows with families to maintain was not inconsiderable although it was often treated as such.<sup>6</sup>

The administration of separation allowances and pensions in the Great War has served many historians, particularly feminist historians of the

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<sup>3</sup> Wootton, *The Politics of Influence*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> While some ex-servicemen's organisations, such as the National Union of Ex-Servicemen (NUS) and the British Legion did exert some pressure on behalf of widows, their concerns were primarily with the needs and rights of servicemen themselves.

<sup>5</sup> "A Short History of War Pensions." Unpublished History: University of Staffordshire, 1982; 17.

<sup>6</sup> Since the first census was taken in 1851, the number of widows under sixty had increased steadily, due to a variety of causal factors such as increase in female lifespan as well as marriage and childbirth patterns. In the three decades before the Great War, the number of widows under sixty had been increasing by 5% to 8% per decade. After the Great War, that steadily increasing number of widows under sixty leaped ahead by 23%, and then began a gradual decline. Richardson, *Widows' Benefits*, 7.

welfare state, as a section of the dividing line between nineteenth and twentieth century conceptions of state responsibility. Certainly, the accelerated pace of legislation designed to formalise and centralise the administration of these benefits was astonishing, given the traditional methods of poor relief still employed by the Local Government Board and the Poor Law Guardians. However, it is too easy to overstate the revolutionary nature of the reforms to service pensions for both servicemen and their dependents; the continuity of certain traditional notions which placed severe limitations on the "universality" of state maintenance for servicemen and their dependents places doubt on the use of this system as an historical demarcation. If the system was a "pathfinder" for the welfare state, it was so only in the most superficial of senses in that it may have blunted the sharp edge of fear regarding the ideal of universality.

The traditional divisions of poor relief and many of the processes and regulations in use since the early nineteenth century were perpetuated in the Ministry of Pensions regulations and practices. As the new Minister of Pensions in Lloyd George's Cabinet, Barnes had two main goals in 1917-1918<sup>7</sup>; he managed to achieve only one of these goals but the principle behind his achievement reflected generalised fear of the levelling effect of universality and the flat rate. Barnes' first goal was to establish a thirty shilling (30s) minimum for totally disabled servicemen; in fact, he was granted twenty-seven shilling and six pence minimum, a partial victory. But his desire to implement the "alternative pensions", that is, extra funds for those servicemen and dependents whose prewar incomes had been above a certain level was immediately implemented and became part of the longterm policy

<sup>7</sup> Barnes left the Ministry in 1918 to join Lloyd George's War Cabinet after the resignation of Henderson.



of the Ministry of Pensions in the interwar period.<sup>8</sup> The Statutory Committee's role in discriminating between the various classes of serviceman's widow and wife and determining levels of relative deprivation was duplicated in the duties of the Special Grants Committee in charge of supplementing pensions based on loss of earning power. Up until 1946, the Ministry of Pensions had the right to award "alternative pensions", later "special hardship allowances" which recognized the hierarchy of privilege to which each rank within the military and navy might have been accustomed or to distinguish between prewar distinctions within each rank. As Barnes described it, the right to grant special hardship allowances preserved "the distinctions between ranker and *ranker*."<sup>9</sup>

Even the idea that all servicemen and their dependents were deserving was difficult to entertain. The Ministry of Pensions went to some lengths in the postwar decades to prove that numerous servicemen and servicemen's dependents were inherently undeserving. Many were "freaks; some were lunatics and some were bone lazy", while others were "veritable weeds"<sup>10</sup> according to Barnes, the first Minister of Pensions. These are interesting statements for the former Chairman of the Labour Party but Barnes' sentiments illustrate the general inability of high level politicians and civil servants to come to terms with the ideal of universality and the contemporary desire to confirm categorical distinctions in the administration of a "rights-based" benefit.

The Special Grants Committee's work declined after 1931 but it was used as a consultative body until the early 1970's, particularly in cases of

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<sup>8</sup> Barnes, *From Workshop to War Cabinet*, 144.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-6.

suspected "cohabitation."<sup>11</sup> The work of the Special Grants Committee demonstrates the intertwining of fears that universal systems of state maintenance failed to make crucial distinctions between classes and undermined the ethics of the recipient. The moral supervision of servicemen's wives and widows, considered so necessary by groups such as the SSFA and RPF during the Great War, was in part continued by the Ministry of Pensions who were entitled, until the early 1960's, to remove a widow's pension if she were deemed "unworthy". The charge that a war widow was living with another man was the most common reason for the removal of a pension. In this instance, women were treated much more harshly than men because they were considered to be living on money they had not earned themselves.<sup>12</sup> In the 1950's and 1960's, the rules governing the rights of widows to war pensions were relaxed, particularly with regard to the time of marriage; fears that a women might capitalize on an injured war veteran were abandoned and the Ministry of Pensions, now part of the Ministry of Social Security, took a more "positive" approach to the administration of pensions for widows, in line with the developing philosophies of the British welfare state.<sup>13</sup>

The treatment of war widows by the British state has been attributed in part to the lack of a representative body or pressure group to represent their rights. The War Widows' Association was formed in 1971 but until that point there was no organisation to lobby on behalf of war widows.<sup>14</sup> Certain major

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<sup>11</sup> "A Short History of War Pensions." 32.

<sup>12</sup> Lomas, "Justice Not Charity." 56.

<sup>13</sup> "A Short History of War Pensions." 31-40.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, *Widows' Benefits*, 11. There were a number of umbrella organisations whose mandate included lobbying on behalf servicemen's widows such as the British Legion or the National Association of Widows; however, the War Widows' Association was the first to work for better conditions for war widows as a primary function.

concessions, such as the exemption of war widows' pensions from income tax in 1979 were made by the Government as a result of the work of this body.<sup>15</sup>

Their status as a secondary symbol of war mirrored their secondary economic and political status after the war. Letters written throughout the 1970's and 1980's to Irish Strange, head of the War Widows' Association, from widows of the Great War provide a picture of the harsh conditions under which many of these women lived. In 1980, many were drawing as little as twenty-five to thirty pounds per week while few had more than fifty. A 1972 letter from a war widow's son recounts his mother's weekly menu throughout most of her life. According to her son, his mother's food budget restricted her to one wholemeal loaf, a quarter pound of butter, a quarter ounce of tea, six Oxo cubes, three pence worth of fish bits, a six pence bag of broken biscuits and a two ounce jar of jam.<sup>16</sup> A 1982 letter from the daughter of a war widow in Buckinghamshire, claimed that her mother waited for over three months to receive any sort of pension following her father's death in 1917; in the interim, the family of five children between the ages of eleven months and eleven years, lived on five shillings a week, provided by a relief agency, presumably the RPF.<sup>17</sup> A war widow in Somerset described being widowed at twenty-four and eventually having to send her children out at fourteen to look for work. She declared that if war widows had had representation in the Great War, "we would not have had

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<sup>15</sup> Richardson, *Widows' Benefits*, 78. In 1976, half of each pension was exempted from income tax and in 1979 the entire amount was exempt.

<sup>16</sup> Correspondence (1975). War Widows' Archive, Irish Strange Collection, University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence(1982). War Widows' Archive, Irish Strange Collection, University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent.

to face poverty and hardship which thousands of families do.”<sup>18</sup> One widow from Sidcup whose husband went missing in 1917 received only seventy-five pence per week for herself and her daughter. In order to support herself, she found munitions work only to be forced out when the war ended. She eventually found other employment and worked until she was eighty-five years old.<sup>19</sup> Another widow who was not lucky enough to find munitions work during the Great War scrubbed floors and did laundry for twelve hours a day, later working in Leeds Market until the age of eighty-four in order to supplement her initial pension of thirteen shillings and six pence per week for herself and her two children.<sup>20</sup>

The penurious living conditions and secondary status of servicemen’s widows and orphans in the interwar and post-war periods reflect the widespread efforts of both official and unofficial promoters of the war effort, including many individuals active in the women’s movement, to both harness and contain the forces of change unleashed by the war. The work of women in factories, the civil service, agriculture and other traditionally male arenas, no matter how well it was done, was a temporary expedient of the war. It was impossible to employ both women and returning servicemen and the former was encouraged, forcibly in some cases, to make way for the latter. The desire to return to the “normality of peacetime”, as Braybon has pointed out, spurred the return to the home.<sup>21</sup> The work of unofficial and official propagandists throughout the war helped to ease this transition; the

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<sup>18</sup> Correspondence (1983). War Widows’ Archive, Irish Strange Collection, University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent.

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence (1975). War Widows’ Archive, Irish Strange Collection, University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent.

<sup>20</sup> Correspondence (1979). War Widows’ Archive, Irish Strange Collection, University of Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent.

<sup>21</sup> Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, 13-14.

“heroines” of the Great War could now, with a sigh of relief, return to the traditional feminine sphere of home and hearth. The serviceman’s wife and widow was, in a sense, a victim of her own popularity in the first three years of the war; her use as a depersonalized symbol of passive female bravery contributed to the continuity of the traditional female role in the post-war period which in turn facilitated the eclipse of “women’s issues” during the period of the reconstruction and beyond. The secondary status of military dependents after the war reflected the secondary status of all female citizens, status that had been temporarily suspended by the demands of war and the need on the part of the official and unofficial promoters of the war effort to purchase the acquiescence of women.

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