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Real Work

A major restructuring of party politics in Britain was one of many unanticipated consequences of the First World War. During the 1920s, the political and the economic landscape altered, and it was these reconfigurations which opened up opportunities for Mrs Wootton, Cambridge University's undercover economics lecturer, to step out of the academic shadows onto the brighter light of the public policy stage.

The 1920s were a Jekyll and Hyde era: a time for bright young things, 'short-skirted flappers ... and young men with Valentino haircuts ... playing noisy ukuleles in the dicky seats of open touring cars';¹ but the other face of this gay abandon was extreme poverty, misery and industrial unrest. Lloyd George, Liberal Prime Minister since 1916, had marked his symbolic promise to the nation by establishing a Ministry of Reconstruction in 1917. Out of the chaos and ruins of war, a new Britain would be created, a far better home for everyone, not just for heroes. His leadership of the Coalition Government of Liberals and Conservatives transformed the political scene for the Labour Party, making possible its first spell of national government in 1924; a longer one followed in 1929–1931. Political parties, citizens and all sorts of associations and pressure groups struggled to understand and control the economic instability that mirrored the shifts in political platforms: a boom in 1919–20, and an 'economic blizzard' in 1929–32.² Economic expertise, such as that which Barbara Wootton had acquired in Cambridge, was much in demand. The War had left Britain, like many other nations, in an economic mess. Her traditional heavy industries suffered from antiquated methods, most of her raw material needed to be imported, and her traditional European customers were too poor to buy. In this desperate situation, organized labour had a pivotal role. Labour had a definite presence on the party political scene, and the old symbiosis of the unions and the Labour Party was weakening, so that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) was free to develop the industrial side of its work. The problem was the lack of a single body to co-ordinate industrial action.

This serious deficit was highlighted in 1919 by a wave of strikes by the police, army, miners, printers and transport workers. In 1921, a TUC General Council charged with the co-ordination of industrial action was created, and out of the same mood of reorganization a new Research and Information Department was born. Although the term 'labour research' could be interpreted in different ways – research into subjects of importance to Labour, or research designed to prove the Labour case³ – both the Labour Party and the trade union movement needed access to evidence. They needed to know what was going on in order to decide strategy. Since duplication of effort would be wasteful, why not combine the efforts of both organizations in a Joint Research Department?

Barbara Wootton, restless in the confines of academia, spotted the advertisement in *The Daily Herald* for two Research Workers in the new Research and Information Department of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Executive Committee, to give it its full name. The Department would be housed in Eccleston Square in London, where the TUC and the Labour Party occupied adjoining premises. Its staff would be drawn mainly from existing Labour Party appointments, but there would be two new research posts and a typist.⁴ Walter Milne-Bailey, who had worked as a research officer for the Union of Post Office Workers, was appointed to the first research post, and Barbara Wootton to the second. She was interviewed by the 'affable and booming'⁵ Labour politician Hugh Dalton, whom she had helped with his (unsuccessful) candidacy in a Cambridge Parliamentary by-election. Dalton wanted her to get the job, but he complained after the interview that she had nearly ruined it with her 'apparently cold-blooded and pompous intellectualism'. Asked why she had applied for the post, Barbara attributed it to 'a multitude of converging considerations'. It undoubtedly was: the consideration of the need to escape Cambridge; to earn a living; and to bury the personal tragedies of the War. Dalton, however, told her she should have referred instead to her desire to do something about 'the unbearable injustices of our social system'.⁶ This would hardly have been disingenuous.

Extricating herself from Girton was not easy. She was responsible for her Girton students until the end of the 1921–1922 academic year. Two days after her interview with Dalton, Barbara wrote with disarming honesty to the Girton College secretary, Miss Clover, about her dilemma: 'I have come increasingly to feel that the centre of my interest is in the Labour Movement rather than in University Work; and while the opportunity which I have had of acting as Director of Studies in Economics at Girton has been of great value to me, I had come to the conclusion some months ago that I should seek a post at the end of the current academic year in which I should be able to devote my services completely to this

movement'.⁷ She told Miss Clover that the new post involved exactly the kind of work to which she felt most strongly drawn, and such openings were rare. The Department wanted her to start immediately. They would, however, be prepared for her to begin on a part-time basis, so she proposed working half-time in London and half-time for Girton until the end of May, when she would resign her Girton post. Perhaps unwisely, she offered the justification that Girton, being so small, had never occupied the whole of her time. However, the Girton Council did accept her proposal. Although many grieved Barbara's departure from Cambridge, they also recognized that what Girton lost, the country won.⁸ Her emancipation from Girton bore similarities with another, the previous year, achieved by economic historian Eileen Power, who escaped Girton, which she likened to a medieval nunnery, for the much more utilitarian LSE.⁹ The plain fact was that for women like these, a university that sheltered women at the same as discriminating against them put impossible limits on their aspirations and abilities to use their talents.

Barbara took some 'rather squalid lodgings' in Ebury Street near Eccleston Square, so she could walk to work. Her new boss was Arthur Greenwood, later deputy leader of the Labour Party, a member of Churchill's War Cabinet, and the main architect of the idea of a Joint Research Department.¹⁰ She found him both charming and exasperating: 'He had absolutely no idea of forward planning or method: everything had to be done in a hurry at the last minute'.¹¹ Greenwood had been invited to leave the civil service and set up the Joint Research Department by Arthur Henderson, a politician whose dedication to reorganizing the Labour Party into an effective governmental machine earned him the nickname 'Uncle Arthur'.¹² The new Department was small, much smaller than Girton College. The two colleagues with whom Barbara worked most closely were Milne-Bailey and the Secretary, Cecil Delisle Burns. Between them, Greenwood, Milne-Bailey and Barbara were supposed to cover 'every field of knowledge which could possibly be of concern to the Labour Party or the Trades Union Congress'. She recalled writing 'endless memoranda' and answering 'innumerable questions on all manner of subjects'.¹³ During 1924, the work involved completing an inquiry into conditions in the shipbuilding industry; preparing additional material for the Colwyn Committee on National Debt and Taxation; drawing up a memorandum for the General Council on the effects on workers' health of using pneumatic tools; collating material on agricultural conditions and prices; proceeding with work on a Wages Index; and adopting a new method of keeping parliamentary voting records – all at the same time as investigating a proposed Summer School, and undertaking 'the usual amount of work' in the form of 'enquiries, reviews etc'.¹⁴ Anthony Greenwood, Arthur Greenwood's son, met Barbara around the time she started

working in the Joint Research Department: 'a young war widow, very strikingly good-looking with pale blue eyes which I have always remembered'. He never forgot hearing his father speak of her great ability and her unique contribution towards enabling the Party to match up intellectually with the other two.¹⁵ These were absolutely crucial days for the Labour Party, and they would not have been at all the same without Barbara Wootton.

One of her first tasks in Eccleston Square was to write a critical review of the social credit theories of Major Douglas. Douglas, a Cambridge-trained civil engineer, had developed an economic philosophy which redefined democracy as the power of consumers to establish the policy of production by exercising their monetary vote.¹⁶ Economist Joan Robinson called Douglas 'a crank' who believed it could 'all be done with a fountain pen'.¹⁷ Douglas's was a complicated theory, wrapped up in religious sentiment, and, although some trade unionists took to it, the Labour Party leadership did not. They wanted an argued case to support their dislike of it. Barbara did not find this difficult. The fact that her memorandum drew negative comments from Sidney Webb, who chaired the Departmental Committee on behalf of the Labour Party Executive, did not even dishearten her – she was just so pleased to be working for the Labour Movement at last.¹⁸ Soon after she joined the Department, Barbara added to her work the role of Secretary to the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Problems. She often took work home. It was an odd experience after academic life. Staff worked office hours, and 'at 5.30 on the dot, in mid-sentence even, some people would stop what they were doing and go home'. However, she enjoyed the variety and the evident practical importance of the job. She liked preparing wage claims and dealing with a bus conductor who walked in and asked for help with his income tax. What she *disliked* was election time. 'We would have to write notes for candidates and sometimes we would go along to evening meetings and listen to what they did with those notes. It put me off for ever wanting to be a Parliamentary candidate. So phoney.'¹⁹

In 1926 came the General Strike. On the first morning of the strike, Barbara arrived at the office ready for anything: she was asked to go out and buy a map. The country's transport systems were paralysed, but no substitute communications could be improvised as the office had no map of England and Wales. This lack of preparedness was odd, as the strike had been brewing for some time. Unemployment was high – throughout the 1920s the numbers of insured unemployed were never below a million, and they rose to an unprecedented two and a half million by December 1930.²⁰ For many of those in work, wage cuts were threatened. Housing was in short supply. Where was the reconstructed Britain its citizens had been promised? The dissatisfactions of the coal-miners, exposed to

pit closures, withdrawal of the government subsidy, and lower wages for the same hours, spearheaded the strike. For nine days there was an extraordinary display of peacefully withdrawn labour, then the unions capitulated, recognizing that the Government had the power to hold out a lot longer than they could. Barbara's colleague, Milne-Bailey, wrote an account of the strike which shows the level of violence lurking just beneath the surface: troops with the freedom to use any force necessary stationed in working-class areas; and even Royal Navy battleships and destroyers positioned in the Clyde, the Tyne and the Mersey just in case of trouble.²¹

Barbara's other contribution to the strike was to carry messages to and from strike headquarters, and drive members of the TUC General Council around in her car. On one occasion, she offered a ride to the Labour politician Ernest Bevin, who refused, having seen the size of her car – he accepted a lift from one of her colleagues who had a bigger one.²² Many years later Margaret Cole reminded Barbara of this insult, and that the trade unionist Will Thorne, a much larger man, agreed to ride in *her* car.²³ These were the days of small cars – the first days. The increase in the annual car tax to £1 per unit of horsepower in 1921, combined with the introduction of assembly line production techniques, produced a boom in more affordable small cars,²⁴ and ushered in the era of mass motoring. Barbara bought her first car in 1924, an open, two-cylinder Rover. Between 1919 and 1924, when she first became a motorist, car registrations in Britain more than quadrupled.²⁵ Car manufacturers targeted female motorists with light saloons adorned with silver flower vases and special compartments for a shopping diary.²⁶ Britain's lanes were full of motorists learning how to drive in vehicles whose capacity to go far exceeded their capacity to stop. Barbara's own first purchase, made by cashing in her Girton pension policy, was more like a wild animal than a civilized machine. Matters improved with the introduction of front wheel brakes in 1925. Unsurprisingly, Barbara was afraid of her car for quite a long time.²⁷

Motoring added spice to Barbara Wootton's life during a period when she was still raw from the emotional shock of Jack's death. The paragraphs in her autobiography which refer to her psychological state during these years are parsimonious: there were times of emotional disturbance; at best, she was a 'somewhat depressed character'; and she would hardly have 'enlivened any man's breakfast table'.²⁸ Yes, there were men she was attracted to, and men who were attracted to her, but there was little overlap between these categories. Perhaps the bereaved heroine of a contemporary novel by Irene Rathbone, *We That Were Young*, described something akin to what Barbara Wootton felt: 'The curious thing about misery was the way it rose and fell. Sometimes you felt quite ordinary. You read books; you shopped; the world seemed normal and pleasant. And suddenly, out of

the four corners as it were, misery came, and swamped you. You could do nothing about it. You just sat there at the heart of it ... People said: "Time will heal," but you didn't want time to heal – or rather you didn't want it to heal at the price of remembrance. The one thing you were terrified of was numb forgetfulness. Suffering was atrocious; it was not a thing to be sentimentally hugged; but if it was the inevitable accompaniment of remembrance you would keep it.²⁹

The year of the car brought another very considerable diversion for Barbara: her appointment as the only woman to the Colwyn Committee on National Debt and Taxation. The question of the national debt dominated post-war politics, and this Committee was purportedly a condition of the King appointing the first Labour Government.³⁰ The National Debt was a subject which had already incensed Barbara Wootton, both as economist and as someone who had personally suffered loss through the national habit of expensive militarism. In 'Where Your Money Goes: What Every Woman Ought to Know', a delightful piece published in *Good Housekeeping* in 1922, Barbara advised the women of Britain that they should concern themselves with national as well as domestic housekeeping. One of the most striking observations to be made about the former was that most of the money people paid in income tax went on warfare – both current expenditure on 'the fighting services' and on servicing the debt for past warfare. 'Where Your Money Goes' is an early example of the diversified and accessible writing in which Barbara specialized. Her piece nestles comfortably in the same pages as suffragist Millicent Fawcett on women voters, and domestic advice on 'Adjustment and Care of the Corset'.³¹

The newspaper headlines announcing Barbara's membership of the Colwyn Committee were effusive and selective, stressing her youth, scholarship and gender: 'Woman's Sudden Fame: Mrs Wootton's Crowded 26 Years',³² 'Debt Committee: Brilliant Woman Scholar',³³ 'Romance of a Girton Girl: Only Woman on the Debt Committee – War Widow: Too Young to Receive a Vote'.³⁴ 'Young and slim, with quantities of soft brown hair surmounting a soft-complexioned face,' began the piece in *The Daily Chronicle*, 'Mrs Barbara Wootton ... does not fulfil the old-fashioned idea of an expert on economic and financial subjects.'³⁵ 'Her grave demeanour,' declared *The Daily News*, 'hides a sense of humour. Her blue eyes twinkled at the suggestion that bank directors and captains of industry would get a shock at the prospect of sitting in conference on high finance with a girl young enough to be a daughter of any one of them.'³⁶ *The Manchester Guardian* regarded the appointment as proof of the value of Barbara's work as an expert economist rather than as a woman.³⁷ *The Evening Standard* reporter found her 'pale-faced, wearing rimless eye-glasses, and with her hair very plainly dressed', sitting at a table in a paper-littered room on the top floor

of 33 Eccleston Square.³⁸ By then, Barbara was clearly irritated by the more salacious aspects of the press interest. 'I am not going to tell you my hobbies or games,' she snapped at the journalist from *The Daily News*. 'It is quite irrelevant to the question whether I eat chocolates before breakfast or smoke cigarettes afterwards. The only relevant matter is to what extent I am fitted for the work I am going to undertake.'³⁹

She was so fitted, and she was undoubtedly in very exalted company. Lord Colwyn, the Committee's Chairman, was director of several railway companies and a previous chair of a Royal Commission on Income Tax. There were two directors of the Bank of England, a City banker, a leading chartered accountant, another railways director, two members of the TUC, the conservative politician Sir Arthur Balfour, the economists J.A. Hobson (who later resigned and was replaced by Fred Hall) and J.B. Lees-Smith, and 'the eminent authority on taxation and statistics', Sir Josiah Stamp,⁴⁰ with whom Barbara had already shared a conference platform when she had given a paper with a long-winded title at a British Association meeting in 1921. The Women's Freedom League told Labour's first Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald that Barbara Wootton's appointment to the Committee was a sign of progress for women.⁴¹ The Committee's brief was to 'consider and report on the National Debt and on the incidence of existing taxation, with special reference to their effect on trade, industry, employment and national credit'.⁴² The reason for its existence was the economic aftermath of the War which had left many industrial nations, including Britain, with enormous debts, the mere servicing (let alone repayment) of which was almost beyond their means. Such debts also, of course, constrained 'social' expenditure on housing, education, health, pensions and so forth – those very areas critical to post-war reconstruction plans. The Colwyn Committee came on the heels of another Committee on National Expenditure set up by Lloyd George and chaired by Sir Eric Geddes, a businessman who, unusually, favoured statistical analysis as a key business strategy. His Committee, which gave rise to a much-used phrase 'the Geddes axe', argued for public economy and retrenchment in public expenditure of £87 million out of a total projected spend of around £528 million.⁴³ The Government agreed to the figure of £52 million, which meant a forty one per cent reduction in defence and a twelve per cent reduction in social spending on education, health, housing, pensions and unemployment.⁴⁴

The scale of Britain's financial problem was huge. At the end of March 1926, the national debt amounted to £7,615,916,000. Nearly the whole of this was the result of expenditure in the First World War, and most of the remainder was left over from earlier wars.⁴⁵ Interest payments on the debt were running at about a million pounds for every working day.⁴⁶ One seventh of the debt was external – owed to other countries, with ninety per cent due to the USA. This was payable

in instalments starting with \$23,000,000 in December 1923 and ending with \$175,000,000 in December 1984.⁴⁷ The TUC and Labour argument – with which Barbara Wootton and some other members of the Colwyn Committee agreed – was that servicing the war debt was essentially an issue of social justice, since paying for it meant (as the Geddes axe had demonstrated) cutting social expenditure, and thus depriving the working classes of the ‘amenities and necessities of civilized life’.⁴⁸ In addition, about one-third of the internal debt was owed to rich individuals, which imposed a continuing transfer of purchasing power from taxpayers to debt-holders, further aggravating social injustice. As a Labour Party pamphlet baldly put it, ‘The workers, including the young men who fought in the war, are, in effect, saddled with a tribute to those who were lucky enough to have money to lend, including wealthy men who were too old to be called upon to fight’.⁴⁹

The problem was how to pay for the national debt and create a more comfortable and equitable society at the same time. It was a problem that divided the members of the Colwyn Committee. The result was two reports: a weighty Majority Report signed by eight members of the Committee; and a much shorter and more incisive Minority Report signed by Barbara Wootton and three other members, although one of these, Fred Hall, added a reservation about his unhappiness that the Minority group’s recommendations did not place more emphasis on taxing earned income. We know from a draft in Barbara’s handwriting in her Colwyn Committee papers, which are lodged in the TUC Archives at London Metropolitan University,⁵⁰ that she wrote every word of the Minority Report – contrary to the assertion, made by one historian of fiscal policy, that she only ‘claimed’ to have done so.⁵¹

The need to pay for the War after it was over led many countries to consider radical proposals. Although income tax had been rising in Britain – five-fold in the years between 1913 and 1919⁵² – the main tax paid by the working classes was indirect, taking the form of duties on tobacco, beer, entertainment, food and other basic goods and services. The authors of the Minority Report objected in principle to indirect taxation as necessarily regressive, and they recommended its abolition. An even more explosive suggestion was the inheritance tax scheme proposed by the Italian economist Eugenio Rignano.⁵³ In the Rignano plan, immediate and more remote forms of inheritance would be distinguished by a modest tax on the former and a much heavier tax on the latter. Hugh Dalton was one of many on the Left in Britain who promoted Rignano’s ideas. He also favoured another radical approach to disposing of the national debt – a one-off tax on wealth, a ‘capital levy’. The Labour Party’s own capital levy proposal, laid out in a 1922 pamphlet, *Labour and the War Debt*, set the tax at five per cent for wealth of £5,000–£6,000, rising to thirty-five per cent for £30,000–£50,000, and to sixty per cent for figures

above £1,000,000.⁵⁴ As Barbara's colleague in the Research Department, Delisle Burns, pointed out, this idea of a capital levy which made the Carlton Club shudder and caused some Liberals to wonder whether they might not after all be Tories, was hardly new: it could be traced back to the thirteenth century when the English King Edward 1, in conflict with his Welsh counterpart, had raised a war loan and then taxed his wealthy subjects to pay it back.⁵⁵ In 1820, the political economist David Ricardo had also established a precedent in suggesting a one-time tax on property as a solution to the debt incurred by the Napoleonic Wars.⁵⁶ With unashamed deviousness, Barbara wrote to Dalton in confidence in advance of his giving evidence to the Colwyn Committee to ensure that he would fully address various arguments against the capital levy favoured by some Committee members; his wife Ruth obligingly sent Barbara a draft of what he would say.⁵⁷ The Minority Report of the Colwyn Committee recommended incorporating the Rignano approach into the British system of death duties, and a special tax on investment income, and it took a much more favourable view than the Majority Report of the capital levy. It concluded that introducing such a levy would be 'a wise and practicable measure'; it would mean both an immediate reduction in the national debt and an increase in economic equality.⁵⁸ But a capital levy would take a long time to implement, would require the co-operation of the banks, and would have the fundamental drawback, which the signatories of the Majority Report saw as insurmountable, that the owners of capital would dislike and resist it.

How to deal with the enormous debts incurred as a result of engaging in war, and how to design a workable tax system which would generate enough government income to finance post-war reconstruction, preoccupied British policy-makers throughout the 1920s and 1930s. This was not simply a matter of fiscal calculations, but of powerful rhetoric and ideology: arguments about the nature of the national debt and about the differential class impact of different forms of taxes were used by political parties to shape their own identities.⁵⁹ The idea of paying off the debt once and for all with a levy on wealth, which was initially regarded by the Treasury, the Inland Revenue and the Chancellor as pragmatic and sensible, became a menacing socialist plot once those on the Left had enfolded it in the language of class opposition. A tax on wealth – like the rising power of the trade unions, the extension of the franchise, and declining standards of public behaviour – signified a seismic and worrying shift in the class system. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Majority Report was a highly conservative document. Not only did it dismiss as impracticable and as 'highly injurious' to social and industrial life any kind of tax on accumulated wealth, but it argued that the existing burden of taxation was 'less crushing than is frequently represented'.⁶⁰ Keynes did not mince

words in calling the Report 'a vindication of the British System of Taxation as it now is'.⁶¹ Several years later, Barbara commented cynically of the history of the national debt that, 'There can, indeed, be few chapters of economic history more completely devoid of progress ... In two hundred and fifty years we have neither invented any significant new method of dealing with the Debt nor shown any growth in the persistence with which we are prepared to apply old methods.'⁶² Her Minority Report disappeared virtually without trace, except that its suggestions about a more steeply graduated and differentiated income tax, together with a surtax on unearned income above £500 a year, were absorbed into official Labour Party policy.⁶³

The Colwyn Committee was a considerable drain on Barbara's time: between early 1924 and late 1926, there were forty-eight sittings, most lasting an entire day, and the Committee took written and oral evidence from sixty-two witnesses, including representatives of the Stock Exchange, banks, chambers of commerce, chartered accountants, insurance brokers, trade unions, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Farmers' Union and the legal profession. There were also, of course, the opinions of leading economists to consider, not forgetting those of women witnesses 'representing the householder'; at the Committee's first meeting, Barbara, as the token woman, was asked 'to advise as to suitable names'.⁶⁴ Throughout the Committee's work, she enjoyed the analytical powers of Josiah Stamp and the benign attention of Lord Colwyn, who on one occasion offered her two tickets for Wimbledon, which she declined on the grounds that she could not be absent from the office during the day. He then hinted that, if the fare to Wimbledon were the real obstacle, he would be only too happy to provide it.⁶⁵

The positive effect on her confidence and career in public life of taking part in the Colwyn Committee helped Barbara to think about whether it might be time to move on from her backroom career in party politics. There were some concrete grounds for dissatisfaction with the Joint Research Department job. The brilliant young economist, Barbara Wootton, knew that the level of her pay was 'meagre'. When Jack Wootton died, she had turned down the widow's pension to which she was entitled because she could see no justification for a young, able-bodied and childless woman being subsidized at the taxpayer's expense.⁶⁶ She and her colleagues at the Research Department, Milne-Bailey and Delisle Burns, wrote to the Joint Finance Sub-Committee asking for their rates of pay to be revised in order to bring these into line with the rates paid for comparable work in other Departments. Sidney Webb investigated the matter, and as a consequence the maximum salaries (achievable by annual increments) for Milne-Bailey and Barbara

were raised to the same ceiling as for Delisle Burns.⁶⁷ But Barbara was still paid less than Milne-Bailey, despite the fact that they were doing the same work. Two women members drew this differentiation to the attention of the Labour Party Executive Committee, making the dastardly suggestion that the salary gap might be on account of sex.⁶⁸ Fortunately for the Department, Burns left for a job at the LSE and when, eventually, Barbara also decided to depart, their posts were not filled because of 'financial stringency'.⁶⁹

There was little possibility of advancement in Eccleston Square. Not only did the men hold all the higher posts and the women the lower ones, but in the end there was something eminently dissatisfying about never being recognized as speaking for oneself. While important and busy people cannot be expected to write all the documents for which they are responsible, Civil Service anonymity, Barbara decided, can be a farce. She approved of the suggestion made by Milne-Bailey that at the annual fair organized by the London Labour Party, all the material on sale should be autographed by its *real* authors.⁷⁰ But her spell in Eccleston Square did bring some benefits. The job provided the rationale for a decisive break from the claustrophobic atmosphere of Cambridge. She made new friends, including Hugh and Ruth Dalton, for whom she became an important source of gossip about internal Labour politics. Hugh Dalton, himself the subject of considerable gossip about his ambiguous sexuality, apparently much admired Barbara's ankles.⁷¹ She saw a good deal of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who regularly included her in the informal lunches they gave for people active in the Labour Movement. 'The lunch was always substantial, but the talk not particularly lively, unless Bernard Shaw was present,' Barbara noted.⁷²

Barbara's exposure to real work for the Labour movement introduced her to an important friendship, a woman with whom she would live for eleven years until she married again in 1935. Mary Leonora Simeon (Leo, as she was known) was six years older than Barbara. She was a colleague in the Joint Research Department, in charge of the clerical staff there (on a salary considerably more meagre than Barbara's⁷³), but she had an impressive social pedigree. The Simeons were a family of wealthy landowners, baronets and MPs. Leo's father, Lionel Barrington Simeon, had been Under-Secretary to the Government of the North-West Provinces in India, and responsible for building a difficult road through the Himalayas. Her grandfather, Sir John Simeon, had been a friend of the poet Tennyson – Tennyson inscribed parts of his famous poem 'Maud' in the Simeons' Isle of Wight home, Swainston Manor, and another short poem ('In the Garden at Swainston') when Sir John died prematurely in 1870.⁷⁴ The TUC reports, which record the activities of Leo and Barbara in the Joint Research Department, also contain the name of the

fourth baronet, Sir John Stephen Barrington Simeon, who was Liberal Unionist MP for Southampton. A less conventional family connection through Leo's mother was with the Awdry family, which produced Wilbert Vere Awdry, creator of that popular star of children's books, *Thomas the Tank Engine*. This exotic background meant that Leo Simeon was independently wealthy: when she died in 1969, nineteen years before Barbara, she left her socialist friend a significant bequest of Marks & Spencer shares.⁷⁵

The only possible photograph of Leo in Barbara's Girton College papers shows her as a conservatively dressed middle-aged woman with bobbed dark hair and glasses. Barbara and Leo first shared a tiny flat in St John's Wood, and then a more spacious one in Hampstead. Hampstead Hill Gardens occupies a wide crescent on a hill rising up above Hampstead Heath; number twenty-five is a large white-painted early Victorian house divided into four flats, of which Barbara and Leo inhabited the one on the ground floor. While their addresses can be traced, there is no record of the texture of their relationship. It was not at all uncommon at that time for the newly emancipated cohort of single women to set up home together: Vera Brittain shared a series of homes with her writer friend Winifred Holtby; Geraldine Aves, Barbara's contemporary at Cambridge, a magisterial woman later known for her pivotal role in organizing the personal social services and social work training, went to live with Nancy Rackstraw, an LSE social science graduate a decade older than her; and there are countless other examples.⁷⁶ Such arrangements were eminently practical; the accompanying relationships often emotionally intimate. Leo and Barbara shared, as well as a flat, their early car-driving adventures, and holidays, chiefly in Norway, and Leo was soon introduced to The Pie, who called her 'Miss Leo'. One indication of enduring services performed is hidden in the Preface to Barbara's *Freedom Under Planning*, published in 1945. Barbara thanked five people for their help, and Leonora Simeon is there 'for making an impossible manuscript into a clean typescript'.⁷⁷ Apart from such duties, and her work in the Joint Research Department, Leo was also active in the Workers' Educational Association; she appears in library catalogues in connection with the work of the Hadow Committee which produced a series of reports in the period from 1923 to 1933 on Britain's educational system.⁷⁸ Her name is attached to two WEA publications⁷⁹ relating to the most famous of the Hadow reports, *The Education of the Adolescent*, which proposed a basic division between primary and secondary education with a break at eleven, and also suggested raising the school-leaving age to fifteen.⁸⁰

Leonora Simeon shared Barbara Wootton's involvement in the local Labour Party. It was through this route that Barbara embarked on an interest that would

absorb her for the next forty-four years: the Party put her name forward as a potential magistrate, and the Lord Chancellor accepted its suggestion. This was yet another first – not the first woman magistrate – a mark of achievement that belonged to Ada Summers, a local philanthropic worker in Cheshire who had taken up the office seven years earlier in 1919⁸¹ – but the first and only woman to become a magistrate at an age at which as a woman she was ineligible to vote. Many people recognized that the magistracy needed new, younger, female blood. Becoming a magistrate was an experience which taught Barbara much about the workings of the criminal justice system and about the circumstances that nourish anti-social behaviour; most importantly, it moulded the central intellectual passion of her life – that public policy should be built on evidence as to what actually works in promoting welfare.

The magistracy work was part-time, and it did not pay the bills. From her viewpoint in Eccleston Square, and unimpressed by the Labour Party's façade of equality, after four years in the job, Barbara scoured the newspapers for an escape. Eventually she applied for a post in which the rate of pay was still different for men and women, but there was at least no secrecy about it. Morley College in south London had the advantage that it resonated very well with her growing interest in adult education. The College's constitution committed it to 'the advanced study by men and women belonging to the working classes of subjects of knowledge not directly connected with or applied to any handicraft, trade or business'.⁸² It had started out sharing premises with the 'Old Vic' theatre, where its classes were held back-stage and in the dressing-rooms.⁸³ The College needed a new principal. When Barbara applied, Morley College had about a thousand part-time students of assorted ages. Barbara borrowed one of Leo's hats for the interview, which blew off as she crossed Westminster Bridge, but she got the job.⁸⁴ The Appointments Committee felt they had faced a difficult choice. They had eventually overcome, in the Vice-Chairman's words, 'Their fear of her tender years and golden curls' and had voted unanimously for Barbara Wootton.⁸⁵ A former principal, Mary Sheepshanks, noted that Barbara's strong Labour sympathies would fit comfortably with the college ethos.⁸⁶

Perhaps Barbara would have been less enthusiastic had she known what would be involved in sorting out Morley College. She and a secretary were the only full-time posts – the rest of the staff were part-time, fee-based lecturers. The College's records were in a state of chaos; the retiring head, Clare Brennand, had moved abroad for the sake of her health; and soon the secretary developed pneumonia and, within a month, he was dead.⁸⁷ Many of the part-time lecturers had been there for years and did a poor job of stimulating the students. With surprisingly few

qualms, Barbara sacked 'a considerable proportion' of them.⁸⁸ Then she enlisted her friends to give lectures: Kingsley Martin on 'English Ideas of the Nineteenth Century', May Wallas on 'French Life, Literature and History'; and Barbara herself provided a series on 'Problems of the Wage Earner'. R.H. Tawney and Sir Josiah Stamp were persuaded to deliver free public lectures to enhance the standing of the College.⁸⁹ She abolished individual College examinations, cut drastically the amount of time devoted to commercial subjects, established bursaries for foreign travel and Summer School attendances, and – most importantly – tackled the large debt of £3,000 consequent on recent building operations. The core of Morley College was an elegant but cramped eighteenth-century townhouse. A new block containing a gymnasium, a refreshment room, a hall and a laboratory had been added. Barbara solved the College's debt problem a great deal more easily than that of the national debt: she did a deal with the London County Council whereby they paid the College an extra £700 a year for three years in return for permission to run a day continuation school in the new building. Then, meeting Lady Astor at a reception, she was open about the College's difficulties. Nancy Astor was a wealthy American, the first woman MP, famous for her politically uncomfortable views and wit – 'I married beneath me; all women do' is one of those ascribed to her.⁹⁰ After Barbara had shared Morley College's problems with her at the social event, Lady Astor retired for a few moments and returned to press into Barbara's hands a cheque for a further £750.⁹¹

The new Principal also had to get her head round the complex London County Council (LCC) regulations – the LCC was the College's main funder – which prescribed different rates of pay for different classes; she quickly realized that the goal was to present as many classes as possible in the highest fee-earning categories. Since the College offered many attractive social activities, some students enrolled in the easiest and cheapest classes just to get access to these. One student had apparently taken the same elementary botany class for eighteen years.⁹² In order to sort out the mess and do her new job properly, Barbara's physical presence was required during most of the College's opening hours, which included every evening until 10 p.m. or 10.30 p.m. When William Beveridge wrote to suggest an evening meeting in early 1926 at the LSE to discuss 'one or two things' of undoubted importance to them both, Barbara regretted that she was unable to be free *any* evening.⁹³ In February 1927, when she had been in the job just over a year, the College had an open day and Barbara was interviewed by a journalist from *The Manchester Guardian*. He or she referred to Barbara as a 'brilliant young economist' (as many at the time did) and she referred the journalist to some of the facts about Morley students: the range in their ages (from seventeen to seventy-seven), and in their occupations: clerks

of every kind; dressmakers; shop assistants; transport workers; printers; policemen (with an obscure penchant for the French classes); a few taxi-drivers and engineers; and teachers, who displayed a fondness for the choir and orchestra. Barbara advertised the purpose of the College: 'rational enjoyment'. The journalist was taken on a tour, and admired the library with its 6,000 books; the gymnasium, where a class of 'business girls' was preparing a public display; the large new hall which hosted the madrigal circle; and a laboratory, enormously popular as more and more people wanted to find out about the wireless and electricity.⁹⁴

The following spring, the growing fame of Morley College's fourth Principal was boosted by a completely unexpected and flattering invitation to attend the League of Nations' first World Economic Conference in Geneva. There had been eighteen months of preparation for this event, which was widely regarded by those inside and outside the League as holding the key to future world economic security. The human and economic costs of the First World War, and the huge dislocations of the inter-war years, inspired many visions of a new internationalism which would be achieved through a rational use of science and economics. The League of Nations was the cradle of many such hopes, particularly for disarmament and the future avoidance of international conflict. Although the subsequent verdict of history would be that, in this most important goal, the League failed,⁹⁵ it did achieve important successes in social and humanitarian fields. For a while it seemed that its economic programme would lead the way: the Economic Organization headquarters in Geneva were viewed by many hopefuls as the repository of an economic policy to save the world.⁹⁶ The 194 delegates and 226 experts from fifty countries⁹⁷ who took part in the first World Economic Conference in Geneva in May 1927 spent their time listening to persuasive speeches in favour of freer trade: the argument that the main obstacles to economic revival were the hindrances to the free flow between countries of labour, capital and goods, and that these should therefore be removed. The Final Report of the Conference recommended the abolition of tariffs and other long-established barriers to free trade. It and the Conference were acclaimed as great successes,⁹⁸ but unhappily the draft convention for the Abolition of Import and Export Prohibitions, the Conference's 'supreme achievement', was ratified by only seventeen of the eighteen states needed to put the recommendations into force.⁹⁹ The League's economic proposals met the same fate as the far more important idea that human beings should stop fighting one another: in each case, the enemy was nationalism. Freer trade meant *other* countries reducing tariffs, not one's own; disarmament and the abandonment of territorial aggression were always policies that *other* nations should adopt.

Conferences of this kind were normally only attended by delegates nominated by the governments of member states – eminent politicians, Ministers, businessmen and so forth. Where were the women? The original Covenant of the League in 1919 had omitted them entirely, but protest by international women's organizations had resulted in the insertion of Article 7 requiring that all positions connected with the League should be open equally to both sexes. 'Perpetual vigilance' had been needed to ensure that this happened, and the women's organizations had set up a Standing Committee precisely for this purpose; it was this Committee that nominated Barbara Wootton.¹⁰⁰ She was one of four women delegates at the Conference. The others were the Dutch feminist economist and politician E.C. van Dorp; Dr Marie-Elisabeth Lüders, a member of the German Reichstag; and Emmy (or Emmi) Freundlich, the first woman to occupy a ministerial post in Austria.¹⁰¹

Barbara counted her invitation to Geneva an important mark of recognition as a woman and as an economist. In a letter to the Secretary-General of the League, she asked for clarification about who would fund the cost of her visit: the League itself, the British Government, or the Women's Societies?¹⁰² The Government refused to pay her the expenses which were automatic for the male delegates. The Women's International League came to Barbara's rescue and raised enough to cover her essential expenses, although she had to stay in a cheap hostel rather than in the expensive hotels frequented by the other delegates. By way of protest, she refused to equip herself with the evening gown required for some of the formal social events. However, this story of second-class citizenship had a happy ending, as at the last minute the British Government relented and issued a cheque which could be cashed only by dint of a Geneva bank staying open an extra quarter of an hour – an unheard of concession. With the proceeds, Barbara booked a sleeper on the train home, and she and Leo had a nice holiday in Norway.¹⁰³ Back in London, Barbara dutifully did her part in publicizing the World Economic Conference's achievement (getting people from different countries to say the same thing in different ways), speaking at an event arranged by the Standing Joint Committee of Industrial Women's Organizations in London in July, and at another three-day conference held in the Guildhall in December.¹⁰⁴ Unhappily for the women's organizations, however, the achievement of getting a few women to take part in these discussions was overridden by the failure of the second World Economic Conference six years later to nominate any: 'Again no woman!' shouted the suffragist magazine *The Vote* – and one of the male delegates, J.H. Thomas, then added insult to injury with his suggestion that the best way to cure unemployment was to remove women from the labour force altogether.¹⁰⁵

The job at Morley College was only the second for which Barbara had formally applied. In 1927, when she had been there less than eighteen months, she was offered without interview a new post: that of Director of Studies for the University of London's Extra-Mural Department. This was a newly-created position, firmly grounded in the movement for increasing access to university-level education, and thus instantly attractive to Barbara, whose (by now considerable) experience of giving and receiving education had instilled in her the belief that it should be a right and not a privilege. The new job could almost have been tailor-made for her, and in a way it was. It was an instance of that 'multitude of converging considerations' for which she had been reprimanded by Dalton: a position that badly needed her organizational and academic talents, just as she needed to feel she was doing something of real practical utility, and would be publicly recognized for so doing. In the eight years since she had taken her final degree examinations at Cambridge, she had tried four jobs, and none of them had been quite right. A mark of the rightness of this one was that she did it for seventeen years.

The idea of universities reaching out into the communities from which their full-time students would not normally be drawn had its roots in late Victorian liberalism, and there were strong associations with the movements for both working-class and women's education.¹⁰⁶ The first university extension lectures were given on astronomy by James Stuart, 'the father of university extension' in Cambridge in 1867 to audiences recruited by the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women. A London movement for university extension launched its first programme of classes on political economy, history, political philosophy, electricity and magnetism and astronomy (clearly a popular subject) in 1876. The first female lecturer was a Mrs Sophie Bryant, a young widow who gave a course on 'moral ideals' (though she was a mathematician by training). The students of these early classes included manual workers – shipbuilders, boiler-makers, dock labourers – as well as clerks and elementary schoolteachers.¹⁰⁷ Then, in the early 1900s, two closely connected things happened to the university extension movement: the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the tutorial class. Albert Mansbridge, who founded the WEA in 1903, had himself once taken a university extension course ('The Chemistry of Everyday Life'); he could see that the movement was failing to attract many working-class people, and so came up with the idea of classes for no more than thirty or forty people based on the university model, and offering a more intimate context for learning than the traditional large-audience lecture.¹⁰⁸ An alliance between the WEA and the universities was, he believed, critical to the success of this idea. The original tutorial classes scheme was developed at Oxford and it committed groups of

adults to attend for three years during the winter months weekly classes, held mostly in the evenings or on Saturdays, following courses of study worked out by them and a tutor of their choice.¹⁰⁹ Other universities followed the Oxford model. The first three tutorial classes in London took place at Toynbee Hall (a university settlement in the East End of London which provided education and social welfare programmes of various kinds) in 1900–1 on the totally non-contentious topics of the dissolution of the monasteries, Tennyson, and combustion and oxidation.¹¹⁰ By the end of the First World War, London housed twenty-one tutorial classes with a much wider range of topics: for example, the poet T.S. Eliot talked about literature, and Barbara's Joint Research Department Colleague, Delisle Burns, lectured on reconstruction.¹¹¹ The buzzword 'reconstruction' gave the extra-mural tutorial class system an important stimulus, featuring in a blueprint for an integrated system of publicly-funded post-school education issued by Lloyd George's Ministry of Reconstruction. Although the Report was a victim of conservative economies and was never adopted, its impassioned critique of those social and educational structures which institutionalized inequality inspired many important inter-war initiatives.¹¹²

The young Barbara Adam may well have met Albert Mansbridge when he visited Girton College to talk about the aims and methods of the WEA in her first term there.¹¹³ The origins of the post she was offered twelve years later lay in London tutorial classes outgrowing the administrative structure – the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching, later the Board to Promote the Extension of University Teaching – into which they had been born. The increase in classes and numbers of students brought an ever-expanding challenge of maintaining standards. The plan for a full-time academic organizer was first hatched by H.P. Smith, a keen young socialist who was secretary to the London District of the WEA. His idea was that a full-time university staff member should be recruited to co-ordinate all extra-mural work: to act as guide and organizer; find and vet new tutors (most of whom did the work as a sideline and had other positions in universities); arrange locations and timetables; and supervise the all-important series of annual residential Summer Schools.¹¹⁴ In 1922, G.D.H. Cole was appointed as staff tutor to fill this role. He entirely lived up to Smith's aspirations, exhibiting 'all the qualities of an electric eel'.¹¹⁵ Cole started advanced tutorial classes so that students who had completed three years' work could move on to more advanced study; he set up 'training groups' providing instruction in teaching methods and research so that students could become teachers themselves; he founded a 'Tutors' Association, wrote a *Tutors' Manual* and started a journal, the *Tutors' Bulletin*. He also found the time to fight and win a battle with the University when it proposed to sack a married woman tutor who had gone off with one of her students.¹¹⁶ Eventually Cole penned

a memorandum to argue for the appointment of a proper Director of Studies. He may have had himself in mind, but when Senate passed a resolution to put his plan into action it recommended that the post be offered to Barbara Wootton. This notion was greeted with some consternation among the London tutors, who wanted the post to be advertised as widely as possible. It was Margaret Cole who wrote to the Joint Committee of the University responsible for tutorial classes to say this, which suggests, perhaps, an element of marital collusion.¹¹⁷ However, no-one seems to have been particularly unhappy when Barbara took the post, after considerable misgivings, mostly about leaving Morley College in the lurch after less than two years. It helped in making the decision that the salary was higher, and there was no associated condition, as there had been at Morley College, that any female post-holder would have to resign on marriage. The prospect of a second marriage, ten years on from Jack's death, was one Barbara obviously entertained.

She was embarrassed about her short stay at Morley, but the College Council was sympathetic. It understood that the new post was one for which she had 'unique qualifications of aptitude, experience and sympathy', and did not question the wisdom of her decision to exploit the wider opportunities of the new appointment. She had done a splendid job for the College in a short time and they appreciated it.¹¹⁸ Moreover, they were fortunate in finding another extremely capable ex-Cambridge economics graduate to replace her. Like Barbara Wootton, Eva Hubback had lost her husband to the War but, unlike Barbara, she had three young children to support. For many years, Eva would continue Barbara Wootton's good work in promoting the intellectual and artistic profile of Morley College.¹¹⁹

Barbara began the London extra-mural job in June 1927, almost immediately after her return from Geneva, although she continued to give some economics classes at Morley until the late 1930s. A measure of her new task is contained in the 'Tutorial Classes Statistical Abstract' for the academic session 1928–29, her second year. Fifty-three classes ran that year across Greater London. A total of 1,199 students were enrolled, although only 643 effectively attended. Barbara herself taught a third-year economics class in Westminster, and an advanced class in St Pancras on 'Control of Industry', and she was about to start another there on the 'History of Socialistic Thought'. Other tutors on the list included C.E.M. Joad, a philandering philosopher who had been expelled from the Fabian Society for sexual misbehaviour at a Summer School; Mrs. A. Blanco-White, whose reputation as one of H.G. Wells' many mistresses unfairly exceeded her reputation as a writer and political activist; and W. Milne-Bailey, Barbara's colleague from the Joint Research Department.¹²⁰ Barbara's main memory of these years was one of 'waiting in cold, dark and rain at eleven o'clock at night in deserted and ill-lit suburban railway

stations for trains that did not come'.¹²¹ Tutors often found themselves in dirty offices with broken gas fires hired for the evening from the local trades council, or in schoolrooms full of tiny desks equipped with dreadful lighting – it being assumed that children would only be there in daylight hours.¹²² One of Barbara's predecessor's classes was held in a room sandwiched between a group rehearsing a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, and army recruits learning to play the drum, with only glass partitions dividing these opposed activities.¹²³

She had a secretary and two staff tutors to help her with a considerable and diverse workload: the endless business of finding suitable premises, and dealing with other material matters; the delicate task of choosing the right tutors; and the sometimes impossible, but essential, need to monitor standards. Much time was given over to details: for example, 'Mrs G.D.H. Cole's' request for a map 'in connection with her course on Social History of the World' – a large wall map, preferably showing Europe, Asia and Africa; the request was referred to a committee and the sum of £2.10s allocated for the purpose.¹²⁴ With respect to the choice of tutors, a little brown notebook in the University of London Archives contains some of Barbara's observations. It is a very telling little book. 'Elias, Norbert, D.Phil ... Breslau, Works in Sociol. at LSE'; 'Eysenck H.J., Young refugee ... degree U.C. (?Ist) psych ... No teaching yet. Too young except in emergency'; 'Gellhorn, Peter, Music qualifications v. high, Specialty int. opera. Young, vital, talks too much. Shd be tried at Toynbee only'; 'Meyer, Ernst H., MA Heidelberg, Music and Sociology ... Farfetched pseudo-Marxism. Not suitable'; 'Turner, Marie. Out of wk Classical School mistress. Seeks new line. Hopeless.'¹²⁵ Elias, Eysenck, Gellhorn, and many other names in the little brown book subsequently became very well-known in their own fields.

As always, Barbara Wootton applied her sharp analytic powers to her new occupation. She faced its weaknesses, as well as its strengths. Academic standards could not be the same in extra-mural as in intra-mural classes, since students in the former picked their own tutors and classes without being selected or graded in any way. In tutorial classes, the measure of success was quantitative (the number of students recruited and the amount of grant money received from the Board of Education) rather than qualitative (the standard of the work achieved). Many students embarked on adult education for a reason – occupational and financial advance or sociability – rather than for its own sake. So tutors often had to make up for their students' deficiencies in schooling, teaching grammar and logic at the same time as the substantive topic.¹²⁶ The doctor and politician Charles Hill (later Lord Hill of Luton) was hired in the mid-1920s as a tutor for classes in biology at Morley College and in Hampstead:

I was a young man of twenty one who had shown no outstanding enthusiasm for education, and here were middle-aged men and women, voluntarily attending weekly classes in serious subjects ... A stockbroker's clerk, a bricklayer, an upholsterer were typical of the regulars at Hampstead. This was truly seeking after knowledge for its own sake ... Though essays were difficult to extract from many of them, the questions these adult students asked left one in no doubt as to their intelligent interest in what they heard.

Hill remembers being inspected by Barbara in her role as Director of Tutorial Classes; she 'dropped in from time to time to see how one managed'. 'One of the ablest women of her generation', he knew enough of her academic triumphs to be slightly scared of her.¹²⁷ The problems Hill noted with his biology class are echoed many times in the reports Barbara turned in: her own class of students doing 'Control of Industry' in St Pancras, for instance, were pleasant, eager people, and three or four of them did a good deal of reading, but the results were always disappointing. 'The others never got beyond facile generalizations based on personal experience.'¹²⁸ An uneasy ambivalence lay at the core of the very idea of the University extra-mural tutorial class: a clash between the liberal values of scholarship and the very disparate ambitions and capacities of extra-mural students.

The years from 1922 to 1932 were extremely busy and diversified ones for Barbara. When her appointment to the Colwyn Committee received its avalanche of press interest, the *Everywoman* reporter recorded some of her subject's other extra-curricular activities: Barbara was a part-time lecturer in Social Economics at Bedford College; she was engaged in presenting 'the results of original researches to the world through papers read to the British Association'; she was the London correspondent of an organ called the *Volkszeitung für das Vogtland* (a local newspaper for an area of Germany and Czechoslovakia); and she was a member of the Central and London executives of the WEA, a member of their London Joint Committee and, from 1923 to 1925, editor of the WEA journal *The Highway*, transforming it into a more influential academic product.¹²⁹

Throughout the decade after Barbara left Cambridge, there was also a flood of reviewing: books on economics, and on social subjects, a cluster of books about women workers and family policy, and Cole's *The Next Ten Years in British Social and Economic Policy* – a political tract containing the interesting idea of tackling unemployment through a National Labour Corps of voluntary recruits from the unemployed who would occupy themselves by rehabilitating shabby housing and generally cleaning up the country. Unfortunately, Mr Cole provided few details of how such an 'exceedingly complicated experiment' might work.¹³⁰ G.B. Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* was also treated to the

scrutiny of Barbara's critical eye: 'Mr. Bernard Shaw has gallantly credited the intelligent woman with a large measure of assiduity, leisure, and money beyond what, on his own showing, she is likely to have'.¹³¹

During this period, some of Barbara's own leisure was devoted to a cause that would later occupy much more of it: the promotion of world peace. In 1924 she spoke on 'Economic Problems of Peace and International Collaboration' at an International Democratic Congress for Peace in London presided over by the peace campaigner and later Labour MP Norman Angell. The subtext of the Congress was soliciting the collaboration of Germany and admitting the limitations of the Versailles Peace Treaty. The Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury both sent goodwill messages.¹³² She wrote a paper on 'Banking, Credit and Currency' for *The Book of the Labour Party*,¹³³ and a careful but also passionate analysis of 'The Costs of Unemployment' for *The Labour Magazine*.¹³⁴ The unequal impact of unemployment on women did not escape her; her short paper 'Unemployment Amongst Women', in the suffragist publication *Woman's Year Book*, noted that female unemployment was particularly high in 'masculine' sectors which had welcomed women in wartime and were now trying to get rid of them; there was no proper unemployment benefit for women, many of whom consequently had to fall back on poor relief.¹³⁵ On 10 November 1926, *The Manchester Guardian* reported the presence of about forty young women in two poster parades outside the Houses of Parliament. On one of the posters was inscribed the legend: 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, but Blondes Prefer the Vote'. The young women were members of the Young Suffragist movement, and Barbara was their President. The police ordered the parades to disperse. When one of the young suffragists visited Scotland Yard to find out why, she was told that their posters had exceeded the allowable size, regulations decreed that no woman was permitted to hold up a poster; any poster carried by a woman must be slung from the shoulders; and any poster-carrying woman would be questioned by the police and must give her name and address. None of these requirements applied to men.¹³⁶

Barbara's public activities, especially those connected with the Labour movement, expanded. In 1928, she was one of two Labour trustees appointed to select candidates for travelling scholarships endowed under the will of Sir Arthur Acland to foster international research on labour and co-operative problems.¹³⁷ The same year, her name joined others in what was 'almost a definitive list of the good, the great and the promising of progressive opinion of the time' in the appeal and manifesto which gave birth to a new journal, *The Political Quarterly*.¹³⁸ She started to become a regular broadcaster, giving an intriguing series of talks for students on 'Some Modern Utopias' in 1929.¹³⁹ She covered both well-known utopias

(Samuel Butler, William Morris, H.G. Wells) and *Freeland*, a rather less known description of a practical utopia constructed on sound business principles created by the German economist Theodor Hertzka.¹⁴⁰ This branching out into utopian fiction signalled an aspect of Barbara's character that remained well-hidden most of the time. It surfaced at the Independent Labour Party Summer School in 1926, where she not only talked about nationalizing the banks, but took part in G.D.H. Cole's comic opera about the General Strike. The opera and the Summer School were staged at the magnificent Easton Lodge in Essex, the home of the notorious Daisy, 'the Red' Countess of Warwick, who attempted to make up for a life of extravagant wealth and exuberant liaisons (including one with the Prince of Wales) by converting to socialism and offering her entire estate to the Labour Party, the TUC and London Zoo, in that order. Only the TUC was interested, but after the 1926 General Strike the running costs of Easton Lodge could not be afforded.¹⁴¹ Cole's opera, *The Striker Stricken*, was written in a white-hot mood in forty-eight hours to the music of Gilbert and Sullivan (perhaps absorbed by Cole through the walls of that tutorial class) and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. In an apocalyptic third act, St Peter opens the gates of heaven to Karl Marx, the miners and their allies. This creation was certainly libellous and was never published, although it did go on tour in the Durham coalfields and elsewhere from time to time.¹⁴² Other stars of the 1926 production were C.E.M. Joad, John Strachey (the Labour politician and writer), and Margaret Cole (who played Lady Astor). One imagines that they all had a great deal of much-deserved fun.¹⁴³ The spring of 1930 saw Barbara's first trip to the United States to attend an adult education conference in Chicago, where she was most affected by the lakeside slums.¹⁴⁴ But she did not make this trip on the *Queen Mary*, as she said in her autobiography – an error picked up by an assiduous reader in Edinburgh who pointed out that the maiden voyage of the *Queen Mary* was not until 1934.¹⁴⁵

Given this enormous industry, it was small wonder that some of the press then and later wondered what she did in any of the spare time she probably did not have. The photographs of the period display her as an unsmiling and incurably serious young woman with cropped hair in 1920s style, wearing sombre clothes and either sitting at a desk or staring out from under a tightly fitted low-brimmed hat. Sometimes she is wearing glasses, sometimes not. But what one sees is a woman young in years with an experience and determination of much greater maturity. She would make use of as many opportunities that presented themselves as possible; and she would not waver from her conviction that vision, reason and hard work would make the world a more congenial and more equitable place.

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