‘Something More than Food and Shelter’: Domestic Workers in the Trade Union Movement 1908-1914

Kathlyn Oliver, founder of the DWU. From the *Daily Mirror,* Nov 1 1909

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Introduction

This dissertation explores the relationship between domestic workers and the trade union movement in the period from 1908 to 1914. It aims to explore to what extent and in what ways the nature of their work set domestic workers apart from other workers within the trade union movement, and how this was influenced by their relationship to the suffragette and socialist women's movements. This period starts the year before the founding of the Domestic Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland (DWU), in the early days of Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and later H.H. Asquith's, Liberal government. The Labour party was becoming more influential, winning 29 seats in the 1906 election versus their previous two.[1] In 1910 a period of extreme worker agitation began in the United Kingdom, referred to as the 'Great Unrest'.[2] These factors mean that this was an important period for British trade unionism and socialist politics, especially when viewed in conjunction with the suffragette movement, which led more women to become involved in politics.

During this period there were approximately 1,259,826 women employed in private domestic service according to the 1911 census, which equates to approximately 3.5% of the UK population, or approximately 26% of the female workforce.[3] Despite being the

[1] Resul Umit, "UK House of Commons Election Results at Constituency Level", https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/S83HOA, Harvard Dataverse, V10, 2022
[2] Roland V. Sires, 'Labor Unrest in England, 1910-1914', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1955), 246-266
[3] Wellcome Collection, Census of England and Wales, 1911. (10 Edward 7 and 1 George 5, ch. 27.) General report, appendices, 1917-18, Cd. 8491, XXXV.483

largest sector of employment for women in this period in the UK, domestic servants have been largely ignored or relegated to the footnotes of British trade unionist and workers history. The majority of existing scholarship on women in domestic service during this period is focused on the social and cultural lives of domestic servants rather than their political lives.

Early social historians such as Pamela Horn began to explore the social history of domestic service during the rise of the social history movement in the 1970s. Through works such as *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (1975), Horn was one of the first historians to extensively engage with the topic.[4] This work provides insights into the daily lives of women in domestic service in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her work paints domestic service as a gruelling and demeaning profession that women were eager to escape, with an emphasis on the newfound liberation of women's work post First World War. While there is some merit to this narrative, historians writing much later, in the mid-2000s-2010s, such as Selina Todd, challenge the preoccupation with 'whether "deference" or "defiance" shaped servants' behaviour and actions'.[5] Alongside historian Alison Light, Todd questions this reductive binary of servant's emotional responses and makes steps towards recognising a greater emotional depth and agency within these women.[6] Alison Light's book *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants* (2007) in particular explored the emotional complexities of women in domestic service and the fluidity of the social and class relationship between servants and their employers, particularly within the

[4] Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (Sutton, 1975)
[5] Selina Todd, 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain 1900-1950', *Past & Present*, No. 203, 181-204
[6] Ibid

context of the emerging first wave feminist movement of the late 19th and early 20th century.[7] Understanding the complexity of these relations and rejecting the reductive 'deference/defiance' binary is important to understanding the domestic servant's own understanding of labour and their own roles as workers.

Another, more recent, key text in this area is Lucy Delap's *Knowing Their Place* (2011), a cultural history of the evolving role of the domestic servant throughout the twentieth century.[8] Delap explores the class positionality of the domestic servant as well as the implications of service towards ideas of gender and ethnicity. The book explores the way in which this role evolved from the traditional Victorian conception through the twentieth century, and how cultural nostalgia impacts the way people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries conceived of domestic service.

Light, Todd, and Delap each engage in interesting critical explorations of the class and gender role of domestic workers. Laura Schwartz takes this line of enquiry a step further in her essay 'A Job Like Any Other? Feminist Responses and Challenges to Domestic Worker Organizing in Edwardian Britain', which explicitly looks at domestic worker's attempts at labour organising.[9] Another key text is Schwartz's article, '"What We Feel is Needed is a Union for Domestics Such as the Miners Have": The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-1914'. This article was the first historical account of the DWU and remains the only in-depth study of the organisation. Schwartz

[7] Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury*, (New York 2007)
[8] Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2011)
[9] Laura Schwartz, '"What We Feel is Needed is a Union for Domestics Such as the Miners Have":The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-1914', *Twentieth-Century British History* 25:2 (2014), 173-192

utilises a Marxist-Feminist mode of analysis, as evident in her article 'Domestic Servants, the Working Class and Servants' Trade Unions in the 19th and 20th Centuries'[10]. In this work, Schwartz engages with the same framework to analyse why domestic service was conceived of as a different category of work. She argues that Marxist-Feminist ideas about reproductive labour, as championed by feminists such as Margaret Benston, are crucial to the understanding of why domestic labour was viewed differently in the worker's movement.[11] In studying the relationship between domestic workers and the feminist movement specifically, Schwartz's *Feminism and the Servant Problem* (2019) takes important steps in examining the relationship between suffragettes and servants.[12] She explains that while many servants were suffragettes, there remained a clear stratification within the movement and a tension between middle class, servant-employing suffragettes and their increasingly politicised servants.

This dissertation intends to expand on Schartz's work by developing her work on the domestic servant's relationship to the feminist and trade unionist movements. While important work has been done on the relationship between domestic workers and the feminist movement, the relationship of domestic servants to organised labour remains relatively understudied. It is significant that the DWU emerged during The Great Unrest, a period of intense labour agitation in the UK. The organisers of the DWU had ties to the Independent Labour Party, the National Federation of Women Workers, and several other trade unionist groups. This dissertation will situate domestic workers within the context of the rising tide of trade unionism and explore their political situation as

[10] Laura Schwartz, 'Servants', in ed. Bev Skeggs, et al.,*The SAGE Handbook of Marxism* (2022), 296-307
[11] Margaret Benston, 'The political economy of women's liberation', *Monthly Review* Vol. 21, No. 4, (1969)
[12] Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem*, (Cambridge, 2019)

members of the working class. Much of the more recent work done in this field has focused on retrieving the agency of women in domestic service, and made extensive use of similar material such as *The Woman Worker* magazine, and this dissertation will develop this a step further by investigating their political agency specifically, beyond the specific focus of the suffrage movement and moving into the labour and trade unionist movement. This exploration will also utilise *The Labour Woman* magazine, a source which has been underutilised in previous studies of domestic workers, as it is a valuable source for uncovering the voices of women in the labour movement, both domestic workers and others. Significant work has been done exploring the relationship of domestic workers to the suffragette movement, as well as exploring the institutional history of the Domestic Workers Union. I hope to expand upon that work by examining the relationship of domestic workers to the women's trade unionist movement, looking at what factors led domestic work to be viewed so separately from other fields of work, in what ways this difference manifested, and the responses from trade unionists and women socialists to domestic workers organising.

Three archival collections form the basis of my research: The Labour History Archive at the People's History Museum in Manchester, the Gertrude Tuckwell Collection in the Trades Union Congress Archive at London Metropolitan University, and the London School of Economics Women's Library.

The Labour History Archive houses the papers of the Women's Labour League (WLL), a Labour Party affiliated group formed in 1906 that campaigned for greater political

representation for women.[13] The WLL were also heavily invested in supporting trade unions for female dominated trades and other issues that directly impacted working women. The organisers of the WLL and the editors of its journal were mostly working-class women who had risen to more comfortable stations in life, such as Margaret Bondfield, a former shop assistant and the first female Member of Parliament.[14] This archival collection contains *The Labour Woman*, the journal of the WLL, as well as numerous letters to and from the executive board of the WLL.

The Gertrude Tuckwell Collection is primarily an archive of the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), an organisation formed as a general trade union to non-unionised female workforces. The organisers of the NFWW were mostly more middle-class women, such as Mary Macarthur and Gertrude Tuckwell, both of whom were very well educated and worked in professional occupations, a writer and a teacher respectively.[15] [16] While the NFWW was committed to the women workers' cause, the middle class leadership and membership meant that readers of their journal, *The Women Worker*, were more likely to keep servants themselves compared to *The Labour Woman*. This is evident in a slightly more sympathetic slant towards the plight of mistresses when compared to The Labour Woman.

[13] Labour History Archive & Study Centre [hereafter LHASC], Manchester, WLL/74, Letter from Margaret Macdonald to Local Secretary, Feb 14 1908; WLL/77, Letter from J. Ramsay Macdonald to Mrs. Middleton, March 21 1908
[14] Philip Williamson, 'Bondfield, Margaret Grace (1873–1953), trade unionist, campaigner for women's interests, and politician.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2011)
[15] Angela V. John, 'Macarthur [married name Anderson], Mary Reid (1880–1921), women's labour organizer.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2004)
[16] Angela V. John, 'Tuckwell, Gertrude Mary (1861–1951), trade unionist and social reformer.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2006)

Finally, the LSE Women's Library contains various letters and ephemera relating to suffrage and the plight of domestic workers. This includes pamphlets written by prominent trade unionists like Kathlyn Oliver, leaflets advertising the Domestic Workers Union (DWU) and various friendly societies for domestic workers such as the Domestic Workers Benevolent Association. This collection also holds notes on household service from the second series Charles Booth's famous study of London's working class, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which took place in the decade preceding the focus of the dissertation, as well as Beatrice Webb's notebooks collecting data on trade unions for women, which spans a longer period of time. While these studies are not solely focused on the time period, they provide useful contextual information about the starting point for domestic servants in this period.

My two main sources drawn on for this dissertation will be *The Woman Worker* and *The Labour Woman*, the journals of the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) and the Women's Labour League (WLL) respectively. These periodicals are important resources because they were a platform for communication between and about domestic workers from a labour movement perspective. *The Woman Worker's* editorial team first suggested to Kathlyn Oliver that she take up the responsibility of starting the DWU after she wrote to them expressing her discontent with her working life, and the journal provided regular updates on the union's progress as well as remarks from Oliver and later Grace Neal, her successor as secretary of the DWU. These documents are invaluable in tracing the unions progress and activities as none of the organisations' papers survive. The journal also features regular letters from servants and mistresses

alike about the challenges of domestic service, often from a socialist or suffragist perspective. Similarly, Glasgow organiser Jessie Stephen wrote a monthly column in *The Labour Woman* reporting on the progress of the Glasgow branch and detailing her own experience of domestic work. This column, titled 'The Problems of Domestic Service', also featured letters from other workers and socialist mistresses. As with *The Woman Worker*, these letters help to offer a broader perspective on life in service and the complex diversity of perspectives on domestic work emanating from the socialist left.

A close study of these documents reveals that domestic workers occupied a unique situation among socialist and trade unionist women. They were members of one of the most oppressed and least regulated workforces, but due to the conditions of their work were incredibly difficult to organise politically. Middle class socialist women supported them in theory but were reliant on their labour in order to do their own activist work, therefore their own self-interest was at odds with the interest of their domestic workers. Despite never reaching large membership numbers or influence in their trade union, domestic workers made up a lively and visible segment of the women's socialist and trade unionist movement.

The first chapter of this dissertation will examine the material conditions of domestic work, such as living conditions, pay, and the employer-employee relationship. These conditions will help to demonstrate how domestic work was viewed differently both by the public and by the government, both by seeing how different their conditions of

labour were and how unregulated and unprotected by legislation this type of work was. This will provide a solid grounding for the second chapter, which will explore the main demands and aims of the DWU and other domestic workers. This chapter will look at why these demands were more difficult to achieve for domestic workers than for some other sections of the workforce, and how they were supported or hindered by other socialist, trade unionist, and feminist groups. The final chapter will analyse responses to domestic worker's demands and trade union organising from the general public, suffragettes, socialists, and trade unionists. This chapter will demonstrate that the most steadfast allies of the DWU were other trade unionists, and that support from suffragettes and middle-class socialists was often limited or conditional.

Through the labour movement, feminist, and trade unionist periodicals I hope to trace the voices of socialist and trade unionist domestic workers and explore their relationship to the rest of the movement, both in solidarity with their fellow workers and in opposition to their employers who were sometimes also a part of the movement. By looking at the unique aspects of their work and the unique difficulties they faced in unionisation, I hope to show the ways in which they were a part of the socialist and trade unionist movement but occupied a distinct position that set them apart from many of their fellow socialists and workers.

‘Want of Liberty’: The Conditions of Domestic Work

This chapter will explore the material conditions of accommodation, working hours, and wages, as well as the way working in the domestic sphere and engaging in ‘reproductive labour’ produced a unique and challenging set of working conditions. It will demonstrate the way in which domestic workers’ situation within the domestic sphere impacted the physical reality of their working lives. This includes the nature of the work and the patronising moral surveillance that these workers were subjected to by their employers. The conditions of work were often unsafe, depressing, and conducive to ill health. They were not subject to inspection or regulation in most circumstances and made privacy and work-life separation near impossible. The letters domestic workers wrote to socialist women’s magazines like *The Woman Worker* and *The Labour Woman* offer a valuable first hand perspective into what this type of work was really like, and why unionisation was so crucial for these women. It is important to understand these conditions in order to understand the unique challenges domestic workers faced in organising into trade unions and their position in relation to the socialist and trade unionist movements, which will be explored in later chapters. An understanding of the working conditions will also help to better contextualise the union demands as explored in the next chapter. The harsh conditions of domestic work set it apart from other types of work because it was not regulated, encompassed the worker’s entire life rather than just the hours they spent working, and the intimate nature of the work blurred the boundaries between a personal and professional relationship with employers.

The late 1800s and early 1900s saw a rapid upheaval in the regulation of work. The Factory and Workshop Act of 1895 and its various amendments over the next decade saw limitations placed on the hours that women and children could work, health requirements such as proper ventilation and access to ‘sanitary conveniences’, fire escapes, and adequate time off.[17] When Henry Campbell-Bannerman’s Liberal party took power in 1905 he instituted a series of reforms aimed at helping the poor, including workers and those unable to work. The Liberal government set up labour exchanges, implemented the first steps towards a minimum wage with the Trade Boards Act 1909, and passed legislation preventing employers from suing trade unions for damages incurred during industrial action.[18] Some of this legislation was specific to women workers, such as the Shops Act of 1911 which required regular lunch breaks and at least a half day off per week for shop assistants, a largely female workforce.[19] Domestic workers were included in the 1906 Workmen's Compensation Act and, controversially, the 1911 National Insurance Act, but excluded from the majority of other workers’ rights reforms of the period.

This period also saw the beginnings of an introduction of a minimum wage. The Trade Board Act of 1908 implemented a minimum wage in four different trades: chainmaking, lace finishing, paper box making, and tailoring. These minimum wages were different for men and women, but for women ranged from 11 shillings and three and a quarter pence

[17] Wellcome Collection Medical Heritage Library, accessed Aug 03 2024, Factory and Workshops Act 1901, (https://wellcomecollection.org/works/yc8xckz4)
[18] Warwick Digital Collections [hereafter Warwick], Trades Union Congress, 292C/230.2/1/95, The Working of the Trade Boards Act in Great Britain and Ireland (reprinted from The Journal of Political Economy, July 1914, Vol. 22, No. 7)
[19] Hansard, HL Deb 5 December 1911 vol 10 cols 1139-61

to 14 shillings and one penny per week.[20] This equated to just over 29 pounds per annum on the low end, and over 36 pounds per annum on the higher end. The Trade Board Act would expand to include other trades over the next decade, but domestic workers wages remained unregulated.[21] The next year the Liberal government implemented the Labour Exchanges Act, opening centres to help find work for the unemployed. Workers from every occupation except for indoor domestic servants were eligible to use this service.[22] Domestic servants instead had to use the servants registry, which charged a fee. These are just two examples of the way that the government view of domestic service as a different type of work led to worse conditions for workers.

One important differentiation in conditions of work for domestic servants in comparison to other workers was that they lived at their place of work. This was not unheard of in other professions; for instance, shop assistants sometimes lived in shared accommodation above their shop as part of their employment benefits, a practice referred to as living-in. However, these accommodations were more akin to shared dormitories, and were by no means a requirement of the work as plenty of shop assistants sought out private lodgings. An article in *The Woman Worker* critiquing the practice says that 'The system is generally abused for profit: and is only condoned by the majority in the belief that it acts as a sort of moral safeguard.'[23]

[20] Warwick, Trades Union Congress, 292C/230.2/1/95, The Trade Boards Act
[21] Warwick, Trades Union Congress, 292C/230.2/1/105, Trade Boards and the Cave Report
[22] Robert À-Ababrelton, 'The National Labour Exchanges', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 59, No. 3076 (1911), 1118-1122
[23] The Woman Worker, 20 January 1909, pg. 54

For domestic servants however, living with their employer was a requirement. Their accommodation was not purpose-built dormitories, but generally a basement room off of the kitchen, if not simply a bed in the kitchen. These rooms were often damp, mould infested, and not properly furnished. Some lacked windows. Jessie Stephen, secretary of the Glasgow branch of the DWU, writes in *The Labour Woman:*

> ‘To go to my room it was necessary to descend a flight of very steep stairs and so dark that I stumbled at every step. [...]. It seemed so dark and gloomy to me that I took a second look at the windows to find the cause. Nothing but a high stone wall met my gaze. But the room itself was the greatest revelation of all. The floor was composed of tar macadam, which, however serviceable it may be for a public street, was a very great surprise in a bedroom. One or two moth eaten rugs, innocent of pile, covered the floor;. Two chests of drawers and two beds constituted the sole furniture of this gloomy, vault-like room. The paper hung off the wall in places through dampness, and the walls themselves were innocent even of a text.’[24]

Damp and lack of windows are a recurring theme that other domestic workers mention in their recounting of living conditions. Stephen goes on to write:

[24] The Labour Woman, March 1914, pg. 187

> ‘At nine o’clock at night I found in one house, three pulleys of steaming wet clothes directly above the bed of the two girls who slept there. Thus we find the seeds of disease sown among these daughters of the working class.’[25]

In the next month’s edition of *The Labour Woman,* another domestic worker writes:

> ‘I and my box were being escorted down this dark dungeon stair, to a dark and very damp room. It was even darker than mine, as all the light it had came from a grating in the area, and if at any time the girl who slept in this room wanted air during the night, her room would be swarmed with cats, which just stepped from the area into the open window, the top of which was on a level with the area ground.’[26]

Accommodation was a part of domestic workers compensation. Employers were able to pay lesser wages due to providing room and board, but these rooms often did not reach even the standard of the crowded dormitories or cheap boarding houses offered to shop girls and other workers.[27] In addition to depressing and unhealthy living quarters, the food provided for workers was often inadequate. Jessie Stephen writes:

> ‘I have partaken of a breakfast which consisted of three scrambled eggs between 6 people. [...] Then what do you think of one kipper (not a pair) between two, or a saucerful of porridge or half a boiled egg? Perhaps you think I am exaggerating.

[25] Ibid
[26] The Labour Woman, May 1911, pg. 196
[27] Women Folk [formerly The Woman Worker], 13 April 1910, pg. 882

> Let me take you further. How would you like to be expected to finish what was left on the plates from the table for your dinner?.'[28]

As these accounts suggest, living conditions were often very dangerous to worker's health. Living quarters for shop assistants were subject to health and safety regulations and inspection in the same way that factories were, but there was no such regulation for domestic workers quarters.[29] Alongside the risks to physical health, living in dark, damp, and underfurnished conditions had a negative impact on mental wellbeing. Jessie Stephen described how 'the depressing influence of that cell used to give me the most horrible thoughts at times'.[30]

Complaints against unhealthy living conditions to which domestic workers were confined would become one of the central demands of their trade unions. Workers called for inspection of their living spaces as well as the option to live in dormitories outside of the household where they worked, which would allow for healthier living spaces and a more defined separation between the workplace and the home.[31] These demands will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Domestic workers living in their workplace also meant that there was no clear delineation between the working day and one's free time. They were expected to spend

[28] The Labour Woman, May 1911, pg. 196
[29] The Woman Worker, 20 January 1909, pg. 54
[30] The Labour Woman, March 1914, pg. 187
[31] The Labour Woman, January 1914, pg. 131

every waking hour attending to their duties without even designated breaks for meals in many cases. Kathlyn Oliver, founding secretary of the DWU, writes in 1909:

> ‘One friend tells me that her working hours are from 6 a.m. until she goes to bed, except for a few hours on Sunday, when she is too tired to go out. Another tells me that she has absolutely no time to herself during the day, from the time she gets up until she goes to bed – no time even for any personal sewing, much less for any mental cultivation; nothing but work, work, work from weary chime to chime. One friend, more daring than the rest, writes: “It would be nice if servants could know (as all other workers do) when their work was done.”’[32]

In most industries women workers were not permitted to work more than twelve hours a day or sixty hours a week, and were required to have at least a half hour long break after five hours, totalling at least one and a half hours of meal breaks through a twelve hour day.[33] Regulation also prohibited working on Sunday, with some exceptions or modifications to industries with time sensitive processes such as creameries and the making of preserves. Even work in less regulated industries such as laundries was capped at 14 hours a day for women, and the 60 hours per week cap remained. None of these regulations applied to domestic workers. Kathlyn Oliver writes that ‘The domestic servant works sixteen or seventeen hours a day– she puts in over a hundred hours a week’[34] This seems accurate to the experiences described by other workers. A

[32] The Woman Worker, Oct. 13 1909, pg. 345
[33] Wellcome Collection Medical Heritage Library, accessed Aug 03 2024, Factory and Workshops Act 1901, (https://wellcomecollection.org/works/yc8xckz4)
[34] The Woman Worker, Oct. 6 1909, pg. 321

writer to *The Woman Worker* describes an acquaintance in domestic service who, 'In her first situation she had to rise at 5:30 a.m., and, working as an under-housemaid through the day in a household where four other servants were kept, she rarely got to bed before 11 p.m.'[35]

As well as long daily working hours, it was rare for domestic workers to have a full day off more than once per month. The standard domestic worker's schedule allowed a half day off every other Sunday, and maybe a full day once a month. Some employers allowed an additional afternoon off during the week of three or four hours, but this was not standard. Employers also often instituted a strict curfew for their servants on their days off.[36] These curfews were one of the measures exercised by employers to impress their own moral standards onto domestic workers. While paternalistic projection of Christian morality onto women workers existed across other industries, especially lower paid roles such as laundry and shop work, these employers ultimately had no say in how their employees spent their downtime.[37] For domestic servants however, employers had full control over what hours their workers were allowed to be out of the house and what visitors they were allowed (usually none). Jessie Stephen highlights this in her column:

> 'The majority of mistresses- even Socialists- think an afternoon once a week quite often enough, and some of them even suggest that three or four hours is quite enough "time off" for the maid. They argue that too much time might be

[35] The Woman Worker, 22 September 1909, pg. 275
[36] The Woman Worker, August 4, 1909 pg. 102
[37] The Woman Worker, January 5, 1910, pg. 603; January 12, 1910, pg. 626

> heavy upon them and cause them to become immoral! What a paltry excuse! If a girl is so abnormal as these ladies suggest, is it not as possible for her to go wrong in three or four hours as in seven or eight? By following that argument to its logical conclusion, maids ought not to have any "time off"!'[38]

One particular aspect of concern for the 'morality' of domestic workers was in sexual relationships. There was a very high rate of illegitimate childbirth among servants in this era, with one London hospital reporting nearly half of all illegitimate births came from women who were or had been in domestic service.[39] Romantic or sexual relationships could often be cause for dismissal, but not in all circumstances, as many young women entered service with the end goal of marriage in mind, perhaps to a fellow male servant or a tradesman who visited her employer for work. This was an occasional discussion topic among socialist servant-keeping women in the pages of *The Woman Worker*:

> "A few months ago I was talking to one of those ultra-respectable women, an immaculate housekeeper and an orthodox manager of house and home. I was saying to her that servants are human beings; and naturally wanted to walk out sometimes, perhaps with one of the other sex; that it would be only natural if a woman felt a desire to talk to a tradesman at the kitchen door; and that she might possibly desire a male companion on a wet winter's evening indoors when

[38] The Labour Woman, June 1914, pg. 228
[39] John R. Gillis, 'Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900', *Feminist Studies*, Spring, 1979, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Spring, 1979), pp. 142-173

> walking was not very pleasant. [...] “Oh, but you must keep them in their place,” said this petty tyrant, this gentle(?)woman, this representative of motherhood.”[40]

While much of this moralising revolved around purity, this was not the only aspect of domestic worker’s lives that their employers surveilled. Several women involved in the labour movement described losing jobs due to their political views or being prevented from attending labour or trade unionist meetings. In a recorded interview with oral historian Brian Harrison, Jessie Stephen describes losing a job due to her trade unionist activities. “But of course that led to me getting the sack! She said she wasn’t having agitators in her house. She didn’t believe in trade unions and she didn’t want anybody in her house that was doing this kind of thing. it was disloyal to the employer and all this sort of thing. So she gave me a month's notice.”[41] Jessie ended up having to move to London once her work as a trade unionist in Glasgow gained traction, saying that it got “too hot” for her and “as soon as they heard my name they wouldn’t look at me”.[42] Similarly, in a 1908 letter to head of the Women’s Labour League, Mrs. Middleton, a domestic servant called Mary Burchell writes: “Want of liberty is one of my grievances, but another is that any mistress is strongly opposed to my attending any labour meetings or demonstrations and if she knew, would raise obstacles to prevent me getting out, this really troubles me.”[43]

[40] The Woman Worker, Oct. 28, 1908, pg. 555
[41] LSE, 8SUF/B/157, Brian Harrison interview with Jessie Stephen 1 July 1977
[42] Ibid
[43] LHASC, WLL/124, letter from Mary Burchell to Mrs. Middleton 2 August 1908

The phrase ‘want of liberty’ is an apt description for the situation of domestic workers. Compared to their peers in factories and shops they had very little control over their private lives. Members of the employing class often viewed this as an advantage to working in domestic service, or at least a reason it would be preferable to factory work, as “she gets more real wages, and, although perhaps not much freedom, still walking the streets at night is good for no girl and often results in ruin.”[44] This last part is in some ways a cruel irony, as women who lost their jobs in domestic service and were unable to find work, or simply who found it too repressive, would sometimes turn to prostitution as an alternative way of earning a living.[45] Another path for domestic workers ending up in prostitution was as victims of rape or sexual coercion by men in their household, especially when it resulted in pregnancy. Miss Coxhill’s 1914 report on the Domestic Workers Union for Beatrice Webb noted that ‘A large number of girl servants are ruined by either one of the household or a visitor. An ignorant and attractive girl from the country has very great risks to run.’[46]

The statement about ‘real wages’, however, has some truth to it. Wages for domestic servants were usually lower than other professions, but this was due to room and board being included. Through *The Woman Worker*’s ‘Situations Vacant’ sections there are wages listed ranging from £18 a year for a general maid for a family of 5 in an 8 room house to £10 for ‘Trustworthy person to assist with housework and children (three)’[47]. A 1909 article lists the wage for a general servant as £16 to £20.[48] In comparison, an

[44] Women Folk [formerly The Women Worker], May 11, 1910, pg. 965
[45] Lucy Delap, ''The Good, the Bad, and the Spicy': Servants in Pornography and Erotica', *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011); The Labour Woman, pg. 237
[46] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/136, Report from Domestic Workers’ Union by Miss Coxhill
[47] The Woman Worker, Feb 17, 1909, pg. 167; Feb 3, 1909, pg. 116
[48] The Woman Worker, April 7, 1909, pg. 330

article in *The Labour Woman* describes a young dressmaker who earned £16 per annum and paid four shillings a week in rent, or ten pounds and eight shillings a year, leaving only five pounds and twelve shillings for food and all other expenses, which she supplemented with a little money sent from home. This salary seems somewhat typical for young women workers, with a worker in a 'fancy-goods shop' describing the same wage of six shillings per week.[49] For both of these women, the working hours were however shorter than domestic workers, leaving the house at 8am and returning home at 8pm with a two mile walk each way.[50] This means that despite a higher wage after rent in domestic service, the hourly wage was substantially less. In an article celebrating the founding of the Domestic Workers Union, Charles N. Shaw writes: "In what other department of industry would the workers engaged be satisfied to work for 1d. per hour? [...] Do you know of any other body of toilers who would consent to toil and moil in underground kitchens through the scorching days of summer for a mere pittance?"[51]

Another way in which domestic work was viewed as separate to most types of industrial employment lay in the ideas of the public and the private/domestic 'spheres', and in turn the idea of productive versus reproductive labour. The idea of reproductive labour is a useful one for understanding the domestic sphere and the unique role of domestic workers in the workforce. The idea was championed by socialist feminists in the 1970s who were developing their own critiques of Marx. Theorists of reproductive labour argue that Marx's idea of labour focused too strongly on capitalist commodity production, and neglected the sexual division of labour and the work done in the home to produce and

[49] The Labour Woman, July 1913, pg. 67
[50] The Labour Woman, June 1913, pg. 22
[51] The Woman Worker Sept. 22, 1909, pg. 275

sustain a capable workforce. Marx differentiated between productive and unproductive labour, arguing that productive labour was work that produced surplus value, such as manufacturing, while unproductive labour did not produce value.[52] Reproductive labour, as defined by socialist feminists, refers to the work done within the home such as cooking, cleaning, and raising children that is essential to economic productivity outside of the home.[53] This concept was first applied to white housewives and stay at home mothers in the Wages for Housework movement, a feminist call for patriarchal society to recognise the value of domestic reproductive labour. The idea was later critiqued by Black and Hispanic feminists in the US due to their experiences as paid domestic workers. Feminists like Maria Stewart and Claudia Jones pointed out that many Black and Hispanic women worked as paid domestic workers in white women's homes.[54] They highlighted the importance of applying a racial and class based analysis to the concept of reproductive labour. This also expanded the concept of reproductive labour to include work outside of the household, in places like state institutions.

On a smaller scale and without the same intersectional approach to race, this same debate was playing out among early socialist feminists in Edwardian Britain. Though it would be over fifty years before the Wages for Housework movement took off, this same idea was being discussed in 1911 in the pages of *The Labour Woman*. Socialist writer Ada Nield Chew published an article in *The Labour Woman* titled 'Should Wives be Paid'? In the article, Chew highlights how men are only capable of going out and

[52] Silvia Federici, "The reproduction of labour-power in the global economy, Marxist theory and the unfinished feminist revolution", Article for UC Santa Cruz Seminar, January 27 2009
[53] Ibid
[54] Susan Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction* (London, 2020), ch. 7

earning wages due to the reproductive work of their wives in the home. She highlights the plight of the middle class woman, describing 'the bitterness felt by middle-class women because they "run the house", and yet they have only an allowance for house-keeping and all the income is their husbands.'[55] She argues that the domestic reproductive work leads to a higher amount of productivity for husbands in the workplace, saying:

> 'The majority of wives, happily, remain in their homes, and men are paid more wages than they would be paid otherwise, because they have wives and families to keep. Therefore the wives have a right to half the money, since the fact that they are there, results in more money being paid.'[56]

Reproductive labour was explicitly viewed as wives' responsibility, whether they were conducting it themselves or overseeing their servants carrying out the work. A male writer to *The Labour Woman*, identifying himself only as "The Bachelors Friend", sums up this idea:

> 'A woman's chief duty is, as a wife, to run her home smoothly, cleanly, and economically. Even when she can have servants to do the work, her personal knowledge of household management is essential to domestic perfection… There is no reason why a man's wife should not do her best in her sphere, as the man does in his…'[57]

[55] "Should Wives be Paid?', The Labour Woman, November 1913, pg. 103
[56] Ibid
[57] "Trained v. Untrained Wives", The Woman Worker, November 17, 1909, pg. 467

"The Bachelor's Friend" describes domestic work as the woman's *sphere*, reinforcing a patriarchal idea that emerged alongside the industrial revolution, which held that women belong in the household, the domestic sphere, and men belong in the public sphere.[58] This gendered binary highlights the way that domestic work was thought of explicitly as a woman's job. Although there were male servants, they occupied roles like gardeners, chauffeurs, valets, and butlers, which rarely involved work in the domestic sphere in the same way that a cook, nursery maid, or general maid would. Female servants also far outnumbered male servants.[59] The above quotes demonstrate the ways in which reproductive labour was viewed as something separate to other forms of 'productive' labour, like manufacturing, and how this labour that belonged to the domestic sphere was the sole responsibility for women. The fact that the actual labour domestic workers were engaged in was such a different category of work led to further differentiation between them and other workers, especially by employers, as later chapters will show.

Domestic workers dealt with worse conditions than many other occupations of similar pay and status. Their living conditions were damp, dark, and unhealthy, and they were often not provided with enough to eat despite room and board forming part of their compensation. Their hours were long and ill defined, and time off was a rarity, with no breaks during the day and only about two days off per month in total. They had little to no privacy and their employers were able to surveil and restrict their usage of free time,

[58] Deborah L. Rotman, 'Separate Spheres?: Beyond the Dichotomies of Domesticity', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (2006), 666-674
[59] Wellcome Collection, Census of England and Wales, 1911. (10 Edward 7 and 1 George 5, ch. 27.) General report, appendices, 1917-18, Cd. 8491, XXXV.483

making interpersonal relationships and political engagement difficult. At the same time their work was incredibly underregulated. Very few of the pro-worker Liberal reforms of the period applied to domestic workers, from minimum wages to maximum hours. The conditions of domestic work were uniquely challenging among the occupations available to women. This, combined with their exclusion from protective legislation, made unionising a challenge but incredibly crucial.

Raising the Standard: The DWU's Demands

During this period there were two simultaneous attempts to form a trade union for domestic workers. One was the Domestic Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland (DWU), formed by London based domestic worker Kathlyn Oliver in 1909 at the urging of the editorial team at *The Woman Worker*.[60] The other was the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers, formed by Glasgow based domestic worker Jessie Stephen in 1912.[61] The Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers merged into a branch of the DWU in 1913 when Stephen moved to London due to difficulty finding work in Glasgow on account of her radical politics.[62] This chapter will explore the demands of the DWU. I will look at what the demands were and what actions the DWU took to try to achieve these demands. This will include looking at the ways that they were supported by other socialist, feminist, and trade unionist groups in their actions, although this will be explored further in the next chapter. Many of their demands were rights and regulations achieved by other industries years ago, such as maximum working hours and mandated breaks. Some were also very specific to their industry, such as reforming the reference system. An analysis of these demands shows that domestic workers aimed to be considered workers in the same way that their counterparts in other occupations were, and these demands were attempts to raise the standard of domestic work to be on equal footing with other trades. The chapter will then explore why some of these demands were more difficult to achieve in the context of domestic work versus

[60] The Woman Worker, September 22 1909, pg. 275
[61] LSE, 8SUF/B/157, Brian Harrison interview with Jessie Stephen 1 July 1977
[62] Ibid

workplaces such as factories and shops, as well as the idea of professionalising the occupation of domestic work through formal training. This was at times a union demand but it was more generally a way that domestic workers felt they could be perceived as a professional workforce instead of a taken-for-granted aspect of the domestic sphere. Finally, this chapter will also examine the 1911 Insurance Act and how it impacted the DWU and their demands. Public debate over the 1911 Insurance Act in relation to domestic servants was frequent and spirited, and presented the DWU with an opportunity for increased public awareness.

In the September 1909 article announcing the formation of the DWU, Kathlyn Oliver laid out the following as the initial aims for the union:

'1– That in connection with the Servants Trade Union a servants' registry office shall be started for members of the Union, who shall be of good character. (A high standard of efficiency in the servants' various capacities should be insisted on, which would result in employers of servants demanding members of the Union in their employ.)
2– Out-of-work pay to servants who shall have been members of the Union for not less than 12 months.
3– That the Woman Worker shall be the official organ of the Union.
4– That the objects of the Union would be to educate servants to a proper sense of their importance, and to *raise the standard of domestic work to the level of other industries*.
5– To agitate for legislation to compel employers to provide proper and healthy accommodation for servants, and for reasonable hours of rest and labour.'[63]

[63] The Woman Worker, September 22, 1909, pg. 275

The desire to 'agitate for legislation to compel employers to provide proper and healthy accommodation for servants, and for reasonable hours of rest and labour' was developed into a more detailed list of demands by Jessie Stephen's Glasgow branch of the DWU. In 1913, *The Labour Woman* launched a monthly column exploring the 'Servant Problem' from the perspective of the workers. The servant problem was a prevalent idea at the time that it was increasingly difficult for employers to find and retain capable domestic workers. The column aimed to explore what conditions were making domestic service such an unappealing employment for women. The column mainly featured workers, but was also open to employers offering contrary opinions.[64] In the first instance of the column, Jessie Stephen put forward a list of the Domestic Workers Union's demands, compiled by the over one hundred members of her Glasgow branch of the DWU. Their demands were:

'1. 12 hour day

2. Set meal hours

3. Provision of uniform

4. Half holiday weekly

5. Graded scale of wages

6. Wages fortnightly

7. Two hours daily

8. Compulsory character note

9. Abolition of registries

[64] The Labour Woman, December 1913, pg. 131

10. All public holidays
11. One week's holiday in three months
12. Sanitary bedrooms'[65]

The demands regarding registry offices were of particular timely relevance as the Labour Exchanges Act was passed earlier this year, a system that helped unemployed people to find work but specifically excluded 'indoor domestic servants'.[66] The alternative for domestic workers was registry offices, which were privately run offices where domestic workers could pay a fee to be listed, and employers could come to seek out domestic workers. The fees charged by these offices were unregulated until 1907, and this was an issue both for employers and workers.[67]. This was acknowledged as an issue in the 1907 Public Health Acts Amendment Act, which introduced further regulation onto the running of registry offices, including a requirement for the registry office to be registered with the local authority.[68] Registry offices were one of the only ways for workers without a character reference to find domestic employment, whether this be because it was their first job or because their previous employer had either given no reference or a very bad one. Starting a registry office run by servants would allow them to structure the employment system so as to give equal power to the servants and the employers. They could offer high quality employees in exchange for employers

[65] Ibid
[66] *'Labour Exchanges. A Bill To Provide For The Establishment Of Labour Exchanges And For Other Purposes Incidental Thereto.'*, 1909. Parliament: House of Commons Bill No. 207. London, Eyre and Spottiswoode Ltd. Available at https://parlipapers.proquest.com/
[67] *'Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907'*, 1907. Ch. 53. Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/
[68] Ibid

agreeing to their union demands.[69] This would be an important step towards a greater degree of worker autonomy.

The DWU formed an employment bureau at some point around 1913. In a leaflet advertising their employment bureau, the DWU said that 'The ordinary Registry Offices are run for the private profits of the proprietors, who are concerned only with making as much profit as possible out of both employers and Domestics by way of fees.'[70] The bureau did not charge fees to union members, and guaranteed: 'A minimum wage; sufficient food and decent sleeping accommodation to be provided; minimum hours of leisure out of house; fortnight's holiday per year on full pay; a true and fair written character to be given upon leaving a place; no cleaning of outsides of upstairs windows, etc.'[71] The employment bureau was one method available for enforcing their demands when they were not encoded in the law.

Another point raised in Kathlyn Oliver's statement of intentions is professional training. The idea of education for domestic servants was a frequent topic of discussion in the pages of many socialist women's magazines. In her weekly column for *The Woman Worker* 'How Can I Earn A Living?', journalist Esther Longhurst discusses domestic work as a profession and the need for training. In April 1909, several months before the formation of the DWU, Longhurst wrote that 'Once our workers were trained they would form trades unions and demand good conditions *i.e.,* fixed hours, a living wage, decent accommodation. The work itself, I know, is attractive and suitable to a large number of

[69] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/139, DWU Employment Bureau Leaflet
[70] Ibid
[71] Ibid

girls who are too timid to take it up for fear of losing social status.'[72] This highlights one of the key reasons for demanding training for domestic work, that as discussed in the first chapter, the work carried heavy social stigma. A young woman who Longhurst interviewed the next year said '[...] my friends would all look down upon me if they knew I was doing servant's work.'[73] Longhurst argued that a system of training college for domestic workers similar to the system offered for teachers would help to bring respectability to the occupation, which would in turn allow qualified women to demand better terms from their employers.[74] She points out that the real pay is similar to that of nursing or clerical work, and that professional training could help elevate domestic work to a similar social status as that work.[75] This demand is echoed in a recruitment leaflet for the union issued sometime between 1911 and 1914, which stated one of their objectives as 'To raise the status of Domestic Work to the level of other industries'.[76] This demand was not isolated to the political left: a column by Mrs. Maude Watson in The Daily Telegraph in 1914 echoed the same idea of schools and diplomas for domestic servants, saying, 'Make it a profession for which proper training is necessary, and the status of the work will go up immediately, and, what is more, the conditions under which girls have to work will improve also.'[77]

The rest of the demands as laid out by Jessie Stephen largely centred around fairer working conditions, as explored in the previous chapter. The workers wanted more regulation around their working hours, wages, conditions, and holidays, similarly to

[72] The Woman Worker, April 7, 1909, pg. 330
[73] The Woman Worker, January 5, 1910, pg. 602
[74] Ibid
[75] The Woman Worker, April 7, 1909, pg. 330
[76] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/137, DWU recruitment leaflet
[77] Daily Telegraph, 21 Feb. 1914, "Servant Problem.", p. 16.

many other trade unions. Women workers in other fields had regulations ensuring they had limited working hours, mandatory breaks, and in some trades a minimum wage, and domestic workers wanted the same treatment. One demand specific to domestic workers however was the 'character note', or reference. Employers would generally not engage a domestic worker unless they could provide a positive reference from their previous employer. In *The Labour Woman*'s 'Problems of Domestic Service' column, Grace Neal explains that, 'there is no law which compels the employer to give a reference. They may not give a false reference, but they can refuse any reference at all, which is worse'.[78] She details how workers are often forced to stay in dangerous or unsafe conditions because they would not obtain a reference if they left, which left workers at risk of abuse, ill health, or sexual assault and rape. In the same issue, Jessie Stephen explains that 'It is one mistress in a hundred who will take a girl without a reference as to her capabilities as a worker, and one in a thousand who will take her without any reference. I have not yet met one myself.'[79] The necessity of the character note differentiated domestic work from other forms of work because it placed an emphasis on the personal relationship between workers and their employers, and making an unbiased reference compulsory would help to mitigate this distinction.

In 1910 the DWU attempted to push a law to require employers to give any departing worker an accurate reference. The bill, referred to as the Character Note Bill, had been proposed in various forms from 1906 as it applied more generally to most fields of work, although it was not such an essential part of other occupations as it was with domestic

[78] The Labour Woman, July 1914, pg. 237
[79] Ibid

service. The 1910 iteration was presented by trade unionist and Labour MP for Newton in Lancashire, James Seddon. Seddon was heavily involved in the trade union movement and would later go on to be president of the Trades Union Congress.[80] Grace Neal is quoted describing it as 'a Bill presented last Session making it compulsory to give a domestic worker a character'.[81] Neal criticises Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George's lack of support for the bill, highlighting that she felt it was more important to the plight of domestic workers than the National Insurance Act, which will be discussed later in this chapter. This bill was not successfully passed in 1910, and would be proposed again in 1911, 1912, and 1913, after which the issue remained dormant until 1921.[82] The DWU would continue to agitate on this issue through those years, hosting a demonstration in favour of the bill in Trafalgar Square in April, 1913.[83]

Outside of legislation and news coverage, it is difficult to ascertain how successful the DWU was on a micro level with disputes against employers as none of the organisation's papers survive. One small, helpful glimpse into this is in the research notes for Beatrice and Sidney Webb's The History Of Trade Unionism.[84] Although the Domestic Workers Union is only mentioned briefly in a footnote in the finished text, some notes compiled by Miss Coxhill for the Webbs in January 1914 shed some light on the union's work. She describes the work done by the union as follows:

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[80] M. C. Curthoys, "Seddon, James Andrew (1868–1939), trade unionist and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2023)
[81] The Times, 30 Nov. 1911, "The Servants' Protest.", p. 7
[82] Hansard, HC Deb 06 April 1911 vol 23 c2437; HC Deb 06 May 1912 vol 38 c46; HC Deb 15 April 1913 vol 51 c1826
[83] Nottingham Evening Post, April 21 1913
[84] Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism, Revised edition, extended to 1920* (London, 1920)

> ‘Has conducted and won legal cases when servants have been dismissed without wages etc. Has agitated about the “character note” and the matter has been brought three times before the House of Commons, but nothing came of it.’[85]

A 1912 report on the work of the Aberdeen branch of the DWU reports that ‘several mistresses had granted the requests drawn up by the union, and in several cases a weekly half-holiday was being given.’[86] This evidence implies that most of the success of the DWU was on a micro level with individual disputes between employers and employees as opposed to industry wide successes. This makes sense as a consequence of the relatively isolated workplaces for domestic workers. They did not have large employers with many employees under them where they could utilise collective bargaining, as was the case with workers in many other industries. Many may have been the only workers in the house where they worked. In a 1977 interview with historial Brian Harrison, Jessie Stephen highlights the difficulty in organising an isolated workforce:

> ‘Oh, very very difficult. Yes, it’s like clerical workers in one or two offices where the only staff is one or two. It’s very difficult, it’s when you get into the big combinations that you make progress. And I found in the big houses we did better than in the small ones.’[87]

[85] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/136, Miss Coxhill Report from Domestic Workers Union
[86] Aberdeen Journal, 1 June 1912, ‘Domestic Servants' Movement.’ p. 7.
[87] LSE, 8SUF/B/157, Brian Harrison interview with Jessie Stephen 1 July 1977

Aside from political agitation, the union also served an important function as a social group. Due to working alone or in small groups and having so little time off, it was difficult for domestic workers to maintain a social life. The DWU helped build a community between workers, hosting dances, picnics, and other similar social events.[88] In a letter to the Hull Daily Mail, Grace Neal describes 'We also have a social side, and hold "socials." The members get up concerts, and are at present engaged in producing a play for our next "social."'[89] In 1914 the DWU opened a hostel and clubroom, creating a social space for their members as well as somewhere for domestic workers to be able to stay between jobs or while on holiday if they did not want to return to their families in other parts of the country.[90]

This shared social space was particularly important for domestic workers due to the fragmented nature of their workplace. In cities it was common for there to be only one or two workers in a given household, meaning there was not much of a sense of community among workers. As cited earlier, Jessie Stephen notes that in her early days of organising in Glasgow they often had more success in big country houses, since there were more workers together and they therefore had greater collective bargaining power.[91] Miss Coxhill's report for Beatrice and Sidney Webb also notes this as an obstacle, along with the fact that 'they have different evenings for their time off and the evening may vary from week to week. This makes organising meetings a hard task.'[92] As discussed in the previous chapter it was common to have at least an alternating

[88] Aberdeen Journal, November 8 1912; June 6 1913; Nov 1 1913
[89] Hull Daily Mail, February 5 1915
[90] The Labour Woman, May 1914, pg. 196
[91] LSE, 8SUF/B/157, Brian Harrison interview with Jessie Stephen 1 July 1977
[92] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/136, Miss Coxhill report on the DWU

Sunday afternoon off, so the DWU was able to take advantage of that fact to host demonstrations and socials on Sundays, but it was not guaranteed workers would have the evening off to attend, and even if they did they may not want to use their only evening off to attend meetings. The isolation of their work also made publications like *The Woman Worker* and *The Labour Woman* all the more important, as they allowed domestic workers to engage in political discussion, keep up to date on the suffragist and trade unionist movements, and build relationships with their fellow workers and socialists, all without having to have the free time to attend meetings in person.

One of the most prominent issues relating to domestic workers in this period was the 1911 National Insurance Act. The act was a liberal reform aimed at providing unemployment insurance in instances of illness or 'disablement'. This was composed of a contribution from the employee, the employer, and the state. The act provided workers with some free medical care, an early form of statutory sick pay, disability benefit, maternity benefit, and 'Sanatorium benefit', which paid for treatment in a sanatorium for mental illness.[93]

The insurance scheme could be administered by the post office, a trade union, or an 'approved society'. The approved societies included benevolent or friendly societies, many of these created for the specific reason of administering the insurance scheme but some preexisting, such as the Scottish Female Domestic Servants' Benevolent Association.[94] The DWU was also an approved society under the act, meaning that any domestic worker could register for their benefits to be facilitated via the DWU. The

[93] The Wellcome Collection, *'The National Insurance Act, 1911 / with introduction and notes by J.A. Lovat-Fraser'*, (London, 1912)
[94] Hansard, HC Deb 10 June 1912 vol 39 cc507-9

insurance section was separate to the trade section, but application leaflets advertised that 'You are, however, strongly advised to join the Trade Section as well. This is not compulsory, but will be to your advantage, as we are fighting for a compulsory character note, regulated hours and fair payment.'[95] The report from the union compiled for the Webb's research mentioned that the act 'brought it a large number of new members', and that although many of them were not particularly politically engaged, 'still the act has advertised the union'.[96]

An article in The Times, November 1911, describes a meeting of various benevolent societies for servants and other women's groups who met to protest the inclusion of domestic servants in the bill. These groups were however largely conservatives, including the Women's Conservative and Unionist Association and the Women's Tax Resistance League, and a range of titled women. These women argued that employers would have to either fire their maids or dock their salaries in order to cover their required contribution, leaving the maids worse off. They critiqued the bill for 'setting class against class' and preventing 'the beautiful intimacy which had hitherto existed between mistresses and servants'.[97] They also felt that as servants would still be, theoretically, looked after in their homes while ill and did not incur additional expenses, there was no need for them to have the insurance sick pay. These arguments were all from a conservative perspective, arguing that the state should not be interfering in the employer-employee relationship and that the relationship of a servant and her employer was personal rather than political.

[95] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/138, DWU National Insurance Leaflet
[96] LSE, WEBB TRADE UNION/A/47/136
[97] " The Times, November 30 1911, "The Servants' Protest", p. 7

Grace Neal, at the time the secretary of the DWU, was also present at this meeting. Neal supported the resolution to exclude servants from the bill, and brought forward evidence of letters between the union and prime minister David Lloyd George where she had attempted to express the union's stance on the issue.[98] The Chancellor of the Exchequer had attempted to arrange a meeting with members of the DWU, but Grace Neal had refused, saying that they did not want the National Insurance Act but they wanted a compulsory character note, and the government had refused to meet with them over that issue so they did not want to meet with them at all.[99]

The politics of the situation was however further complicated by Mary Macarthur, general secretary of the Women's Trades Union League, protesting the resolution 'being submitted on the basis of the speeches that had been made', presumably due to the conservative slant of the arguments put forward.[100] Grace Neal also objected to Liberal MP Hilaire Belloc's attempts to organise workers to protest by not paying their insurance, saying that he was 'not a trade unionist, and that he only joined their union on the previous day'.[101]

Grace Neal's reference to correspondence with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister over this topic highlights one of the only times aside from the character note debate that the concerns of domestic workers were given time in

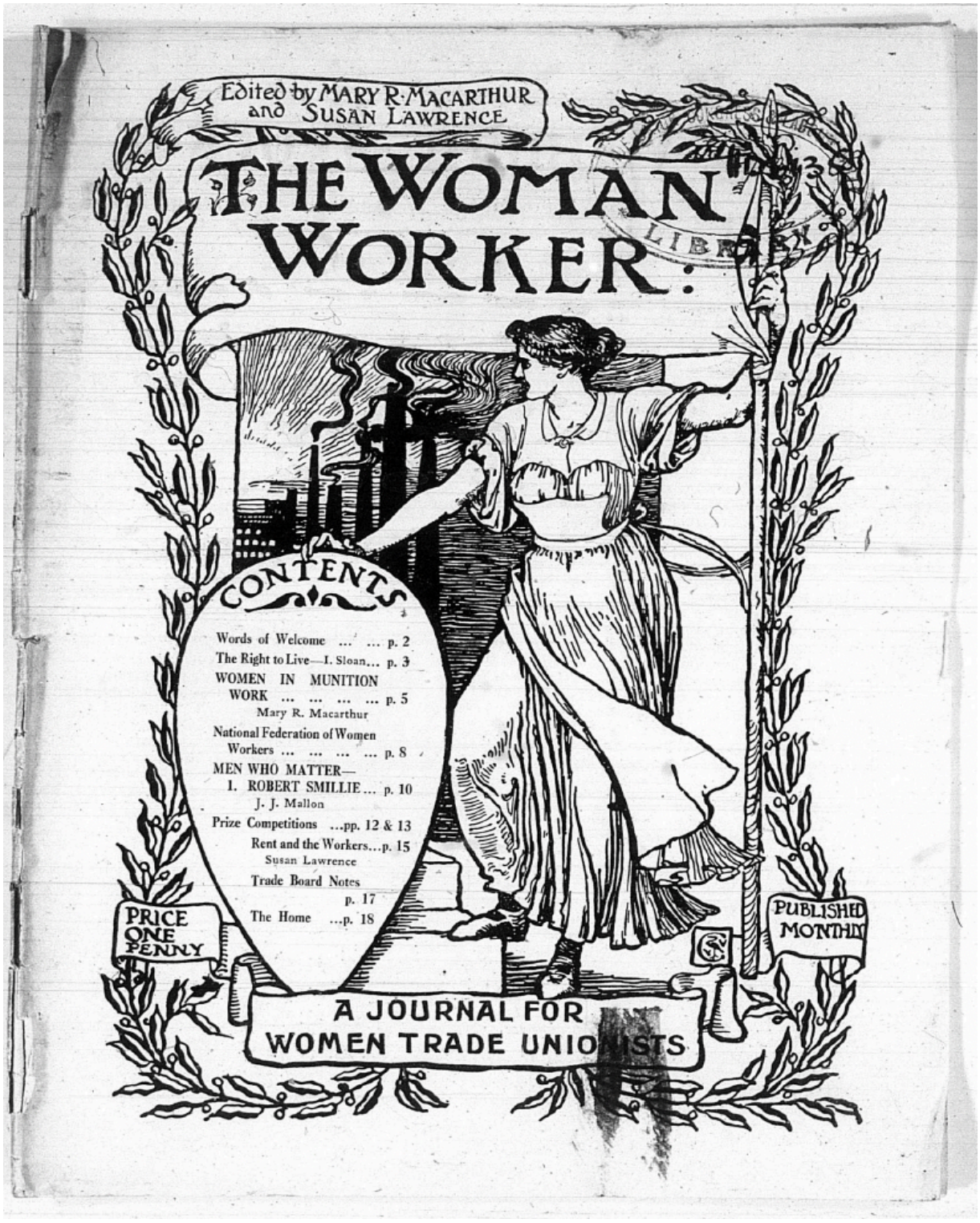
[98] Ibid
[99] Aberdeen Journal, November 30 1911, "The Servant Tax."
[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid

parliament. Some politicians, such as Conservative MP for Brighton George Tyron, said that he received 560 communications on the matter, many of which came from domestic workers.[102] Labour MP for Manchester John Clynes attempted to raise the union's concerns during a Commons debate, saying 'Members of the House have this morning received from the Domestic Workers' Union four questions relating to the Bill' and enquiring as to whether the DWU had been granted an audience with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but the line of enquiry was dismissed and does not come up again.[103] In the third reading of the bill, Conservative MP for Hitchin Robert Cecil highlighted that the question of domestic servants had been 'the backbone of the agitation against this Bill.'[104] Despite achieving little success in their agitation, this was one of the first times in parliament that domestic workers were considered as a group of workers, and the DWU made some effort both in public meetings, the press, and government to make the voices of the servants heard against a flurry of outcry from their employers.

Although they did not win any major legislative battles, the DWU made a concrete difference in some individual workers' lives, helping to challenge unfair dismissals and secure better working conditions on a case by case basis. They provided an avenue for domestic workers to express their political views, even if they were disregarded, through their writing to government officials and attempts in conjunction with the Parliamentary Labour Party to pass a bill regarding character notes. Their demands demonstrate an overarching aim of being treated as a serious workforce instead of just a part of the household. They wanted to be treated as professional workers and subject to the same

[102] Hansard, HC Deb 28 November 1911 vol 32 c257
[103] Hansard, HC Deb 30 November 1911 vol 32 cc575-6
[104] Hansard, HC Deb 06 December 1911 vol 32 c1476

regulations and protections as other workers were achieving. The union and its use of *The Woman Worker* and *The Labour Woman* helped to unite a fragmented and isolated workforce. Their work was covered in socialist and suffragist magazines, but also in the mainstream press like the *Daily Mirror* and *The Times*. These findings help to evidence that domestic workers were an active and present group within the labour movement and that they also achieved a small degree of mainstream recognition.



Scan of *The Woman Worker* journal cover, from London Metropolitan University's Trades Union Congress Library, Gertrude Tuckwell Papers

Solidarity and Schism: Responses to Domestic Worker Organising

This chapter will analyse responses to the domestic workers' struggle for better conditions. Mainstream press exercised a preference towards employers, and was usually only sympathetic towards domestic workers when they 'knew their place', and were upholding their deferent and servile role within the class hierarchy. Many writers in mainstream media viewed domestic workers' rights to better conditions as dependent on their performance of this deference. Middle class employers wanted to think of themselves as benevolent providers for their servants, and the idea of domestic workers as workers conflicted with this perception. They did not want industrial relations or the government interfering with life in the domestic sphere, which they felt was a private matter. Attitudes towards domestic workers' unionisation in the radical press, including socialist women's publications and suffragette publications, show the tensions between middle class socialist and suffragist women's ideological desire to support oppressed female workers and their reliance on their servants to be able to do their activist work, work their own jobs, and look after their families. This is reinforced by the idea of domestic work as a separate and more intimate class of work than the impersonal industrial relationship between employer and employee that factory workers experienced. This chapter will also analyse the debates that arose around specific union demands, and how these highlight the at times contentious relationship between domestic workers and their fellow trade unionists.

Revisiting the topic of the previous chapter, The *Daily Mirror* was host to an intense discourse about the 1911 National Insurance Act. While The *Daily Mirror* in modern times is considered left leaning and generally supports the Labour Party, at the time it was owned by the conservative Lord Northcliffe, also owner of The *Daily Mail,* and while not often political, the editorial line generally leaned conservative or at the very least anti-socialist.[105] The liberal, conservative, and trade unionist arguments against servants' inclusion in the Insurance Act were distinct, but ultimately oriented towards a common goal. As mentioned in the previous chapter, employers objected to paying the additional fee, deemed a 'Servant Tax' in the press, and domestic workers realised that it would likely result in either fewer positions being available or overall lower wages. Fewer positions being available would also mean a higher workload for those still employed, as for instance a household that previously employed three servants may cut down to only two.[106] Despite protests on both sides, the attitude in the mainstream press was largely sympathetic to employers, with headlines such as 'Hard On Our Good Mistresses' and 'Alas, The Poor Mistress!'[107] The *Daily Mirror* also pointed to an increase in class tension that this financial burden would cause. This was reinforced by the ideas of the domestic sphere discussed in the first chapter. The idea that the domestic sphere is an intimate setting dictated by personal relations rather than industrial relations as compared to a factory meant that many members of the middle class viewed National Insurance applying to servants as an unjust intrusion into their personal lives. A barrister writing to the *Daily Mirror* criticises the idea of inspectors

[105] Adrian Bingham, 'The Daily Mirror and Left-Wing Politics', Mirror Historical Archive 1903-2000, Cengage Learning (EMEA) Ltd, 2019.
[106] Daily Mirror, 18 Nov. 1911 "Rising Storm of Protest against the Servants' Tax."
[107] Ibid

enforcing this regulation, calling inspectors ‘autocrats’ and asserting that they ‘will not have the right to enter our houses, make room-to-room visitations, and interrogate our women-folk…’[108]

Employers were also eager to view domestic servants as more aligned with them in their middle class respectability than with the working classes, especially those employed in industry. The Daily Mirror said that ‘Servants who, as a class, are healthy are to be taxed to provide for unhealthy workers in other callings’.[109] The idea that domestic workers were inherently healthier than other working class people echoes the paternalistic morality discussed in chapter one, wherein the moral health and cleanliness of domestic workers was of great concern to their employers. This moralising is echoed in other letters to The Daily Mirror with statements such as ‘A good servant is always looked after’, and ‘If a mistress has a good servant, she wants to bring her back to health, when she falls ill, as quickly as possible.’[110] The emphasis on a *good* servant being deserving of medical assistance and looking after is telling, as it demonstrates that to their employers, a domestic worker's value as a person is predicated on their morality and ability to do their job well. While there were letters addressed from ‘An Old Servant’ and ‘Maids of Hammersmith’, it remained hard to discern the true sentiments of the workers from letters to mainstream newspapers, because as pointed out in a House of Commons debate, there is no way of knowing whether these letters were fabricated and it seems likely that many of them were.[111]

[108] Ibid
[109] Ibid
[110] Ibid
[111] Hansard, HC Deb 28 November 1911 vol 32 c260

However, the *Daily Mirror* had in the past favourably reported on the DWU, including printing a photo of Kathlyn Oliver when she first began the union.[112] They also reported on the union's demand for mandatory character notes in a 1913 article entitled 'What Domestic Servants Want.'[113]

Moving away from the question of National Insurance, this era also saw much debate in the news about the 'servant problem'. The solutions proposed by middle class writers to the issue of struggling to find 'good' servants is very telling about their attitudes towards domestic workers rights and desires. Most discussions from middle class women seem to acknowledge the same fundamental issues with domestic work as the workers themselves. They point to the increase in other more appealing jobs for women and the lack of personal freedom.

In 1909 the *Daily Mirror* ran an article about the proposal of a bill limiting the working hours for domestic servants to eight hours a day. The article stated that 'a Bill for the regulation of the hours of domestic servants would receive the Government's favourable consideration.'[114] The article went on to publish the quite radical proposal from Mary Macarthur, at the time secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, that the living in system should be abolished entirely. Macarthur also discusses the difficulty in organising a union for domestic workers (this was in August, before the DWU officially formed), and some of the other issues members of the Women's Trade Union League who worked in domestic service had brought to her, like lack of social life and disrespect

[112] Daily Mirror, 1 Nov. 1909, "Servants' Trade Union.", p. 4.
[113] Daily Mirror, 21 Apr. 1913, "What Domestic Servants Want.", p. 17.
[114] Daily Mirror, 27 Aug. 1909, "Eight Hours Day for Servants.", p. 4.

from their employers.[115] The *Daily Mirror* then published a response to this titled 'Employers' Views', detailing objections from various employers to Mary Macarthur's proposals and complaints. The responses highlight the ways in which employers thought of themselves as benevolent providers to their workers, and how they rejected the idea of domestic workers being treated as another class of workers similar to shop or factory workers. Lady Hope, a woman described as an 'expert' on the matter of domestic service, said that domestic workers should not be upset by lack of free time to see friends because they 'get the society, sympathy, and help of the mistress.'[116] Another woman, described as a 'lady professor of domestic economy', thought the idea of domestic workers having assigned shifts was ridiculous, saying 'How would it be worked? Would servants work a house in "shifts", and sign on and off duty at 6 a.m., 2 p.m., and 10 p.m., like railway signalmen?'[117] The comparison to railway signalmen is a clear attempt to paint the idea of domestic servants as a class of workers as a comical and absurd concept.

Most articles regarding the 'servant problem' have a tendency to paint the problems of domestic workers as the failing of individual employers. A 1914 article in the Southern reporter says,

> 'There is no doubt that some servants have suffered at the hands of unprincipled mistresses, who treated them with scant consideration. But surely such cases were the exception rather than the rule. In every sphere of life we meet with

[115] Ibid
[116] Daily Mirror, 28 Aug. 1909, "Servants' Eight Hours Charter.", p. 4.
[117] Ibid

> employers who are not fit to be entrusted with the guardianship of workers, yet no one would argue that the whole class was bad on this account.'[118]

This same article says that 'the majority of people suspect that the domestic servant enjoys the best all-round conditions in any department of life to-day.'[119] The author found it ridiculous that some servants felt envious of their peers in factories or in nursing, mostly on the basis of domestic workers' real wages being higher due to not having to pay rent. These all echo a pattern of refusal to acknowledge domestic workers as a coherent workforce and a rejection of their complaints about the system. Middle and upper class employers were only interested in the complaints of domestic workers so far as responding to those complaints could help them to find a continuous supply of cheap and hardworking servants.

The perspectives of middle class socialist and suffragette women tended to be more sympathetic. Despite belonging to the same servant keeping middle class, women engaged in the fight for workers and women's rights were more likely to engage in a dialogue with workers and their demands. This dialogue was still at times hostile, but there was a wide range of opinions.

A middle class and self proclaimed socialist woman writer to *Women Folk* (formerly *The Woman Worker*- the name changed briefly in 1911), attended the DWU's first meeting, and said that she was 'very sorry to find the note struck was one of class war'.[120] This

[118] Southern Reporter, 28 May 1914, "The Domestic Servant Problem.", p. 2.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Women Folk, April 13, 1910, pg. 880

woman was writing to a magazine formed explicitly as the journal of a trade union organisation, something with a clear inherent tie to social class and in fact built on the idea of class antagonism. It seems therefore contradictory for her to complain about the idea of class tensions at an organising meeting for workers. She goes on to write that 'The true spirit of co-operation and understanding between employer and worker is the only solution', and that this is 'more necessary where domestic work is concerned than in any of the other callings that women follow, because it is so intimately connected to the home; and any union organised on class war lines is bound to lead to serious friction in the home, where women should work in harmony if success for the employers and workers alike its to be obtained.'[121]

Another women writing to *The Woman Worker* in 1909 criticised a domestic worker she employed for spending her downtime working on personal embroidery work, saying, 'In fact, she has more [free] time than I have, as I am at business all afternoon.', and 'I do not see, however, even under a Union, how fixed hours can be formed for a domestic's duties'.[122] This received particularly sharp retorts from domestic workers in the following weeks, such as domestic worker J. Smith's letter, saying 'I would like to ask your correspondent of July 7 why she does not go into service, as she seems to think they have such a good time.', and another saying 'Why not do away with this ungrateful creature, who does not seem to appreciate her cosy fire, fancy work, and four evenings a week, throw up her own business, and constitute herself the domestic?'[123] These women are highlighting the white collar working woman's reliance on domestic workers

[121] Ibid
[122] The Woman Worker, July 7 1909, pg. 6
[123] The Woman Worker, July 21 1909, pg. 54

to be able to pursue their own careers, and making fun of their lack of understanding for the lived experiences of domestic workers.

An even more extreme line is taken by a number of Suffragette women in the Common Cause magazine. A woman called A. J. Macgregor writes that 'In no branch of industry is interference from without less required', and that some domestic workers 'write as if a private house were a prison and domestic servants were bonded slaves'. Although Common Cause did interact with trade unionist ideas, its readers were not as explicitly socialist. A woman writing as 'Another Mistress' says about a domestic worker who wrote into the magazine, 'I fear that, like many of her sisters, she is a victim to that prevalent disease which unsettles so many– i.e., Labour unrest.' In Common Cause the class hostility is even more evident, with these women explicitly condemning the idea of unionisation. However there are traces of this same attitude even in socialist women's publications. Kathlyn Oliver writes in *The Woman Worker*:

> 'The lady who signs herself a "socialist mistress" also says that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." She probably means for domestics. I quite agree, it *is a* dangerous thing, for when servants are allowed to obtain a little knowledge they learn and know that they are *equally* as human as their employers, that they have an equal right to respect and an equal right to live, and to lie as comfortably as they themselves, and very often more right (for it is only *work* which justifies a person's existence).'[124]

[124] The Woman Worker, December 22, 1909, pg. 566

Many suffragist and socialist women alike were reluctant to accept the idea of domestic workers as an oppressed class. There appears also to be a precieved gendered divide among the treatment of domestic workers and attitudes towards unionisation. A domestic worker writing into *The Woman Worker* writes,

> "...it is *women* who make, by their selfishness, idleness, and luxury, servants' lives so hard. I have served two masters (widowers), and about a dozen or more mistresses. The men gave me about half the work and praised and thanked me for my effort. The women, with *one* solitary exception, worked me from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., grumbled, and scolded, and said they did not pay me to "rest." Ask a majority of maids.'[125]

This could be because women are more familiar with and responsible for the maintenance of a household. It could also be because of the gender and class hierarchies of the household. The wife is in charge of the household, and it is one of the few spaces in which she can exercise her authority over someone on a lower rung of hierarchy than her, the housemaid. She may also be dependent on her domestic worker for her own freedom– freedom to work in a white collar profession or freedom to engage in political organising. A man writing into *The Woman Worker*, Edward Page, highlights this social hierarchical aspect:

> 'Many women take advantage of an unfair social system to enslave other less fortunate women. There are some among the Suffragettes and Suffragists, keen

[125] The Woman Worker, September 29, 1909, "Women Largely the Tyrants", pg. 296

> on getting equality with men, but neglectful of their duty to give their servants more equality and freedom from servile conditions. I hope Socialist women will set an example to other mistresses and allow their helpers considerably more hours of liberty, to be enjoyed indoors or out.'[126]

Another male writer to the paper speaks in even more radical terms, describing domestic work as slavery and writes that 'To take advantage of another's poverty so that we may buy slavish personal service is the meanest form of exploitation.'[127] Without biographical information on the writers it is impossible to be certain, but it is likely given their writing into a women's trade union publication that these men were trade unionists themselves. Another writer, Douglas Hurn, writing in 1908 before the formation of the DWU but in response to discourse on the 'servant problem' and identifying himself as from a servant keeping family and a socialist, said that *The Woman Worker* 'should know better than to entertain such bourgeois notions about this form of female employment, which should not be distinguished by Socialists from other forms of exploitation of female labour'.[128]

As demonstrated in the above quotes, socialist and trade unionist men usually proved to be strong allies to the domestic worker's plight. In this chapter and the previous one I have mentioned bills proposed in parliament by Labour politicians to introduce legislation for domestic workers, namely the Eight Hours Day Bill and the Character Note Bill. These highlight the close working relationship between the DWU and the

[126] The Woman Worker, July 28, 1909
[127] The Woman Worker, January 12 1910, "No Right to Have Servants", pg. 626
[128] The Woman Worker, December 9, 1908, pg. 694

Labour party, reinforced by their connections through the NFWW and Women's Trade Union League. Many leading women in these groups were married to members of the ILP or the Labour Party, such as Mary Macarthur's marriage to William Anderson, chairman of the ILP. Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party Ramsay MacDonald's wife Maragaret was also heavily involved in the women's trade union movement, chiefly through the Women's Industrial Council, National Union of Women Workers, and later the WLL.[129] These interpersonal relationships were a small aspect, but helped to strengthen the connection between the women's movement and the Labour movement.

Jessie Stephen was herself a member of the ILP from the age of sixteen, following in the footsteps of her father, a principled socialist and Co-Operative Society member.[130] Stephen was well respected within the ILP, becoming branch vice president in Maryhill, Glasgow as a teenager, and later becoming a local organiser in Bermondsey, London. Stephen was supported by the ILP in her efforts to organise the domestic servants in Glasgow. She enlisted the help of unionised dock workers in the ILP to provide security and protection from hecklers during her meetings with the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers, as well as with the Women's Social and Political Union.[131] A local 'labour man' in Glasgow who ran a tea room offered the committee of the Federation free use of his rooms for their meetings, and they 'had two or three Glasgow [labour] councillors who helped us as well'.[132] This relationship demonstrates the class solidarity between working class trade unionists and labour men, and the women attempting to

[129] June Hannam, "MacDonald, Margaret Ethel Gladstone (1870–1911), socialist and feminist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* 2004
[130] Audrey Canning, "Stephen, Jessie (1893–1979), suffragette and labour activist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004
[131] LSE, 8SUF/B/157, Brian Harrison interview with Jessie Stephen 1 July 1977
[132] Ibid

form unions for domestic workers. Given the high percentage of women working in domestic service, it is also likely that working class men would have had sisters, cousins, daughters, or friends working as domestic workers, as in Jessie Stephens case, adding another layer of personal connection to their political solidarity.

A similar instance of solidarity appears in an early meeting of the Aberdeen branch of the DWU. Joseph F. Duncan, president of the Aberdeen Trades Council and later president of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, presided over the initial meeting of over 300 domestic workers where they were deciding whether to form their own group or to affiliate with the DWU.[133] Duncan saw that the domestic worker 'was not always thought of in the same way as other workers', and felt that 'there was no reason why they should not be able to remedy their grievances just as other workers had done.'[134] Alongside other male Trades Councillors he helped to provide organising expertise and a platform for domestic workers to air their grievances and unite to organise. This is another example of trade unionists, particularly male trade unionists, providing solidarity in the form of resources to domestic workers attempting to organise. As men and as trade unionists they had access to more privilege, experience, and sometimes capital than the domestic workers did, and their mental and material support was a useful resource for the young women attempting to unionise their workforce.

Support for domestic workers unionisation was not as clear cut as in some other industries. Mainstream press was reluctant to view them as a class of workers similar to

[133] Aberdeen Journal, 10 May 1912, "Aberdeen Domestic Servants.", p. 7
[134] Ibid

shop or factory workers. The reliance of socialist women on their labour to maintain their own households led to a relationship that was at times tense and uncomfortable. The suffragette movement, which was the most visible group of women engaged in politics at this time, had a complex diversity of opinions about domestic service. Their solidarity with their fellow women was at times superseded by their class alliances. The most powerful allies of the domestic workers unionisation movement were the working class. The DWU and other attempts at unionisation by domestic workers were strongly supported by the ILP, Labour Party, and various trade unions, both for women and for men. While trade unionists acknowledged the way domestic workers were treated as a separate class of worker, they were generally eager to rectify this and supportive of their efforts to unionise.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the First World War was a moment of upheaval for all women workers, and domestic workers were no exception. The first and most immediate impact was the economic chaos of the war which led to high rates of unemployment in all sectors, especially 'luxury' trades like dressmaking and millinery, which had a higher percentage of women workers.[135] Many households dismissed their servants as a cost cutting measure, leaving many servants out of work and others overworked, now having to do two people's jobs.[136] As the war progressed and more men enlisted there became a need to replace them with women in roles not traditionally done by women, such as transport workers and munitions.[137] An estimated 200,000 domestic workers left their post to work in munitions alone during the war.[138] Now that other jobs outside of domestic work were available, being a servant became an even more unattractive proposition. The National Federation of Women Workers continued to grow during the war, and many unions that did not previously admit women changed their policies.[139] Even as the war ended and the demand for additional war work decreased, women remained a more present part of certain segments of the workforce. There were calls for women to quit their new jobs now that men were returning home from war, but with hundreds of thousands dead and many more disabled, the pre war male workforce was not necessarily returning.[140]

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[135] Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War,* (London, 1981)
[136] The Labour Woman, October 1914, pg. 257
[137] Braybon, *Women Workers*
[138] M. B. Hammond, *British Labor Conditions and Legislation During the War*, (New York, 1919)
[139] Braybon, *Women Workers*
[140] Ibid

The DWU fell apart shortly after the beginning of the war as many of its members left domestic work for war work.[141] After the war there were several attempts to restart the union or form a new one, often headed by Jessie Stephen. In 1919 Stephen attempted to form a domestic worker's branch of the NFWW, but it did not last.[142] In her book *Feminism and the Servant Problem* (2019), Laura Schwartz describes one interwar union attempt as tending 'towards a greater degree of employer-employee cooperation than Stephen was prepared to accept.', and a later attempt to form a domestic worker's union by the TUC as 'a top-down project that pursued a conciliatory policy towards employers– a far cry from the rank and file militancy of its pre-First World War namesake [the DWU].'[143] This attitude is evident in the TUC papers from the time. A letter from Marion Phillips, Labour MP and former secretary of the WLL, to an organiser in the TUC's domestic worker section, argued for a joint group of domestic workers and their employers, because it was 'desirable that the greatest possible harmony shall exist', and 'A trade union, however strong numerically, is not going to carry much weight, and would very soon decline in membership, if the employers were not enticed, to their own advantage, to recruit their staff from its ranks.'[144]

As demonstrated, while the issue of domestic workers remained present in the trade unionist movement through the interwar years, it never held the same radicalism as the DWU. The DWU was a union by and for workers, with support from other socialists,

[141] Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge, 2019)
[142] Ibid
[143] Ibid, ch. 5
[144] LHASC, LP/DOM/30/8, Letter from Marion Phillips to TUC

feminists, and trade unionists, but never dictated by those other groups. Although they faced many obstacles in their efforts to form trade unions, domestic workers were a small but vocal and active segment of the trade unionist movement, especially among women. They faced uniquely difficult working conditions compared to many of their fellow women workers, and with little of the same regulatory protection. Their position within the domestic sphere and the often uncomfortable intimacy of the employer-employee relationship often led them to be considered a different class of worker and a separate category to other trade unionists, especially by the servant keeping class. These unique and difficult conditions were also obstacles to organising, as they were often isolated, had little free time, and were dependent on their employer for housing and for any hope of a future job, making it comparatively dangerous to revolt against them. The DWU attempted to organise around these issues, especially the issue of the character note, but to little success. In their protest for the character note however, they were supported by several Labour MPs and other socialists and trade unionists. They found this same support among other female trade unionists, such as the NFWW who encouraged Kathlyn Oliver to found the union in 1909 and supported her work. While the DWU found support among other members of the working class, they were not always supported by their fellow suffragettes and socialists in the middle class, who relied upon their labour to be able to work their white collar jobs or engage in activist work.

Domestic workers did not have a typical and straightforward relationship to the trade union movement, and struggled to develop a substantial presence due to various

organising obstacles inherent to their work. Despite this, they were supported by female and male trade unionists alike, and through their representatives and through the pages of socialist women's magazines like *The Labour Woman* and *The Women Worker*, were able to participate in the trade unionist conversation and make their voices heard.

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