Friend or Foe? --- The War Resisters League (WRL) and the War in Vietnam during the "Long Sixties"

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On the morning of June 16, 1965, the day shift at the Pentagon arrived at their offices, beginning their workday as usual, unaware of what this day would hold in store for them. No strangers to crises, both domestic and international, Department of Defense staff nevertheless must have been taken off guard as dozens of people entered the building and began setting up loud-speaking equipment in the hallways. With many more outside, a veritable torrent of leaflets and brochures poured out over the unsuspecting Pentagon employees, accompanied by numerous broadcasts echoing through the corridors.

Instigators of this "Alice-in-Wonderland scene," as one participant described it, were two groups, the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) and the War Resisters League (WRL), both adherents to principles of non-violence, pacifism and resistance. At the end of the day, leadership of these organizations estimated that more than 250 peace activists had attended the Pentagon demonstration-turned-teach-in, which lasted for a surprising six hours.[1]

On the same day, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara announced that another 22.000 American troops were to be sent to Southeast Asia, where the conflict between North and South Vietnam had been escalating over the previous decades. Not surprisingly, what CNVA and WRL members called for on that day was an end to the Vietnam war.[2]

As the long sixties progressed, social and popular movements, surrounding a multitude of issues, multiplied and grew in numbers. Causes seemed to abound, as Civil Rights activists fought for equality, women sought emancipation, students clamored for political participation, and more and more people took to the streets in response to the escalating conflict in South East Asia. Next to the growing number of activists, an increasing militancy also led to a significant fracturing

[1] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes June 22, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 25, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[2] "22,000 More GIs to Viet Nam", *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 1965, 1.

among some groups, as the Weather Underground split from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Black Panther Party (BPP) took a different approach to resistance than their non-violent Civil Rights activist brethren.

The history of the WRL in the decades between the First World War and the War in Vietnam was sometimes one of success, other times one of failure, but at all times it was one of struggle. Despite being one of the oldest radical pacifist groups in the United States, and one that still remains active today, the War Resisters League has garnered surprisingly little attention. Scott Bennett offers a first remedy to correct this omission, and his *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963*[3] is a concise examination of the organization shedding light on the organization's origins in the aftermath of World War I, the strong female presence among the founding members, and the group's inherent international connections as part of the European based War Resisters' International (WRI). Bennett charts the WRL's rise, from its early growth at the hands of feminists, progressive social reformers, and socialists in the interwar years, to the group's adoption of civil disobedience, direct action, and its key role in strengthening secular conscientious objection during World War II.[4]

Today, emphasizing traditional causes for resistance, ranging from war in general, to the militarization of U.S. police forces, or to the deployment of tear gas against protestors, the WRL also upholds the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement and stands in solidarity with Black Americans in general.[5] Their twenty-first-century credo reads:

> "The War Resisters League affirms that all war is a crime against humanity. We are determined not to support any kind of war, international or civil, and to strive

[3] Compare Scott H. Bennett, *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence In America, 1915-1963* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

[4] Ibid.

[5] WRL website, accessed December 4, 2020, https://www.warresisters.org/revolutionary-nonviolent-perspective-us-uprisings-0.

> nonviolently for the removal of all causes of war, including racism, sexism and all forms of exploitation."[6]

While their brothers and sisters in the aftermath of World War I had been focused more narrowly on pacifism and the abolition of war, it seems at some point between 1923 and 2020, "racism, sexism and all forms of exploitation" had been added to the war resisters' ideological agenda.

Did this shift within the WRL from a narrow anti-war stance to a broader idea of resistance against war and violence in connection with racism and gender occur during the long 1960s, a time of vibrant international activism? The WRL seemed ideally positioned to capitalize on their history of collaboration with the Civil Rights Movement, and their origins in the female-led antiwar movement of the interwar period. The group also boasted strong ties across U.S. borders to activists and groups in Europe.

Ultimately, however, despite the WRL's feminist origins in a time of rising internationalism, its close links to the Civil Rights Movement, and its vibrant international connections, the group remained unable or unwilling to capitalize on the diverse alliances they forged during the 1960s. Although the WRL's connections in the movement against the Vietnam War at times transcended color and gender lines, and although their international contacts reached as far as Europe and Vietnam itself, the WRL never substantially moved beyond the largely white pacifist community. Even the group's international character was not strong enough to realize the potential for alliances with radicals from groups outside of the Western world, such as the Tricontinental, women activists from Eastern Europe, or from the Global South in general.[7]

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[6] WRL website, accessed December 4, 2020, https://www.warresisters.org/.

[7] For a range of radical activist groups outside of North America and Europe, see Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013); Kristen Rogheh Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

The WRL saw its birth during a post-World War I time marked by the "spirit of Geneva," as historian Susan Pedersen highlights, a spirit based on the hopes of outlawing war. Pedersen aptly traces the rise of the League of Nations as a new idea for reorganizing the imperial order and create geopolitical stability. Although the League would ultimately fail in safeguarding world peace, as Pedersen argues, it still was an important institutionalization of an internationalism that ultimately contributed to the post-Second World War decline of colonialism and imperialism.[8] Similarly, historians Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro identify the Paris Peace Pact of 1928 as an integral step in the process of transforming the global order into an internationalist system not grounded on the unquestioned acceptance of warfare as a legitimate political tool.[9]

Historian Michael Kazin, in *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918,* adds an in-depth examination of the origins of antiwar activism and sentiment during the First World War. He establishes connections to later Cold War peace activists, such as the WRL, who consistently looked back to their predecessors for inspiration. Yet, although war certainly has not vanished, he also warns, that "their legacy is not simply one of failure," but that the fundamental questions of interrelation between war and democracy are still relevant today, and the peace movement has always been an important vehicle for discourse and change.[10] Historian Charles Chatfield agrees on that point, arguing for the "viability of the antiwar movement and of liberal internationalism beyond the stereotypes that masked it then and now."[11] Kazin also points to the

[8] Susan Pedersen. *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[9] Oona Anne Hathaway and Scott Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

[10] Compare Michael Kazin, *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

[11] Charles Chatfield, "At the Hands of Historians: The Antiwar Movement of Vietnam Era." *Peace and Change* 29, no. 3-4 (June 2004): 498.

general problem of pacifists' ad-hoc nature of activism in response to war, and the subsequent decline and relegation to the margins during peace time.

After claiming such a lull in WRL activism during the 1950s, however, Bennet ends his insightful analysis of the WRL at the dawn of the turbulent sixties. Yet, its eventful journey during the first half of the twentieth century and its primary occupation of war resistance begs the question of the WRL's activities as radical pacifists in an antiwar movement that, historian Mitchell Hall points out, by 1965, had become "one of the largest social movements in the nation's history."[12] Although, only a minority of activists in the anti-Vietnam movement resorted to violence, as historian Simon Hall affirms, this minority is still evidence for a growing militancy among some activist groups as the war went on, the question arises how the WRL positioned itself in this changing field of protest and resistance.[13]

Historians of the Vietnam antiwar movement Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield provide a fundamental examination of the Vietnam war era and portray the peace movement as a highly diverse and very decentralized phenomenon. Ranging from absolute non-violence to radical militants, the movement comprised all segments of society, and had no clear, central strategy or philosophy. Instead, individual groups followed their own set of ideas, like the WRL, who DeBenedetti and Chatfield describe as "anarchist and secular," spreading their "doctrine of prophetic love to the repudiation of war, and its loving concern for social outcasts" across the United States.[14]

[12] Mitchell K. Hall, *The Vietnam War* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 49.

[13] Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 14-15.

[14] Charles DeBenedetti, and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1990): 21.

In contrast, historian Marian Mollin diagnoses the radical pacifist movement as a whole between 1940 and 1970 with having fallen victim to "racialized and gendered dynamics that repeatedly defined, distorted, and undermined this vanguard movement for social and political change."[15] Focusing on radical pacifist groups in America, Mollin only mentions the WRL in passing, not taking into account the group's status as the oldest secular radical pacifist organization in the Unites States, and overlooking the WRL's vibrant international connections.

Lastly, that international protest movements can have a significant influence on policymakers is one conclusion of Jeremi Suri's *Protest and Power: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*.[16] Suri identifies a growing fragmentation of societies, and distrust in governments during the 1960s as the origin for international social activism that would prove integral to bringing about a period of détente in Cold War geopolitics. With *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History*,[17] Petra Goedde emphasizes the truly global nature of peace activism in the decades after the Second World War, as peace advocacy groups necessarily became transnational as global politics became increasingly entangled in the violent process of decolonization and projects of national liberation. Goedde also points out the complex relations between different social movements and the challenges peace activists presented not only for their governments, but also to themselves.

In order to explore the WRL's activities during the Vietnam era, first, it is necessary to consider the WRL's history from its founding in 1923 in the aftermath of World War I as a chapter of the Amsterdam-based War Resisters' International (WRI), and the tradition of radical pacifism

[15] Marian Mollin, *Radical Pacifism In Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 182.

[16] Compare Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[17] Compare Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

that this earlier generation of activists handed down to their mid-century successors. Second, the WRL's goals and strategies concerning not only the Vietnam war, but also the group's other projects at the time can contribute to our understanding of its relevancy. Finally, tracing the WRL's domestic network, but especially its international connections to other popular movements and resistance organizations will make clearer the shape and nature of international community during a time of vibrant exchange and activism.

Since the WRL's executive committee met at least once a month, in addition to special meetings and events in response to extraordinary circumstances, the minutes of these proceedings are a valuable source to trace the activities of the group. The peace advocates also regularly published a magazine, WRL News, as well as numerous additional press releases. Moreover, David McReynolds, the WRL field secretary during the long sixties also kept a sizable collection of material surrounding his activities for the pacifist cause. These sources provide a rich groundwork for an examination of the activities and the significance of the WRL, as well as for the group's contribution to, and its position within, the transnational community of the 1960s.

In the following pages, the term 'Long Sixties' will describe a periodization that takes the WRL's activities in the 1950s into account as these influenced the group's development in the following decade. In the same manner, the timeframe extends into the 1970s, as the Vietnam War came to a close for America. As historian Christopher Strain points out, "doing so might beneficially complicate our understanding of the decade." Strain himself had borrowed the concept from the growing field of the Long Civil Rights Movement.[18]

[18] Christopher B. Strain, *The Long Sixties: America, 1955-1973* (Chichester, West Sussex: WILEY Blackwell, 2017), Preface.

A Brief History of the WRL

After the carnage of the "Great War" that had, between 1914 and 1918, claimed so many lives and had introduced to many countries destruction on an unprecedented scale, peace advocates in the United States and in Europe were all the more convinced of the necessity of their cause. In the immediate postwar years, liberal pacifists placed a great deal of hope in a new international institution, supposedly committed to world peace: the League of Nations. Their more radical brothers and sisters also found inspiration in the emerging Soviet Union. However, as both these movements did not fully reject all forms of violence – The League of Nations allowing for the use of military force for peacekeeping purposes, and the violence inherent in communist class warfare, to say nothing of the Bolshevik Revolution – radically pacifist options seemed scarce.[19]

It was three American activists with a long tradition of participation in the women's movement that sought to establish a radically pacifist and secular organization opposed to all forms of war and violence. Tracy Mygatt, John Haynes Holmes, and Jessie Wallace Hughan, who had already been secretary and board member of the Woman's Peace Party (WPP) branch in New York, and had been a member of the Women's Peace Society (WPS), as well as the Women's Peace Union (WPU), before she felt the need for an absolute pacifist group in the United States, such as the British No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) or the No More War Movement (NMWM). The NCF had been one of the first groups that rejected all aspects of the war effort and opened its doors to all genders and beliefs.[20]

Reared in the tradition of pacifism, experienced in non-violent activism, and inspired by an absolute pacifist British organization, Hughan took the founding of the War Resisters' International (WRI) in Amsterdam in 1921 as a sign to establish a branch of that organization in

[19] Bennett, *Pacifism*, 16-17.
[20] Ibid., 8-10;

her side of the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, in 1923, she laid the groundwork for what would become the largest secular war resistance group in the United States, a group that still exists today.[21]

While the interwar years certainly were a period of extensive activism for the newly organized radical pacifists, a first true test for their activism arrived in the form of another world war. Although the United States would not immediately enter the conflict, the WRL engaged in resistance early on. After American troops finally saw deployment in the global theater of war, peace advocates adopted a strategy of conscientious objection. Fundamentally, the WRL also shifted its focus away from education towards direct action. Although still non-violent, WRL protest moved beyond passive resistance towards civil disobedience, direct action, and especially conscientious objection.[22]

However, during the Second World War, the WRL's radical pacifism also experienced a pronounced decline in popularity. This can be ascribed to a general rise in patriotism, as the United States had been victim to a direct attack, but also to the WRL's diplomatic stance, favoring negotiation with the Third Reich to facilitate a speedy conclusion to the war, avoiding unnecessary bloodshed, yet also preventing the unconditional surrender of fascist Germany.[23]

While numerous developments factored into this growing hostility towards the pacifist cause, Mollin suggests that in the aftermath of not just one, but two globally devastating wars, pacifism to many must have seemed like an "impossible quest."[24] Another contributing factor certainly was the Civil Rights Movement's increase in activity. As activists like Martin Luther King publicly upheld principles of non-violence, especially for Black activists, pacifism began to

[21] Ibid., 17-19
[22] Ibid., 69-74.
[23] Martin B. Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: New Press, 2011), 36.
[24] Mollin, *Pacifism*, 59.

have "more meaning in the context of civil rights, where it was proving its power and effectiveness," historian Jerald Podair suggests.[25]

Furthermore, the Korean War served to heighten anti-communist patriotism and militarism the United States, severely preventing any form of pacifist activism. Although the WRL remained one of the few groups that remained active, it had shrunk considerably, and "mass-based peace activity in the United States became virtually nonexistent."[26]

Yet, while the 1950s also experienced a division among the peace movement along the lines of ideology – radicals largely remained true to communist and socialist ideas, whereas liberals' refusal of the same often allowed them a greater degree of cooperation with the government – one of the issues they remained united on was the nuclear arms race. The growing threat of nuclear annihilation motivated the pacifists to pursue activism for arms limitation and abolition, and against civil defense campaigns.[27] While the shift to anti-nuclear activism was a significant expansion of World War II WRL activities, revolving mainly around conscientious objection, still, Mollin argues that in times of perceived nuclear doom on the horizon, "pacifism was vital to the world's survival and yet profoundly impotent at the same time."[28]

Anti-nuclear activism was important to the WRL for another reason. It brought the group closer together with the Civil Rights Movement. One of the strongest connections between pacifists and their Black brothers and sisters in arms, was the nuclear arms race. In 1957, the WRL organized a meeting between members of the Civil Rights Movement, long-time peace advocate A.J. Muste, and others, intending to start a campaign against nuclear weapons, one that would link

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[25] Jerald Podair, *Bayard Rustin : American Dreamer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 45.

[26] David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 119-120, quote on 120.

[27] Penny Lewis, *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory* (Ithaca, London: ILR Press, 2013), 58.

[28] Mollin, *Pacifism*, 61.

the pacifist cause to the struggle for the rights of African Americans. Whereas the WRL was interested in protesting nuclear tests in Nevada, at the same time the Southern Christian Leadership Union (SCLC) organized a "Pilgrimage of Prayer" at the Lincoln Memorial. Although not physically linked, some WRL activists saw the connection between these two events.[29]

In 1959, Martin Luther King himself addressed the WRL, lauded the pacifists' anti-nuclear activism, and linked that issue to the civil rights struggle.[30] However, it was another prominent member of the Civil Rights Movement that tightened the relationship to the pacifists. Since collaboration was still productive in the early 1950s, the WRL added Bayard Rustin to their ranks. In 1953, he became program director for the organization and later even executive secretary.[31]

Although, as Podair notes, "the WRL made little headway in slowing the arms race during the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration," as nuclear weapons became an integral part of U.S. foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. Still, he also contends that Rustin was instrumental in reinventing the WRL during the 1950s, by linking "capitalism, imperialism, and militarism."[32] Historian Vincent Intondi agrees that by 1959, the collaboration between the WRL and the Civil Rights Movement had even linked the issue of nuclear abolition to the struggle for independence in the African continent.[33]

While increasing collaboration, Rustin switching teams, also created tension, as both his mentors, the Civil Rights Movement's A. Phillip Randolph, and the pacifists' A.J. Muste, were in a constant rivalry over Rustin. Yet overall, the WRL seemed content to 'lend' Rustin to other

[29] Vincent J. Intondi. *African Americans Against the Bomb : Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 48.
[30] Intondi, *Bomb*, 64.
[31] Podair, *Rustin*, 34.
[32] Ibid., 35.
[33] Intondi, *Bomb*, 52.

projects, and as a consequence of his many connections beyond the organization, he facilitated an increase in cooperation and contacts for the radical pacifists.[34]

By the mid-1960s, however, Rustin moved back to the Civil Rights Movement, leaving the WRL in 1965. In the eyes of the peace movement, he would go on to appease Johnson's foreign policy when it came to Vietnam, in exchange for concessions in the domestic economic realm. Rustin himself did not perceive of his departure from the WRL as a betrayal of pacifism, but as a compromise for the larger goal of equality.[35]

In his time with the WRL, Rustin was instrumental in ushering in a new generation of radical pacifism, one in the spirit of the New Left and the Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Although still a small organization before the escalating war in Vietnam, the WRL under Rustin's influence began to experience not only a slow revival, but also increased visibility. Rustin's leadership and his quest for publicity served the WRL well in raising the profile of the organization. Whereas the group was unable to make much progress in their effort to halt the arms race and prevent war in the climate of rising tensions of the early Cold War, radical pacifists once more realized the effectiveness of visible protest.[36]

In the early 1950s, radical pacifists had been "on the fringes of the American political landscape," and "the peace movement as a whole seemed locked in place."[37] The roots of the transformation a decade later can be found in the collaboration with the black struggle and the student movement, and the increasing militancy of groups such as the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). While the WRL, for

[34] Podair, *Rustin*, 43.
[35] Ibid., 81.
[36] Ibid., 35-36.
[37] Ibid., 36.

instance, remained decidedly non-violent, with Rustin in their ranks, it adopted strategies of direct action and civil disobedience, softening its passive pacifist orientation.[38]

Thus, the importance of Rustin's presence for the WRL can hardly be overstated, as historian Jerald Podair notes, as due a decline in popularity following the Second World War and the postwar lull in social activism, the WRL was in trouble and "its continued existence was in question." Rustin would go on to facilitate a vital cooperation between civil rights activists and radical pacifists and breathe new life into the organization.[39]

However, the close cooperation could never compensate for fundamental tensions between radical pacifists and civil rights activists. Whereas absolute non-violence drove one half of the alliance, many of those struggling for racial equality increasingly regarded militancy, or at least something more than absolute pacifism, as an acceptable instrument of protest. As Mollin aptly points out, overall, it was "this ideological imbalance, and the absence of shared goals beyond the common denominator of opposition to racial segregation" that prevented a fundamental and lasting alliance.[40]

The WRL's Goals and Strategies during the Long 1960s

The Early 1960s

When Wallace-Hughan founded the WRL in 1923, inspired by British peace activism and her personal experiences in a number of groups and organizations, the newly established league borrowed its first declaration from the WRI chapter in Great Britain:

> "I declare it to be my intention never to take part in war, offensive or defensive, international or civil, whether by bearing arms, making or handling munitions,

[38] Duberman, *Remnant*, 81.
[39] Podair, *Rustin*, 34.
[40] Marian Mollin, "The Limits of Egalitarianism: Radical Pacifism, Civil Rights, and the Journey of Reconciliation." *Radical History Review* 88 (Winter 2004): 130.

> voluntarily subscribing to war loans, or using my labor for the purpose of setting others free for war service."[41]

Furthermore, members also vowed "to strive for the removal of all the causes of war, and to work for the establishment of a new social order based on co-operation for the common good."[42] This statement saw some revisions during the 1920s, but would remain almost unchanged throughout most of the twentieth century as follows: "War is a crime against humanity. I, therefore, am determined not to support any kind of war, international or civil, and to strive for the removal of all the causes of war."[43]

In keeping with the philosophy of non-violence and the fundamental goals set forth by their predecessors over the decades, the WRL activists of the long sixties remained committed to ending war and violence in all their forms. As the conflict between North and South Vietnam intensified and escalated during the 1950s, and culminated in American participation beginning in 1964, the WRL, unsurprisingly and vehemently strove for an end to the Vietnam war in particular and, thus, was the first major pacifist organization to publicly oppose the war.[44] It is worth pointing out, that the WRL did not support either side in the conflict, but sought to bring an end to the fighting in general.[45]

Historian DeBenedetti divides the pacifist movement in general into "liberal internationalists" – such as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) on the one hand – and "radical pacifists" – such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), and the "anarchist War Resisters

[41] Bennet, *Pacifism*, 19.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Bennett, *Pacifism*, 21.
[44] Duberman, *Remnant*, 90.
[45] Ibid.,110.

League" on the other.[46] Peace advocate and former SANE director, David Cortright agrees, and goes on to describe the antiwar movement during the Vietnam era as "the largest, most sustained, and most powerful peace campaign in human history."[47]

Since the WRL was part of a social movement depending on grassroots activism, at times its goals, and its strategies to achieve the same, are not readily separable. Although an organization with a long tradition of peace activism, the WRL was by no means a group with a broad base and wide support in society. As a result, visibility always remained a primary concern in the league's desire to grow its organization. Thus, the league leadership was always keen on seeing its brand of radical pacifism and the sacrifice of its proponents in the media. For example in 1965, when a protest on Armed Forces Day, involving leafletting and sitting blockades, was widely covered by TV, radio, and newspapers.[48] Similarly, whenever WRL representatives visited other organizations, events, or schools and campuses, they sought coverage by local and institutional newspapers and magazines.[49] Moreover, beyond boosting its membership and profile, the WRL also depended on media coverage for fund raising purposes. Thus, a report on one of their public demonstrations or an advertisement for the group's annual peace calendars in a newspaper, such as the New York Times, was highly valuable.[50]

In general, in addition to visibility, expanding its reach across the United States remained on the WRL's agenda, as the group sought to establish new local branches and offices. Since its headquarters had always been in New York, the WRL's presence was strongest on the East Coast,

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[46] Lewis, *Hardhats*, 58.

[47] Cortright, *Peace*, 157.

[48] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, May 25, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[49] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Feb. 23, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[50] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Nov. 13, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Jan. 22, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

yet less so in the rest of the country. Also, both a goal and a means to an end were the WRL's efforts of building networks of activism. Although often cautious with whom to ally themselves, WRL activists constantly sought alliances with likeminded brothers and sisters.

As radical activists, the strategies and means at the WRL leadership's disposal were numerous. Yet, at the outset of the long sixties, the group remained staunchly committed to its principle of non-violence. One of the most visible avenues of war resistance was the public demonstration, an instrument in the toolbox of any social activist in fundamental disagreement with existing power structures. Thus, the WRL took to the streets and often. Throughout the sixties, radical pacifists organized and took part in countless marches, walks, bicycle rides, rallies, vigils and any other form of collective public display of discontent, provided that participants remained non-violent.[51] Historian Melvin Small points to the effectiveness of such demonstrations, as in 1967, for instance, antiwar activists laid siege to the Pentagon in great numbers, a gathering that "greatly concerned Johnson and his advisors."[52]

Another aspect of WRL activities was the group's effort towards informing and educating the public about all matters of war and violence, and how to resist and abolish them. Often in conjunction with their group outings in demonstrations, WRL activists disseminated leaflets, brochures, flyers and other smaller printed or painted publications.[53] In addition to the mass-distribution of material, individual WRL staff, particularly the leadership, and selected valued

[51] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Feb. 9 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Jan. 22, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes June 22, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes April 21, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[52] Melvin Small, "The Doves Ascendant: The American Antiwar Movement in 1968," *South Central Review* 16/17, 16, no. 4 - 17, no. 1, Rethinking 1968: The United States & Western Europe (Winter, 1999 - Spring, 2000): 46.

[53] WRL Letter to Mailing List, Jan. 1960, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, Box 3.

members were regularly sent on speaking tours and teach-ins across the country. Sometimes travelling for weeks, they stopped on university campuses, joined smaller, local organizations for presentations, or attended special events, spreading the WRL's messages of war resistance and non-violence.[54]

For all its members, the WRL also maintained an extensive mailing list, through which the organization's leadership distributed not only regular newsletters and information on current events, but also lists of literature on pacifism and war resistance. For that purpose, the league even had established a literature committee to regularly create book lists containing literature from all over the world.[55]

However, two of the league's major avenues of war resistance in the Vietnam War era were resistance to the draft, and a refusal to pay taxes that would go towards funding war. As the conflict in Asia escalated, the number of American soldiers sent to war increased rapidly. In its mission of radical pacifism the WRL also soon began to offer counseling on strategies to avoid the draft, most notably by collaborating with peace activists in Canada, who lent their assistance in helping Americans find refuge beyond the Northern U.S. border.[56] The rejection of the draft also found expression in draft caravans, as a visible form of demonstration, but also in the far more powerful public burning of draft cards.[57]

Whereas the WRL, as an American organization naturally spent a significant amount of time on developing ties to domestic organizations and on becoming part of a vibrant network of

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[54] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 25, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Feb. 23, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[55] "Dissent, Revolution, Freedom, Peace," June, 1963, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, 3.

[56] Compare Jessica Squires, *Building Sanctuary: The Movement to Support Vietnam War Resisters In Canada, 1965-73* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

[57] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes April 11, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

activists, as a branch of the Europe-based War Resisters' International (WRI) its connections beyond the U.S. borders were equally extensive. First and foremost, the league was tightly linked to its umbrella organization in London. Thus, the New York office regularly received information on and calls for support of events organized by other country branches in France or Italy in 1963, for example.[58] Similarly, the WRI kept its American colleagues appraised of any interest from their European brothers and sisters in visiting the United States.[59]

One of the strongest connections to another social movement, however, had always been the link between the WRL and the Civil Rights Movement. From its early cooperation with Martin Luther King in the postwar decade to the early 1960s, radical pacifists had continuously sought collaboration with civil rights activists and vice versa. The strongest connection between the two arguably was Bayard Rustin, who had joined the WRL and remained an important part of its leadership until his resignation in 1965. During his time in the league, Rustin regularly emphasized the unprecedented level of cooperation between the pacifists and the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, Rustin demonstrated the success possible when WRL and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), or the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) joined forces, to say nothing of the collaboration with King himself.[60] The WRL also eagerly joined the 1963 March on Washington, and its field secretary David McReynolds himself had also participated in the Civil Rights Movement's Freedom Rides a number of times.[61]

As the decade progressed, however, parts of the Civil Rights Movement began to view the continued stance of non-violence with skepticism, however, tensions arose between radical

[58] Letter from Devi Prasad to the War Resisters League, Sep. 12, 1963, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, Box 3.

[59] WRI Memorandum, Feb. 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries VII, Box 19.

[60] WRL Letter to Mailing List, June, 1963, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, Box 3.

[61] Duberman, *Remnant*, 81-83.

pacifists and civil rights activists. Although Rustin ultimately resigned in 1965 to focus his efforts on civil rights issues, and although he remained a true friend to the WRL, the league's persistence on absolute pacifism had created a wedge between its members and their civil rights brethren.[62] Overall, Rustin's presence had facilitated a strong bond, yet the two movement's competition over him had only contributed to the underlying tensions concerning the question of militancy.[63]

Despite the growing feeling of incompatibility, the WRL never lost sight of civil rights issues, and throughout the Vietnam War era continued its support for activist groups in that realm. In 1965, league leadership adopted a plan to use its counseling program for conscientious objectors to emphasize leafletting in lower income neighborhoods and African American communities, as these segments of society often provided a disproportionate number of recruits for the war.[64]

The Later 1960s

The WRL also remembered its origin within the distinctly female war resistance movement after World War I. In the late 1960s the organization could already look back at years of cooperation. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the WRL sent out a greeting and congratulatory note to the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) for its anniversary in June of 1965, a note that the feminist activists immediately included in their celebratory publication.[65] Just a year later the WRL even discussed the idea of sending an all-female delegation to Vietnam in their anti-

[62] WRL Letter to Mailing List, April, 1964, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, Box 3.

[63] Podair, *Rustin*, 43.

[64] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, May 25, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[65] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes June 22, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

war efforts. Although this decision seemed to have been tabled indefinitely, significant elements of the WRL were sympathetic to the feminist cause.[66]

Furthermore, it is indicative that in 1967 the WRL saw fit to bestow its annual peace award to Barbara Deming, a prominent feminist and proponent of non-violence.[67] However, it is equally revealing that Deming, although even a member of the WRL for some time, also created skepticism among many in the organization. Deeming her ideas often too radical, WRL leadership were not surprised that Deming accused them of a lack of willingness to collaborate. Overall, although not without tension, the relationship between the WRL and the women's movement was largely productive, yet often far from an outright alliance.[68] In fact, during the 1960s, McReynolds believed the WRL had contributed more to the women's cause than many other organizations around, an opinion he shared with Deming as well. He would even go on to ponder the idea of having half of all official positions at the WRL be staffed by women.[69]

Over the course of the 1960s, through the WRL's manifold strategies of war resistance it managed to increase its visibility during the Vietnam War era and also attracted new members for its organization. Historian Martin Duberman estimates that by 1965 already between five and ten young men per week contacted the WRL in search for draft counseling. Yet, McReynolds deemed the size of the anti-Vietnam movement to be too small, around five percent of the U.S. population, ten percent at the most. However, the popularity of the WRL should rise significantly as the war went on.[70] By 1966, for instance, the organization's mailing list had more than doubled compared

[66] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes June 7, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[67] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 16, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[68] Duberman, *Remnant*,164-166.

[69] Ibid., 205-206, and 186.

[70] Duberman, *Remnant*, 111.

to the five years before, and the WRL had established three new branch offices across the nation.[71] Only a year later, with the merger of the Committee on Non-Violent Action and the WRL under the leadership of the latter, the organizations membership rose further.[72]

By the mid-sixties, the increase in support for the WRL also began to have a visible effect on the group's financial situation. By 1965, the peace activists experiences a declining deficit, rising contributions, and were even able to extend a loan to the Student Peace Union (SPU).[73] In the following year the WRL reported a new high point in financial support and turned a part their income into contributions to the New York Workshop for Peace (NYWP), as well as into growing their own branch in California.[74] The same year also saw an expansion of the WRL News to cover states on the West Coast as well.[75] On top of an increase in publications, the group even started to organize the creation of tapes on various pacifist issues, ranging from racism, the Civil Rights Movement, to war resistance and anti-nuclear activism, to be distributed to interested parties. 1966 also marked the first year that the WRL had to reorganize its mailing list, which had grown so much that it had become infeasible to distribute all information to all members. A new shorter list of key personnel, leaders in their local communities, should help in streamlining the dissemination of various issues, while the only the most important news was now shared with the whole group.[76] In 1967, the leadership was overjoyed at sales from the annual WRL peace calendar being at an unprecedented high. On the other hand, they also received an increased number of requests for

[71] Ibid., 115.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes March 23, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.
[74] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, March 1, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.
[75] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Oct. 18, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.
[76] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Sep. 27, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Jan. 22, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

financial support from numerous smaller, local activist groups.[77] In its newly generated financial prowess, the WRL also generously canceled the debt it held from the World Peace Brigade (WPB).[78]

By 1965 McReynolds was excited by the rise in support for the WRL and the flurry of war resistance activism. On the one hand, seeing a new era dawning for the WRL, he argued for the need to expand the reach of the organization across the United States by forming local chapters, especially due to his perceived lack of awareness for the war in Vietnam.[79]

As the vibrant community of U.S. social movements of often diverging, sometimes contradicting, yet often complementary aims and strategies grew, the WRL sought to maintain existing alliances, but also became interested in forming novel connections. One particularly active movement was the network of students and youths across the country. Although in 1965 McReynolds perceived the student movement as lacking a central, national organization and structure, he still remained impressed by their ad hoc events and activities. Seeing in groups, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) or Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), more of a formless assemblage of radicals rather than a coherent movement, in his function as a war resister, McReynolds was an ardent proponent of cooperation.[80]

McReynolds was also not alone with this opinion, as the WRL increasingly began to explore possibilities of getting younger people interested in the pacifist cause. In the first half of 1966, for instance, the organization sent out questionnaires through their mailing lists, explicitly asking for younger people's opinions on current political matters, ranging from the Vietnam War

[77] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Jan. 10, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[78] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, March 14, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[79] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, March 23, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[80] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 107.

to democracy.[81] Similarly, after the annual WRL in 1965 had been organized under the theme "The Student Movement," in the next year the WRL decided to create a position for a Youth Secretary in its ranks. Designed for the purposes of school and university outreach, the secretary was to be a visible link between the radical pacifists and their younger radical brothers and sisters.[82]

On an international level, one opportunity for contact were the annual WRI conferences, where delegates from all countries came together. These conferences also changed venues every year, with the 1966 meeting held in Rome[83], or the 1967 get-together organized by the London office.[84] To the delight of the WRL leadership, the WRI informed them that the following conference was to be held in the United States. As these conventions meant an invaluable opportunity for exchange of information, deepening existing relations, but also establishing new ones across the globe, the league was understandable excited at the prospect of hosting radical pacifists hailing from many nations, especially in a time of war.[85]

In the same year, the WRI also sent its general secretary from London, Devi Prasad to a tour of the United States. Visiting not only the WRL, Prasad also travelled across the country and met with numerous other pacifist organizations and representatives of social movements.[86]

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[81] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 10, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes April 5, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Feb. 9, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[82] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, June 13, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes April 21, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1; Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Jan. 22, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[83] War Resisters' International Memorandum, June 22, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries VII, Box 19.

[84] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 44-48.

[85] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Nov. 13, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[86] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Jan. 10 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

As draft evasion was one of the WRL's primary activities during the Vietnam War era, it soon began to develop novel strategies to accommodate interested Americans. In the process, relations to their Canadian neighbors became integral. In 1966 already, a Canadian pacifist contacted the WRL's office inquiring about the league's plans, and emphasizing the need for a more organized effort of helping American draftees escape northwards.[87]

The WRL's vibrant international connections also become clear considering the extensive travels of some of its members. As field secretary, David McReynolds was one of the most visible faces of his organization, as his duties included giving presentations for other groups, or at schools and universities, as well as attending conferences, both in the United States and abroad. In 1966 alone, he visited Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and France, meeting with a number of likeminded groups, such as the *Kampagne für Abrüstung* (Campaign for Disarmament), or the Italian National Vietnam Committee. While in France he even met the Head of the Commercial Mission of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[88] That same year McReynolds also toured through Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom, all in preparation for an international Vietnam conference in the UK.[89] At the same time, another WRL member, Gerry Hunnius, spent time in Frankfurt, Köln, and Paris in pursuit of the same cause.[90] To round out his world tour, McReynolds then flew to Japan, before arriving back in the WRL New York office.[91] In the same year, an unnamed WRL delegate also visited West Germany and participated in an Easter march for peace, meeting, among others, the son of future German chancellor Willy Brandt. Another delegate

[87] Squires, *Sanctuary*, 22-23.
[88] Report: Tour of Italy, Switzerland, Germany and France, April 27 – May 5, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries VII, Box 19.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Duberman, *Remnant*, 112.

reported similar activities from Rome.[92] The year before, another influential WRL leader, Ralph DiGia, had travelled to Dublin and Italy for a number of meetings with other WRI branches.[93]

Admittedly, 1966 proved an extraordinarily demanding year for McReynolds, and while the amount of travel was unusually high, he regularly left his home country throughout the sixties. The following year he would meet with the Buddhist monk Thich Tri Quang in Saigon, discussing the Vietnam war and possibilities of pacifist resistance. [94]

In 1968, he found himself in Prague, attending a WRI conference, and excitedly reporting the presence of many radical student leaders, liberal writers and political figures, forging connections and exchanging experiences of protest, resistance, and activism in general.[95] While in Prague, between one conference in Vienna and another one in Ljubljana, then Yugoslavia, McReynolds was also caught in the midst of the Soviet invasion of the Czechoslovakia. During the following days, he reported an impressive effort of non-violent resistance on the part of the Alexander Dubček-led Czechs. Leaving on a train for Americans caught in the crossfire, he remained strengthened in his pacifist beliefs and the necessity of organizations like the WRL in its mission to end all violence and war.[96]

One of the most intriguing aspects of the WRL in the Vietnam era was its inclusion of, at least, two gay men in its leadership, Igal Roodenko and David McReynolds. Their homosexuality was a fact widely known within the WRL. At the beginning of the 1960s, McReynolds stance on gay liberation, however, was decidedly negative. Of the opinion that his sexuality was nobody's

[92] WRL News, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[93] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes June 22, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[94] Duberman, *Remnant*, 113.

[95] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 49.

[96] Duberman, *Remnant*, 142.

business, he refrained from identifying publicly as homosexual. Due to his essentialist position on sexuality he came to reject the, in his eyes, radical gay liberation front.[97]

However, the WRL constantly linked violence to masculinity and the military as a whole, pointing to its extoling of aggressiveness, dominance, and force, and, thus, also attempted to approach the gay and lesbian movement during the sixties.[98] In 1965, for example, McReynolds moved the WRL to sponsor one of the speakers, Paul Goodman, at that year's conference of the East Coast Homophile Organizations. Although McReynolds himself did not see homosexuals as a minority in itself, he began to form stronger links with their cause.[99]

By 1969, the WRL's San Francisco office even shared an office with the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Unsurprisingly, the gay rights activists were highly interested in the pacifist cause and had not missed the inherent sexism in the U.S. military as a social control mechanism, becoming strongly engaged in anti-Vietnam war demonstrations, draft resistance, and the veterans' movement.[100]

As the 1960s progressed, the issue of gay and lesbian rights came to head in the Stonewall riots of 1969. As a sign of solidarity, the WRL published a special issue of its WRL News magazine on gay liberation that year.[101] Towards the late sixties, McReynolds also began to ponder whether or not to publicly come out as gay. Fearing a backlash against the WRL in the past, he now was convinced of the necessity to move the organization closer to the gay and lesbian cause.[102] A trend

[97] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 131.
[98] Duberman, *Remnant*, 246.
[99] Ibid., 120.
[100] Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity In the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 28-29.
[101] Duberman, *Remnant*, 221.
[102] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 115-117.

that was continued in the following years by Mandy Carter, a WRL member and ardent activists for the rights of lesbians.[103]

The WRL in Crisis

On the other hand, however, despite the increase in support for the WRL and despite its growing reach as well as its increasing activism that the Vietnam War brought, the 1960s also were a time of crisis for the organization. In 1962 already, McReynolds bemoaned the small size of the WRL and vented his frustration with the peace movement, questioning the effectiveness of rallies and demonstrations. "Mass peace rallies do not really frighten the government because there is no evidence that the thousands taking part […] are really prepared to make a major break with the war system," he criticized. Although his idea of a general strike as a radical instrument of resistance was never realized, he was not alone with his misgivings about the WRL.[104]

By the mid-1960s, however, the WRL leadership had begun to grow uneasy about the group's cooperation with other organizations, who did not necessarily reject violence. While the WRL's founding principle was pacifism, some among the group's leadership had growing doubts concerning the viability of non-violence, whereas others remained convinced of its need.[105]

It was Roy Kepler, a long-time WRL member and instrumental in establishing the organization on the West Coast, who reacted to the growing split and drafted a policy statement. Pointing to the WRL's past he contrasted the group's status as a third party between the Cold War East and West during the 1940s and 1950s, with perceived rise of a more multipolar political

[103] Hobson, *Lavender*, 50.

[104] David McReynolds, "The General Strike – Myth and Reality," *WRL News*, Sept./Oct., 1962, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries III, Box 3.

[105] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, April 21, 1965, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

landscape in the 1960s. The WRL had to respond to the New Left in general, and to radical student activism. Claiming the united fronts of the past had disintegrated, Kepler saw an increasing homogeneity in individual actions and projects of dissent and resistance.[106]

Kepler also noted the New Left's more radical positions of anti-imperialism, its criticism of socioeconomic structures, and its attention to racial liberation struggles. However, in light of the New Left's he reaffirmed the need for the WRL to stay true to non-violence. For Kepler, it was always more important to resist war and violence, than to challenge the political order. It is this position of radical pacifism without realization of the fundamental causes of violence in economy and race, that led many in the WRL to shy away from lasting alliances with Black activists and women's rights groups.[107]

Since the leadership never seemed to be able to resolve these tensions, in 1966 they organized a special meeting on WRL policy. Again, one side leveled criticism against the organization's growing alienation from other groups, and pointed to a lack of willingness for collaboration in general. The other side argued for continued adherence to the pacifist philosophy. The group also remained split over the question of whether to pursue change within the structures of government and institutions, or to practice resistance outside of them. However, again the leadership did not find a solution.[108]

The protracted ideological crisis of the WRL was not only marked by discussions and quarrels, resulting in little to no concrete changes, but it also caused loss of personnel. In October of 1967, Charles Bloomstein, a member of the WRL leadership chose to resign, venting his

[106] Roy Kepler, "Draft of Statement on WRL Policies," May 3, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Special Meeting, Nov. 8, 1966, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

frustration over the group not having a real program of its own. In his eyes, the WRL was stuck between the New Left and the Black Power without a clear ideology or plan, unable to challenge either side constructively. In his eyes, in order to stop the Vietnam war, the WRL needed better allies.[109]

By early the 1970s, the organization boasted a level of membership higher than ever before in its long history. Over the course of the long sixties, the WRL had increased its followers, raised more money, had established a number of new offices and branches across the country, and was proud of a rising interest in its activities by the younger generation.[110]

At the beginning of the Vietnam War era, the WRL had already formed a strong collaboration with the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), an alliance that would not change during the decade. After CNVA had been founded in 1957 in response to the U.S. government's nuclear weapons program, its adoption of non-violence naturally made it attractive to the veteran pacifists of the WRL. So much so, that in 1967, when the CNVA had to close its doors due to declining membership and financial difficulties, the WRL was only too willing to have the anti-nuclear activists join them. Thus, after a period of negotiation CNVA officially merged with the WRL beginning in 1968.[111] Mollin notes, that the CNVA, although equally radically pacifist, had been more action-oriented than the WRL. With the merger, the war resisters were the only major peace group to carry forward the ideas of radical pacifism.[112]

[109] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Oct. 6, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[110] Duberman, *Remnant*, 154.

[111] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes Dec. 12, 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[112] Mollin, *Pacifism*, 168.

More importantly, however, the merger also again raised the vexing question of non-violence and collaboration with more militant organizations.[113] By 1970, even McReynolds, a long-time proponent of cooperation, felt that "not much coalition [was] left" and the WRL should consider focusing on building its own local branches. He concluded that with the increasing fracturing of movements, there was little the WRL could do, "barring a serious mistake similar to the Cambodian invasion."[114] Historian Melvin Small provides a wider perspective, arguing that in 1968 already, the peace movement had peaked, having "convince[d] a critical mass of Americans" by then to oppose the war in Vietnam.[115] Historian Petra Goedde also points to the increasing militancy among many social movements in the late 1960s, as notions of self-defense, and many equating non-violence with support of the status quo, contributed to a growing rejection of pacifism.[116]

Overall, the 1960s spelled a time of increased activity, but also rising internal tensions for the WRL. With radical pacifism having to compete with increasing militancy of other groups working towards social change, and no clear grand strategy in place, the war resisters main purpose of finding peaceful solutions to war often remained a vague idea. Still, looking back in 1970 on the history of the WRL and some of its most influential members, David McReynolds emphasized the importance of Bayard Rustin, and also the contributions of James Peck, an active member of the Civil Rights Movement who had left the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) to join the WRL.[117]

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[113] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Special Meeting, Sept. 1967, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[114] Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Oct. 7, 1970, War Resisters League Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Series B, Subseries II, Box 1.

[115] Small, "Ascendant," 51.

[116] Goedde, *Peace*, 225-226.

[117] McReynolds, *Invaded*, 252.

Cortright points out that the WRL had never been a particularly large group "with membership in the USA of only a few tens of thousands at its peak." Yet, given its status as an important link in the international peace community, together with the group's vibrant activism at home, the WRL "exerted considerable influence during times of anti-war mobilization."[118]

On the effectiveness of antiwar protest in general, DeBenedetti and Chatfield point to the limitations of the peace movement's reach. While, at the beginning of the 1960s, "it defined the issues on which policy would be debated for a decade," it also "gave cultural dissonance a political import more surely than it effected public policy." Thus, the WRL as a vibrantly active part of the peace movement certainly contributed to the shaping of public discourse, but very likely did not affect concrete policy changes.[119] Still, Petra Goedde affirms that it had been the "vital contributions of transnational peace advocates to the global discourse on peace" during the 1960s and 1970s that, in turn, had led to "the eventual political transformation of the Cold War," especially to the rise of détente. Of that movement, the WRL had been a very active part.[120]

Conclusion

Building on its activities from the WRL's founding shortly after World War I until the 1950s, the organization entered the Vietnam War era with decades of experience in non-violent war resistance. From the early interwar years of radical pacifism and feminist political and educational activism, to a period of direct action and conscientious objection during the Second World War, and through a postwar slump in popularity and support, the WRL had established itself as a flagship organization for radical pacifism and grew to become an integral part of the anti-Vietnam

[118] Cortright, *Peace*, 71.
[119] DeBenedetti, *Ordeal*, 1-2.
[120] Goedde, *Peace*, 223.

war movement. Still, the WRL never was a large group and, as was the case with many other organizations of the peace movement, often resided on the margins of society in peace time, experiencing growth mostly during times of war. However, the fact that the WRL remains active today, already speaks to its ability to survive and remain active in war resistance.

As the war in Vietnam escalated, the WRL engaged in various forms of resistance. From the visible protest and rally, to information dissemination and teach-ins, to offering counseling services on draft evasion and tax resistance, radical pacifists sought to spread its influence across the United States. Even before the number of casualties in Vietnam rose, the WRL already experienced an increase in popularity in the early 1960s, one that allowed the group to grow its offices across the country, strengthen its financial standing, and expand the reach of its brand of radical pacifism.

Throughout the long 1960s, peace advocates built a multipolar network of activist groups, connecting the WRL to other movements with various causes. Remembering its origins at the hands of early twentieth century feminist activists, the WRL sought contact to the women's movement of the 1960s. Similarly, the league had been closely collaborating with the Civil Rights Movement in the postwar years, and although that relationship cooled off during the Vietnam war era, not least because of the departure of Bayard Rustin from the ranks of the radical pacifists, the WRL remained interested in keeping a looser connection alive. The league also kept its commitment to the anti-nuclear movement, as well as other pacifist organizations during the sixties.

However, the WRL, like many other radical pacifist organizations, never addressed underlying questions of social, economic, and racial equality. Instead, focusing on their brand of largely white male pacifist war resistance, the WRL missed a golden opportunity to realize the

potential of establishing powerful alliances across color and gender lines. Even long-time WRL leader Bayard Rustin and his ability to link war resistance to imperialism and the global Black freedom struggle was not enough to effect fundamental change. In the international community of pacifists, the group maintained a vibrant exchange of ideas and people with European partner organizations. While travels took WRL representatives all across the world, their circle of international contacts markedly did not include activist groups form the broader Global South.

As the Long Sixties came to a close, the WRL was in crisis. The growing number of activist groups during the decade and the high turnover increasingly prompted questions of alliances and the WRL's philosophy. An increasing detachment from the Civil Rights Movement, compared to the collaboration of the preceding decades, and an emerging split within the WRL over the issue of militant radicalism and absolute non-violence spelled troubled times for these pacifists.

Although today, the WRL continues its quest for the end of all warfare, the group also expanded its philosophy of protest to recognize the fundamental connection between war, race, and gender. However, while it remains unclear when exactly the WRL broadened their concept of resistance, it must have happened largely after the 1960s. While during this decade the radical pacifists certainly saw the value of alliances across lines of race and gender, these connections remained superficial. With the Vietnam War ending in the first half of the 1970s, interest in the WRL markedly declined again.[121] Since radical pacifism had remained viable during the 1960s, the WRL's post-Vietnam development remains an intriguing aspect for further research. Although, the WRL remained part of a white international community of protest and resistance during a time that also experienced global decolonization and national liberation struggles, often distinctly

[121] Duberman, *Remnant*, 195-196.

violent processes, the league's activities during the 1970s, especially with human rights rising to become a central element of international politics, warrant further attention.

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