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## **Peace at any Price: The Visit of Nazi Women's Leader Gertrud Scholtz-Klink to London in March 1939 and the Response of British Women Activists**

*Julie V. Gottlieb and Matthew Stibbe\**

*In early March 1939 the Nazi women's leader (Reichsfrauenführerin) Gertrud Scholtz-Klink made a little-known visit to London at the invitation of the Women's League of Health and Beauty and the Anglo-German Fellowship. Taking place against the background of intense efforts to maintain peace, and growing expectations of war, the visit prompted a variety of responses from British women activists. Through analysing these responses, as well as examining why this visit has been overlooked in historical writing, this article sheds new light both on women's particular contribution to appeasement and on the gendering and feminising of internationalist activism in the aftermath of the First World War more generally. The German intentions behind accepting the invitation, the protests by a small number of London-based anti-fascist women and the reason why even some pro-appeasement women like Nancy Astor refused to meet Scholtz-Klink, are also explored.*

In March 1939, a few days before German troops entered Prague and thereby made the renewed Nazi threat to European peace and British security all too real, a significant, but now largely forgotten, international visit took place from Berlin to London. The specially-invited guest who arrived at Croydon airport on 7 March to be received by assembled photographers and newspaper reporters, as well as officials from the German embassy, was Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, leader of the National Socialist Women's League (NSF – Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft) and of the subsidiary mass organisation for women in the Third Reich, the German Women's Enterprise (DFW – Deutsches Frauenwerk).<sup>1</sup> Her trip lasted for three days and included a dinner held in her honour at Claridge's, a five-star hotel in London's Mayfair, and attended by a long list of dignitaries, including, among others, representatives of the National Council of Women, the National Women Citizens' Association, the Townswomen's Guild and the Auxiliary Territorial Service League. Ironically, many of these organisations were also involved in preparing British

women to take part in civil defence measures in the event of war.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as supporters of appeasement, and as activists, they were prepared to dine alongside and listen to the woman who claimed to represent the vast majority of female volunteer workers, civic functionaries, professionals, housewives and mothers living in Nazi Germany, and who was therefore reckoned to have something important to say.<sup>3</sup>

When we think of attempts to avert war during this period, we think of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's three visits to Hitler in September 1938, culminating in the high-risk, but at the time much-welcomed, Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938. Beginning with 'Cato's' famous indictment of the 'Guilty Men', the narrative of appeasement has been unreflectively male-centred, paying little to no attention to the women protagonists and to the gender dimension of this most divisive and anxious moment in international relations.<sup>4</sup> However, it was in fact the case that British women and their organisations were deeply invested in the policy and practice of appeasement. Despite their continued exclusion from the diplomatic service,<sup>5</sup> women supporters of Chamberlain – including those on the right-wing as well as the more liberal side of Conservative politics – sought to exercise their 'feminine' and allegedly innate diplomatic influence, and to reach out as wives and mothers to other women across geopolitical and ideological borders. This article will explore one key moment when British women's organisations engaged with the appeasement agenda.

Scholtz-Klink's visit to London is also of relevance in view of the recent revival of scholarly interest in the history of internationalism during the inter-war period. Debate in this area has indeed often gone hand-in-hand with a specific focus on women's activism.<sup>6</sup> Our particular focus in this article is on the role of international networks linked to the appeasement of Nazi Germany, but this story cannot be told in isolation from wider developments since 1918. Indeed, as several of the other contributions to this special issue also suggest, the aftermath of the First World War saw an explosion of interest in cross-border co-operation between civic organisations aimed at promoting peace in the broadest sense, without necessarily endorsing an absolute pacifist, or feminist, stance. Often they were led by women and/or driven at least in part by an idealised female perspective on wartime and post-war relief. This included transnational associations as well as organisations that promoted, or at least integrated, an approach to international relations which explicitly recognised the sovereignty of individual nation-states and their right to self-determination.<sup>7</sup>

Internationalism of this kind – as much of the literature now concedes – was not always associated with the liberal left or with what are conventionally seen as ‘progressive’ movements and causes. For one thing, it was often highly euro-centric and prone to exclude or marginalise non-white peoples, as seen, for instance, in the international women’s campaigns against the French deployment of colonial troops as part of the Allied occupation force in the Rhineland after 1920.<sup>8</sup> For another, it could embrace ideologies of female difference and ‘domesticity’ rather than equality.<sup>9</sup> As Gabriella Hauch has shown, in the post-1918 era, although attempts to create a ‘woman’s party’ in particular national settings invariably failed, ‘from time to time women of all political persuasions could... recognise a collective female interest, and formulate common goals “from a woman’s point of view”’.<sup>10</sup> Ensuring the continued absence of war was often one such goal, as was negotiating new roles for women as active citizens in post-suffrage societies, particularly in the spheres of health, youth work and welfare. A conservative or “motherly” brand’ of peace activism could thus be constructed and used to carve out a space for women to engage in non-partisan leadership at the national and international levels by contrasting the ‘male business of war’ with the ‘female penchant for peace’.<sup>11</sup> In Britain in the early 1920s, to take the most prominent example, up to fifty-five voluntary women’s groups, including the Mothers’ Union, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes and the Girl Guides’ Association, positioned themselves behind the Women’s Advisory Council of the League of Nations Union (LNU), and later played a major role in winning over women for the LNU’s ‘Peace Ballot’ (in fact, a test of support for world disarmament and collective security rather than peace per se) in 1934-35.<sup>12</sup>

Interestingly, even male politicians could buy into such rhetoric. For instance, during the general election campaign in Britain in May 1929, the former Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal party David Lloyd George described women as ‘peace maker[s]’ and suggested that if they had been enfranchised across Europe in 1914, there would probably have been no First World War.<sup>13</sup> Similar arguments could be found in numerous other contexts in the inter-war years, and were used both to legitimise the continued exclusion of women from official roles in diplomatic service and at the same time to justify granting them informal rights, as citizens or mothers, to a say in foreign policy – whether in support of the League of Nations’ vision of disarmament and collective security, or in support of appeasement, a policy

which, in David Reynolds' words, was then seen in positive terms as denoting 'the peaceful settlement of grievances' rather than – as it later appeared – 'craven surrender' to fascist powers.<sup>14</sup>

It was this kind of idealism (and essentialism) that inspired the poorly-timed and highly contentious visit of the Nazi women's leader to London in March 1939. As well as examining the importance of this visit for the gendering of inter-war foreign policy and appeasement, our purpose in this essay will be to address two main questions. Firstly, why has Scholtz-Klink's presence in pre-war London disappeared almost entirely from memory and historical writing?<sup>15</sup> And secondly, what does this disappearance tell us about some of the blind spots in recent historical writing on internationalism and women's activism in the inter-war period? Could it be, as Paul Betts has recently suggested, that, advances in knowledge notwithstanding, there is still something of a reluctance to discuss those internationalisms that do not fit into the standard 'liberal' or 'progressive' models of politically organised efforts to maintain peace, such as the notion of a 'patriotic sisterhood' across the anti-communist nations of Western Europe that became part of the British Union's (formerly British Union of Fascists) Women's Peace Campaign in the period 1938 to 1940,<sup>16</sup> or – to take the rather different example we intend to examine below – the cross-border networks of conservative, right-wing and non-political women that played an important role in the British appeasement of Nazi Germany before March 1939?<sup>17</sup>

Our aim is to address these issues by juxtaposing Scholtz-Klink's visit and the reaction to it with two kinds of gendered international activism prevalent at that time – what we will call the feminist/anti-fascist discourse and the more conservative motherly/pacifist discourse. Our central argument will be that the visit has largely been forgotten because Scholtz-Klink was somebody who both continued and at the same time perverted the original liberal feminist visions of women's participation in international relations after World War I. She was able to do this by being willing to act as front woman for a regime which actually absolutely denied women a voice in domestic politics or external affairs – and thereby made war more likely – while appearing to act as a symbol of the possibility of female co-operation, even friendship and lasting peace, across ideological and political divides. In order to demonstrate this further, the article will first analyse the background to Scholtz-Klink's trip to London, including the question of who invited her and who, on the German side, made the decision to accept the invitation. After this the reactions of British women activists to the visit, and its wider resonance in the British press, will be explored.

## **Background to the visit**

Although, as Helen McCarthy has argued, British membership of the League of Nations and the public prominence of groups like the LNU had a democratising influence on British domestic politics across party lines in the 1920s and 1930s, and thereby helped to shape new ideas about citizenship,<sup>18</sup> this was counter-balanced by a right-wing press and establishment determined to uphold the old ways of doing things and sceptical of all claims to equality. The conduct of British foreign policy at the highest levels thus remained a significant bastion of male upper-class power and privilege, with women (and lower class men) almost wholly excluded but landed and business interests, including those of the City of London and the stockbroker belt, well represented. It was this same world that influential figures in the Third Reich, notably the former wine salesman Joachim von Ribbentrop, who acted first as Hitler's informal plenipotentiary for foreign relations (1934-36), then as German ambassador to London (1936-38) and finally as Reich Foreign Minister (1938-45), sought to penetrate.<sup>19</sup>

According to Gerwin Strobl, Ribbentrop and other initially anglophile Nazis also shared the dominant German image of Britain in the 1930s as an 'old-fashioned nation' with reassuringly old-fashioned ways of doing things. Women and men of all social classes may now have had the vote, but 'debutantes driving to the Palace to be presented [and] ermined dignitaries at the opening of Parliament' continued to represent the most recognisable and internationally familiar 'public face of the reigns of both George V and George VI'.<sup>20</sup> In the male-dominated world of the British aristocracy, with its London clubs and its endless round of hunting parties and weekends away at lavish retreats, any informal political influence exercised by women was based on the hidden roles they performed as diplomats' wives, society hostesses, fund-raisers for the Conservative Party, confidantes of up-and-coming politicians, or – as some of the intelligence service files from the 1930s attest – as international spies.<sup>21</sup> A somewhat different case would be the well-connected Mitford sisters, Unity and Diana, whose pro-fascist tendencies drew them to Germany and into the inner circle around Hitler.<sup>22</sup>

One of the first surprises about Scholtz-Klink's visit to London, then, is that she did not easily fit into any of the categories described above. She was not from an upper-class background – rather she was the daughter of a minor public official from Baden in South-West Germany. She was not married to a

diplomat or politician; in fact, at the time she came to London she was a divorcee, having separated from her second husband, a medical doctor, in 1938. She did not belong to Hitler's inner circle and indeed admitted to Martin Bormann in a letter in January 1938 that she had 'not yet once had the chance to discuss women's affairs with the *Führer* personally'.<sup>23</sup> Certainly she was not trusted to the same extent as a number of female confidantes who were close to the German leader and could expect to receive personal gifts and greetings from him – among them Unity Mitford as well as Henriette von Schirach, Magda Goebbels, Eva Braun and Leni Riefensthal.<sup>24</sup> Although formally placed in charge of the entire apparatus of the Reich Women's Leadership (*Reichsfrauenführung* – RFFg) in 1936, in reality she suffered from a lack of power and status within the hierarchical structures of the Nazi regime, and lost a succession of turf wars with male colleagues over control of organisations for female youth, women workers and peasant women. Her rise to prominence was not the result of any autonomous activism but was largely due to her role in the post-1933 co-ordination (*Gleichschaltung*) of previously independent women's groups, first in Baden and then in the Reich as a whole.<sup>25</sup>

It is true that she travelled a lot within Germany in the 1930s, and was involved in propaganda mobilising German women at home and overseas, including in Austria which she visited with other top Nazi leaders immediately after the *Anschluss* in March 1938.<sup>26</sup> German women's organisations – with Scholtz-Klink's blessing – also participated in various international and transnational networks, particularly those promoting rural interests, social welfare, physical fitness or cross-border female solidarity against Bolshevism.<sup>27</sup> However, in spite of this, before 1939 she had not personally spent much time abroad (although admittedly she had been to London once before, in July 1936, to address the third International Congress for Social Work).<sup>28</sup> Propaganda claims to the contrary, there is also absolutely no evidence that she worked as a spy and it seems extremely unlikely that she would have had any contacts with the highly secretive civil and military agencies in Berlin that collected foreign intelligence for use in the event of war – usually in competition rather than co-operation with each other.<sup>29</sup> Certainly she was aware of, and endorsed, the more brutal sides of the Nazi treatment of women, visiting the fortress prison at Lichtenburg near Torgau in the company of SS leader Heinrich Himmler after it had been re-designated by the terror state as a camp for female political offenders and 'asocials' in 1937.<sup>30</sup> She also supported the compulsory sterilisation of women and men deemed to be 'hereditarily unfit', and denounced Catholic

women's objections to such measures.<sup>31</sup> However, although occasionally she was given high profile roles, such as helping to organise the plebiscites planned in advance of the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938,<sup>32</sup> her political influence within the Nazi hierarchy was minimal.

So why did she come to London in March 1939, and why is this visit of historical significance? As in 1936, so in 1939 she came ostensibly to study 'social conditions'.<sup>33</sup> However, whereas in 1936 her remit was to address an *international* gathering of social work experts, in 1939 both the foreign and the British domestic political contexts were different. This time she came at the direct invitation of Prunella Stack of the Women's League of Health and Beauty (WLHB), an organisation founded by her mother, Mary Bagot Stack, in 1930 to run fitness classes for women and girls in Britain. Although not the only group in this field, it was typical of the kind of non-party but socially-inclusive institution that drew women into voluntary public and associational life in post-suffrage Britain in pursuit of good causes.<sup>34</sup> Mary died in 1935, having built up the WLHB nationally and having established branches and/or contacts with like-minded organisations overseas, including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Ireland. With Prunella now at the helm, UK membership rose to almost 100,000 by 1936, with 1,200 classes taking place each week.<sup>35</sup> In 1937 further success came when the WLHB was invited to take part in two gigantic displays put on at Wembley Stadium, the first to mark George VI's Coronation, and the second as part of the Festival of Youth.<sup>36</sup>

In March 1939 Stack was returning the hospitality Scholtz-Klink had extended to her when she had taken a WLHB delegation to an international 'Strength through Joy' (*Kraft durch Freude*) festival which took place in Hamburg in June 1938 under the aegis of the Nazi-controlled German Labour Front.<sup>37</sup> In the intervening months, she had married Lord David Douglas-Hamilton on 15 October 1938, their nuptials coinciding with Neville Chamberlain's 'honeymoon period' with the public in Britain and around the world in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement. The groom was the youngest son of Lt. Alfred Douglas-Hamilton, 13<sup>th</sup> Duke of Hamilton. His eldest brother, who succeeded to the dukedom in 1940, was the aviator, Conservative MP for East Renfrewshire, active member of the Anglo-German Fellowship and quintessential 'fellow traveller' the Marquess of Clydesdale. Having come into contact with various senior Nazi officials at official receptions in Berlin when he was there to watch the Olympic



Games in 1936, the 14th Duke of Hamilton – Stack’s brother-in-law – was the man Rudolf Hess claimed to be hoping to meet when he spectacularly crash landed in Scotland in May 1941.<sup>38</sup>

Whether Stack herself had any direct Nazi sympathies is difficult to say with absolute certainty, but it seems relatively unlikely. While her contemporary critics dubbed her ‘Führer Stack’ because of her apparent ‘willingness to provide favourable publicity to the [Hitler] regime’, feminist treatments have stressed the previously overlooked internationalist, pacifist and even anti-fascist credentials of her work for the WLHB.<sup>39</sup> Certainly she was a strong supporter of Chamberlain and appeasement, as well as the empire and the monarchy. At the same time she hated the idea of another European or world war. The three slogans she chose in order to advertise the WLHB’s goals during its Coronation pageant at Wembley stadium in June 1937 were: GEORGE VI – HEALTH – PEACE, the carefully-choreographed display ending with a group of women gymnasts lying down on the grass to form a line in the shape of these words.<sup>40</sup>

As far as international influences go, in a letter to the *Times* Stack referenced the voluntary Sokol gymnastics association in Czechoslovakia as the ‘pioneer national movement of its kind in Europe’ and as the foremost ‘representative of the high standard of physical education now becoming universal on the Continent’.<sup>41</sup> In the context of the 1930s fitness craze, she may also have imagined some vague non-ideological affinities between her organisation and Scholtz-Klink’s NS-Frauenschaft, but there is no evidence that she endorsed anti-Semitism or any kind of extreme nationalism, and BUF women were a notable absence from the dinner at Claridge’s which she jointly organised with the Anglo-German Fellowship. It is likely that a more pressing concern for Stack in early 1939 was maintenance of peace and a return to diplomatic ‘normality’ after the drama of the Munich crisis and its aftermath. This is reinforced by some of the economic difficulties the WLHB was facing in the last few months of 1938: membership had fallen from 100,000 to 70,000, and in order to pay its bills and meet the rent on its various schools and its London headquarters on Great Portland Street, it had been forced to apply to the National Fitness Council (NFC) for emergency funds. As a report commissioned by the chairman of the NFC’s Grants Committee indicated, the League’s financial problems could be attributed largely to ‘the loss of classes during the period September to December 1938..., the attendance of members or potential members at courses in connection with A.R.P., and to competition’.<sup>42</sup>

On 18 February the emergency grant application was approved by the NFC. War, when it did break out in September 1939, nonetheless proved disastrous, with the Board of Education immediately announcing the suspension of the NFC's work 'in view of the National Emergency'.<sup>43</sup> Henceforth the WLHB was only able to continue its own activities on the basis of severe economies and the raising of a special appeal fund, and in 1941 it 'went into voluntary liquidation and restructured yet again as a limited liability company'.<sup>44</sup> In short, subsequent events were to demonstrate how much of an interest Lady Douglas-Hamilton, as she was now known, had in preserving peace. War, it seemed, was not compatible with national fitness, or at least not with the maintenance of a nationwide programme of fitness classes for women.

Given Stack's connections through her marriage to Lord David Douglas-Hamilton to the Anglo-German Fellowship (AGF), it is significant that Scholtz-Klink's visit to London also came at the invitation of this right-wing Conservative, but not overtly pro-Nazi organisation. Set up in early 1935 by the merchant banker Ernest Tennant, a trusted friend of Ribbentrop, and initially closely connected to its German equivalent, the Berlin-based Deutsch-Englische Gesellschaft, which Ribbentrop had helped to found, the stated purpose of the Fellowship was to 'promote good understanding between England and Germany and thus contribute to the maintenance of peace and the development of prosperity'.<sup>45</sup> Some of its members – and many of the guests at its dinners – were openly sympathetic to the Nazi regime, but others are better described as moderate 'fellow travellers of the Right' who desired Anglo-German rapprochement for business reasons or out of fear of communism, but were not (overtly) in favour of Britain assimilating Nazi ideologies.<sup>46</sup> This was made clear in November 1938 when the AGF's chairman, the former Conservative transport minister Lord Mount Temple, publicly resigned in protest at the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, an event which, as Richard Griffiths argues, left the Fellowship in 'considerable disarray'.<sup>47</sup>

In the weeks that followed, the AGF suffered a significant – and very rapid – decline in membership. Some of its more moderate volunteer workers and discussion hosts lost interest after the Munich crisis or took fright at the negative publicity around *Kristallnacht*, while right-wing and pro-Nazi elements transferred their allegiance to the openly anti-Semitic Link organisation.<sup>48</sup> The decision to host a dinner for Scholtz-Klink during her visit to London and a further reception at the Ritz – which was

organised by two members of the AGF's 'Ladies Committee', Lady Nutting and Lady Swann – may therefore have been seen as a way of reviving some of the 'short-lived air of optimism'<sup>49</sup> which exuded from the Fellowship in the immediate aftermath of the Munich Agreement. However, it is unclear how much hope was invested in it on the part of the AGF's governing Council, which consisted largely of 'moderates'. Certainly it is fair to assume that their invitation to Scholtz-Klink was not intended as an active endorsement of current Nazi policies, whether towards the Jews, towards the rump state of Czechoslovakia, or towards Poland. On the contrary, by the end of 1938 the AGF's secretary, T. P. Conwell-Evans, was himself so concerned about Hitler's future 'intentions' that he even contacted the Foreign Office to relay his fears.<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, although Conwell-Evans and the rest of the AGF Council expressed private 'regrets' over *Kristallnacht*, which they held responsible for 'setting back the development of better understanding between [our] two Nations', they stopped short of resigning, as Mount Temple had done. Instead, in a circular letter dated 18 November 1938, rank-and-file AGF members were informed that in spite of recent 'events', the Council would 'steadily prosecute its efforts to maintain contact with Germany' in order to 'support the Prime Minister in his policy of appeasement' and to 'encourage those friendly relations upon which peace depends'.<sup>51</sup> It was presumably with this purpose in mind that Conwell-Evans also became centrally involved – alongside Prunella Douglas-Hamilton – in initiating and laying preparations for the visit of the Reich Women's Leader.<sup>52</sup>

### **The German Response**

On the German side, the decision by the RFFg to accept the invitation to speak before the AGF in London on 7 March seems to have come in December 1938. It was approved in the first instance by Reich Minister Rudolf Hess, head of the office of the Deputy Führer.<sup>53</sup> Also involved from the outset was the Dienststelle Ribbentrop (Bureau Ribbentrop), the Nazi party organisation set up in 1934 to support Ribbentrop's special projects in the foreign policy sphere. Although housed in the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin, the Dienststelle was in fact kept organisationally separate from the German Foreign Office and was attached instead to the staff of Deputy Führer Hess.<sup>54</sup> Ribbentrop was also personally informed of the visit in his capacity as Reich Foreign Minister. The task of liaising with the Dienststelle Ribbentrop was

taken up by Dr Martha Unger, head of the 'Border and Foreign Department' of the Deutsches Frauenwerk and as such responsible for the RFFg's relations with German and foreign women living overseas and for 'counteracting alleged slander from abroad about the condition of women under Nazi rule'.<sup>55</sup>

On 25 January 1939 an enquiry was passed on from the RFFg via the Dienststelle Ribbentrop to the Reich Foreign Minister asking if the visit should still go ahead 'in view of the changed situation'<sup>56</sup>. This was presumably a reference to worsening Anglo-German relations in the wake of *Kristallnacht* and to the subsequent hardening of anti-British attitudes within the senior ranks of the Nazi party. However, it may also have been a more specific response to the crisis within the AGF, which – according to information gathered by MI5 – was now regarded as a 'very great disappointment to the Nazis' and as having 'completely failed' to 'exert its influence' in Germany's favour during and after the Munich crisis.<sup>57</sup> More generally, Britain, once admired by senior National Socialists for its 'old-fashioned' aristocratic leadership and apparently unapologetic role as colonial master in large tracts of the world, was increasingly seen as a declining imperial power that refused to recognise its own weaknesses and lacked the political will to agree to a new global division of power between the 'Germanic nations'.<sup>58</sup> This was apparent even to more clear-headed members of the AGF, one of whom, Colonel Etherton, spoke critically of Goebbels' negative newspaper campaign against Britain when he addressed a Fellowship meeting on 8 December 1938.<sup>59</sup>

Entirely separately from Goebbels, Ribbentrop had already begun to place greater hopes in the Berlin-Rome Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan well before he became Reich Foreign Minister in 1938, while Hess – who as deputy to the Führer was supposed to provide clear political leadership between the party and the state – allowed his position to remain obscure and undefined.<sup>60</sup> Formally subordinate within the Nazi hierarchy to Goebbels, Ribbentrop and Hess,<sup>61</sup> and, as a woman, barred from holding ministerial positions, Scholtz-Klink was always careful not to express any opinions of her own on major foreign policy issues. Nor was she ever invited to. Indeed, in all spheres of the RFFg's activities, including radio programming for women, a key means of communication at this time, foreign policy was strictly off the agenda.<sup>62</sup>

However, in spite of these unpromising beginnings, made worse by Scholtz-Klink's lack of seniority and autonomy within the NSDAP, the Dienststelle Ribbentrop and the Reich Foreign Minister

himself were still willing to allow the London visit to go ahead, with Ribbentrop expressing his agreement 'in principle', pending 'further investigations' to be carried out by Paul Karl Schmidt, head of the newly-created 'news analysis agency' (*Nachrichtenbeschaffungsapparat*) in the German Foreign Office and later placed in charge of its Press Department (*Presseabteilung*).<sup>63</sup> These investigations must have proved positive, for on 13 February Scholtz-Klink was formally invited by the ambassador's wife, Hilda von Dirksen, to use the London embassy as her place of residence during her stay.<sup>64</sup> Schmidt's involvement underlines the importance Ribbentrop attached to gaining a thorough analysis of British press reactions (he neither expected – and nor did the visit get – much reaction in the German domestic press). Significantly, Scholtz-Klink was not to have any meetings with British government officials. Instead, an extensive, three-day programme of events was drawn up for the entire trip by Josias von Rantzau, legation secretary at the London embassy, in co-operation with Cornwall-Evans of the AGF, and was approved by Unger and subsequently by the Dienststelle Ribbentrop.<sup>65</sup> Unger would accompany Scholtz-Klink from Berlin.<sup>66</sup> In the early afternoon of 7 March, the party of two arrived at Croydon airport.

### **Internationalism and Anti-Fascism**

Most, but not all, British proponents of appeasement welcomed Scholtz-Klink's trip to London as a last ditch effort at Anglo-German *rapprochement* through travel and cultural exchange. In particular the AGF, which as we have seen, had suffered not only internal self-doubts but also a significant cooling in its relationship with Ribbentrop and other German patrons towards the end of 1938,<sup>67</sup> leapt at the chance to host a dinner at Claridge's in honour of the Reich Women's Leader. The guest of honour gave a speech in German about 'Women's Work in Germany' in which she defended Nazi social and family policies as a fresh start after 'fourteen years... of Marxist-bolshevist philosophy' under Weimar, and as a positive example to the rest of the (non-communist) world. 'Every German woman', she argued, was now socially and spiritually equipped to 'offer her best for the nation', while in the project of German 'renaissance' launched by Hitler 'there is no difference of the sexes'. She clearly felt that her mission was to contest the negative representations of the Nazi treatment of women, taking shots at the 'various international journalists' for mislabelling her countrywomen as 'the most oppressed women in the world'.<sup>68</sup>

Florence Horsbrugh, one of the most vociferously pro-Chamberlain and pro-appeasement Conservative MPs – and a sponsor of recent parliamentary legislation on adoption and child welfare<sup>69</sup> – replied with a speech about the social work done by leading women’s organisations in Britain. Both Lord and Lady Douglas-Hamilton were in attendance. Scholtz-Klink then spent the next couple of days visiting various non-political women’s organisations, such as the Mothercraft Training School at Highgate, the WLHB at Great Portland Street, the Lapswood Training School for Girls from the Special Areas at Sydenham Hill, the recently-completed Kensal House housing scheme at Ladbroke Grove and the South London Hospital for Women at Clapham Common.<sup>70</sup> On the evening of her return home, Lady Douglas-Hamilton made a radio broadcast in German to physical fitness enthusiasts in Germany, and announced that a team of twenty German girls would be invited to take part in an international fitness display in London in June.<sup>71</sup>

Nonetheless, while the trips to various training schools and hospitals did proceed as planned, some of the potentially more controversial parts of the programme drawn by the London embassy in February were abandoned, although it is not clear why or by whom. In particular, the proposed tour of both Houses of Parliament, which was to be conducted by an unspecified female member of the Commons and by Lord Harmsworth (Cecil Harmsworth, Liberal politician raised to the peerage as 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Harmsworth in 1939) or Lord Arnold (Sydney Arnold, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Arnold, former Liberal and Labour politician and AGF member), did not go ahead. Likewise the trip to an unnamed Oxford women’s college did not take place. This was not a world in which Scholtz-Klink belonged, or one in which she would have found many sympathisers, at least in 1939. For the main part of her stay in London, she seems to have stuck to private functions – the dinner at Claridge’s on 7 March, a reception at the Ritz on 8 March organised by members of the ‘Ladies Committee’ of the AGF (Lady Helen Nutting, Lady Swann, Mrs. Ernest Tennant and others), and a separate event put on by the London branch of the NS-Frauenschaft on 9 March.<sup>72</sup>

The British media, including even sympathetic newspapers like the *Daily Mail*, was also not told in advance about her planned appearance at the Mothercraft Training School and other places around the capital. The German embassy was willing to work with the AGF on drawing up a programme of events, but – presumably in view of the recent downturn in Anglo-German relations – it became evident that one

or both of these bodies was anxious that Scholtz-Klink should avoid any unscheduled encounters with the public.<sup>73</sup> Even so, news of her presence in London spread quickly and was met with some feminist anti-fascist protest. On 9 March 1939, the last day of the visit, twelve members of the Women's Committee for Peace and Democracy walked in a single line from Tottenham Court Road to the German Embassy in Carlton House Terrace, their posters reading 'Clear Out Scholtz-Klink', 'Hitler Wants War, We Want Peace', 'No Nazi Klink for British Women', and in German 'Freedom for the Women of Hitler's Concentration Camps'.<sup>74</sup> The WCPD was, in fact, the renamed British branch of the Women's World Committee Against War and Fascism, and one of a number of groups that had mounted various campaigns to bring public attention to bear on the abuses practised by Nazi Germany against its own people, and even more specifically the barbaric treatment of women deemed enemies of the state.<sup>75</sup>

It is worth noting that these feminist protests were not extensive, or at least not much covered by the British press. In Germany, they were dismissed as communist-inspired and 'childish'.<sup>76</sup> And yet they were not made in a vacuum. Left-wing groups in Britain, aided by the small trickle of German and Austrian anti-Nazi refugees who been able to enter the UK from the mid-1930s onwards, promoted pamphlets such as the *Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* (1933) which focused, among other things, on the growing number – and brutal mistreatment – of political prisoners in the Third Reich, including women.<sup>77</sup> What is more, since the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, and even before, British feminists had articulated their specific anti-fascist concerns in myriad appeals to a broader international conscience,<sup>78</sup> and at home the Left Book Club had also commissioned a book in 1937 which made detailed reference to the Nazis' mistreatment of women.<sup>79</sup>

The Six Point Group especially had become the 'clearing house of the most tragic cases of the women victims of dictatorship',<sup>80</sup> and the most focused campaigns were on behalf of individual German women who were victims of the National Socialist regime. One of the more prominent cases was that of Liselotte Herrmann, the first woman to be sentenced to death for treason by the People's Court, in June 1937. As a communist student, Herrmann had distributed anti-Nazi petitions in Berlin. Later she passed secret details of Germany's rearmament plans, which she had gained access to while working in an aircraft factory near Stuttgart, to the German Communist Party headquarters in Switzerland. Her execution was carried out at Plötzensee prison in Berlin on 20 June 1938, and was preceded by a year-

long international campaign, organised from Britain, to win a reprieve. Several leading British women activists from the Labour and Liberal parties, including Ellen Wilkinson MP, Monica Whately (LCC member for Limehouse), Lady Rhondda, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter and Sybil Thorndike, as well as the radical independent MP Eleanor Rathbone, registered their concern in a public petition sent to Hitler.<sup>81</sup> The fact that Herrmann had a four-year-old son, from whom she had been separated since her arrest in December 1935, was repeatedly emphasised during the campaign in order to demonstrate the lie behind the notion that the Nazi regime cared about the welfare of mothers and children.<sup>82</sup>

Scholtz-Klink's status as the leader of a reactionary organisation that had risen to displace and then replace the once vibrant German women's movement meant that even Conservative woman MPs like Lady Nancy Astor refused to meet her, judging that her activities 'give no recognition to the rights of women in any sphere but the home'.<sup>83</sup> Although Lady Astor had herself been at the centre of appeasement and behind-the-scenes Anglo-German relations as the hostess of the so-called Cliveden Set in 1936-38, and although she had been somewhat half-hearted in her work on behalf of individual women victims in Nazi Germany and clearly distanced herself from organised forms of left-wing anti-fascism, she was also a staunch feminist and objected to Nazism on the grounds that the regime represented an assault on working women.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Astor's public objections to Scholtz-Klink's visit coincided with her campaign to be rid of her reputation as a conspiratorial Clivedenite, and it was in March 1939 that she gave a number of interviews trying to distance herself from Nazi anti-Semitism – despite her frequent anti-Semitic comments over the years – and to clarify her continued support for appeasement which she espoused in tandem now with her anti-Nazism: 'I backed Chamberlain in trying to get appeasement in Europe. Make no mistake. If we don't get appeasement we shall get war. I think he has been right to make a serious attempt to reach an understanding, even with the countries whose internal policies are different from our own, and with pushing on with rearmament at the same time'.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that Scholtz-Klink's visit came at a time when publications on Nazi Germany in Britain, while still offering a variety of viewpoints, were becoming increasingly critical and hostile. From the Penguin Specials and Left Book Club editions which frequently sold tens of thousands of copies each, to Edward Hulton's *Picture Post*, founded in October 1938 and with a circulation of 1.35 million per issue by early 1939,<sup>86</sup> there was no shortage of material documenting the cruelties of the Hitler



regime. Indeed in Dan Stone's view, by this time 'the reading public', and not just adherents of the organised, anti-fascist Left, were 'ahead of the game where the government and its cautious stance towards Hitler was concerned'.<sup>87</sup> Grass-roots Conservative party opinion itself was deeply unsettled by the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, with the chairperson of the Chelmsford Conservative Women's Association apparently echoing the views of her members when she noted that 'it was generally felt that this country should take a definite lead in evolving a policy to help a persecuted people'.<sup>88</sup> This allows us to set what were ostensibly small-scale protests against Scholtz-Klink's visit in the broader domestic political context, although equally it would be wrong to under-estimate the desire for peace that still existed in Britain in March 1939, as Lady Astor's (self-) defensive article for the *News Chronicle* alluded to, with its blunt message: appeasement or war.<sup>89</sup>

### **Internationalism and Peace Activism beyond Anti-Fascism**

While anti-fascist women reacted with disgust to Scholtz-Klink's visit, even those women who had greater expectations of it would have been disappointed by the events of the following days. German press reporting on the visit was extremely brief and perfunctory, indicating that the Nazi regime had never set much store by it as a means of improving Anglo-German relations.<sup>90</sup> Instead, as in the preceding three months, so in March 1939, the Nazi-controlled German newspapers were full of charges of British 'hypocrisy' in world affairs.<sup>91</sup> This was especially the case immediately after 15 March, the date on which the Munich Agreement was torn up through the Wehrmacht's march into Prague, at the end of March, when Britain, together with France, offered a guarantee of Polish independence, and again after 27 April, when the Chamberlain government announced the introduction of a limited form of conscription – a first for peacetime conditions. War now seemed increasingly likely.

As if to fall into line, the NSF's own fortnightly periodical, the *NS-Frauenwarte*, carried an article in April 1939 which made the by now commonplace accusations regarding British 'double standards':

We have no intention here of compiling yet another list of all the acts of repression that Britain has on its conscience in America and Africa, India and Ireland: we simply ask, how is it that England can pose as the guardian of international justice, this England which, when left to its own devices, has never shown the slightest regard for justice at the international or social levels... has created a

system out of the principle of the unrestricted right of the strongest... and in its abuse of power does not even spare the peoples of its own islands.<sup>92</sup>

Especially in respect to its treatment of mothers and children, the article continued, Britain could not be regarded as an international model worthy of emulation. In fact, its approach to welfare had hardly improved since the time of the early industrial revolution, when children were forced to work for fourteen hours a day. What is more, the lords and ladies of that era had used every trick in the book to try and stop the introduction of more humane factory legislation: 'This is what the English understood and understand by justice. The world has gradually learned to see this kind of justice for what it is – the greatest hypocrisy of all times. We have had enough of it!'<sup>93</sup>

So much, then, for the idea of a shared female interest in social policy and child welfare transcending the Anglo-German antagonism, which Scholtz-Klink's visit was supposed to promote. Instead, 'internationalism' was now cited as a justification for anti-British attitudes, a theme used by women Nazi propagandists during the war itself as they sought to lay claim to a German-led, anti-liberal and anti-communist 'New Order' in Europe. A German victory, it was hoped, would also promote new visions of women's cross-border co-operation and activism in Europe in common opposition to the 'Anglo-Saxon spirit' and alleged Anglo-American domination of older networks of female activists.<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, in Britain in 1939, press reactions to Scholtz-Klink's visit were mixed and certainly not in keeping with the AGF's intentions, with male journalists commenting negatively on her imagined poor dress sense or presenting her as a Nazified (and exoticised) female 'other'. Typical in this sense was the report in the London *Evening Standard*:

Germany's woman Fuehrer wears no make-up. She stepped from the air liner which had brought her from Berlin wearing clothes of the kind that Herr Hitler thinks the Nazi woman should wear. She had simple black shoes, dark stockings, a black cape of a silky material, a black tailored suit, with a white shirt and tartan tie. On the lapel of her suit she wore a Nazi badge... She has fair hair which she wears in plaits wound round her head. Her face is freckled and her eyebrows are unplucked.<sup>95</sup>

In between the hostile press coverage on what she wore, the core message did nonetheless get through – as the Conservative *Daily Telegraph* noted that the '36 year old leader of Germany's National Socialist Womanhood' had merely come to London to 'outline the work done by women in the Reich' and to meet

'leading representatives of women's movements in Great Britain'.<sup>96</sup> Later, during the war, the journalist and Allied propagandist Richard Baxter alleged that she was 'heavily built', with the 'biggest pair of feet I have ever seen on a woman' and had come across as a 'dour, irritable Hun who could not even sum up sufficient decency to be civil to the authorities in Croydon, much less the representatives of the press who came to welcome her'.<sup>97</sup> But there was also far more positive coverage of the visit by pro-appeasement newspapers, especially the *Daily Mail*.<sup>98</sup> It is also significant that Scholtz-Klink was not represented in the British press as a terrible anti-Semite or warmonger – even if she was mocked as Hitler's 'perfect Aryan woman'. The true dangers of the Nazi regime were still not recognised in March 1939, even if parts of the public were 'ahead' of the government on this issue.

The cynical aim of German propaganda abroad was to present Scholtz-Klink in the same light as she was depicted at home – as the spokesperson for millions of German mothers and children, and as a national women's leader who was willing to reach out to women from her own and other (anti-communist) nations via her 'motherly' interest in social policy and women's health. How successful this propaganda was is difficult to gauge. Certainly her visit to London did little to offset the growing belief in both countries in the inevitability of war.<sup>99</sup> Anti-fascist women in Britain had few illusions about the real purpose behind it: to cover up Nazi abuses against women at home and in recently occupied territories in Austria and the Sudetenland, and to place a veil over her male superiors' plans for further military aggression in Europe. In their view, failure to recognise what Scholtz-Klink really stood for would make war more, rather than less likely. Moreover, even for some pro-appeasement Conservative women like Lady Astor, the visit clearly jarred with their identities and achievements as feminists. No amount of propaganda, then, could present the German women's leader as an active defender of women's rights in the domestic or international spheres.

Yet what is interesting is that, in spite of this, other British women activists were willing to give Scholtz-Klink a sympathetic hearing, and even to welcome her visit as an example of a wider female (or 'motherly') agenda which crossed national and ideological boundaries. Here National Socialist policy had been quite clever, showing itself capable of working within and at the same exploiting and perverting discourses of international co-operation and cross-border networks on issues such as public welfare and women's health in order to manipulate opinion in other fascist or non-fascist countries.<sup>100</sup> In Britain itself,

such cultural co-operation was still being sold by groups like the AGF, and by extension, the various women's organisations that supported the AGF dinner in honour of Scholtz-Klink, as being in the interests of peace. It is significant, for instance, that many of the voluntary women's organisations who sent representatives to attend the dinner at Claridge's on the evening of 7 March 1939 had, in the aftermath of World War I, been affiliated to the LNU and/or to pro-peace bodies promoting women's fitness and well-being.<sup>101</sup> In this regard, they were part of the same 'broad-based tradition' of grass-roots female mobilisation and sense of 'post-Suffrage empowerment' identified by Helen McCarthy as being behind the 'gendering' and 'feminising' of internationalist activism in Britain after 1918.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, Scholtz-Klink's visit, even if it did not achieve very much in a positive sense, at least chimed with what Tessa Dunlop calls the 'private, domestic vision of Englishness' which played a key part in 'national sentiment' during the inter-war period and was indeed actively promoted by Prime Ministers Stanley Baldwin and Chamberlain. Such visions could also be projected outwards, as Prunella Douglas-Hamilton's radio address to German listeners immediately after the visit – in effect a private, and yet also very public plea, for peace – suggests. The simple message of this kind of sentiment, Dunlop notes, which was shared by many, but by no means all Conservative (and conservative) women, and by quite a few Liberal, Labour and non-political women too, is that 'world war must be avoided at all costs'.<sup>103</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the various strands of Scholtz-Klink's visit – the German intentions behind it, her reception by the British and the British press, and the near erasure of it from the historical record – serve as a suitable last chapter in the narrative of women's international peace activism, tangible and constructed, in the long aftermath of the First World War. Indeed, it is not only in the historiography that we note striking silences, but also among female activists and women's organisations themselves. Right-wing and fascist international networks of women did exist at this time, and indeed continued into the first half of the 1940s,<sup>104</sup> but in Britain they were outside the political mainstream and were hidden away in marginal groups such as the British Union and the Link. For the more established parts of the women's movement, the main interest in the late 1930s was the schism between a feminist-pacifist internationalism and a more active anti-fascist feminism.<sup>105</sup> Neither of these strands of female activism was represented in the

Scholtz-Klink visit, although the pacifists, at least through their silence about Nazi brutality and anti-Semitism, seemed to give Scholtz-Klink the benefit of the doubt. Anti-fascist feminists, on the other hand, would never have considered international networks of right-wing women to be compatible with their definition of feminist internationalist activism, especially as one of their key campaigns was against the Nazis' mistreatment of women in general, and women political prisoners in particular.

Two further strands of women's peace activism that played an important role in the creation of new national and international identities for British women after 1918 were nonetheless present in Scholtz-Klink's visit, and indeed are of broader interest for understanding the particular contribution made by women's organisations to the appeasement agenda of the late 1930s. The first of these was the attempt to transcend rivalries between nation-states by making a specifically female interest in health, fitness, child welfare and social policy the basis for a shared identity that crossed political boundaries. This was the clear message that Scholtz-Klink intended to purvey, for instance when she was photographed alongside Prunella Douglas-Hamilton at the headquarters of the WLHB in Great Portland Street. The second position, more essentialist in nature and present in self-consciously liberal as much as right-wing international women's networks, was the notion that motherly values and a 'natural' female hatred of war could unite women from different countries in a search for peace, regardless of their separate 'national' interests and divergent political systems.<sup>106</sup> Both of these discourses were caught up in British women's responses to Scholtz-Klink's visit. Moreover, both represent a hidden and hitherto under-explored part of the legacy of the First World War for women's international activism.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful pen portrait of Scholtz-Klink, see Anna Maria Sigmund (1998) *Die Frauen der Nazis* (Vienna: Ueberreuter), pp. 119-129. On the NSF and the DFW see also Jill Stephenson (2001) *Women in Nazi Germany* (Harlow: Pearson); Matthew Stibbe (2003) *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold); and Nicole Kramer (2011) *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

<sup>2</sup> See Lucy Noakes and Susan R. Grayzel (2012) *Defending the Home(land): Gendering Civil Defence from the First World War to the 'War on Terror'*, in Ana Carden-Coyne (Ed.) *Gender and Conflict since 1914: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 29-40 (here esp. pp. 32-34); and Lucy Noakes (2012) 'Serve to Save': Gender, Citizenship and Civil Defence in Britain, 1937-1941, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47(4), pp. 734-753.

<sup>3</sup> Women Leaders Meet 'Perfect Nazi Woman', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1939. On the dinner at Claridge's see also Julie Gottlieb and Matthew Stibbe (2014) When Hitler's Perfect Woman Came to Call, *BBC History Magazine*, 3, pp. 51-54.

<sup>4</sup> For a critique of, and corrective to, the existing historiography, see Julie V. Gottlieb (2015) 'Guilty Women', *Foreign Policy and Appeasement in Inter-War Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

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<sup>5</sup> Women could not enter the diplomatic service in Britain until 1946 (with a marriage bar lasting until 1973) – see Helen McCarthy (2014) *Women of the World: The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London: Bloomsbury), pp. xi and 284.

<sup>6</sup> See here, among others, Glenda Sluga (2013) *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press); Patricia Clavin (2013) *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); David Gorman (2012) *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Helen Jones (2014) *Women in British Public Life, 1914-1950: Gender, Power and Social Policy* (Harlow: Longman); Daniel Laqua (Ed.) (2011) *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris); and Michael Pugh (2012) *Liberal Internationalism: The Interwar Movement for Peace in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>7</sup> See also Leila J. Rupp (1994) Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945, *American Historical Review*, 99(5), pp. 1571-1600 (here esp. pp. 1587-1593); and Heather Jones (2009) International or Transnational? Humanitarian Action during the First World War, *European Review of History – Revue européenne d'histoire*, 16(5), pp. 697-713.

<sup>8</sup> See, among others, Erika Kuhlman (2011) The Rhineland Horror Campaign and the Aftermath of War, in Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe (Eds) *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 89-109. 'Euro-centrism' was nonetheless also subject to political challenge from those women seeking liberation from European or western colonial rule in the years 1880 to 1945 and after, as Rupp, Constructing Internationalism, pp. 1580-1582 and 1592-1593, and Kimberley Jensen in her contribution to this special issue, both demonstrate.

<sup>9</sup> David Reynolds (2013) *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (London: Simon & Schuster), p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriella Hauch (2011) Sisters and Comrades: Women's Movements and the 'Austrian Revolution', in Sharp and Stibbe (Eds) *Aftermaths of War*, pp. 221-243 (here p. 241).

<sup>11</sup> Rupp, Constructing Internationalism, pp. 1582-1584.

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<sup>12</sup> Helen McCarthy (2010) Democratizing British Foreign Policy: Rethinking the Peace Ballot, 1934-1935, *Journal of British Studies*, 49(2), pp. 358-387 (here pp. 372-373). See also Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>13</sup> Mr Lloyd George at Albert Hall: Appeal to Women, *Manchester Guardian*, 10 May 1929.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, *The Long Shadow*, p. 229.

<sup>15</sup> It appears in none of the standard accounts of British appeasement of Germany or of Anglo-German relations in the countdown to the Second World War, and is barely touched upon in the most detailed study of the Reich Women's Leader to date: Massimiliano Livi (2005) *Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: Politische Handlungsräume und Identitätsprobleme der Frauen im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der 'Führerinnen aller deutschen Frauen'* (Münster: LitVerlag), pp. 125 and 242. Nor does Scholtz-Klink mention it herself in her selective documentary account of her career as Reich Women's Leader – see Gertrud Scholtz-Klink (1978) *Die Frau im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Tübingen: Grabert). In fact we have only been able to find two very short references to it in the current literature. Anne de Courcy flags it up in her book on 1930s London 'society' – see de Courcy (1989) *1939: The Last Season* (London: Thames and Hudson), pp. 15-16 – although, as will become apparent below, the visit was hardly a central part of the aristocratic 'season', even in 1939, and it would be wrong to interpret it in that light. More convincingly, Elizabeth Harvey briefly mentions the visit in the context of discussing the international links developed by Nazi women before and after 1939 – see Harvey (2012) International Networks and Cross-Border Cooperation: National Socialist Women and the Vision of a 'New Order' in Europe, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13(2), pp. 141-158 (here p. 149).

<sup>16</sup> See Julie V. Gottlieb (2000) *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement 1923-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris), esp. pp. 59-64.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Betts (2015) The Politics of Internationalism Revisited, *German History*, 33(1), pp. 123-129 (here p. 126).

<sup>18</sup> Helen McCarthy (2011) *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c. 1918-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).



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<sup>19</sup> On Ribbentrop, see Wolfgang Michalka (1993 [1989]) Joachim von Ribbentrop: From Wine Merchant to Foreign Minister, in Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zitelmann (Eds) *The Nazi Elite*, transl. by Mary Fischer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 165-172; and on the varied attitudes to be found in 1930s Britain and within the British elite towards relations with Germany, see also Richard Griffiths (1980) *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-39* (London: Constable); Dan Stone (2003) *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933-1939: Before War and Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); and Ian Kershaw (2004) *Making Friends with Hitler: Lord Londonderry and the British Road to War* (London: Allen Lane).

<sup>20</sup> Gerwin Strobl (2000) *The Germanic Isle: Nazi Perceptions of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 128.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Martha Schad (2004 [2002]) *Hitler's Spy Princess: The Extraordinary Life of Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe*, transl. by Angus McGeoch (Stroud: Sutton); Jim Wilson (2011) *Nazi Princess: Hitler, Lord Rothermere and Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe* (Stroud: History); and Karina Urbach (2015), *Go-Betweens for Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 217-278.

<sup>22</sup> Anton Joachimsthaler (2003) *Hitlers Liste: Ein Dokument persönlicher Beziehungen* (Munich: Herbig), pp. 517-540. On the Mitford sisters' involvement in British fascism, including Diana's marriage to the BUF leader Oswald Mosely in October 1936, see Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*, pp. 323-326. Although the Mitford sisters were probably exceptional for their very strong political attachment to the Nazi regime, as Tessa Dunlop notes, with the expansion of travel opportunities during the 1920s and 30s it was not uncommon for upper-class girls and even middle-class girls from 'smart' private schools to be sent by their parents to spend some time in Germany as part of their education or entrance into the adult world. In this sense they contributed to broader 'friendship' networks and efforts to promote 'cultural understanding'. See Tessa Dunlop (2015) *The Bletchley Girls. War, Secrecy, Love and Loss: The Women of Bletchley Park Tell their Stories* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), esp. pp. 40-42.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Jill Stephenson (1981) *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London: Croom Helm), p. 118. See also Livi, *Gertrud Scholtz-Klink*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>24</sup> Joachimsthaler, *Hitlers Liste*; Sigmund, *Die Frauen der Nazis*.

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<sup>25</sup> See also Jill Stephenson (1993) Gertrud Scholtz-Klink – die NS-Musterfrau, in Ronald Smelser, Enrico Syring and Rainer Zitelmann (Eds) *Die Braune Elite II: 21 weitere biographische Skizzen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), pp. 219-230 (here esp. pp. 221-222 and 225-227).

<sup>26</sup> Giles MacDonagh (2009) *1938: Hitler's Gamble* (London: Constable), p. 83. On Scholtz-Klink's contacts with pro-Nazi women activists in Austria from 1936 onwards see also Johanna Gehmacher (1998) *Völkische Frauenbewegung: Deutschnationale und nationalsozialistische Geschlechterpolitik in Österreich* (Vienna: Döcker), pp. 177 and 204-217.

<sup>27</sup> For examples see Harvey, *International Networks*, pp. 145-149; and Daniela Liebscher (2009) *Freude und Arbeit: Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen Italien und des NS-Regimes* (Cologne: S-H Verlag).

<sup>28</sup> The 1936 visit is mentioned in an untitled article in the *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 14 July 1936, copy in Bundesarchiv (henceforth BA) Berlin, R 8034 III/414, Bl. 119; and in Liebscher, *Freude und Arbeit*, p. 486. According to both sources, Scholtz-Klink was accompanied on this occasion by the head of the Nazi Winter Aid organisation, Erich Hilgenfeldt, who was formally her superior with right of administrative oversight over the social work of the NSF. Livi, *Gertrud Scholtz-Klink*, pp. 125, 136 and 241-242, also mentions visits by the Reich women's leader to Copenhagen, Stockholm and Zurich in 1937, Rome in 1939, occupied France in 1940, Italy (again) in 1941, and the Netherlands, Norway and Luxemburg at later points during the war.

<sup>29</sup> During the war the British journalist and propagandist Richard Baxter alleged that Scholtz-Klink had come to London as a spy. According to his unnamed 'sources', she had sought contact with an espionage ring initially built up by Anna von Ribbentrop, the former ambassador's wife, and based on the strategic 'planting' of German and Austrian girls as employees in leading businesses or as domestic servants in homes belonging to serving military personnel. See Richard Baxter (1941) *Guilty Women* (London: Quality Press), pp. 40-44.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Helm (2015) *If this is a Woman. Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler's Concentration Camp for Women* (London: Little, Brown), p. 19. In May 1939, a few weeks after Scholtz-Klink's visit to London, the

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remaining female inmates at Lichtenburg were transferred to the new women's concentration camp at Ravensbrück.

<sup>31</sup> Gisela Bock (1996) Equality and Difference in National Socialist Racism, in Joan Wallach Scott (Ed.) *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 267-290 (here p. 279).

<sup>32</sup> Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women*, p. 118. The plebiscite in Austria went ahead in April 1938, but the one in the Sudetenland was cancelled.

<sup>33</sup> The Perfect Nazi Woman, *Manchester Guardian*, 8 March 1939.

<sup>34</sup> McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, p. 187.

<sup>35</sup> Prunella Stack (1988) *Mary Bagot Stack and the Women's League of Health and Beauty* (London: Peter Owen), pp. 131-132 and 136. More information on the WLHB can be found in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (2010) *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 247-251; and Charlotte Macdonald (2011) *Strong, Beautiful and Modern: National Fitness in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, 1935-1960* (Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books), esp. pp. 38-39. Macdonald also stresses the WLHB's impact on fitness movements in the British dominions – see *ibid.*, pp. 133 and 157.

<sup>36</sup> Stack, *Mary Bagot Stack*, p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138. For further details on this event see Liebscher *Freude und Arbeit*, p. 594; and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p. 308.

<sup>38</sup> Kershaw, *Making Friends*, p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> See Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, p. 308. Also Jill Julius Matthews (1990) 'They had Such a Lot of Fun': The Women's League of Health and Beauty Between the Wars, *History Workshop Journal*, 30, pp. 22-54 (here esp. p. 39).

<sup>40</sup> Health and Beauty: Women's Pageant at Wembley, *The Times*, 14 June 1937.

<sup>41</sup> Prunella Stack, Aims of Sokol Movement: Expression of the Individual, *The Times*, 9 July 1938.

<sup>42</sup> James T. Dowling, Report to E. H. Pelman, Chairman of the Grants Committee for Physical Training and Recreation, 18 January 1939, in The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA), ED 113/81.

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<sup>43</sup> Grants Committee, National Fitness Council for England and Wales, to Women's League of Health and Beauty, 4 September 1939, in *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Prunella Douglas-Hamilton to Grants Committee, 12 October 1939, in *ibid.* See also Matthews, 'They had Such a Lot of Fun', p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> See Anglo-German Fellowship, Aims and Objectives, n.d., in TNA, KV 5/3.

<sup>46</sup> On the ideology of the AGF see Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers*, p. 184; and on this organisation more generally see Simon Haxey (1939) *Tory M.P.* (London: Left Book Club), pp. 198-209; N. J. Crowson (1997) *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940* (London: Routledge), pp. 232-234; G. T. Waddington (1997) 'An Idyllic and Unruffled Atmosphere of Complete Anglo-German Misunderstanding': Aspects of the Operations of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop in Great Britain, 1934-1938, *History*, 82(1), pp. 44-72; Kershaw, *Making Friends*, pp. 143-44; and Urbach, *Go-Betweens*, pp. 201-206.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Griffiths (1998) *Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club and British Anti-Semitism, 1939-1940* (London: Constable), p. 37. Although Mount Temple resigned as chair, he held on to his individual membership of the AGF – see Crowson, *Facing Fascism*, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> According to a report by the MI5 mole 'M/G' on 23 November 1938, the AGF had 'lost nearly 50% of its members in the last few weeks' and subscriptions had 'fallen to a deplorably low level'. See Kershaw, *Making Friends*, pp. 263 and 428; and TNA, KV 5/3. A further group left in late 1938/early 1939 to join the Link - see 'M/G's report, 'The Anglo-German Fellowship and the Link', 17 February 1939, in *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Waddington, 'An Idyllic and Unruffled Atmosphere', p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Griffiths, *Patriotism Perverted*, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> AGF circular, 18 November 1938, in TNA, KV 5/3.

<sup>52</sup> Conwell-Evans' involvement in planning the programme of events for the visit in conjunction with the German embassy in London is mentioned in a letter from the Deutsches Frauenwerk (Hauptabteilungsleiterin Dr Unger) to the Dienststelle des Beauftragten für aussenpolitische Fragen der NSDAP im Stab des Stellvertreters des Führers (Dienststelle Ribbentrop), 22 February 1939, in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (henceforth PA-AA), R 27151, 26/1.

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<sup>53</sup> See Deutsches Frauenwerk (Hauptabteilungsleiterin Dr Unger) to the Dienststelle Ribbentrop, 13 December 1938, in *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> On the Dienststelle Ribbentrop see Waddington, 'An Idyllic and Unruffled Atmosphere'. Also Paul Seabury (1954) *The Wilhelmstrasse: A Study of German Diplomats under the Nazi Regime* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press), p. 50; and William Young (2006) *German Diplomatic Relations, 1871-1945: The Wilhelmstrasse and the Formation of Foreign Policy* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse), pp. 208-209.

<sup>55</sup> Harvey, *International Networks*, p. 147. On Unger see also Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women*, p. 120.

<sup>56</sup> Aktennotiz für Pg. Luther, 25 January 1939, in PA-AA, R 27151, 26/1.

<sup>57</sup> See the report by MI5 agent 'M/G', 'The Anglo-German Fellowship and the Link', 17 February 1939, in TNA, KV 5/3.

<sup>58</sup> For an in-depth study of how German attitudes changed over time, see Strobl, *The Germanic Isle*.

<sup>59</sup> See the untitled report by MI5 agent 'M/G', 13 December 1938, in TNA, KV 5/3. For examples of German anti-British newspaper articles from the period after the Munich crisis, see BA Berlin, R 8034 II/8286.

<sup>60</sup> Waddington, 'An Idyllic and Unruffled Atmosphere', p. 70. On Ribbentrop's 'alternative' foreign policy strategy after 1936, which involved 'continuing to court Britain' while secretly seeking to 'forge a powerful anti-British system of alliances' which eventually even included the Soviet Union, see also Michalka, Joachim von Ribbentrop, pp. 167-170; and Michalka (1985) *From the Anti-Comintern Pact to the Euro-Asiatic Bloc: Ribbentrop's Alternative Concept to Hitler's Foreign Policy Programme*, in Hans Koch (Ed.) *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London: Macmillan), pp. 267-284.

<sup>61</sup> Sigmund, *Die Frauen der Nazis*, p. 122.

<sup>62</sup> See Kate Lacey (1996) *Driving the Message Home: Nazi Propaganda in the Private Sphere*, in Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (Eds) *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency and Experience From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (London: UCL Press), pp. 189-210 (here esp. pp. 196 and 204). By contrast, during the Weimar era at least one regional radio station, owned by the Norag

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company and based in Hamburg, made it its business to schedule 'news of women's issues on an international level', including 'reports on developments in the League of Nations and foreign affairs'. See Lacey (1996) *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), p. 76. British women in the 1920s and 30s were also increasingly used to regarding the radio as a key mode of communication and political 'conversation' – see Dunlop, *The Bletchley Girls*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>63</sup> Marginal notes scribbled by Hans Kramarz on the Aktennotiz für Pg. Luther, 25 January 1939, PA-AA, R 27151, 26/1: 'R.M. ist grundsätzlich einverstanden, hat aber auch weitere Ermittlungen durch Paul Schmidt veranlaßt'. On Paul Karl Schmidt, who should not be confused with Hitler's interpreter, Paul Otto Schmidt, see Seabury, *The Wilhelmstrasse*, p. 76; and Peter Longerich (1987) *Propagandisten im Krieg: Die Presseabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes unter Ribbentrop* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg), pp. 29 and 311-312.

<sup>64</sup> See Unger to Frau von Dirksen, 21 February 1939, in PA-AA, R 27151, 26/1.

<sup>65</sup> See Josias von Rantzau to Unger, 20 February 1939, and Unger to the Dienststelle Ribbentrop, 22 February 1939, both in *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Dienststelle Ribbentrop to the Passport Section of the German Foreign Office, 28 February 1939, in *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Waddington, 'An Idyllic and Unruffled Atmosphere', pp. 70-71.

<sup>68</sup> Women's Work in Germany, translation of speech by Gertrud Scholtz-Klink on 7 March 1939, provided by the Anglo-German Information Service. Copy in the Wiener Library, London, document collection 558b. We would like to thank Charles Spicer for drawing our attention to this source.

<sup>69</sup> On Horsbrugh see the entry by Elizabeth Vallance in Cathy Hartley (Ed.) (2003) *A Historical Dictionary of British Women*, revised ed. (London: Europa), p. 228.

<sup>70</sup> Women Leaders Meet 'Perfect Nazi Woman', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1939.

<sup>71</sup> German Radio Talk by Health Leader, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 1939. The fitness display, now billed as an 'Empire Pageant', did take place in June 1939 at Wembley stadium with invited guests from Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa. Significantly, the newspaper reports made no

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mention of any German women participants. Needless to say, Stack again took the opportunity to make a public appeal for peace. See Display at Wembley, *The Times*, 12 June 1939.

<sup>72</sup> See the programme of events sent by von Rantzau to Unger, 20 February 1939, in PA-AA, R 27151, 26/1.

<sup>73</sup> 'Ideal Nazi Wife' on Mystery Visit Here, *Daily Mail*, 7 March, 1939: 'While in London she will stay at the German embassy. Her plans for her visit are a mystery. An official at the German embassy politely said, "You must ask the Anglo-German Fellowship". An official of the Fellowship said, "You must ask the German Embassy"'.

<sup>74</sup> 'Perfect Nazi' Protest, *Daily Mirror*, 10 March 1938.

<sup>75</sup> On the overlapping nature of these feminist anti-fascist organisations, see Angela Jackson (2002) *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge), p. 141.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Kindische englische Demonstration gegen Frau Scholtz-Klink, in *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 March 1939. Copy in BA Berlin, R 8034 III/414, Bl. 110.

<sup>77</sup> Dunlop, *The Bletchley Girls*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>78</sup> See Julie V. Gottlieb (2012) 'Broken Friendships and Vanished Loyalties': Gender, Collective (In)Security and Anti-Fascism in Britain in the 1930s, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13(2), pp. 197-219, and Gottlieb (2010) Varieties of Feminist Anti-Fascism, in Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Eds) *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 101-118.

<sup>79</sup> See Robert A. Brady (1937) *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism* (London: Left Book Club), esp. pp. 186-210.

<sup>80</sup> Annual Report of Six Point Group, 1938-1939, Women's Library, SPG/B6-13.

<sup>81</sup> On Herrmann and the international campaign to save her from execution see Sybil Oldfield (1986) German Women in the Resistance to Hitler, in Siân Reynolds (Ed.) *Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf), pp. 81-101 (here pp. 90-91).

<sup>82</sup> See also the campaign materials collected in BA Berlin, SgY 13 / V239 / 5 /21, including a copy of the above-mentioned petition, as published in *Labour Woman*, November 1937, with an accompanying article by Monica Whately, Liselotte Herrmann – Victim of Nazi Tyranny.

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<sup>83</sup> Nazi Woman's Visit: Lady Astor has no Sympathy with her Activities, *Western Morning News*, 9 March 1939.

<sup>84</sup> See Gottlieb, *Guilty Women*, esp. pp. 77-80.

<sup>85</sup> 'My Hope for Peace Does not Mean that I'm a Fascist': Munich and the Cliveden Set by Lady Astor, *News Chronicle*, 12 March 1939. See also At Last! Lady Astor Tells the Truth About the Cliveden Set, by Lady Astor, *Sunday Chronicle*, 5 March 1939.

<sup>86</sup> See Tom Hopkinson (Ed.) (1970) *Picture Post, 1938-50* (London: Penguin Books), pp.11 and 32-39.

<sup>87</sup> Stone, *Responses to Nazism*, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Crowson, *Facing Fascism*, p. 32.

<sup>89</sup> Lady Astor, 'My Hope for Peace Does not Mean that I'm a Fascist' (as note 85 above).

<sup>90</sup> See the extremely short and non-descript piece, Besuch der Reichsfrauenführerin in London abgeschlossen, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 11 March 1939. Copy in BA Berlin, R 8034 III/414, Bl. 110.

<sup>91</sup> See the selection of press cuttings in BA Berlin, R 8034 II/8286.

<sup>92</sup> Dr M. Menzerath (1939) Jeder kehre vor seiner Tür – soll Englands Heuchelei ewig währen?, *NS-Frauenwarte*, 2. April Heft, pp. 661 and 684.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 684.

<sup>94</sup> Harvey, *International Networks*, p. 153.

<sup>95</sup> Ideal Nazi Woman Here: She Wears No Make-Up, Dresses in Simple Black, *Evening Standard*, 7 March 1939. Copy in BA Berlin, R 8034 III/519.

<sup>96</sup> Women Leaders Meet 'Perfect Nazi Woman', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1939.

<sup>97</sup> Baxter, *Guilty Women*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>98</sup> 'Ideal Nazi Wife' on Mystery Visit Here, *Daily Mail*, 7 March 1939; She Doesn't Smoke, Make Up, Or Talk: She's Hitler's 'Ideal Woman', *Daily Mail*, 8 March, 1939. Scholtz-Klink also appeared in the *Daily Mail* Picture Gallery on 8, 9 and 10 March 1939. On the *Daily Mail's* attitude to Nazi Germany see Wilson, *Nazi Princess*; and Urbach, *Go-Betweens*, esp. pp. 241-242.

<sup>99</sup> For the 'expectation of war' in Britain in particular, see Richard Overy (2009) *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919-1939* (London: Allen Lane), esp. pp. 314-319.



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<sup>100</sup> For some broader perspectives on the Nazi regime's efforts to 'sell' its domestic and social policies internationally, see Kiran Klaus Patel (2015) *Welfare in the Warfare State: Nazi Social Policy on the International Stage*, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London*, XXXVII(2), pp. 3-38. Glenda Sluga, in her recent study, also notes that 'to some degree, the cachet of internationalism drew the curious fascination of the German and Italian fascist regimes which, like their liberal counterparts, recognized the political utility of international organizations and networks' – see Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, p. 77.

<sup>101</sup> Notable examples here would be the National Council of Women, the National Women Citizens' Association, the Townswomen's Guild, the Women's League of Health and Beauty, the Association of Moral and Social Hygiene and the National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare. For a full list see Women Leaders Meet 'Perfect Nazi Woman', *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1939.

<sup>102</sup> See McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, pp. 182-211 (here esp. pp. 184-185 and 187); and Matthews, 'They had Such a Lot of Fun', p. 38. The National Council of Women and the National Women Citizens' Association had also backed the 'National Declaration' in favour of the LNU's 'Peace Ballot' in 1934-35 – see McCarthy, *Democratizing British Foreign Policy*, p. 371.

<sup>103</sup> Dunlop, *The Bletchley Girls*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> See, for instance, the 'International Women's Meeting' that took place in Berlin in October 1941, as discussed by Harvey, *International Networks*, esp. pp. 149-157.

<sup>105</sup> See Julie V. Gottlieb (2014) 'The women's movement took the wrong turning': British Feminists, Pacifism and the Politics of Appeasement, *Women's History Review*, 23(3), pp. 441-462; and idem., *Broken Friendships and Vanished Loyalties*.

<sup>106</sup> See also McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, p. 194.