



## Early WILPF Women

Name: Margaret Caroline Llewelyn-Davies

Dates: 16 October 1861 – 28 May 1944

Born: Marylebone, London, UK

Educated: Queen's College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge (1881).

Profession: Activist and campaigner

After leaving Cambridge University in 1883 Margaret worked in the Marylebone area doing social work. She supported the ideals of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, and joined the Marylebone branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild (formed 1883).

From 1889-1921 she was Hon. Secretary of the Women's Co-operative Guild (Margaret would not accept a salary). Membership grew from approximately 1700 in 1889 to 52,000 in 1922.

In 1904 the Women's Co-operative Guild joined the non-militant suffrage movement and began campaigning for improved maternity care and a maternity benefit to be paid to the mother. In 1907 the central committee began campaigning for a minimum wage for all female co-operative employees. By 1912, the Co-operative Wholesale Society and over 200 retail societies had implemented the minimum wage.

1909 Margaret gave evidence to a royal commission on divorce law reform and the Guild's annual congress passed a resolution for an extension to the grounds for divorce and for divorce after 2 years' separation in 1912. The Guild advocated that women should be able to petition for divorce on the same grounds as men. Margaret refused to back down when pressure from the Roman Catholic Church caused the central committee of the Co-operative Union to withdraw its annual grant.

Margaret was a signatory to the Emily Hobhouse 1914 Open Christmas Letter to the Women of Germany and Austria. During WW1 Margaret was elected to the general council of the Union of Democratic Control, which called for a negotiated peace. She supported the War Resisters international and in 1915 publicly supported the International Women's Congress to the Hague. During the war, Margaret was also elected to the general council of the Union of Democratic Control.

In 1915 Margaret compiled the book *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, followed by *Life As We Have Known It* in 1931.

In 1916 Margaret helped the Guild connect with other women's organisations through the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organisations. In 1921 she helped form the International Women's Co-operative Guild.

Between 1924 and 1928 Margaret chaired the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR and in 1928 issued her declaration "Why I Believe in the No More War Movement".

She was the first woman president of the Co-operative Congress, a lifelong pacifist and strong supporter of the Peace Pledge Union and the 'white peace poppy'. Margaret believed that capitalism benefitted the armaments manufacturers at the expense of the common man. An internationalist campaigner for total disarmament, Margaret supported the War Resisters International and the No More War Movement. She worked tirelessly on behalf of working people; the issues she supported included: minimum subsistence wages, pithead bath for miners, maternity benefit paid to mothers, adult suffrage, maternity healthcare, divorce issues.

Margaret Llewelyn-Davies is remembered for the support she gave to working-class women, the confidence she gave them to find their voice in public life - Virginia Woolf, in her introduction to *Life As We Have known It* makes this very point.

Published:

1904 *The Women's Co-operative Guild, 1883–1904*

1915 *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*

1931 *Life As We Have Known It*

Sources and further reading:

Oldfield, Sybil (2001). *Women Humanitarians" A Biographical Dictionary of British Women Active Between 1900 and 1950*. London, New York, Continuum

Stott, Mary, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004-2014; online edition