

Grussbotschaft von Jennifer Hobhouse Balme, 23. April 2016, Kiental

Emily Hobhouse had seen war. She knew what it was about and how in South Africa, where she had gone in 1901 to take relief, it was the women and children, non-combatants, who were the chief sufferers. It was they who had watched their homes, stock – and all their livelihood – destroyed, and then had been driven into camps to live with all their squalor, and where many – 26,000 – died. Denuded of everything Emily said they had not lost their souls. They could accept sympathy – pity – but they rose far above it. Now another great war was raging and she knew many, many innocent people would die.

It was natural that Emily Hobhouse would be a pacifist. She had views and she felt she had the responsibility of letting people know of the horrors of war. Civilized people, especially Christians, she said, should be able to solve their differences through dialogue.

She thought suffering for liberty was noble, regardless of colour, sex or religion and she recognised that this nobility could be held by people of all ages, including little children, but she did not believe it should be imposed upon them by incompetent statesmen.

At Kiental, where Emily was honoured to be a guest, many views were expressed. Though convened with the idea of peace many had their own agenda. Lenin in particular made a stir with his views of a communist state. There was an overriding feeling for the communality of working people, and yet it was evident that the delegates did not feel their countries were ready to work together. Borders were still there. Boundaries had not been beaten. Robert Grimm had a vision. He had brought the people together but perhaps those chosen were not in fact the right people. At Christmas 1914 the soldiers had crossed the trenches, fraternized, shared cigarettes, carols and football. These were ordinary people with the most basic feelings for family and friends. These

were the same as the people who died in the concentration camps of 1901. It is not surprising that Emily Hobhouse had a feeling for ordinary people. She believed that ordinary people should have a say on how things should be done. She believed and fought for universal suffrage. She had headed up a group in England, with Bertram Russell and others, the slogan being: 'One man, one vote: one woman, one vote'. In the past England had been run by kings, then it had been run by the elite, and later more broadly based, by the politicians and statesmen and yet had not succeeded to keep peace. Emily was interested in new ideas. She believed in a League of Nations. Perhaps that would succeed. She was interested in Lenin and his views. She must have been one of the few people from England at that time who had met him and he impressed her. She wrote later to her friend General Smuts in South Africa that perhaps some variant of his (Lenin's) ideas would provide a solution for the 'Poor Whites' problem in that country. She said:

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'Lenin seems the one great man who the war has thrown up' (To Smuts 23 October 1919)  
which was not to say she became a Communist which I do not believe she did.

Diplomacy had failed and Emily Hobhouse was interested in new ideas and here one must comment on diplomacy. No one had really wanted the war – except perhaps the producers of arms – and yet the diplomats had been unable to prevent it, and that last chance, the close relationship between three of the rulers, had not been activated. Emily said in her Journal (Agent of Peace page 18) 'All Governments concerned in making this war are to blame in my eyes, none better than others but some worse.' She believed war should be outlawed as the 'great impossible barbarity'. Diplomats act in a certain way as Robert Grimm was to find out, but this method was outdated. If television had been available in the First World War and life in the trenches had been televised and shown to the public, the public would have been outraged. As it was propaganda fanned the flames of hate and prevented peace from being seriously discussed.

Emily who had seen the German Foreign Secretary not long after the Kiental Conference and found he was willing to talk peace was prevented from even seeing the British Foreign Secretary to try to get talks going. Like Lord Lansdowne sixteen months later she was pilloried for her action.

In these passion-filled moments it is a very strong man or woman who can stand against the flow. Wounded but not out Emily Hobhouse continued to fight for peace till the end of the war and even beyond. She always felt she was working for the honour of her country and was saddened that her efforts were not understood or recognised.

I commend those who have organised the Conference today and wish you Good Luck.