

Peace - June 9, 1915

Leonora O'Reilly

June 09, 1915— New York City

O'Reilly delivered this report from the International Congress of Women, held at The Hague, Holland, on April 28-30, 1915, to the Fifth Biennial Convention of the National Women's Trade Union of America.

When on April 1st I received a telegram from our National office saying, "By vote of the National Executive Board you are earnestly urged to represent League at Peace Conference, The Hague. Steamer sails April 13th." I thought some one was playing a practical joke on yours truly. My reply, however, to the call was, as nearly as I can remember it, "Do you think there is a ghost of a chance of bringing peace on earth or anything lastingly useful by going? If so. I'll go if they blow me to atoms; all's well spent which is spent in labor's cause, the greatest peace movement in the world."

Well. I went, and in order that we may be perfectly clear in our own minds about the work which was begun by women for peace that shall be permanent, I must tell you the Peace Conference resolved itself at once into "The International Congress of Women, which has for its object the establishment of such relations between all the peoples of the earth as will make for permanent peace. founded on justice, rather than peace immediately at any price."

The keynote struck by the 954 women delegates to The Hague was one of self-obliteration in the desire to help suffering

Europe to-day, in the hope that, through a wise understanding of the immediate anguish and sorrow, they may bring all mankind to a larger, better life on this planet before long. Some wise person has said, the reason women succeed in doing new things while men stay put in ways that are old, is that the women are such darn fools they don't know the thing can't be done, so they go right ahead and do it. Be that as it may, women did a piece of work at that International Congress of Women, and they can leave the future to decide whether they were fools or wise ones in their day and generation.

I should like to give you here the sense of the words with which Jane Addams closed that convention, at noon Saturday, May 1, 1915. She said that this first International Congress of Women, met during the greatest war the world had known, served to create good will and good fellowship; the work had been most difficult, we had done it extremely well; the wonder was that at this time women from belligerent and neutral nations could meet together for four day without one jarring word, one word of discord.

Now I believe I am not overstating when I say all our labor men. and all other men, looked on those women delegates setting out on their errand of peace, fraternity and solidarity in these war times, as a bit freakish, if not definitely mad. The women started out believing peace possible; they returned knowing that women in all countries want peace, are willing to work for it, and are ready to make great personal sacrifices to secure permanent peace.

At Christmastime, 1914, in spite of the horrors and bitterness of war, the women of England sent the season's greeting of love to the women of Germany and Austria, and Austria sent back a message of solidarity and humanity to the women of England. These letters were quickly followed by letters from the women of France, Russia, Ireland, Denmark; in fact the women of all lands were anxious to be heard in the name of peace. All these women pinned their faith in the power of women to bring peace on earth. In these letters a note of solidarity among women was struck which was heard around the world. The women of the warring countries having done this much for peace and humanity, it remained for the women of the neutral countries to carry the good work further. The women of the neutral countries hesitated at first, not knowing how to act, then Rosika Schwimmer came to us; she went through the states and stirred our women to a sense of their responsibility for

this war, if they sat quiet in their neutrality without trying to answer the call of the women of Europe in distress. The thought which Rosika Schwimmer left in the head and heart of every thoughtful woman in this country was: Europe's women are shedding their blood on the battlefield in the lives of -their children, who are being sacrificed to the War God. She made women feel they must come out of their snug, inert neutrality, and do something to bring peace. They must secure a peace ship and set sail for Holland and at the Hague meet other women in the name of peace. Granted they might be blown to pieces on their way over, they, must accept their fate conscious that so too they might serve as their sisters were serving in Europe.

The women who sailed on the "Noordam" April 13th, felt they were going forth likely not to return. They did not escape so easily; instead they have returned, and brought back with them a program of action and a set of resolutions, to carry out which will require a long and useful life's service; from all of them. These resolutions deal with:

1. Women and War.
2. Action Toward Peace
3. Principles of Permanent Peace.
 - (a) Respect for Nationality.
 - (b) Arbitration and Conciliation.
 - (c) International Pressure.
 - (d) Democratic Control of Foreign Policy.
 - (e) The Enfranchisement of Women.
4. International Co-operation.
 - (a) International Organization.
 - (b) General Disarmament.
 - (c) Commerce and Investments.
 - (d) National Foreign Policy.
5. The Education of Children.
6. Women and the Peace Settlement Conference.

On the voyage going over we had as our leader Jane Addams, that splendid democrat, meaning by that much abused term, a woman so quietly, splendidly strong that, with her intelligence, she could understand the smallest of us and the biggest of us, while she held all of us to the best that was in us by her own humane goodness, for the sake of the cause we served, which was greater than all of us put together. Around this woman democrat we grouped and worked on the tentative program which the women of the Dutch countries had prepared. We began our sessions the first morning out at sea, planning for one session a day; the next day we planned for a morning and afternoon session, and later we added an evening session. We worked morning, noon and night, leaving the sessions for meals and going back from meals to work. Jane Addams was getting from every member of the party the best she had to give, while making the giver see that that which we moulded out of the intelligence of the group was much better than the best in any one of us. Always unity and solidarity of purpose prevailed.

We were held up outside the coast of England for four days, just off the coast from Dover or Deal. While held as prisoners by order of the British Admiralty we were the guests of the Holland-American line and fared like

princesses, but prisoners for all that to whom the world was calling to be up and doing in the cause of peace.

When we reached Holland we learned we were very likely held out of the North Sea for our own good, as there had been some serious action there while we sat quietly waiting the signal to move on. Had we gone into the trouble we would have had to take the consequences.

We reached Rotterdam 7 p. m., April 27th; had to take one-half hour's ride to reach the Hague, where we ate a hurried supper, then on to the first evening meeting. The meetings were held in the Dierentuin, the largest meeting hall outside of the Madison Square Gard in New York I have ever seen. The hall was full to overflowing with the delegates and the people of Holland, who came great distances to be present at the night sessions.

The four days the women of Europe sat waiting for the United States delegates to arrive made heroines of us all. We were welcomed as sisters saved from the sea, to whom might be given the wisdom to know how to bravely serve the others. In all honesty I think I can say the women of the United States did not disappoint the hopes of the women of Europe.

At the Hague we found there were 1,328 women enrolled as members of the Congress; there were 954 delegates present from sixteen countries—England, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Armenia, Brazil, Poland, Italy, South Africa, Canada, Holland and the United States of America.

The members not present were prevented from coming by the governments at war.

At the Hague, by a unanimous vote, Jane Addams was made chairman of the Congress.

While the past has given to gods credit for deeds great and heroic, I believe the future will have to place by the side of the gods the goddess of great and heroic deeds, or maybe, better still the future will show how the God of War was vanquished forever by the Goddess of Peace. Be that as it may, when the International Congress of Women was called to order April 28, 9 a. m., at that table of peace beside Jane Addams there sat and worked two of these wonderful women from each of the nations assembled, super-women, goddesses, if you will, who through their own fine sympathy and intelligence were working to make love grow where hate might so easily flourish.

These women sat at a table such as Christ and His disciples are pictured at when taking their Last Supper together. The table of women may some day become the symbol of the day when woman made her vital contribution to the sisterhood of women and the motherhood of the same, by declaring woman's right to share the bread of peace and plenty of one nation with that of another, through the love and understanding in the heads and hearts of the women of all nations.

At the table of peace Jane Addams was the central figure; at her right hand sat the two German delegates, at her left hand the two English delegates; next to the German delegates sat the Belgian delegates; next to the English sat the Austrian, and so on down the table, two women from each of the nations represented.

The meetings were conducted in three languages—English, French and German.

The splendid women secretaries translated immediately from one language to another, as if it was just as easy to speak three languages as it is to speak one. The Europeans seem to learn three languages at school as we are taught the three R's—reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Without more words from me you will understand the great goodness in human nature which the success of this congress bespeaks. The spirit of love permeated all those present It made them forget national strife for the sake of international peace.

Every woman at the congress understood that peace cannot and will not come if we sit with folded hands waiting for its arrival. A peace propaganda is not one in which we can sit and talk big talk and do nothing, while human beings are slaughtered by the millions for one reason or another. So these women undertook the peace

movement as a crusade in which women were enlisting to pay the price of eternal vigilance—eternal vigilance in order that no child born on this planet may be deprived of its rightful inheritance of peace and plenty through industry and the full return therefrom.

These women knew that to them will fall the duty and the privilege of proving that the peoples of the earth will do right one by the other through mutual interest and the fraternity of nations sooner than by the power of authority exercised autocratically from above.

To secure this fraternity of nations and give it expression in the democratic laws, the voice of the whole people, men and women, must be heard in the making and enforcing of these laws. To secure these rights of autonomy and self-government, in order that all may do their duty, will need much work, quiet, steady patient unending service in season and out of season.

The International Congress of Women at The Hague took up this work of active service in this crusade to make the men and women of all nations, creeds and colors love one another, because they were worthy of love, knowing the road would be a difficult one, but that it was the only one which could bring peace on earth.

In our midst sat women whose hearts were torn and bleeding because of the horrors they had witnessed and lived through, women whose eyes had grown accustomed to seeing maimed men on every street, blind men learning to use their fingers, without the aid of sight, in the hope that when the war is over they may be again self-supporting. These women were petitioning all women to love one another for the sake of those who were suffering, through no fault of their own, save that they were ignorant of the ways of militarism and what was done in its name to all peoples. These women maintained the people, the great mass of the common peoples, had no bitterness in their hearts for each other; their interests were mutual if not identical; from their mutual understanding and interest the women knew there would be born a day in which war would be only a memory.

The first night's meeting, April 27th, was given over to short speeches from the women of all lands.

A word of welcome was spoken to the strangers by Dr. Alletta Jacobs of Holland.

Madame Rose Genoli brought greetings from Italy.

Froken Anna Kleman brought greetings from Sweden.

Miss Kathleen Courtney brought greetings from Great Britain and Ireland.

Fraulein Vilma Glucklich brought greetings from Hungary.

Dr. Keilhau brought greetings from Norway.

Dr. Anita Augspurg brought greetings from Germany.

Fru Tybjerg brought greetings from Denmark.

Frau Leopoldina Kulka brought greetings from Austria.

Mrs. Fannie Fern Andrews, of Boston. from the United States.

The next morning, May 28th, all delegates were in their seats early, and active work began on the program.

The second night, April 28th, was given over to speeches on what war meant to the women of all lands.

The story was the same from all nations: Women pay the first and last full tax of all wars. They take up the burden of production when the men are forced to lay down their tools to take up guns. They must feed the men at the front while in their bodies they must build the next generation perhaps to share a like fate. These women, one and all, maintained war must cease. They stated emphatically this cessation can only come through the

growth and development of the anti-military spirit in the whole people. This is a matter of education; education is principally woman's work.

April 29th was given over to talks on suffrage from the women of all lands, those who had the vote those who were working to get the vote. Here again unanimity of purpose and solidarity of thought prevailed. All the speakers maintained the time for democracy is here, the enfranchisement of women in all lands is necessary to make the self-government of people possible. Ballots in the hands of women, preferable to bullets in the hands of their fathers, husbands and sons as a means of settling questions political, industrial or territorial. Arbitration and conciliation can be trusted to settle all questions to-day. For this woman must be given an opportunity to write the laws, and help establish the relations which must prevail between nations before men and women can live on this planet in peace. Intelligent women must refuse to re-people the earth for any purpose less worthy than to work out a destiny of constructive peace and harmony. For this the enfranchisement of women is needed.

On April 30th at least twenty women from different lands brought their messages of energetic sympathy to the congress. All the speakers were filled with altruistic cosmopolitanism, rather than narrow, egotistical patriotism of one country for itself and its people, regardless of what happened to humanity as a whole.

It would be impossible to give you the thoughts of all those splendid women, doctors all, educators. physicians, writers, economists, lecturers, and workers generally for the liberty of the human family.

When Gerald Massey wrote his glorious poem to the Men of '48, who was there then to understand that before the glorious dreams of the men could be made realities, beside the spirit of those wise men would have to, stand the dauntless spirit of the mothers of men to make possible the fusion of the peoples through the sympathy, intelligence, and love of the women of 1915.

This fusion of the people was begun in the work of the International Congress of Women at The Hague, and especially expressed in those five-minute speeches on April 30th.

Jane Addams, who made the address of the evening, made her strong plea for the spiritual which, in spite of the grossest materialism, will survive and triumph.

She put the question, why had women come from both warring and neutral nations? Because women realized the spiritual value of Internationalism which surrounds and completes our national life. Men have recognized internationalism in science, art, philosophy and religion. Women are here demanding it for political life. We must find methods of expression for this new internationalism. We must trust international good will.

If the idealism of men can drive men to the point of making war, then cannot the idealism of wo men induce them, at no matter what cost to themselves, to give to the world their spiritual message, the world to use it now if it will, but surely at last, for always the spiritual triumphs however difficult the situation into which it has come.

Then when your delegate was asked to give labor's message, she tried to say what you would have her say, in no failing tones, out of the fulness of a heart of love ;to all these intelligent women. She tried also to be true to that department of school children who asked her to speak for them in the name of peace. As their teacher mother they asked her to bring peace on earth, in order that their children might be permitted to fulfill their function as useful workers in their day of the world's work. Rather a large order for any poor mortal, but they are young and how can we old ones serve the young better than by trying through our larger experience to make the dreams of youth come true. With all seriousness she therefore tried to use her time to say for the 250,000 working women what no other woman there was delegated to say—namely, that the organized workers of the world had been carrying on a peace propaganda for more than fifty years, that these workers had done more for international peace than all the capitalist peace movements put together. Yet where were the workers and their representatives to-day? Where were the institutions and societies that by industry and personal sacrifice they had built up? All gone, all mowed down as grass before the devastating machinery of war. She tried to tell them that most of the workers in the United States were exiles from the European countries because they could not make a living in their native lands, but for all that the love of their hearts was in their own lands. They had left their own lands to seek larger opportunities; they soon learned that the same economic struggle to live holds the workers down in

all lands, yet it is the courage and pioneer spirit of the people who leave their native land to try to make their fortune in a new world that underlies the labor struggle in the United States, which will be satisfied with nothing short of industrial democracy; further, that the industrial war waged in the United States will run a very close second to military war in the mortal statistics of the future, which will be compiled to show how men, women and children sacrificed to empire and profit alike by their masters, political and industrial, in the twentieth century. The workers must learn that ignorance is the evil which destroys all before it, and that profit and idleness are the canker worm and the cancer which eat the vitals out of life and labor on this planet. She told them further that the thoughtful women in the labor struggle were beginning to see that there must be something fundamentally wrong with society as organized to-day, since if the workers escape death by cannon they meet with it in the exigencies of commerce, which sap them white in factories and mills, for profit, through long hours and short wages, or again feeds sixty thousand of the youngest working women in the United States into the white slave trade every year.

Yet we, the workers, would dismiss our own immediate wrongs for the moment, after calling attention to them, in the hope of establishing a peace on earth that shall be permanent—permanent because it shall be established in accordance with the first law of life, which is to labor; for this every child must be taught how to labor, every worker must join the constructive army of the workers, for so and so only can the people shake off those parasites, personal and institutional, that live by and profit on the negotiations leading up to war and the carrying on of the murderous business.

To sum up and give a mental picture of the work done at the International Congress of Women: We set sail in a very light craft of hope on a seething sea which might rise up and submerge us at a moment's notice. We found in our travels 1,300 other women imbued with the same faith; they had all come together in response to the call of brave women in countries at war. High up in the crow's nest of the craft on which we sailed sat intellect, using the strongest glasses at its command to detect and prepare to meet any signs of disturbance or trouble on the far horizon. Every woman on board was tense with the desire to serve to her utmost capacity in the cause of peace. The wonderful ship was kept afloat and sailing smoothly by the stokers in their holds below the surface; the work of the stokers was carried on so quietly, so far from sight, that intellect itself almost forgot the existence of the men at the furnaces and the boilers below. Yet unless the stokers on that ship, the men in the mines, the women in the factories, the girls in the shops; the children in the mills, the vast army of workers, can be made to understand it is their labor and their blood which supplies the energy that keeps the ship of state afloat, as well as the body social intact, there is no hope for permanent peace. Only when the workers are intelligent enough to stop all industry, when anywhere on earth a worker is compelled to take up arms to destroy that which humanity through long ages of labor has built up, will war cease. To teach this is labor's mission, none but the workers can do this work.

The labor movement is the true peace movement of the world, because it is based on principles which are just, and therefore will bring peace and plenty to all who obey labor's law.

The world has had only two forms of civilization thus far—the military and the industrial. Military civilization is what has brought Europe where she is to-day, with seventeen million men in arms in eight countries, costing seven billion six hundred million dollars to keep them active in destruction for six months. Who must pay for all of this? The workers, the producers, unto the fifth, sixth and seventh generation to come.

What an industrial civilization can be is typified by the hundred years of peace which has existed between the United States and Canada, with a four thousand mile border line between them without a fort or battleship in sight on either side.

We, the workers, must put all our energy to work in the constructive army of labor, to establish this industrial civilization upon a permanent basis. We must insist that sane people can settle all disputes, nation or international, by arbitration and conciliation. We must teach that the worker, the producer battling for industrial justice is the hero in an industrial civilization. We must work for universal anti-militarism. If we will do these things as the workers' contribution to an industrial civilization, we can let the poor politician build few more battleships because they know not what else to do. We, the workers, when the time is ripe, will make floating schools out of these battleships. We will leave the guns on shore and take brains on board. We will give health,

pleasure and knowledge to the students, and inspire humanity with a crew of energetic, sympathetic, constructive minded youths who shall inaugurate and represent the altruistic cosmopolitanism of the future, not my country as against they country, but our world, our humanity. This, and nothing short of this, is labor's stand on the peace question. Labor stands for organization and co-operation. Labor must never lose sight of its great ideal, which is the establishment of universal peace, a universal republic, and the solidarity of mankind.

National Women's Trade Union League of America. Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention of the National Women's Trade Union of America. Chicago.