

ANNOT ROBINSON: A FORGOTTEN MANCHESTER SUFFRAGETTE

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Annot Wilkie before her marriage to Sam Robinson.

The nature of the women's movement in the last twenty years has led to increased interest in its origins and progress. Twentieth century suffrage history has, until recently, concentrated on either the militant, mainly middle-class and eventually London based Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), encapsulated in studies of the Pankhursts and their circle, or, less commonly, on the umbrella organisation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), with its liberal origins, meticulous organisation, and its anti-Socialist right wing represented by Mrs. Fawcett. Mainstream suffrage history has thus tended to polarize and simplify the issues, and to ignore the complex interconnections between suffrage groups and the relationship between the women's movement and socialist politics. Many of the strong, committed, ordinary women whose lives can illuminate the nature of the struggle have been "hidden from history".¹

It is not necessary to subscribe to any theory that women's history has been in some way suppressed to appreciate that the sources of evidence for ordinary working women's participation in political movements are limited both in quantity and in scope. Primary sources, such as family papers, are scarce as a result of the lifestyle of such women; thus it is difficult to substantiate the considerable oral evidence still available from their descendants. Working women, who tended not to hold official positions, seldom appear in the archives of organisations. Newspapers and journals can contain illuminating correspondence, but news coverage of women's activities was sporadic and depended on contingency with national events. Furthermore many of the sources about working women, rather than by the women themselves, were middle class in origin and perspective, representing women as either wives and mothers or as workers and activists, but seldom showing women in both roles.

However, recent research into the lives of individual women has shown that private papers can be unearthed, and memories of surviving relatives can add significantly to the conventional history of the mainstream suffrage movement, as well as to a clearer understanding of what was happening to women, especially working-class women in the north of England. This research has examined issues far wider than that of "Votes for Women". Marian Ramelson's *The Petticoat Rebellion*², written from a socialist perspective, was perhaps the first work based on evidence of working women campaigning for the vote. Roger Fulford and Andrew Rosen both gave space to the campaign of women cotton workers, and the publication of Hannah Mitchell's autobiography and Ada Nield Chew's biography depicted the dramatic struggles of two previously little-known activists.³ By the late 1970s, many historians of the labour and women's movements were taking a new perspective, foremost among these being Jill Norris and Jill Liddington, whose work, based on painstaking research through oral evidence, family archives and local records, has both augmented and challenged mainstream suffrage history.⁴ *One Hand Tied Behind Us* and *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* introduce the reader to a network of northern radical suffragists, active from the early 1900s, many of them working women with families, whose commitment to the suffrage movement arose directly from their own industrial experience and was intertwined with their involvement in local labour politics, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), or with trade unionism. The names of perhaps twenty of these women, a handful of whom rose to national prominence, occur again and again in various combinations in suffrage organisations, electoral campaigns, union and labour party conferences, on committees, and, when the fight for the vote was won, some of them reappear as a driving force in the international peace movement after 1918.

One of these women was Annot Robinson, born in Scotland in 1874, who married and moved to Ancoats in Manchester in 1908, and returned to Scotland in 1923, where she died suddenly, two years later. The papers Annot Robinson left are a miscellaneous collection of notes, newspaper cuttings, handbills, programmes and letters, which, together with oral evidence from her surviving daughter⁵, show a woman committed to three political causes — socialism, suffragism and international peace. Detailed research into Annot Robinson's life set out to examine how a biographical study could elucidate the intricate internal politics, inter-relationships and divergences of the three movements between 1906 and 1924.⁶ How could her personal effectiveness be evaluated in comparison with that of her contemporaries? Why was her name forgotten, despite her prominence during her active years, even before her early death, when she moved away from Manchester? Could the life of this woman add significantly to our understanding of how the suffragist and socialist movements progressed, as Selina Cooper's story had done.⁷ How was it possible for one woman to shift allegiances and differ from the mainstream movement while remaining within it? What balance of personal circumstances and political ideals

shaped the lives of women like this in early twentieth-century Manchester?

As a member of the group loosely defined as northern suffragists, Annot Robinson was in some ways set apart. Her origins were not working class. Born Annot Wilkie, into a genteel Scottish family, her mother and sisters all teachers, herself the recipient of a primly titled degree (LLA — Lady Literate in Arts) gained externally from St. Andrew's University, she was brought up in the expectation of the effectiveness of women. Her mother worked as a teacher in a village school while bringing up three daughters and a son, with the help of female relatives, while John Wilkie, according to his granddaughter, kept in the background, helped in the house, and read books. Annot was brought up largely in the company of strong-minded and intelligent women; her own mother, her strict Aunt Annie who was a headmistress, her elder sister Peggie, and her adored and brilliant younger sister, Nellie, sparkingly successful in everything she attempted. It is not surprising that Annot, surrounded by clever and aware women following the only career open to them in the late 1880s and 90s, and with a father who has been described as "a cipher" grew up with the assertion of women's rights as a natural objective.⁸

Annot Robinson had no quarrel with her family, unlike Hannah Mitchell, who literally fled from her mother, nor was she forced to take issue with employers as Ada Nield Chew had been. Her early horror at working-class conditions in Dundee arose from observation rather than experience. In 1890, she moved away from the family at Montrose to teach children, first in Lochgelly, a small town near Dunfermline and then in the textile and mining town of Dundee. It was here, according to Helen Wilson, that her political consciousness was first aroused.⁹ How her feelings about social and sexual inequality were formalised and confirmed is not well documented, but she was working for the ILP in Dundee from the mid-1890s, confirming her identification with, if not her membership of, the working class. Her papers show her to have been logical and literate, a writer and an organiser; her letters and private writings are stylish and lucid, and in this she had more in common with colleagues like Margaret Ashton and Catherine Marshall than with her own vibrant and intuitive colleague Selina Cooper.¹⁰ In some ways, Annot Robinson bridged the gap between the worlds of the working-class activists and their middle-class allies.

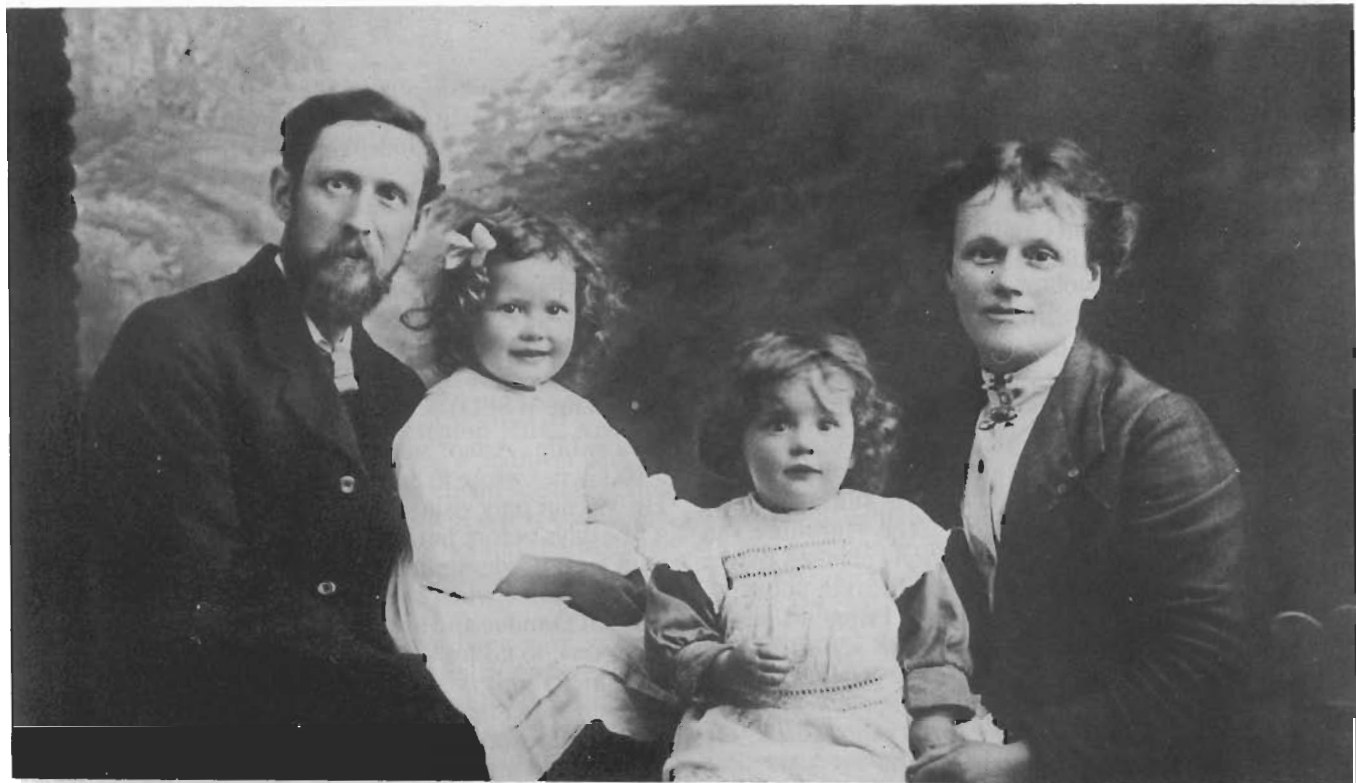
Nevertheless, her life was no success story. Leaving Scotland at the age of 34, she entered a marriage based at first on love and shared political ideals but which was ultimately disastrous. Subsequently living as a single-parent in an unaccepting age, she struggled in support of her chosen and unpopular causes, a constant and active member of the ILP and, at different times, of the WSPU, the NUWSS, the Women's Labour League (WLL), Women's War Interests Committee, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an ebullient speaker and tireless traveller and twice a candidate in local elections.¹¹ Though she succeeded for 14 years in making a living through paid work as an organiser of campaigns, she failed in the end either to pursue her chosen career in politics or to resist the effects of the depression in the early 1920s which forced her to return to teaching and to Scotland, to the regret of her close friend and confidante, Ellen Wilkinson, who wrote of Annot's force and fearlessness and described her as "a big woman and a powerful personality".¹² A fragment of Annot Robinson's life is presented here, concentrating on her early activities on behalf of the suffrage movement from 1908-1912. It is intended to give some insight into

the socialist and suffragist politics of the time, and into the motivation and life style of one woman for whom politics and personal life were inextricably linked.

When Annot Robinson moved to Ancoats in January, 1908, her dual concern was with the ILP and the women's suffrage movement. Her work in Manchester must be seen in the context of the complex national background. The WSPU had been in existence for four years, recruiting its first members mainly from the ranks of the ILP rather than the existing, more Liberal suffrage societies, and growing in militancy since the autumn of 1904, the first arrests taking place at the Manchester Free Trade Hall meeting in October 1905. Between June 1905 and March 1907, four private member's bills dealing with women's suffrage had been "talked out" of the House of Commons, and a fifth had been interrupted by suffragists themselves. The Liberal election victory of January 1906 had been accompanied by the return of 29 Labour Representation Committee MPs, and the subsequent formation of the Labour Party, and of the Women's Labour League. Two deputations of women to the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, in 1907, followed by a wave of arrests resulting from the "lobby raids", had escalated the militancy of some and attracted unprecedented press and public interest. The focus of the WSPU during that year had been on public demonstrations, interrupting political meetings, asking "the Question", lobbying MPs and cabinet ministers and spearheading anti-government activity in by-elections. Huddersfield had returned its Liberal member, but with a reduced majority, and in the summer of 1907 the Labour candidate, Pete Curran, and the controversial ILP starlet, Victor Grayson, were elected for Jarrow and Colne Valley respectively. It was this period too which saw the emergence of the Anti-Suffrage Movement as an organised campaign, embracing, as Brian Harrison¹³ points out, not only opponents of the principle of women's suffrage, but opponents of particular modes of granting it, as well as men and women of all parties whose opposition sprang from an instinctive conservatism, and, not least, the misogynists.

Annot Robinson thus arrived in the north of England at a time of some success but also some confusion for the causes she supported. The ILP was thriving in Manchester, with 17 branches; her husband, Sam Robinson, and Mrs. Pankhurst were Manchester Central's delegates to the Annual Conference in Derby.¹⁴ The Labour Party as a whole, with its trade union and labourist, rather than socialist, majority had not given official backing to the female suffragists. However, despite the "irritation" caused by the action of the WSPU at by-elections where women ILP campaigners appeared to be canvassing for an anti-Liberal rather than a pro-Labour vote, and despite the opposition to women's suffrage by some delegates to the 1907 ILP Conference, the ILP National Administrative Council was resolved to give continued support to women's suffrage in order to "open the way for a great franchise reform".¹⁵ Thus the NAC hoped to speak for both female suffragists and adultists within the ILP.

From Annot's activities and correspondence, it seems likely that in her first year in Manchester she remained loyal to the WSPU and the Pankhursts, despite their rift with the ILP and their ultimate assertion of political independence.¹⁶ Her draft notes for a speech on "votes for women" made five years later, began with a personal explanation of her conviction of the rightness of the campaign and her support for early militancy.¹⁷ When the WSPU suffered its dramatic split in October 1907, it was



Sam Robinson, Cathy, Helen, Annot. c. 1912.

the "imperious domination" of the Pankhursts, and the denial of suffrage in their *own* undemocratic Society which aroused such bitterness, not the aims of the movement itself. When the self-ruling Women's Freedom League (WFL) established its constitution in January 1908, it had a special attraction for those, such as Hannah Mitchell¹⁸, who felt personal animosity towards the Pankhursts, as well as for those idealistic members of the ILP such as Charlotte Despard and Theresa Billington. Annot Robinson, on the other hand, seems to have sustained her admiration for Emmeline Pankhurst, for even at the height of the WSPU militancy of 1912-13, when Annot was immersed in the NUWSS, she described Mrs. Pankhurst as "that wonderful woman".¹⁹ It seems likely that Annot was, in Theresa Billington's words, one of "... a large section of the original Manchester members who remained with the dictator when the cleavage occurred, continued to regard the Union (WSPU) as a branch of the Labour Movement, and to speak and act accordingly for some time after that event, and indeed until a special pledge was devised to make them toe the independent line".²⁰

It must have been with some excitement that in January 1908 Annot joined her husband Sam, and his active political life in Manchester at this time.²¹ We know that she was not in good health, however, and the prospect of Ancoats and a council flat in Caroline Street can only have confirmed her sense of injustice at the poverty of urban life. Women's opportunities in such an area were strictly limited by their environment and their work. By 1907, some Ancoats women had successfully organised themselves, with the help of Eva Gore Booth and Sarah Dickenson²² into the Ancoats Winders Union, but for the majority the hardship of their lives left little time or energy for union activities, neither were working women represented in political groups such as the ILP. John Kilgarry, a fellow socialist in the pre-war years, wrote, after Annot Robinson's death, to her daughter, "She was a good socialist who realised that women's problem was more than winning the vote. She saw conditions in (Ancoats) — women working from 6 in the morning till 5.30 at night in cotton waste mills ... women exploited to

the detriment of their menfolk, who were earning 16 shillings to 18 shillings a week in the foundries. To your mother and her kind the vote was only a means to an end ... It was terrible to be a known socialist then, but your mother didn't shirk her responsibilities."²³

Annot Robinson's years living and working in Dundee may have prepared her for urban squalor and deprivation, for she appears to have entered her new environment without a qualm. Certainly she became immediately involved in political life. Helen Wilson believes that it was through Hannah Mitchell that Annot became established. "Sam Robinson had worked with Hannah and he asked her to look after his wife otherwise it would have taken a lot longer".²⁴ Annot did not, however, have to rely on Sam for contacts and friendship. She was herself in correspondence with Adela Pankhurst and Annie Kenney and there is evidence that her status as a graduate helped to make her a welcome addition to WSPU meetings and demonstrations. Arranging a procession in Stockport, Jennie Baines wrote to Sam: "Tell her (Annot) to come in her gown — that makes a good impression, and they have never had anything like that in Stockport, a God-forsaken place as it is".²⁵ Annot remained interested and closely in touch with the affairs of the Dundee ILP branch, was on friendly terms with Lillie, wife of Keir Hardie and was addressed as "Dearest Annot" in affectionate letters from the flowery pen of Katherine Bruce Glasier.²⁶ She must have been happy with Sam at first in the flat in Ancoats. They enjoyed bicycle runs, and quiet Sundays, interrupted by unexpected visitors to tea.²⁷ Helen Wilson recalls that Sybil Thorndike was a frequent caller when she was appearing at the Gaiety Theatre.

During her first month in Manchester, Annot was fully occupied with the WSPU in encouraging working-class support for London demonstrations, distributing funds to this end, meeting women off trains and planning the forthcoming "furniture van raid" on the House of Commons. It was with some trepidation that she embarked on this venture. Arriving in London on 10 February, she wrote hurriedly to Sam before a committee meeting that tomorrow she would be going in charge of 20

women in a furniture van to the Stranger's entrance. The idea was to emerge, as if from a Trojan horse, rush in and speak until arrested. "I have ma doots", she added, as to carrying it out, and she promised to send messages from prison. The letter is friendly and loving, giving advice to Sam about eating properly and assuring him that he must not worry as there would be no danger. The next day's telegram announced — "Arrested not hurt. 50 prisoners at present. Love Annot", and the police document of the same date summoned her to appear in court on 12 February to answer the charge of "using insulting behaviour and resisting Police at Old Palace Yard".

A detailed picture of this event and Annot's reaction to it is presented in her papers, and a study of it reveals something of the attitude of and towards suffragettes, as opposed to suffragists, at this time. The "furniture van raid" was just one in a series of actions planned by the WSPU to provoke imprisonment and attract publicity. Since May 1906, when the Liberal Prime Minister, Campbell Bannerman, had rejected the giant national deputation of women's suffragists on the grounds that his party as a whole would oppose the cause, the WSPU had made it their business to embarrass and attack the Liberals, as the party of government, at every possible opportunity. This they did by heckling campaigns against all Liberal candidates and members at by-elections, by tax resistance on the part of their wealthier single members, by police court protests, and, most memorably, by public demonstrations and attempts to enter Parliament and harass any member of the despised party of government.²⁸ This particular raid was planned to coincide with a rally of women at Caxton Hall, and it was successful at least in terms of the publicity given to the imprisoned women. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* of 12 February reported the trials under the headline "Suffragette's Ruse: Today's Sequel". Fifty "ladies of refinement and education" had appeared in court; the police had "had a warm time keeping them out of the House of Commons". On the same day, the newspaper reported, Mrs. Lawrence's speech at the "Women's Parliament" at Caxton Hall had a special significance in the light of subsequent events — "We shall proceed by any means open to us. Words are of little use unless behind them there is a proved capacity for action". Resolutions were passed, and a deputation was sent immediately to Parliament. Off they went, writes the reporter, sweeping aside the police cordon. All was quiet until they arrived at the entrance to St. Stephen's Hall, and then one of the two furniture vans stopped, and "down tripped some 20 or 30 ladies — a light brigade", who struggled to pass the police. An officer is quoted: "We treated them as gently as we could ... but possibly some of them got a little bruised. Women are such tender, fragile beings that you can hardly touch them without bruising them".

On the same day, Annot wrote to the newspaper expressing indignation at the arrests: "Because I, and these other women, tried to enter the House of Commons to lay our grievance before the only body in the country which had the power to remove it, I was marched like a criminal through the streets of London".²⁹ She goes on to describe the jocular and, to some extent, chivalry, of the police, and to look on her six hours in custody as "crowded with glorious life" in the opportunity it afforded for solidarity with other women of different backgrounds, jobs and lives. Her next telegram, after the sentence, reads: "Six weeks said nothing love Annot" (sic). The circular letter to Sam and other husbands from Annie Kenney of 13 February reports on the great

cheerfulness and dignity of the 50 arrested women, and hopes that it will rouse men to shame that a so-called Liberal government puts people in prison for demanding the right to vote.³⁰ Annie Kenney exhorts the relatives to cheer up, and to write to the press. A few days later, Sam received a strategically timed letter from Christabel Pankhurst urging him to do what he could to "bring the Labour Party up to the mark" by urging them to vote officially in favour of Stranger's women's suffrage bill, due for its second reading on 28 February.³¹ The Labour Party "now have a chance to redeem themselves (in the eyes of the WSPU) ... Mother's imprisonment may help".

Meanwhile, Annot was "cheerily bearing her turn", as J. R. Clynes wrote to Sam after visiting her in Holloway.³² He was her only visitor, as she wrote to Sam on 12 March, a few days before her release. She writes that she is sorry Sam feels tired, inquires after his meals and suggests they go to Dundee when she comes home. She is anxious for news of Dundee and Manchester ILP affairs and she longs to be out, to go for a run on the bicycle, to have "one of our quiet Sundays — No! Somebody will come to tea! ... I have no paper or books and so can't prepare lectures ... I sit and plan and think over the last 2 or 3 months. I can't get it out of my head ... I feel a failure, but I am usually sane and level-headed". She goes on to say that she has written articles, and even a story, on her slate, but has had to rub them out, which is a pity because they might have earned some money. She has been looking at the Prayer Book and the Bible, and reading *Bleak House* and wondering, with Mrs. Jellyby, about the marriage service as "an injustice inflicted by tyrant man".

When released, Annot immediately returned to the campaign; a WSPU handbill for a meeting of women at Peckham Public Hall to demand votes for women lists Mrs. Robinson as a speaker on the evening of 18 March, the day of her release. On Thursday 19 March, a Great Suffragist Meeting was held at the Royal Albert Hall; the souvenir programme puts Mrs. Pankhurst top of the bill and lists the nineteen "released yesterday" as the main attraction. The list again includes Annot Robinson. However, it seems that for Annot the six weeks of prison life and being a celebrity on her release had been less than joyful. She explained her early involvement with the WSPU in notes for a speech made in 1911 or 1912.³³ In this she admitted that she was at first shocked by the use of militant methods, then wondered whether her feelings were inflamed by the press, who "fatten on shocks". Discussing this with her female family, she became at last an enthusiastic supporter of militancy. Nothing in this speech indicates directly whether she became disillusioned with militancy, but her prison experiences, the tone of her later letters to her sister, her subsequent employment by the WLL and the NUWSS, and her absence after 1909 from WSPU platforms all seem to indicate that, like Theresa Billington, she began to question if the public chorus of approval for the suffragettes' cause was beginning to bring out its weakness and encourage martyrdom.³⁴ Annot belonged to the middle class by birth and education, to the working class in sympathy and marriage. For her the issues were always large and broad; she too, like Theresa Billington, may have begun to feel that the WSPU was becoming an "emotional obsession, a conventional campaign for a limited measure of legislation, with militancy its instrument and expression of its hurry".³⁵ Prison made Annot ill and tired, and may have been a time for doubts to germinate about the rightness of the WSPU campaign, but she was heavily committed and continued her own militancy for the rest of the year.

In June she was arrested again and sentenced to three weeks' imprisonment³⁶; Beatrice Scott of Flixton wrote to her regretting her sentence and feeling "ashamed of being at large" herself³⁷, while Jennie Baines' letter to Sam begins to reveal doubts about the WSPU's policy of provoking arrest.³⁸ She thinks it is a "damned shame" for Annot so soon after her six weeks and adds caustically, "Mary (Gawthorpe) will say what a grand advert for the Heaton Park demonstration. How is it she wasn't arrested instead? ... I admire your wife for all the pluck and courage she as showed" (sic). During the rest of 1908 and 1909, Annot was much in demand as a public speaker on women's suffrage, appearing at Heaton Park, Ancoats, Denton, Preston, sometimes sharing a platform with the Pankhursts, sometimes listed as the main speaker. After 1909, however, there is no evidence of direct connection with the WSPU and she was dividing her time between the ILP, the Women's Labour League and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

Annot Robinson's life cannot have been easy in these early years in Manchester. It is not known whether Sam had any paid work, or if he was paid for his ILP activities. Annot earned a little money by journalism, and increasingly from her organising posts, but finances and idealism always posed problems. She now had the added responsibility of two babies — Cathie, born in 1909, and Helen in 1911. Keir Hardie wrote to Annot and Sam in August 1911 congratulating them on Helen's birth — "... may she (the wee lassie) and you long be spared to each other and to the work of freeing the race from bondage and superstition and perversity".³⁹ Later Keir Hardie carried out what was depicted by the press as "A Socialist Christening — Novel Ceremony".⁴⁰ The child's mother is described as "Annot Robinson, the well-known Manchester women's social worker and suffragist lecturer". The Rev. Mr. Ripponer said a short prayer,

welcomed the baby, Helen, to the socialist movement, and pinned to the child's clothes the badges of the WLL and the ILP. The event illustrates the extent to which the Robinson's personal and political lives were inseparable. From this time on, Annot faced the problem of either taking her children with her to meetings, or making other arrangements.⁴¹ Her daughter recalls a "Mrs. Fenswick ... A shocker. She used to wallop us with a wet dishcloth ... but before that, Hannah Mitchell, she said in the flat in Caroline Street we had a dog. And she said Annot used to have to go and leave the dog in charge — of two children" (sic).⁴² After Annot's death, her elder daughter, Cathie, blamed her tubercular condition on childhood neglect; as an adult she looked with disapproval on her mother's political activities. The younger daughter, Helen, on the other hand retains a fierce devotion to her mother and her mother's causes, and looks back admiringly at Annot's struggle.

Photographs for this period show us a respectable Edwardian family: Sam, upright and austere, Annot and the two girls neatly dressed, vivacious with the same round, bright eyes. It seems, however, that tensions between Sam and Annot were arising after their first two years together — a situation not dissimilar to that of Hannah Mitchell or Ada Nield Chew, active women whose husbands' support was ideological rather than practical. Sam was immersed in his own ILP concerns, painstaking and pedantic; Annot was left to care for the family, earn a living for them and make the decisions about where to live and how to educate the children. "Hannah Mitchell said the trouble started before I (Helen) was born. She was surprised when I was born that I was so big and healthy because it wouldn't have surprised her if I hadn't been".⁴³ From this point the story of Annot Robinson's marriage descends into a tragic and



Police escort a women's suffrage demonstration.

bitter tale, but it diminished not at all her energy or devotion to socialism and suffragism.⁴⁴

From January 1910, Annot was paid as an organiser, not of the women's suffrage movement, but of the Women's Labour League (WLL). This had been formed in 1906, principally by Ramsay Macdonald and his wife Margaret, to work for women's representation in Parliament and elsewhere, and to consider social issues. Because of its close relationship with the Labour Party, it came to be thought of by some to undermine, or at best to fail to support, the women's suffrage campaign. However, judging by Lucy Middleton's account of its aims and composition, the WLL would certainly have held an attraction for Annot Robinson.⁴⁵ Middleton claims that, while its origins were labourist, arising as it did from requests by the Railway Women's Guild for the formation of a National Women's Labour committee, it was an umbrella organisation for varied types of work, class and outlook at a time when women of all classes were beginning to like and respect each other; it stressed the importance of international co-operation, and it favoured adult suffrage, thinking of equality not so much in terms of the emergence of women as of women taking their full part with men in the emergence of a better society. Among WLL discussions and campaigns between 1906 and 1910 were the issues of hours and conditions for women workers, the provision of compulsory education to the age of 16, with school meals and medical inspections, colonial justice, sweated industries, higher education and career opportunities for women, and industrial pollution.

Margaret Macdonald was known for her capacity for fitting jobs to people, for "making diamonds out of dust"⁴⁶, and it is possible that she was responsible for the employment of Annot Robinson as a WLL organiser in 1910. "The League makes a special effort to enrol the wives and daughters of Trade Unionists and Socialists, since it recognises the weakness and danger where the wife is not in sympathy with the husband's politics", wrote Margaret Macdonald in 1909, acknowledging the pervasiveness of Socialism.⁴⁷ It is unlikely that this motive prompted the invitation to Annot who showed signs of being more radical than her husband, but Margaret Macdonald went on to say "... We have among us many professional women — teachers, nurses, doctors, inspectors ... etc. The facts of life have driven them to make common cause with the wage earners, and they see in our movement the only hope for real social reform". Whatever the motivation on either side, two letters from Ramsay Macdonald to Annot testify to her involvement in the WLL.⁴⁸ She accepted the post of Lancashire organiser, to the gratification of Macdonald, who wrote of the advantages of having "local part-time people" and promised to "talk it over about money at Newport".

The WLL's contribution to the winning of the franchise has been acknowledged and described by Margherita Rendel.⁴⁹ The methods of the League, Rendel points out, were relevant to the franchise question; they wished to work with the Labour Party locally and nationally, to educate themselves on political and social issues, to take an active interest in local bodies, to work to secure full rights of citizenship for all men and women, and to watch the interest of working women in their own neighbourhood, striving to improve their social and industrial conditions. Three major questions, however, threatened the solidarity of the WLL; should some women (even if only the propertied and single) be enfranchised in order to establish the principle of votes for women? Should the

Labour movement oppose any measure for further enfranchisement of men that did not include women? And, after 1912, should Labour MPs oppose all government measures until women were enfranchised? Despite some internal differences on these matters, the WLL was well in advance of the Labour Party as a whole, acting, like the ILP, as a pressure group through resolutions which urged strong support for women's suffrage. The executive of the WLL, when asked for support for a limited measure in July 1910, refused to give it officially. In 1911 and 1912, WLL Conferences reaffirmed their opposition to any government Reform Bill which did not contain a women's suffrage clause and, when at last the Labour Party itself pledged its commitment to women's suffrage in 1912, the WLL's campaign slogan became "Help the Labour Party to get Votes for Women this Year!" In October of that year, the WLL executive joined the Women's Freedom League (WFL) at their International Fair, and took part in the WFL national conference in December. From the time of Asquith's "betrayal" in January 1913, when the long-awaited Reform Bill and promises of women's enfranchisement were withdrawn, the WLL and the Labour Party were implacable opponents of any further government-initiated franchise bills, and insisted on the inclusion of women on the widest possible basis.

During the period of indecision from 1910 to the beginning of 1913, Annot Robinson's attitude to the conciliation bills seems to have wavered. On the one hand, as a WLL worker, radical and socialist, it is likely that she would have opposed a limited measure, with its associated danger of swamping the Labour vote, and there is evidence that she spoke openly against conciliation, expressing fears that a limited franchise for women might encourage some suffragists to "fall into the trap" of thinking the fight was won, and encouraging continued militancy.⁵⁰ Yet she also spoke at the 1911 ILP Conference to urge it to support the limited measure. Perhaps she opposed the principle of a limited measure but in fact, with Keir Hardie, optimistically believed that in practice the limitations for working-class women would not be as great as expected. In any case, by 1911, she was working full-time, not for the WLL but for the NUWSS, who had employed her as a temporary organiser, even though their policy was apparently at variance with that of the WLL. She would at least then be in a position to radicalise NUWSS policy and she would be more free with that organisation to publicise and further her own ideals. It may simply be that she needed the work, and that an efficient, constitutional, democratic and wide-ranging organisation, which according to its admirer, Ray Strachey, went about its business with sanity and humour, offered good prospects for a woman with organisational and communication skills.⁵¹ It also became clear later that, despite these skills, her strong socialism made her something of a thorn in NUWSS flesh.

In 1910 though, at least a show of peace among suffragists was being maintained. The NUWSS, which had at first repudiated militancy, now either allowed or ignored it; the WFL, in spite of their dramatic departure from the WSPU, never criticised it openly and continued to raise and donate money to it; impressive demonstrations and meetings were organised jointly by all groups. It is thus perhaps not so surprising that, as a rational and practical person, Annot Robinson began to work for the NUWSS. Reading through issues of the NUWSS weekly journal, *Common Cause*, one discovers her name again and again in 1911. Her energy is impressive. It should be remembered that this year she was attending fortnightly



Suffragette meeting in Manchester c. 1910. Annot Robinson standing. The baby is her daughter, Cathy.

ILP meetings in January, February and March, speaking, lecturing and organising. Her domestic troubles had begun, she had a two year old child and was pregnant. On 17 and 18 April she was at the ILP Conference in Birmingham. By the middle of May she was organising in Manchester for a record contingent to the 17 June procession, encouraging working women to save for their fares. On 27 May she held a "White Sale" of second-hand goods for the NUWSS in Ancoats, where she had just returned from spending two weeks in Blackburn setting up a local suffrage society.⁵² On 15 June, she was speaking with Margaret Robertson at an "At Home" at the Criterion Cafe, Blackburn — at least an indoor engagement this time! On 17 June she was with the 600 strong delegation to the London procession with the WSPU. Helen was born on 19 July. By September, Annot was once again attending ILP meetings, and on the 16th she was on the platform again, at an open-air demonstration in Stevenson Square in support of the new Reform Bill.⁵³ The pages of *Common Cause* are sprinkled with references to members' "bright humour", "eloquence", "enthusiasm", "sound logic" — admirable qualities for which NUWSS workers were presumably chosen, but which must have been difficult to maintain against the grim background of Ancoats and Annot's personal life.

The NUWSS intensified its political activity from 1911, seeking to convert individuals. At last, the executive of the NUWSS, disillusioned with private members' Bills and the government's half-promises, offered its conditional electoral support to the Labour Party, and it was at this stage that the NUWSS formally set up an Election Fighting Fund to encourage three-cornered contests as a threat to the Liberal Party. It attempted to keep credibility with all parties by not opposing any candidate who had pledged himself to women's suffrage. With her engagement as a part-time organiser for the

Election Fighting Fund, began Annot Robinson's most active period of travelling, speaking, writing and electioneering with other northern suffragists. Her first four years in Manchester had established her as both a fighter and a thinker. She had not only participated in but, to some extent, epitomised in her own early career the complexities and fluctuations of the first phase of the movement for women's suffrage.

During these years her personal political philosophy had evolved. Despite her origins, she was committed to the ILP, rather than to the reputedly more middle-class Social Democratic Federation or the Fabian Society. She shared the ILP aims of collective ownership, reform of working conditions, public assistance for those in need, free education for all, the "endowment of motherhood" and furthered these aims through her practical work at branch level. As an adherent of Keir Hardie, she strongly condemned domination by "the party machine", attacking the *Labour Leader* in 1908 for its failure to reflect grass-roots opinion, and endorsing her branch's desire the following year to emphasise its independence from the Labour Party. She did not join some other members of Manchester and Salford ILP in their move towards the British Socialist Party after 1911, but continued to show her concern with the prestige and development of the ILP at local level. Annot's alignment with grass-roots opinion caused her some difficulties on the question of women's suffrage at first, since the majority tended towards adultism. She was fearless in her spirited condemnation of the NAC at the 1910 ILP Conference for its inactivity and failure to arouse agitation in the country on behalf of women's suffrage, but by 1911 she was working to re-unite the women's and labour movements, not by tact or stealth, but, as was her style, by argument and conviction at the annual conference.⁵⁴

In 1914, Annot put her peace work and relief work above all other politics when the war divided the members of the NUWSS. In later years, though always active in the ILP and President of her branch, and so much "heart and soul with the Labour Party" that she was considered unsuitable now for the post of NUWSS organiser⁵⁵, she was to move towards international socialism and full-time work for peace through the Women's International League, a radical movement for social and political change. This, she considered, was partly the cause of her electoral defeat in 1920, where she stood for Medlock Street, "a drink-sodden Tory ward, and a very dead set was made against me, a Bolshevik, a German spy, a traitor, etc, etc." and where "the anti-woman vote did for me".⁵⁶ This defeat, and another in 1921, caused Annot to abandon hope of a career in politics, where more ambitious personalities, like Ellen Wilkinson, went on to fight another day. This failure does nothing to dilute the strong impression of conviction and integrity which comes through Annot's speeches and correspondence. Helena Swanwick wrote to her, "I want to tell you with what satisfaction I note your influence on the work you do and the reciprocal influence on you of your fine work. Truly, I always think of you as one of the people who are alive in the best sense, and I send you my warm regards".⁵⁷

It will be clear to the reader that a biographical study of this nature has certain limitations. Although a wide range of sources was consulted to provide collateral and place the subject in the local and national context, there has been heavy reliance on three primary sources: the Annot Robinson Papers, interviews with her daughter, and minutes of the ILP meetings. The Robinson papers presented two problems; first, in looking at a life in this way, the researcher can be led into a strong identification with the subject, making it difficult to give a balanced account of her activities and her role in the women's movement, and of her motivation and ideals. Second, although it is extensive, the collection needed a great deal of work to give it some coherence and to achieve some chronology; it is randomly selective in that the material within it is what has survived by chance. The letters to her sister, for example, cover a relatively short period although they were written throughout her life; the recipient destroyed those written between 1906 and 1916. The interviews conducted with Mrs. Helen Wilson were valuable in giving coherence to Annot Robinson's life and family background, and explaining something of her ideology. Mrs. Wilson's reflections on and feelings about her mother's marriage and motivation were the more interesting because her attitude has of course changed and matured in the last sixty years and she feels able, with hindsight, to put her mother's life in context. As an adult, she herself contacted several of Annot's contemporaries to discover more about her. The two problems of this oral evidence are obvious; Mrs. Wilson's first hand recollections cover less than ten years of her mother's life and the rest is gleaned from others; and, though not entirely uncritical of her mother, Mrs. Wilson's account is naturally influenced by pride and loyalty. The Minute Books of Manchester Central Branch ILP give a detailed picture of the size, preoccupations, dissensions, relationships and activities of this group of people, but minutes too are selective (and sometimes illegible) and in this case they were often more intriguing for what they left out than for what they included.

Despite its limitations, Annot Robinson's story adds, to some extent, to both aspects of mainstream suffrage history mentioned earlier. As a member of the WSPU, she demonstrated and marched, initiated militant tactics,



Election campaign photograph of Annot Robinson, 1921.

suffered imprisonment, shared ideals and platforms with the Pankhursts, and her private papers give insight into the events and personalities of these years. Similarly, as a member of the NUWSS, a study of her activities helps to give a detailed picture of how such movements were organised, of the commitment and mobility expected of their workers, and of their political relationships.

However, Annot Robinson's story does more than this. It reveals how a woman in the WSPU could differ from the Pankhursts in her ideas about political independence, in remaining a committed member of the ILP, in expressing doubts about the value of militancy and imprisonment, while not alienating herself from the movement. It shows how the transition could be made from the WSPU to organising work for the NUWSS, and how she could maintain and pursue radical and socialist ideals while working alongside more moderate liberals. It shows how fiercely, in later years, the NUWSS was torn by those who wished to remain in the movement but repudiated the war, and how and why she, with other mainly middle-class socialist women, stepped aside from the British suffrage movement into internationalism and pacifism.

Above all, her story shows that Annot Robinson was not alone in any of this and adds to the growing body of knowledge about the northern suffragists. The political allegiance of all Annot's closest colleagues, Ellen Wilkinson, Hannah Mitchell, Selina Cooper and Ada Nield Chew, was with socialism; all were members of the ILP, and all came into contact with each other in the Lancashire area. All were at first active in the WSPU, but because of their concern for working women in manufacturing towns they were also interested in the unionisation of women and their economic rather than purely political conditions. All of them subsequently took up jobs in the NUWSS, helping to radicalise it, taking its message into the cotton towns, running election campaigns and negotiating with the Labour Party. They showed a remarkable energy and mobility, travelling extensively and tirelessly in an age when it has been assumed that most working women were parochially confined through lack of time and resources. All were lively and intrepid public speakers in their different ways. None of them was able to rely on support from their husbands, although all (except Ellen Wilkinson) had married fellow socialists. Only Annot Robinson among them had more than one child, and in at least two cases this was a deliberate decision, unusual in their time. These were the dedicated, single minded, intelligent women Annot Robinson knew and whose ideals she shared.

The study of her life, however, has shown that Annot Robinson was unusual in several ways. Her middle-class origins have been described earlier, and she retained a hint of aloofness. Her attachment to her Scottish origins, evidenced by the fact that she remained ILP delegate for Lochgelly long after her move to Manchester, contributes to this impression, along with her understandable reticence about her private life. There is, in addition, a stark contrast between the account given in her private papers, which reveal an active and talented woman who had considerable impact on her contemporaries and the fact that she scarcely received a mention in the published writings of the women with whom she worked and was apparently forgotten except by her daughters within a few years of her death.

It is possible to speculate at different stages in her life on the degree of Annot Robinson's success in comparison with her contemporaries. It seems that she had more freedom of choice than many, and that she made the choice to leave Scotland, to marry for love and political ideals, to live in hardship and unappealing surroundings when she need not have done. It is unlikely that at 36 she married in desperation as a last resort, since expectations in her family tended, unusually, towards careers rather than marriage for women. Having arrived in Manchester, she was successful in unflinching allegiance to the causes she supported; some of her contemporaries retired early from the struggle, emotionally and physically exhausted, but Annot never gave up, continually developing and moving on. She was at first the family breadwinner and then a single parent of two young children. She certainly earned

more in her organising jobs than she would have as a teacher, and, unlike the others, was able to employ help in the house. As to the failure of her marriage, which was the source of many of her difficulties, it is tempting to subscribe to her younger daughter's view of her as a courageous, imaginative woman hindered by an inadequate and obstructive husband rather than to her elder daughter's opinion of her as a selfish, domineering wife who excluded her husband both personally and politically by her own competence and contempt for his weakness. It is impossible to say whether a happier and more supportive marriage might have relieved her of tension and facilitated her success, or whether it might have encouraged her to a more comfortable and less active life. If the suffragists already mentioned are used as a yardstick, it does seem that close and loving marriages were not the norm among politically active women. Annot Robinson, however, was unique in this group in making the decision to live without her husband, and she was certainly successful for five years, at least in material terms, in providing for herself and her children.

Annot Robinson was not alone in falling into obscurity, and her rescue, and that of some of her contemporaries, has helped to show that socialism was not a male preserve, and that voteless women could be both active and influential. It has shown that the suffrage movement was not polarised between militants and moderates, but that there existed another type of suffragist who combined an empathy with working women with a previously unacknowledged skill in political organisation and economic understanding. There is much work still to be done in re-discovering such women.

NOTES

1. S. Rowbotham, *Hidden From History* (1973).
2. M. Ramelson, *The Petticoat Rebellion* (1967).
3. R. Fulford, *Votes for Women* (1958); A. Rosen, *Rise Up Women* (1974); Doris Nield Chew, *Ada Nield Chew: The Life and Writings of a Working Woman* (1982); H. Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up* (1968).
4. J. Liddington and J. Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (1978); J. Liddington, 'Looking for Mrs. Cooper', *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*, 7 (1980-1), J. Liddington, 'The Women's Peace Crusade: The History of a Forgotten Campaign' in D. Thompson (ed.), *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb* (1983), J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (1985).
5. Helen Wilson, nee Robinson. Interviewed by Jill Liddington, 4 Oct. 1982 and by K. A. Rigby, 8 Feb. 1986. Mrs. Wilson was born in Ancoats in 1911 and lived with her mother and elder sister until Annot's death in 1925, when both girls were looked after by their aunts in Scotland. Helen returned to Manchester as a teacher, married and worked there until her retirement. She now lives in Altrincham.
6. K. A. Rigby, *Annot Robinson: Socialist, Suffragist, Peacemaker. A Biographical Study*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Manchester Polytechnic 1986.
7. Selina Cooper (1864 - 1946) subject of J. Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*. Selina Cooper was active in Nelson ILP from the early 1890s and in cotton workers' unions, as a winder herself. She was elected a Poor Law Guardian in 1901 and worked with the WSPU in its early years, and later as an organiser for the NUWSS from 1906. Relief work and suffrage activities continued during the war, until she became involved in the peace movement.
8. Helen Wilson to K. A. Rigby. Interview, 8 Feb. 1986. Annot Robinson Papers. Manchester Reference Library Archives (hereafter MRL) Misc.718/133 Annot Robinson's letter to Nellie 24 May 1922.
9. Helen Wilson to K. A. Rigby. Interview 8 Feb. 1986. "The conditions she saw ... you see she couldn't stand it. In Montrose there was poverty, but there were the fish you see ... you could grow vegetables, but for these workers there was nothing ... She told me that the children had races with the bugs on the desk, and that every night when they got home she and Peggy had to take everything off and stand in the bath to get rid of the bugs and fleas ... The injustice of it all ... I don't think politics were much discussed in their house because her father was always into literature and her mother was too busy".
10. Margaret Ashton was the daughter of a wealthy Liberal manufacturer, and became Manchester's first woman city councillor. She was an early member of the middle-class Manchester Suffrage Society and Chairman of the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations. Catherine Marshall was the daughter of a school master at Harrow School. Like Margaret Ashton, she foresook her activities with the Liberal Party and in 1908 began to fight for women's suffrage through the NUWSS. She graduated towards the ILP and became Secretary of the NUWSS Election Fighting Fund, working nationally to co-ordinate the work of local organisers like Selina Cooper and Annot Robinson. Selina Cooper was already active with the NUWSS when Annot Robinson was first employed, and they worked in parallel as organisers in the Manchester area, later meeting at election campaigns throughout the north west and at ILP Conferences. Both were in demand, and sometimes shared platforms, as speakers at outdoor meetings, and both were in relief work during the war while they continued their suffrage work, particularly with trade unions.
11. Women's Social and Political Union. Formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst; adopted militant tactics and gained public attention. Leading members split from the ILP, believing political independence essential for women's suffrage cause. Mrs. Despard and followers broke away in 1907 in protest against anti-democratic leadership of the Pankhursts to form the Women's Freedom League, which continued with militancy. The Pankhursts and their group diverted their attention to the war effort in 1914. See Pankhurst, E.S., *The Suffragette Movement* (1931). National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Formed in 1897, led by Mrs. Fawcett, to co-ordinate the work of local suffrage societies and organise support for private member's suffrage Bills. See R. Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1928). Women's Labour League. Formed 1906, to "work for Independent Labour Representation in connection with the Labour Party and to obtain direct Labour Representation of women in Parliament and on all local bodies". (Resolution passed at inaugural meeting.) See L. Middleton (ed.), *Women in the Labour Movement* (1977).

- Women's War Interests Committees. Formed during the war to safeguard the living and working conditions of women.
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Formed as a result of the International Congress of Women at the Hague in 1915, with 12 national committees. See Bussey, G. and Tims (eds.) *The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (1965).
12. Ellen Wilkinson. Obituary of Annot Robinson in *Women's Leader*, 6 Nov. 1925. Ellen Wilkinson (1891 - 1947) was one of Annot Robinson's closest friends: they worked and travelled together and Ellen and her sister Annie supported Annot in her domestic troubles. See B.D. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson* (1982).
 13. B. Harrison, *Separate Spheres: the Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (1978). The North West groups and supporters of the Anti-Suffrage Societies have not yet been fully researched.
 14. N. Reid, 'Manchester and Salford ILP — the pre-1914 era', *North West Labour History Society Bulletin*; Minute Books of Manchester Central Branch, ILP 1906-19, (MRL M42).
 15. Report of ILP Conference at Derby, 1 and 2 April 1907. A resolution was passed declaring the actions of the WSPU at by-elections detrimental and disloyal to the (Labour) party.
 16. Letter from Emmeline Pankhurst resigning from the ILP, not because her "sympathies have changed, but because, until women are men's political equals, my first duty is to work independently of party for the political freedom of my sex". A similar letter was sent by Christabel Pankhurst. Both letters reported and read on 14 Sept. 1907. Minutes of Manchester Central Branch ILP.
 17. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/92.
 18. Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up* (1968). Her energetic work in the WSPU had contributed to a nervous breakdown. The Pankhursts, who had been personal friends, showed no interest in or acknowledgement of her illness.
 19. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/92.
 20. T.B. Greig, *The Militant Suffrage Movement* (1911).
 21. Sam Robinson (1869-1937). Son of a Salford mill worker, no formal education, incapacitated by a severe stammer. Propoganda Secretary for Manchester Central ILP in 1906 and a declared supporter of women's suffrage, he met Annot Wilkie that year while both were campaigning for the Labour Party in Ebbw Vale.
 22. J. Liddington and J. Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (1978), p.93.
 23. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/164. Letter to Helen Wilson from John Kilgarry, 8 June 1960.
 24. Helen Wilson to K.A. Rigby. Interview 8 Feb. 1986.
 25. Hannah Mitchell Papers, MRL. Misc.220/2. From Jennie Baines to Sam Robinson 8 July 1908.
 26. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/27, 29. Letters to Annot from Dundee. Letter from Lillie Hardie to Annot, 5 May 1908. Letter from KOB to Annot, 16 Dec. 1909.
 27. Annot Robinson to Sam, 12 March 1908.
 28. Four months earlier a suffragette had chained herself to the grille of the Ladies Gallery, while other protests were made in and around the House of Commons, resulting in the imprisonment of the protagonists and ten other women. The House of Commons had to choose between removal of the offending grille and adjournment. They chose the former and it was never replaced. This was looked on by the WSPU as a symbolic victory.
 29. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/8, 9, Newspaper Cuttings.
 30. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/11. Circular letter from Annie Kenney to Sam, 13 Feb. 1908.
 31. Letter to Sam Robinson from Christabel Pankhurst, 16 Feb. 1908. The Bill proposed the enfranchisement of women on the same terms as men.
 32. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/14. Letter 11 March 1908, to Sam Robinson from J.R. Clynes, who was an ex-mill-worker, member of the first Labour Cabinet, and Home Secretary in 1929.
 33. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/92, "Votes for Women". This is a full draft of a speech, written apparently, from its references, at the end of 1911 or beginning of 1912. There is no evidence as to where or when it was delivered.
 34. T.B. Greig, *The Militant Suffrage Movement* (1911).
 35. *ibid.*
 36. Helen Wilson (interviews 4 Oct. 1982 and 8 Feb. 1986) remembers hearing that her mother was in prison twice, but the only written evidence of this second term is in the private letters, and the reason for her arrest is not given (although in September the following year, 1909, a summons was issued by Manchester Police to Mrs. Robinson for "obstruction by holding a meeting in the street".)
 37. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/20, 2 July 1908.
 38. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/19, 3 June 1908.
 39. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/30, 24 July 1911.
 40. Socialist naming ceremonies were not unusual for ILP members. Mary Cooper remembers her Socialist Sunday School in Nelson: "They used to have baptisms ... Keir Hardie or someone would come down ... we'd have a middle name like Bruce Glasier". Mary Cooper to Jill Liddington, quoted in *Respectable Rebel*, p.136.
 41. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/47.
 42. Helen Wilson to Jill Liddington, 4 Oct. 1982.
 43. Helen Wilson to K.A. Rigby, 8 Feb. 1986.
 44. See K.A. Rigby, *Annot Robinson: Socialist, Suffragist, Peacemaker*, op. cit.
 45. L. Middleton (ed.), *Women in the Labour Movement* (1977) p.27.
 46. E.J.N. League Leaflet, Sept. 1911, quoted in L. Middleton, *op. cit.* p.27.
 47. *Internationalist*, 1909, quoted in L. Middleton, *op. cit.* p.28.
 48. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/28, 29. Letters to Annot Robinson from Ramsay Macdonald, 1 Jan. and 8 Jan. 1910.
 49. M. Rendel, 'Contribution of the WLL to the Winning of the Franchise', in L. Middleton (ed.), *Women in the Labour Movement* (1977).
 50. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/92.
 51. R. Strachey, *The Cause* (1928).
 52. *Common Cause*, 18 May 1911. Margaret Robertson was a graduate and teacher who became one of the three permanent paid organisers of the NUWSS in 1908 (with Selina Cooper and Emilie Gardner). She joined the ILP, partly through her association with Fenner Brockway, whom she later married.
 53. In which Asquith had promised to leave room for a women's suffrage amendment "if the House wanted it".
 54. "She hoped the Conference would pass the resolution (to support the enfranchisement of women on the same terms as men) with an overwhelming majority as, owing to division in the past on this question, they had lost some of the most active members of the ILP ... She hoped the time would come when they would welcome back with open arms those who had left them on this question, and that the Conference would show by its vote that the ILP still stood by the women. It was said that the women's suffrage Bill was anti-democratic, but out of every ten women who would be enfranchised under it, eight would be working women". *ILP Annual Conference Report*, Birmingham, 17, 18 April 1911.
 55. NUWSS Executive Committee Minutes, 3 January 1918. MRL. M50/2/7:22.
 56. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/111. Letter to Nellie Wilkie, 5 Nov. 1920, Misc.718/110. Undated, Oct. 1920. Annot Robinson stood for Blackley in 1921.
 57. Robinson Papers. MRL. Misc.718/34. From Helena Swanwick to Annot Robinson, 14 Feb. 1916. Helena Swanwick was a Cambridge graduate and wife of a Manchester University lecturer, a prolific speaker for the NUWSS though never an organiser. She started the journal *Common Cause* in 1909, was on the committee of the NUWSS Election Fighting Fund in 1912, took part in election campaigns and the Labour-suffrage campaign of 1915. By 1916 she was Chairman of the British Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. See H.M. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* (1935).