

**THE LIFE AND WORK OF
ETHEL CARNIE HOLDSWORTH,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO THE PERIOD 1907 TO 1931.**

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FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY TO THE UNIVERSITY
OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE**

MARCH 2006

ABSTRACT

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth confronted the problems faced by the British working class in the early twentieth century in a fresh way. She believed that writing could change attitudes, and between 1907 and 1931 she endeavoured to practice that conviction through journalism, poetry and fiction in order to make her dream of a fairer society come true. Despite working in Lancashire cotton mills from 1897 when she was eleven, until the end of the First World War, she established a substantial audience for her views in the popular press and through romantic novels, and supported the impact she made in this way by verse, the use of film as propaganda, and involvement in the work of forgotten political groups like the British Citizen Party and the National Union for Combating Fascism.

This study describes Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's experiments in mass communication and it assesses the influence she had on contemporary debates about the meaning of freedom in the 1910s and 1920s. In doing so it reveals new perspectives on the position of women in society, on the attempts of the Labour movement to improve the lot of the working class, and on the fight against fascism. The argument made here is that an understanding of early twentieth century political history is revised and enriched by the incorporation of an unusual working-class voice which is expressed in forms that give Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work an immediacy and difference. It is presented here as a biography because the circumstances she had to

overcome make her effort worthy of celebration, and her achievement a rare and valuable commentary on her times.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Dates refer to year of formation. Links with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth are indicated where these can be substantiated.

BCP British Citizen Party 1915. A pressure group which agitated for socialism and opposed conscription. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth chaired some of its meetings.

BSP British Socialist Party 1911. Formed from ILP and SDF opponents of the Labour Party's alliance with the trade union movement. It opposed the 1914-1918 War, supported the Bolshevik Revolution, and merged with the CPGB in 1920. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth supported Victor Grayson, one of its founders.

CPGB Communist Party of Great Britain 1920. A Marxist party initially dominated by BSP delegates to the Third International. It was subsidised by the USSR and abandoned attempts to affiliate to the Labour Party in 1928.

ILP Independent Labour Party 1893. A socialist party, initially seeking independent labour representation in parliament and affiliated to the Labour Party until 1932. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth joined in 1908.

- LRC Labour Representation Committee 1900. Established to sponsor affiliates in trade union, co-operative and socialist groups and to form a distinct Labour party in parliament. It adopted the name Labour Party in 1906. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth joined about 1927.
- NUCF National Union for Combating Fascism 1924. An anti-fascist pressure group formed by E. Burton Dancy. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth became General Organiser in December 1924.
- NUSEC National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship 1920. The successor to the NUWSS seeking equality of liberties, status and opportunities between men and women.
- NUWSS National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897. A non-militant group which demanded the vote for women on the same terms as for men.
- SDF Social Democratic Federation 1884. Britain's first Marxist political party with a strong branch in Burnley where Ethel Carnie Holdsworth attended meetings. It merged with the BSP in 1911.
- TUC Trades Union Congress 1868. The co-ordinating body of the trade union movement.

- WCA Women's Citizen Association 1917. Encouraged women to participate in local government. It merged with the NUSEC in 1924.
- WEA Workers' Education Association 1903. Founded to provide further education for working people through evening classes and summer schools.
- WIC Women's Industrial Council 1894. A non-socialist group which sought to improve the social, political and economic position of women.
- WIL Women's International League 1915. Established after The Hague Peace Congress to link women from different countries who wanted a negotiated end to the war.
- WLL Women's Labour League 1906. Encouraged activism amongst women sympathetic to the Labour Party.
- WPC Women's Peace Crusade 1917. Encouraged activism amongst women sympathetic to negotiated peace.
- WSPU Women's Social and Political Union 1903. A militant suffrage group which demanded the vote for women on the same terms as for men.

WTM Worker's Theatre Movement 1926. The Agitprop performance arm of the CPGB, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth became a committee member in 1926.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1 - 43
Chapter 1 - To 1914	
1.1. The Biographical Framework	44 - 48
1.2. The Political Context	49 - 65
1.3. <i>The Woman Worker</i> , 1909-1910	65 - 91
1.4. Poetry 1907, 1911 and 1914	91 - 112
1.5. <i>Miss Nobody</i> , 1913	112 - 128
Chapter 2 - From 1914 to 1924	
2.1. The Biographical Framework	129 - 133
2.2. The Political Context	133 - 143
2.3. <i>British Citizen</i> , 1915	143 - 152
2.4. <i>Iron Horses</i> , 1915	152 - 155
2.5. <i>Helen of Four Gates</i> , 1917	155 - 167
2.6. <i>The Taming of Nan</i> , 1920	167 - 177
2.7. <i>The Marriage of Elizabeth</i> , 1920	177 - 185
2.8. <i>The House That Jill Built</i> , 1920	185 - 199
2.9. <i>General Belinda</i> , 1924	199 - 214
Chapter 3 - From 1924 to 1931	
3.1. The Biographical Framework	215 - 217
3.2. The Political Context	217 - 227
3.3. <i>The Clear Light</i> , 1923-1925	227 - 257
3.4. <i>Freedom</i> , 1924-1925	257 - 262

3.5. <i>This Slavery</i> , 1925	262 - 293
3.6 <i>The Quest of the Golden Garter</i> , 1927	293 - 297
3.7. <i>Barbara Dennison</i> , 1929	297 - 309
3.8. <i>Eagles' Crag</i> , 1931	309 - 314

Conclusion	315 - 326
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Appendix

1. Ethel Carnie in 1907	i
2. A Chronology of the Main Events in the Life and Work of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth	ii - v
3. 80, Roe Greave Road, Oswaldtwistle	vi
4. Great Harwood in the 1950s	vii
5. 2, Railway View (Hameldon View) Great Harwood	viii
6. (a). The British School, Barnmeadow Lane, Great Harwood	ix
(b). Memorial Stone of the British School, Great Harwood	ix
7. (a). St.Lawrence Mill, Great Harwood	x
(b). The Co-operative Bakery, St. Lawrence Street, Great Harwood	x
8. The front cover of Ethel Carnie's first collection of verse	xi
9. Ethel Carnie in 1908	xii
10. Windsor Road, Great Harwood	xiii
11. The title page of <i>The Basket of Violets</i>	xiv
12. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth on her wedding day, 3, April 1915	xv
13. 76, Garnet St., Barrowford	xvi

14. Salem School Hall, Nelson	xvii
15. Herbert Jenkins' contract with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth for the publication of <i>Helen of Four Gates</i> and her next six novels	xviii - xxiv
16. The only surviving image from the film of <i>Helen of Four Gates</i>	xxiv
17. Long Tail, Colden	xxv
18. Robertshaw, 29, Slack Top, Heptonstall	xxv
19. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth in 1922	xxvi
20. 'The Carnival of State 1923'	xxvii - xxix
21. The dust jacket of <i>This Slavery</i>	xxx
22. The Leeds and Liverpool canal at Church	xxxi
23. (a). The North View Terrace date stone, Rainhall Road, Barnoldswick	xxxii
(b). Rainhall Road, Barnoldswick	xxxii
24. Alfred Holdsworth	xxxiii - xxxiv
25. Hob Cottage, Stanbury	xxxv
Bibliography	xxxvi - xlviii

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the twentieth century there was a strong protest tradition in north-east Lancashire. It was created by men and women who worked in cotton mills, attended their local Social Democratic Federation(SDP) or Independent Labour Party(ILP) meetings, and became active on behalf of the trade unions or the suffragists. Some of them also became writers, recording their hardships and their hopes for a better future in fiction, autobiography and journalism. A few are well known, amongst them Allen Clarke author of *The Red Flag*, and the radical suffragist Selina Cooper, the subject of Jill Liddington's *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*. However the tradition does not include Ethel Carnie Holdsworth⁽¹⁾ despite the fact that she too was a mill worker, an ILP member and a writer at that time. Indeed, the range of her political and literary involvement, and her influence, exceeded that of many of her better known contemporaries. Yet a detailed study of the life and work of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth does not exist. The aim of this thesis is to provide one.

There are four objectives through which I hope to fulfil my aim - to establish who my subject was and what she did; to show how her thinking developed, focusing especially on her views about capitalism, socialism, feminism, pacifism and fascism; to give her a place amongst

(1) I use the name Ethel Carnie to refer to my subject before her marriage in 1915. After 1915 or when referring to her career as a whole I use Ethel Carnie Holdsworth.

the others of her era who were involved in the same work; and to describe the new features of the social, political and literary scenes that are provided by an investigation of her career between 1907 and 1931.

Liz Stanley argues that conventional biography is an artful enterprise which selects and shapes an unnatural product,(2) and that the process of selection and shaping leads to a subjective outcome.(3) Such biography, 'the spotlight' approach as she calls it, is an intellectual non-starter in Stanley's opinion because it is based on the false premise that we can recover and understand the past as it was experienced and understood by the people who lived it.(4) She advocates 'the kaleidoscope' approach instead. This acknowledges the different configurations the subject's life takes on with each new examination of the elements within it, and the possibility of coming nearer the truth if social conditioning factors such as gender, race, class and age are recognised as influences on the biographer as well as the subject.(5)

Whilst I have not used all aspects of Stanley's rigorous framework, I have employed the same techniques of selection and interpretation as she did as editor of Hannah Cullwick's diaries,(6) and with similar implications. Amongst these are the admission of the complexity of my

(2) Stanley, L., *The Auto/Biographical I : The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002) pp. 3 – 4.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.6.

(4) *Ibid.*, p.7.

(5) *Ibid.*

(6) Stanley, L., (ed.), *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick* (Virago, London, 1984).

subject's life and the avoidance of reducing it to an indisputable base line,⁽⁷⁾ and the recognition of conflicting evidence and inconsistency in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's life and work. I also acknowledge that alternative interpretations may be made by others from a different standpoint, using different sources, at a different time.

The principal source I have used to prepare the thesis is Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's writing - her poetry, her journalism and her fiction. She wrote three volumes of verse before the First World War. Between 1909 and 1910 she contributed leading articles and essays to Robert Blatchford's *The Woman Worker*, and from 1923 to 1925 she published her own paper, *The Clear Light*. Her journalism also appeared in a variety of other socialist papers in the 1910s and 1920s, including *The Co-operative News* and *Freedom*. Between 1913 and 1931 she wrote ten novels, and several long stories were serialised in magazines during the same period.

As well as her own work I have considered what contemporary reviewers thought of it, the views of more recent critics who have examined her output, and the comments of those who have written about relevant aspects of the period during which she lived. Finally I have used archival material, mainly from the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, and oral testimony of those who knew her.

My use of these sources has been determined by the almost complete absence of personal papers and pertinent memoirs. The

⁽⁷⁾ Stanley, L., *The Auto/Biographical I*, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

small Salford archive and the memories of a few relatives and acquaintances provide only a precarious framework for a biography. The substance to enable it to stand has been supplied by her writing. Much can be learnt of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's opinions, and something of her day to day life, from her journalism, for her letters and articles appeared in the press throughout the period 1907 to 1931. However, her main journalistic activity was confined to the years 1909 to 1910 when she was on the staff of *The Woman Worker*, and 1923 to 1925 when she co-wrote *The Clear Light*. Although *The Woman Worker* had a circulation of about 30,000 a week, *The Clear Light* reached a maximum of only 5,000 a month, so it is probable that more people read her fiction than her journalism, and it is certain that they did in the period 1913 to 1923 when imaginative writing made up the bulk of her production. Because of this I have examined her poetry and her novels for the biographical evidence they provide. This approach, I will argue, allows a fuller picture to emerge of periods of her life about which we otherwise know little, and supports much of what is known of her thoughts and her actions from her journalism.

The value of imaginative writing to the biographer has been acknowledged by scholars not faced by a paucity of other sources. Isabella Ford left few personal papers but June Hannam was able to draw on material generated by Ford's links with trade union, suffrage and political organisations to overcome this difficulty. However Ford wrote fiction too, and evidence from this was also incorporated into

Hannam's biography.⁽⁸⁾ Dave Russell also sees the potential of novels to supplement the historical record. In his discussion of northern writers and the impact of their work on the way their region is perceived, he uses the expression 'autobiographically inflected fictions'.⁽⁹⁾ He is referring specifically to David Storey, Stan Barstow and Sid Chaplin, but the term applies equally well to the poems and novels of my subject. Liz Stanley sees much autobiography in Virginia Woolf's fiction as well as in her literary criticism and essays,⁽¹⁰⁾ and Carolyn Steedman regrets the marginality of working-class fiction which has led to stereotypical interpretations that lack a psychoanalytical perspective.⁽¹¹⁾

The opinions of these critics have encouraged me to use Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's literary work in this study for what it says about the author as well as what it says about contemporary affairs, but ultimately I have done so because she herself claimed it expressed her convictions.⁽¹²⁾ I have, however, always sought confirmation of the views carried in her fiction in her polemical writing, using each type of source as a support for the other.

Using this approach allows me to see autobiography as well as

⁽⁸⁾ Hannam, J., 'Usually Neglected in Standard Histories: Some issues in Working on the Life of Isabella Ford 1855-1914', in Farran, D., Scott, S., and Stanley, L., (eds.), *Writing Feminist Biography* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986).

⁽⁹⁾ Russell, D., *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004) p.95.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Stanley, L., *The Auto/Biographical I*, *op.cit.*, p. 248.

⁽¹¹⁾ Steedman, C., *Landscape for a Good Woman: a story of two lives* (Virago, London, 1989) p.22.

⁽¹²⁾ See *Women Folk*, 23 May 1910, p.163. Here Ethel Carnie criticises writing which merely entertains and calls for it to make people think by offering them ideas.

poetry in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's pre-1914 verse collections. The importance of freedom to her vision is more marked in her verse than in her journalism,⁽¹³⁾ as is the nature of her personal religion.⁽¹⁴⁾ We also get a stronger sense of her concern for the weak and her anger at the burden women, especially mothers, had to bear from the poems, and a vulnerability not apparent in the confident voice of the magazine writer is evident in them. They are full of doubt, not of her commitment to the cause but of her ability to ensure its success.⁽¹⁵⁾ Just as it illuminates her ideas, her poetry also casts light on the otherwise unclear circumstances of the quarrel with Blatchford that ended her association with *The Woman Worker*, and on her response to working in London.⁽¹⁶⁾

Her novels can be used in the same way. For example, not only are her views on marriage, frequently dealt with in her journalism, clarified by reading *Barbara Dennison*, but her feelings about the failure of her own marriage are indicated too. Indeed this novel and the long story *All On Her Own* are our only sources of information on that matter. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's hatred of capitalism is well established by her articles in *The Woman Worker*, but her novels sometimes illustrate the nature of this hatred in a way not found in the journalism. *Miss Nobody*, for example, adds to our understanding of her political ideas because it shows how capitalism overturns

(13) See for example 'Freedom', in *Songs of a Factory Girl*, p.49.

(14) See for example 'Civilisation', in *Voices of Womanhood*, p.78.

(15) See for example 'Think Not When Men Smile', in *Rhymes from the Factory*, p.86.

(16) See for example 'A Crying Child in London', in *Songs of a Factory Girl*, p.326, and 'Knowledge', in *Voices of Womanhood*, p.88.

eternal truths by scorning virtue as weakness and praising vice as strength.⁽¹⁷⁾ Similarly the role of domestic service and trade unions in her critique of capitalism can be better understood from *General Belinda* and *This Slavery* respectively, than they can from other sources.

Using both her journalism and her fiction as joint keys to her life story it is possible to claim that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth wrote mainly for working-class women. Before any of her work was published she had distributed hand written copies of her poems in the mills of Great Harwood.⁽¹⁸⁾ It was in working-class magazines like *The Wheatsheaf* that her early short stories were published, and in working-class papers like *Sunday Worker* that her latest novels were reviewed. All of her fiction was published in cheap editions, indeed *This Slavery* was called 'for working-class readers at something like a working-class price'.⁽¹⁹⁾ Her contributions to *The Woman Worker* were aimed at working-class women. The subject matter was social and political injustice and her stated objective was to suggest ways women could overcome it. The readers' letters pages of *The Woman Worker* confirm the gratitude of working-class women for her efforts, for example a factory girl wrote to say how much she looked forward to Wednesdays because that was when the paper came out.⁽²⁰⁾ The principal characters in her novels were always working-class women.

(17) Carnie, E., *Miss Nobody* (Methuen, London, 1913) p.156.

(18) *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, pp.998-999; and oral evidence of Brenda Shorrocks to Roger Smalley, 10 May 1993.

(19) *The Plebs*, October 1925, p.408.

(20) *The Woman Worker*, 29 December 1909, p.578.

It is difficult to establish how successful Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was in reaching her target audience, but her publishing history indicates that her imaginative work was issued at regular intervals – in 1907, 1911, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1920, 1924, 1925, 1927, 1929 and 1931. Sales figures are only available for *Helen of Four Gates* (1917) – over 33,000 copies were bought – but Herbert Jenkins thought her early reception good enough to offer her a six book contract, and the Socialist Sunday School authorities put her poetry in their libraries. In the early 1930's Skipton Public Library held a complete set of her work, (21) and others must have done so. In 1925, 25,000,000 books were exchanged at Boot's circulating library.(22) Perhaps some of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's were amongst them or amongst the stock carried by Day's or Mudie's, rival libraries with big turnovers at the time.

Different problems have hampered the application of my methodology to my subject's fiction.(23) The novels have been out of print for years. Second hand copies are rare, and none of the copyright libraries holds a complete set. Those stories which were

(21) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 26 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

(22) Beauman, N., *A Very Great Profession* (Virago, London, 1983) p.11.

(23) A surprising number of likely avenues of enquiry proved fruitless. For example the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, the Fawcett Library and the Marx Memorial Library have no references to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth in their indexes. The Women's Labour League material and the minutes of the Standing Joint Committee on Industrial Women's Organisations at the Archive Centre of the National Museum of Labour History are equally barren, as is the Working Class Movement Library's archive on the National Council for Equal Citizenship. The columns of Wilfred Wellock's *New Crusader*, the paper of the Committee for the Promotion of Pacifism, started in 1916 in Nelson and edited by Theodora Wilson Wilson contain nothing by or about Ethel Carnie Holdsworth even though she lived in Nelson then, and, as *British Citizen* proves, was a committed pacifist campaigner. The absence of her name from these sources at least supports my contention that she was a maverick who avoided working with established groups even when it would have been easy for to do so.

serialised in newspapers but never published in book form are even more elusive. An example is *Down Poverty Street* (1922). The title suggests it might have something significant to say about the author's thinking on the need for social reform, but I have not been able to track it down.

Other sources also throw up difficulties. Contemporary material about her life and work is limited to a handful of newspaper and magazine reviews,⁽²⁴⁾ interviews⁽²⁵⁾ and character sketches,⁽²⁶⁾ and these mainly concern her breakthrough into journalism. Her first published poem, 'The Bookworm' was noticed several times and the second edition of *Rhymes from the Factory* was reviewed by Keighley Snowden,⁽²⁷⁾ but although the titles of *Songs of a Factory Girl* and *Voices of Womanhood* were sometimes mentioned in the press, the poems themselves were never examined. Apart from *Helen of Four Gates* and *This Slavery* her novels were not widely reviewed.

Even the 1987 interview with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's daughter Margaret is of limited value because it refers to only a few aspects of her mother's work and ideas, and to none of her poems or novels. It is also prone to error, for example, she remembers the 1915 Nelson riot incorrectly, describing it as the result of a suffragette rather than an anti-conscription meeting.⁽²⁸⁾

(24) See for example 'Ethel Carnie's New Book', a review of *Songs of a Factory Girl* in *Blackburn Times*, 15 April 1911, p.7.

(25) See for example 'Ex-Mill Girl Who Became Literary Celebrity', in *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April 1932, p.11.

(26) See for example 'A Lancashire Fairy' in *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p. 155.

(27) *The Woman Worker*, 3 July 1908, p.135.

(28) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, *op.cit.*

Nevertheless the sources are sufficiently robust. They have enabled me to write a biography and fill a gap in the story of early twentieth century protest. I argue that it is the biography of an activist, but the sense I attribute to this term needs clarification, for I use it to describe all her efforts to make socialists and create a better world. Her programme for achieving this was, in some respects, conventional. Articles promoting her ideas appeared in the Labour movement and socialist press as well as in local newspapers; she spoke on behalf of the British Citizen Party in opposition to war and conscription; and she distributed party literature and helped to organise fund raising events for the ILP. However her programme took unconventional forms as well. It was often launched from an independent position on the political left as poetry, fiction or film, and was issued in her own newspaper, *The Clear Light*, between 1923 and 1925. I refer to this variety of communication strategies as her propaganda style, and try to show how she used each aspect of it to promote her aim. For example how she campaigned for a revision of marriage law in the novel *Barbara Dennison* and the film of *Helen of Four Gates*; how she pressed the government to change the relationship between employer and employee in both fiction, for example *The Taming of Nan*, and polemical articles in *The Woman Worker*; how she anticipated the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship's policy of welfare reform to empower mothers in her poetry, and supported it in her novel *The House That Jill Built*; how she

fought fascism by converting *The Clear Light* into the mouthpiece of the National Union for Combating Fascism, and became that group's organising officer.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's propaganda style represents perhaps the only female working-class voice of the period to offer a perspective on the contemporary social and political scene in such a distinctive way, and although it was the voice of a propagandist, that term does less than justice to her achievement. Because of this I refer to her as an activist as well. She saw her imaginative writing as a major component of her activism, with perhaps a greater potential for fulfilling her aims than her journalism or her involvement in party or pressure group work. This suggests that she did not distinguish between propaganda and activism, the one complemented the other as she combined established methods with new ones in an innovative approach towards contemporary problems.

I compare Ethel Carnie Holdsworth with other working-class women who became socialist and feminist activists at relevant points in the thesis, for example to indicate the lack of contact between them and the differences in their propaganda styles. By contrast, although I have no proof they ever met, there are striking similarities in the lives of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and Hannah Mitchell which help to locate her in the north east Lancashire protest tradition.⁽²⁹⁾ Ethel Carnie

(29) Although born in Derbyshire Hannah Mitchell ran away from home at the age of fourteen to work in north east Lancashire as a domestic servant and dressmaker. See Mitchell, H., *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel* (Virago, London, 1984) pp.54-75.

Holdsworth received little formal education, Hannah Mitchell virtually none, but both were committed autodidacts who used their learning to escape drudgery. For Mitchell this drudgery was the sort of women's farm work that Holdsworth describes in *Miss Nobody* and *Helen of Four Gates*, and domestic service, the subject of *General Belinda*. Both women were influenced by Robert Blatchford and the Clarion Movement and both joined the ILP and the Co-operative Movement. These links brought them into contact with socialist public speakers and they became effective public speakers themselves.

They had a similar attitude towards marriage considering themselves as equal partners in their relationships, and the form they chose for their weddings broke with custom. Sandra Stanley Holton suggests that Mitchell's decision to wear a simple grey frock, to get married on the weekly half day holiday she had recently helped shop workers to win, and to dispense with a honeymoon was not only an assertion of her independence and autonomy, but a deliberate political act which reflected the new possibilities there were for women in marriage in 1895.⁽³⁰⁾ But at least the wedding was in church and the guests got refreshments. Twenty years later Holdsworth rejected marriage conventions more thoroughly, keeping even her registry office ceremony a secret, and dispensing with a reception as well as a honeymoon.⁽³¹⁾ Like Holdsworth, Mitchell saw birth control as an

⁽³⁰⁾ Holton, S.S., *Suffrage Days : Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Routledge, London, 1996) pp.93-94.

⁽³¹⁾ *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915, p.7.

important part of the solution to working-class poverty.⁽³²⁾ She had only one child, although she adopted another, Holdsworth had two.

Both women favoured adult rather than equal suffrage, but Mitchell joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a move Holton believes reflected her disillusion with the ILP's luke-warm attitude towards votes for women and her admiration of WSPU leaders like the Pankhursts and Annie Kenney.⁽³³⁾ But whilst Holdsworth, too, admired Annie Kenney⁽³⁴⁾ she disliked WSPU militancy. Mitchell saw the coincidence of the WSPU Free Trade Hall protest in 1905 with the site of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 as the continuation of the long struggle for the vote.⁽³⁵⁾ For Holdsworth the same site represented a wider struggle against class and gender oppression, and against fascism, which she described in her poem 'The Carnival of State 1923'.⁽³⁶⁾

After the suffrage campaign ended Mitchell criticised the creation of Labour Party women's sections. She stayed in the ILP and worked for the cause of complete equality for women by contesting local government elections. As a municipal councillor in Manchester from 1923 to 1935 she did much to improve housing, create provision of public laundries and libraries, and she became a Justice of the Peace. Holdsworth never tried for public office. During the same period she

⁽³²⁾ Mitchell, H., *op.cit.*, p.102.

⁽³³⁾ Holton, S.S., *op.cit.*, p.109.

⁽³⁴⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p.155.

⁽³⁵⁾ Mitchell, H., *op.cit.*, p.139.

⁽³⁶⁾ See Appendix 20.

focused on fighting fascism and helping Soviet dissidents, although she continued to promote social justice and marriage reform through her writing as well, but whereas Mitchell's autobiography has become a key text in the major revision that has occurred in the study of early twentieth century protest, Holdsworth's journalism and fiction is now forgotten.

I have judged a chronological framework to be appropriate to address that omission. By assessing her work in the order of its production I have identified the pattern of her thought, and by setting this beside the events in her personal life and the prevailing political situation I have tried to explain its development. My approach however has been historical. Although I have used literary sources I have not attempted to analyse them as literature, and I have engaged with those who have investigated her work from the standpoint of literary studies or cultural theory only when their comments have biographical implications.

It seems to me that there were three phases to her activism. The first, to 1914, reflects the Marxist and ethical socialist ideas she came across at SDF and ILP meetings, and the compassionate idealism of a young woman who believed the world could be changed now, and peacefully. The second, from 1914 to 1924 shows a widening of her political concerns and a hardening of her views about how they could be achieved. The third, after 1924, represents her conviction that

society would only be improved if the state was overthrown, by force if necessary.

Because of this I have presented my findings in three long chapters corresponding to these three phases, although each is sub-divided into individual studies of her writing arranged according to date of publication. This mixes the various aspects of her activism haphazardly, but that was how she worked. A thematic approach would make her seem now a journalist, now a novelist, now a platform speaker, whereas in reality her propaganda style integrated all these forms of protest. She used one to complement and strengthen another - her articles in *British Citizen* to support the anti-conscription rallies, her fictional revolution in *This Slavery* to support the uprising of a citizen army she called for in *The Clear Light*.

In the first chapter I deal with Ethel Carnie's life and work before the Great War. I describe her efforts to get an education after she left school at the age of eleven and show how her ideas first reached an audience. The success of her first volume of verse led to further press exposure and to the conviction that she had the chance to help the oppressed through her writing. I argue that the belief her pen could create social and political change remained her motivating force until the early 1930s, but that in the period covered by this chapter the principal expression of this belief was made through journalism. She made standard socialist propaganda in standard ways, and I maintain that this conventional approach was accompanied by conventional

political affiliation, although I present some evidence for her move to the British Socialist Party in 1911. I also show that by 1913 she was developing a different propaganda style, that she was trying to enlarge her readership by using the popular novel to carry a political message, and that this marked the beginning of a shift in her thinking and her methods.

Chapter 2 covers the period 1914 to 1924. It shows how the war shaped Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's activism by describing her anti-conscription campaign with a group that gets no recognition in studies of pacifism - the British Citizen Party. I argue that after the war she adopted an independent position on the political left and pursued her objectives by using maverick methods dominated now by fiction which bore her vision of a better society, and by experimentation with the propaganda possibilities of film. I show how each of the five novels she wrote during these years helps to chart the way she thought, and how by the early 1920s she was questioning the constitutional route to reform. I argue that by 1923 she changed her propaganda style again in her search for a more effective antidote to capitalism.

Alfred Holdsworth influenced this change. Chapter 3 describes his collaboration with Ethel in the production of *The Clear Light*, a journalistic project made possible by the earnings from her novels. It demonstrates her use of allegory as a propaganda tool to urge social and political change through revolution. I argue here that in 1924 the project was adapted to confront the threat of fascism, and that her

experiences at the hands of early fascist organisations indicate an aspect of the threat hitherto overlooked. This chapter also describes her flirtation with anarchism and the nature of her later fiction. I claim that *This Slavery* (1925) marks the zenith of her fictional achievement, and that although her final three novels use the same formula as her earlier ones and make socio-political points in the same way, they do so with less effect. My coverage of her output continues to 1931, but I argue that she was finished as a significant factor in the story of early twentieth century protest by 1925.

The appendices have been arranged chronologically to support the overall structure of the thesis and to give a visual dimension to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's life and work.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth has virtually disappeared from the early twentieth century political and literary scene.⁽³⁷⁾ Because of this it has been difficult to identify an existing critical literature relevant to

(37) The only attempt to outline her career was made by Frow, E., and Frow, R., 'Ethel Carnie: writer, feminist and socialist', in Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914* (Harvester, Brighton, 1987). They extended the outline to cover the period after 1914 in 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth,' a pamphlet presented to Great Harwood library in 1988, a copy of which is in the Ethel Carnie archive, at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford. Three of her novels have been critically examined. Ashraf, M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain Part II: Prose* (Berlin, 1979) deals with *Miss Nobody*, *This Slavery*, and, briefly, *General Belinda*. Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Harvester, Brighton, 1982) deals with *This Slavery*, and Fox, P., 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Revolt of the Gentle*: Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working Class Women's Writing', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals. British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) deals with *Miss Nobody* and *This Slavery*. Susan Alves has considered some poems from all three volumes of her verse in 'Whilst Working at my Frame, the poetic production of Ethel Carnie', *Victorian Poetry* (Vol.38, No.1, Spring 2000). Kathleen Bell's thoughts on *Voices of Womanhood* are due to be published as *All On Her Own* by Trent Editions, forthcoming.

her life and work. However the following survey covers the few authors who have written directly about her, and others whose remarks have a bearing on the period during which she was active, and which can be applied to her work. The first part of the review relates to her political role, the second to her role as a writer.

Of the scholars who have examined the origins and development of Marxism in Britain, Ross McKibbin is relevant to my subject because of the attention he pays to north east Lancashire in his search for an answer to the question 'why was there no Marxism in Britain?'⁽³⁸⁾ He says that in 1901 Britain, with a huge proletariat, 75% of whom were manual workers, should have been fertile ground for the development of a mass Marxist party. However the structure of the workforce, he adds, must encourage a sense of sameness and collectivity, and in Britain it did not. Early twentieth century industrial organisation was small scale with Lancashire textile workers typically distributed throughout dozens of relatively small factories, and relations between employer and employee were close. According to McKibbin's analysis this situation should have weakened a collective sense of class and discouraged Marxism in Burnley, yet that was precisely where the most successful SDF branch in the north of England developed, and it

(38) Others include: Tsuzuki, C., *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961); Pelling, H., *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880-1900* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1965); Klugmann, J., *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol.1: Formation and Early Years 1919-1924* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968); Kendall, W., *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1969); Levy, C., (ed.), *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987); Crick, M., *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Ryburn, Keele, 1994).

was there that Ethel Carnie's politicisation began.

McKibbin maintains that a successful Marxist party needed a working class without an already established associational culture, so that one could be imposed upon it. This condition, he says, existed in Germany but not in Britain. Some of his reasons why this was the case are convincing - religion fulfilled a quasi-political associational need by giving the middle and working classes shared values, and religion was important in the lives of many early Labour leaders;⁽³⁹⁾ the monarchy was seen as the even handed guarantor of the class neutrality of parliament, the supremacy of which was accepted and the chances of working through it greater, once the franchise was widened;⁽⁴⁰⁾ and real wages were rising, giving the working class access to affordable alternatives to political agitation such as music hall, pigeon fancying and football.⁽⁴¹⁾ However he moves to shakier ground when he links the British sporting tradition to working-class political attitudes. He claims that it would be unthinkable for working people imbued with a sense of fair play to press for new social and political structures.⁽⁴²⁾ Some north-east Lancashire workers may have embraced corinthian values as a result of watching football and cricket but many did not. Indeed late nineteenth and early twentieth century sport in the area was marred by foul play and class tensions. In 1880 fights on the pitch resulted in crowd violence and the abandonment of

(39) McKibbin, R., *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990) pp.714-15.

(40) *Ibid.*, p.18.

(41) *Ibid.*, p.13.

(42) *Ibid.*, p.22.

the match between Blackburn Rovers and Darwen.⁽⁴³⁾ In 1891 ten Rovers players rejected the referee's authority and walked off in a match against Burnley. Blackburn Olympic's 2-1 win over Old Etonians in the 1883 cup final was heralded as a workers' victory over the nobs in the class struggle. Cricket also caused class tension in Blackburn where the East Lancashire team, which was controlled by the mill owning Hornby family, refused to play teams made up of mill workers before 1914.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Local experiences of this sort undermine McKibbin's argument. I do not know what interest Ethel Carnie took in Blackburn sport, but its identification with elitism, discrimination and factionalism can only have fuelled her determination to overthrow capitalism and its associated institutions.

Carl Levy's edited essay collection addresses the appeal of socialism for the educated middle class during the era of the Second International. However it is relevant to my working-class subject because Levy suggests that the early ILP was shaped by publications such as *Labour Leader* and *Clarion*, go-ahead papers which used new American features like stop press, human interest stories and illustrated adverts as well as news and commentary to increase their readerships.⁽⁴⁵⁾ If Levy is correct Ethel Carnie Holdsworth can be said to have influenced the thinking of ILP supporters through her contributions to two Blatchford papers, *Clarion* and *The Woman Worker*.

(43) Beattie, D., *Blackburn. The Development of a Lancashire Cotton Town* (Ryburn, Halifax, 1992) pp.123-124.

(44) *Ibid.*, p.125.

(45) Levy, C., (ed.), *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987) pp.143-150.

Levy does not mention her. It is Joseph Burgess, a Lancashire cotton spinner who edited the *Workman's Times* who best exemplifies the worker-journalist in his opinion. My contention is that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth has a right to be included in the same tradition of Lancashire socialist activists.

Those who have written on the women's movement are strangely silent about Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as well. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris have done a great deal to uncover the part played by Lancashire working -class women in the politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through their work on the radical suffragists.⁽⁴⁶⁾ This group is now accepted as important in the history of the struggle for the vote, which can no longer be seen as dominated by middle-class women like Millicent Fawcett of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies(NUWSS) and Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst of the Women's Social and Political Union(WSPU), as it once was. Liddington and Norris have rescued many working-class activists from obscurity and established them as significant players in feminism in connection with political and social equality, and with welfare provision. Selina Cooper and Ada Nield Chew are prominent amongst them. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is not. Liddington and Norris make no mention of her despite the fact that she was addressing the same issues at the same time in the same area. I can only assume that they were unaware of her work. There can be no other reason why

(46) Liddington, J., and Norris, J., *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Virago, London, 1978), and Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (Virago, London, 1984).

she should be excluded, for reference to her efforts on behalf of political and social justice for women, and for peace, would strengthen their argument that Lancashire was in the vanguard of contemporary protest and that it was characterised by the part played in it by some remarkable working women. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth worked independently rather than through established organisations like the radical suffragists, but she was, nevertheless, one of these women.

Sandra Stanley Holton argues for a redefinition of the term 'suffragist' that avoids the division into militant and constitutional wings favoured by the existing historiographic tradition.⁽⁴⁷⁾ She also rejects the label 'radical' because, she says, it has been applied, confusingly, to both militant WSPU and non-militant NUWSS members.⁽⁴⁸⁾ For Holton militancy embraces not only church burning and hunger striking but peaceful civil disobedience and indeed membership of labour or socialist organisations as well.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Her study highlights the conflict of loyalty felt by many suffragists campaigning for sexual equality at a time when working-class movements were beginning to campaign for independent parliamentary representation, and she pays tribute to the group she calls democratic suffragists,⁽⁵⁰⁾ that is militant and constitutional suffragists who tried to forge an alliance between those whose priority was votes for women and those

(47) Holton, S.S., *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002) p.5.

(48) *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

(49) *Ibid.*

(50) The term was coined by Margaret Llewellyn Davies of the Women's Co-operative Guild. Holton uses it to identify a tendency, not a faction within the suffrage movement, and in this sense it could be applied to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth.

whose priority was a fully independent Labour Party.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth faced this priority dilemma, but unlike Catherine Marshall whose contribution within the democratic suffrage tradition is detailed by Holton, she rejected the idea of forging links with the Labour Party, believing that the political changes she favoured would be more likely through support of the ILP and the British Socialist Party.

A particular issue raised by Holton is the debate about equal or adult suffrage. In 1904 the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) adopted a policy of adult suffrage, ending its previous support of the ILP's preference for equal suffrage. Holton argues that the LRC position was ambiguous, for adult suffrage could mean either universal suffrage with both property and gender qualifications removed, or merely the extension of the vote to all adult males.⁽⁵¹⁾ By 1909 at the latest Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was an unequivocal supporter of adult suffrage in its unfettered universal sense.⁽⁵²⁾ There is no evidence that she considered backing limited suffrage as a first step towards universal suffrage as Ada Nield Chew did, against her natural inclination, because she thought adult suffrage was an unrealistic demand in the face of the Liberal government's intransigence.⁽⁵³⁾

Holton also argues that the efforts of democratic suffragists continued during the First World War despite the wish of some to

⁽⁵¹⁾ Holton, S.S., *op.cit.*, p.54.

⁽⁵²⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 27 October 1909, p.396.

⁽⁵³⁾ Holton, S.S., *op.cit.*, p.60.

concentrate entirely on winning the conflict. She cites Millicent Fawcett's relief work – providing workshops and cost price canteens for unemployed women – as examples of this.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth worked against the war and conscription. She was destitute in 1916⁽⁵⁵⁾ and would have welcomed any relief scheme, but she was an internationalist, out of sympathy with Fawcett's support for the government. However whilst many democratic suffragists followed the lead of Helena Swanwick and Catherine Marshall into the Union of Democratic Control or the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom⁽⁵⁶⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth pursued her pacifism and her internationalism from a separatist position, through the pages of *The Clear Light*.

Holton suggests that New Feminist issues – family allowances, improved housing, birth control – were advanced in the 1920's because democratic suffragists had forced society to recognise both class and gender inequality, although New Feminists, she says, increasingly lost faith in women's ability to alter political life for the benefit of all. ⁽⁵⁷⁾ However Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was amongst those who remained committed to both social and political change, for her early 1920s fiction dealt with welfare issues whilst her mid 1920s journalism advocated revolution.

Martin Pugh refers to Selina Cooper in his analysis of the women's

⁽⁵⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.131.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Oral evidence of Arthur Simm to Roger Smalley, 8 June 1993.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Holton, S.S., *op.cit.* pp.135-138.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.152.

movement in Britain between 1914 and 1959.⁽⁵⁸⁾ She joined the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) in 1918, approving of its new feminist objectives such as equal job opportunities, equal pay, equal rights within marriage and divorce, birth control advice and widows' pensions, and of its parliamentary methods. Pugh says that Selina Cooper admitted that many women in north-east Lancashire could not care less about NUSEC type feminist issues in the 1920s.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Liddington agrees that Selina Cooper had stopped trying to recruit new members to the Nelson branch of the NUSEC by 1923, but she blames lack of interest in Lancashire's problems by the national leadership, and competition from organisations with similar aims like the Women's Freedom League and the Open Door Council, as much as local apathy.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's failure to respond to NUSEC and similar groups was not caused by indifference however, indeed she cared so deeply that she devoted much of her three 1920 novels and *The Clear Light* from 1923 to dealing with NUSEC concerns. She had not lost faith in the issues or in the people as Pugh suggests Selina Cooper had, but in the NUSEC preference for parliamentary methods, for by this time she was a revolutionary anarchist.

However by 1927 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had joined the Labour Party. Pat Thane asks a question relevant to this surprising move -

(58) Pugh, M., *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1992) pp.5, 11, 17, 37, 51, 59 and 154.

(59) *Ibid.*, pp.37 and 51.

(60) Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, *op.cit.*, pp.311-313.

why did some women choose to work for feminist objectives within a mixed sex organisation, the Labour Party, which had other goals as well as feminist ones? Her answer is that they believed these objectives could best be achieved through political means, and exclusively female political parties had no chance of gaining political power.⁽⁶¹⁾ Applied to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, the significance of the question is that the failure of her separatist experience with *The Clear Light* convinced her that the only way to achieve any of her aims was through a party which had a realistic hope of office. The growing strength of the Labour Party Women's Sections which had a membership of 120,000 in 1923 and branches in all the towns of north-east Lancashire and west Yorkshire, and their advocacy of easier divorce, maternity hospitals, and equal rights, opportunities, and status wherever they were lacking, endorsed much of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's own work. She was merely echoing, less effectively, what better organised groups were saying. Her move into the mainstream was also prompted by the Labour Party's recognition of domestic work as equal to other types of work. This sort of feminist issue had clearly become more important to her, and by 1927 it was as 'author and home worker' that she described herself.⁽⁶²⁾

June Hannam and Karen Hunt are the only historians I can be sure know anything of the life and work of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth.

(61) Thane, P., 'The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism 1906-1945', in Smith, H.L., (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1990) p.134.

(62) *Labour Who's Who* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1927) p.105.

This is because they name her in their recent study of the ways socialist women developed political identities and practised their politics.⁽⁶³⁾ Hannam and Hunt say that socialist pioneers believed that their critique of capitalism and their vision of a new society built on justice, liberty and equality simply needed to be communicated to people for the scales to fall from their eyes. Communication meant public meetings, writing pamphlets and books and organising political parties, that is to say making socialist propaganda in whatever form the working class might find accessible. In the authors' opinions contemporary activists believed that using such propaganda to convert people to socialism was more important than affiliating them to particular socialist groups, at least until the ILP and SDF polarised in the early 1900s.⁽⁶⁴⁾ This created the common practice of individuals belonging to several different groups at the same time, or moving from one group to another depending on the positions the groups adopted on the issues of the day.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is mentioned by Hannam and Hunt in connection with this propaganda,⁽⁶⁵⁾ but her work is not discussed. The authors call her 'a former mill worker' and bracket her with middle-class propagandists like Isabella Ford, Katharine Bruce Glasier, Margaret McMillan and Dora Montefiore. They show how the party political history of these and other socialist women changed over

⁽⁶³⁾ Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s* (Routledge, London, 2002).

⁽⁶⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.61

time. For example Katharine Bruce Glasier affiliated to the ILP and later moved into the WLL, Dora Montefiore started in the SDF and went on to join the WSPU, whilst Margaret Bondfield was a member of the SDF and the ILP before she joined the Labour Party. Their conclusion is that socialist women cannot be pigeon-holed. What it meant to be a socialist woman differed from one socialist woman to the next. Hannam and Hunt do not aim to produce a patchwork of individual stories but to reflect on what the key issues were for socialist women, what caused conflict between them, and why and how this changed over time.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Nevertheless they use many individual stories to establish what the key issues and the problems associated with them were. I hope that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's story will also support their aim, for whilst she is quite different from any of the examples they use, she fits the process of party identification and re-negotiation over time with which they are concerned.

Historians of the origins of fascism in Britain have dismissed it as of little importance in the 1920s.⁽⁶⁷⁾ None but Dave Renton and Nigel Copsey acknowledge the existence of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's National Union for Combating Fascism(NUCF), and even they give no details of its organisation or activities. As a result they imply that there

(66) *Ibid.*, p.12.

(67) See for example: Benewick, R., *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (Allen Lane, London, 1972); Thurlow, R., *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918-1985* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987); Griffiths, R., *Patriotism Perverted* (Constable, London, 1998); Gottlieb, J., *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement 1923-1945* (I.B.Tauris, London, 2000); Linehan, T., *British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000); Pugh, M., *Hurrah for the Blackshirts! Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2005).

was no group co-ordinating anti-fascist activities in the 1920s.⁽⁶⁸⁾ I refute this implication and describe in detail Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's anti-fascist campaign in 1924 and 1925. The evidence of *The Clear Light* suggests that fascism was, perhaps, a greater menace in the 1920s that has been hitherto recognised. Certainly Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed it required a tough response and the NUCF was created to co-ordinate that response nationally. It was an organisation that Rotha Lintorn Orman and the British Fascisti did their best to suppress, but whilst Orman and the Fascisti feature in all histories of fascism, the struggle with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and the NUCF does not. The existence of that struggle changes our understanding of the nature of fascist activity in the 1920s and of the anti-fascist response to it.

For Ethel Carnie Holdsworth to have been overlooked in the analysis of early twentieth century radical politics is understandable. She held no official position in a political party, as, for example Margaret Bondfield did. Unlike Margaret MacDonald she did not marry an influential man. By contrast with, say, Millicent Fawcett she left no diary or biographical papers for historians to work on. She was not amongst the working-class women who published accounts of their careers later in life.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Few women without links like these,

(68) Renton, D., *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 2000) p.16. Copsey, N., *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 2000) p.7.

(69) See, for example, Kenney, A., *Memories of a Militant* (Edward Arnold, London, 1924).

especially if they were working-class women, could expect to make an indelible mark on the historical record, and aspects of her activism, including her journalism have consequently been ignored. Some of her poems and novels however, have received more attention.

In her analysis of the style of *Voices of Womanhood* Kathleen Bell makes a link between Ethel Carnie's work and the modernist mainstream from which her old fashioned style seems to separate her.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Bell places Ethel Carnie close to, but apart from, modernism, but she believes that her aesthetics, her language and her message took her closer to her readers than did the verse of some of the modernist mainstream. Susan Alves, who considers a larger selection of poems from all three of Ethel Carnie's volumes (although most are from *Voices of Womanhood*), also identifies modernist features in her style, alongside Victorian ones. She argues that the poems show Ethel Carnie's 'anxiety over gender roles and the social position of white working-class women', indeed she goes so far as to say that Ethel Carnie reclaims subjects such as fallen women, poverty and motherhood, which had become the preserve of middle-class writers, as working-class concerns through her poetry.⁽⁷¹⁾ Using 'The Children of the Poor', 'The Mother', 'Weariness', and 'A Modern Magdalen' her critique shows how well and how sympathetically Ethel Carnie wrote about women like these.

(70) 'The Speech of a Silent Woman : Ethel Carnie's Poems of 1914', a paper given by Kathleen Bell at the Modernist Cultures Conference, Birmingham, 25-28 September 2003.

(71) Alves, S., 'Whilst Working at My Frame, the poetic production of Ethel Carnie', *Victorian Poetry* (Vol.38, No.1, Spring 2000) p.77.

However Alves has a poor knowledge of Ethel Carnie's background. Presumably following Pamela Fox she calls Ethel Carnie a south Lancashire mill girl and she does not know when she died,⁽⁷²⁾ and following Edmund and Ruth Frow she says Ethel Carnie's father died in 1910 when in fact he was still alive in 1928.⁽⁷³⁾ She also states that Ethel Carnie's three volumes of verse preceded her novels, despite the publication of *Miss Nobody* in 1913, the year before *Voices of Womanhood*. This is not a strong position from which to assert, as Alves does, that the poems tell us little of Ethel Carnie's life.⁽⁷⁴⁾ They are, in fact, helpful in this respect.

But, more seriously, it is the beliefs of the poet in relation to race that Alves misrepresents. She says there is 'racial hierarchy, racial exclusion and racial vulnerability' in Ethel Carnie's poetry, although she admits this is an assumption in most cases, being stated specifically only in 'Woman' which employs the image:

'Fair woman! With skin made of roses and milk
With ivy-white hands for embroidering silk.'

This is no more than part of a tribute to women which uses a medieval, chivalric setting and which goes on to refer to Joan of Arc in similar terms, but Alves says it 'epitomises Ethel Carnie's attitude towards race.'⁽⁷⁵⁾ In justification Alves says 'Woman' was written at a time(1908) of rising ethnic and racial unrest amongst the working

⁽⁷²⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁷³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.90.

class who did not consider Jews and Irish to be white, and that Ethel Carnie's implicit racism is supported by her association with Robert Blatchford who 'identified Jews and other foreigners as threats' to the working class.⁽⁷⁶⁾ But Ethel Carnie made an impassioned defense of the Jews after the 1909 Bucharest pogrom in *The Woman Worker*,⁽⁷⁷⁾ and she was one of the first to warn of the fascist threat in the early 1920s. It is ironic that such a person should be labelled a racist, and Alves produces no better evidence from Ethel Carnie's poems, and none from her pieces in *The Woman Worker* to make her case. Ethel Carnie's inclusive humanity is frequently demonstrated in this thesis. She was not without prejudice, but it was class and gender, not ethnically based.

H. Gustav Klaus describes an alternative tradition to modernism in the 1920s which he calls 'socialist literary endeavour' influenced by the Russian Revolution, the post-war upheavals in Britain, and William Morris.⁽⁷⁸⁾ The writers he puts into this tradition and the novels he considers are James Welsh (*The Underworld*), H.R.Barbour (*Against the Red Sky*), Mary Hamilton (*Follow My Leader*) and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth (*This Slavery*). Useful as this is as a piece of contextualisation, Klaus gives only a brief synopsis of the plot of *This Slavery*. His purpose is not to make a close analysis of the titles he chooses but to raise the profile of a genre, that is the socialist novel, in a decade from which it had disappeared. Nevertheless he says enough

(76) *Ibid.*, p.91.

(77) *The Woman Worker*, 1 September 1909, p.207.

(78) Klaus,H.G.,(ed.), *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Harvester, Brighton, 1982) p.89.

to upset Maroula Joannou who criticises Klaus for representing the novels he deals with as socialist texts concerned with class. Joannou thinks this reflects the Labour movement's assumptions about the subordination of women and is, therefore, covertly misogynistic. She says that Klaus overvalues the working-class cult of masculinity, confusing it with working-class militancy, and so marginalises or excludes women by giving primacy to the male rather than the female experience.⁽⁷⁹⁾ It seems harsh of Joannou to build an anti-feminist case against Klaus on his very brief treatment of selected novels, but it is true that he does little to celebrate the pivotal role of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's two working-class heroines in *This Slavery*, or to promote the author as a feminist, concerned with gender as well as class. However to see Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as a feminist and not a socialist writer is unfair, for she was both. Her journalism sometimes subsumed her feminism beneath her socialism by representing socialism as an ultimate panacea which would cure all society's ills, including discrimination against women, but her fiction always makes it clear that she had aspirations specifically for women as well as more generally for mankind.

Two chapters in Klaus' later edited collection on socialist fiction⁽⁸⁰⁾ provide greater detail about Lancashire writers. Paul Salveson's chapter on 'the Lancashire school' considers writers about labour who lived in Lancashire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

⁷⁹⁾ Joannou, M., *Ladies Please Don't Smash These Windows: Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918-38* (Berg, Oxford, 1995) p.56.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914* (Harvester, Brighton, 1987).

whose work, in his view, challenged the reputation of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* as 'the only novel of any importance by a working-class socialist before the First World War'.⁽⁸¹⁾ The characteristics of these writers, he says, were that they had a background in ILP ethical socialism and looked optimistically to a socialist future; that they were mill workers as well as writers who depicted Lancashire working-class life realistically; that they used socialists as their main characters; and that they included romance themes in their plots.⁽⁸²⁾ The leader of Salveson's 'school' is the Bolton journalist Allen Clarke, who is recognised in a wider context by David Trotter (see p. 39 below). Others in the group are Arthur Laycock, John Tamlyn, Fred Plant, James Haslam and Peter Lee. Salveson says they represent 'an unprecedented flowering of working-class socialist literature' and had a strong impact on their Lancashire readers. They all tackled the same themes from the same standpoint and in the same way as Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, for example Clarke describes a May Day socialist meeting on Pendle Hill, the setting for her *Helen of Four Gates*, in *The Red Flag*,⁽⁸³⁾ and he uses a revolutionary heroine in *The Knobstick*, as she does in *This Slavery*. Furthermore, as Teddy Ashton, editor of *Fellowship*, Clarke had reviewed her early poetry enthusiastically.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Nevertheless

⁽⁸¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁽⁸²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.200.

⁽⁸³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.184.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ *Fellowship*, an article entitled 'Factories and Poetry', 9 August 1907.

Salveson has omitted her from the group.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The concept of a Lancashire school of socialist worker-writers needs redefinition, for Ethel Carnie Holdsworth has all the right credentials to be considered a part of it and her inclusion changes the nature of the 'school'. It should not, therefore, be thought of as exclusively male nor as a pre-war movement confined to just a Lancashire readership. Clarke was still writing after 1914⁽⁸⁶⁾ and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth continued to do so till 1931. Both reached audiences beyond Lancashire.

Edmund and Ruth Frow, who wrote chapter 11 for *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914*, entitled it 'Ethel Carnie : writer, feminist and socialist'. It is their outline of her life and their comments on *Miss Nobody* that triggered this research. They make no attempt to link Ethel Carnie with Salveson's Lancashire school because their brief extended only to 1914, by which date, they consider, she was still an apprentice writer. The same date prevents them commenting on any of her novels other than *Miss Nobody*. They judge this to be a stylistically flawed but passionate work which satisfied a need amongst class conscious workers for fictional representations of their own experiences from a working-class point of view.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Joannou asserts that David Smith, like Klaus, ignores an important aspect of women's fiction, the romance element. She refers to Ellen

(85) There is evidence that Salveson considered including Ethel Carnie Holdsworth but could not locate enough of her work from which to make a judgement. See letter from Arthur Simm to Paul Salveson, 18 September 1985, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

(86) For example *Windmill Land*, 1916.

(87) Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914*, *op.cit.*, p.265.

Wilkinson's *Clash*, but her comments are just as relevant to the novels of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth. Joannou says Smith implies 'that romance somehow divests the novel of its political content' and is, to him, no more than a distraction from more serious matters which betrays his lack of understanding of the crucial importance of sexual politics in the lives of ordinary women.⁽⁸⁸⁾

To be fair to Smith he claims only to deal with 'novels which include as one of their primary purposes the advocacy of a species of Socialism',⁽⁸⁹⁾ but Joannou is right, feminist socialism is not amongst them. Smith defines the species of socialism he is dealing with as characterised by two factors - it has most relevance to the working class, and its moral and economic ends are the elimination of social injustice by the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.⁽⁹⁰⁾ This definition does not exclude women as socialists of course, but to all intents and purposes Smith's book eliminates women as feminists. He says he deliberately rejects novels of social protest which offer no radical alternative and are, therefore, not socialist propaganda, like Walter Greenwood's *Love On The Dole*. He adds that his selection has also been determined by a preference for novels which convey the author's conviction and which are satisfactory as works of art. However he makes no reference to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, a working-class writer whose novels are packed

(88) Joannou, M., *op.cit.*, pp.57-58.

(89) Smith, D., *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth Century British Novel* (Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1978) p.1.

(90) *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

with conviction, socialist propaganda, and, at least in some cases, literary merit. Was this because he did not like her work or because he was unaware of it? The evidence suggests he should have known of it. His preparation for the book included correspondence with William Holt, a friend of the Holdsworths, and Holt mentions this friendship in *I Haven't Unpacked* which is one of the titles Smith includes in his survey.⁽⁹¹⁾

What Smith is really interested in is the identification of novels which are both works of art and propaganda. Of over 170 books which he considers, just twenty of which were written by women, he is only prepared to apply that accolade to *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Robert Tressall,⁽⁹²⁾ and Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*.⁽⁹³⁾ I am not suggesting that this pair should be joined by any of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's novels, but, with Joannou, I regret that such a wide review of the literature of the period should ignore work that matches his stated criteria and would have enabled him better to acknowledge the feminist dimension in the genre.

In Peter Keating's opinion, fiction before 1914 failed 'to come to terms in any convincing way with either modern politics or working-class life.'⁽⁹⁴⁾ David Trotter agrees, maintaining that little fiction of significance concerning the working-class predicament had been

(91) *Ibid.*, p.169.

(92) The original 1914 edited version of the book was published with the author's name spelt thus. The full text, which was not published till 1955, uses the spelling Tressell.

(93) Smith, D., *op.cit.*, p.155.

(94) Keating, P., *The Haunted Study : A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1989) p.311.

written before the First World War and that working-class women did not feature in it as rebels.⁽⁹⁵⁾ He admits that G. Colmore's⁽⁹⁶⁾ *Suffragette Sally*, published in 1911, dealt with the politicisation of a working-class girl, the cockney domestic servant Sally Simmonds, but only as one of a group of three representative WSPU militants in the story, the others being the aristocratic Lady Geraldine Hill and the provincial middle-class Edith Carstairs.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Angela John has highlighted the work of Evelyn Sharp as a writer as well as a suffragette.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Although Sharp came from a middle class background and was privately educated she was dependent on writing for an income after the death of her father in 1903. Like Ethel Carnie Holdsworth this took the form of journalism, children's stories and fiction which carried a political message. Sharp left the WSPU in 1912 because her concerns had become adult rather than equal suffrage, pacifism and internationalism, but her best selling novel *Rebel Women*, published in 1910 had championed the suffragette cause. Thereafter she used mainstream outlets (*Daily Herald* and *Manchester Guardian*) for her journalism which, John argues, gave her an influence with male as well as female readers – she 'made the most of being both suffragette and rebel journalist'.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's best selling novel *Helen of Four Gates* (1917) and her niche journalism (*The*

(95) Trotter, D., *The English Novel in History 1895-1920*(Routledge,London,1993) p.28.

(96) This is the pseudonym used by Gertrude Renton.

(97) Trotter, D., *op.cit.*, p.46.

(98) John, A., 'Behind the Locked Door : Evelyn Sharp, suffragette and rebel journalist', *Women's History Review* (12, 1, 2003).

(99) *Ibid.*, p.11.

Woman Worker and *The Clear Light*) show her making the most of being both a suffragist and a rebel writer.

Trotter further argues that between 1895 and 1920 writers seldom overcame the problem of finding ways of dealing with the experiences of workers in their novels other than by making them forfeit their allegiance to their class, as, for example, Jude Fawley in Thomas Hardy's *Jude The Obscure* and Paul Morrell in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* do. However he credits a select group with some success in overcoming this difficulty. It includes Margaret Harkness with *A City Girl*, Allen Clarke with *Driving*, Robert Tressall with *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and Patrick MacGill with *Children of the Dead End*. MacGill's book, Trotter says, is the only working-class novel of the period which finds poetry in working-class speech.(100)

By 1913 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had created Carrie, and by 1920 Helen, Nan, Elizabeth and Jill. All of them meet the specifications Keating and Trotter use. In response to Keating's view I hope to demonstrate that *Miss Nobody* is a convincing pre-1914 portrait of working-class life, and in response to Trotter's that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's heroines during the period to 1920 are firmly rooted in the working class and do not move out of it, and that in *Helen of Four Gates* and *The Taming of Nan* at least, her characters, like MacGill's, achieve the poetic in their speech.

(100) Trotter, D., *op.cit.*, p. 33.

Pamela Fox argues that women writers of the 1910s and 1920s used romance as 'a complex resistance strategy'.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ The reason for this, she says, is that working-class women were chastised or ridiculed by the prevailing patriarchally controlled romance codes if they even attempted to view marriage romantically. For them marriage was simply 'an economic relation'. Because of this Fox sees the presence of romance in texts written by working-class women as resistance to the codes in two ways - it registers a longing for marriage based on tenderness, not exploitation, and it demands 'a utopian private arena in which one is valued for one's gendered self alone'.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Fox says that by using romance in this way women writers of proletarian fiction, like Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, differed from their male counterparts who focused on the public arena, and who were considered most successful when private arena love was eliminated as bourgeois, alien to the proper concern of working-class novels, which is work.

If successful, this attempt to impose the private arena on the public expands the potential of the proletarian novel, Fox claims, allowing it to expose both the repressive nature of patriarchal expectations and the pleasurable possibilities of romance. She applies her analysis to *Miss Nobody* and *This Slavery* where it is persuasive, and illuminates the relationships between the chief protagonists in each case.⁽¹⁰³⁾ My

(101) Fox, P., 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's Revolt of the Gentle : Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working Class Women's Writing', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals. British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) p.58.

(102) *Ibid.*, p.60.

(103) For *Miss Nobody* see *Ibid.*, pp.61-62. For *This Slavery* see *Ibid.*, pp. 69-71.

contention however is that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had a further purpose. The romance strands in her novels are bait to catch an audience, her aim, having caught it, is to encourage her readers to think more seriously about their social and political situations. Despite the space social and political themes occupy in these novels Fox is unwilling to recognise them as a significant element in the author's thinking, yet in 1910 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth expressed the hope that her writing would make people want something better and rouse them to fight against poverty,⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ a hope she reasserted regularly.

As a Marxist Mary Ashraf's interest in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's novels concerns their potential for promoting social revolution.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ She uses three of them as part of a scheme to show connections between working-class writing from the Chartist period in the 1830s through to the advanced socialist literature of the early twentieth century, so that she can claim it is part of an historically determined social process in line with Marxist Leninist theory. Ashraf calls the imaginative writing she reviews 'proletarian realism', and identifies it as literature in the service of the people which contributes to the growth of class consciousness and political awareness; which grasps the reality which capitalism conceals; which contains true descriptions of working-class life and the role in it of working-class organisations; which is optimistic; which attacks religion; and which is simply stated and

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ *Women Folk*, 23 May 1910, p.163.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Ashraf, M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain Part II: Prose* (Berlin, 1979) p.177.

accessible.(106)

For proletarian realism to be successful, Ashraf says, it must show how individuals deal with socialist themes in such a way as to point towards the right mass response, but without preaching a sermon or becoming a mechanically didactic story.(107) In this respect Ethel Carnie Holdsworth scores well by comparison with Allen Clarke. Ashraf sees these two, together with Robert Tressall and James Haslam, as the founders of a new popular literature and an improvement on bourgeois 'slum' novelists, who represent the working class as crushed and brutalised victims. By comparison the workers in the new literature make constant efforts to maintain their humanity and to find ways of overcoming their circumstances.(108)

From a study of *Miss Nobody* and *This Slavery*, and a brief reference to *General Belinda*, Ashraf concludes that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth showed that easily read fiction could be of high quality and thought provoking as well as entertaining. I argue that this is true of some of her other novels as well. I also argue that there is a unifying theme behind the disparate plots of the individual books, namely the search for a way of achieving socialist unity to ensure the overthrow of capitalism. This is a theme Ashraf does not identify, perhaps because her sample is too small.

Few commentators have acknowledged the existence of Ethel Carnie

(106) *Ibid.*, pp.198-202.

(107) *Ibid.*, pp.177-178.

(108) *Ibid.*, p.200.

Holdsworth's imaginative writing in their analysis of early twentieth century working-class literature, fewer concede its propaganda purpose, and none examine more than a fraction of her output. I believe that the arguments put forward by the critics whose opinions I have reviewed would have been strengthened or modified by reference to more of her work. I will attempt to establish its nature and value more accurately by considering all of it, and to show that she found a way of reaching the oppressed with a message of hope for a better future. Only then can a case be made for taking Ethel Carnie Holdsworth more seriously as a central figure in the history of early twentieth century protest.

CHAPTER 1 - TO 1914

1.1 THE BIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethel Carnie's writing was influenced by her experiences in north east Lancashire in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. She was born in Oswaldtwistle,⁽¹⁾ a mill town near Accrington, on 1 January 1886, but the family had moved three miles north to Great Harwood⁽²⁾ by 1891. This too was a mill town, providing employment for her parents and, from 1897, for Ethel herself as a half time teacher at the Delph Road factory. She disliked both the town and the work. Great Harwood was described in 1907 as

'similar to other outskirts of manufacturing towns...There are no trees in the streets, the houses are as like each other as two peas, and on every side one sees tall, black chimneys belching forth smoke night and day'.⁽³⁾

In 1909 Ethel Carnie complained that

'Factory life has crushed the childhood, youth, maturity of millions of men and women. It has ruined the health of those who would have been comparatively strong but for the unremitted toil and the evil atmosphere'.⁽⁴⁾

She believed in the dignity of labour but not in the capitalism that controlled it:

(1) See Appendix 3.

(2) See Appendix 4.

(3) *The Millgate Monthly*, March 1907, p.69. An article by Priscilla Moulder.

(4) *The Woman Worker*, 3 March 1909, p.214.

'Make cloth profit the master. This is the text taught in the mill. There is no time for laughter, only for toil...Toil is not a curse, imposed upon man by God, it ought to be a blessing, and will be recognised as such in the future. Toil is not drudgery, but useful service, and the worker is a king - but we dress our kings and queens in rags, let them dwell in ugly buildings, and wear their souls away fearing for the morrow.'⁽⁵⁾

Ethel Carnie avoided the fate she describes here. Between the ages of six and eleven she attended the Nonconformist British School in Great Harwood.⁽⁶⁾ She stayed on for two more years within the half time system common in textile areas then,⁽⁷⁾ before she became a winder at St Lawrence mill.⁽⁸⁾ It was not much of an education, and it was frequently interrupted by epidemics of scarlet fever, ringworm and measles according to the school's records,⁽⁹⁾ but she developed an interest in writing which she followed up at Technical School evening classes.⁽¹⁰⁾ She also formed an appreciation of the natural beauty of the local countryside which featured in her school work and although this has not survived she obviously enjoyed composition, for in the preface to her first book of poems she wrote 'From a child I

⁽⁵⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁶⁾ See Appendix 6.

⁽⁷⁾ The 1902 Education Act which raised the school leaving age to twelve allowed eleven year olds in textile districts to work in the mill in the mornings and go to school in the afternoons, an exemption which was not removed until the 1918 Fisher Education Act.

⁽⁸⁾ See Appendix 7.

⁽⁹⁾ Great Harwood British School log book, 1 May 1896-30 July 1909, Lancashire Record Office, SMHa1/3.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Owens College Declaration Book, Manchester University archive RA/39/10.

found myself expressing my thoughts in rhythmic forms and deriving great pleasure from so doing'.⁽¹¹⁾

As a result she had an escape route through her imagination from the horrors of the mill, and her poetry was to provide her with a way out of the factory system before she was twenty one. In 1906 'The Bookworm' was published in the *Blackburn Times*. It was noticed by the Blackburn Authors' Society which sponsored an edition of five hundred copies of her verse collection *Rhymes from the Factory, by a Factory Girl* in 1907, and in 1908 a second edition of a thousand copies, because of the interest it had aroused both in Britain and abroad.⁽¹²⁾ The volume was favourably reviewed in *The Woman Worker*,⁽¹³⁾ and its proprietor, Robert Blatchford, visited Ethel to judge her for himself.

She may already have decided to leave the mill to try to earn a living from writing. Some of her short stories had been published in *Fellowship* in 1907 and her poetry was being distributed in Lancashire mills as pamphlets entitled *Voices From The Loom*.⁽¹⁴⁾ She became a member of the Independent Labour Party(ILP) in 1908,⁽¹⁵⁾ and her standing was such that a keepsake published to accompany its Bazaar that year included her favourite quotation alongside those of

(11) Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory, by a Factory Girl* (R. Denham and Co., Blackburn, 1908) p.vii.

(12) See Appendix 8.

(13) *The Woman Worker*, 3 July 1908, p.155. The review was written by James Keighley Snowden, a popular novelist whose stories were set in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

(14) *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, pp. 998-999; and oral evidence of Brenda Shorrock to Roger Smalley, 10 May 1993.

(15) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 October 1908, p.2.

Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and H. M. Hyndman⁽¹⁶⁾. By 1909 her work had been published in *Women's World*, *The Red Letter*, *Horner's Weekly*, *The Co-operative News*, *The Millgate Monthly* and *Clarion* as well as in local papers.⁽¹⁷⁾ However Blatchford offered her a job on the staff of *The Woman Worker* and she accepted.⁽¹⁸⁾ After nine years at St. Lawrence mill she went to London to begin the most important part of her pre-war journalism.

Blatchford described his new recruit as plainly dressed and ordinary looking except for a dimple in her chin. What impressed him was her clear eye, her sense of humour, her quiet smile and her modest sincerity.⁽¹⁹⁾ *The Millgate Monthly* profile issued a few months later provided more detail - she was five feet three inches tall, with dark hair, grey eyes, firm lips and an oval face⁽²⁰⁾ - and in 1915 *The Co-operative News* called her slightly built, homely and quiet in manner, and bubbling with the joy of life.⁽²¹⁾ In general terms the description of her appearance given here is confirmed by contemporary photographs,⁽²²⁾ and the character Blatchford gives her indicates his view of what was appropriate working-class femininity then. It was a character he hoped would appeal to his readers. The angry challenge

(16) *A Comrade's Garland* (Advance Press, Blackburn, 1908) p.60. Ethel Carnie, Great Harwood

'Through tattered clothes small vices do appear
Robes and furred gowns hide all.' Shakespeare.

(17) *The Millgate Monthly*, November 1909, p.71.

(18) 'Miss Ethel Carnie' in *Blackburn Times*, 20 June 1908, p.9; and Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914* (Harvester, Brighton, 1987) pp.254-255.

(19) *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p.155.

(20) *The Millgate Monthly*, November 1909, pp.70-72.

(21) *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, pp.998-999.

(22) See Appendices 1 and 9.

to this view which soon emerged in her journalism surprised and upset Blatchford, and he sacked her after seven months, but when she returned to Lancashire part of her income still came from writing. In 1911 a second collection of poems entitled *Songs of a Factory Girl*, and in 1913 a selection of children's stories first issued as *Books for the Bairns*, but now collected under the title *The Lamp Girl and Other Stories*, were published. They were followed by her first novel, *Miss Nobody*, also in 1913, and a third volume of verse, *Voices of Womanhood*, in 1914. All were produced under difficult circumstances - between serving customers at the draper's shop her mother had taken in Little Harwood,⁽²³⁾ between lectures at Owens College, Manchester, where she registered as a non-degree student from 1911 to 1913,⁽²⁴⁾ and between the creative writing classes she taught at Bebel House in 1913 and 1914.⁽²⁵⁾ There were periods too when she went back to St. Lawrence mill or sold ribbons and laces at Blackburn market.⁽²⁶⁾

(23) *The Co-operative News*, *op.cit.*, p.998.

(24) Owens College Declaration Book, student registrations for 1911-1912 and 1912-1913, Manchester University archive RA/39/10. The courses she studied are not recorded. She also attended an extension course at Oxford in the summer of 1913 where she met Margaret Macmillan and Albert Mansbridge. She told them that she thought the Workers Educational Association courses they supported were capitalist tools designed to make 'well trained lambs' out of the worker-students who attended them. See *Cotton Factory Times*, 6 March 1914, p.4; 3 April 1914, p.4; and 17 April 1914, p.8.

(25) Craik, W., *The Central Labour College, 1909-29* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1964) pp.102-103. Bebel House was a Labour College for working women established by Mrs Bridges Adams, an SDF member, in Kensington in 1913. Its only students were Alice Smith and Mary Howarth of the Lancashire Weavers Union. They transferred to the Central Labour College at Earls Court, and Ethel Carnie returned to Great Harwood.

(26) *World's Work*, May 1922. The article is classified B921 in Blackburn public library's local studies collection.

1.2. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Ethel Carnie's childhood coincided with major developments on the political left that were to have a profound effect on her activism. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) was formed in 1884. Initially its analysis of society was influenced by Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) which indicted the competitive, individualistic aspects of capitalism, and Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1881), a simply stated criticism of the part played by laissez-faire economics in increasing the misery of the proletariat. But the Federation's founder, Henry Hyndman, gave some socialists their first introduction to Marx when cheap editions of his *England for All* became available in 1881. Edward Carpenter who provided the Federation with the money it needed to launch its paper, *Justice*, was amongst them. Martin Crick has described the SDF as a Marxist organisation seeking the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the prosecution of class war by revolution, whilst also being prepared to engage in local politics on behalf of the oppressed. He calls the SDF 'the most important school for working-class militants and activists, exercising a disproportionately large influence in relation to its size.'⁽²⁷⁾ Many future Labour Party luminaries, including James Ramsay MacDonald, George Lansbury and Margaret Bondfield were introduced to socialism through the SDF. So was Ethel Carnie.

The Burnley branch which she attended as a teenager was keen

(27) Crick, M., *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Ryburn, Keele, 1994) pp.9-10.

on socialist unity. This had led it to court trade union support in the 1890s, and to help establish a Labour representation committee in Burnley in 1905. It was also less secular than some branches, indeed one of its officials, John Sparling, had been a Sunday School superintendent.⁽²⁸⁾ It was amongst the most successful in the country, well organised by Dan Irving, with 600 members and two town councillors in 1893.

The SDF branch in Blackburn was smaller, but it had a charismatic leader in Tom Hurley and a sought-after speaker in Isobel Tiplady. One member, A.A. Brooks, got himself elected to the Board of Guardians of Blackburn workhouse and did much to improve conditions there, including the provision of a bowling green for inmates, the only one ever built for a workhouse in England.⁽²⁹⁾ Like the Burnley branch the SDF in Blackburn was open minded, pragmatic and anxious to forge links with the unions and other socialist groups in order to overthrow capitalism.⁽³⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie's first documented political affiliation was in Blackburn, but to the ILP, not the SDF. It was one of the Party's largest branches, efficiently run by its agent Sam Higgenbottom, and supported by *The Workers' Tribune* which claimed a circulation of 6,500 in 1909.⁽³¹⁾ There is no primary evidence to help explain Ethel Carnie's move, but the history

⁽²⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.109.

⁽²⁹⁾ Johnson, G., *Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911* (Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, USA, 2002) p.164.

⁽³⁰⁾ Through, for example, the *Blackburn Labour Journal*, which was produced jointly with the SDF, and the endorsement of Philip Snowden's 'Labour and Socialist' candidature in 1900. See Howell, D., *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983) p.210.

⁽³¹⁾ *The Workers' Tribune*, No.15, 1909, p.1.

of the struggle for socialist unity provides some possibilities.

The ILP shared the SDF's aim of securing collective ownership of all means of production, distribution and exchange. Its programme, adopted at the 1893 inaugural conference at Bradford, demanded the abolition of child labour under the age of fourteen; a legal eight hours working day; state provision for the aged, for sick and disabled workers and for widows and orphans; the abolition of indirect taxation; taxation to extinction of all unearned incomes; the right to work and democratisation of government. But there was also an ethical dimension to the ideas of the ILP, which many members tried to express by leading lives that prefigured the socialist society they wished to create. For example they encouraged a sense of comradeship through the Clarion cycling clubs, and emphasised personal commitment to moral improvement and concern for others by establishing Socialist Sunday Schools and Labour Churches. Socialist Sunday Schools (which were later to keep copies of Ethel Carnie's *Rhymes from the Factory* in their libraries) taught alternative 'commandments'. They included 'love learning, which is the food of the mind', 'be a friend to the weak', and 'look forward to the day when all men will be free citizens.'⁽³²⁾ The Labour Churches taught belief in the essential goodness of humanity rather than the doctrine of original sin. Notions of ethical progress can also be seen in the Party's tolerance of a sub-culture of vegetarianism and openness about

⁽³²⁾ Frow, R., 'Educating Socialists', *Working Class Movement Library Bulletin* (Working Class Movement Library, Salford, 2004) pp.45-48.

sexuality.⁽³³⁾ Many of these ideas can be traced in Ethel Carnie's work.

There had been six Lancashire SDF delegates at the ILP conference in 1893, and at the 1894 conference a Lancashire delegate's resolution led to consideration of ILP amalgamation with the SDF. But except in Lancashire the two groups were not in direct competition and could operate independently whilst still increasing their memberships, and amalgamation was rejected. In the 1895 general election all twenty-nine ILP candidates were defeated. This steered the Party further away from amalgamation and towards the idea of a 'progressive alliance' with the Liberals in order to gain parliamentary representation.

Nevertheless the value of co-operation was recognised by socialist groups. The SDF participated in the 1900 conference that led to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). Socialist unity as well as independent Labour representation was an aim of the LRC, and both the ILP and the SDF affiliated to it. However an SDF resolution calling for class war and a clear LRC statement of socialism as its objective was defeated. ILP delegates argued that it was too soon to headline such matters because they would alienate the hard won, and far from complete, support of the unions. As a result the SDF withdrew from the LRC in 1901, an action which Crick says illustrates its dilemma of how to marry its revolutionary aims with the reformist practices socialist unity required, and explains its eventual demise.⁽³⁴⁾

⁽³³⁾ Winter, B., *The ILP : Past and Present* (ILP Publications, Leeds, 1993) p.9.

⁽³⁴⁾ Crick, M., *op.cit.*, p.96. Paul Thompson agrees that rejection of the Labour alliance was a key factor in the SDF's failure, along with inept leadership. See Thompson, P., *Socialist, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London, 1885-1914* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967) p.297.

Until 1906 co-operation focused on the right to work. High unemployment caused riots in Bradford in 1904, Manchester in 1905, and the formation of the Right to Work Council in 1905, an ILP initiative supported by the SDF. The 1906 Liberal landslide and the election of twenty-nine Labour MPs was followed by a socialist revival - between 1906 and 1908 a hundred new SDF branches were established, sales of *Clarion* soared, Labour Churches increased their congregations, and in 1907 Victor Grayson was elected as a socialist for Colne Valley. It was during this period that Ethel Carnie joined the Blackburn ILP. Of course she may also have joined the SDF, which had branches in Great Harwood and Accrington as well as in Burnley and Blackburn, although the local press makes no reference to it.⁽³⁵⁾ Robert Blatchford believed there were thousands of unattached socialists ready to join a unified party and, through *Clarion* and *Merrie England*, he urged them to do so.⁽³⁶⁾ His role in the formation of the ILP and favourable reviews of her poetry in his papers may have influenced Ethel Carnie's choice, but there could have been other reasons.

Her journalism shows that unity of the Labour movement was consistently a priority for Ethel Carnie, and the SDF seemed unable to support this. The Socialist Labour Party had been formed by dissident

⁽³⁵⁾ Gustav Klaus says Ethel Carnie was 'close to, if not in, the SDF' at this time. Letter to Roger Smalley, 4 April 1995.

⁽³⁶⁾ In his preface to Blatchford's *Autobiography*, Alec Thompson claimed that for every convert to socialism made by *Das Kapital*, a hundred were made by *Merrie England*. See Lucas, J., *The Radical Twenties: Writing, Politics and Culture* (Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1999) p.205.

SDF members in 1903; the SDF did not involve itself in consolidating the Labour/trade union alliance in Blackburn after 1906 as the ILP did; the 1908 SDF conference rejected reaffiliation; and since 1904 *Justice* had become increasingly preoccupied by German militarism, and critical of what Hyndman considered the ILP's extreme internationalist and ultra pacifist stance, a stance that coincided with Ethel Carnie's views. Furthermore Dora Montefiore resigned from the SDF Women's Committee in 1905 because its Women's Circles, which were designed to politicise, had not developed in some branches and had degenerated into sewing clubs in others.⁽³⁷⁾ Any of those factors, together with the disappointment of Hyndman's defeat at Burnley and Irving's at Accrington in the 1906 general election, may explain why Ethel Carnie joined the ILP rather than the SDF in 1908.

Alternatively it might simply have been a matter of convenience - Blackburn was only four miles from her home in Great Harwood, Burnley was seven - or perhaps the importance she attached to ethical socialism was decisive. The language used in the relevant press report suggests a final possibility - that she did not really want to join any group, but was reluctantly persuaded to do so. The paper says Ethel Carnie 'has been induced to join the Blackburn ILP. Some credit for this 'capture' is due to Mrs Townley, an enthusiastic

(37) M.A.Jackson had failed in her attempt to form a Circle at the SDF branch in Great Harwood in 1904; Annie Oldacre of the Blackburn SDF thought the idea of Women's Circles 'silly'. See Hunt K., 'Women and the Social Democratic Federation: Some Notes on Lancashire', *North West Labour History Journal* (Vol. 7, 1980-81) pp. 59-60.

member of the branch.'⁽³⁸⁾ But if it is impossible to know the precise motives behind her ILP membership, its consequences are clear - disillusionment and secession.

At just the time she joined the Blackburn branch, ILP principles in north east Lancashire seemed to be changing. David Howell has identified Robert Blatchford's influence on this change. He says Blatchford's *Merrie England* socialism and dislike of Keir Hardie's puritanism moved the ILP towards adopting a 'cakes and ale' approach to counter the traditional appeal of Tory paternalism in north east Lancashire. This led it to abandon much of its ethical socialist ideology in favour of more practical measures such as advocating working-class municipal representation, to ensure that their policies on wages and hours were implemented.⁽³⁹⁾

However developments in parliament suggest Ethel Carnie was at first in step with the ILP line. The Labour Party had introduced a Right to Work Bill in 1907 when the Liberal government failed to include any unemployment measure in the King's Speech. Labour was criticised by the ILP and by Ethel Carnie for allowing attention to the Bill to be deflected, and for supporting the 1909 Budget.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The criticism intensified after the January 1910 election when forty Labour and eighty Irish MPs held the balance of power in the Commons. The ILP expected Labour to exploit this new advantage to force the Right to Work Bill through, but Labour did not want to

⁽³⁸⁾ *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 October 1908, p.2.

⁽³⁹⁾ Howell, D., *op.cit.*, pp.208-209.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 1 December 1909, p.498.

jeopardise the government's position because it supported the Liberal reform programme, and preferred to use its improved bargaining strength to overturn the Osborne Judgement which had deprived Labour of the political levy.⁽⁴¹⁾

The ILP was dismayed. It responded by issuing the 'Green Manifesto' which accused the Labour Party of neglecting the unemployed, an accusation Ethel Carnie echoed in *The Woman Worker*.⁽⁴²⁾ Labour's continued co-operation with the Liberal government after the December 1910 election, and its support for the 1911 National Insurance Act was the catalyst for the SDF and forty ILP branches to join the British Socialist Party (BSP). The Act required a contribution from workers as well as from employers and the state, and, the ILP believed, condemned them to a subsistence level existence whilst doing nothing to solve the problem of unemployment.⁽⁴³⁾ However the Blackburn ILP branch did not join the revolt. It supported Philip Snowden in both 1910 elections despite the fact that he worked with the Liberals in the constituency to make sure that they shared its two seats.

By then Ethel Carnie had left *The Woman Worker* and her response to this situation is unknown, but the line taken by the Blackburn branch may have caused her to leave the ILP, for nothing she wrote

⁽⁴¹⁾ In 1909 the House of Lords ruled that trade unions could not use their funds to support Labour Party activities. As MPs were not paid before 1911 the judgement threatened Labour's parliamentary programme. It was nullified by the Trade Union Act of 1913.

⁽⁴²⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 8 December 1909, p.518.

⁽⁴³⁾ Crick, M., *op.cit.*, p.181.

before or after 1911 suggests that she would endorse sacrificing socialist principles in order to sustain a Liberal government, or approve the ILP leadership's policy of 'the triumph of politics over ideology.'⁽⁴⁴⁾ She was an admirer and journalistic colleague of Victor Grayson who, like her, had been agitating in *Clarion* and *The Woman Worker* for a united socialist party since 1909. Grayson announced the formation of the BSP in 1911 and claimed 35,000 members from a wide range of socialist organisations, but mainly from ILP and SDF branches. The Unity Conference of 1911 was held in Caxton Hall, Salford. Ethel Carnie was living in Manchester then, and attending Owens College. The evidence is only circumstantial, but it at least makes her membership of the BSP a possibility.

Whether she joined or not she soon faced further disappointment, for Grayson became disillusioned with what he saw as an SDF move to take control of the BSP. A bad illness in 1913 ended his commitment, and factionalism prevented the BSP becoming a significant new political force.

However other political developments in the period to 1914 offered some encouragement to those on the left in north east Lancashire. Both the established parties were forced to devise strategies to keep their working-class voters loyal in the face of SDF, ILP and Labour Party competition. Since the extension of the franchise in 1884 the Liberal Party had reorganised throughout Lancashire to attract

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.235.

new worker-voters. For example branch membership cost on average only one shilling; ginger groups such as the Gladstone League in Burnley put pressure on party leaders to adopt new policies; crusading journalists like T.P.Ritzema of Blackburn's *Northern Daily Telegraph* gained control of the local press and supported Snowden's candidature in 1900 and 1906;⁽⁴⁵⁾ and progressive Liberals Henry Norman in Blackburn and Philip Morrell in Burnley, were adopted instead of conservative Liberals as parliamentary candidates in 1910.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Furthermore Clitheroe, usually a Liberal stronghold, and Ethel Carnie's constituency in 1913,⁽⁴⁷⁾ returned David Shackleton as the LRC's third MP in a famous by-election in 1902.

Women made a significant intervention in that by-election. Shackleton was secretary of the Darwen Weavers, Winders and Warpers Association. Women unionists pointed out that their subscriptions were partly used to support LRC candidates and MPs, and that a majority of union members in the constituency were women. This, they felt, justified them urging Shackleton, if elected, to work vigorously for the enfranchisement of women. Shackleton agreed to campaign for votes for women on the same terms as men,⁽⁴⁸⁾ but the female suffrage bill he finally introduced in 1910 was limited to women who could already vote in local elections, and it was defeated

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Clarke, P., 'British Politics and Blackburn Politics 1900-1910', *Historical Journal* (12, 1969) p.307.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Tanner, D., *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990) pp.135-136.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Barrowford was in the Clitheroe constituency. Ethel Carnie had moved there to live with her parents after her return from teaching at Bebel House in 1913.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Liddington, J., and Norris, J., *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (Virago, London, 1978).

after its second reading anyway.(49)

The issue of votes for women had gained prominence since the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in 1897. Under the presidency of Millicent Fawcett it co-ordinated the efforts of earlier groups like the Women's Franchise League and the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage. It was affiliated to no political party and asked for the vote for women 'as it is, or may be, accorded to men.'⁽⁵⁰⁾ This would not have enfranchised all working-class women, as men had the right to vote only if they were householders or lodgers paying ten pounds a year rental.⁽⁵¹⁾ The NUWSS limited franchise proposal caused much debate. Philip Snowden estimated that it would enfranchise only 500,000 of the country's 12,500,000 women,⁽⁵²⁾ and Harry Quelch of the SDF, which supported votes for all adults, argued that most of them would be middle class.⁽⁵³⁾ The ILP disputed this and backed up its endorsement of the NUWSS position with a survey which indicated that 82% of the women who would be given the vote by a limited extension of the franchise would be working women.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock

(49) Martin, R., *The Lancashire Giant. David Shackleton, Labour Leader and Civil Servant* (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000) p.100.

(50) Liddington, J., and Norris, J., *op.cit.*, p.26.

(51) These were the terms of the 1884 Reform Act. Ten pounds a year (four shillings a week) was more than many in the working class paid in rent.

(52) Barrow, L., and Bullock, I., *Democratic ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) p.156.

(53) Foot, P., *The Vote: How It Was Won and How It Was Undermined* (Viking, London, 2005) p.204.

(54) Barrow, L., and Bullock, I., *op.cit.*, p.157. The figure in the Nelson ward surveyed by Selina Cooper was 95%. See Hunt, K., *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman question 1884-1911* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) p.162.

have shown that the survey was deeply flawed,(55) but the ILP's official preference remained for women to be given the vote on the same terms as men. However a group within the North of England Society, now referred to as the radical suffragists,(56) wanted the vote for all women over the age of twenty-one and campaigned for this amongst Lancashire cotton mill workers and the textile unions.

David Howell has argued that the wives and daughters of ILP working-class activists typically played only supporting roles as tea-makers and organisers of social events, and that it was middle-class women who became propagandists.(57) However Jill Liddington and Jill Norris have detailed the work of ILP women like Harriet Beanland from Nelson and Ethel Derbyshire from Blackburn who were both active suffragists and working women, and established the fact that the campaign of the radical suffragists inspired local women to become activists in north east Lancashire.(58)

In 1900, for example, the radical suffragists started a petition for votes for all women. It was launched in Blackburn and promoted throughout Lancashire not only by public meetings but through Women's Co-operative Guild branches, Labour Churches, ILP branches and door to door. Although she was only fourteen Ethel Carnie had already been working in a mill near Blackburn for three years. She must have been asked to sign the petition, as 29,359

(55) Barrow, L., and Bullock I., *op.cit.*, p.158.

(56) This term was coined by Liddington and Norris, *op.cit.*

(57) Howell, D., *op.cit.*, pp.330-331.

(58) Liddington, J., and Norris, J., *op.cit.*, pp.288-289.

working women did, before it was presented to parliament in March 1901, and it may have influenced her thinking on the vote for she was a supporter of adult suffrage by 1909.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Paul Foot calls the petition a success, not because its demands were accepted by the government, but because it changed the attitude of the Trades Union Congress towards votes for women. The TUC adopted a universal suffrage resolution at its 1901 Congress.⁽⁶⁰⁾

In 1903 the radical suffragists established the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers' Representation Committee, calling for political and industrial rights. They were anxious to work with sympathetic groups such as the LRC, the Women's Co-operative Guild, and, during its Manchester years, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were ILP and North of England Society members, and both had taken part in the Clitheroe by-election in 1902. However Shackleton's failure to promote female suffrage led them to believe the ILP and the LRC were lukewarm on the matter of votes for women, and to form the WSPU in 1903. Whilst the radical suffragists remained rooted in Lancashire and had a wider programme of social reform, the WSPU, though based in Manchester, aimed to create a national organisation focused just on votes for women on the same terms as men. Annie Kenney joined in 1905, and she and Christabel propelled the WSPU into the headlines by

⁽⁵⁹⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 27 October 1909, p.396.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Foot, P., *op.cit.*, pp.192-193.

disrupting a meeting of Liberal supporters at the Free Trade Hall which led to them being imprisoned in Strangeways. The radical suffragists and the ILP applauded their action, but closer co-operation did not follow. Whilst the WSPU concentrated its efforts on opposing Winston Churchill's Liberal candidature in Manchester in 1906, the radical suffragists supported the LRC's Thorley Smith in Wigan.⁽⁶¹⁾

After the election the Pankhursts moved the WSPU to London and in the process ended its remaining links with the Lancashire ILP and the suffragists.⁽⁶²⁾ Violent tactics became an integral part of its policy, and Pankhurst autocracy a characteristic of its management, despite the democratic rules its conference had adopted in 1906. This in turn caused about a fifth of the membership, led by Teresa Billington-Greig, to secede to form the Women's Freedom League in 1907.

Initially Ethel Carnie sympathised with the WSPU and expressed a keen desire to meet Annie Kenney.⁽⁶³⁾ However Ethel's daughter Margaret was adamant that her mother took no part in the militant suffragette movement because of her hatred of violence,⁽⁶⁴⁾ so this admiration of Annie Kenney is perhaps based on the dramatic impact of her Free Trade Hall gesture, the fact that she was one of the few working-class members of the WSPU, having worked fifteen years in a

(61) Churchill was successful. Thorley Smith, who claimed 'the women's suffrage question is the first plank in my programme' forced the Liberal into third place in a contest won by the Conservative.

(62) However Krista Cowman makes a convincing case for continued links between rank and file WSPU members and the ILP. See Cowman, K., 'Incipient Toryism? The Women's Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903-14', *History Workshop Journal* (53, 2002) pp.129-148.

(63) *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p.155.

(64) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 26 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

textile mill, or her support for the Bebel House project, which was ignored by other members of trade union, Labour and suffrage groups.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Ethel Carnie never commented on the suffragette hunger strikes which began in 1909 when she was in London writing for *The Woman Worker*, but she did criticise the WSPU campaign of violence.⁽⁶⁶⁾

It is less easy to gauge her response to the activities of the suffragists, but she certainly does not fit Howell's model. In 1908 she was still only eighteen, and she might have been the tea-maker at the ILP Bazaar that year, but she was an activist as well through her contribution to its keepsake, within two years she was one of Blatchford's propagandists, and she was later described as 'a worker for women's emancipation'⁽⁶⁷⁾ and a union organiser.⁽⁶⁸⁾ This is a record that takes her way beyond Howell's stereotype. She does not fit Pamela Graves' model of women active in socialist politics before 1914 either. Graves describes them as the 'suffrage generation' because their identity as activists was overwhelmingly influenced by the struggle for the franchise.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Ethel Carnie supported adult suffrage, but her journalism, her poetry and her pre-war novel *Miss Nobody* all indicate that her concerns were much broader.

However she shared the same background and beliefs as Selina

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Craik, W., *op.cit.*

⁽⁶⁶⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 22 September 1909, p.276. See p.79 below.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, p.998.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries* (Journeyman Press, London, 1993) p.174.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Graves, P., *Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics 1918-1939* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994) p.14.

Cooper, a long-standing NUWSS member and a leading radical suffragist with an eminence in local and national politics that Ethel must have been aware of. Selina addressed the Blackburn branch of the ILP on women's suffrage in 1905 so Ethel may have come across her then.⁽⁷⁰⁾ In 1913 the NUWSS and the Labour Party organised a suffrage campaign in Accrington to protest against its MP, Harold Baker, who had moved the rejection of the Women's Franchise Bill in the House of Commons. Selina Cooper was one of the speakers, as were Ada Nield Chew, a trade union and NUWSS activist who had written about votes for women in the *Accrington Observer* just prior to the campaign,⁽⁷¹⁾ and Helena Swanwick, editor of *Common Cause*, the NUWSS newspaper. Perhaps Ethel heard the speeches or read Ada Nield Chew's articles, but although she and Selina were close neighbours for years living within two miles of each other in Nelson, there is no evidence that they ever met, let alone worked together. Nor had she any links with the Women's Labour League(WLL), which had been formed in 1906 to work for the Party and to canvas for Labour candidates at elections, despite the fact that details of WLL activities appear in *The Woman Worker* during the period she worked for it. At the 1913 League conference Katherine Bruce Glasier moved a resolution protesting against militarism, and the 1914 conference voted against arms expenditure and conscription and in favour of the joint action of workers internationally against

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Liddington, J., and Norris, J., *op.cit.*, p.293, note 7.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Chew, D.N., *The Life and Writings of Ada Nield Chew* (Virago, London, 1982) pp.209-226.

war,(72) all positions with which Ethel Carnie agreed. However although the WLL had a strong presence in north east Lancashire, when it dropped its pacific posture in 1914 in line with Labour Party policy, thirty branches closed, including those in Accrington, Burnley and Nelson.(73)

This was a period of intense political activity in north east Lancashire and Ethel Carnie was profoundly affected by and involved in it. But although the sources clearly establish her socialist and feminist convictions, they do not convincingly place her within the mainstream movements of the day. They show someone on the fringes of the emerging power structures of the left, reluctant to commit herself wholeheartedly to any of them because they did not reflect her own aspirations closely enough. Instead she saw writing from an independent position as an alternative through which she might make a better contribution, and drew on her SDF, ILP and radical suffragist experiences to try to do so in both her polemical and her imaginative work.

1.3. THE WOMAN WORKER, 1909-1910

Before 1909 Ethel Carnie's journalism had been limited to poems and short stories. Typically these were tales of redemption through which she tried to articulate her sympathy for the oppressed poor and

(72) Collette, C., *For Labour and for Women: The Women's Labour League 1906-1918* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989) pp.142-143.

(73) *Ibid.*, pp.204-217.

her anger against the rich oppressors.⁽⁷⁴⁾ It was not until her appointment to the staff of *The Woman Worker* in that year however that she got a chance to develop her ideas on the immediate social and political situation in print. This section analyses her role on the magazine in 1909 and 1910, and assesses her views on socialism, feminism and religion at that time.

Blatchford started *The Woman Worker* in 1907 as a penny weekly adjunct to his highly successful *Clarion*. Its aim was to help women 'to realise their importance, to see their duty, to feel their power' in order to help humanity in general and the poor in particular.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The language is vague, but in its Edwardian context it implied a propaganda campaign to secure political rights and social equality for women, and better living standards for the working class. Within a year it had built up a circulation of 32,000. This was a respectable performance in a competitive market, for between 1890 and 1910 800 papers, half of them explicitly socialist, were published in the interest of Labour,⁽⁷⁶⁾ however *Clarion* had sales of 95,000 at its peak in

1908.⁽⁷⁷⁾ *The Woman Worker's* regular contributors included Victor

(74) In 'A White Geranium' (*Fellowship*, 26 July 1907, p.6) for example, a mill girl is seduced and ostracised. The geranium acts as a symbol of hope until her persecutors are made to see the injustice of their actions. In 'Old Jim's Last Looms' (*Fellowship*, 4 October 1907, p.5) for example, a poor weaver's family face destitution at the hands of his callous employer. They are saved from starvation by the return of a prosperous relative from America.

(75) *The Woman Worker*, 14 April 1909, p.348.

(76) Hunt, K., and Hannam, J., 'Propagandising as Socialist Women': the case of the women's columns in British socialist newspapers, 1814-1914, in Taithe, B., and Thornton, T., (eds.), *Propaganda, Political Rhetoric and Identity 1300-2000* (Sutton, Stroud, 1999) p.168.

(77) *Clarion* averaged sales of 40,000-50,000 in 1900. This had increased to 70,000 by the time of the 1906 Election. It still sold 66,000 copies when the December 1910 Election was held, but this figure dropped to 10,000 in 1914 because of the paper's uncompromising patriotism. See Thompson, A., *Here I Lie* (Routledge and Sons, London, 1937) pp.100, 128 and 156.

Grayson, by then socialist MP for Colne Valley, Robert Blatchford, his daughter Winifred, and Muriel Nelson of the Women's Freedom League. Their lively mix of items covered topical political matters with the emphasis on women's issues, especially votes for women, but also bread and butter concerns such as how to get a job and 'What to Wear'.

Ethel Carnie joined this team in 1909, but was she the editor? Her byline was always attached to the poems, articles and stories she wrote for *The Woman Worker*, but the twenty five editorials between 28 July 1909 and 26 January 1910 are not attributed, the column is simply called 'The Editor's Chair'. The author of these pieces certainly changed after 14 July 1909 when Blatchford apologised, tongue in cheek, for having edited *The Woman Worker* so badly for the last three months. He did not identify his successor either by name or gender and perhaps he had not yet decided who it should be, but Ruth and Edmund Frow think it was Ethel Carnie. They say that from 28 July 1909 'The Editor's Chair' column bears Ethel Carnie's imprint and reflects her class consciousness. Their examples are the recurrence of the themes of universal brotherhood, unemployment and poverty, and the interest in the new cinema phenomenon, an interest which matches Ethel Carnie's later attempts to get her own fiction filmed. They also demonstrate the distinct difference between the sequence they attribute to Ethel Carnie and those of her predecessor and successor in terms of political stance, placing her views to the left of both

Robert Blatchford before her and Winifred Blatchford after her.(78)

As far as it goes this analysis is accurate, but it ignores a difficulty about 'The Editor's Chair' for the issue of 22 December 1909 in which a review of the paper's staff describes Ethel Carnie like this - 'then, as the breath of poetic inspiration, there is the verse of our own Ethel Carnie'.(79)Can this have been written by Ethel Carnie herself? It is possible that it was written by a stand-in if Blatchford judged it inappropriate for Ethel Carnie to announce the impending change of authorship herself, however the style of 'The Editor's Chair' for the 22 December is consistent with the others in the sequence,(80)and suggests that she was making an objective attempt to assess the paper's qualities knowing that her future role would be limited to that of poet.

I do not know why Blatchford hid the identity of the author of 'The Editor's Chair' when other contributors, including the assistant editor, are named. However I believe it was Ethel Carnie between 28 July 1909 and 26 January 1910 for the following reasons. Firstly the style. It is often allegorical, for example she represents the anti-clerical disturbances which culminated in 'The Tragic Week' in Spain in 1909 as a filmscript,(81) a technique also prominent in her journalism of the

(78) Frow, E., and Frow, R., 'Ethel Carnie, writer, feminist and socialist', in Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880-1914*, *op.cit.*, p.258.

(79) *The Woman Worker*, 22 December 1909, p.558.

(80) For example it repeats, in the same words, the view first expressed in 'The Editor's Chair' for 28 July 1909 that no paper had higher ethical standards than *The Woman Worker*.

(81) *The Woman Worker*, 4 August 1909, p.108. (See also 22 September 1909, p.276, the Satni allegory, and from *The Clear Light*, October 1923, 'Marcus of the Iron Hand'.)

1920s. It is often humorous, of a gentle mocking sort which aims at correcting without offending, as it is when she reproves readers who complain that their letters have not been included in the paper's next issue.⁽⁸²⁾ This type of humour is present in her later work as well. Secondly her criticism of the hypocrisy of politicians who pretend concern but remain inactive, as Asquith did during the Kiev pogrom of 1909.⁽⁸³⁾ Attacks against those who fail to use their power to protect the oppressed are a hallmark of her work. Thirdly the marked similarity between the subject matter of the editorials and that of the novels and *The Clear Light*, especially regarding her known views on marriage, divorce, the need for socialist unity and the murder of Francisco Ferrer, the Catalan progressive educator who was executed by the Spanish authorities in October 1909.⁽⁸⁴⁾ Fourthly the use of specific vocabulary, typical of Ethel Carnie's other writing, such as 'tired mothers', which is the idea behind *The House That Jill Built*,⁽⁸⁵⁾ and the military images reminiscent of *The Clear Light* like 'we must fight side by side with them in the battle of life'.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Finally there is the rift between Ethel Carnie and Blatchford which forms the subject of his article 'Miss Ethel _____' discussed on pp. 87-89 below. This ended some aspect of the relationship between the two, and, as her essays and poems continued to be published as usual

⁽⁸²⁾ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1909, p.578.

⁽⁸³⁾ *Ibid.*, 29 September 1909, p.300.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1909, p.373; 3 November 1909, p.418; and 12 January 1910, p.618.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1909, p.252.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1910, p.658.

after 26 January 1910, my conjecture is that it was the editorials that were at issue.

But while I agree with the Frows' judgement on the authorship of 'The Editor's Chair' column for the period under discussion the evidence does not show that she had any responsibility for the overall content of *The Woman Worker*, and it would have been surprising if Blatchford had given someone totally inexperienced in magazine management such a role. Nor was it a role she ever claimed - she simply described herself as 'a member of his staff' with the freedom to write what and how she liked.⁽⁸⁷⁾ It is better, therefore, to consider 'The Editor's Chair' as the opportunity Blatchford gave Ethel Carnie to review and comment on current affairs. Such a column was a more suitable vehicle for this than the poetry and story slots she had been provided with previously. It represented a significant expansion of her work and it shows what she thought about the important issues of the day.

The Japanese plan to build a railway in China to link its trading bases at Antung and Muckden was one of them. She predicted a backlash against European and Japanese economic exploitation of China, and recommended co-operation as the basis on which governments should conduct international relations.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Fairness, trust

(87) See *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, p.998, and *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April 1932, p.11.

(88) *The Woman Worker*, 11 August 1909, p.132.

and co-operation recur as key elements in Ethel Carnie's view of socialism. She was distressed by the 1909 Bucharest pogrom, for example, and emphasised the need for co-operation based on comradeship as the route to acceptance of equality between disparate groups.⁽⁸⁹⁾ She seems to have believed that sincere and tender relationships were possible between all people, and she was angered by what she saw as resistance to this natural state of affairs resulting from self-interest.

This is apparent in her comments on the 1909 budget. She did not like it because it was, in her view, only a half-hearted skirmish with privilege, not the root and branch measure that was needed. However the politician against whom her anger was directed was not the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, but Lord Rosebery who had been Liberal Prime Minister between 1894 and 1895, and who was still an influential voice in the House of Lords as a supporter of imperialism and conservative domestic policies. Rosebery too disliked the budget, but for different reasons. He claimed that the new land tax made it harder for the aristocracy to fulfil its Christian duty to provide employment and charity for the less fortunate. Ethel Carnie accused Rosebery of misunderstanding scripture in this connection, because the instruction of St. Paul, she believed, was not to give money, but love, in charity. She thought that socialism met this requirement through its belief that all men are brothers, and that

⁽⁸⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, 1 September 1909, p.207.

capitalism did not because it was based on exploitation and class hatred.⁽⁹⁰⁾

She illustrates the destructive role money plays in the capitalist system in a parable. 'The Cry in The Night' tells the story of a child brutally beaten by her father for losing the money she has been given to buy bread. It tries to show that the elimination of such evil depends upon the abolition of private property and the transfer of the country's wealth creating agencies to communal control.⁽⁹¹⁾

Time and time again the profit motive is her target. It causes cotton goods to be passed off as fine linen and milk to be watered down. This in turn, she claims, is responsible for the high incidence of rickets amongst children and an infant mortality rate of 150 in every 1,000, 70% of which could be avoided if the supply of milk, like the carriage of letters, was taken over by the government. The underfunding of lunatic asylums, Ethel Carnie says, has the same cause, but like all the cases she highlights, could be remedied overnight if Britain started to produce for use rather than for profit.⁽⁹²⁾ She does not refer to the current Labour Party debate on child welfare during her time at *The Woman Worker*, but her attack on the Liberal government's programme suggests that she would have been critical of Labour's acceptance of the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act, which allowed but did not compel local authorities to provide school

⁽⁹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1909, p.252.

⁽⁹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 10 November 1909, p.430.

⁽⁹²⁾ *Ibid.*, 24 November 1909, p.478.

meals. Ramsay MacDonald justified Labour's support for the Act on the grounds that it was consistent with the notion of parental responsibility, and deflected those critics who were claiming that socialism would lead to state ownership of children. Although she concentrated on milk rather than school meals Ethel Carnie's position reflects the SDF claim that child welfare was the most important palliative principle in its plan to overthrow capitalism.⁽⁹³⁾

Another important aspect of Ethel Carnie's socialism is its integrity. Labour's negotiations for parliamentary co-operation with the Liberals towards the end of 1909 indicated to her that the Labour Party lacked integrity. She urged the party to stay true to the principle of independent labour representation, and to resist short term expediency, if the price was giving support to a government which had betrayed the people over the budget and votes for women.⁽⁹⁴⁾ She used another parable to illustrate this idea of political integrity. In 'Ships that Pass in the Night' the optimistic heroine tries to bridge the gulf between the good and evil she sees all around her. Even as she admits the effort is beyond her she is gathering her strength to try again. Ethel Carnie's point is that worthwhile principles must not be abandoned, they have to be preserved by perseverance.⁽⁹⁵⁾

Allegory could produce a surprising view of her beliefs, and perhaps that was its point. For example on one occasion she defined socialism

⁽⁹³⁾ Stewart, J., 'Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Party, and Child Welfare, 1900-1914,' *Twentieth Century British History* (Vol.4, No.2, 1993) pp.120-123.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 1 December 1909, p.498.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1909, p.519. The parable is based on an 1893 novel by Beatrice Harraden, who was later to become a WSPU activist.

as: 'working for pleasure instead of for money, serving for the sake of service and not for personal gain, loving for loving's sake and not for a house in Hanover Square, giving oneself as the leaves give their shade to shelter the swallow's nest.'⁽⁹⁶⁾ But Ethel Carnie had practical proposals for achieving socialism as well. One was a Right to Work Bill which would establish community production for its own needs. It would be facilitated by dispossessing those who failed to cultivate their land, and financed by a graduated income tax and a twenty shillings in the pound tax on unearned income.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Similar proposals had been made by the ILP, the SDF and the Right to Work Council in 1905, and adopted by the Labour Party in 1907. The government was now more sympathetic towards agitation for work than it had been in the 1880s and 1890s when, as Jose Harris says, it viewed unemployment as a problem of public order rather than of social distress,⁽⁹⁸⁾ but Ethel Carnie was trying to use the influence of *The Woman Worker* here to keep the right to work on the parliamentary agenda at a time when the Labour Party was pre-occupied by the Osborne Judgement.

Like Victor Grayson and many in the ILP she was anxious to distance herself from the encumbrance of the Labour Party connection. As the first general election of 1910 approached she expressed the hope that a new socialist party would soon be formed

⁽⁹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, 13 October 1909, p.343.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1909, p.518.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Harris, J., *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy 1886-1914* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1972) p.56.

which excluded the Labour Party. She referred to it as the British Socialist Unified Party or the United British Socialist Party.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Her intention of playing some sort of role in this party is, perhaps, indicated by her response to the failure of the left to make a bigger impact at the polls. It did not depress her. She was still only twenty-four, an optimist with a vision of a realignment of socialists in a more honest and caring grouping which would reflect the importance she placed on integrity, co-operation and trust. In her final 'Editor's Chair' she asked her readers to continue to work for internationalism and for Grayson.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

So the value of *The Woman Worker* to the biographer of Ethel Carnie the socialist lies in the detail it provides of her political ideas. It explains her socialism in both philosophical and practical terms, and shows that she was an ethical socialist with a moral vision that came from a passionate belief in high humanitarian standards. She shared the SDF and BSP materialist view of history that capitalist accumulation of profit based on the surplus value of workers created misery for the masses.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ What mattered to her in 1910 was the elimination of what she characterised as the competitive anarchy of capitalism. This was a task the Labour Party had failed to tackle seriously in her opinion, but one which she expected would be achieved if other elements within the Labour movement would

⁽⁹⁹⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 5 January 1910, p.598.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 26 January 1910, p.658.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ See Macintyre, S., *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980) pp.17-18.

concentrate on socialism and avoid factionalism. Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock suggest that two alternatives faced those who gave up on Labour at this time - syndicalism and the BSP. They describe syndicalism as the more radical reaction to Labour's perceived failure because it entailed rejecting parliamentary politics in favour of direct strike action and an alliance with the trade unions. By joining the BSP, by contrast, activists could channel their efforts into achieving socialist, as distinct from Labour, parliamentary representation.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Graham Johnson thinks the choice was especially tricky for SDF sympathisers because the Federation considered syndicalism compatible with membership as long as it did not involve a rejection of other aspects of social democratic politics.⁽¹⁰³⁾ I do not know how hard it was for Ethel Carnie to resolve this dilemma but the evidence suggests that she saw Victor Grayson as the best hope of unifying Labour movement dissidents, and that she actively supported the formation of the British Socialist Party in 1911.

Mary Gawthorpe and Dora Marsden, two disaffected WSPU members, started a new journal, *The Freewoman*, in 1912. In it they identified themselves as feminists interested in a much broader range of issues relating to the position of women in society than just their right to vote.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ The use of the term 'feminist' in this sense can be

⁽¹⁰²⁾ Barrow, L., and Bullock, I., *op.cit.*, p.249.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ Johnson, G., *op.cit.*, p.164.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Holton, S.S., 'The Women's Movement, Politics and Citizenship from the Late Nineteenth Century Until 1918', in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Pearson, Harlow, 2001) p.256.

traced back to 1894⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ and Arnold Bennett had used it of writers on women's issues in 1916,⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ however June Hannam and Karen Hunt say that socialist women did not call themselves feminists habitually before 1918.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Certainly Ethel Carnie never did but her writing shows an abiding concern about matters that would now be called feminist, and her contributions to *The Woman Worker* allow an initial impression of her feminism to be formed. They deal with abuse of mothers and children, the difficulty of obtaining a divorce, the campaign for the franchise, and women's reluctance to become activists.

Her first clear feminist statement in *The Woman Worker* ridiculed the prevailing stereotype:

'Do you want the early Victorian woman, with her high heeled boots, crinoline, fainting fits and clinging airs? So sorry sir, but we cannot turn back the wheel of progress for you. We shall no longer be again the faithful echoes ... of our husbands, swearing the sun the moon if they say so. Our brains may weigh a few pounds less, but what we have we mean to use'.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

Ethel Carnie rejected gender stereotyping and demanded that women join men in labour and leisure on equal terms. She allowed no exception to this principle because she believed there was no sphere in

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Barnhart, R., (ed.), *Dictionary of Etymology* (Chambers, Edinburgh, 1988) p.375.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Bennett, A., *These Twain* (Methuen, London, 1916) p.318.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s* (Routledge, London, 2002) p.10.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 4 August 1909, p.100.

which women could not contribute. For this reason she called for all workers who did the same job to receive the same pay,⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ but it also caused her to criticise the organisers of the Women of all Nations Exhibition at Olympia. They had been praised as innovative feminists for providing a creche for visiting mothers and children, but Ethel Carnie saw them as conformists, prepared to fulfil their male-determined role in society. Running a creche was no more demanding than making the tea in her view. She wanted better use to be made of women's stamina and moral judgement, qualities she thought men lacked.

She promised to work on behalf of the loveless, the child, the mother and 'those who can no longer battle.'⁽¹¹⁰⁾ For example she asked men to relieve women of the neglect and fear of abuse that led to prostitution. She also called for a Royal Commission to investigate child abuse and for legislation to require houses where children were taken in to board to be licensed and inspected.⁽¹¹¹⁾ And she wanted wives to be protected from ill-treatment by their husbands.

Ethel Carnie's comments on marriage in *The Woman Worker* are uniformly hostile. She believed it was an inimical institution which society would be better without. Ninety-nine out of every hundred women who married regretted it, she claimed, as they soon realised that it was a prison just as secure as the work from which they had

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1909, p.418.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 4 August 1909, p.100.

⁽¹¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 15 December 1909, p.536.

hoped to use it as an escape. She criticised current regulations which set the cost of divorce at sixty pounds, a prohibitive sum for working people, and she supported the recently appointed Royal Commission which had recommended liberalisation of the divorce laws.⁽¹¹²⁾ She also condemned church weddings and honeymoons. She called them barbaric intrusions into what should be private transactions. Her own wedding arrangements were consistent with these opinions - she married Alfred Holdsworth secretly at Burnley Registry Office, they did not have a honeymoon,⁽¹¹³⁾ and when the relationship became loveless she left him.

Equal political rights were of course important to Ethel Carnie, but during her time at *The Woman Worker* she rarely mentioned the suffragette campaign, and never sympathetically because of the violence of its activities. Indeed she was critical of Mary Leigh and Charlotte Marsh, two suffragettes who threw slates from the roof of Bingley Hall, Birmingham, on to police who were protecting the Prime Minister. Her concern was for those whose lives had been endangered although they represented an authority she hated.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Leigh and Marsh were imprisoned and became the first suffragettes to be forcibly fed, but Ethel Carnie does not comment on this development.

Karen Hunt says that the Adult Suffrage Society was 'one of the most invisible of the suffrage organisations, entirely absent from many

⁽¹¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1909, p.418

⁽¹¹³⁾ *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 22 September 1909, p.276.

accounts,'(115) however its activities were given prominence and approval by *The Woman Worker*. In October 1909 Ethel Carnie reported a debate between representatives of the WSPU, the Women's Anti-Suffrage League and the Adult Suffrage Society, although only the Women's Anti-Suffrage League representative's arguments are given in detail. This speaker justified her opinion that women should not be given the vote on biological grounds. Martine Farout suggests that the Women's Anti-Suffrage League position was based on the belief that a woman's foremost duty was to fulfil her biological function in order to buttress the British Empire at a time when its supremacy was threatened, if the gloomy reports of Boer War recruiting officers were to be believed, by racial degeneracy.(116) But as an opponent of imperial adventures Ethel Carnie interpreted 'biological grounds' quite differently. To her it meant simply that women, like men, were human beings, and that no further reason for giving them the vote need be sought.(117) There is no evidence that she was attracted by the eugenics theories of Francis Galton which were so popular at the time.(118)

Ethel Carnie disagreed with the ILP over the extension of the franchise. Of the European socialist parties affiliated to the Second

(115) Hunt, K., *Equivocal Feminists*, *op.cit.*, p.176.

(116) Farout, M., 'Women Resisting the Vote: a case of anti-feminism?' *Women's History Review* (Vol.12, No.4, 2003) p.606. Farout also points out that from August 1910 the *National Review*, the organ of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, advocated 'a Woman's Council elected by women to discuss women's questions and to make recommendations to Parliament.' (*Ibid.*, p.613). The idea of spheres of activity segregated by gender was frequently attacked by Ethel Carnie.

(117) *The Woman Worker*, 27 October 1909, p.396.

(118) Galton's *Essays in Eugenics* was published in 1909. Some feminists, like Selina Cooper, saw them as treatises on motherhood and childcare, but Ethel Carnie detected a more sinister, proto-Nazi message. See Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (Virago, London, 1984) pp.318-319.

International, only the ILP supported limited franchise, that is votes for women on the same terms as men.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ The SDF supported adult suffrage, that is the vote for all people over the age of twenty-one irrespective of gender or property qualifications. June Hannam has argued that individual women did not necessarily hold the official view about the franchise of the parties of which they were members,⁽¹²⁰⁾ and this seems to have been the case with Ethel Carnie. *The Woman Worker* report on the franchise debate indicates that she supported the Adult Suffrage Society's position rather than the party line, although it is not possible to say whether she left the ILP because of it.

Lack of political equality was offensive to Ethel Carnie, and she was perplexed and frustrated by the fact that few British women became activists. 'Why is it that men outnumber the women by ten to one in the socialist and Labour movements here?'⁽¹²¹⁾ Are women really interested in politics? she complained.⁽¹²²⁾ Her disappointment was the deeper because she thought women had a keener political sense than men, and were better able to remain focused on the struggle for human progress without being side-tracked by issues like co-operation with the Liberals, which she considered irrelevant. This idea of men's unreliability in matters requiring long term commitment, such as the conflict between labour and capital, can also be seen in a contribution she made to the local press at the time. Her target was John Morley,

(119) Hannam, J., 'New Histories of the Labour Movement', in Gallagher, A.M., Lubelska, C., and Ryan, L., (eds.), *Re-Presenting the Past: Women and History* (Pearson, London, 2001) p.164.

(120) *Ibid.*, p.163.

(121) *The Woman Worker*, 20 October 1909, p.372.

(122) *Ibid.*, 1 December 1909, p.498.

Secretary for India in the Liberal government but once editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette* with a reputation for supporting women and workers' causes. He became Viscount Blackburn in 1908, a title she claimed was only secured by abandoning those causes.(123)

Ethel Carnie emerges from *The Woman Worker* as an angry feminist. She demands compassionate legislation to eliminate endemic abuse of women and children; she criticises campaigns for anything less than full equality; and she regrets the lack of commitment to any form of political activism by many women. However it is clear that the prevailing anti-feminist climate is in her view a manifestation of deeper social problems, the real cause of which is capitalism. It is a view that made her reluctant to distinguish between her feminism and her socialism. That is to say her feminism was an integral part of her socialism, not a separate concern. The defeat of capitalism, she believed, would provide the freedom and equality she wanted for everyone and thus satisfy her feminist objectives as well. It was an opinion close to that of her contemporary Lily Gair Wilkinson of the Socialist Labour Party, who in 1910 warned that 'the enemy of the workers is not the male sex but the capitalist class.'(124)

Standish Meacham, writing about the pre-Great War working class, suggests that it was no longer much influenced by religion.(125)

(123) *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915, p.7.

(124) Wilkinson, L.G., *Revolutionary Socialism and the Women's Movement* (Socialist Labour Press, Edinburgh, 1910) p.21.

(125) Meacham, S., *A Life Apart : The English Working Class 1890-1914* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1977) p.16.

However Elizabeth Roberts' oral history project indicates that in Lancashire at least religion had not lost its hold in the early twentieth century, for most of her respondents claimed to be Christian believers and church-goers.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Ethel Carnie had attended Great Harwood's British School and been exposed there to current Methodist teaching. At the time the idea of religious duty was changing from belief in the efficacy of good works to the need for government intervention to limit social evils,⁽¹²⁷⁾ and her comments on prostitution and baby farming in *The Woman Worker* perhaps reflect the influence of these revised nonconformist priorities. By 1910 she was not a member of any church⁽¹²⁸⁾ but she was nevertheless interested in religious news. She liked the idea of women priests and expressed the hope that the Church of England, which allowed women into the ministry as deaconesses, would extend the principle so that one day there might be a female Archbishop of Canterbury.⁽¹²⁹⁾ She also recommended the *New Testament* as a socialist text and respected the early church as a proto-communist organisation. ⁽¹³⁰⁾

But generally her comments are critical. For example she highlights the case of a girl who committed suicide because she thought the world was about to end. The inquest found that the girl had been influenced by the religious press which, Ethel Carnie claims, was fill-

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Roberts, E., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984) pp.4-5.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Kent, J., *The Unacceptable Face : The Modern Church in the Eyes of History* (SCM Press, London, 1987) p.121.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ *Women Folk*, 6 April 1910, p.855.

⁽¹²⁹⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 27 October 1909, p.396.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, 8 September 1909, p.228.

ing the nation's asylums with people driven mad by religious mania. She hated apocalyptic religion because it was dangerous and exclusive, anxious to label those who did not share its values as the damned. She also found more innocent aspects of religious practice distasteful - badly sung hymns, over-long services, compulsory church attendance - because, to her, they were symptomatic of an organisation which was out of touch with its members. It led to a hostile review of the 1909 Anglican synod which tried to silence some of its younger clergy who had preached socialism from the pulpit.⁽¹³¹⁾

However she responded in an intensely spiritual way to nature. 'Autumn Leaves' for example, a description of the beauty of life season by season and the plight of those who are denied the chance to enjoy it, contains this elegy:

'Scarlet and grey, brown, deep brown, and pale amber, wannest greens that seem almost like April's - they are coming to the earth, leaving the naked branches to stand against the chill sky like delicate filigree work. The stars have winked through them during the long summer nights, the rising sun has turned them to golden splendour, the clear rains have washed them, the warm beams have dried, and the birds have sung amongst them with their shadows on the tiny eggs about the mother-bird's breast. Over them from birth to death was the broad, free sky; together

⁽¹³¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 13 October 1909, p.348.

they danced to the zephyrs that wandered amongst them - and sorrowing on their way, to the narrow streets, the shop, the factory, to the feast, the funeral, the bridal - and their whisper mixed itself in with their thoughts as they passed as the music of the instrument mingles itself to the singer's voice.

Why should it make us sad to see them lying on the earth, their beauty decaying, the glory that made the earth bright tramped beneath unthinking feet?'

The author goes on to identify nature as the saviour. Present suffering will be replaced by future bliss - 'The leaves, the birds, the mountain torrents shall speak to them yet' she says.⁽¹³²⁾ This belief in the ability of a pastoral scene to soothe the urban soul is commonly found in Ethel Carnie's work. The view of country life she offers is idealised, but it is a view formed first hand from an intimate knowledge of the countryside around the north east Lancashire mill towns. It undoubtedly helped her to cope with the degradation of factory work, and she wanted it to do the same for others.

In 1909, then, Ethel Carnie believed that conventional religion had become the enemy of the people it was supposed to succour and had abandoned the equality upon which it was founded, so she turned for the support she needed from religion to where she saw it, in nature.

⁽¹³²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.343.

Walt Whitman's poems, which speak of a divine presence in everyone and in all nature, were popular with ethical socialists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because they seemed to endorse their vision of equality and comradeship. John Trevor, founder of the Labour Church Movement was an enthusiast. Isabella Ford thought *Democratic Vistas* exactly expressed her beliefs. Katherine Bruce Glasier described *Leaves of Grass* as a twentieth century bible.⁽¹³³⁾ J.W. Wallace of the Bolton ILP attributed his spiritual transformation to Whitman.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Although Ethel Carnie made several respectful references to the poet I do not think she accepted him as a socialist saint in the way that many within the Labour movement did. Her personal religion was not mediated through Whitman or anyone else. Its inspiration was of a more direct sort that suggests she was a pantheist.

Karen Hunt and June Hannam identify two styles of women's columns in socialist newspapers of the period 1884-1914. One, typified by Dora Montefiore who edited the women's column of the SDF's *Justice*, was reluctant to devote a discrete part of a paper for both men and women to a women's column because this might affect what the writer wanted to say about class rather than gender issues. Writers in this style feared separate space for women would be filled

(133) Hannam, J., *Isabella Ford* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989) p.24.

(134) Robertson, M., 'Worshipping Walt. Lancashire's Whitman Disciples,' *History Today* (Vol.54, No.4, 2004) pp.51-52.

mainly with household management advice.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The other, typified by Julia Dawson ⁽¹³⁶⁾ who wrote 'Our Woman's Letter' in the *Clarion* between 1895 and 1911, was prepared to try to attract women to socialism by emphasising their roles as wives and mothers.⁽¹³⁷⁾

At *The Woman Worker* other departments were responsible for covering matters like these, so Ethel Carnie did not face Dora Montefiore's dilemma. However Robert Blatchford changed the title to *Women Folk* in February 1910 and gave 'The Editor's Chair' to his daughter Winifred. One reason for this rebranding was the hope that it would increase the magazine's circulation by appealing to all women, not just to working women, and Winifred Blatchford's contributions contrast sharply with Ethel Carnie's. She obviously saw her role differently - not to thunder against capitalism and write socialist propaganda, but to make readers feel cosy with features about running a home and bringing up children.

Another explanation for these changes is given by Blatchford in 'An Open Letter to Miss Ethel_____'.⁽¹³⁸⁾ It suggests that during his prolonged absence from the magazine through ill health Ethel Carnie left London for Lancashire without his knowledge because she was homesick. The fact that she was homesick is supported by her

(135) Hunt, K., and Hannam, J., 'Propagandising as Socialist Women: the case of the women's columns in British socialist newspapers 1884-1914', *op.cit.*, pp.173-174.

(136) Julia Dawson was the pen name of Mrs. D. Middleton Worrall. She was, briefly, a predecessor of Ethel Carnie at *The Woman Worker* and much closer in style to her successor Winifred Blatchford.

(137) Hunt, K., and Hannam, J., *op.cit.*, pp. 174-175.

(138) *Women Folk*, 2 February 1910, p.685.

poem 'Knowledge',⁽¹³⁹⁾ but this is hardly evidence that she walked out on the job. Indeed she continued to write 'The Editor's Chair' for four more issues after her successor was named (on 22 December 1909). The 'Open Letter' makes no reference to the differences of opinion between employer and employee, but there were many. In November 1909 Blatchford had accepted an offer from the *Daily Mail*, a target of Ethel Carnie's Yellow Press polemic in July 1909,⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ to report on German army manoeuvres.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ It had led him, on his return, to advocate conscription, an idea to which she was implacably opposed.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Like the ILP he supported limited franchise,⁽¹⁴³⁾ she favoured voting rights for all adults, which was the SDF position. He never read Marx and rejected SDF collectivist policies⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ whilst she moved closer to Marxism, the SDF and the BSP during her time with *The Woman Worker*. Both had utopian visions, but his was that of a parochial Little Englander, hers that of an internationalist.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ He was lukewarm about her great hero Shelley.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

Blatchford's practice had always been to let his contributors write what they wanted but he was no longer the 'out and out radical'⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

(139) Carnie, E., *Voices of Womanhood* (Headley Brothers, London, 1914) pp.88-89.

(140) *The Woman Worker*, 28 July 1909, p.84.

(141) Lyons, A.N., *Robert Blatchford. The Sketch of a Personality: An Estimate of Some Achievements* (The Clarendon Press, London, 1910) p.174.

(142) Thompson, L., *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman* (Gollancz, London, 1951) p.215.

(143) *The Woman Worker*, 10 March 1909, p.228.

(144) Thompson, L., *op.cit.*, p.109.

(145) *Ibid.*, p.111.

(146) *Ibid.*, p.222.

(147) Lyons, A.N., *op.cit.*, p.87.

of the 1890s, he was tired and ill, plagued by pneumonia and ptomaine poisoning⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ and anxious for a quieter life than Ethel Carnie's articles allowed him. His concern about the note she was striking was, perhaps, behind her admission in December 1909 that some readers might think her condemnation of the Liberal-Labour alliance too emphatic.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ If this was the case it could be argued that Blatchford sacked her because he felt her writing was becoming too extreme. Certainly his daughter promised that 'the Editor's Chair' would provide a more 'balanced and impartial' view of women's issues from now on.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ This background may reveal the real purpose of the 'Open Letter' - to provide the readership of the magazine with an explanation for Ethel Carnie's removal that does not reflect badly on Blatchford. The continued appearance of her poems might have helped the acceptance of this explanation amongst readers, even if the poet, now without a regular income, had little option but to carry on submitting them.

Whatever Blatchford's motives were for reducing Ethel Carnie's involvement with *The Woman Worker* and its successor, he was soon contemplating ending it all together. 'If she is not worth her money' he instructed Alec Thompson, his manager, 'drop her off the *Women Folk*, let her do occasional verses for the *Clarion* and charge the one

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ Thompson, L., *op.cit.*, p.87.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 15 December 1909, p.538.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ *Women Folk*, 2 February 1910, p.678.

pound to me. After all there are few kings who keep a poet'.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ By the time this was written Blatchford's admiration for Ethel Carnie was clearly over, though his willingness to employ her on piecework might indicate a bad conscience about the way he had treated her.

The issues of *Women Folk* for 9 and 16 February 1910 throw further light on the circumstances of Ethel Carnie's departure. Her poem 'If I Forget' is a nostalgic salute to her roots. It claims that she felt her work was distancing her from those she cared about, and that she wanted to return to the poor textile workers she grew up amongst and share their difficulties again. Her essay 'We Who Work'⁽¹⁵²⁾ also shows her deep commitment to her class, her distress at its suffering and her perplexity about how to alleviate it. It is a bitter piece and disappointment at losing her job may have contributed to it. Nevertheless she criticises herself for leaving the mill for the magazine - 'I tried to be content...but I hated the narrow, monotonous, long day', 'their patience put me to shame'. She acknowledges that her understanding of life was gained through hardship in the factory, not by working as a journalist - 'the torture of the turning wheels, the whirling straps, the roar and rattle of the machinery when I have come to my place sick with the cold, or tired with running lest I should be late. I should never have learnt any other way.'

(151) An undated letter from Robert Blatchford to Alec Thompson, Robert Blatchford archive, MS F9205 B72, p.3, Manchester Central Library. It was written from Villa Mentone, Rome, where he had gone to recover from pneumonia. Thompson, a longstanding friend and colleague in journalism was looking after Blatchford's business interests in his absence.

(152) *Women Folk*, 16 February 1910, (page numbers in this section of the original are missing.)

She was back in Great Harwood by early March 1910,⁽¹⁵³⁾ but she did not return to mill work immediately, for Thompson had commissioned her to write a series of essays describing a visit to Germany. These appeared in *Women Folk* between 13 April and 25 May 1910 under the title 'One Girl to Another' and concern the natural beauty of the Black Forest. She obviously enjoyed the trip, and it provided the inspiration for a children's Christmas story, 'The Bishop's Shoes', which was published in *The Wheatsheaf* the following December, but again she complained of homesickness. She never left the country after that, and except for brief stays in London in 1913 and 1922 she spent the rest of her life in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Her experience at *The Woman Worker* had, however, reinforced her belief in her ability as a writer and her determination to use it against injustice.

1.4. POETRY 1907, 1911 AND 1914

The working-class writers collectively known as the Blackburn poets had their heyday in the late nineteenth century. Nearly fifty of them had poems published, but the movement was oral as well as written, for the town had its own poets' corner where public recitations took place.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Like Ethel Carnie most worked in the mills, though unlike her many wrote in Lancashire dialect. She does not mention their influence, but the movement was at its strongest, lasting until

⁽¹⁵³⁾ *Ibid.*, 9 March 1910, p.775. Ethel Carnie asked for her letters to be sent to Great Harwood where 'I am well known to the police and the postman'.

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Beattie, D., *Blackburn: The Development of a Lancashire Cotton Town* (Ryburn, Halifax, 1992) p.126.

1914, just when she was writing her earliest poems, and the local cultural climate was right to help promote them in newspapers and through organisations like the Blackburn Authors' Society. This section seeks to show how Ethel Carnie's poetry amplifies the intellectual profile I have described in my review of her early journalism. It also demonstrates how she used poetry as propaganda, and examines it for biographical evidence for the period up to 1914.

One source suggests that Ethel Carnie was only ten when she wrote 'The Bookworm', the first of her poems to be published.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ She was probably older but all of the verses in her collection *Rhymes from the Factory* (1907) were written before she was twenty-one. Many of them reflect the views of a diffident teenager, indeed the preface to *Rhymes from the Factory* asks the reader's indulgence for her lack of education. Only five years full time schooling was common for working-class children then, but Jonathan Rose's research suggests that the church societies provided a good grounding in literature if nothing else.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Ethel Carnie also benefited from the working-class autodidact tradition in Lancashire. She read the *Clarion* which had a substantial book review section, she used Great Harwood's Co-operative Society library which had opened in 1870, and she had

(155) *Blackburn Times*, 20 June 1908, p.9. Other sources say she was eighteen or nineteen. See *The Millgate Monthly*, 1 November 1909, p.70 and *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915, p.7.

(156) Rose, J., *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001) ch.5.

some books of her own,(157) possibly bought from cheap editions like Dicks' Shakespeare - two plays for a penny, the complete works for a shilling.(158) Nevertheless, despite good notices of her early work in the local press(159) she was obviously nervous of the critical judgement that a book of verse would attract, and she wanted her youth and inexperience to be taken into account when her worth as a poet was assessed. However it was mainly a concern about content, not form. Her style has been analysed by Susan Alves who sees in it a mix of Victorian and Modernist characteristics.(160) The Victorian features, she says, are the construction of a communal audience, and uncertain self-mythologizing and self-inventing, in imitation of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti. The Modernist features are the use of banal rhetoric and the representation of the struggle of female emotion, often in romantic, sentimental and popular terms. There is, though, no external evidence that Ethel Carnie ever read the modernists, and I doubt that she strove for any of these characteristics.(161) Her own view of her style was much simpler - 'It might be as Miss Marianne Farningham said

(157) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 November 1906, p.9, and *Women's Outlook*, September 1920, p.295.

(158) Rose, J., *op.cit.*, p.131.

(159) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, *op.cit.*, and *Blackburn Times*, 23 February 1909, p.7.

(160) Alves, S., 'Whilst Working at my Frame: the Poetic Production of Ethel Carnie', *Victorian Poetry* (Vol.38, No.1, Spring 2000) p.80.

(161) The best guide to her literary influences is *General Belinda*. Even in 1924 they were mainly Victorian or earlier (see ch.2, p.206 below). The living authors she mentions most often are Hardy, Shaw, London and Galsworthy. Kathleen Bell explains that lack of knowledge of contemporary 'canonical' poetry was common amongst working-class writers because it was too expensive. See Bell, K., 'The Speech of a Silent Woman: Ethel Carnie's poems of 1914', a paper given at the Modernist Cultures conference, Birmingham University, 26 September 2003.

of me in *The Christian World* that my occupation had something to do with the rhythmic forms into which my thoughts shaped themselves'.⁽¹⁶²⁾

As well as weaving shed business other influences on Ethel Carnie's poetic style can be identified. For example the title page of *Rhymes from the Factory* acknowledges her debt to Longfellow, and she includes poems 'To Thomas Carlyle' who influenced SDF philosophy,⁽¹⁶³⁾ and about Hetty Sorrell from George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. And whilst it is true that much of her work does indeed represent the struggle of female emotion expressed in commonplace terms, her poems were written in a wide range of verse forms without favouring a particular style. An early review of *Rhymes from the Factory* went no further in an analysis of the way she wrote than to repeat the Preface statement.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ The 'Editor's Gossip' column of *Fellowship* for 9 August 1907 deals with poetry produced by factory workers. After commenting on the difficulty of poetic composition in mill conditions 'amid flying shuttles and mischievous picking-pegs and gliding mules and dangerous straps' the editor ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ praises Ethel Carnie's recent verse collection. He thinks 'Charity' is one of the best.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory by a Factory Girl* (R.Denham, Blackburn, 1908) p.vii - Preface. Marianne Farningham was the pen name of Marianne Hearn who wrote for *The Christian World* and *The Sunday School Times* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Farningham, M., *A Working Woman's Life. An Autobiography* (James Clarke, London, 1907).

⁽¹⁶³⁾ See p. 49 above. She especially admired Carlyle's claim in *Sartor Resartus* that everyone was much the same under their clothes. *Women Folk*, 9 March 1910, p.775.

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ *Blackburn Times*, 20 June 1908, p.7.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ This was Allen Clarke, leader of Paul Salvesson's 'Lancashire school', writing under the pseudonym 'Teddy Ashton'.

He does not say why, but the selected quotations he uses from the poem show that it is the sentiment, not the style, he admires. He is affected by the generosity of the poor sempstress who gives the old beggar a coin, compared with the selfishness of the rich woman who feigns concern but quickly forgets, and the professor who assumes that the beggar has brought ruin on himself, that he must be 'addicted to vice'.

Contemporary reception consistently showed that what Ethel Carnie said was far more important than how she said it. The President of the Blackburn Author's Society, W. H. Burnett, thought her 'wholly unconventional and would rather sacrifice sound to sense,' although he granted her 'easy power of compelling rhyme' and her ability to choose apt and felicitous epithets.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ However he believed he had discovered a powerful new voice because her work was sincere, didactic and free from theological tincture or stereotyped forms of thought. He challenged anyone to match her in 'clearness, exaltation, realisation of a true and pure ideal, or in free-running lucid thought.'⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

So Burnett encouraged Ethel Carnie because she had something to say and said it well. Other reviewers were interested in her for the same reasons. For example a second edition of *Rhymes from the Factory*, published in 1908, was judged to be 'fresh and original ... inspired by a love of nature and warm sympathy with the suffering of

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ 'Ethel Carnie as a Poetess', in *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 November 1906, p.9.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ *Ibid.*

the poor, the joy and gladness of the innocent and unspoiled'.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ In general terms these continued to be the themes dealt with in her other verse collections *Songs of a Factory Girl*(1911) and *Voices of Womanhood* (1914).

The evidence of contemporary judges indicates that Ethel Carnie possessed the literary skills necessary to be a successful propagandist, and the will to use them to create change. In 'Prelude' she insisted that she wrote poetry for earnest reasons, not for vanity, and that her aim was to help people now.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ In this sense poetry is an important aspect of her propaganda style.

Considering that all three of her books of poetry were published before she was twenty-eight and not yet married, and that many of the poems in them were written when she was a teenager, they cover a wide range of feelings and interests. For example in 'Ghosts'⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ she uses the image of a cemetery to personify dead love, sorrow and regret bursting their coffins and demanding our continued concern. Her advice however is to turn 'thy back upon their burial ground, Behold! Tomorrow's golden rising sun'. This determination to face a brighter future is sprung on the reader in the last two lines of what had seemed a poem of despair. A similar device is used in 'The Misanthropist'.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ The eponymous curmudgeon dominates the first

(168) *Blackburn Times*, 20 February 1909, p.7.

(169) *Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*, p.v.

(170) *Ibid.*, p.10.

(171) *Ibid.*, p.27.

five verses, offering the opinion that

'All things beneath the sky
Are fashioned on a selfish plan;
There is no virtue in the maid,
Nor truth nor honesty in man.'

The poet only denies him in the last four lines where she asserts that 'Man is not vile ... His feet are on the upward path', and forecasts his ultimate success.

'Civilisation'(172) is more complex in structure. It juxtaposes hope with despair, initially portraying the fruits of civilisation as available only to the few. She asks the question 'Was our toil, Up through the countless ages but for this?' and she exemplifies: 'That some may wear the flower, but most the thorn'; 'Lessons taught for one fine scholar – and the others, naught'; 'For one flower's subtle scent – and all this slime'. Whilst recognising man's shortcomings however the poet's optimism is, again, finally triumphant. She claims that

'... God would never mock
The creatures born with pain, to die with pain,
And force them through these endless grooves of change
Without some noble end, some glorious gain;
Some hope to reach the lowest, weakest, worst,'

and looks forward with confidence to the fulfilment of a socialist vis-

(172) Carnie, E., *Voices of Womanhood* (Headley Brothers, London, 1914) pp.77-79.

ion when 'for the first time in this vaunted land Labour and Love and Art walk hand in hand'. It is a vision she had first expressed, less eloquently perhaps, in *The Woman Worker* and which recurs in her work. We are asked to believe in 'a world where Beauty reigns' in 'A Year's Dream',⁽¹⁷³⁾ for example, although here fulfilment is not promised imminently but rather to 'man unborn' in an unspecified future.

Ethel Carnie's preoccupation with capitalism shows in 'The God of Gold'. It appears as an international scourge helped by its vassal, Greed, to buy power and fame everywhere by exploiting the blood and tears of the people.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Of course she did not invent this way of representing the love of money and its selfish consequences, but sometimes her point is made in a surprisingly fresh way. In 'The God of Gold' the reader is not comforted by hope of the end of an iniquitous system, instead the god is simply asked

'Canst thou purchase

A Burns, a Keats or a Moore,⁽¹⁷⁵⁾

Buy a friendship stamped with the hallmark of truth

Make a gentleman from a boor?'

(173) Carnie, E., *Songs of a Factory Girl* (Headley Brothers, London, 1911) p.40.

(174) *Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*, p.17.

(175) The reference is probably to Thomas Moore (1779-1852). He was an Irish poet whose sentimental and oriental romances such as 'The Last Rose of Summer' and 'Lalla Rookh' were still popular in the early twentieth century. It is just possible that the reference is to George Moore (1852-1933), the Anglo-Irish novelist and playwright. If it is Ethel Carnie may have *Esther Waters* (1894) in mind here. It is a story of a working-class teenage mother struggling to bring up an illegitimate child in the face of contemporary prejudice and male exploitation. However by bracketing him with Burns and Keats I believe it is the poet Moore whom Ethel Carnie means to celebrate.

The put down is gentle and typical. Society's inequalities and delusions are depicted vividly and condemned roundly, but the poet is still full of the hope and optimism of youth, not yet ready for revolution as the only solution. 'The Rich and the Poor' shows this well. 'Men with coffers flowing o'er still kneel at Mammon's shrine and pray for more', whilst some advise making the best of it - 'Life is but a little span, don't bother be as happy as you can' - and others advise waiting passively for death when they will have 'golden streets to walk on up above'. There is a sense of outrage in Ethel Carnie's response to these palliatives, but it does not lead to a call to the barricades. Although she admits 'my heart is weary and my soul turns cold with loathing' when she sees men's greed, she still believes that it can only be a matter of time before capitalism is rejected naturally. Her message is not rise up and overthrow your oppressors, but trust evolution - 'the little tinkling lowly mountain stream is swelling to a river...rushing on to meet the sea.'⁽¹⁷⁶⁾

She knew that to seek happiness from wealth would always be an illusion, not only 'when we are dreamers in Youth's fragrant bowers',⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ and in her pre-Great War poetry she eagerly points the reader to sounder alternatives. In 'Happiness'⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ it is the beauty of nature, love, music or literature that lead if not to happiness, then at least to contentment. In 'Civilisation'⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ her alternative is paganism.

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ *Rhymes from the Factory*, op.cit., p.20.

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ 'Happiness' in *Rhymes from the Factory*, op.cit., p.55.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ *Voices of Womanhood*, op.cit., p.78.

She felt betrayed by Christianity because of its alliance with capital and its failure to offer help to the poor this side of death. One stunning verse from this poem reveals the depth of her disaffection with conventional religion, and her attraction to a more pantheistic form:

'Sun worship! Now men worship barren gold,
Tread bloody, worldly ways o'er human hearts.
To count their wealth by figures in a book,
And praise a nation for its cluttered marts,
Great God, keep me a pagan; in this night
Of Mammon-worship, let me worship light.'

Few of her poems lack a reverent reference to nature. She took inspiration from her Lancashire surroundings and found in them a refuge from the distress which the injustices she saw in early twentieth century Britain caused her. Flowers and birds were a special comfort. This can be seen in 'Possession'(180) written before 1911, and later set to music by Ethel Smyth. Its images from nature are used to make a point about freedom. The poet plucks a rose whose fragrance is then lost forever. She cages a linnet whose song captivated her and it falls silent. She realises that only free will its beauty be able to soothe, as only unpicked will the rose give its healing scent.

Ethel Carnie's poetic view of freedom is personified by contrast in

(180) *Songs of a Factory Girl*, op.cit., p.49.

'Freedom'(181) as a 'barefoot maid', begging from door to door and often being rejected. The poet is confident of freedom's ultimate success however because of its undeniable truth. Its slow progress 'along the path of centuries' against vast odds should not dishearten us, she says, for Freedom's 'spirit cannot die - 'tis made of flame.' As in so much of her verse, here, too, is the naive confidence of youth expressing a noble dream in a lovely form.

Writing poems about freedom was one of Ethel Carnie's strategies for achieving it. Her belief that all would attain it in the end did not imply complacency, indeed she had worn herself out fighting for it by the early 1930s, but although her activism took various guises, writing was always the most important of them. 'Who Are The Great?'(182) is perhaps unintentionally prophetic about the nature and effect of her method. When it was written she had reached a wide audience through her contributions to *The Woman Worker*, but none of her novels had yet been published and she could not have expected the readership of her fiction to become so large. Yet her major effort to win converts to her ideals was *The Clear Light* project (1923-25) which was read by only a handful. 'Who Are The Great?' praises those who do the right thing anonymously, not the great artists or warriors but the boy who stops the bully, those

'Who oppose might with right;

Though two miles from the threshold of their home

(181) *Ibid.*, p.51.

(182) *Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*,p.88.

Their name is never heard; though all unknown
Save to their kindred and a few dear friends,
Their life proceeds unto its journey ends,
...
Like the poor herb that sways upon the wind,
Unnoticed by the masses of mankind,
They are truly great.'

She would not have intended these lines to refer to herself, but they nevertheless form an eloquent epitaph to her present anonymity.

Ethel Carnie's quietest, most reflective mood is contained in a group of poems that show her deep humanity, her willingness to take the world's burdens on her own shoulders. In 'Faith'(183) she states 'The human heart is beautiful and good.' She admits that 'poisonous deeds' threaten it but, she says, love will overcome 'its dark emotions.' However here it is not a confident claim. She asks for help to keep her 'faith in sweet humanity' through the 'cynical, cold...infidel and sour' trials of old age, and she can only trust, not know, that she will succeed:

'Yet will I trust, for better 'tis to fall
Through trusting much than trusting not at all.'

There is a similar uncertainty in 'To my Dear Friend Miss M.A. Pilkington'.(184) Amid nostalgic memories of a friendship's past and anticipation of the comforts it will provide in the future, she fears

(183) *Songs of a Factory Girl*, op.cit., p.48.

(184) *Rhymes from the Factory*, op.cit., p.83.

that her hopes for humanity will not be fulfilled:

'When our castles lie shattered - when Father time proves
That the dreams we indulged in were vain.
Still our Friendship, my sweet, like some beautiful gem,
Shall its joy - giving lustre retain.'

Sometimes in these reflective verses it seems, even when still young, that she doubted her ability. 'Think Not When Men Smile'(185) is about hiding doubt and presenting a brave face to difficulty, as must a frightened Spartan boy if he is to retain his standing in society, or as a rose must hide a canker if it is to seem beautiful. The closing lines show she knows the same pain:

'And this earth has some souls just as bright and
as brave,
Who can smile where another would groan,
And who show to the world all the sun of their lives,
Whilst they weep in the shadows - alone.'

Yet she is always able to overcome her fears in her poetry, such is the strength of her humanity. This quality is typically expressed in 'The Universal Life.'(186) She describes her soul as an open door through which all in need may pass, those who have won and those who have lost, the laughing and the despairing, the weak and the strong, the lovers and the loved, the mothers and the children. Their fate is hers. Had Susan Alves known of this poem her judgement of Ethel Carnie's

(185) *Ibid.*, p.86.

(186) *Songs of a Factory Girl*, *op.cit.*, p.24.

work as indicative of racial hierarchy and exclusion⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ would surely have been modified.

Claims of inclusiveness are often made by Ethel Carnie, but mothers and children had a special place in her heart. *Songs of a Factory Girl* is dedicated to her mother, as, later, was her novel *This Slavery*. It contains 'A Tired Mother' which must be a tribute not only to her own mother but to all mothers who coped with the demands of children and factory work without complaint, not only enduring the weariness but finding the resources to 'cradle...to rest with merry patience' the fretful baby.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ She wrote several traditional elegies to motherhood presenting woman as heroine overcoming social and industrial oppression and the trials of old age.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ She also wrote about man's violence towards woman. 'The Building' begins

'Nay, strike not back - Forbear, my mother said,
Tis women's part to suffer and forgive;
To kiss the striker...'⁽¹⁹⁰⁾

Ethel Carnie lived in a brutal society. She sought ways of preventing violence by man towards beasts, nation towards nation, and man towards woman, throughout her life, but at this point, that is in 1914 when she was twenty-seven, she suggests man's violence towards woman can be dealt with by dissembling - 'I fought my foes with

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ Alves, S., *op.cit.*, p.90.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ *Songs of a Factory Girl*, *op.cit.*, p.19. However Louisa Carnie had only two children, Ethel and her younger brother, Rupert.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ See 'Lines to My Mother' in *Rhymes from the Factory*, p.14; 'Motherhood', p.17 and 'The Mother', p.18 in *Songs of a Factory Girl*, p.62; and 'Old Woman's Song' in *Voices of Womanhood*, p.75.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ *Voices of Womanhood*, *op.cit.*, p.75.

smiles and dulcet words that held a hidden poison.' This is a tactic as old as Eve but the poet uses it to make a new point. Man's is the initial fault, but the blame is compounded because it creates woman's need for subterfuge, and this necessitates dishonesty.

In 'The Building' the consequences are tragic, woman 'made helpless with a kiss this Titan ... Betrayed him, scorned him, slew him'. 'The Tongue'(191) has a lighter tone but the same message:

'God made the woman's arm soft, warm and white,
And pencilled it with veins of harebell blue,
That it might cling to man with sweet delight
And clinging lead him better than he knew.'

However, feeling that even this armoury might be insufficient, as an afterthought God added to it the force of a woman's tongue. This is more than the familiar smug assertion, for in both these poems Ethel Carnie is saying that part of woman's role (along with everything else she has to cope with) is to moderate man's violence. It may have been a role she failed to fulfil in her own marriage. She left her husband 'to save her sanity' possibly because of his violence towards her.(192)

So autobiographical glimpses can be caught in Ethel Carnie's poems. She refers directly to her mother, her friends and her beliefs, and the biographer can infer character qualities such as self-doubt, optimism and modesty. Occasionally the poems also provide evidence of where she was and how she felt at a particular time. This is

(191) *Ibid.*, p.109.

(192) Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, Bk 63.

important in connection with her first visit to London. She must have moved there in 1909 to join the staff of *The Woman Worker*. We know her views on the issues of the day from its pages, but we do not know what she thought about living in London, about the job or about her feelings when she was dismissed from it. Four poems help to fill that gap.

'London'(193) describes the capital's 'grey streets, vast crowds,' 'the hoarse call of violet-sellers,' 'the child's thin treble' and 'the beggar's drone.' This is an expected approach. What is surprising is that she calls London 'dearer than woods bursting to new bright green', claiming that

'bramble bushes hung with gossamers

Wake not within my heart a thrill so sweet

As when surrounded by this mighty throng.'

Her reason is 'what are bees and birds, and chainless sea, compared with men and women?' Flesh and blood are more important than nature. Still, it is a rejection of natural beauty found nowhere else in her work. However I believe the poem was written soon after her arrival in London as a euphoric response to an exciting experience and in impatient anticipation of the great work ahead of her. The tone of 'A Crying Child in London,'(194) which immediately follows 'London' in *Songs of a Factory Girl*, is quite different. The sense of adventure has gone. The cries of the child are 'muffled,' 'dreary,' 'afraid,' 'over quiet.'

(193) *Songs of a Factory Girl*, op.cit., p.35.

(194) *Ibid.*, p.36.

Its tears are like 'sap from some old tree,' the result of the 'direst pain.' The call of the violet seller is not used now to help create a vibrant city-scape but to recall a pastoral spring scene of green woods and singing birds. By contrast London is seen in autumn, 'ceaseless traffic rumbles low' through falling leaves. The city is disembodied, there is no humanity in it now, rather

'London has...lies to sell as truths

...she has not time

To stay a weeping mite and dry its tears;

Like a tired jade she bustles ever on,

Striving to mitigate her vast arrears.'

This is a bleak and lifeless scene. It speaks of disillusionment as if, with familiarity, Ethel Carnie came to see London as a worse case of soulless depravity than the mill towns of her native Lancashire.

She may also have missed home. 'Knowledge'(195) is a poem about experience. In it she says that she is 'glad to have known the home-sick loneliness' and that she would not 'have missed the city's heat and strife,' for she emerged strengthened, better able to cope with the continuing struggle. She may also be commenting, as constructively as she is able, on her dismissal by Blatchford in the lines:

(I am) 'Glad to have felt the sting of unearned blame,

If that has taught my lips to be more kind.'

But she finds it hard to maintain the sensible view that there are valuable lessons to be learned from every circumstance, admitting that

(195) *Voices of Womanhood, op.cit.*, pp.88-89.

the pain of this circumstance, whatever it was, was a high price to pay. Still, she paid it, although 'Faiths Outworn'(196) perhaps suggests she came very close to giving up. It begins:

'There is no sadder hour in all our lives
Than when we find the spirit has outgrown
Some creed, or faith, which in the by-gone days
Had seemed sufficient for its joy alone.'

There is a world weariness in these lines. The faith it refers to must be the poet's belief in the ability of words to achieve the perfectibility of man. It is tempting to see here a decision to stop writing poems, for it ends 'Take them, O Time, for they have had their day,' and indeed the volume in which it appeared was her last. But this may be too gloomy a reading. After all, although most of her writing after *Voices of Womanhood* was novels and journalism, poems continued to feature in it and her voice in support of the cause was not muted, it became stronger and reached an audience far larger than her verse ever did.

The three volumes of poetry are important in any attempt to assess the development of Ethel Carnie's thought because they provide such a clear statement of her beliefs. They show a woman keenly aware of social injustice, full of love for humanity and desperate to help the weak. They also show self-doubt. She worried about her ability to

(196) *Ibid.*, p.63.

write verse polished enough to be taken seriously,(197) and, by the time of *Voices of Womanhood* her failure to change the world occasionally caused her to question whether the effort was worthwhile. Other sources provide the skeleton of her biography - where she was, what she was doing, when - but her poems give it flesh.

Ethel Carnie's poetry is also important because it gave her a voice. It was not one she intended to waste. Having overcome the embarrassment of being thrust into the limelight of Blackburn's literary circle and her fear that its educated middle-class membership would laugh at her crude style, she wrote on. Her determination to transmit her message is all the more remarkable because she had to work on too, for apart from her time at *The Woman Worker* her income from writing was not regular or large enough for her to live on without going back to the mill, or taking whatever other employment she could get, until 1923. However the reception her poetry received helped her resolve to continue writing. She realised she was in a favoured position - many working-class women shared her beliefs and agreed with her proposals for improving their world, but few had the chance to promote them, tellingly, through words. Perhaps self-recognition of her special status explains why she was reluctant to join political parties or other organisations of the left. Anyone could do that. She thought she could make a difference by writing.

(197) Wendy Webster states that such doubts amongst women working-class poets were common before Ethel Carnie's time and have persisted to the present day. See Webster, W., 'Our Life: Working-Class Women's Autobiography in Britain', in Bonner, F., Goodman, L., Allen R., Janes, L., and King, C., (eds.), *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995) p.116.

Most of her early prose was written for children. 'The Bishop's Shoes'(198) was the first of many stories to appear in the co-operative and socialist magazines after 1910, and she also had several collections published before the Great War, for example *The Lamp Girl and Other Stories* and *Books for the Bairns*.(199) All use exotic or fantasy settings and right versus wrong plots to lead the reader to a conclusion with a clear moral point. It was a structure she retained, with modifications, when she started writing novels for adults in 1913. The major new element was romance. Her poetry had suggested that this was a theme that interested Ethel Carnie as much as any of her contemporaries. The romance plot was well established as a winner amongst Edwardian women readers in particular, and she exploited it. Between 1913 and 1931 the popular love story became the main vehicle for her propaganda.

That is not to deny that she enjoyed writing them, nor that she hoped to make money from them, but in the following pages I try to demonstrate that she adapted her literary gifts to the creation of novels aimed at working-class women readers primarily in order to change their lives.

It is impossible to know how successful she was in this aim. Although some of her novels sold well and were reviewed well, contemporary notices suggest this was because of their plots not their message. I can not demonstrate that her readers spotted the message

(198) *The Wheatsheaf*, December 1910, pp.94-96.

(199) See Appendix 11.

and responded to it, however I can establish what that message was and how it was presented.

Ethel Carnie's novels contain fine descriptions of nature and some memorable characters who engage the reader's interest and concern. However they sometimes have unlikely plots in which melodrama predominates - a surprise witness secures a last minute reprieve from the gallows for the innocent hero,(200) mill girl marries factory owner's son,(201) a timely legacy revives a doomed plan.(202) But what distinguishes her work from the rest that used the same formula is her determination to make some point about society's faults and how these can be remedied. Her novels are shot through with such authorial interventions, so that her readers are forced to confront the issues she relentlessly places before them. Ethel Carnie aimed to make the passive reader think, for in 1910 she had written 'It is too terribly easy to give people what they want. The difficult task is to teach them to want something better ...We want to sting them into rebellion against poverty; to fire their hearts with a cause'.(203) Someone who might skip her essays in *The Woman Worker* or be put off by the overtly political content of *The Clear Light*, might still be stirred into action through her more accessible novels. Although the medium was different she hoped that the end result would be the same, the

(200) See *Miss Nobody*.

(201) See *Iron Horses*.

(202) See *The House That Jill Built*.

(203) *Women Folk*, 23 May 1910, p.163.

acceptance by her readers of socialism as the way to a better future and of the need for united action to secure it.(204)

Some of Ethel Carnie's novels contain more such interventions than others, and some work better than others, the moral point fitting naturally into the plot without interrupting it in a way that makes it an irritating intrusion for the ordinary romance reader. But all her novels bear this feature to some degree. The following section describes her first attempt to use a new type of propaganda and explains how she tried to influence her readers through it.

1.5. *MISS NOBODY*, 1913

The 'Miss Nobody' of her first novel, is Carrie, an orphan who makes a marriage of convenience with a local farmer. She soon rejects it because of the hostility of her sister-in-law, becomes a strike organiser in a Manchester factory, and is finally reconciled to both her sister-in-law and her husband after his acquittal following a wrongful murder charge. She inherits a fortune from her long lost father with which she does good works among the Lancashire poor. Several themes broached earlier reappear in *Miss Nobody*, for example anti-capitalism, feminism and socialism. The novel also provides a detailed

(204) Jane Eldridge Miller suggests that novels with a political content were considered risky by most writers at this time. Annesley Kenealy's 1916 votes for women novel *The Poodle Woman*, for example, was advertised as a 'non-political love story' in an attempt to avoid alienating readers. However Miller is concerned with middle-class writers. Ethel Carnie had plenty of working-class precursors and contemporaries, such as the members of the 'Lancashire school'. See Miller, J. E., *Rebel Women. Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (Virago, London, 1994) p.129.

account of the condition of the working class in early twentieth-century Lancashire.

Ethel Carnie's anti-capitalist critique in *Miss Nobody* is made in two ways. Firstly she describes the exploitation of workers in a flax mill and in a factory that produces Christmas cards. She shows the corrosive effect of capitalism on the hands by likening them to 'pale phantoms' who have become dull-eyed and neglectful of their children through overwork. There are few exceptions, but the spirit of the Winklesworths, at least, has not yet been broken. They are the poorest people Carrie knows, but they are still able to laugh, if grimly, at having to drink out of the same cup. They display a ship in a bottle in their window. The author uses the ship 'always struggling, always making no headway' to symbolise the plight of both the Winklesworths and the working class as a whole. 'It never sank, as many lives had done in those narrow streets to be washed up, broken, hopeless wrecks to make men shudder.'⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Wrecks were what capitalism usually produced, she says, 'half-timers...and grey-haired women who had borne children, buried children, had grandchildren, yet still must follow the call of the whistle'.⁽²⁰⁶⁾

Capitalist manipulation as depicted in this novel is more subtle and complete than this however. At the flax mill workers go blind because of poor light, a foreman who is prepared to provide new gas mantles before the old ones are completely done risks losing his job

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Carnie, E., *Miss Nobody* (Methuen, London, 1913) p.152.

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.154.

and is dismissed as a fool even by those he helps. 'He'll always be at the bottom' said Carrie, practically, 'He gives way.'⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Under capitalism consideration for others becomes a fault.

Of course the author was in a strong position from which to comment. Many of the images of exploitation she uses must have been taken from her own experiences in the mills of north east Lancashire. Certainly the factory sequences in *Miss Nobody* are vivid and convincing and challenge Peter Keating's assertion that pre-1914 fiction fails to come to terms with working-class life.⁽²⁰⁸⁾ This is perhaps most noticable when she deals with the brutalising effects of capitalism which dehumanises through fear and grinding poverty. Ethel Carnie brands it as criminal. For her a system which seeks to profit by such methods is evil. The point is tellingly made in this passage about two lovers:

'At such times a young couple found it difficult to believe that in a few hours the whistle would call them, two slaves amongst a multitude of slaves, when they felt that each other was the most wonderful person in the world! They walked on air, and saw the stars shine, and even poverty could not numb their hearts, but let them stray for a short time in that fairy garden whose gate opens but once, and, once closing, nevermore!

Through the following week the spirit of those few hours

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.156.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ Keating, P., *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (Secker and Warburg, London 1989) p.311.

consecrated their lives. Every bit of work they did was for each other, not for the boss. They lived for these week-ends, and forgot the mechanical monotony of walking backwards and forwards over a few yards of hot, dusty floor that pulsed to the throb of the tireless engine, and the whirl of the spindles became an accompaniment to thoughts of each other.

Then they married, and the 'bliss soon died. The old painful monotony crept back, worse than ever, and once again they were numbers -links in an endless chain.'(209)

In the Christmas card factory exploitation follows the same pattern. It robbed both the buyer, who paid 9s.6d. for a dozen cards, and the worker, who was paid a halfpenny for every fifty she made.(210) It cheated those it discarded of what they were owed.(211) It set worker against worker.(212) Control was exercised through bullying. (213)

Carrie rebels against capitalism by helping to organise a strike at the flax mill. It is successful but the price is high. Months surviving on five shillings a week causes hardship to all and the death of Annie Swales' baby, and Carrie is sacked 'for bad work', a trumped-up charge used to get her blacklisted throughout the industry. Later she chooses the possibility of starvation in preference to the continuous abuses of factory work. However throughout the suffering

(209) *Miss Nobody, op.cit.*, p.161.

(210) *Ibid.*, p.177.

(211) *Ibid.*, p.179.

(212) *Ibid.*, p.183.

(213) *Ibid.*, p.182.

they endure, the victims of capitalism retain some optimism. The ninepence an hour won by the strike 'was there for the next comers.'⁽²¹⁴⁾ The collective oppressions of the bosses do not break the communal spirit of the workers who continue to act unselfishly towards their mates in the direst situations. Margaret Vane spent the extra pence she earned one week on a dancing doll to hang on the gas mantle to make her friends laugh. Milly Jones replaced Betty Smith's bad twist with good twist of her own.⁽²¹⁵⁾ The workers protected each other as best they could.

The second way an anti-capitalist critique is made in *Miss Nobody* is through the character of Carrie's brother Charlie. He is caring, intelligent, charming and has noble qualities, but capitalism extinguishes them. His heavy, monotonous, poorly paid work as a blast-furnaceman leaves him without the energy even to read a paper. He, too, can see no point in continuing to let himself be used as a wage slave by an unfair system, but unlike Carrie he can't fight it, it changes his character. He becomes bitter, sarcastic and contemptuous of those who allow themselves to be exploited. He sponges off Carrie and loses all interest in life. He dies of a knife wound received when he intervenes in a drunken brawl to protect a woman he did not even know. It is the waste of human potential caused by capitalism that Ethel Carnie is highlighting here. Capitalism has turned Charlie into a thief, she says, but a boss who steals bread from hundreds by

⁽²¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.172.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.162.

paying starvation wages nobody calls a thief, because he lives in a fine house.

The position of women in early twentieth century society is an important theme in *Miss Nobody*. The author illustrates the gender discrimination of the time with the case of Molly Smith's youngest child, burnt to death whilst Molly ran an errand. The child had to be left unattended because her husband was drinking in the Red Cow, 'but because he was a man the coroner reserved his reprimand for the mother, who was the responsible person.'⁽²¹⁶⁾

Drunks crop up frequently in Ethel Carnie's novels. They are invariably men, sometimes excused by the author because they have been driven to the bottle unwillingly by despair, but usually pilloried as weak and selfish. Women in a similar position think of others, not themselves.⁽²¹⁷⁾ Most of the men in her fiction are flawed, reflecting her belief that as the power to control society lay with men, she was right to blame them for society's ills. It is not a class based judgement, but in *Miss Nobody* working-class men at least are given redeeming qualities, and one, the socialist who offers Carrie a lift is portrayed as purely philanthropic.⁽²¹⁸⁾ Ethel Carnie is indignant at the lack of options women have in a society controlled by men. Domestic service is dealt with more fully in *General Belinda*, but in *Miss Nobody* it is

⁽²¹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁽²¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.53.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.195.

one of the few available alternatives that Carrie tries. She hates it more than mill work, for the drudgery, exploitation and bullying are as bad, and there is not the consolation of the companionship she got in the factory. She felt 'she was as a captive in a strange land.'⁽²¹⁹⁾ So the best option for women was often considered to be marriage. In *Miss Nobody* Carrie initially thinks so - 'She determined to be a good wife - feed the pigs and make him good dinners - in return for the position and freedom he would give her. It would surely be a fair exchange.'⁽²²⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie characterises marriage here just as she had done in *The Woman Worker*, as a contract which trades a woman's work for security and independence, a better contract than that between worker and boss in the capitalist economy. Maybe she really believed that it could be, she had not yet had the experience of her own marriage to guide her, but in this novel the promise of marriage is not initially fulfilled. Soon enough Carrie comes to view the farm as a prison - 'I consider it next door to Holloway, where they puts Suffragettes, except the winders are bigger and there's no forcible feeding.'⁽²²¹⁾ The problem however is not the work, nor her husband, Robert, but the hostility of Sarah, her sister-in-law, who resents Carrie's challenge to her position in the household and does nothing to make Carrie welcome. Ultimately Sarah acknowledges her error and atones for it, so that the role of marriage as escape route is reinstated.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁽²²⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁽²²¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.95. This is the only time the author refers to this aspect of the WSPU campaign.

The author's point is that for all its hazards it is one of the few ways to a chance of a better future for women.

Miss Nobody is a portrait of despair from which its characters can not escape. The would-be suicide finds he is breaking society's law if he takes his own life even if it is a life no-one cares a farthing for.⁽²²²⁾ If you try the life of a tramp, as Carrie does for a while, illness, starvation or age force you into the workhouse eventually. Ethel Carnie tells her readers that society as it is presently constituted is unjust. However she also offers them a solution. The problem is poverty, the cause is capitalism, the answer is socialism. In this respect *Miss Nobody* has much in common with Robert Tressall's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Tressall's is a more polemically structured novel, with the author's arguments punctuating the story as regularly as its tea breaks, but it makes the same analysis of cause and effect, and recommends the same solution.

In *Miss Nobody* Ethel Carnie makes no attempt to apply Marxist theory to the situation she describes, as Tressall does, and she shows Carrie as politically naive. The laundry-van driver tells Carrie he has given her a lift because he is a socialist. That made her, or anyone else who needed help, his sister. Carrie calls that Christianity but the driver contradicts her, he sees nothing of religion in socialism. Carrie tries again - 'Is it pulling them down as is up?' and again she is
⁽²²²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.225.

contradicted - 'No, it's only makin' em get off those who are down.'⁽²²³⁾ One of the purposes of the novel is to plant this simple definition in the mind of the reader. Another is to take them beyond it. The book's final image is of Carrie, Robert and Sarah united in usefulness to society and love for a child who is 'unhappy under any sort of bondage'.⁽²²⁴⁾ Although it is Carrie's legacy that removes the fear of bondage from her daughter it is the family's unity that guarantees her freedom. The author's point is that usefulness and love are also essential components of socialism, and that if the Labour movement would embrace them, in future all children would be free.

Miss Nobody was well received by *The Times* whose reviewer said it was 'an industrial novel' which 'shows very great promise', and provides an accurate portrait of the grim determination of the Lancashire working class 'which is so difficult to present in literature.' *The Times* judged that 'the chapters on industrial life, whether true or not, are wonderfully powerful and vivid, and these alone stamp her book with distinction as a work of art, apart from the value they may have for social students'.⁽²²⁵⁾ So a national newspaper took the first novel of an obscure northern working-class woman seriously as a commentary on the condition of her class and her region, and maintained its interest until 1917 when it reviewed her next novel,

⁽²²³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁽²²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.296.

⁽²²⁵⁾ *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 September 1913, p.377.

However the fullest notice of *Miss Nobody*, in *The Wheatsheaf*, is baffling. It includes biographical background which explains how Ethel Carnie was able to escape from factory work herself, yet it makes no reference to the factory scenes in the novel nor to any aspect of the author's critique discussed above beyond the opinion that 'those who fail to express themselves come to be ignored by the world'. The rest of the notice is confined to an assessment of the Carrie, Robert, Sarah relationship about which it is generally favourable, although it criticises Ethel Carnie for resorting to melodrama for the ending. It attributes this to her youth, and need of 'a deeper knowledge of the innermost secrets of character'.(227)

It is a major review of the novel and yet it shows no appreciation of Ethel Carnie's purpose or method. It makes me question whether her work was having the impact she intended. How many other readers ignored the message behind the story?

Pamela Fox follows *The Wheatsheaf* in disputing the primacy of the political message of *Miss Nobody*. For her the novel challenges the traditional romance model by being neither 'a potboiler fantasy nor a service contract'.(228) She may be right about this, and a consideration of the role of Sarah in the story would have helped her case. Fox never

(226) *Ibid.*, 31 May 1917, p.262. However *The Times* reviewed none of her work after this date.

(227) *The Wheatsheaf*, November 1913, pp.85-86.

(228) Fox, P., 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's Revolt of the Gentle : Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working Class Women's Writing', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) p.62.

mentions Sarah despite the fact that she plays a significant part in the breakdown of the promising relationship that is beginning to develop between Carrie and Robert. As Robert's spinster sister, Sarah is one of the legions of female relatives who suffer from the patriarchal code which, Fox says, governed romance at the time. Part of the code made women like Sarah dependent on the tolerance of their male relatives' wives for a home, a situation that Ethel Carnie acknowledged in *The Taming of Nan* and *The Marriage of Elizabeth* as well as in *Miss Nobody*. In this case it is Sarah's hostility to Carrie, born of insecurity and resentment, that initially breaks the marriage, and her remorse later that remakes it.

But Fox has a prior concern. It is to depict the romance between Carrie and Robert as cross-class, and only resolved when Carrie accepts a future 'in an entirely different class community'. Fox claims that this shows that Ethel Carnie imitates and endorses middle-class social novels which use marriage between classes to stave off radical change.(229) If she is right *Miss Nobody* is a conventional romance in which a working girl gets to marry a landowner. This interpretation makes the book's urban sequences irrelevant except to show that Carrie comes from a different class from Robert, and demonstrates a misunderstanding of the social position of both, for Robert is a working farmer with little land who needs a working wife to help him cope with his hard life. He is not a member of the gentry. Carrie is of (229) *Ibid.*, p.64.

the urban working class but Robert is of the rural working class, they run the farm in a partnership of equals.(230)

This reluctance to consider the critique of capitalism in *Miss Nobody* through an examination of living and working conditions and industrial disputes, what Fox calls the 'public arena' of working-class fiction, leads her to ignore another of the novel's main characters, Carrie's tragic blast-furnaceman brother Charlie. This selective approach does not invalidate Fox's argument that *Miss Nobody* is a romance novel with a point to make about sexual politics, for Ethel Carnie is certainly critical of the repressive patriarchal code of the time, but her priority is to stimulate political reflection in the romance reader on the economic evils of capitalism. The concluding image is not about ideal love between different classes, it is about a socialist future in which class divisions are swept away altogether.

Mary Ashraf has written the only other serious study of *Miss Nobody*.(231) Her Marxist analysis identifies it as an example of proletarian realism which achieves 'a remarkably true and unstereotyped embodiment of the general condition of a large part of the working class'.(232) Ashraf's judgement is that Ethel Carnie portrays Carrie without sentimentality, not yet a socialist but good material for becoming one and helping the success of the revolution in

(230) In a book of sixteen chapters only four have an exclusively rural setting, whilst six are wholly or partially to do with factory conditions. Another six concern Carrie's experiences as a tramp, Robert's trial, and the final resolution of the plot.

(231) Ashraf, M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain Part II : Prose* (Berlin, 1979) pp.168-176.

(232) *Ibid.*, p.186.

due course.⁽²³³⁾ She says that Carrie taps her native optimism to overcome the horrors of working-class life that deaden the imagination and make hardness the price of survival, and to overcome the narrow minded rural backwardness she encounters after her marriage. It is this optimism, she says, that allows Carrie to become politicised.⁽²³⁴⁾

Ashraf's characterisation of Carrie reflects the Marxist influences at work on Ethel Carnie in the period between 1910 and 1912 and accurately places her well on the way to becoming a revolutionary socialist, a position *This Slavery* shows she had reached by 1925. However Ashraf shows no appreciation of *Miss Nobody's* use of romance as a way of embedding socialist ideas into the plot and getting readers to take them more seriously. Ethel Carnie was still using the device to introduce the idea of the overthrow of capitalism by revolution when she wrote *This Slavery*, but to Ashraf the medium, as to Fox the message, seems to have been invisible.

Political parties always want new members. Karen Hunt has discussed what methods the SDF used to involve more women, arguing that it even tried to counter the perception that politics was boring by painting a future socialist society as a shoppers' paradise,⁽²³⁵⁾ and Susan Bruley has shown that a tradition of presenting Marxist ideas in a simplified, popular form was well established as a recruiting tool. The example she uses is *The Woman*

⁽²³³⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.182-183.

⁽²³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.179.

⁽²³⁵⁾ Hunt, K., *Equivocal feminists, op.cit.*, p.201.

Question, a pamphlet written by Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling which attempts to summarise the work of Engels and Bebel in sixteen pages.(236) But a more typical SDF recruitment strategy was to make *Justice* more accessible by publishing in it stories that made a socialist point, and by 1914 Ethel Carnie had decided that this was the way she would proselytise in the socialist and feminist cause. She had tried journalism, poetry and fiction but as yet her propaganda style was still evolving. She had published *Miss Nobody* but there was no hint that the novel would become her favoured and most successful medium. However she was sure that it was through writing that the changes she wanted would be achieved, for in 1914 she once more invoked the power of the pen, calling on other writers to help the Esher bookbinders who were on strike. Her justification was the debt all writers owed to those who made a physical reality of their ideas.(237)

Many of the issues that would preoccupy her throughout her career were also set by 1914 - socialism, capitalism, feminism and religion. The hallmarks of her beliefs in relation to these issues at this time were idealism and gradualism. Her socialism was based on the conviction that people could live together in loving comradeship and that nature, music and literature had the power to support this. When it came to practical action she preferred constitutional means. Violent protest was not yet an acceptable strategy for her even though

(236) Bruley, S., *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939* (Garland, New York and London, 1986) p.21.

(237) *Daily Herald*, 16 June 1914, article entitled 'Book-Makers and Bookbinders', British Library Jaffray Collection 168/31. The original shows no page number.

her comments on capitalism's 'murderous' effects on women and children were always bitter.⁽²³⁸⁾ In 1914 she still believed that capitalism would die through a natural process of rejection, but there are indications that her view was changing, for that was the year she got involved in the adult education controversy.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) had been founded by Albert Mansbridge in 1903 and had become the most successful early twentieth century organisation through which working people could get higher education. It was in the same liberal, non-partisan tradition as Ruskin College from which rebel students had seceded to form the Marxist Central Labour College in 1909, because they believed Oxford University was attempting to steer them in a conformist political direction.⁽²³⁹⁾ The WEA, too, was criticised by Marxists who saw objective scholarship as a deliberate distraction of workers from class warfare. Ethel Carnie was one of those critics. In 1914, claiming to be the conscience of the SDF which had been betrayed by its leadership, she conducted a debate in the correspondence columns of the *Cotton Factory Times* with Lavena Saltenstall who held the view that WEA classes were liberating and no threat to workers' class consciousness or dreams of a better, non-capitalist future. Saltenstall was echoing the enthusiasm for the WEA of Alice

(238) *Women Folk*, 16 February 1910, article entitled 'We Who Work'. The page number is missing in the original.

(239) Jonathan Rose has collected convincing evidence to show that Ruskin College did not have a capitalist agenda aimed at stifling dissent, and continued to produce political militants after the 1909 secession. See Rose, J., *op.cit.*, pp.260-265.

Foley who claimed that it not only provided the means of achieving socialism, but was socialism in fact.(240) Ethel Carnie's letters show that she believed WEA classes were disabling the Labour movement's best minds in the evening just as effectively as the mill owners were during the day. It was a situation she characterised as a capitalist partnership to exploit the worker 'from every point of view', and she advised workers to spend what little leisure time they had preparing for class conflict.(241)

Lavena Saltenstall thought Ethel Carnie was 'libelling the intelligence of the working classes' by implying that they could be so easily fooled.(242) Like much of her writing during this period, this debate suggests that by 1914 Ethel Carnie was frustrated by the willingness of the exploited to accept their exploitation. She was certainly not criticising the idea of higher education, but when the WEA failed to produce the results she expected - enlightenment leading to the overthrow of capitalism - she took the hard line, education must become more focused on making revolutionaries.(243)

The Marxist position she adopted during this debate supports my hypothesis that despite her known ILP affiliation there was a strong SDF strand in Ethel Carnie's political thinking. During the period covered by this chapter she embraced ethical socialism because it

(240) *Ibid.*, p.54.

(241) *Cotton Factory Times*, 6 March 1914, p.4.

(242) *Ibid.*, 3 April 1914, p.8.

(243) *Ibid.* However she was critical of H.M.Hyndman, Rev. Conrad Noel and Lady Warwick for leaving SDF members 'befogged' by their silence, and urged the Lancashire SDF to make its leaders condemn the iniquitous WEA 'capitalist - clerical scheme'.

matched her wish to live out her socialist ideals daily in a comradely spirit of co-operation. It enabled the strong sense of the teacher in her to feel fulfilled by making a moral condemnation of capitalism rather than an analysis of it. She used her imaginative writing as a didactic tool to recommend gradualist ways of reordering the capitalist society she attacked in *The Woman Worker*. But at the same time she attended SDF meetings, she had close links with Marxists like Dan Irving, Victor Grayson and Mrs Bridges Adams, and with Marxist organisations like the BSP and Bebel House.

Against this background her *Cotton Factory Times* letters come as less of a surprise. Her early commitment to ILP ideas of ethical social progress had not eliminated more extreme solutions to the evils of capitalism in her thinking, and by 1914 she was already considering the possibility that evolutionary methods alone might not be capable of achieving the changes she wanted.

CHAPTER 2 - FROM 1914 TO 1924

2.1. THE BIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Alfred Holdsworth was a life assurance agent when he met Ethel Carnie at the Nelson Writers' Circle. They were married in Burnley on 3 April 1915 and lived at 76 Garnett Street, Barrowford.⁽¹⁾ *The Pioneer*, a Burnley Labour and Socialist Movement paper edited by Dan Irving, secretary of the Burnley SDF, reported the event, referring to Ethel as a gifted poetess and 'for some years an ardent worker in the socialist cause.'⁽²⁾ She was close to the SDF on issues of social reform, but she supported the anti-war group within the BSP, of which the SDF had become a major part in 1911. However the Burnley branch, dominated by Hyndman and Irving, declared its support for the war in May 1916.⁽³⁾

By then Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had made her opposition to war public. She had to, for pro-war poetry bearing her name was published in a local paper in early 1915. A vigorous disclaimer was issued in which she expressed her opposition to recruitment in particular.⁽⁴⁾ Later the same year she became involved with the British Citizen Party. She contributed an article condemning conscription to its paper *British Citizen*,⁽⁵⁾ and chaired anti-conscription rallies in

(1) *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915, p.7, and birth certificate of their daughter Margaret Louise Holdsworth. See Appendix 12 and Appendix 13.

(2) *The Pioneer*, No.228, April 1915.

(3) *Ibid.*, No.242, June 1916, p. 2.

(4) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 1 May 1915, p.6.

(5) *British Citizen* ran for twelve issues between 11 December 1915 and 18 March 1916. It opposed the war and supported the reform issues of the day.

Nelson and Halifax which were disrupted by pro-war groups.⁽⁶⁾

She was pregnant at the time, for her daughter, Margaret, was born on 15 May 1916. The following year her husband was conscripted. Although he shared his wife's socialist and anti-war views, and may have applied for exemption on conscientious grounds, he went to the Western Front in 1917.⁽⁷⁾ Ethel carried a red flag to the railway station to see him off.⁽⁸⁾ Ten months later he was reported missing, presumed dead. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth continued to write during this period. In 1915 a long story *Iron Horses*, a model for her 1925 socialist novel *This Slavery*, was serialised in *The Co-operative News*,⁽⁹⁾ but her first major fictional success came in 1917 when *Helen of Four Gates* went into a fourth edition and finally sold over 33,000 copies.⁽¹⁰⁾ She must have received little by way of an advance or royalties for this work at the time, for early in 1918, destitute and assuming that she was a widow with a two year old daughter to support, she moved in with the Simm family at 24 Palmer Street, Blackburn. Whilst there she wrote articles for local papers and taught

(6) *Ibid.*, 25 December 1915, p.1.

(7) Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, BK63.

(8) Oral evidence of Harold and Bessie Dickinson to Ruth Frow, in 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth', notes for a lecture given at Great Harwood library, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford. Bessie was only thirteen, but already a weaver in Nelson and a member of the Weavers Union. She joined the CPGB in 1922 and became a leading cadre in north east Lancashire, active especially during the 'more looms' dispute of 1931-32 (see p.314 below). Ethel's red flag gesture seems to have made her a local heroine to people like the Dickinsons. See Bruley, S., *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1920-1939* (Garland, New York and London, 1986) p.213.

(9) *The Co-operative News*, 31 July-11 December 1915.

(10) Adverts facing title pages of *Helen of Four Gates* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1917) - Fourth edition; and *The Taming of Nan* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1920) - 33,000.

the Simm children to make artificial flowers from crepe paper.⁽¹¹⁾ Later that year her husband was discovered alive in a British hospital having been transferred from a prisoner of war camp,⁽¹²⁾ and when he recovered the family moved to Colden near Hebden Bridge.⁽¹³⁾ Their second daughter Maud was born there on 14 January 1920. Her birth certificate describes Alfred Holdsworth then as a farmer.

There were some financially difficult periods for the Holdsworths between 1919 and 1924, for example in 1922 when they had to sell the house in Colden and move in with Ethel's parents in Barnoldswick. They went to look for work in London, failed to find it, and returned to live at Slack, near Hebden Bridge. But they were usually well off for this was one of Ethel's most prolific and successful periods. Three more novels - *The Taming of Nan*, *The Marriage of Elizabeth* and *The House That Jill Built* - were published in 1920. *Down Poverty Street* was never published in book form but it was serialised in 'a popular weekly newspaper' in 1922.⁽¹⁴⁾ Another novel, *General Belinda*, followed in 1924. A further boost to her income came when *Helen of Four Gates* was filmed at Hardcastle Crag by Cecil Hepworth.⁽¹⁵⁾ *The Taming*

(11) Oral evidence of Arthur Simm to Roger Smalley, 8 June 1993. However she presumably also received the serviceman's wife's allowance. See Winter, J.M., *The Great War and the British People* (Macmillan, London, 1985) p.234.

(12) Alfred Holdsworth archive, *op.cit.*

(13) *Blackburn Times*, 31 July 1920, p.6. The harsh attitude of the Nelson authorities towards those who had resisted conscription may have prompted this move. Even though the war had ended they were hounded and given punitive hard labour sentences. See Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel* (Virago, London, 1984) p.301.

(14) *World's Work*, May 1922. I have not discovered the identity of the paper.

(15) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 26 June 1920, p.7. It was filmed in 1920 but released in 1921.

of *Nan* may also have been made into a film⁽¹⁶⁾ although the sources refer to this as a proposal or as a 'film drama'. The film rights were bought by an American company but there is no evidence that it got beyond the planning stage.⁽¹⁷⁾

It is difficult to calculate Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's earnings from her novels. The sales figures are only available for *Helen of Four Gates* and these are only approximate, however the contract she signed with Herbert Jenkins established the following royalties formula:

10% of the published price on the first 2,000 copies.

12.5% of the published price on the next 3,000 copies.

15% of the published price on subsequent sales, 28,000 plus in the case of *Helen of Four Gates*.

The contract also offered 50% royalties on American sales and 10% on colonial and other sales, but I do not know how well the book sold in these areas. The cost of a copy in 1917 was six shillings, so these figures would have given the author an income, eventually, of at least £1,200 from this book. However she may have received significantly less than this estimate suggests, for the term 'published price' may mean the cost to Herbert Jenkins of publishing the book rather than its cover price to the buyer, and the contract also stipulated that for the purpose of royalties each thirteen copies would be reckoned as twelve. Agents fees would also have reduced the income, nevertheless

(16) *Labour Who's Who* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1927) p.105.

(17) *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April 1932, p.11.

Helen of Four Gates alone earned her a huge sum.⁽¹⁸⁾ Its relative worth is indicated by contemporary property prices - in 1919 she bought Long Tail, formerly an inn with 392 square yards of land attached for £100.⁽¹⁹⁾

So after the post war boom ended in 1921 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was protected against the consequences of the slump that followed by the income from her writing whilst all around her the situation was desperate. For example by 1922 the number of working looms in Blackburn had dropped to 48,000 from 90,000 in 1918,⁽²⁰⁾ and the Geddes 'Axe' reduced government spending by £64,000,000 including cuts to health services and the council house building programme.

2.2 THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress supported the war in 1914, the ILP did not. The split led to the replacement of James Ramsay MacDonald by Arthur Henderson as leader of the Labour Party and the exclusion of others, notably Philip Snowden and George Lansbury, from the wartime Coalition set up in 1915. However the Asquith - Lloyd George power struggle within the Liberal Party encouraged Labour to believe it could become the principal rival of the Conservatives after the war, and it undertook a complete reorganis-

(18) The first payment was to be made nine months after publication, and at six monthly intervals subsequently. Memorandum of Agreement between Ethel Holdsworth and Herbert Jenkins, 16 May 1915, Barrie and Jenkins archive, Random House, London. See Appendix 15, p.xxi.

(19) West Riding Registry of Deeds 1919-1931, Vol.56, p.848, no.306, and Vol.66, p.491, no.160. See Appendix 17.

(20) Beattie, D., *Blackburn: The Development of a Lancashire Cotton Town* (Ryburn, Halifax, 1992) p.146.

ation to that end. The Labour Party Constitution of 1918 was one result of this reorganisation. It established branches in every constituency and was prepared for the first time to enrol individuals as well as to affiliate groups. Consequently many who had joined the ILP earlier now opted just for Labour Party membership. The ILP leader, MacDonald, was reinstated as leader of the Labour Party in 1922, but by now he was less sympathetic towards the ILP's policy of 'Socialism in our Time', a radical programme based on state control of credit and money, payment of family allowances, and the guarantee of a realistic living wage through the establishment in each industry of a commission to fix wage rates.⁽²¹⁾ Instead MacDonald backed the manifesto 'Labour and the New Social Order,' which expressed the Party's commitment to tackling post-war reconstruction and to socialism, but of the evolutionary, gradualist kind favoured by its Fabian authors, and was, perhaps, deliberately designed to sideline socialist activists who preferred Marxist revolutionary solutions.⁽²²⁾

Stuart Macintyre offers convincing proof that British Marxism was transformed after Hyndman took the pro-war faction out of the BSP and re-established the SDF in 1916. For example he says that under the influence of John Maclean and Willie Gallagher the BSP began to criticise the war and to agitate for Marxism more effectively, within both the trade unions and the Labour Party.⁽²³⁾ He adds that the

(21) Brown, G., *Maxton* (Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1986) p.186.

(22) Labour Discussion Series No.1, *The Rise of Labour* (Labour Party, London, 1946) p.9.

(23) McIntyre, S., *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980) p.20.

Socialist Labour Party, which had split from the SDF at the turn of the century and had a more extreme Marxist agenda, which included replacing existing state machinery with working-class institutions to prevent state power from defending the older order, also began to co-operate with BSP strategies.⁽²⁴⁾ Furthermore, Macintyre says, the ILP developed a Marxist wing which, unlike its ethical socialist wing, became estranged from the Labour Party. One of its initiatives, in co-operation with the BSP, was the creation of the United Socialist Council. This supported committees of workmen and soldiers delegates for initiating and co-ordinating working-class activity at its 1917 convention. Some saw it, understandably, as a move towards the dictatorship of the proletariat through the creation of soviets, although Stephen White has argued that the Convention's real aim was to use recent events in Russia to stimulate the peace movement in Britain.⁽²⁵⁾

However the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) became the focus of Marxist hopes of further progress after its formation in 1920. The BSP was the largest component of the new CPGB. Other groups which joined before or at the Unity Conference of 19 January 1921 were the Communist Unity group of the Socialist Labour Party, Sylvia Pankhurst's CPGB (British Section of the Third International), the South Wales Socialist Society, and the Marxist wing of the ILP.⁽²⁶⁾ There is no evidence that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was involved with

⁽²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²⁵⁾ White, S., 'Soviets in Britain: The Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History* (19,1974) p.174.

⁽²⁶⁾ Bruley, S., *op.cit.*, p.62.

any of these groups in 1921, although there is circumstantial evidence that she had joined the BSP in 1911, (see p.57 above). CPGB strategy initially was to affiliate to the Labour Party, but in 1922 it adopted Bolshevik organisational methods, striving for greater co-ordination through national and district committees. The CPGB aimed to provide a militant lead in the trade unions and win over radical sections of the Labour Party by agitation and exposure of the inadequacies of the leadership. In the 1920s it commanded impressive electoral support - in 1922 J.T.Walton-Newbold and Shapurji Saklatvala became Communist Party MPs for Motherwell and Battersea North respectively,⁽²⁷⁾ and in 1923 its nine candidates averaged 25.3% of the poll - but it did not become a major force in national elections, nor did it make a significant impact on Labour's national position.

In 1918 Labour returned fifty-nine MPs and polled over 2,300,000 votes in an election won by a Conservative dominated Coalition. In 1922 Labour's representation increased to 142 MPs from over 4,200,000 million votes. The Conservatives had a majority of eighty-eight over all other parties, but for the first time Labour became the official opposition as the Liberal decline and division continued. Asquith Liberals gained sixty seats, Lloyd George National Liberals fifty-seven. By 1923 the Labour vote passed 4,300,000 and its representation in the Commons rose to 191, but the Liberals, reunited now under Asquith, sustained the Conservatives in power. This co-

⁽²⁷⁾ They were elected as Communist Labour candidates, that is they did not face Labour Party opposition.

operation was short lived however. It ended in disagreement over Conservative protectionist policies and the Liberals switched their support, enabling the first Labour Government to be formed in January 1924.(28)

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was thirty-two at the time of the 1918 election, but she was not a local government elector and her husband was presumed dead, so she was not one of the 26,000 women who voted for the first time in the Blackburn constituency where she was then living.(29) The sitting Labour MP, Philip Snowden, was defeated, probably because of his opposition to the war, as the successful Coalition Conservative, Percy Dean, was a 'coupon' candidate who had recently been awarded the Victoria Cross.(30) In 1918 the Clitheroe constituency had been split. A part of it became the new division of Nelson and Colne, which included Barrowford where Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had lived until earlier that year. Albert Smith won it for Labour and it was retained in 1922 and 1923 by Arthur Greenwood. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's constituency in 1922 was either Skipton (if she was living in Barnoldswick then) or Sowerby (if she was already on the Hebden Bridge register). Both returned Conservatives.

(28) Election data based on figures in Mowat, C.L., *Britain Between The Wars 1918-1940* (Methuen, London, 1962) pp.6-7, 145,168 and 171.

(29) Taylor, A., *20th Century Blackburn* (Wharncliffe Books, Barnsley, 2000) p.42.

(30) The winner in this two seat constituency was Sir Henry Norman (Coalition Liberal). P.T. Dean (Coalition Conservative) came second in the poll, thus unseating Philip Snowden. Norman and Dean were endorsed by the Coalition government which had been formed in 1915 and led since 1916 by Lloyd George. The endorsement took the form of a letter of support from Lloyd George and the Conservative leader, Balfour, known as the 'coupon'. In the wake of victory in the Great War the coupon virtually guaranteed electoral success, for those who held it, in the 1918 election.

Skipton remained a safe Conservative seat throughout the 1920s but the pattern at Sowerby was erratic and in 1923 a Liberal got in. (31)

These local results must have disappointed Ethel Carnie Holdsworth whether she had been able to participate directly or not.(32) However she would have found the international and national situations more encouraging by 1923 - the war had ended; the Russian Revolution had been consolidated despite Allied intervention against it; Labour's representation in Parliament included one of her early influences, Dan Irving, as MP for Burnley, and an ILP group with opinions similar to her own. But she was still concerned about the lack of socialist unity. It was a concern shared by two rank-and-file members of the CPGB. H.J.Hinchelwood of the Amalgamated Engineering Union said he supported 'anything that will bring about a united front of the working-class movement', and Bram Longstaffe of the Barrow Labour Party claimed that 'by admitting the Communist Party we would knit the whole Labour and Socialist movement together and be able to present a united front'.(33)

Nevertheless Ethel Carnie Holdsworth remained aloof from membership of all the available organisations of the Left during the period 1914 to 1924 although her views remained those of an extreme

(31) Constituency details from Craig, F.W.S., *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949* (Political Reference Publications, Glasgow, 1983).

(32) She had become a ratepayer in 1919, following the purchase of Long Tail, in the Sowerby Constituency. However this was sold and the family moved to Barnoldswick and then to London. She was back in the constituency, living at Slack, some time in 1922. She is listed in the Sowerby electoral register for the first time in Spring 1923.

(33) Branson, N., and Moore, B., *Our History. Labour-Communist Relations 1920-1935, Part 1: 1920-1935* (Communist Party History Group, London, 1990) p.9.

socialist influenced by SDF and ILP ideas.⁽³⁴⁾ Perhaps she distrusted Henderson, who, some thought, wanted to weaken the ILP, which had always supported women's rights.⁽³⁵⁾ The Labour Party would certainly have become less attractive to her after the reinstatement of the gradualist MacDonald as leader. Still, the work of George Lansbury on behalf of pacifism and feminism might have been enough to secure her loyalty, at least to the ILP. But at this time she could buttress her disinclination to work through mainstream groups by the money and enthusiasm necessary to pursue her independent initiatives.

Sylvia Pankhurst addressed a packed ILP meeting in Nelson late in 1917. She demanded the government accept Russia's proposed armistice, complete adult suffrage, and municipal control of empty houses so that they could be used for the benefit of those living in insanitary conditions.⁽³⁶⁾ These were all causes which Ethel Carnie Holdsworth supported, and as she was living in Barrowford, near Nelson, in 1917 she must have known of the meeting and either attended it or read about it in the local press.

She must also have admired Pankhurst's efforts on behalf of the east London poor, her opposition to conscription, and her support for universal suffrage, and she would have sympathised with Pankhurst

(34) There is no evidence that she had membership of any group during this period. There is evidence that she had not - 'I do not belong to any anarchist group or any other group. I belong to the folk'. *Freedom*, October 1924, p.52.

(35) Rowan, C., 'Women in the Labour Party 1906-1920,' *Feminist Review* (12,1982) p.87.

(36) Liddington, J., *op.cit.*, p.274.

when police seized copies of her paper, *Worker's Dreadnought*, on 4 October 1917,⁽³⁷⁾ and when she was expelled from the CPGB in 1921. But Sylvia Parkhurst is never mentioned in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work. Neither is Annie Kenney, despite the fact that in a 1908 interview she had said that Annie Kenney was one of the people she would like to meet.⁽³⁸⁾ This may have been because of the increasing violence of suffragette tactics after this date. Certainly any remaining respect she may have had for the WSPU would not have survived the outbreak of war when Annie Kenney, along with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst offered the services of the WSPU to the government. Millicent Fawcett and a minority of the NUWSS also supported the government by undertaking work with the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies, but Helena Swanwick and the majority, including Selina Cooper, broke away to form the Women's International League(WIL) in 1915.⁽³⁹⁾

The end of the war and the 1918 Parliamentary Reform Act removed the primary purpose of the WSPU and it did not adapt its organisation to the post war situation. However the NUWSS did. It became the

(37) Bullock, I., and Pankhurst, R.,(eds.), *Sylvia Pankhurst: From Artist to Anti-Fascist* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1992) p.131.

(38) *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p.155. One of Annie Kenney's first attempts at public speaking was in Blackburn, at the 1905 Easter fair, when she tried to recruit women factory workers to trade union membership. This may have been the occasion when Ethel Carnie first heard her. See Kenney, A., *Memories of a Militant* (Edward Arnold, London, 1924) pp.30-31.

(39) It was known as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom only from 1950. However from 1919 the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace retitled itself the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. See Ceadel, M., *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000) p.251.

National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship(NUSEC) aiming to secure equality of liberties, status and opportunities. Eleanor Rathbone succeeded Millicent Fawcett as NUSEC president in 1920, and the Women's Citizen Association(WCA) merged with it in 1924. Initially it focused on the right of married women to employment, equal divorce conditions, equal pay for teachers, provision of birth control advice and widows pensions.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The NUWSS had finally aligned itself with the Labour Party but the NUSEC remained independent of party, reckoning socialists (Mary Stocks), Liberals (Mrs H.A.L.Fisher) and Conservatives (Lady Frances Balfour) amongst its members. It was essentially a middle-class organisation - when Selina Cooper tried to establish a branch of the WCA in working-class Nelson in 1919 she was unsuccessful.⁽⁴¹⁾

Other feminist groups emerged in the post war period. Lady Rhondda's 'Time and Time' group emphasised the need for women to seek roles in public life independent of party labels, but it was elitist, reluctant to co-operate with other organisations with similar interests, and its feminist agenda lapsed after equal franchise was achieved in 1928.⁽⁴²⁾ The Six Point Group supported equal rights feminism after its formation in 1921, but it remained a small organisation confined to the London area.⁽⁴³⁾

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Pugh, M., *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 1992) p.52.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Liddington, J., *op.cit.*, pp.310-311.

⁽⁴²⁾ Pugh, M., *op.cit.*, p.48.

⁽⁴³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.49.

Between them these pressure groups had some success in persuading the government to improve the political and social position of women between 1914 and 1924. The 1918 Parliamentary Reform Act enfranchised many women over thirty, but 2,000,000 were still excluded - resident domestic servants, unmarried women living with relations, women who rented their homes, and widows living with married children.⁽⁴⁴⁾ In 1919 the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act abolished all restrictions on the admission of women into the professions and civil positions, including jurors and magistrates. Through the efforts of the Women's Co-operative Guild maternity clinics had been established in Accrington in 1915 and Oswaldtwistle and Nelson in 1916.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Similar facilities providing advice, treatment and social assistance for pregnant women were implemented nationally by the 1919 Maternity and Child Welfare Act. In 1922 the Married Women (Maintenance) Act required men who left their wives and children to provide for them at the rate of two pounds a week for the wife and ten shillings a week for each child. In 1923 the Matrimonial Causes Act made adultery grounds for divorce for both men and women.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Furthermore the Labour Party dropped its equivocal attitude. It started describing itself as 'the Women's Party'⁽⁴⁷⁾ and emphasised its

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's first child was born in 1916 when she was living in Barrowford. She would have been able to benefit from the new Nelson maternity clinic.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Pugh, M., *op.cit.*, pp.108-109.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Pugh, M., 'Women, Food and Politics, 1880-1930', *History Today* (41, March 1991) p.19. However Pugh denies that the Labour Party was feminist. He says its priorities for women were domestic.

commitment to improved state welfare policies through the promotion of motherhood and family, for example by opposing the abolition of the Ministry of Food in 1921 and supporting control of milk supplies to ensure its cheap availability, something Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had advocated as early as 1909.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The only sources from which her response to these developments may be judged are *British Citizen* and the regular north-east Lancashire press which covered the anti-conscription campaign locally, and the novels she wrote between 1915 and 1924. The following sections examine these sources in order to establish the changes that occurred in her thinking about violence as a way of solving the world's problems during this period. They also assess the contribution her fiction makes to our understanding of her feminism, which once the war ended became her main preoccupation. Finally they present the evidence contained within this part of her writing that may be considered biographical.

2.3 BRITISH CITIZEN, 1915

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth could have channelled her opposition to war, as many women did, through the ILP. The National Committee of the No-Conscription Fellowship was dominated by ILP activists Fenner Brockway and Clifford Allen and its explicit pacifism, based on the belief that international socialism would end war, coincided with Ethel

⁽⁴⁸⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 24 November 1909, p.478.

Carnie Holdsworth's position in 1915. If she had moved into the BSP she would still have been in an anti-war organisation once the Hyndmanite pro-war faction seceded in 1916. However by 1916 the No-Conscription Fellowship was the acknowledged voice of the conscientious objection movement and claimed 15,000 members, although there is no proof that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was one of them.(49)

The Fellowship of Reconciliation claimed 8,000 members in 1918. They were mainly Nonconformists or Quakers, although they included the Anglican George Lansbury as well. Its religious membership and its concern to define a rigorous theological and spiritual basis for pacifism(50) perhaps explains Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's lack of interest in it. However there were other groups that might have attracted her. For example she could have supported the Union of Democratic Control which had been formed by Ramsay MacDonald, with Liberal help, after his resignation from the leadership of the Labour Party in 1914. The Union wanted an international organisation to maintain peace, as did the WIL which from 1915 campaigned to bring together women from all combatant countries on neutral territory to urge peace on their governments. Jill Liddington has described Nelson, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's home from 1915 to 1918, as 'an anti-war stronghold'(51). It was there that Wilfred Wellock

(49) Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980) p.50. The author suggests that 15,000 is a gross exaggeration.

(50) *Ibid.*, p.37.

(51) Liddington J., *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (Virago, London, 1989) p.124.

organised the Committee for the Promotion of Pacifism,⁽⁵²⁾ and Selina Cooper established a branch of the Women's Peace Crusade,(WPC). It would have been easy for Ethel to join one of these groups but she did not. Instead she worked for the British Citizen Party(BCP) and contributed to its paper *British Citizen*.

The BCP was founded by S. Mortimer Holden who claimed thirty years experience agitating for 'the absolute nationalisation of everything', a minimum wage of thirty shillings a week and equal pay for men and women.⁽⁵³⁾ Holden edited, printed and published *British Citizen* in London although most of its content concerns Lancashire matters. However it is possible to trace links of principle, if not of direct co-operation, between the BCP and the ILP,⁽⁵⁴⁾ the Fellowship of Reconciliation,⁽⁵⁵⁾ the Union of Democratic Control⁽⁵⁶⁾ and the Women's Co-operative Guild⁽⁵⁷⁾ from its pages. It particularly identified itself with the ideals of Freedom, Democracy and the Brotherhood of Man of the Labour and Socialist No-Conscription Council,⁽⁵⁸⁾ and boasted of the support it received from Sir Arnold Lupton, Liberal MP for Sleaford from 1906-1910.⁽⁵⁹⁾ *British Citizen* also reprinted letters written to other papers by Isabella Ford about living conditions for working

(52) Ceadel, M., *op.cit.*, p.50. Ethel Carnie certainly knew Wellock. He was chairman of the literary circle in Nelson at a meeting of which she met her husband. See Wellock, W., *Off The Beaten Track: Adventures in the Art of Living* (Sarvodaya Prachuralaya, Tanjore, India, 1961) p.32.

(53) *British Citizen*, December 11 1915, p.1.

(54) *Ibid.*, December 25 1915, p.8.

(55) *Ibid.*

(56) *Ibid.*, December 11 1915, p.6.

(57) *Ibid.*, December 18 1915, p.6.

(58) *Ibid.*, p.2.

(59) *Ibid.*, December 25 1915, p.1.

women in Yorkshire,(60) and by Margaret McMillan on the need for improved child care,(61) although it did not claim that they were BCP activists. I have found no reference to this party or its paper in studies of pacifism.(62) This invisibility raises the possibility that the British Citizen Party was only as significant as other idiosyncratic organisations that emerged in response to anti-war feelings at that time, such as John Hargreave's Co-op backed Woodcraft Folk (a William Morris inspired pacific alternative to the Boy Scouts) and the self-sufficiency movement which Wilfred Wellock supported. However the national stir caused by the BCP meeting in Nelson in December 1915 makes this unlikely, and requires Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's role in the anti-war movement to be recognised.

The main aim of *British Citizen* was to prevent conscription. It ceased publication after the Military Service Acts were passed in 1916. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth wrote an article for its first issue from 'the women workers' point of view' which condemned conscription as 'a conspiracy of the rich against the workers'.(63) In developing her argument she claimed that Britain had not become involved in the war reluctantly but had been preparing for it through a build-up of the

(60) *Ibid.*, December 18 1915, p.4.

(61) *Ibid.*, p.1.

(62) Apart from the work of Martin Ceadel already footnoted my main sources have been:- Berkman, J., 'Pacifism in England: 1914-1939' (unpublished PhD thesis, Yale University, 1967); Liddington, J., *The Long Road to Greenham*, *op.cit.*; Liddington, J., 'The Women's Peace Crusade: the history of a forgotten campaign', in Thompson, D.,(ed.), *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb* (Virago, London, 1983); Weinroth, H., 'Peace by Negotiation and the British Anti-War Movement, 1914-1918', *Journal of History* (10,1975); and Wiltsher, A., *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (Pandora, London, 1985).

(63) *British Citizen*, 11 December 1915, p.1.

navy, if not of the army, for some time, and that Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, had admitted this. She clearly held the view that capitalists were encouraging conscription for war against the Central Powers in order to divert workers from revolution against British capital, and that they planned to fill the gaps this would create in the labour force by turning women into scabs and children into slaves. She gives an example of the establishment's fear of revolution - the use of troops to protect Lord Derby's extensive properties, many of them close to her home. These troops were members of the Colne Volunteer Corps who were being given pre call-up military training.⁽⁶⁴⁾ There is no evidence that they were intended for use in the way she implied, however they wrecked the BCP's Nelson meeting.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was active on behalf of the BCP in 1915. It had wider aims than either the No-Conscription Fellowship or the Fellowship of Reconciliation. As well as opposing conscription its programme demanded a Right to Work Bill; limits on employer's profits; increased old age pensions; nationalisation of liquor traffic, land, mines, railways and armaments; housing reform; greater protection against eviction for tenants; equal votes for men and women; and 'no war in future without a General Election.'⁽⁶⁵⁾ Eva Gore Booth, who also wrote for the Party's newspaper, drew attention to Asquith's promise to seek majority support for war amongst the people

⁽⁶⁴⁾ *Colne and Nelson Times*, 3 December 1915, p.4.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ *British Citizen*, 11 December 1915, p.1. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had advocated many of these measures in *The Woman Worker*, 1909-1910. The exception is equal votes. In 1909 she supported adult suffrage.

before considering it.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The BCP did not believe the government had general consent for the war, and at a series of public meetings carried resolutions criticising the Northcliffe press for inducing the government to introduce a Conscription Bill, and pledged support for the Liberal and Labour MPs who opposed it.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth chaired some of these meetings, the only instances I have found of her speaking in public.⁽⁶⁷⁾ The Nelson meeting on 30 November caused a riot and questions in the House of Commons. The *British Citizen* claims that between one and two thousand people attended the meeting at Salem School Hall, Nelson,⁽⁶⁸⁾ and that as well as Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, S. Mortimer Holden and Arnold Lupton were on the platform. After she had introduced Holden, eleven members of the Colne Volunteer Corps led by Veevers, a cotton manufacturer, attacked shouting 'We are going to stop this meeting, clear off!'⁽⁶⁹⁾ It was an hour before order was restored by the stewards and the meeting could continue. During this time 'Ethel Carnie the famous Lancashire poetess, proved a heroine in holding to her post.'⁽⁷⁰⁾ The *Colne and Nelson Times* confirms this, adding that she repeatedly appealed for calm and led the singing of 'The Red Flag.'⁽⁷¹⁾ However considerable damage was caused for which the BCP received a bill

⁽⁶⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, 18 December 1915, p.3.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Later, however, she listed 'giving papers and addresses on literature which has a tendency to reveal Revolutionary and Evolutionary Thought' as amongst her interests. See *Labour Who's Who*, *op.cit.*, p.105.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ *British Citizen*, 11 December 1915, p. 1 - 'nearly two thousand'. *Ibid.*, 25 December 1915, p.1 - 'over a thousand'. See Appendix 14.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, 25 December 1915, p.3, and *Colne and Nelson Times*, 3 December 1915, p.4.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ *British Citizen*, 11 December 1915, p.1.

⁽⁷¹⁾ *Colne and Nelson Times*, 3 December 1915, p.8.

from the school's trustees,(72) and the pro-war local newspaper suggested the Party should be refused the use of such venues for their meetings in future.(73)

Philip Snowden raised the matter in the House of Commons and promised prosecutions against those who would try to deny freedom of speech.(74) H.J.Tennant, the Under-Secretary for War, replied that only four people attacked the platform and that they were not in uniform. This seems like an attempt to minimise the seriousness of the incident, for the Colne Volunteer Corps, a section of the Home Defence Corps, was not a uniformed group anyway. The anti-conscription meeting organised by the BCP in Halifax was attacked by regular soldiers in uniform. A military band prevented some people getting in to the meeting. It was deliberate intimidation, possibly officially orchestrated, and it succeeded in persuading the BCP to cancel its scheduled meeting in Bradford.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's campaign with the BCP failed. Conscription came into force on 2 March 1916, but a conscience clause in the legislation allowed both non-religious and unconditional exemption, that is those granted it would not be required to give non-combatant service instead. However the implementation of the conscience clause was in the hands of local tribunals, not centrally controlled, so exemption depended on the attitude taken towards

(72) *British Citizen*, 25 December 1915, p.1.

(73) *Colne and Nelson Times*, 3 December 1915, p.4.

(74) *Ibid.*

applicants by the local worthies who made up the tribunals.(75) Alfred Holdsworth seems to have had his application rejected, but he accepted an army office job rather than go to prison, (76) a compromise similar to that made by 80% of the 16,500 men who claimed conscientious objector status.(77)

In their study of women's responses to early twentieth century militarism Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott examine the neglected writing of Catherine Marshall and Mary Singer Florence.(78) Both were articulate pacifist feminists from privileged backgrounds, but their propaganda on behalf of the No-Conscription Fellowship had no more impact than the neglected writing of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth for the BCP. Kamester and Vellacott make the point that despite their reputation for opposing violence, women were not united against the war.(79) Many suffragettes supported it and those who did not, having accepted the legitimacy of the use of violence in the WSPU campaign for votes for women, were less likely to become absolute pacifists. The question of whether or not the use of force was acceptable in some circumstances also divided ILP women. Some were absolute pacifists not prepared to compromise their principles on any grounds, as was Ethel Carnie Holdsworth when the war began,(80) others became what Joseph Clayton called 'rebel pacifists' after the

(75) Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain, op.cit.*, pp.38-39.

(76) Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, Bk.63.

(77) Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain, op.cit.*, p.39.

(78) Kamester, M., and Vellacott, J., (eds.), *Militarism Versus Feminism: Writings on Women and War* (Virago, London, 1987).

(79) Jill Liddington makes the same point in *The Long Road to Greenham, op.cit.*, p.58.

(80) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, 'A Disclaimer', in *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 1 May 1915, p.6.

Russian Revolution in 1917, that is they accepted the use of violence if it was specifically directed against the capitalist system. Later historians relabelled Clayton's rebel pacifists 'pacifists'.⁽⁸¹⁾ *General Belinda* suggests that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had adopted a 'pacifist' position by 1918.⁽⁸²⁾ The route she took was individualistic, but so was that of others, for example Helen Crawford, who organised the Glasgow Women's Peace Crusade in 1916, claimed to hate war but would not admit to being a pacifist because she was prepared to respond violently to injustice and duplicity.⁽⁸³⁾ So in this sense Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's response to the war was not unusual and fits the pattern of the 'varied journeys' followed by women practising their socialism established by June Hannam and Karen Hunt.⁽⁸⁴⁾

The BCP campaign shows that the early twentieth century protest tradition in Lancashire was stronger than has been acknowledged. The WIL was especially active in the north of England,⁽⁸⁵⁾ and the WPC in north east Lancashire.⁽⁸⁶⁾ On 11 August 1917, for example, Selina Cooper organised a WPC procession in Nelson which precipitated a riot reminiscent of that caused by the BCP anti-war rally in the town in 1915. A fortnight later Ethel Snowden spoke for the WPC at the same

⁽⁸¹⁾ Clayton, J., *The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924* (Faber and Gwyer, London, 1926) p.171. In 1957 A.J.P. Taylor used the term 'pacifist' to describe this position, i.e. war, though irrational, and to be avoided if possible, is sometimes necessary. See Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain, op.cit.*, pp.3 and 47.

⁽⁸²⁾ See pp. 209-210 below.

⁽⁸³⁾ Ronan, A., 'The Women's Peace Crusade in Manchester: June-September 1917', *North West Labour History Journal* (28,2003) p.56.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s* (Routledge, London, 2002) p.49.

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Hannam, J., *Isabella Ford* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989) p.183.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel, op.cit.*, p.275.

venue that the BCP had used two years earlier, Salem School Hall. In 1917 and 1918 protests against food shortages were also common in north east Lancashire. Bread queues had to be policed in Blackburn, and in Burnley miners downed tools because of inequitable distribution of food supplies.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth does not seem to have been involved in any of this activity despite the fact that she was living in the midst of it, although the conscription of her husband and the struggle to feed herself and her baby may have been her preoccupations then. However my contention is that her peace work was already complete, and that in 1915 and 1916 the BCP had been an important dissenting voice in the area. By the time the WPC was formed in Nelson Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had changed both her propaganda style and her focus. She was writing fiction again and examining socialist and feminist themes.

2.4 IRON HORSES, 1915

It would, perhaps, be wrong to call *Iron Horses* a novel. It is a long story that was serialised in *The Co-operative News* between 31 July and 11 December 1915. The title refers to the cotton mill power looms which Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses to symbolise the oppression of the factory system and the tyranny of capitalism in early twentieth

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Weinroth, H., 'Peace by Negotiation and the British Anti-War Movement, 1914-1918', *Journal of History* (10, 1975) pp.389-390.

century Lancashire.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Once she has established this setting the author introduces the romance plot. David's arm is torn off by an 'iron horse' and Charlotte, his four loom weaver sweetheart, jilts him on the eve of their wedding to avoid being saddled with an invalid and the prospect of a life of poverty. Instead she marries the mill owner's son. They have nothing in common and Charlotte soon leaves him, but the mill where she gets work burns down. Her mother will not take her in because she believes marriages have to be made the best of, so Charlotte goes back to her husband.

Up to this point the plot of *Iron Horses* fits Pamela Fox's view of a conventional romance which reflects middle-class social novels by using inter-class marriage to prevent radical change.⁽⁸⁹⁾ But Charlotte has an ulterior motive which invalidates this interpretation here - she uses her position as a mill owner's wife to learn how the masters plan to break a strike, and she passes the information on to the union. In the demonstrations that follow Charlotte rouses the strikers with an inspiring speech, the crowd is attacked by the police and Charlotte is killed.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's didactic purpose is to encourage change, not to prevent it. The reader cannot miss it. The romance element, the workers' hardships and the melodramatic conclusion may be typical

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Real place names (Pendle, Briercliffe) are used as well as fictional ones (Fordham, Clay Hole).

⁽⁸⁹⁾ Fox, P., 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Revolt of the Gentle: Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working Class Women's Writing*', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) p.64.

of popular writing of the time, but the authorial interpolations are not. *Iron Horses* is more than a statement about what is wrong with society, it shows how it can be remedied. Exploitation at work, appalling living conditions, government indifference and contemporary examples of industrial unrest provide the material for a story of gross oppression of the working class, but it is not left to make its impact just by being powerfully rendered. The author always makes the message clear - the virus of slavery is in the blood of the workers and it is up to those with the strength to overcome it to fight for freedom for the rest, to win 'the fruits of the world for all'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ She repeats her preferred method insistently - 'rely on yourselves', 'fight for your rights', 'don't accept every sugar pill', 'keep your eyes open', 'stick together', 'think for yourselves'. She called it 'Revolutionary Socialism'.⁽⁹¹⁾ Unconventional definitions of this sort, and the nagging underlining of her message, are the identifying features of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's propaganda style. Standard Marxist rhetoric, she believed, would not have made the point so well to mill girls, her target audience.

Iron Horses was published when her main preoccupation was the anti-conscription campaign, but the detail within it suggests a date of composition before the war began. References to agitation amongst miners and railwaymen as well as amongst textile workers, and to the creation of a trade union alliance for a general strike, reflect the

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Holdsworth, E.C., *Iron Horses* (*The Co-operative News*, Manchester, 1915) p.1632.

⁽⁹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.1338.

events of the period 1911 to 1914.⁽⁹²⁾ Those events also form part of the context for *This Slavery* (1925). The later work is longer, and it uses a major new stylistic device, joint heroines, but it is clearly adapted from *Iron Horses* for the plot and the message are essentially the same. There is one way however in which *Iron Horses* is uniquely helpful in assessing Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's political position in the mid- 1910s, for although like *This Slavery* it recommends revolution, it is careful to explain that this 'only means change'⁽⁹³⁾ not the violent overthrow of the state. *General Belinda* shows that the war modified these views, but in 1915 all the forms her activism took were driven by passionate pacifism. Despite its brutal episodes and its bloody climax *Iron Horses* illustrates her belief in non-violent solutions to society's ills.

2.5 HELEN OF FOUR GATES, 1917

Commenting on middle-class women writers between 1914 and 1939 Nicola Beauman poses the question 'why did no one portray, in fiction, the lives led by working-class women?' Her answer is 'for fiction to be believable it demands first hand knowledge and involvement from the writer ... It would have been quite impossible for any of the poor, struggling, coping women ... to have won the time or quiet to put pen to paper.'⁽⁹⁴⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work during this period suggests that Beauman is too pessimistic. Her novels are

⁽⁹²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.1339.

⁽⁹³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.1555.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Beauman, N., *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* (Virago, London, 1983) pp.100-101.

certainly based on personal experience, and *Helen of Four Gates* was written amid the distractions of her husband's conscription, the birth of her first daughter and her anti-war activities, just the sort of conditions that Beauman thinks precluded creative endeavour.

Peter Keating says that it was sales in excess of 50,000 that made a book a best seller at the time,⁽⁹⁵⁾ but Mrs Humphrey Ward, one of the most successful writers of the period 1916 to 1919 averaged only 35,000, and H.G.Wells at the height of his career only 15,000.⁽⁹⁶⁾ So *Helen of Four Gates* was a significant breakthrough for its author. Four editions totalling 25,000 copies had been issued before the end of 1917,⁽⁹⁷⁾ and over 33,000 sold by 1920. In that year, too, the novel was published by E.P.Dutton in America, perhaps to co-incide with the release of the film.⁽⁹⁸⁾

These developments obviously raised public awareness of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work, which may not have made much impact previously. This is suggested by contemporary reviews.⁽⁹⁹⁾ On the one hand they seem unaware of *Miss Nobody* as they refer to *Helen of Four Gates* as her first novel. (This is despite the fact that *Miss Nobody* was still in print in 1916, its publication having been taken over from Methuen by Herbert Jenkins during the negotiations with the author for

(95) Keating, P., *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (Fontana, London, 1991) p.424.

(96) Raitt, S., and Tait, T.,(eds.), *Women's Fiction and The Great War* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997) pp.20 and 43, note 9.

(97) Advert facing title page of fourth edition of *Helen of Four Gates*, 1917.

(98) Memorandum of Agreement between E.P.Dutton and H. Jenkins, 16 April 1920, Barrie and Jenkins archive, Random House, London. However copies of *Helen of Four Gates* published by E.P.Dutton of New York bear the date 1917.

(99) *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 26 June 1920, p.7, and advert facing title page of fourth edition of *Helen of Four Gates*, 1917.

the publication of *Helen of Four Gates*). But on the other hand contemporary reviews make extravagant claims about the new novel - 'an extraordinarily powerful book',⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ 'distinctly original',⁽¹⁰¹⁾ 'a great novel. The book is an epic. Martin's farewell is one of the greatest things in modern fiction.'⁽¹⁰²⁾

Praise like this helps to explain the relatively high sales of *Helen of Four Gates*, and perhaps that was its job, that is these complementary reviews may have been publishers' puffs as much as honest assessments of worth. 'Great' and 'epic' are not appropriate here, neither will 'distinctly original' do, for *Four Gates* farm, *Helen* and *Fielding Day* bring to mind *Wuthering Heights*, *Cathy* and *Heathcliffe*. However, *Helen of Four Gates* is not without literary merit. The initial description of the Pennine landscape conveys the spirit of the place convincingly, and the north east Lancashire dialect used by all the characters (sometimes modified for the benefit of readers not from the area) is as natural as the laconic dialogue.

For this novel it was important for Ethel Carnie Holdsworth to establish a precise location for the plot. It helps the characterisation of *Helen* as a witch, and supports her father's claim that she was born of insane stock. Place names like *Brungerley*,⁽¹⁰³⁾ and *Helen's* wedding

(100) *Westminster Gazette*
(101) *Manchester Guardian*
(102) *Weekly Dispatch*

} All three quotes form part of an advert on an unnumbered page, facing the title page of the third edition of *Helen of Four Gates*.

(103) *Brungerley* is a district of *Clitheroe*.

incantation 'By the magic of fire, air and water I draw thee to me. By the seven colours that make earth an' heaven, by moon, sun and stars I draw thee to me,'⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ created a Pendle background for the story, familiar to all locally, and many nationally from Harrison Ainsworth's *Lancashire Witches* as witch country. A mood of menace and mystery pervades the novel. Other women besides Helen are perceived as odd at best and mad at worst, especially Sue Marsh who died shrivelled, soulless and bitter. Although Sue's plight is used as a prediction of Helen's future it is movingly presented and its cause, we discover, is a callous lover. In fact Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses the diabolical atmosphere she creates in *Helen of Four Gates* to make a strong feminist statement, for it is not the women who are the devils, but the men.

For the most part the author resists the temptation to condemn capitalism in *Helen of Four Gates*. The sense of grinding rural poverty is strong, and occasionally specific social injustices such as tramp weaving shops and workhouse casual wards are referred to,⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ but the author's preoccupation is to highlight the disadvantaged position of women in society and its unfair consequences. She uses a simple story line - a woman abused by her father and her husband, abandoned by her lover, and vilified by society because of supposed insanity. These are formidable circumstances, but Helen triumphs over them nevertheless.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Holdsworth, E.C., *Helen of Four Gates* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1917) p.17.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.37.

Abel Mason and Fielding Day are fiends. Helen is the child of Mason's sweetheart and his mate, Hinson. His idea of revenge for this betrayal is to bring Helen up as his own daughter after her parents' early deaths. His guiding principle is hate⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ and his intention is to make her miserable. His method is to stifle the growing love between Helen and Martin by telling Martin there is madness in the family, implying that Helen has inherited it, an implication easily believed by anyone under the impression that Mason was Helen's true father. His method is also to bully Helen mercilessly, for example when he attacks her with a knife he only stops short of murder because 'I get afraid lest I kill her, and lose my revenge.'⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ The revenge he means is to force Helen to marry Fielding Day, a tramp who calls at Four Gates farm looking for work and who agrees to marry Helen and continue her persecution after Mason's death - 'I'll make her my slave or I'll bray her to a mortar', he promises, 'I'll break her heart, or I'll break her neck'.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾

The author states that 'all she (Helen) was fighting for was human love'.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Denied this by her father and by Martin, who loves her but deserts her, she marries Day for whom she feels nothing. By doing so she follows what Cicely Hamilton, a contemporary middle-class writer, considered to be the only route for women then - 'she exchanged

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.62-63

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.85.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.48.

...possession of her person for the means of existence.'⁽¹¹⁰⁾ This enables Ethel Carnie Holdsworth to make her main point. The right of a husband to unquestioning obedience from his wife is challenged by Helen's refusal to tell Day where she goes when she can contrive to get out of the house, despite the torture he inflicts on her. This leads to scenes of appalling violence.⁽¹¹¹⁾ They are a clear call for an end to society's sanction of man's treatment of woman in this way, a sanction that allowed Day to claim 'she's my property,' and children to be 'conceived in hatred, born in hatred, suckled in hatred'.⁽¹¹²⁾ This is the closest Ethel Carnie Holdsworth comes to grasping the nettle of sexual violence. The implication is that Helen is the victim of marital rape, although this is not explicitly stated here and the issue is broached nowhere else in her novels, the emphasis being always on physical violence.

In her recent discussion of domestic and sexual violence Shani D'Cruze suggests that its visibility has varied over the last hundred years. Police records indicate that wife assault cases in the Edwardian period were fewer than in the late Victorian period and, she says, a culture of silence and shame developed which created a false picture of domestic harmony which lasted until the 1980s. D'Cruze compares

(110) Hamilton, C., *Marriage as a Trade* (London, 1912) p.14, cited in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain* (Pearson, Harlow, 2001) p.5.

(111) *Helen of Four Gates*, *op.cit.*, pp.206-219. For case studies of violence within marriage in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Lancashire, see D'Cruze, S., *Crimes of Outrage. Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, 1998).

(112) *Helen of Four Gates*, *op.cit.*, p.215.

cases of rape in 1923 and 1975 in both of which the offence was proved but the perpetrator excused. 'Gentlemen, we are all liable to fall', the judge advised the jury in 1923.⁽¹¹³⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's experience of violence within her own family prevented her from accepting the appearance of marital calm being peddled by the authorities, and her indignation shows here.⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Helen's stand against her abuse makes her a feminist icon and the novel a good example of Pamela Fox's complex resistance strategy, that is it strikes a blow for freedom against the patriarchal code of the time that, Fox says, frowned on the idea that marriage could result from romance amongst members of the working class.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ Helen is given the qualities of a madonna, with the 'right to be the mother of men by the rare and simple virtue of courage.'⁽¹¹⁶⁾ She challenges 'iron laws, social customs Priests, philosophers and teachers'⁽¹¹⁷⁾ who would condemn her to an early grave by denying her the basic right to love, because she is a woman. Martin's failure to mount a similar challenge emphasises Helen's courage and the author's message. Despite his love for Helen

(113) D'Cruze., 'Crime', in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I., (ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*, op.cit., pp.208-209.

(114) Kate Flint says the 'New Woman' fiction of the 1890s had discussed sexual and marital issues with a new frankness, but gives no examples of marital rape being represented in the violent terms Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses. See Flint, K., *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993) pp.310-311. Lucy Bland points out that feminists had been highlighting the issue of marital rape or 'legalised prostitution' since 1825. She gives George Egerton's *Discords* (1894) as an example of a novel by a middle-class writer which deals with the subject - although the heroine there sees sexual intercourse as a duty, not an act of brutality as Helen does - but she offers no examples from working-class writers. See Bland, L., *Banishing the Beast. English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (Penguin, London, 1995) pp.131-133.

(115) Fox, P., op.cit., p.58.

(116) *Helen of Four Gates*, op.cit., p.48.

(117) *Ibid.*, p.159.

he is too weak to fight for it. After his return from America he sickens and is saved from death only because Helen shows she loves him, in defiance of the convention which requires submission to her husband of a respectable married woman.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was not concerned with the issue of women's political rights in this novel, despite its national prominence at the time she wrote it. Nor was she campaigning for legislation to outlaw the cruelty men often practised towards women. She wanted attitudes to change so that whatever the letter of the law, social mores could no longer make it easy for women to be exploited. In the context of her work as a whole *Helen of Four Gates* is her first fictional attempt to build on the moral case she had initiated in *The Woman Worker*, and to focus the readers' attention on women's human needs.

Joseph McAleer argues that during the First World War the demand for escapist fiction soared, especially amongst women. Two factors explain this, the need for distraction from the horrors of the conflict, and a publishing revolution started by Herbert Jenkins. From 1916 he began to expand his cheap fiction list and to offer contracts to new writers, many of them women. Jenkins was criticised for putting rubbish into print, but he defended his policy on the grounds that he was responding to pressure from soldiers and the bereaved 'who want to forget things occasionally for an hour or so'.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ In reality he might simply have been manipulating the popular mood for financial gain,

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ McAleer, J., *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992) p.72.

but whatever his motive his new publishing programme gave Ethel Carnie Holdsworth a second chance. The poor reception of *Miss Nobody* made her doubt the propaganda potential of the novel, but she was one of Herbert Jenkins' first recruits and able to try again.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ So there was an element of luck behind the success of *Helen of Four Gates* - a tale of sex, violence and greed in a gothic style was perfect for the changed circumstances. But the author seized the opportunity to promote afresh what was to become her preferred form of activism, the use of a social and political sub-text delivered through a popular medium to a large audience. Three years later she would use a film of *Helen of Four Gates* in the same way.

From its inception film was used as a vehicle for propaganda. Although some saw the new medium as a threat to books just as photographs had been thought a threat to paintings, many, especially on the left, were enthusiasts from the start. In America the silent movies of the 1900s and 1910s were watched mainly by working-class audiences and frequently used by unions, socialists and suffragists to promote their causes.⁽¹²⁰⁾ Capitalist iniquity and the class struggle was portrayed in films such as *The Crime of Carelessness* (Edison, 1912) based on the Triangle Factory fire in New York in 1911 in which 146 garment workers died because of the neglect of their employers,⁽¹²¹⁾

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ See Appendix 15.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ Ross, S.J., *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998) pp.6 and 19.

⁽¹²¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.34.

and *From Dusk to Dawn* (Wolfe, 1913) which showed the constitutional overthrow of capitalism through the election of socialists.(122)

It is, perhaps, more likely that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was influenced by European rather than American cinema. George Bernard Shaw championed film in Britain, and his view that it was a more momentous development than the printing press because it was accessible even to the illiterate, was well known,(123) as was Lenin's use of film to try to form minds and shape conduct on a huge scale in Russia. But as a reader of the cinema press Ethel Carnie Holdsworth would have known something about American movies as well, and her husband had met Jack London who thought revolution unlikely until the motivational potential of film was harnessed.(124) These were the influences behind her decision, at some point in 1920, to respond to an advertisement placed in one of the new cinema magazines like *Bioscope* or *Kinematograph Weekly* by film makers looking for new subjects.(125) The film of *Helen of Four Gates* was released the following year. Of course her motive may also have been to make money, but her enthusiastic references to the new medium in *The Woman Worker* suggest that she recognised its propaganda value and wanted to exploit it.

Cecil Hepworth considered *Helen of Four Gates* to be one of his best

(122) *Ibid.*, pp.95-97. The socialist hero of *From Dusk to Dawn* is called Grayson. Is this just a coincidence?

(123) Holroyd, M., *Bernard Shaw* (Random House, New York, 1997) p.705.

(124) Ross, S.J., *op.cit.*, p.29.

(125) Lake, F., letter to R.Smalley, 20 February 2004.

films⁽¹²⁶⁾ and her representation of Helen to be one of Alma Taylor's best pieces of work.⁽¹²⁷⁾ *Kinematograph Weekly* agreed. It considered the production 'excellent', the acting 'sincere and strong but unforced'. It was concerned about its violence however, indicating that Mason's brutal treatment of Helen could have been more effective if it had been 'suggested'. Scenes of husbands whipping their wives 'are better treated with restraint', it said.⁽¹²⁸⁾

In 1920 Hepworth's company spent three weeks in the Hebden Bridge area making the film. Hepworth was seeking 'a somewhat similar atmosphere' to that of *Wuthering Heights* ⁽¹²⁹⁾ and most scenes were shot on the moors between Hebden Bridge and Haworth. So the evidence suggests that Hepworth kept to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's story line closely, and this is supported by *The British Film Catalogue* summary:

HELEN OF FOUR GATES (58000).

Director	Cecil M. Hepworth
Story	Mrs E. Holdsworth
Scenario	Blanche McIntosh
Alma Taylor	Helen

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Low, R., *The History of the British Film, Vol.4 1918-1929* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1971) p.112.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Hepworth, C., *Came the Dawn, Memories of a Film Pioneer* (Phoenix House, London, 1951) p.150.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ *Kinematograph Weekly* (Vol.43, No.701, 30 September 1920). A similar judgement had been made of the novel by *The Times* – 'its characters are too often in hell.' See *The Times Literary Supplement*, 31 May 1917, p.262.

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Hepworth, C., *op.cit.*

James Carew

Abel Mason

Gerald Ames

Hinson

George Dewhurst

Martin Scott

Gwynne Herbert

Mrs Trip

John McAndrews

Fielding Day

DRAMA - Madman adopts daughter of dead woman who rejected him and forces her to marry crook.(130)

The film was released on 28 February 1921, but a picture of Alma Taylor as Helen is all that remains of it.(131) Between 1899 and 1924 the Hepworth studios made around 2,000 films, only 9% of which have survived, and *Helen of Four Gates* is not among them. It was melted down after Hepworth was bankrupted in 1924 to make waterproofing for the canvas covered fuselage of a plane.

It was not a popular film,(132) but that did not stop Ethel Carnie Holdsworth attempting to get more of her work made for the cinema. *The Taming of Nan* was bought by an American company. It is not listed in the *Library of Congress Motion Pictures 1912-1939* however, so it may have been made under a different title, as sometimes happened, or it may never have been made at all. Nevertheless Ethel Carnie Holdsworth clearly saw the potential of film as a new way of reaching the masses and wanted it to play a more prominent propaganda role

(130) Gifford, D., *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1985*, (David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1986) entry 07003. The reference (58000) is to the length of the film in feet. It converts to a running time of 90.6 minutes.

(131) See Appendix 16.

(132) Hepworth, C., *op.cit.*

in her work. In 1932 she was still trying to interest the movie industry in her latest novel, *Eagles' Crag*.⁽¹³³⁾

2.6. THE TAMING OF NAN, 1920

After the success of *Helen of Four Gates* in America E. P. Dutton of New York agreed to publish Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's next three novels - *The Taming of Nan*, *The Marriage of Elizabeth* and *The House That Jill Built*. In Britain Herbert Jenkins published them all in 1920, presumably hoping to capitalise on the popularity of *Helen of Four Gates* which was still selling well.⁽¹³⁴⁾ As contracted, American editions of *The Taming of Nan* and *The House That Jill Built* followed,⁽¹³⁵⁾ although I have been unable to find any trace of the publication of *The Marriage of Elizabeth* in the USA.

The 1920 novels all have the same structure - romantic entanglements in a northern working-class setting against which socio-political points are made. In the case of *The Taming of Nan* the underlying message concerns the position of women in society, domestic violence and disability, with reference especially to the Workmen's Compensation Acts of 1897 and 1906.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth establishes an urban industrial scene of uncompromising grimness for her fictional Narrowfields:

⁽¹³³⁾ *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April, 1932, p.11.

⁽¹³⁴⁾ Advert facing title page of *The Taming of Nan*, 1920.

⁽¹³⁵⁾ Chester County Library, Exton, PA., 19341, USA.

'The town lay in a hollow...it appeared as the body of a long dragon from whose back rose half a hundred chimney stacks. These...pricked the sky like the charred fingers of some underworld giant, thrust smoking through the earth to grab at sun, moon and stars. The bent figure of an old man who could toil no more, crept from little door to little door, rousing others to toil'.⁽¹³⁶⁾

The author also uses a rural working-class story line featuring struggling smallholders against whom the mortgage is about to be foreclosed. The plight of the principal characters in this setting is dire. Bill Cherry, a porter, loses his legs in a railway accident and has to cope on ten shillings a week and little family support - his wife, the Nan of the book's title, is a delinquent, and his daughter, Polly, a dreamer. Adam Wild is cursed with fancy plans for poor land and the feeling that he can not cut his losses and leave Sagg Farm because he was born on it. The same problems cause his father to hang himself.⁽¹³⁷⁾

As the character of Nan unfolds a disaster seems assured. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth describes her as an 'untameable hooligan - the Stone Age hidden under the veneer of Civilisation. She had neither humour, imagination nor protectiveness. She should have been an apache's mate.'⁽¹³⁸⁾ It seems an accurate assessment. Nan regularly attacks Cherry, even after he becomes a cripple, finally stabbing him

⁽¹³⁶⁾ Holdsworth, E.C., *The Taming of Nan* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1920) p.9.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.260.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.11.

with a kitchen knife and walking out on him.(139) The initial justification given by the author is this - 'To Nan every man born was the inveterate invader of a woman's liberty.'(140)

By comparison her husband is one of the few good men in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work. He bears his cross without complaint, makes shift to improve his family's situation by using a windfall to set up a fent dealing business,(141) and vows not to hit his wife whatever the provocation. His status is enhanced by references to the book he reads during enforced inactivity, Southey's *Life of Nelson*. This is a conscious attempt to link the two limbless men, and the reader is expected to see some of the sailor's heroism in the porter.(142)

However, although a bad woman, from the start Nan has redeeming qualities. 'She was a fighter by nature.'(143) It is the sneers of her neighbours about her worthlessness to Cherry that determines her to make a success of the fent dealing venture. 'She would work hours at a stretch, without food - when another woman would have fainted. She might have discovered the North Pole by her single virtue of savage persistency.'(144) At first Nan is unable to use that stamina and commitment to create a better relationship with her husband and her

(139) *Ibid.*, p.204.

(140) *Ibid.*, p.108.

(141) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth probably used this detail because her father had been a fent (i.e. clothes) dealer. See *Barrett's General and Commercial Directory of Blackburn District* (P.Barrett and Co., Preston, 1905):Great Harwood - 'Carnie David, clothes dealer, 21 St Edmund Street'.

(142) I cannot fit Cherry into Elaine Showalter's view of fictional male disability, i.e. that it is inflicted to make men understand unwilling female dependency and so to moderate their behaviour. See Showalter, E., *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing* (Virago, London, 1978) p.152.

(143) *The Taming of Nan, op.cit.*, p.216.

(144) *Ibid.*, pp.181-182.

daughter. But she develops, showing a tenderness towards Little Rob, a child she minds, and finally to her own child, after Polly's shabby treatment by a no-good boyfriend. The key to this development is Nan's realisation that she has a reputation for hitting children and of letting her own children die. Whilst the charges of delinquent are true, those of child abuse are not. It is the desperation that these accusations create in Nan that spark her desperate acts. It is Cherry's refusal to believe the rumours about her and to hit her that cause Nan to stab him. She can not accept his compassion and understanding and she leaves him, not for another man as the reader suspects, but to seek refuge with the Salvation Army.

As the title of the novel implies, Nan is finally reconciled with her family. Stripped of her capriciousness she becomes a classic Carnie Holdsworth heroine, the enduring rock whose strength in adversity enables her brood to prosper. But whilst satisfying those who read the novel for its human tragedies, its human passions and its happy ending, the author offers serious messages as well. Important amongst these is her view on the state's attitude towards those injured at work.

The story begins with a terrible industrial injury - Cherry's legs are cut off by a runaway train - and ends with a court decision requiring the railway company he worked for to compensate him with a pension of a pound a week, not the ten shillings he was initially awarded, to take account of tips, which were reckoned to be half of a porter's

income.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Before this resolution Ethel Carnie Holdsworth rails against a society 'that thrust the weak ... out to perish, that left the sick and aged to die.'⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ By the time the novel was published the 1897 Workman's Compensation Act had made some employers financially responsible for all accidents to workers arising from the ordinary course of their employment, whether such accidents were due to the employers' negligence or not, and railway workers were amongst those employed in dangerous trades who were covered by the Act. The 1906 Act extended the principle embodied in the 1897 Act to practically all kinds of employment, but such was her deep distrust of the capitalist system that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth did not want people to accept the new situation complacently, for although it represented an end to 'the doctrine of common employment' which since 1837 had denied workers protection against negligent employers,⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ it still ignored the victims' needs - who could survive on ten shillings a week?

In *The Taming of Nan* the courts are vindicated, for although the Borough Court magistrate rejected Cherry's claim, the Higher Court upheld it. It is the employers against whom the author is complaining however, for between the two verdicts she makes the railway company

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Dan Irving, secretary of the Burnley SDF and one of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's earliest political influences, had lost a leg as a result of a railway accident in the 1870s, and his employers, the Midland Railway Company, reduced his wages from nineteen to eight shillings a week. Perhaps Irving's plight suggested Cherry's to the author. See 'Dan Irving and Socialist Politics in Burnley 1880-1924', *North West Labour History* (23, 1998/1999) p.5.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ *The Taming of Nan*, *op.cit.*, p.92.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Gardiner, J., and Wenborn, N., (eds.), *The History Today Companion to British History* (Collins and Brown, London, 1995) p.825.

try to bribe Cherry with thirty half sovereigns to drop the case.(148)

The issue of physical disability recurs in this novel. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses it to emphasise the callous attitude of the authorities by restricting humane responses to the powerless. An example of this concerns Gibbs and Moss, two blind men Bob Wild takes to see a sunrise. The pleasure they derive is clearly a combination of Bob's description, the 'feel' of the sunrise, and gratitude for a simple kindness.(149)

The second major theme with which the novel deals is the position of women in society. It is particularly linked with an examination of domestic violence. Until she is 'tamed' Nan's outrageous behaviour imbues the story with an uncomfortable sense that violence may erupt at any time, but the author also makes it clear that the Cherrys' confrontations are typical of relations within working-class families. Husbands were expected to beat their wives if they deviated from contemporary notions of obedience, and wife beatings without even this justification, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is suggesting, were common. Nancy Tomes' research supports this view, indeed it indicates that in mid-Victorian London wives were not only subject to physical violence but that they tolerated it as deserved if they felt that they had not lived up to their responsibilities as managers of the household economy.(150) However Jane Lewis disagrees. In her opinion

(148) *The Taming of Nan*, op.cit., p.169.

(149) *Ibid.*, p.219.

(150) Tomes, N., 'A Torrent of Abuse: Crimes of Violence between Working Class Men and Women in London 1840-1875', *Journal of Social History* (11,78), pp.328-345.

marriage acted as 'an economic and emotional support system' amongst the working class.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Elizabeth Roberts' work, too, suggests that the stereotype of widespread oppression of working-class women within marriage, established by Frederick Engels in 1884, is exaggerated. She attributes the decrease in brutality and neglect that she discovered in early twentieth century husbands in Barrow, Lancaster and Preston mainly to the 1915 Defence of the Realm Act's control of the availability, strength and price of alcohol. The post war social acceptability of women going into pubs, and the popularity of the cinema were also factors, Roberts says.⁽¹⁵²⁾ Her analysis is of just the period with which *The Taming of Nan* is concerned, but it does not reflect Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's experience. Domestic violence was still clearly a problem in her opinion. She wanted to show that it was not a solution to domestic disputes, and that barbarism need not be an acceptable feature of family life. The device she uses to do so in this novel is Cherry's forbearance. Even as a cripple he is expected to beat Nan, and he is criticised in Narrowfields for not doing so. But 'blackened flesh was changing his whole philosophy of life'.⁽¹⁵³⁾ The author clearly hopes it will change the philosophy of others who conformed to traditional practices without thought.

Sarah Wild plays no significant part in the plot, yet she is a

(151) Lewis, J., (ed.), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986) pp.106-107.

(152) Roberts, E., *A Women's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984) pp.121-124.

(153) *The Taming of Nan*, *op.cit.*, p.116.

memorable character of memorable appearance. 'She looked so like a man that it was not wonderful that Adam forgot she was a woman. She walked like a cow'.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Her role is not to help the story along but to enable the author to make a point about the fate of unmarried women. 'She was that tragic thing - a farm drudge...she was a woman under those masculine clothes she wore, troubled about many things and...faced with the workhouse if ever Adam married and his wife did not take to her.'⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ The point is effectively made only if an inconsistency is overlooked - factory jobs and domestic service were ways unmarried working-class women had of supporting themselves, and Narrowfields is clearly a Lancashire cotton town. But conveniently the main characters in this novel do not work in the mills, and Sarah would undoubtedly have found it difficult to leave the family farm for domestic service elsewhere. The author's view of Sarah's plight is supported by Mrs Wilbaut who had highlighted the problem of economic survival for spinsters, forsaken wives and widows in the 1890s in her pamphlet *Working Women and the Suffrage*, claiming that it was difficult for them to earn enough to provide for themselves however hard they worked.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Ethel Snowden agreed with this judgement in *The Feminist Movement*, published in 1913.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Spinsters like Sarah, whether they worked or not, remained dependent on male relatives for a roof over their heads, and old maid status often brought

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.144.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Adam, R., *A Woman's Place 1910-1975* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975) p.18.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.19.

with it resentment, exploitation and violence. In *The Taming of Nan* Sarah is spared the last of these indignities, but the author uses her to criticise a society which leaves so many women with a choice only between beholden drudgery with relatives and state drudgery in the workhouse.

Marriage emerges well from *The Taming of Nan*. In *The Woman Worker* Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had been critical of marriage as an institution,⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ but here she does not introduce the attractions of divorce despite the disintegration of Nan's relationship with Cherry, indeed a double wedding is used as the novel's set piece happy ending. Undoubtedly her own recent marriage, the miraculous reappearance of a husband thought dead, and the birth of her first child affected her judgement. Later novels, written after she left Alfred Holdsworth, are once more unsympathetic towards marriage.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

By contrast she clearly hates the displays of moral superiority, so prevalent at the time, towards unmarried mothers. A strong thread in the plot deals with this issue. It is Nan's daughter, Polly, who is falsely accused of 'being in trouble'.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's unmarried women never become pregnant through promiscuity, but through weakness against philanderers, or, as in this case, through rumour. The author is concerned here to point out the damage 'evil tongues had done,'⁽¹⁶¹⁾ and she makes it clear that malicious gossip and the

(158) See for example *The Woman Worker*, 3 November 1909, p.418.

(159) See *Barbara Dennison and Eagles' Crag*.

(160) *The Taming of Nan*, *op.cit.*, p.272.

(161) *Ibid.*

cruelty that it causes is as much a fault of the working class as any other. There is no attempt to make Polly the victim of the factory owner's son and so to pick off two of her prime targets, men and capitalism, at a single stroke.⁽¹⁶²⁾

Nor is there in the case of Becky. She, too, is irrelevant to the main plot, but is introduced to reinforce Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's rage against current attitudes towards unmarried mothers. Becky is forced into the workhouse because she is pregnant and unmarried, and only escapes because of the kindness and generosity of the Cherrys. When the father of Becky's child is discovered the author gives Nan the words 'Every chap as is born ought to be strangled at birth'.⁽¹⁶³⁾ In essence this represents Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's own view of the disadvantaged position of women in society. Men were to blame.

The author accepts that there are solutions to the problems of industrial injury and domestic violence already available - the law can force reluctant employers to treat their workers more fairly, and personal relationships can be healed through the capacity of individuals to change and develop. But despite this, she says, the boss will usually get away with exploiting the worker and men will continue to abuse women. She points out what the possibilities are, and the difficulty of realising them. This enables her to call for improved behaviour between individuals, as she had done in *Helen of Four*

⁽¹⁶²⁾ However Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is not immune to the use of the factory owner's son as the cause of the ruin of an honest working girl. See *Iron Horses* and *This Slavery*.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ *The Taming of Nan*, *op.cit.*, p.283.

Gates, but now for stronger laws to prevent exploitation at work and abuse in the home as well. Unfortunately she is not more precise. The moral framework she offers falls short of guidance about how the laws against employers should be changed or what measures could be introduced to effectively check domestic violence. This is a mystifying omission for she could be focused and specific. Her next novel is a case in point.

2.7. THE MARRIAGE OF ELIZABETH, 1920

This is 'one of the best stories we have read in a long time...sure to increase Mrs. Holdsworth's rapidly rising reputation as a novelist'.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ 'It is a story of great power, showing originality of conception and a remarkable gift of characterisation'.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ If these contemporary reviews are to be believed Ethel Carnie Holdsworth surpassed herself with her new novel. Unfortunately the reviewers do not explain their enthusiasm beyond summarising the plot and suggesting that it reflected 'conditions as they are found in all Lancashire manufacturing towns.'⁽¹⁶⁶⁾

There is a great deal of vivid local colour in *The Marriage of Elizabeth*. Elizabeth's father is brought home dead from the quarry; poverty drives people to work whilst their dependants lie at home mortally ill;⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ natural disasters destroy property and force the

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ *Blackburn Times*, 26 June 1920, p.11.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 26 June 1920, p.7.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Holdsworth, E.C., *The Marriage of Elizabeth* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1920) p.43.

dispossessed into the workhouse;(168) an illegitimate child has to be buried in unconsecrated ground.(169)

But there is far more to this novel than tired themes from the hackneyed tradition of Victorian and Edwardian melodrama. Against this background Ethel Carnie Holdsworth builds a moral case. No longer prepared to wait for the government to intervene constructively on behalf of the people, she provides the necessary lead herself. *The Marriage of Elizabeth* is a guide to the creation of harmonious personal relationships which will allow society to function in the grimmest circumstances. The author achieves this through the portrayal of another in her string of remarkable women, Elizabeth Peel. The community she lives in is Lancashire working class all right, but it is peopled for the most part by flawed women, a surprising setting for social analysis in the work of a feminist. Mary is a ruthless manipulator. She is unfaithful to her husband John, and from her death bed extracts promises out of both John and Elizabeth, although neither is aware of the other's pledge, to marry for the sake of her love child. Elizabeth's mother is a miser and a gossip who destroys her daughter's reputation. One of John's housekeepers, Mrs Biers, is a self-seeking fantasist, the other, Mrs Waydale, a blackmailer. Some wives, like Mrs Crowther, are weak in the face of bullying but cowardly husbands, others turn their husbands against ageing parents.

This awful framework is necessary so that the author can launch

(168) *Ibid.*, p.116.

(169) *Ibid.*, p.52.

her heroine at it and set all to rights. The litany of Elizabeth's good deeds is staggering. She marries John Stone, believing he does not love her, for the sake of Mary's baby. She acts as his housekeeper, not as his wife, but keeps up the appearance of a conventional marriage so as not to shame him to his neighbours. As far as they know she is the ideal mate, running the house and family efficiently, preventing John from succumbing to drink, and exhibiting all the clean and thrifty merits of a 'particular' Lancashire woman, as well as sharing his bed.

As the novel progresses so Elizabeth's saintliness increases. She finds ways of getting the destitute but proud Crowthers to accept duck eggs.(170) She blames herself when a land slip buries a house she owns and kills a tenant. She pays for the funeral and finds new accommodation for the survivors.(171) She takes in John's mother when she is driven from her home, and resolves the dispute between the mother and her two other sons so that she can return.(172) When Crowther hits his wife Elizabeth takes a stick 'to administer justice to the man whom God had left unpunished for twenty years',(173) and she contrives to make it seem as though the retribution came from Mrs Crowther so that he will not be tempted to transgress again. She makes the soldier who has abandoned Amelia realise his callousness, repent of his behaviour and put a headstone on the grave of Amelia and her baby.(174) She sells her last assets to get John the best medical care

(170) *Ibid.*, p.110.

(171) *Ibid.*, p.116.

(172) *Ibid.*, p.124.

(173) *Ibid.*, p.143.

(174) *Ibid.*, p.148.

after he has an accident at work. She refuses to expose Burnham, Mary's lover, in order to preserve Mary's good name and the reputation she still enjoys with the grieving and unsuspecting John. Rather than press charges against the blackmailer she accepts it as the action of a desperate woman, gives her five pounds and re-employs her.

It is tempting to see the influence of Coventry Patmore's *Honoraria*, 'The Angel in the House', in Elizabeth Peel.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ Certainly her effect on Crowther and John match Patmore's expectations of the power of women to make 'brutes men and men divine'. Virginia Woolf was influenced by the poems, indeed she described Patmore's angel as a malevolent presence which got between the author and the page, preventing her from expressing her true feelings.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Woolf finally overcame the angel's instruction to create only selfless and pure heroines, whilst Ethel Carnie Holdsworth reincarnated Elizabeth Peel as Belinda Higgins in 1924. However Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's angels depart from the Patmore model in one important respect, they have minds of their own. Their purpose is not to reflect a Victorian ideal, magnificent but complacent, it is to teach from a position of moral strength. They help to promote the working class as valiant, exploited and victimised, issues that Virginia Woolf admitted left her

(175) 'The Angel in the House' is a sequence of poems in praise of married love, written between 1854 and 1863. For the Victorian idealised view of women see Poovey, M., *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Virago, London, 1989) pp.7-9. For Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's rejection of the Victorian stereotype see p.77 above.

(176) Woolf, V., 'Professions for Women', in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (Penquin, Harmondsworth, 1961) pp.202-203.

'in my blood and bones, untouched'.(177)

The plot of *The Marriage of Elizabeth* is executed in a more convincing way than the arid listings above perhaps suggest because, by now, the author was maturing as a writer and more the mistress of description, dialogue and characterisation than she once was. It is only in the last chapters, which are concerned with the unravelling of mistaken motives and the provision of both Elizabeth and John with the means of realising that they love each other for themselves in the end, whatever their initial reasons for marrying might have been, that the structure of the novel disappoints. This section is pure melodrama. Elizabeth surprises Mrs Waydale stealing money from John's desk. The thief threatens to blackmail Elizabeth if she calls the police claiming she knows Elizabeth and John are not married. (As housekeeper she knows they do not sleep together, and this is proof enough for her.) Elizabeth leaves home and in her absence John finds her love poems to him. He tracks her down and they live happily ever after. But Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was simply deploying the formula. Such passages she hoped would find her the audience she sought, typically the exploited, unpoliticised, enduring poor, and enable her to give them something more significant to think about.

The Marriage of Elizabeth is dedicated 'To My Mother'. Like much of her work it urges better behaviour on its readers as the way to a

(177) Richardson, S., *Writing on the Line. 20th Century Working-Class Women Writers* (Working Press, London, 1996) p.95.

better future. In the absence of government relief she recommends a strategy of personal improvement that makes the book a self-help manual. I am inclined to believe that Elizabeth was modelled on Louisa Carnie (Ethel's mother), although there were many examples of women who had Elizabeth's do-what-must-be-done grittiness. Rather than saint, a better interpretation of Elizabeth's role is teacher, and an inspirational one at that, although in this novel Ethel Carnie Holdsworth seems more concerned to show what decent specimens bad or weak women, not men, could become if they would be guided by the likes of Elizabeth.

Once more gossiping is condemned. This plot is riddled with examples of gossip destroying the fabric of society just as surely as capitalism does in *Miss Nobody* or *This Slavery*. The author distinguishes between malevolent gossip of the sort threatened by Mrs Waydale and the loose talk that allows the town to learn that Mary does not wash her family's clothes well⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ or that John has proposed to Elizabeth even before she has given him an answer. But she makes it clear that society would be better off without both. Elizabeth speaks with authority on this matter because she is in possession of information about Mary's adultery and Mrs Waydale's stealing that would make them social outcasts if revealed. But she deliberately conceals it.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth stakes a claim for high moral standards in

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.36.

this book. She makes Elizabeth dress in black for her wedding to clear her of pretending that hers is a love match.(179) She moves heaven and earth to try to get Amelia and her baby a grave in the churchyard to point up the cruelty of the convention that denied unmarried mothers and bastard children basic rights. She is critical of families, like John's, who will not help him with the baby when Mary dies yet who are happy to see that need supplied by others.(180) Elizabeth hates meanness of all sorts. When she discovers that her mother has sold her wedding roses to Annice Fairbody she returns the money. She believes it is better to help the Crowthers, who live in abject squalor, than to laugh at them as the rest of the town does.(181)

The Marriage of Elizabeth offers a generous view of men. Certainly bit parts are played by soldiers who desert their sweethearts and husbands who beat their wives, but they reform, and the chief male character, John, is a paragon, and along with Bill Cherry, the only good man in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fiction. He helps to complete Joe Crowther's transformation into a model husband by working with him in his garden and finding him a job. He develops a new safety machine out of concern for the welfare of the foundry men as much as to provide better for his family. He does not need Elizabeth to point out that Mary was less virtuous than he thought, he makes the discovery accidentally and then adjusts his assessment of the relative worth of his two wives accordingly. More importantly John helps

(179) *Ibid.*, p.88.

(180) *Ibid.*, p.50.

(181) *Ibid.*, p.109.

Elizabeth to overcome her one obvious fault, pride, by asking her 'have you ever noticed how they resent being helped, these helpers, and good givers, and strong folk generally?'(182) Nevertheless the reader must suspect that it is having Elizabeth constantly before him as an example that acts as a catalyst for good on John's behaviour.

Regular Carnie Holdsworth themes are relegated to a subordinate position in this novel. She takes a side swipe at capitalism by pointing out that John's safety machine must be made to capitalist specifications, that is that it must be cheaper to use than the cost of compensation claims per year if it is to be adopted by his employer. The struggle for supremacy in the Crowther household is handled lightly. It features almost as comic relief, but the author's point is clear, there is no place for domestic violence in her ideal society. Distrust of organised religion is apparent again in this book. Elizabeth says a vicar's prayers will not help her dying mother. (183) But it seems to be the form of worship used by the Church of England that upsets her, not religion itself, for elsewhere she prays to be made a good woman,(184) and she advises Mrs Crowther to use prayer to combat her husband's brutality.(185)

But in essence *The Marriage of Elizabeth* is a feminist tract. The moving force behind societal improvement as presented here in its Little Hareton microcosm is 'only a woman'.(186) But she had the 'innocence of a child' and 'the brain of a man'.(187) She seems bitterly

(182) *Ibid.*, p.81.

(183) *Ibid.*, p.240.

(186) *Ibid.*, p.23.

(184) *Ibid.*, p.263.

(185) *Ibid.*, p.81.

(187) *Ibid.*, p.13.

disappointed by men because they are too weak to face up to adult responsibilities and leave women to shoulder the burden of making life worth living. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth resented that. It stifled her potential. As she says at the end of her story 'Had she not been so practical, it is possible that Elizabeth might have been a poet'.⁽¹⁸⁸⁾

2.8. THE HOUSE THAT JILL BUILT, 1920

Pamela Graves argues that although traditional ideas about gender roles usually limited women's influence on policy making, they facilitated women's involvement in guiding welfare reform because women were seen as more suited to judge the care needs of mothers and infants, schoolchildren, the elderly, the sick and the insane.⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ Pat Thane agrees. She thinks that it was Labour women who put welfare on the Labour Party agenda in the inter-war years and were responsible for much improved health care, especially at the local level.⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ North-east Lancashire was relatively well off in this respect because of activists like Selina Cooper whose efforts led to the opening of a range of new welfare facilities there in 1917 and 1918. It was an issue of importance to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth who was the mother of a two year old child, and who believed herself to be a widow, at the time. She made her contribution to the current welfare debate in the

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.269.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ Graves, P., 'An Experiment in Woman-Centred Socialism: Labour Women in Britain', in Gruber, H., and Graves, P., (eds.), *Women and Socialism. Socialism and Women. Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Berghahn, New York and Oxford, 1998) p.211.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ Thane, P., 'The Women in the Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-45', in Smith, H.L., (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1990) pp.124-141.

last of her 1920 novels.

The House That Jill Built was dedicated to 'The Tired Mothers of All Nations.' One contemporary notice⁽¹⁹¹⁾ makes no reference to the dedication, and another⁽¹⁹²⁾ does no more than explain that the 'House' of the title is a place of recuperation from the cares of domestic life. Both reviews see the new book rather as 'A Comedy of Today'⁽¹⁹³⁾ which 'opens out the path for the authoress's humour'.⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Both attribute the comedy to the fact that Jill Bennett is partly Irish and therefore vivacious and impulsive, qualities which cause her to get into a series of financial and romantic entanglements through which the plot moves along.

However the amplification of the dedication proves that it was not Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's purpose merely to entertain her readers with light situation comedy, for it states 'I affectionately dedicate this book in the hope that they (the tired mothers of all nations) will open a door for themselves.'⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ So her real aim was to encourage the development of welfare provision for an oppressed and forgotten section of society not only in Britain but throughout the world.

The House That Jill Built, then, is another example of a novel constructed according to the formula preferred by the author at this time. In this case however the background against which the socio-political point is made is less convincing than in her earlier work. She

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ *Blackburn Times*, 9 October 1920, p.11.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 11 December 1920, p.7.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ *Blackburn Times*, *op.cit.*

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ Page following title page of *The House That Jill Built*, 1920.

is best at northern settings and usually introduces her stories with lyrical descriptions of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Pennine countryside that she knew intimately. This is lacking in *The House That Jill Built*. The action starts in, and frequently returns to London. She had been to the capital in 1909 to join the staff of *The Woman Worker*, and 1913 to teach at Bebel House, but she does not use these experiences to create a telling context for her purpose beyond a few mentions of the ugliness and poverty of the East End.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ Jill goes there on business, her visits are episodes in her efforts to establish, run, and keep in existence Firstlings House, the home for tired mothers which is clearly located in the industrial north. But in this novel the location is incidental, the focus is on the mothers' home.

It is difficult for the twenty-first century reader to see the comic content to which the reviews written at the time of publication refer. Presumably it revolved around the romance plot, the behaviour of the mothers who go to Firstlings, and Jill's attempts to raise money to keep it going. However apart from Jill the novel's characters are not convincing. Harry Thorn's reasons for jilting Jill are unclear,⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ the bogus millionaire from whom she hopes to prise a donation for her scheme is preposterous,⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ and her mothers are stereotypes - salt of the earth,⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ over-grateful⁽²⁰⁰⁾ or selfish troublemakers.⁽²⁰¹⁾ Neverthe-

(196) Holdsworth, E.C., *The House That Jill Built* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1920) p.32.

(197) *Ibid.*, ch.1.

(198) *Ibid.*, ch.17.

(199) Mrs Briggs, *ibid.*, ch.6.

(200) 'The mother of nineteen', *ibid.*, ch.8.

(201) Martha Smith, *ibid.*, ch.7.

less Ethel Carnie Holdsworth does succeed in her central purpose, that of making a case for state care for poor women crushed by the burdens of motherhood, for this novel has a single theme. It proposes a practical and detailed solution to a pressing social need.

Initially the difficulties of early twentieth century motherhood are highlighted - large families, inadequate income, no respite from the demands of the children, feckless husbands. The first tired mother Jill comes into contact with has eight children, but she tells Jill of her mother's fifteen, and of the woman with nineteen children who begged the police to jail her 'to give her a rest, for she was afraid she'd commit suicide'.⁽²⁰²⁾ Both move to Firstlings, as does a Northumberland miner's wife with four sons. Five men working three different shifts meant 'always the big wooden tub was on the fire...always the food was on the table...always the wet clothes, gritty with coal-slack dust hung around the fire. Always she slept the broken sleep of those who tend on the breadwinner'.⁽²⁰³⁾ (My emphases.) Women are portrayed not only as drudges, but as treadmills of human reproduction, not valued for themselves as human beings.⁽²⁰⁴⁾

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth seems to be paving the way for a serious justification of birth control. Marie Stopes' *Married Love* had been published in 1918. It argued in favour of reducing family size by

⁽²⁰²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁽²⁰³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.78.

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's novels of 1920 support Ken Worpole's view that unwanted pregnancy was a major trauma in twentieth-century novels of working-class life. See Worpole, K., *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading, Popular Writing* (Verso, London, 1983) p.23. However she never tackles abortion, which Worpole identifies as another major trauma, and the emphasis in her other work is on political and industrial oppression, which Worpole discounts.

spacing pregnancies, but although its aim was to promote sexual pleasure and to limit conception it showed the influence of eugenics in its emphasis on the improved fitness of the mothers and the children that birth control would bring.⁽²⁰⁵⁾ More practical guidance from Stopes on contraception followed in *Wise Parenthood* but this, too, reflected eugenics arguments in its use of phrases such as 'the thriftless who breed rapidly' causing prisons and hospitals to be 'filled with inferior stock'.⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's view of working-class mothers with many children was more sympathetic, but although she supported birth control she recognised that it was still a taboo subject, indeed it led to her friend Rose Witcop being prosecuted for publishing Margaret Sanger's *Family Limitation* in 1922.⁽²⁰⁷⁾ So in 1920 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth thought that women would be better served by campaigning for an extension of existing welfare legislation.

Of course philanthropic gestures towards tired mothers had been made before the period this novel deals with. The author acknowledges the efforts of social workers, ministers of the gospel, members of literary and debating societies and Theosophists⁽²⁰⁸⁾ but she is critical of them because they expected the beneficiaries of their philanthropy to be grateful and to accept, or at least pay lip-service to their own beliefs. The Firstlings model by contrast requires nothing of

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Pugh, M., *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 2000) p.255.

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, *op.cit.*, p.320.

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Rowbotham, S., *Hidden From History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (Pluto, London, 1977) p.150. Rose Witcop became a regular contributor to the Holdsworth's paper *The Clear Light* in 1923.

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ *The House That Jill Built*, *op.cit.*, p.76.

its mothers, they 'had come there to *rest*, not to swallow tinpot theories'.⁽²⁰⁹⁾ Jill even baulks at the suggestion of grace before meat, believing this to imply thankfulness when none was wanted.⁽²¹⁰⁾

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's dream, for Jill is in my view articulating the author's vision in the novel, is of an international network of refuges where women exhausted by the demands of motherhood can go for a month's rest, with no strings attached. If informal regimes to help run the houses emerge from the uncoerced suggestions of the guests themselves, all well and good, so long as it is clearly understood that this is not a requirement of admission. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is anxious to claim the humanising effect of such a system on women who have become mere automatons and to demand access to it for all who need it.⁽²¹¹⁾

Her despair about the situation women faced shows through Jill's responses to the problems she encounters whilst setting up Firstlings. Jill's view is that 'There ought not to be any tired mothers in the first place', and that as there nonetheless are, 'giving a holiday once a year to a handful of tired mothers out of the world's millions'⁽²¹²⁾ did little to solve the problem. Indeed she recognises that 'a glimpse of beauty ... had aggravated their sense of hardship and wrong' and thus perhaps done more harm than good.⁽²¹³⁾

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²¹⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁽²¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁽²¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁽²¹³⁾ *Ibid.*

This realistic assessment leads the author to a radical solution via a condemnation of capitalism. As a beneficiary of capitalism's inheritance laws Jill is able to set up Firstlings House, but when her investments are embezzled the scheme is faced with collapse, and the only tools to deal with such a difficulty in a capitalist world - begging and greed - are degrading. Even if these work, Homes for Tired Mothers are never likely to be established for long on a secure footing, and never in sufficient numbers; if they depend on individual initiatives within a capitalist framework. Only socialism can achieve that through state funded provision of the infrastructure and co-operative management of the Homes by the mothers themselves.(214)

Karen Hunt argues that the early twentieth century debate about women's economic independence was not limited to promoting their participation in the existing labour market, it also included the demand that women be paid for their work as wives and mothers.(215) This idea of endowment of motherhood, first outlined by Eleanor Rathbone in *The Disinherited Family* in 1924, became a general principle amongst socialist women, but different groups emphasised different detail. Caroline Rowan has described the discussions within the WLL on this issue as the hottest in the League's history,(216) but although endowment could mean anything from short term maternity

(214) *Ibid.*, pp.308-310.

(215) Hunt,K.,*Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) p.137.

(216) Rowan, C., 'Mothers, Vote Labour! The State, the Labour Movement and Working-Class Mothers, 1910-1918,' in Brunt, R., and Rowan, C.,(eds.), *Feminism, Culture and Politics* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1982) p.75.

benefit to state payments to mothers as full time home workers, it did not embrace the sort of scheme Ethel Carnie Holdsworth outlines in *The House That Jill Built*. Yet she believed that continued neglect would have dire consequences. One of the mothers, 'the Burnley woman', predicts revolution. A visiting benefactor, the millionaire Minton, agrees. He puts himself in the place of the working class and sees that they have no alternative. However for the time being Ethel Carnie Holdsworth seems prepared to compromise. Despite Jill's belief in the ultimate victory of socialism through revolution the author makes her accept Minton's help with good grace and in a friendly spirit in order that the idea of the Homes is preserved. She is content to end her novel on an optimistic note:

'The very sanest person does not dare to say now that Firstlings is a mistake. But Jill knows it for what it is - a tiny 'making-up' for the grey lives endured by those whose work is the most important in the world - the work that some have called soul-making. Some day, she hopes, there will be no need of places like Firstlings.'(217)

Stony-hearted readers may have ignored this message, but surely some reflected on its truth, thus both confounding contemporary reviewers and vindicating the author's propaganda style. The reforms she promoted were not immediately achieved, however by 1923 the climate of opinion was changing, following the case of nurse Daniels

(217) *The House That Jill Built*, op.cit., p.318.

who was dismissed for giving birth control advice. This led to a co-ordinated campaign in her defence by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Bertrand and Dora Russell that had a considerable influence on the Labour movement.⁽²¹⁸⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, too, threw her weight behind birth control in 1925,⁽²¹⁹⁾ although a national network of family planning clinics was established only slowly, in the 1930s.

The 1920 novels, considered as a group, provide a snapshot of the author's thinking at the time. They reveal her attitude to specific issues (domestic violence, self-help, welfare provision) and her ideas for remedying them (more tolerant relationships between individuals, more government enabling legislation, state funding). But their greatest value to the student of her intellectual development is that they show the depth of her concern about gender inequality. She believed it was so serious an abuse that vigorous government intervention was needed to reverse it, and because of this leadership and teaching roles in these books are given to women.

Now, however, she sometimes represents women as bad, and men as good. One reason for this change is the author's need to demonstrate the fruits of gender equality, for marriage based only on love would not have been possible if the men in the 1920 novels had been like the men in *Helen of Four Gates*. Gossip provides another reason for this new feature. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth portrays gossiping

⁽²¹⁸⁾ Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, *op.cit.*, pp.324-325.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.19, January 1925.

as an exclusively female fault, and her novels need flawed women to show this. It would, perhaps, be going too far to use the evidence here to claim that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed social injustice could be eliminated if a way could be found to stop women gossiping, but it plays a disproportionate role in these books. Gossip seems a trivial matter to set alongside capitalism, militarism or fascism in the pantheon of evils, but in 1920 at least it had assumed that rank in her thinking.

Melanie Tebbutt has analysed the nature and extent of gossip amongst the working class,(220) and her work shows that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was right to be concerned about the impact gossip could have on communities like those her novels describe. However Tebbutt's conclusion is more sympathetic, for although she accepts that gossip could often be divisive she asserts that it was also one of the few recreational outlets available to those who used it, and that it provided a support network which strengthened community feeling.(221) She points out, too, that for all their criticism of it, men were just as likely to gossip as women, and for the same purposes, although amongst themselves in the pub or club, not with women.(222)

Furthermore Tebbutt's study indicates that gossip was a response to patriarchal oppression, lack of male support and irregular income(223) which led to the emergence of the street matriarch,

(220) Tebbutt, M., *Women's Talk: A social history of 'gossip' in working-class neighbourhoods, 1880-1960* (Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1995).

(221) *Ibid.*, p.173.

(222) *Ibid.*, p.14.

(223) *Ibid.*, p.177.

respected for her leadership in times of distress in her immediate sphere of influence.(224) Gossip also, Tebbutt says, had an exchange value, as neighbourhood money-lending depended on the availability of good information about family circumstances.(225)

There is no sign of any of these apologies for gossip in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work. Gossip had no cathartic or therapeutic value for her, nor did it make a useful contribution to the community by regulating the behaviour of those tempted not to conform, as Tebbutt suggests it could. (226) As Clementina Black observed in 1915, gossip was not compulsory. Some women (including Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fictional heroines) avoided it, and those who did not poisoned relationships and undermined women's virtuous reputation as conciliators.(227)

There is a link between women's talk and men's domestic violence according to Tebbutt. She says women's greater command of language often intimidated men, who hit their wives and daughters if what they said offended them because they were unable to respond effectively verbally.(228) She is not using gossip in quite the same sense as Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is in the novels considered in this chapter, however. She means any talk that deprived men of a quiet life, that angered them because of its quantity as much as its quality. Ada Nield Chew believed that women who did this were considered to deserve all

(224) *Ibid.*, p.179.

(225) *Ibid.*, p.75.

(226) *Ibid.*, p.181.

(227) Black, C., *Married Women's Work* (Virago, London, 1983) p.238.

(228) Tebbutt, M., *op.cit.*, p.39.

they got by many of their contemporaries.(229) On the other hand Elizabeth Roberts suggests that gossip acted as a brake on domestic violence because men were anxious not to get reputations as wife beaters or drunkards.(230)

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth already had direct experience of domestic violence. By 1901, when she was fifteen, her mother had left her father and taken Ethel and her brother Rupert to live with their grandparents at 2, Railway View, Great Harwood.(231) However the cause was drink, not gossip. David Carnie was an alcoholic and had started to hit his wife, although by 1921 he was able to control his drinking and he was taken back into the family home.(232) David Carnie's personal tragedy did not lead his daughter to condemn drunkenness out of hand, for she recognised that for the working class there were times when it was understandable that they should seek an escape from difficulties caused by the capitalist system over which they had no control. The much harder line she took with gossiping however, may indicate that she had been its victim herself. Righteous indignation, feigned or real, about her father's drunkenness amongst neighbours, local envy at her escape from the factory system, and unkind comments about her northern accent or her unsophisticated behaviour by London's journalist community are all possibilities. But if

(229) Chew, D.N., *Ada Nield Chew: The Life and Writings of a Working Woman* (Virago, London, 1982) p.181.

(230) Roberts, E., *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940*, op.cit., p.194.

(231) Great Harwood census, 1901, p.152.

(232) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 26 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

personal experience did influence her judgement, the absence from her work of the positive benefits of gossip that Tebbut and Roberts highlight does not mean that she did not recognise them. It just did not suit her didactic purpose to admit them here.

The feminist reading I ascribe to the 1920 novels gives Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work as a whole a more complex character than has been accepted by the critics who have ignored them. Along with *Helen of Four Gates* they represent the high water mark of her fictional effort to demonstrate men's faults and to win a better future for women. Scholars who have limited their studies just to *Miss Nobody* and/or *This Slavery* have been unable to incorporate material which shows that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's concerns included gender issues of the sort described above. This feminist dimension enriches her work and disqualifies it from the labels that have been attached to it. 'Socialist literary endeavour' in the sense that Gustav Klaus uses the term (233) suggests texts concerned with class, and it is accurate for the novels he considers. For example although James Welsh's *The Underworld* (1920) includes a sub-plot about a working girl who runs off with the colliery owner's son, and the role of women in a pit village is not entirely ignored, it is essentially a story of a miner's struggle with industrial oppression and the class system.(234) H.R. Barbour's *Against the Red Sky*(1922) is about the politicisation of a middle-class man and his contribution to a socialist revolution in which women play

(233) Klaus, H.G., *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Harvester, Brighton, 1992) pp. 89-90.

See Introduction, p.32-33 above.

(234) *Ibid.*, pp.91-94.

no significant part.(235) *Follow My Leader*(1922) concerns a middle-class woman who, like the author Mary Hamilton, MP for Blackburn from 1929 to 1931, becomes a socialist. But the focus is on Jane Heriot's trade unionist mentor, and her socialism is 'revisionist of the MacDonald type'. She does not discuss feminist matters, indeed when she becomes a socialist she justifies her decision in masculine terms - 'To be a socialist...coloured every part of a man's thinking. It was not a thing a man thought about now and then...it determined how and why he lived' (236) *Helen of Four Gates* and the 1920 novels do not fit into this company because of the prominence of their feminist message.

Pamela Fox's characterisation of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as a writer of 'the private arena' of love who attacks stifling patriarchal views of marriage(237) could have been better made from the novels discussed in this chapter than from *Miss Nobody* and *This Slavery*. This strategy would also perhaps have enabled her to acknowledge the socialist content of those texts. Conversely a consideration of the books discussed here would either have modified Mary Ashraf's Marxist reading of their author by requiring domestic violence, divorce and welfare to be encompassed in her definition of 'proletarian realism', or forced her to drop that writer from the elite group with which she deals. (238)

(235) *Ibid.*, pp.97-99.

(236) Hamilton, M.A., *Follow My Leader* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1922) p.237.

(237) See Introduction, p. 40 above.

(238) See Introduction, pp. 41-42 above.

The novels of the period 1917 to 1920 provide clear evidence that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was deeply concerned about the exploitation of women by men in the home and in law, and that she had constructive remedies to offer. The reluctance of other commentators to accept this has, I believe, skewed their judgement and undervalued her achievement.

2.9. GENERAL BELINDA, 1924

In 1911 11.1% of the entire female population of England and Wales worked in domestic service.⁽²³⁹⁾ However whilst it was the largest employer of female labour in the country as a whole it was not so in Lancashire where until the First World War textile manufacturers depended heavily on women workers. The twin pressures of returning soldiers after 1918 and the slump in the cotton industry after 1920 changed that. Margaret McCarthy, an Oswaldtwistle mill girl at the time, and a Young Communist League activist, believed 'the authorities tried to tackle the unemployment problem among the women by attempting to force us into training centres for domestic service'.⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Her view was that this was bitterly resented because domestic servants were ununionised and exploited, the pay was poor, it was a non-insurable occupation, and, most importantly, it carried the stigma of lost independence. Work in a factory was no picnic, but

⁽²³⁹⁾ Thane, P., 'The Social and Political Status of Women', in Johnson, P., (ed.), *Twentieth Century Britain : Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (Longman, London, 1994) p.97.

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ McCarthy, M., *Generation in Revolt* (Heinemann, London, 1953) p.151.

at least you could wear your own clothes, you had companionship, and when the shift ended your time was your own.

Margaret McCarthy's impression is an accurate reflection of the political realities facing domestic servants. Not only had women in service over the age of thirty been denied the vote in 1918, they were excluded from the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance Act of 1920 as well.⁽²⁴¹⁾ Unemployment insurance replaced the 'out of work donation' which had been paid to those dismissed from their wartime jobs after 1918, but in north east Lancashire the *Blackburn Times* supported the idea of forcing unemployed weavers to accept domestic service and the out of work donation was withdrawn from those who refused.

The Women's Industrial Council(WIC) had examined conditions in domestic service in 1916. In general terms its report confirmed Margaret McCarthy's view - domestic servants felt exploited by comparison with other workers because of long hours, loss of control over what they could do in the little free time they had, and what friends they could make; they lived in cramped, ill-ventilated bedrooms with limited access to bathrooms; and in the case of generals, that is maids-of-all-work who were usually the only servants in their employers' households, they suffered from loneliness.⁽²⁴²⁾ The WIC was sympathetic to this situation and recommended better

⁽²⁴¹⁾ Taylor, A.J.P., *English History 1914-1915* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990) p. 148.

⁽²⁴²⁾ Butler, C.V., *Domestic Service: An Enquiry By The Women's Industrial Council* (G.Bell and Sons, London, 1916) pp.13-15, 20, 23, 34, 44, 49.

accommodation, set hours with some time off each day, the abolition of the maid's cap because it was seen as a badge of slavery, and the establishment of a system of training to create greater efficiency and to enhance the status of the job.(243)

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth expressed her concern for the plight of domestic servants in *General Belinda*. She, too, was keen to improve their status, but for completely different reasons. The WIC enquiry was commissioned because of middle-class anxiety about the shortage of servants, and its findings were geared towards increasing their supply, whereas Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was concerned about the servants themselves. She did not envisage a world without servants but she wanted them to have absolute equality with their employers.

The summary facing the title page of *General Belinda* admits that 'there surely never was a domestic servant like Belinda'. It is hard to disagree. Belinda Higgins is the most appealing character in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fiction, a true working-class heroine who, faced with poverty, hardship and exploitation, displays competence, unselfishness, generosity, honesty and reliability. She cheerfully makes the best of the difficult circumstances confronting her by utilising the vast stores of common sense and moral rectitude with which the author endows her. Many of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's working-class characters have faults, Belinda's perfection, what Mary Ashraf calls

(243) *Ibid.*, pp.55-57, 62, 76-79.

her 'moral beauty',⁽²⁴⁴⁾ does not make her unbelievable however, rather it gives an authority to the proletarian voice on the social and political issues dealt with by the novel.

General Belinda was published in 1924, but two chapters had appeared as short stories in 1920 and 1921, and the last four chapters deal with the First World War and its aftermath, which suggests an initial date of composition of 1919 or earlier,⁽²⁴⁵⁾ in which case Ashraf is correct in assuming that the narrative was interrupted and modified by the conflict.⁽²⁴⁶⁾ She is wrong, however, in thinking that the author made Belinda's father a miner and that he was killed in the pit.⁽²⁴⁷⁾ The story begins with a convivial family evening after which Sam Higgins died 'as he was pulling his socks off',⁽²⁴⁸⁾ and amongst the mourners of their dead colleague are the local firemen who talk of his 'calmness when a fire was raging'.⁽²⁴⁹⁾ Ashraf is the only commentator to consider *General Belinda*. She sees Belinda as a 'medium of social criticism'⁽²⁵⁰⁾ and a Marxist mouthpiece on the evils of a capitalist

(244) Ashraf, P.M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain, Part 11 : Prose* (Berlin, 1979), p.188.

(245) Chapter 14, 'A Doll's House', appeared in *The Wheatsheaf* in July 1920, pp.101-102, as 'Belinda : The Story of a Domestic Servant'. Chapter 13, 'Belinda Refuses to be a Burnt Offering on the Shrine of Mammon', appeared in *The Wheatsheaf* in September 1921, pp.133-134, as 'Belinda gets an offer'. Both chapters were given an extra paragraph in conclusion so that they could stand as separate stories, suggesting they were published in *The Wheatsheaf* after they had been written as part of the novel, thus supporting an initial composition date of 1919 or earlier. *The Wheatsheaf* published a third Belinda story in April 1922, pp.53-54, entitled 'Belinda turns a Nursemaid', but this was not incorporated into the novel when it was published in 1924.

(246) Ashraf, *op.cit.*, p.188. Contemporary reviewers of Great War fiction thought 1924, when *General Belinda* was published, too late for it to have any impact. See Raitt, S., and Tait, T., *Women's Fiction and The Great War* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997) p.48.

(247) Ashraf, *op.cit.*, p.186.

(248) Holdsworth, E.C., *General Belinda* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1924) p.25.

(249) *Ibid.*, p.29.

(250) Ashraf, *op.cit.*, p.186.

war,(251) and she classifies the novel as another example of proletarian realism in which the author was 'looking for the growing points in spontaneous behaviour (in her characters) which socialism could nourish into blossom'.(252) I do not dispute Ashraf's reading, but *General Belinda* is not as one-dimensional as this judgement implies.

It was Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's most ambitious novel to date. The device of making Belinda a 'general'(253) enables the author to place her in a variety of middle and working-class settings and so to comment on a wider range of issues, however the picture of middle and working-class life provided here merely confirms that established by contemporary writers and by the author's earlier work. For example Mrs Higgins is saved from the workhouse by the reluctant co-operation of her daughter-in-law;(254) Belinda accepts work in service rather than the only alternative, marriage, as a strategy for combating poverty;(255) and the family furniture is sold to pay off outstanding bills.(256)

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth also uses *General Belinda* to reprise her grudge against capitalism. An old man has to sell a treasured book in order to eat;(257) reading a fashion journal given her by one of her employers only makes Belinda 'wonder that people could for shame spend so much on robes and furs when so many poor creatures

(251) *Ibid.*, pp.186-187.

(252) *Ibid.*, p.186.

(253) As her father's pet name for his daughter 'general' also refers to her energy and organisational abilities.

(254) *General Belinda, op.cit.*, pp.25-26.

(255) *Ibid.*, pp.166-167.

(256) *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

(257) *Ibid.*, p.94.

were up and down the world half naked',(258) a form of materialism she labels 'the shrine of Mammon'(259) or 'Pot and Pan worship';(260) it is the capitalist system that enables the middle class to exploit workers and to live like drones, contributing nothing to society;(261) Belinda, with only a pound to her name is financially sounder than her employers whose speculations and mortgages lead to bankruptcy;(262) the police ignore major fraud yet persecute an old woman dying of gall stones and bronchitis who tries to make a living telling fortunes.(263)

Of course the novel contains insights into domestic service, but these, too, are familiar from other sources. From a wage of twenty-four pounds a year Belinda has to provide her own uniform and pay for laundering;(264) she has two hours off on a Monday, and every alternate Sunday evening to go to church;(265) domestic servants were not regarded as human beings(266) but yet were expected to bear immaculate characters, whilst their employers gave no such guarantee and, indeed, often behaved badly, for example by sexually harassing their servants.(267) But whilst it is critical of the gross exploitation of domestic servants *General Belinda* does not condemn the institution of domestic service. However it does demand its reform. Belinda pleads for its recognition as an honourable occupation in which servants are considered their employers' equals.(268) Asked to imagine a better

(258) *Ibid.*, p.139.

(259) *Ibid.*, p.218.

(260) *Ibid.*, p.199.

(261) *Ibid.*, p.58.

(262) *Ibid.*, p.85

(264) *Ibid.*, p.42.

(265) *Ibid.*

(266) *Ibid.*, p.49

(267) *Ibid.*, p.269.

(268) *Ibid.*, p.231.

future Belinda envisages the servant in the role of teacher or mother in the relationship between worker and master,(269) an equality symbolised by the parties taking their meals together.(270) This arrangement contrasts sharply with that which Pam Taylor says obtained at the time. Taylor's model places an older woman of one class *in loco parentis* to a younger woman of another. In this relationship the pseudo-mother exercises benevolent authority, management and control over the pseudo-daughter.(271) Not only does this paradigm ignore the exploitation of the employee by the employer that struck Ethel Carnie Holdsworth so forcefully, but it perpetuates traditional class structures. Belinda's alternative does away with both.

Belinda's vision was surely her creator's. Other incidents in the book may be autobiographical as well. For example when Belinda, prompted by a gift of Plato's *Republic* from an unsuccessful author, discovers 'a rare truth', it is perhaps a discovery Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had made for herself. It was 'There can be mediocrity with sincerity. But there can be no greatness without it is deep and intense'.(272) Whether she associated herself with the mediocrity of the unsuccessful author or the greatness of Plato is not made clear, but I think she was too modest and realistic to mean more than that her sincerity, at least, was as deep and intense as that of the greatest

(269) *Ibid.*, p.228.

(270) *Ibid.*, p.187.

(271) Summers, A., 'Public Functions, Private Premises. Female Professional Identity and the Domestic-Service Paradigm in Britain, c.1850-1930', in Melman, B., (ed.), *Borderlines. Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (Routledge, New York and London, 1998) pp.371-372.

(272) *General Belinda, op.cit.*, p.136.

writers.(273) Nevertheless it is a reassertion of her belief that her writing could make a difference, as it does in this novel when the fortune teller asks for payment not in cash but with a poem that might touch the hearts of her uncaring children. Her faith in the power of words is vindicated in the story. Belinda's poem acts as 'a new purgative'(274) and purifies the poisoned feelings within the fortune teller's family. It reflects Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's belief that her best chance of helping the changes she wanted to see in society become a reality was to write about them.

The theme of literature as teacher is common throughout Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work. She had a touching faith in its power typical of the autodidact. Because of this it is important to establish what books she valued as fictional support for the beliefs socialists formed at party meetings and from related polemical publications. *General Belinda* is a good source from which to do this, for it contains more citings of authors and their works than any of her other novels. I must assume that they represent the reading which influenced her political development. It is a traditional collection featuring Shakespeare, Ibsen, George Eliot, Longfellow, Burns, Blake, Ruskin, Lamb, Hugo and Coleridge amongst others,(275)

(273) This evaluation is supported by the interviewer who described Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as 'Britain's quietest and most unpretentious novelist'. See *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April 1932, p.11.

(274) *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.182.

(275) The full list of authors cited, and their specific works, if mentioned, is:- Shakespeare (p.19); Ibsen (p.63); Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (p.88); Eliot, *Silas Marner* (p.102); Napoleon, *Book of Fate* (p.102); Longfellow (p.103); Wells (p.114); The Bible (p.117); Burns (p.122); Blake (p.122); Plato (p.125); Ruskin (p.135); Lamb (p.136); Hugo, *Les Misérables* (p.192); Maeterlinck, *Pelleas and Melisande* (p.203); Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (p.224); Coleridge, *Christabel* (p.277).

and it is predominantly male. She mentions few women writers. Apart from George Eliot here, and Beatrice Harraden in *The Woman Worker* (see p.73 above) none of the 'three generations of nineteenth century feminine novelists' of the 1880s and 1890s whom Elaine Showalter considers influential, are referred to in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work.(276) Nevertheless it is essentially the same list as that from which many workers, including Helen Crawford, the ILP activist who later moved into the CPGB, and Annie Kenney of the WSPU derived their socialism and feminism.(277)

Jonathan Rose makes the point that most workers found Marx, and Marxist publications like *Justice* difficult to understand, preferring the simpler language of *Merrie England* and *Clarion*.(278) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth knew this. Although Marxist writing played a part in the formation of her own socialism she was not prepared to make it a significant factor in the socialism she offered to her readers. Instead she endorsed the classics as more stimulating and effective instructors, and preferred a popular rather than an esoteric approach in her own work.(279)

So the importance of this novel is not only what it has to say about the state of contemporary society, but also what it has to say about the author herself. The addition of the war chapters in particular make

(276) Showalter, E., *op.cit.*, pp.19, 154, 182-215.

(277) For Crawford see Rose, J., *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001) p.318. For Kenney see Kenney, A., *Memories of a Militant* (Edward Arnold, London, 1924) p.23.

(278) Rose, J., *op.cit.*, p.305.

(279) This aspect of her propaganda style is examined more fully in section 3.3 below.

General Belinda a rich source for the biographer because they reflect Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's own situation so closely. In the novel Belinda's response to the Great War is conditioned by the involvement in it of her nephew, Reggie. It is one of concern for his welfare. She wonders if he will be killed. When he is listed as 'missing' if he is dead. When he is identified as a prisoner of war if he will survive or be shell shocked. She asked herself just these questions about her husband. The primary sources do not provide the answers but perhaps the novel does. Surely Belinda's reaction to Reggie's departure is in fact a description of Ethel's reaction to Alfred's : she was 'crying openly and unashamed for burning pity's sake and rage - a cry against something or somebody deep from her heart. The men to her, looked like a lot of corpses, stamping their feet'.⁽²⁸⁰⁾

The fact that Reggie's experiences in 1918 exactly match those of Alfred Holdsworth make it possible that the details the author uses about Reggie in her novel are those that applied to her husband - that he was captured on 2 April 1918 and was held prisoner at Limburg a/d Lahn.⁽²⁸¹⁾ The novel may also be the only means of reconstructing something of Alfred Holdsworth's return home after the Armistice. If Reggie's movements reflect Alfred's he was marched from Limburg to the British lines then transferred to a hospital in London.⁽²⁸²⁾ His discharge was delayed because of a combination of shell shock and

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.256.

⁽²⁸¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.287.

⁽²⁸²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.301-302.

malnutrition.(283)

I take Belinda's response to the war to be the author's own: 'It was a world in which there was more cruelty than ever she had dreamed of. Her own bloodthirsty longings had been a revelation', and she had to admit to herself that she was not a pacifist.(284) However 'The fire of her wrath had gone out, leaving the dull smoke of disillusionment - terror, fear. There was nothing to rebuild on, when human beings could treat each other so - when folk could feel as she had felt.'(285)

Both Elaine Showalter(286) and Jill Liddington(287) say that feminist criticism of male violence was muted in the 1920s because of the effect of war not only on men but on bereaved women. This, however, is exactly when Ethel Carnie Holdsworth tackles the issue most vigorously. Through Belinda her concern is all-embracing. She makes her worry about German soldiers as well as British - 'they're all somebody's lads'.(288) She simply wants to stop people getting hurt, so her criticism is of the church for glorifying war and of the xenophobes who no longer patronise a shopkeeper, hitherto a well-liked good Samaritan in the community, because she is German. She offers to eat grass for a year if it would end the war a day sooner.(289) Her sympathy is for the conscientious objector who could have evaded the draft because he was an unpaid preacher but would not appeal on

(283) *Ibid.*, pp.305-306.

(284) *Ibid.*, p.292.

(285) *Ibid.*, p.303.

(286) Showalter, E., *op.cit.*, p.240.

(287) Liddington, J., *The Long Road to Greenham*, *op.cit.*, p.142.

(288) *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.251.

(289) *Ibid.*, p.253.

those grounds.(290) She respects a man who will go to prison because he will not kill. However in due course both women recovered. Belinda married an old admirer who, though thinner and war weary, had come through the conflict without a scratch, whilst Ethel was reunited with her husband.

Further light is shed on Alfred Holdsworth's involvement in the war by the *Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette*. This was his local paper and it published two letters he wrote in response to a reader who compared those who refused to fight with those who refused to join a union.(291) Holdsworth argued against the comparison. The conscientious objector, he said, lost his liberty because he would not be party to a class war which pitted worker against worker and caused physical, mental and moral degeneration, whilst the anti-unionist prevented the preservation of a decent standard of living.

He denied Germany's responsibility for the war, putting the blame squarely on 'private commercial enterprise' and he asserted the superiority of moral and spiritual force over blood and iron as the reason for his own conscientious objection. Nevertheless he was conscripted, although his office skills got him a job as a non-combatant and undoubtedly he hoped to see out the war typing for Britain. He was to be disappointed. Somehow he was involved in action that led to shell shock and capture,(292) but not to resentment against

(290) This is what happened to Wilfred Wellock, amongst others. See Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain, op.cit.*,p.50.

(291) *Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette*, 21 December 1923, p.2, and 11 January 1924, p.7.

(292) Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, BK.63.

ordinary Germans. He expressed great sympathy for German conscientious objectors whom, he says, he saw chained together and worked like beasts for refusing to fight British, French and Russian workers. He also expressed gratitude for the kind treatment he and many other soldiers received from German civilians, although he does not explain how he got into a situation which enabled him to make such observations.

So both Alfred and Ethel were placed in equivocal positions by the war. They were anti-militarists who did not believe it should be fought even with a volunteer army, yet he served in it and she found herself wanting to kill German soldiers because they might kill her husband.⁽²⁹³⁾ Ethel's experience of war was pivotal. It moved her away from pacifism and the possibility of links with the No More War Movement⁽²⁹⁴⁾ towards what Martin Ceadel, following A.J.P.Taylor, calls 'pacifism', that is the search for a way of preventing war in future by attacking capitalism, its cause, with force if necessary. ⁽²⁹⁵⁾

General Belinda is an anti-war book, a worker's view of society in the 1910's, and a guide to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's thoughts, feelings and beliefs. It also points to the future as the surrogate Ethel

⁽²⁹³⁾ *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.303.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ The No More War Movement was founded in 1921 as a direct successor to the No-Conscription Fellowship and became the focus of non-religious pacifism in the inter-war years. Fenner Brockway edited its journal *No More War*. See Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain*, *op.cit.*, p.73. However the devout Wilfred Wellock claimed that the Crusader group founded the Movement, and that therefore it was religiously inspired. See Wellock, W., *Off The Beaten Track*, *op.cit.*, p.73.

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ Ceadel, M., *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000) p.7. However Ceadel points out that the term pacifism can be traced back at least to a Cambridge Union debate in 1927. *Ibid.*, p.271.

and Alfred consider the problem of what to do next : 'There'll be as much to fight here, now it's over, as there was there...Till all the wars is over...Till everybody's happy...Till there isn't one lot allus trampling t'others down under their heels. Till there's *real* peace.'

These concerns were the inspiration behind the establishment of *The Clear Light*. The conclusion of *General Belinda* offers a realistic assessment of the Holdsworths' chances of succeeding with it - 'There'll be no peace in our time...But happen - if we fight hard - in somebody's time.'

Apart from her brief association with the British Citizen Party in 1915 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth belonged to no political group in the period 1914 to 1924. June Hannam and Karen Hunt acknowledge that socialist women found it difficult to express their views in male dominated organisations at that time, and often preferred to use imaginative literature to explore controversial issues such as marriage, considering it an integral part of their role as propagandists. Hannam and Hunt mention Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as the only working-class example of such a woman but they do not name or discuss any of her novels, relying instead on Pamela Fox's judgement that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's romantic fiction critiques gender relations whilst not denying the importance of love. As Fox's comments refer only to *Miss Nobody* and *This*

(296) *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.310.

(297) *Ibid.*, pp.310-311.

(298) Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *op.cit.*, p.60.

(299) *Ibid.*, p.61.

Slavery I assume that Hannam and Hunt are not familiar with the books I examine in this chapter, but they support their argument well. In fact they perhaps give an answer to their concern about 'what a woman-focused socialism would look like'(300) by addressing issues such as marriage, family relationships, welfare and war. These novels also fulfil their expectation that 'we would understand more about political actors if...we valued their evolving political imagination as highly as their pragmatic achievements',(301) for Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's dreams, as expressed here, show how a socialist woman could practice her politics effectively from outside socialist organisations.

Furthermore Ethel Carnie Holdsworth bears out the contention of Hannam and Hunt that socialist women can not be readily pigeon-holed and that it is important to distinguish between individuals in order to appreciate the richness of the group. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth fits their model by the very fact of being different from the examples they provide. Between 1914 and 1918 she focused on resisting conscription and opposing the war. The protest march and the political rally were her preferred methods, supported by an important strand of *General Belinda*. After 1918 she returned to feminism and fiction, although she did not take the opportunity of criticising the new franchise arrangements despite the fact that they failed to treat men and women as equals. Nor did she comment

(300) *Ibid.*, p.60.

(301) *Ibid.*, p.203.

specifically on legislation such as the 1919 Maternity and Child Welfare Act or the 1923 Matrimonial Causes Act which met some of her feminist demands. Instead she examined society's oppression of women through entrenched patriarchal attitudes which perpetuated domestic violence and facilitated discrimination against unmarried mothers, domestic servants and female dependants within the family. She was particularly critical of a government which refused to recognise the importance of work in the home and failed to support the tired mothers this created.

Although revolution had not yet emerged as her preferred political strategy there is evidence that she considered it in *The House That Jill Built*, and in *General Belinda* that her pacifism had modified to the point where she found violence acceptable in some circumstances. However the conviction that revolution was the answer to capitalism did not dominate her thinking until *This Slavery* and *The Clear Light*.

CHAPTER 3 - FROM 1924 TO 1931

3.1 THE BIOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's success as a novelist in the years around 1920, and the interest of British and American film makers in her work, provided the money for her major enterprise *The Clear Light*. This was a monthly newspaper which ran for twenty-five issues between June 1923 and July 1925 offering a platform for all progressive opinions, but from October 1924 it called itself the 'Organ of the National Union for Combating Fascism' and asked for a Labour/Communist/Anarchist front to be formed to deal with the threat of Mussolini-inspired groups in Britain and Europe. *The Clear Light* never exceeded a circulation of 5,000. It closed when the Holdsworths' savings ran out and because of intimidation - copies were seized,⁽¹⁾ the printer received death threats⁽²⁾ and fascist agents tried to infiltrate the movement.⁽³⁾

The failure of *The Clear Light* project did not end Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's journalistic activity. She continued to be published in the left wing press, especially in *Freedom* and *Sunday Worker*, and at some point she joined the Labour Party. She was certainly a member by 1927.⁽⁴⁾ She also served on the committee of the Workers' Theatre Movement which was affiliated to the CPGB,⁽⁵⁾ and continued writing

(1) *The Clear Light*, October 1924. (Many page numbers are missing in the original, as in this case. When they are present they are included in the footnotes.)

(2) *Ibid.*, April/May 1925.

(3) *Ibid.*, June 1925.

(4) *Labour Who's Who* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1927) p.105.

(5) Klaus, G., *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (Harvester, Brighton, 1982) p.97.

novels - *This Slavery* appeared in 1925, *The Quest of the Golden Garter* in 1927, *Barbara Dennison* in 1929 and *Eagles' Crag* in 1931. A new outlet for her work became increasingly available after 1920- cheap magazines like *Ivy Stories* which offered 'complete stories for young women' fortnightly from 1922 to 1932, price 4d.⁽⁶⁾ In 1929 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *All On Her Own* was one of them. There may have been others, for contemporary press profiles suggest that during her career she wrote fifteen serials and 'a host of short stories'.⁽⁷⁾

The Holdsworths' marriage broke up in 1928. I do not know the precise cause, but Ethel's doctor told her to leave Alfred if she wanted to retain her sanity.⁽⁸⁾ She took the advice and went to live with her parents in Barnoldswick.⁽⁹⁾ Her elder daughter, Margaret, attended Skipton High School for Girls, helped her mother revise the proofs of *Eagles' Crag* and had some children's stories of her own published in America.⁽¹⁰⁾ Ethel hoped to interest film makers in her later novels and she planned to write a new book in 1932, but nothing came of either venture.⁽¹¹⁾ By 1934 she had moved to Manchester. Margaret looked after her until 1947, the year her mother became eligible for the old age pension. Ethel was in poor health by then and no longer politically active, however she always voted,⁽¹²⁾ and she continued to

(6) Melman, B., *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989) p.158.

(7) *The Yorkshire Observer*, 5 April 1932, p.11.

(8) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 26 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

(9) See Appendix 23.

(10) *The Yorkshire Observer*, *op.cit.*, p.11.

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.*

write short stories till at least 1936.⁽¹³⁾ She died at Crumpsall hospital, Manchester, on 28 December 1962. She left no will and no obituaries of her were written. Her part in the history of early twentieth century protest was already forgotten.

3.2. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Labour's first governments, in 1924 and between 1929 and 1931, did little to lighten the pessimism of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's political outlook during this period. Both were minority governments dependent on Liberal support, and nationally Labour's share of the vote continued to trail that of the Conservatives. Labour candidates did not do well in the constituencies in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's area. She was registered to vote in Sowerby in 1924 when it returned a Conservative, and in Skipton in 1929 after her move to Barnoldswick. This, too, returned a Conservative. Of the neighbouring constituencies Clitheroe was a safe Conservative and Burnley a safe Labour seat. However the replacement of the radical Irving, who had died just after the 1923 election, by the gradualist Henderson at Burnley from 1924 to 1931 would not have been a development she welcomed. Blackburn, a two member constituency, returned a Liberal and a Conservative in 1924, but Mary Hamilton and Harry Gill held both seats for Labour from 1929 to 1931. The Nelson and Colne division, Labour held since its creation in 1918, remained

⁽¹³⁾ The last story she had published, as far as I have been able to discover, was *A Piece of Cloth* in *The Wheatsheaf*, December 1936, although her daughter Margaret says her mother wrote until 1939. Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.*

Labour throughout this period, represented by Arthur Greenwood, in 1929 with a majority of over 10,000.⁽¹⁴⁾ He became Minister of Health in the second Labour government.

The Clear Light indicates no confidence in the ability of the 1924 Labour government to help the people. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed this could only be achieved by embracing just those groups that Labour excluded, the Communists and the Anarchists. Dual membership and CPGB affiliation was finally rejected by the Labour Party at its 1925 conference, and the CPGB stopped seeking affiliation in 1928. This faced activists with a choice, and Ellen Wilkinson, for example, gave up her CPGB membership in order to carve out a career in the Labour Party. Although Ethel Carnie Holdsworth disliked the 1925 decision because of her commitment to socialist unity, it might explain why she, too, had joined the Labour Party by 1927. *The Clear Light* did at least acknowledge the worth of Wheatley's Housing Act, which increased municipal housing stocks by a £9,000,000 grant,⁽¹⁵⁾ but it could be argued that Baldwin's 1924-1929 Conservative government did more of which she approved. The 1925 Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pension Act was a compulsory insurance scheme based on the 1911 model of worker, employer and state contributions. It provided pensions from the age of sixty-five, and for widows, and made extra payments for children, including orphans. The 1927 Unemployment Insurance Act increased contributions and

(14) Constituency details from Craig, F.W.S., *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918-1949* (Political Reference Publications, Glasgow, 1983) pp.92, 111, 393, 526, 527.
(15) *The Clear Light*, No.17, October 1924, p.1.

reduced benefits for the unemployed, but it ended the gap between payment periods that had existed since the 1920 legislation.

However in most respects the Conservative government in the 1920s matched the repressive profile Ethel Carnie Holdsworth expected. It repudiated the improved relations with Soviet Russia that Labour had established in 1924. The CPGB offices were raided by the police in 1925 as were those of the Soviet trading organisation Arcos in 1927. The government falsely claimed it had evidence of plots to overthrow the capitalist system and diplomatic relations with Moscow were broken off.⁽¹⁶⁾ She was highly critical of the Conservative government's backing of employers in industrial disputes in 1926,⁽¹⁷⁾ and of the 1927 Trade Disputes Act which outlawed sympathy strikes and obliged union members to contract in to the political levy, reducing Labour Party income by 25%.

But apart from improved relations with Soviet Russia, a renewed council house building subsidy, and a reduction of half an hour (to seven and a half hours) in the length of the miners' working day, the record of the second Labour government was also bleak. Oswald Mosley's Keynesian economic plan was rejected in favour of Snowden's cautious preference for the cuts in government expenditure of up to 20% on public sector salaries and unemployment benefits, which had been recommended by Sir George May's Report in 1931. Nothing Ethel Carnie Holdsworth wrote indicates that she would have approved of

⁽¹⁶⁾ Taylor, A.J.P., *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990) p.255.

⁽¹⁷⁾ *Sunday Worker*, 28 March 1926, article entitled 'In Barlick Now'.

such measures, indeed the evidence of *The Clear Light* and *This Slavery* suggests that, like the CPGB, she saw Labour now as the 'third party of capitalism' following 'social fascist' policies.⁽¹⁸⁾ I do not know how she responded to MacDonald's apostasy and the formation of a National government in 1931, but she was soon involved with the communist Workers Theatre Movement. Her membership of the Labour Party may therefore have lapsed after the second Labour government fell, if it had not done so earlier.

Martin Pugh judges the Labour Party to have been anti-feminist in the 1920s. It courted women's votes and tripled the membership of its women's sections between 1922 and 1927 but, he says, the leadership was hostile towards feminist organisations believing that they diverted energies away from party concerns. This attitude lost Labour potential women members and effectively created two parties in women's politics - loyalists like Marion Phillips, Margaret Bondfield and Susan Lawrence, who accepted the orthodox party line that socialism was about class, not gender, and feminists like Dorothy Jewson, Helena Swanwick and Dora Russell who would not subordinate gender concerns in that way, and who continually crossed the lines between the Labour Party and the women's organisations.⁽¹⁹⁾

Labour's failure when in power to introduce widows' pensions and family allowances Pugh attributes in part to this anti-feminism,

⁽¹⁸⁾ Bruley, S., *Leninism, Stalinism and the Women's Movement in Britain 1920-1939* (Garland, New York and London, 1986) p.176.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Pugh, M., *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1999* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000) p.135.

because these were measures opposed by working men whose pride they bruised.⁽²⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth does not comment on this situation specifically, but she did detect a conservatism in the Labour leadership, and amongst working men, which she identified as a major obstacle to progress, and she wanted a change in such attitudes so that improvements in living standards could be made.⁽²¹⁾

In this respect she shared the aims of the new feminists. Eleanor Rathbone had been moving the NUSEC on from an organisation seeking equal political and legal rights to one seeking social and economic equality since becoming its president in 1920. The campaign for better employment opportunities for women continued, but Rathbone accepted that many women saw low paid work as an interlude between school and marriage, and that it would be hard to involve them in a campaign for better careers. So she shifted NUSEC policy towards improving health and living standards. Family allowances, birth control and housing became more important than equal pay. The argument was that motherhood was an occupation which deserved state resources paid direct to the mother, so new feminism accepted that women had different needs from men and that equal rights, 'Me Too' feminism as it was called by Mary Stocks, was therefore irrelevant.⁽²²⁾

⁽²⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁽²¹⁾ For example in *The Woman Worker* 1 December 1909 she criticised the Lib-Lab Pact; and in the issue of 5 January 1910 she accused the Labour Party of not being socialist. In *The Clear Light*, March 1924 she attacked the Labour government's industrial policy because, she said, it sustained capitalism.

⁽²²⁾ Pugh, M., *op.cit.*, p.238.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth identified herself closely with the new feminist programme. She had always venerated mothers as home makers, and in 1927 described herself in just these terms.⁽²³⁾ She saw family allowances paid to mothers as an important escape route for battered wives, and she became involved in the birth control debate, devoting a full page of *The Clear Light* to it in 1925.⁽²⁴⁾ Her enthusiasm was expressed in a typical Carnie Holdsworth way - she characterised birth control as a liberator bringing freedom to enslaved women. This attitude was reflected in her novels and in her own life, she does not burden her heroines with many children, and only had two herself. It may have been easier for her to practise contraception than other working-class women because she was better informed, but it is clear that despite falling birth rates she still saw large families as a major obstruction to female equality.⁽²⁵⁾

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's dismay at Labour's shortcomings regarding class and gender issues was compounded in the 1920s by its failure to show any concern about fascism. Following the rejection of his economic plan Mosley had left the Labour government and by 1932 he had formed the British Union of Fascists. Richard Thurlow says this was the only fascist organisation of any significance in inter-

(23) *Labour Who's Who*, op.cit.

(24) *The Clear Light*, No.19, January 1925.

(25) Between the wars women in textile areas had significantly fewer children than other women. Between 1921 and 1925 for example the number of live births per thousand married women in Blackburn was 127, when the national average was 157. Diana Gittins attributes this to the fact that there were far more women in full time employment in textile areas, and Elizabeth Roberts' view is that they limited the size of their families in order to be able to keep their jobs. See Roberts, E., *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984) pp.100-102.

war Britain,(26) but Ethel Carnie Holdsworth committed herself to fighting what she believed was a very real fascist threat in the mid 1920s.

Antonio Gramsci, the leader of the Communist Party in the Italian Parliament from 1924 to 1926, argued that whilst in theory fascism could take root anywhere, in practice its chances of doing so were greatest in 'the capitalist periphery', that is in countries with structurally weak economies and a large bourgeoisie, such as Spain and Italy. In countries which did not fit this pattern, like Britain, the working class could be controlled through the existing economic and political frameworks.(27) Nevertheless a fascist movement did develop in Britain. For some the attraction of fascism was its potential for restoring an imagined utopian past of harmonious political, economic, and social relationships which had been disturbed by the recent extension of the franchise and the emergence of the Labour Party. For others it was an opportunity to create a new society - the increased control of the economy assumed by government during the war could be used to achieve social change in peacetime. Those who felt like this were both alienated by the failure of the government to create a 'home fit for heroes' in the 1920s, and prepared to accept limitations on the democratic rights of political parties and individuals.

The first fascist group to be set up in England was the Britons

(26) Thurlow, R., *Fascism in Britain: A History 1918-1985* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987) p.23.

(27) Beetham, D., *Marxists in Face of Fascism* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1983) pp.10-11.

Society in 1919, founded to 'protect the birthright of Britons and to eradicate Alien influences from our politics and industries'.⁽²⁸⁾ Its leader, Henry Beamish, and many of its members were army officers or aristocrats. Although its membership was never large it had an active publishing programme between 1920 and 1925 which included a monthly paper *The Hidden Hand*⁽²⁹⁾ and numerous editions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This purported to describe an international Jewish conspiracy to destroy the western world but had been exposed as a forgery by *The Times* in August 1921.⁽³⁰⁾

However the first organisation to call itself fascist and to acknowledge Italy as its source of inspiration was the British Fascisti, founded in 1923 by Rotha Lintorn Orman.⁽³¹⁾ Its stated aims were 'to revive the spirit of sane and intelligent patriotism, uphold the established constitution and prevent the spread of Bolshevism and Communism'. Its programme for political reform advocated increasing the powers of the House of Lords, raising the voting age to twenty-five, disenfranchising those in receipt of poor relief for six consecutive months, and outlawing strikes and trade union alliances.⁽³²⁾

The British Fascisti gave itself a high profile by its paramilitary style (massed Union Jacks, the fascist salute, the blue shirt after

(28) Lunn, K., and Thurlow, R.C., (eds.), *British Fascism: Essays on the Political Right in Inter-War Britain* (Croom Helm, London, 1980) p.41.

(29) Until September 1920 it was called *Jewry Uber Alles*. After May 1924 it was renamed *British Guardian*. See Thurlow, R., *op.cit.*, p.67.

(30) Pugh, M., *Hurrah for the Blackshirts: Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2005) p.28.

(31) The British Fascisti were later known as British Fascists Ltd., See Lebzelter, G., *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918-1939* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1978) p.69.

(32) Benewick, R., *The Fascist Movement in Britain* (Allen Lane, London, 1972) pp.27-28.

1927) and its vastly inflated claims about membership numbers. In fact membership reached its peak in 1925 at exactly the time Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was trying, through *The Clear Light* to draw attention to its menace. British Fascisti membership subscription income that year was £6,848 (at six shillings a month for active members and one shilling a month for passive supporters). On top of this Lintorn Orman spent her fortune of £50,000 on the British Fascisti. Prominent members included Brigadier-General Blakeney, who was its president from 1924-1926, William Joyce (later 'Lord Haw Haw'), Arnold Leese and Nesta Webster. Its resources were such that by 1926 the British Fascisti had abducted Harry Pollitt, then Secretary of the National Minority Movement and later General Secretary of the CPGB, sabotaged the distribution of left wing papers, including *The Clear Light*, broken strikes and disrupted Labour Party meetings, and offered the government 200,000 members to help crush the General Strike. According to Margaret McCarthy, A .J. Cooke, the miners' leader, was warned that his fate would be 'far worse than Matteotti's', the Italian Socialist recently murdered by the fascists.(33)

The British Fascisti began to disintegrate in 1925 when a splinter group, the National Fascisti, was formed. This used the black shirt, military drills, and contained more extreme elements dedicated to the destruction of socialists, communists and Jews, and to the suppression of 'revolutionary' speakers and 'seditious' publications.(34)

(33) McCarthy, M., *Generation in Revolt* (Heinemann, London, 1953) p.77.

(34) Benewick, R., *op.cit.*, p.34.

Further splits followed, with some members joining Mosley's British Union of Fascists in 1932, and as Lintorn Orman's funds ran out and she became progressively more of an alcoholic the membership of the British Fascisti fell to 300 in 1933.

Both Richard Thurlow and Robert Benewick dismiss the influence of the British Fascisti and the National Fascisti, claiming that the public was unaware of their existence and the authorities unconcerned by their activities. Martin Pugh agrees. He suggests that contemporaries saw early fascist activity as no more than a movement of conservatives worried about the empire, Bolshevism and trade unions, an attitude summed up in a definition of his own political philosophy by Arnold Leese as 'Conservatism with knobs on'.⁽³⁵⁾ Yet in 1925 William Joynson-Hicks, the Home Secretary, refused to prevent military practice by fascist groups, the King thanked the British Fascisti for its expression of loyalty,⁽³⁶⁾ and there is evidence in *The Clear Light* that fascists were particularly active in London, Edinburgh, and the area where the Holdsworths lived.⁽³⁷⁾ Certainly the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police described them as 'a menace to the country'⁽³⁸⁾ and this was Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's view also. From the perspective of the period 1920-1925 the fascist movement in Britain must have seemed to those who were charting its activities on

(35) Pugh, M., *Hurrah for the Blackshirts*, *op.cit.*, p.55.

(36) *Ibid.*, pp.59 and 63.

(37) For London and Leeds see *The Clear Light*, No.17, October 1924.

For Edinburgh see *Ibid.*, Nos. 22-23, April/May 1925 double issue.

For Burnley and Manchester see *Ibid.*, No.25, July 1925.

(38) Benewick, R., *op.cit.*, p.39.

course for a breakthrough like that achieved by the Italian fascists. It was backed by the wealthy and the influential, and, with a growing membership likely, if unopposed, to threaten democracy in general and the Labour movement in particular. These were grounds enough for her to make the anti-fascist campaign an all-consuming personal crusade during the mid-1920s.

The following section examines that campaign through the evidence provided by *The Clear Light* in 1924 and 1925, to try to establish more accurately how serious the fascist threat was then, and how organised the opposition to it became. However the threat emerged relatively late in the life of the paper, its earlier issues show how Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's thinking on old concerns like capitalism, anti-militarism and religion had developed. These, too, are analysed, as is the question of what meaning she gave to the idea of revolution.

3.3. THE CLEAR LIGHT, 1923-1925

The Clear Light was a paper with a mission. The Holdsworths produced it from their home, 29 Slack Top, Heptonstall, near Hebden Bridge⁽³⁹⁾ in the hope that it would unite the Labour movement. It aimed 'to agitate, educate, organise'⁽⁴⁰⁾ in order 'to arouse frustrated Manhood, Womanhood and give Childhood its heritage'.⁽⁴¹⁾ The name

(39) See Appendix 18.

(40) *The Clear Light*, No.20, February 1925. It is an adaptation of the SDF motto, 'educate, agitate, organise'.

(41) *Ibid.*, No.7, December 1923. Page numbers are frequently missing in the originals. When they are present they have been included in the footnotes, and additional guidance to precise locations, such as article headings, is given whenever possible.

they chose for the paper reflects this wish to provide enlightenment. It would represent ideas, not parties, it would argue not cajole, so that it could 'without guile and price go to the masses and preach the coming of the People, lay the foundations of the Age of Wonder'.⁽⁴²⁾ This self-description places *The Clear Light* and its authors in what Brian Simon has called 'the classic tradition of humanist education' typified by socialists of SDF and ILP backgrounds.⁽⁴³⁾ The BSP, too, had emphasised education in the principles of socialism as essential to its success at the 1911 Unity Conference.⁽⁴⁴⁾ *The Clear Light* shows the importance Ethel Carnie Holdsworth continued to attach to teaching as part of her propaganda style. Many of her fictional heroines act as teachers, she wanted her work to instruct her readers, she revered her own revolutionary heroes, Francisco Ferrer and John Maclean, perhaps for their work as teachers as much as for their socialist activism.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Clear Light wasted no space on pictures or adverts,⁽⁴⁶⁾ and was sometimes given away for nothing. It usually sold for 1d or 2d, but only if the reader could afford it. 2s.6d. a year bought twelve post-

⁽⁴²⁾ *Ibid.*, No.1, June 1923.

⁽⁴³⁾ Simon, B., *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1974) p.147.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Morton, A.L., and Tate, G., *The British Labour Movement 1770-1920* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1973) p.240.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ In 1901 Ferrer founded La Escuela Moderna which used secular, rational and non-coercive methods. He also helped the Spanish Radical Party to set up low cost schools for working-class children. Maclean was a founder member of the Socialist Teachers' Society. He was dismissed by the Pollokshaws School Board for his socialist activities. His views on education were similar to Ferrer's.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ The only exceptions are regular listings of meetings of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation and occasional promotions of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's novels, for example in issue 7, December 1923 subscribers are recommended to read *This Slavery* which was being serialised in the *Daily Herald* at the time, two years before publication in book form.

paid copies and an extra dozen free. It is not surprising that the proprietors claimed they had to subsidise each issue by ten pounds.(47)

Alfred Holdsworth was the nominal editor of *The Clear Light* and he and his wife wrote most of it. Until issue 17 when it changed its focus in favour of the National Union for Combating Fascism, a common pattern was for Alfred Holdsworth to make an initial point and for his wife to illustrate or develop it through a poem or a story, often allegorical. There were, perhaps, other regular contributors, for example Henriette Gautier who wrote a column from Paris, and 'Gabras' who lived in the Cotswolds. Articles by Felix Holt ('The Beggar Bard'), and Rose Witcop also featured frequently. Some of these may have been pseudonymously written by the Holdsworths themselves however.(48)

The Clear Light is a key source for an investigation of the state of mind of the mature Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and it reveals a dynamic personality. At this stage in her life she was a driven woman who threw everything into the fight against injustice and the struggle on behalf of the oppressed. As a result her analysis is fuller than it is in her earlier work, but it is sometimes less accessible because of the

(47) *The Clear Light*, No.5, October 1923.

(48) Felix Holt could be a pen-name suggested by George Eliot's 'Radical', but I think it is more likely William Holt, a contemporary activist from Todmorden, near Hebden Bridge. His autobiography *I Haven't Unpacked* (Harrap, London, 1939) pp.197-210, mentions his friendship with Alfred Holdsworth. Rose Witcop was an anarchist feminist who worked with Guy Aldred's Industrial Union of Direct Actionists. Sheila Rowbotham describes her political style as 'independent self-activity from below'. It would be apt for Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as well. See Rowbotham, A., *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (Pluto, London, 1977) p.101.

allegorical style and obscure symbolism she often adopts. The main themes she deals with are capitalism, revolution, anti-militarism, religion, internationalism, and, from issue 17, fascism.

It is clear that by 1923 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had not changed her views about capitalism. She still saw it as the root cause of human misery, and she still characterised it as taking many forms - war, religion, imperialism and commerce in particular. In August that year the paper carried her current view of capitalism in 'The Carnival of State 1923', a parody of Shelley's 'The Mask of Anarchy'.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In it she describes the wretched condition to which the country has been brought by capitalism. It is a grim vision of corrupt authority and unearned privilege ruthlessly exploiting the weak, living idly, and creating war for its own amusement. Monarchy is condemned as senile, the law as a vandal, religion as gibbering superstition. Lord Curzon is prominent in the procession 'blowing war's trumpet',⁽⁵⁰⁾ as is Mussolini, who has 'upon his vest of blood-soaked darkness an English crest'. Democracy features as a hypocrite fraudulently perpetuating monarchy. Thrift is a shrivelled figure whose dry lips offer a joyless alternative to poverty. Scandal is dressed as a jester.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ See Appendix 20.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Lord Curzon was Foreign Secretary at the time. He had been Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905, a member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet, and had expected the premiership in 1923 when Bonar Law resigned. His arrogance in parliament was likened to that of 'a divinity addressing black beetles'. See *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh and London, 1961) p.342. In 1914 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had seen Curzon, then Chancellor of Oxford University, as the controlling force behind biased economics courses offered to working-class students at Ruskin College to ensure they became good capitalists. See *Cotton Factory Times*, 10 April 1914, p.8.

The rear of the cavalcade is brought up by Proletarian Life, fearful lest it be deprived of what remains to it of love, family and song. The unemployed beg for work, women who refuse to become prostitutes are hissed, mothers unable to properly care for their children think only of death. The Strike and Pacifism are impotent, as is the soldier who is kept uneducated and unable to think of sedition. It is a hopeless pageant, for Freedom is 'far off in the rain', unattainable until Courage unites with Thought, Dream and Passion.

The nightmare is regularly reprised. For example in number 7 capitalism is portrayed as a barrier which prevents the evolution of a just society by imposing hunger, fear and superstition on the people. The task of overcoming the barrier gets harder every day because capitalism has become so well entrenched not only in society as a whole, but within every individual in society.⁽⁵¹⁾ Legislators, the most powerful proponents of capitalism, are criticised for maintaining the barrier through deception, promising reform whilst continuing to victimise the poor by their greed.⁽⁵²⁾

The Clear Light did not welcome the advent of a Labour government in 1924 because, it claimed, Labour's industrial relations policy sustained capitalism. Its view was that the minor adjustments to working conditions offered by Henderson's Factories Bill were simply a ruse to get workers and employers to set aside their differences. The Holdsworths call this Labour's 'co-partnership' plan, and compare it

⁽⁵¹⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.7, December 1923, article entitled 'Barriers'.

⁽⁵²⁾ *Ibid.*, No.8, January 1924, article entitled 'A Maiden Speech'.

to the oppressive industrial practices described by Jack London in *The Iron Heel*.⁽⁵³⁾ The implication is that whilst owners and skilled workers would benefit from the plan the majority, the unskilled workers, would remain the wage slaves they had always been. In an article which criticises a specific policy for failing to combat capitalism an alternative solution might be expected. None is offered, indeed the editor admits not knowing of one which would work given the current moribund condition of the Labour movement.

By December 1924 Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's exasperation with factionalism in the Labour movement was such that she described its inability to offer a united front against capitalism as 'treachery' against the working class. By then she had given the task of putting capitalism where it belonged, on 'the dunghill of civilisation', to the National Union for Combating Fascism,(NUCF) and expected no more from the Labour movement than that it set aside its differences at least long enough to fight fascism. She hoped each group within the movement would send representatives to the NUCF which would then co-ordinate the struggle. ⁽⁵⁴⁾

Revolution is the solution to capitalism, according to *The Clear Light*, but it is no longer an option to be kept until other strategies have failed, as it had been in 1920.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Now it is a remedy

⁽⁵³⁾ *The Iron Heel* was published in 1908. Alfred Holdsworth had met Jack London during his time as a hobo in North America. Alfred Holdsworth archive, *op.cit*.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.18, December 1924, article entitled 'Shall Fascism Flourish?' (NB there are two no.18s! The other is the issue for November 1924).

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Holdsworth, E.C., *The House That Jill Built* (Herbert Jenkins, London,1920) pp.266-267.

recommended in almost every issue of the paper. However it is presented to the reader in both factual and allegorical forms and it is often unclear what precise or practical action the Holdsworths favoured. For example revolution sometimes seems synonymous with democracy. By September 1924 the Holdsworths had lined democracy up as the opposite of and alternative to capitalism, to replace their earlier preferred juxtaposition of progress versus capitalism. However, democracy is compared to Whitman's poetry and defined simply as beautiful and true.⁽⁵⁶⁾ It is difficult to read militancy into this definition of democracy, yet nine months earlier revolution was described as 'Evolution shaking off its chains', a terrible course to take, but a logical one whilst war was being brewed for imperial purposes and the interests of the few.⁽⁵⁷⁾ It is a confusing picture, but I think that at this point the Holdsworths identified democracy with change, although they sometimes use the term revolution to denote that change. This reflected their hope that change would be peaceful, but their fear that it would be violent, not because there is anything inherently bloody in change, but because it would be opposed.

This belief is seen clearly in the Symbols of Society issue of the paper which states that 'an armed citizen rising' is justified even though one soldier killing another at the command of capitalist masters is not, and that the armed citizen is justified in meeting legalised murder and brutality by the state with his own violence.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Ethel

⁽⁵⁶⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.16, September 1924, p.1.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, No.7, December 1923, article entitled 'Revolution'.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, No.3, August 1923, p.1.

Carnie Holdsworth owed the idea of a citizen army to the SDF which had included it in its programme since 1884. It featured military training for all male citizens, elected officers and deployment only when attacked.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Graham Johnson considers that, like the Holdsworths, the SDF sought peaceful alternatives through which to overthrow capitalism, but that the citizen army was an important strategy option if the transition to socialism was not to be prevented or delayed.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The idea of justified force occurs again in 'The Inevitability of Revolution'. Here violence is accepted as a last resort - 'if the counter-revolution is peaceful the revolution will be, if not - well it won't.'⁽⁶¹⁾ This is confirmation of the pacifist position Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had adopted by 1918.(See p.151 above). Whilst this committed her to acceptance of force as sometimes necessary, it also affirmed her belief that war was an irrational way to solve disputes and that its prevention should be a political priority.⁽⁶²⁾

Martin Ceadel argues that the pacifist position commonly led to support for internationalism in the inter-war years because it was based on the conviction that there is a latent harmony of interest between nations. In practice, he says, this meant boosting economic and cultural links, and fostering federal or confederal systems at the

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Barrow, L., and Bullock, I., *Democratic ideas and the British Labour movement, 1880-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) p.168.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Johnson, G., *Social Democratic Politics in Britain 1881-1911* (Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, USA, 2002) p.128.

⁽⁶¹⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.16, September 1924, p.2.

⁽⁶²⁾ Ceadel, M., *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980) p.3.

expense of individual state sovereignty.⁽⁶³⁾ Ceadel does not mention *The Clear Light*, but Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's discussion of internationalism in its pages conforms to this model. She identified capitalism and imperialism as the main rivals to internationalism, as Ceadel does, and for the same reason - they were the cause of war. Her analysis of the elements within capitalism which were agents of international discord also matches Ceadel's model - arms manufacturers, global financiers, and the 'jingo' press, as does her long term solution - world socialism, and her short term resistance strategy against warmongering governments - the general strike.⁽⁶⁴⁾

The critique of militarism in *The Clear Light* is given in a mixture of conventional and allegorical styles. An example of the former was printed in the leader of the issue of March 1924. It is a simple and concise statement of her opinion - capitalism leads to unemployment so labour cannot exchange at its true value, yet such a surplus of labour is necessary for boom periods in the economy and is therefore cultivated by capitalists. Because capitalism causes war this system has the added merit for capitalists of being able to provide the soldiers that war requires.⁽⁶⁵⁾

For those subscribers who preferred to take their serious reading in story form there were plenty of allegorical alternatives. A good representative is 'The Nationalist',⁽⁶⁶⁾ a thinly disguised comment on the arms

⁽⁶³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁶⁵⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.10, March 1924, p.1.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, No.4, September 1923.

race and war-time exploitation which ends with a surprisingly accurate prediction about the inevitability of future war. A member of a relatively contented group of apes finds a stick and for a time they are the only ape tribe who know how to use it. But one day they discover that other tribes have learnt the secret of the stick and set about collecting sticks to protect themselves with if attacked. In response the other tribes do the same, for safety. In due course a nut dispute leads to war between two ape tribes. During the war nuts go uncollected and rot until some enterprising apes collect them and sell them to the ape women at high prices. Children of ape women who cannot afford the nuts starve and die. After the war the victors celebrate, even though the nut wood has been destroyed, and send their sons to be taught the secret of success - have more sticks than anyone else. The vanquished resolve that next time they will have as many sticks as the rest, even if this means neglecting their other needs.

This sort of treatment of such an issue could appear patronising to a modern reader. Its prevalence in *The Clear Light* is a reminder that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth always earned some income from writing children's stories, but she obviously thought this style palatable to her adult audience as well. Perhaps she was searching for a form of expression that would keep the attention of those she had addressed on the same matter so often. She was certainly not using allegory as a means of covert criticism. When necessary her writing identifies

individuals and groups who have behaved badly in her view. This is especially true of her stand against militarism. She was appalled by the split in the Labour movement about the First World War, and those like Hyndman, Blatchford, Tillett, Henderson, Webb, Clynes, Barnes and Shackleton who supported it are named and roundly condemned.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Religion gets a similar roasting, especially in early issues. Number 1 somewhat obscurely offers a New Faith to fight 'the priests of Darkness', who should promote 'Christ's Light' but who in fact do all they can to obstruct those who would build 'Faith in Today'. Fortunately clarification follows - those who should be preaching the joy of beauty and freedom deal instead in fear, bondage and the horrors of poverty.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The next issue opens with an indictment of ministers who lie from the pulpit to preserve class interests when religion should have made them champion the abolition of class distinctions.⁽⁶⁹⁾ It also claims that sacrifice is not rewarded, for though Jesus died to make men free those who defy the wishes of the powerful now, will also die.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Quoting the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, number 7 calls religion 'an illusion', and demands that the proletariat be shown its falsehoods. However her most vituperative attack on the Church is in the 'Symbols of Society' issue. Here she condemns it as interfering 'diabolically' in the affairs of man and as being a facade for

⁽⁶⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, No.3, August 1923; No.4, September 1923; No.9, February 1924; No.12, May 1924.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, No.1, June 1923, p.1.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, No.2, July 1923, p.1.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.2.

'dark political powers, anti-educational factors, anti-revolutionary forces'. The Church is described as 'militaristic' and 'imperialistic', preaching acceptance of social evils whilst doing nothing to alleviate them. She depicts the Church as a network dedicated to the submission of the masses. She uses the image of an inverted church spire to represent a sword killing freedom of thought and truth.(71)

This view of the corrupting nature of religion is later amplified. It is called 'irrational' because it spreads fear, superstition and hatred, and because it burns good men, and it is asked to answer the question 'what is heaven but the conception of a splendid materialism?'(72) For Ethel Carnie Holdsworth religion is nothing but a form of capitalism which she rejects because, she says, 'the world is my country, humanity my religion'.(73) But it is organised religion that she criticises, she accepts that personal belief based on reason, love and beauty as expressed by Walt Whitman amounts to religion, and she admires it. Although there is little in *The Clear Light* to confirm the pantheist view of religion which can be identified in her earlier writing,(74) this approval of Whitman's god does nothing to deny it.

Revulsion against war after 1918 led to increased support for internationalism in the 1920s. A symptom of this within the Labour movement was the shift in interest from the isolationist Union of

(71) *Ibid.*, No.3, August 1923, p.1. Her acquaintance, the devout Wilfred Wellock, held similar views. See Wellock, W., *Off The Beaten Track: Adventures in the Art of Living* (Sarvodaya Prachuralaya, Tanjore, India, 1961) p.57.

(72) *Ibid.*, No.15, August 1924, p.1.

(73) *Ibid.*, No.4, September 1923.

(74) See, for example, pp. 86 and 100 above.

Democratic Control to the League of Nations Union, which offered arbitration and multilateral disarmament as ways of ensuring permanent peace. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was an enthusiastic internationalist. Her particular view of the links between class, socialism and internationalism appears in the 'International Issue' of September 1923 through an examination of the true meaning of the word 'internationalist', which, the paper says, is often confused with 'imperialist'. Imperialists are, predictably, damned as unpatriotic, 'for no-one covets another country if he is satisfied with his own,' and destructive, setting country against country so that Chaos can laugh at them and say 'here lies a great civilisation where they who should have been comrades have slain each other.' For Ethel Carnie Holdsworth the poor man is the true internationalist for he is the friend of the poor everywhere. He does not need to attend conferences, he knows from direct experience that industry the world over is based on plunder and exploitation, so the poor will always resist the efforts of those who control industry to create war.

June Hannam and Karen Hunt argue that Edwardian women socialists who espoused internationalism rarely explored what this meant in terms of practical politics or reflected on what challenge internationalism posed to socialism.⁽⁷⁵⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is amongst their implied exceptions. In 1914 practical internationalism for her meant rejecting the Labour Party and working for the British

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s* (Routledge, London, 2002) p.196.

Citizen Party. By 1918 it meant taking an anti-militarist, pacifist position because she believed the continuing threat of capitalism to internationalism must be resisted by force if necessary. Perhaps, as well, her reference to the futility of conferences indicates rejection of a form of practical politics favoured by contemporary local activists like Margaret Aldersley (who was invited to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance peace conference at The Hague in 1915), and Ethel Snowden (who attended the inaugural meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Zurich in 1919.)⁽⁷⁶⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth thought that Labour Party socialism could not meet the challenge of internationalism in 1923. She came close to accepting that communism could, however, recommending the general strike as a counter-capitalist tool, and praising the Communist Manifesto. Indeed she represents communism as a utopia as long as communists believe 'that all men will one day share labour and its reward, and that all things can be shared without debasing their essential values.'⁽⁷⁷⁾ Although she was later to criticise the Soviet government

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Both were Nelson women although Ethel Snowden no longer lived in the town. Martin Pugh says that three of the 180 British delegates to The Hague conference actually attended - *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 2000) p.104. Jill Liddington agrees - *The Long Road to Greenham:Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (Virago, London, 1989) p.102. However Angela Ingram says five attended, including Theodora Wilson Wilson, who later edited Wilfred Wellock's *New Crusader* - 'In Christ's Name - Peace', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) pp. 180-181. Ingram's source, the official report of The Hague conference, seems impeccable, and Wilson Wilson's attendance is supported by Martin Ceadel, see his *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations 1854-1945* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000)p.208.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.5, October 1923, p.4.

because of its treatment of dissidents in the Solovetsky prison, she still considered that the Russian Revolution had the potential to create a utopia, a potential which the 'world capitalist counter revolution' was undermining.⁽⁷⁸⁾ At the time of the general election in 1923 she was prepared to call parliamentary representation a farce and to claim that the only true representation was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.⁽⁷⁹⁾

The fascist threat dominates the content of *The Clear Light* from the issue for October 1924 until it folded in July 1925, but it is first highlighted as a problem in Britain in February 1924. Readers were advised then that fascism was spreading in Britain, especially in London and Leeds, and the royal family was criticised for encouraging it by decorating Mussolini. A fascist organisation called The Plantagenets is named, and the paper claims it had 100,000 men ready to destroy the Labour movement. I can find no reference to this group in any study of the development of fascism in Britain.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Rotha Lintorn Orman's British Fascisti had been founded in May 1923 and it was soon to interfere directly with the work of the NUCF. In 1924 membership of the British Fascisti was estimated at 100,000,⁽⁸¹⁾ however no British fascist party could ever mobilise that number, and

⁽⁷⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, No.10, March 1924, p.2.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, No.7, December 1923.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ A group called The Yorkshire Fascists existed in the 1920s. There is no reason to think they were The Plantagenets under another name apart from their area of activity and the fact that communists were their declared target. See Linehan, R., *British Fascism 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000) p.130.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Gottlieb, J., *Feminine Fascism. Women in Britain's Fascist Movement 1923-1945* (I.B.Tauris, London, 2000) p.30.

the suggestion that *The Plantagenets* could, throws doubt on the objectivity of the Holdsworths' anti-fascist campaign. Nevertheless in view of the developments discussed below I do not think the reference to *The Plantagenets* disqualifies *The Clear Light* from being an important source of information about the political history of the mid-1920s, nor does it trivialise the efforts of the proprietors to resist the spread of fascism.

In May 1924 *The Clear Light* expressed its alarm at the complacency of the press. It complained that newspapermen with real power (Blatchford is mentioned specifically) were alive to the danger of a Mussolini-type coup d'etat in Britain but were doing nothing about it. *The Clear Light* promised to try to awaken the conscience of the nation but doubted its ability to have much impact as, in a year of existence, its circulation had only reached 5,000 and warned that unless more widely-read papers took an urgent line, Britain would find Parliament closed, the press in the hands of Harold Harmsworth and education in those of Winston Churchill. The reason for the criticism of Harmsworth is clear. His newspaper empire included the *Daily Mirror*, which had a circulation in excess of 3,000,000 by 1924, the *Sunday Pictorial*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Dispatch* and the *Glasgow Herald*, as well as weekly magazines like *Girls' Friend* which targeted working-class readers.⁽⁸²⁾ This represented a conservative monopoly to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and, therefore, an

(82) Purvis, J., (ed.), *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, an Introduction* (UCL Press, London, 1995) p.139.

undemocratic development. But why does she criticise Churchill in connection with education here? She had been angered by his policies as Home Secretary during the period of industrial unrest between 1911 and 1914, and as First Lord of the Admiralty during the Great War, but in May 1924 he was in opposition. In 1908 he had recommended compulsory education to the age of seventeen.⁽⁸³⁾ If Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had been aware of this she would have applauded it. However the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act and its 1920 successor, the Emergency Powers Act, had led to government surveillance of the educational activities of Socialist Sunday Schools and the Young Communist League, and in 1922 Churchill had asked the Home Secretary, Edward Shortt, to suppress *Young Communist* in order to protect children who attended Socialist Sunday Schools from 'poisonous propaganda'.⁽⁸⁴⁾ So the reference reflects Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fear that in office Churchill would be a threat to socialist education. She identified him with the idea of education for obedience and conformity. She believed this was dangerous because it taught children patriotism, the glory of the gun and of empire, and reverence for kings. She wanted schools to teach responsibility and initiative, not the automatic acceptance of authority.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Her point is that in a Britain where public opinion was moulded by the likes of Harm-

(83) Jenkins, R., *Churchill* (Macmillan, London, 2001) p.147.

(84) Several attempts to support Churchill's request by legislation received backing in the House of Lords and from British fascists. All failed. See Kean, H., *Challenging the State? The Socialist and Feminist Experience 1900-1930* (Falmer Press, London, 1990) pp.56 and 70-71 (notes 14 and 15).

(85) *The Clear Light*, No.3, August 1923. This reflects Wilfred Wellock's concern about military indoctrination in schools, expressed in his pacifist paper *Crusader* in May 1920. See Ceadel M., *Semi-Detached Idealists*, *op.cit.*, p.70.

sworth and Churchill, admirers of Mussolini since 1922, a fascist takeover would become not just a possibility but a formality.⁽⁸⁶⁾

The Clear Light indicates that the NUCF was already in existence in July 1924, having been established by E. Burton Dancy and based in London. The Holdsworths decided to link their fortunes with it because the spread of fascism had become their main concern by mid-1924, and because they thought such an alliance would enable *The Clear Light* to reach a wider audience. To prepare readers for its conversion to an out-and-out anti-fascist publication a report was printed of a reader who returned from holiday to find that a branch of the British Fascisti had been established in his town. To an invited audience and the press British Fascisti representatives condemned slum housing conditions, not because they were unhygienic, but because they allowed communism to flourish. The British Fascisti solution was a social redemption scheme - improve housing conditions and end communism, then the Black Shirts would disband.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Richard Thurlow suggests that the British Fascisti used no distinctive uniform before 1927 when the blue shirt was adopted.⁽⁸⁸⁾ It was the more extreme National Fascisti who wore black shirts, he says, but they were not formed until 1925. So *The Clear Light* report may be evidence of earlier National Fascisti activity, or it may be propaganda, part of *The Clear Light's* plan to focus public attention on the fascist menace.

(86) *Ibid.*, No.12, May 1924, article entitled 'The Need for The Clear Light'.

(87) *Ibid.*, No.14, July 1924, article attributed to a 'Labour Journalist'.

(88) Thurlow, R., *op.cit.*, p.52.

This change of focus required some journalistic compromises. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had started to serialise a story 'The Woman in the Red Shroud' in number 11, April 1924. The intention then was to publish it in twelve episodes over the coming year, however it was cut to half its usual length from number 16, September 1924, and with number 19, December 1924, it disappeared altogether. That issue contained a note explaining that the story would be continued in the next, but by then she had taken over as General Organiser of the NUCF and had neither the time nor the space for it.

The issue for October 1924 is central to an analysis of the NUCF. It explains the background to its formation, its aims and its structure. It begins by defining fascism as a movement of exclusion and slavery, the opposite of democracy, and names the Duke of Northumberland as a fascist who is using the *Morning Post* and *The Patriot* to promote this exclusion by popularising the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy.⁽⁸⁹⁾ *The Clear Light* also claims that fascists have no interest in preserving the freedom of the press and intend to suppress the paper. It reports cases of copies of *The Clear Light* being seized, an interference which occurs regularly from this date.

The aim of the NUCF was therefore to take 'An intellectual and moral stand against illegality and savagery'.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth indicates that unlike the fascists the NUCF will use only

⁽⁸⁹⁾ Martin Pugh judges the Duke to have been an extreme reactionary, obsessive anti-semite, Conservative, but admits that his early death in 1930 probably saved him from a formal involvement with fascism. See Pugh, M., '*Hurrah for the Blackshirts*', *op.cit.*, p.78.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.,17, October 1924, p.1.

constitutional means. She accepts that this is the British political tradition, and explains that it will be used by the NUCF to educate workers and to appeal to reason in order to bring about a change in attitude that will transform society. There is, however, a note of anxiety expressed about keeping faithfully to the constitutional path. The editor admits that, as always in a parliamentary democracy, progress will be slow, perhaps too slow in such dangerous times. So, he hopes, the efforts of *The Clear Light* will be matched by similar constitutional efforts by the relevant constitutional groups, that is those representing Labour, Communists, and Anarchists.

The back page of number 17 is devoted to the NUCF's recruitment drive. A membership application form is provided as are details of how intending activists can help. The last lines of Shelley's 'The Mask of Anarchy' from 'Rise like Lions after slumber' to 'Ye are many - they are few' are quoted as if to give the cause authority, and a proudly worded announcement is made that the paper now has an Italian correspondent who will provide regular reports, but whose name will not be divulged for his own safety. The organising secretary of the NUCF at this time is named as E. Burton Dancy, its founder.⁽⁹¹⁾

The following issue⁽⁹²⁾ provides the NUCF's address - 10 Dukes' Avenue, W4. The paper continued to be printed by William Ackroyd in Sowerby Bridge however. It claims that NUCF branches had been established in several important towns although these are not named,

⁽⁹¹⁾ I have found no reference to this person elsewhere.

⁽⁹²⁾ The first No. 18 of *The Clear Light*, November 1924.

but in fact there must have been a poor response to the call for support, for the next issue included a new membership application form without a subscription requirement.⁽⁹³⁾ Dancy's notes describe the NUCF as 'a specialised branch of the Socialist Movement' at present not requiring a large membership as this could cause violence through confrontations between fascist and anti-fascist groups. The function of this branch would be to watch and report on British Fascisti activities - 'in other words the NUCF will become Labour's CID.'⁽⁹⁴⁾ The paper was unable to fulfil its promise of news from an Italian correspondent. The nearest it got was reprinting an extract from the recently murdered Matteotti's *The Fascisti Exposed* and a list of fascist atrocities in Italy for May 1923.⁽⁹⁵⁾ It is a long list and it makes a point about fascist tactics, but it was hardly news in November 1924.

The most significant part of the issue for December 1924 is Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's article 'Shall Fascism Flourish', her first contribution as NUCF General Organiser. It re-affirms her belief in peaceful methods, but the tone is angry. She blames the spread of fascism on sectionalism within the Labour movement, a form of treachery which, she says, has enabled the British Fascisti to establish 400 branches. This worrying development is tackled in the following issue.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Whilst conceding that *The Clear Light* is far too small to stop fascism unsupported it calls for fifty committed volunteers to set up an

⁽⁹³⁾ The second No. 18, December 1924.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁽⁹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, No.19, January 1925, p.2.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*

equivalent 400 NUCF branches and sell a hundred copies of the paper each.

By now, for all its claims of growth, there is a sense of resignation to failure in much of the paper's content. It affects Ethel Carnie Holdsworth as much as other contributors. Her article 'To Be Or Not To Be - Pawns' admits that they have been unable to persuade most people of the danger of fascism and that she has been accused of exaggerating its power in Britain.⁽⁹⁷⁾ She sees this as symptomatic of the same complacency that enabled the Zinoviev letter to bring down the Labour government in October 1924,⁽⁹⁸⁾ and with some justification, for in 1925 the British Fascisti claimed to have twice the number of branches that *The Clear Light* estimated.⁽⁹⁹⁾ She had always rejected the authenticity of the Zinoviev letter believing it to be a fascist plant, but now asked her readers to accept it as proof of the strength of the fascist threat, and to try once more to form a Socialist/Communist/Anarchist front against it.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had already begun her campaign in *Freedom* on behalf of political prisoners in Russia by this time,⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ and even though she discounted the Zinoviev letter as a fake she

⁽⁹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽⁹⁸⁾ The letter, purporting to be from members of the presidium of the Communist International, was proved in 1966 to be a forgery prepared by White Russian emigres and planted on the Foreign Office by British Intelligence and the Conservative Central Office. It encouraged the British Communist Party to prepare for armed revolution. Its publication on 25 October, four days before the general election, led to a hundred Liberal candidates standing down to ensure a united front against socialism, and resulted in a Conservative victory. Some, however, thought Labour would have lost anyway. See Mowat, C.L., *Britain Between The Wars 1819-1940* (Methuen, London, 1962) p.190.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Gottlieb, J., *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ *Freedom*, October 1924, p.54.

distanced herself from both British and Russian communists after it was published. She identified NUCF members as revolutionary socialists, that is pure communists who accepted the Communist Manifesto and rejected the tactics of armed insurrection favoured by Russian and British Bolsheviks.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ Nevertheless she was understanding of their reason for using them - despair at the willingness of some elements in the Labour movement to compromise with capitalism - and urged them to abandon force and adopt the best weapon available to the masses, the strike.

The remaining issues of *The Clear Light* (numbers 21-24) are taken up with details of a concerted fascist effort to close it down. Both the British Fascisti and the National Fascisti were active against their enemies in 1925 and *The Clear Light* was one of their targets. For example number 21 contains an open letter from Ethel Carnie Holdsworth to the British Fascisti claiming that she had unmasked a prominent member of that organisation offering to spy for the NUCF. The double issue for April and May records British Fascisti members posing as communists and offering to help finance *The Clear Light*,⁽¹⁰²⁾ and reports that its printer, William Ackroyd, had been threatened with blowing up, a threat that may have worked as this issue was printed by Labour Institute Ltd. of Bradford. An account of distributors having their bundles tampered with and copies of *The Clear Light* replaced by *Empire News* is also included.

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.20, February 1925.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ *Ibid.*, No.22/23, April/May 1925.

The catalogue of atrocities continues in number 24 with an accusation that fascists were trying to implicate Alfred Holdsworth in a fascist initiated plot to overthrow the existing order by force, and print seditious matter, so that the police would have an excuse to close *The Clear Light* down. It goes on to cover the capture of the communist leader Harry Pollitt by the British Fascisti and their acquittal by a Liverpool court, a fascist raid on the Glasgow offices of the *Sunday Worker*, and a plan by Lintorn Orman to combat the threat of women communists.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth admitted to being flattered that the fascists thought *The Clear Light* worth stopping. She charged them with exaggerating the influence of the section of opinion it represented, for example she estimated that there were less than a thousand women communists in Britain in 1925, hardly sufficient to pose a threat to anyone.⁽¹⁰³⁾ But if she felt the paper could withstand a fascist dirty tricks campaign, she had accepted by early 1925 that it would fold if it did not increase its circulation. The double April/May issue asked for an emergency rescue fund to be established and for intending Scottish supporters to send their applications to Hebden Bridge, not Edinburgh, suggesting the demise of the Scottish branch of the NUCF. In June the attempt to stir up anti-fascist sentiment was extended to the letters page of the *Daily Herald*.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

A call for badly needed financial support was repeated in the July

⁽¹⁰³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ Copsey, N., *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000) p.7.

1925 issue of *The Clear Light* but there is no other indication that this would be its last appearance, indeed it reported the establishment of NUCF branches in Burnley and Manchester, and continued the argument for peaceful resistance to fascism. Once more Ethel Carnie Holdsworth defined fascism - it was anti-democratic, violent, underhand, aiming specifically now at blacklegging a general strike and preventing the election of a socialist parliament by force. It was a definition broad enough to enable her to apply it to the medieval lords who crushed the Peasants' Revolt, to the Ku Klux Klan which was enjoying a resurgence in the USA in the 1920s,(105) and to Lord Curzon whom she blamed for the Allied intervention in Russia in support of the Whites after the Bolsheviks had signed a separate peace treaty with Germany at Brest Litovsk.(106) Once more she warned that if the British Labour movement did not join the NUCF in its peaceful counter-revolution against fascism, socialism would only be established by a 'social holocaust'.(107)

The sort of unity she sought and the peaceful elimination of fascism that might have followed was, of course, never achieved, and, if the Second World War can be so described, a 'social holocaust' was required before the advent of socialism in 1945. What is beyond dispute, however, is the existence in 1924 of an anti-fascist organisation which was trying to take on a national co-ordinating role. Dave Renton and Nigel Copsey are the only historians of British

(105) *The Clear Light*, No.19, January 1925.

(106) *Ibid.*, No.20, February 1925.

(107) *Ibid.*, No.25, July 1925, p.1.

fascism to confirm the existence of the NUCF, but they do not accept that it had that role.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ This research shows that the NUCF had clear aims, a vigorous recruiting policy, Scottish and Yorkshire organisers,⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ branches in many towns including London, Manchester and Edinburgh, and a co-ordinating executive. It had to confront fascist intimidation and it tried to counter fascist propaganda.

Jill Liddington's reclamation of Lancashire working-class women's lives includes a tribute to the part played by Nelson activists Selina Cooper and Margaret Aldersley in the fight against fascism. During the 1920s they were preoccupied by welfare issues and had no links with the NUCF, but ten years after Ethel Carnie Holdsworth tried to organise an anti-fascist front from Hebden Bridge they did the same from Nelson, less than ten miles away, with more success. Of course the threat was greater by then, Hitler had come to power in Germany and Oswald Mosley had formed the British Union of Fascists, but the 1934 Cooper/Aldersley front also used broader objectives to increase its appeal - repeal of the Means Test, legalisation of abortion, conversion of armament production to social use - as well as condemning fascism.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ It also merged with the Women's World Committee Against War and Fascism, which was sponsored, amongst

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Renton, D., *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Britain in the 1940s* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000) p.16. Copsey N., *Anti-Fascism in Britain, op.cit.*, p.7.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ The NUCF's Scottish organiser was Basil Taylor, (*The Clear Light*, the second No.18, December 1924, p.4). The Yorkshire organiser was Joe Walker (No.20, February 1925, p.4).

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, (Virago, London, 1984) p.411.

others, by Sylvia Pankhurst, Ellen Wilkinson and Rose Smith, a Communist Party organiser in Burnley, none of whom had Ethel Carnie Holdsworth been able to interest in the NUCF.

It could therefore be argued that the Holdsworths used the wrong strategy, but in the end the Cooper/Aldersley initiative failed as well. Selina Cooper was part of a 1934 delegation which investigated the plight of women who were held in German prisons just because their husbands were communists. Its report heightened awareness of the nature of fascism to a level *The Clear Light* never did, but the British Union of Fascists was nevertheless able to establish a branch in Nelson because disillusioned mill workers were seduced by Mosley's plan to stimulate the textile industry by banning cotton imports.⁽¹¹¹⁾ The Labour Party was also hostile to the front because of its links with the Communist Party. Little attention has been paid to Nelson anti-fascists and none to Hebden Bridge anti-fascists. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth began that aspect of the protest tradition in the area. Her contribution to it should be recognised.

But she set herself too great a task. By placing herself outside the mainstream of the Labour movement she became dependent on her own resources. Comparisons are difficult to make, but in 1912 the *Daily Citizen*, with the backing of the Labour Party, was launched with £85,000 of its projected £150,000 start-up capital. It had more circulation committees (6,000) than *The Clear Light* had readers, yet it

⁽¹¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.421.

lasted only three years.⁽¹¹²⁾ I do not know how much Ethel Carnie Holdsworth spent on *The Clear Light*, but she had been unsuccessfully looking for work in London as recently as 1922 and the six-month gap between payments of her royalties might have caused cash-flow problems. With a policy of refusing to accept adverts, relying on volunteers for copy and distribution, and a maximum readership of 5,000, *The Clear Light* was bound to be short-lived.

The period 1923 to 1925 covers an important stage in the development of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's political thought. She was in her late thirties and had both the energy and, from the sales of her books, the money to make her most serious bid to change the world. The plan was disrupted in 1924 by the need to challenge the growing fascist threat, but it remained essentially the plan of an idealist, a dreamer and an activist. Issue 6 illustrates this particularly well. She wanted unhappiness, despair, poverty and hatred, the common life experiences of so many, to be replaced by her ideals, happiness, hope, plenty and love, and she called for positive courage to make a reality of these ideals, for passive courage she believed only enabled people to endure their lot, not to change it. ⁽¹¹³⁾

She thought she had a practical programme that would deliver these dreams. Firstly the Labour movement must unite under the

⁽¹¹²⁾ Shepherd, J., *George Lansbury* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002) pp.141-142.

⁽¹¹³⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.6, November 1923, p.1.

banner of 'World-Wide Class Emancipation'(114) and petty differences be set aside. Secondly national frontiers must be dismantled 'since we all dream one dream'.(115) Thirdly the enemy must be confronted over legislation, education, propaganda, industry and free thought. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed that different sections of the Labour movement could deal with these issues separately, without it leading to a split. Fourthly compromise must be resisted, and support welcomed from all who accepted the ideals, irrespective of previous allegiance. If *The Clear Light* could do it why not the whole Labour movement? she asked. Finally militancy was necessary. This should not be interpreted as a sign of fanaticism she warned, but of determination.

The Clear Light is packed with ideas. It overflows with statements of intent, explanations of belief, criticism of opponents, suggestions for action. It illuminates Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's thinking in the period 1923-25 because, as a regular newspaper, it was responding to contemporary events as well as expressing her long held views. Without it, it would be impossible to establish the nature of her anti-fascism for this does not feature prominently in any of her other writing. However it is difficult to legitimate the historical narrative which she establishes. It is significantly different from the received record and corroboration from other sources is scarce. Why have no other references to The Plantagents or E. Burton Dancy been

(114) *Ibid.* Ethel Carnie Holdsworth also uses the expression 'the Red Flag of the Brotherhood of the World's Workers' in this context. *Ibid.*, No. 25, July 1925.

(115) *Ibid.*

unearthed? Why is there no mention of the British Fascisti's sabotage campaign, which *The Clear Light* says hit the Hebden Bridge area in spring 1925, in the *Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette*? Was it just propaganda or fantasy?

Contradictions within *The Clear Light* also suggest that a cautious approach to its claims is advisable. For example it promises to use only constitutional methods to oppose fascism, yet it condones violence, albeit reluctantly, to overthrow the state. It is difficult to reconcile its espousal of the British political tradition⁽¹¹⁶⁾ with its rejection of parliamentary representation⁽¹¹⁷⁾ - an indication of syndicalist tendencies emphasised by its frequent encouragement of readers to use the strike as their main weapon in the class war⁽¹¹⁸⁾ - and its call to British women 'to prepare for Direct Action'.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Furthermore *The Clear Light* is critical of the 1924 Labour government, and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth claimed to be affiliated to no party in October 1924,⁽¹²⁰⁾ yet in August 1923 Alfred Holdsworth presided at a meeting of the Sowerby Labour Party. It was held at the Holdsworth's house at Slack Top. Tom Myers, the ex-Labour MP for Spen Valley was the speaker.⁽¹²¹⁾ And when a Heptonstall branch of the Labour Party was formed in April 1925⁽¹²²⁾ Alfred Holdsworth was appointed its secretary.⁽¹²³⁾ Although Alfred seems to have been keener than

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, No.17, October 1924.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, No. 7, December 1923.

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, No.5, October 1923.

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, No.24, June 1925.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ *Freedom*, October 1924, p.54.

⁽¹²¹⁾ *Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette*, 10 August 1923, p.8.

⁽¹²²⁾ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1925, p.8.

⁽¹²³⁾ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1925, p.5.

his wife on playing an active role in local Labour Party politics, it is possible that Ethel became a member in May 1925 when her home, effectively, became its headquarters. Stuart Macintyre says that most socialists plumped for working within the Labour Party rather than in pressure groups after the election advances of the early 1920s. If this is what Ethel Carnie Holdsworth did, she was not unusual, for as Macintyre points out many Marxists had done the same, including J.T.Walton Newbold and Ellen Wilkinson.⁽¹²⁴⁾

There is also some evidence in *The Clear Light* that Ethel saw her future in the political mainstream, for amongst the final thoughts she expressed in it is this: 'More and more I am driven to the conclusion that democracies can never be won save by enlightened, determined and uncompromising majorities'.⁽¹²⁵⁾ But if she did join the Labour Party in 1925 she continued her independent activism as well.⁽¹²⁶⁾ Her most significant contribution was made on behalf of the Solovetsky prisoners. The following section examines her role in that campaign.

3.4. FREEDOM, 1924-1925

There are no contemporary sources to help determine Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's view of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, for even if she joined the BSP when it was formed in 1911, there is no evidence that she was a member in 1917. However *The Clear Light* shows that she

⁽¹²⁴⁾ Macintyre, S., *A Proletarian Science. Marxism in Britain 1917-1933* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980) pp.49 and 60.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.24, June 1925, p.3.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ For example her account of industrial unrest in Barnoldswick, *Sunday Worker*, 28 March 1926, entitled 'In Barlick Now'.

was still on the revolutionary left in 1923 and 1924, and it is likely that she shared the enthusiasm of the BSP about the overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917 because she saw it as bringing the working class to power in Russia. Martin Durham argues that 'for most revolutionaries the Bolshevik Revolution was without doubt their revolution'.⁽¹²⁷⁾ The anarchist communist monthly *Freedom* agreed, but by 1921 it had turned against Lenin because of his repression of his left-wing critics. Faced by civil war, famine and declining industrial production because many workers were leaving the towns looking for food in the countryside, Lenin introduced war communism, that is compulsory requisition and rationing of agricultural supplies. It caused strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd, and these were supported by sailors from the nearby Kronstadt naval base who proclaimed a third revolution to secure greater freedoms and an amnesty for left-wing political prisoners. The rising was ruthlessly suppressed, and although war communism was modified the 1921 dissidents were sent to Arctic gulags like Solovetsky.

In 1924 the American anarchist Emma Goldman, who had lived in Russia during the revolutions, went to Britain to advertise their plight. She had little success. The CPGB backed Lenin. The ILP refused to get involved. Durham says that a few individuals were sympathetic, especially the feminist journalist Rebecca West, the radical Liberal

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Durham, M., 'British Revolutionaries and the Suppression of the Left in Lenin's Russia, 1918-1924', *Journal of Contemporary History*(20, No.2, April 1985)p.205.

Josiah Wedgwood, and Edward Carpenter,⁽¹²⁸⁾ but he does not mention Ethel Carnie Holdsworth. In fact she was deeply committed to the campaign to free the Solovetsky prisoners through the columns of *Freedom* between October 1924 and August 1925. Like *The Clear Light*, *Freedom* had expressed concern about the world-wide spread of fascism at an early date,⁽¹²⁹⁾ indeed it may have been a stimulus for her involvement with the NUCF if she was a regular reader.

She wrote to *Freedom* to agree with its condemnation of prisons like Solovetsky, and to show solidarity with prisoners such as Maria Spiridonova and Alexandra Jzmailovitch.⁽¹³⁰⁾ She was obviously responding to an article in a previous issue by Guy Aldred, who sometimes contributed to *The Clear Light*⁽¹³¹⁾ and she took the opportunity to praise the imprisoned revolutionaries, not because they had helped to establish the Soviet system in 1917 but because they had liberated the Russian people from tsarist tyranny. Power structures were less important than people in her analysis of freedom. She claimed that she identified with those in the camps because they were prisoners, not because they were 'Anarchist, Labourites, Socialists or Communists'. Furthermore she said such an identification was 'the highest expression of individuality', for it placed her within 'one mass mentality'. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed

(128) *Ibid.*, p.215.

(129) *Freedom*, June 1923, p.30 contains an unattributed article entitled 'Anti-Fascisti Movement in the United States' which warns of the threat of the spread of fascism not only to Europe but to the world.

(130) *Ibid.*, October 1924, p.54.

(131) *The Clear Light*, No.8, January 1924. At the time of the Solovetsky campaign Aldred was publishing his own paper, the *Spur*, which portrayed Lenin's critics as enemies of the Revolution.

that this mass had split into groups like Anarchist and Communist only 'for the time being', and looked forward to its reunification. She said she saw no contradiction in claiming common descent from Whitman and Morris and Marx and Kropotkin and Bakunin, even if some of them were no longer revered by others. So she offered to help the imprisoned revolutionists. Her proposed method supports my view that she believed the most effective form of activism for her was writing. It was not the arguments of the rival sectarians that they needed, she said, but 'a poet to sing their indignities'. She was hopeful that once freed these comrades would again be able to help build a good society to replace the bad one that they had helped to destroy. In case her point had been missed she signed herself 'Yours in the cause of United Freedom'.⁽¹³²⁾ This was an intervention not only on behalf of the unjustly persecuted, but for the cause she had identified as crucial to the creation of a better world since her days at *The Woman Worker* - the unity of the Labour movement.

The editor of *Freedom* promised to publish Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's poems and gave *The Clear Light* a generous plug.⁽¹³³⁾ Five sonnets appeared over the next year expressing the same sentiments as those outlined above - do not despair, Power can not for long confine the immortal flame of Liberty. The most interesting is 'Russia'.⁽¹³⁴⁾ Placed next to an article condemning 'the present governing regime' by Emma Goldman, it chimes in with Goldman's

⁽¹³²⁾ *Freedom*, October 1924, p.54.

⁽¹³³⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽¹³⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, November/December, 1924, p.61.

astonishment that the values of 1917 should already have been abandoned by the Bolsheviks - 'That thou should strive to stem Thought's streams!'. It also highlights the role played by women in the revolution. 'Women who could not with whips be tamed' by the tsars would ensure victory over this new oppression, because they had an ability to endure not shared by men.

It is impossible to assess Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's effect on the struggle to close Solovetsky prison, but *Freedom* reported the success of the campaign above her last sonnet.⁽¹³⁵⁾ What her contribution to the paper does prove, however, is her involvement in that struggle and the influence of anarchist ideas on her thinking. It is only in *Freedom* that she openly acknowledges this influence, although there are hints of it throughout her work. For example she reflects Proudhon's belief in change through the peaceful proliferation of co-operative organisations in *The House That Jill Built*, and the anarchist preference for loose confederations of propagandists who see their duty not to lead the people so much as to enlighten and give example to them in *General Belinda*. *The Clear Light's* view that society must be rebuilt on the idea of Contract matches the mutualism of Proudhon, and the importance it places on trade unions and the general strike in the creation of a future free society echoes the anarcho-syndicalists. All her work endorses the principle 'from each according to his means,

(135) *Ibid.*, July/August, 1925. It was a hollow victory. The dissidents were transferred to grimmer prisons in central Russia and western Siberia. See Applebaum, A., *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (Penguin, London, 2004) p.58.

to each according to his needs' of Kropotkin's anarchist communists. These are illustrations of belief which fit George Woodcock's definition of anarchism as 'the replacement of the authoritarian state by some form of non-governmental co-operation between free individuals'.⁽¹³⁶⁾ Her *Freedom* poems should not be seen as a contradiction of her claim in *The Clear Light* to be a 'pure' communist,⁽¹³⁷⁾ but they clearly indicate her disaffection with soviet communism by 1924, and an involvement greater than the brief flirtation with anarchism claimed for her by Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight.⁽¹³⁸⁾

At the same time that she was working on *The Clear Light* and intervening in the Solovetsky campaign Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was preparing *This Slavery* for publication. The following section examines what, in my view, is her major novel. Together with the journalism discussed above it testifies to the remarkable creative energy she put into her attempt to realise her dream of freedom in the early 1920s, and enables a fuller evaluation of the influence of Marxism on her thought to be made.

3.5. THIS SLAVERY, 1925

When Herbert Jenkins took over the publication of *Miss Nobody* from Methuen in 1916 he agreed to publish Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's

⁽¹³⁶⁾ Woodcock, G., *Anarchism: a History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Penguin, London, 1986) p.14.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ *The Clear Light*, No.20, February 1925.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ Klaus, H.G., and Knight, S., (eds.), *'To Hell with Culture': Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2005) p.7.

next six novels as well.⁽¹³⁹⁾ He issued *Helen of Four Gates* in 1917, *The Taming of Nan*, *The Marriage of Elizabeth* and *The House That Jill Built* all in 1920, *General Belinda* in 1924 and *The Quest of the Golden Garter* in 1927. Her last two novels, *Barbara Dennison* and *Eagles' Crag*, were published by Stanley Paul in 1929 and 1931 respectively. However her most significant work, *This Slavery*, the sixth in the sequence after the Herbert Jenkins contract was signed, was published by The Labour Publishing Company in 1925. Why?

Possibly Herbert Jenkins refused to publish it because of its revolutionary content, for although *This Slavery* follows Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's usual novel structure its political message is more prominent and extreme than in any of her other work, calling, as it does, for the violent overthrow of capitalism, and featuring the bloody suppression of a strike. This was more natural material though for The Labour Publishing Company whose presses supported creative socialist literature.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ Certainly the Labour Publishing Company was congratulated by *The Plebs* for producing a novel for working-class readers at something like a working-class price⁽¹⁴¹⁾ and this, too, might have been a motive for the author - she could expect a larger readership at The Labour Publishing Company's 2s.6d a copy than at the 7s.6d a copy Herbert Jenkins was charging at the time.

In fact *This Slavery* was written long before 1925. Mary Ashraf

(139) Memorandum of Agreement between Ethel Holdsworth and Herbert Jenkins, 27 May 1916, Barrie and Jenkins archive, Random House, London.

(140) Klaus, H.G., *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, op.cit., p.106.

(141) *The Plebs*, October 1925, p.408.

favours some time between 1903 and 1911 because these dates fit the chronology of cotton trade slump and boom with which the novel deals, and because she finds it inconceivable that a narrative which features Marxists as its central characters would make no propaganda reference to a capitalist war.⁽¹⁴²⁾ Gustav Klaus prefers 1911 to 1914 giving as his reason the debt the novel owes to the industrial unrest and the use of troops against strikers of that period.⁽¹⁴³⁾ He also mentions the absence of the names of contemporary working-class leaders in *This Slavery*. The book's main protagonists certainly revere early socialist heroes like Owen, Shelley, Blake, Marx and Morris, but they also read Edward Clodd, the rationalist thinker, who lived until 1930. However Rachel's comment that it 'knocks Genesis to blazes'⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ probably indicates that it was Clodd's *The Story of Creation* that was being discussed, and that was published in 1888. More significant is the reference to Francisco Ferrer, the Spanish anarchist executed on trumped-up treason charges in 1909. As Rachel refers to this as a recent event it supports Klaus' view of the novel's date.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾

But there are difficulties about accepting either of the dates of composition suggested. None of the contemporary reviews comment on the lack of contemporary detail that worries Ashraf and Klaus, and whilst Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was attacked for misrepresenting

(142) Ashraf, P.M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain Part 11: Prose* (Berlin, 1979) pp.188-189.

(143) Klaus, H.G., *op.cit.*, p.95.

(144) Holdsworth, E.C., *This Slavery* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1925) p.6.

(145) *Ibid.*, p.100. Ethel Carnie used part of *The Woman Worker* editorial of 20 October 1909, (p.372) to deal sympathetically with the Ferrer case. See p. 69 above.

Lancashire factory life by 'G.H.',⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ and reminded that 'things have greatly improved since the period dealt with in the story' by 'J.A.B.',⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ she was also complimented on her contemporary realism by 'H.O.B.'⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ and she made a fiery defence of *This Slavery* as a text for today 'holding up a mirror' to contemporary society in her local paper.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

Furthermore the author makes a specific mention of conscription in her novel, even if she does not link it to the Great War - 'the conscripted men driven out to kill other conscripted men'.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Could this have been written before 1916? Also, in a passage which deals with the options open to an oppressed working class, she makes Rachel 'want a Labour Government to get in'.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ It is a wish for immediate change, the alternative to which is class war. Could this have been written before the election campaign of 1922?

Iron Horses was serialised in *The Co-operative News* in 1915. It deals with the same issues as *This Slavery* and has similar characters and a similar story line. It reads almost like a first draft of *This Slavery*. Together with the points raised by Ashraf and Klaus it leads me to suspect that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth revised her text in the early 1920's but that its conception and initial form belong to the early 1910's. Perhaps the similarity between the novel's climax, the fight

(146) *Blackburn Times*, 27 June 1925, p.16.

(147) *Millgate Monthly*, April 1926, an article entitled 'A Bookman's Causerie' on an unnumbered page.

(148) *The Plebs*, October 1925, p.408.

(149) *Blackburn Times*, 4 July 1925, p. 7.

(150) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.104.

(151) *Ibid.*, p.118.

between strikers and troops which leads to Hester's violent death, the events in Liverpool in 1911 and Tom Mann's subsequent reissue of the 'Don't Shoot' article in 1912⁽¹⁵²⁾ make the period just prior to the Great War the most likely initial date of composition, whilst the deployment of troops on British streets during the Red Clydeside disturbances of 1919 may have prompted the later revision. However the sentiments expressed in the novel match those of *The Clear Light* (1923-25) closely, and so *This Slavery* does, I believe, act as a guide to the state of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's thought at the time of publication.⁽¹⁵³⁾

It had matured considerably. There are aspects of political awareness in *This Slavery* barely hinted at in the earlier novels, indeed it may represent a landmark in working-class imaginative writing - had there previously been any attempt made by any writer, let alone by a working-class woman, to depict the emergence of a politicised, even Marxist, female proletarian leader? Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's earlier heroines respond instinctively to injustice because it is the natural thing to do, and whilst some of them have specific ideas for bettering the condition of the working class, such as Jill's home for tired mothers, they all approach the social problems they face empirically and struggle, like Carrie with socialism, to understand basic political theory. But in *This Slavery* we are presented with characters who are driven by Marxism. Jack Baines is a member of

⁽¹⁵²⁾ The original article, 'An Open Letter to British Soldiers', was written by Fred Bowyer. It was a direct appeal to troops not to fire on unarmed fellow citizens during disputes or disturbances in Britain. It was first published in the *Irish Worker* in 1911.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ It had been serialised in the *Daily Herald* in 1923.

the SDF;(154) Bob Stiner chalks Marxian slogans on walls;(155) Rachel Martin reads *Capital*;(156) workers are 'the proletariat', the middle class 'bourgeois', engaged in 'class war' as a matter of routine vocabulary; religion is portrayed as the opium of the people; an analysis of the evils of capitalism is the focus of every chapter. The author clearly understood the dialectic of class struggle, that is the contradiction between the interests of capital and labour that made the revolt of working class and the defeat of the bourgeoisie inevitable. Indeed she had claimed to believe 'wholeheartedly in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' as early as 1920. Her way of explaining it then was: 'the holding down of those who have so long wronged the workers by the worker, until chaos changes into order, and the disorder of classes is transformed into the order of Humanity'.(157) The treatment of Marxist ideas in *This Slavery* shows a similar awareness of her audience and her continuing preference for engaging them in political thought through familiar forms. She was not writing a text book, rather she was trying to use her established accessibility to pull her readers a little further towards her own political position. Even so it was a bold step, for *This Slavery* requires more from the reader than does her earlier work.

Capitalism and its consequences is an all pervading presence in *This Slavery*, indeed it is this to which the book's title refers, and

(154) *This Slavery*, op.cit., p.8.

(155) *Ibid.*, p.27.

(156) *Ibid.*, p.33.

(157) *Women's Outlook*, September 1920, p.294. Ethel Carnie had made a similar attempt to explain this concept even earlier, in *Miss Nobody*. See p.119-120 above.

which the artist has represented as a controlling demon on the dust jacket.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Workers are consistently called 'slaves' who live in 'the slime of a civilisation in which the few, a dark brigand band, gather the roses of culture, idleness and power.'⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ These 'few' are represented in *This Slavery* as an alliance of mill owners, the police and the Church. Most of the mill owners are based on the standard caricature of the selfish, philistine exploiter, but one, Sanderson, is treated more fully. He is never an attractive character, but initially the author at least shows him getting on through his ambition and his efforts rather than through inheritance, and he acts kindly towards Hester when he finds her exhausted after her attempt to raise the money for granny's funeral by busking in the streets of Redburn. But it is a self-serving not a genuine kindness, just part of his strategy for luring Hester into a marriage that nothing but desperation would have allowed her to consider. He emerges as an anti-intellectual,⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ anti-semitic⁽¹⁶¹⁾ philanderer⁽¹⁶²⁾ who causes an outbreak of diphtheria because of his failure to mend the drains, and who is thus responsible for the death of his own son. He compounds his crime by trying to blame it on a household servant.⁽¹⁶³⁾

However even Sanderson's is only a symbolic role in *This Slavery*. He is there in all his awfulness to facilitate Ethel Carnie Holdworth's

(158) See Appendix 21.

(159) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.14.

(160) *Ibid.*, p.86.

(161) *Ibid.*

(162) *Ibid.*, p.191.

(163) *Ibid.*, p.179

condemnation of capitalism and to enable it to get its come-uppance. Capitalism made Sanderson but it also destroyed him. He tries to meet loan and mortgage repayment deadlines by using blackleg labour to fulfil a big order only for the cloth and his factory to be set on fire by a scab who can not live with his betrayal of his class.(164) In *This Slavery* the police are characterised as dupes of the capitalists, part of the 'class which exists to keep slaves in their places.'(165) 'Slaves chosen from slaves.'(166) They are represented in the novel by O'Neill who kills a picket and is provided with an alibi by Sanderson.(167) But he, too, gets his come-uppance, forced by a bad conscience to confess.(168)

The third member of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's triumvirate, the Church, is also shown as in thrall to the capitalists, more responsible than the mill owners for the plight of the workers because of its hypocrisy. 'The Church says we shouldn't destroy life. What did the Church do to help her to cherish life? Did it fight the things and the folk that made her poor?' Rachel answers her own questions, which follow yet another worker's death through starvation, by condemning a Church which 'throughout its whole black and bloody history upheld the rotten traditions of them who have the power to go on murdering folk to keep that power.' It threw a tombstone at the starving weaver and asked her to wait until she was in heaven for justice.(169) 'The

(164) *Ibid.*, pp.250-251.

(165) *Ibid.*, p.16.

(166) *Ibid.*, p.26.

(167) *Ibid.*, p.214.

(168) *Ibid.*, p.253.

(169) *Ibid.*, p.100.

Church is a Murderer. It murders Truth, Reason, Liberty and Life, for it backs up all the temporal things that destroy them'.(170).

This is as comprehensive a condemnation of religion as there is anywhere in her writing. Even the Salvation Army, which usually earns her approval, and in *This Slavery* is congratulated for having 'no damned bishops wi' thousands a year',(171) is criticised as just like the rest, reflecting the world's selfishness in its teaching of an unforgiving hell for the outcast, the unchosen.(172)

However it is mainly with the consequences of capitalism in this life, not the next, that *This Slavery* is concerned. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had described these consequences many times before, but never so graphically. The detail is overwhelming - the Martins live in Ryan Street, a 'Hades of poverty'(173) where the houses are 'a double row of rabbit-hutches',(174) women were 'mothers in their spare time',(175) families lived on potato peelings(176) or ham bones,(177) and had trouble keeping up with burial club payments.(178) The psychological strain was as bad as the physical - it thwarted young love(179) and destroyed all appreciation of beauty,(180) it forced Rachel and her mother to dress up when they went to a neighbour to ask for food, in the hope that people would think they were out on the business of granny's funeral

(170) *Ibid.*, p.101.

(171) *Ibid.*, p.114. It is to the Salvation Army that Nan turns for help. See *The Taming of Nan*, *op.cit.*, p.204.

(172) *Ibid.*, p.49.

(179) *Ibid.*, p.45.

(173) *Ibid.*, p.13.

(180) *Ibid.*, p.50.

(174) *Ibid.*, p.22.

(175) *Ibid.*, p.23.

(176) *Ibid.*, p.47.

(177) *Ibid.*, p.34.

(178) *Ibid.*, p.41.

rather than starving,(181) they lived in constant fear of 'policemen, soldiers, law, Church, State, Moneyed Interest forever against them'.(182)

Working conditions matched living conditions in their grimness - eleven year olds choked on cotton fibres as they cleaned moving machinery(183) and were sometimes scalped by it.(184) Mill owners speeded up looms to maximise profits and paid overlookers a percentage of their workers' wages to ensure their collaboration.(185) The hopeless acceptance of their slavery led outsiders to think mill workers were 'contented'.(186) Those without work were forced to poach, to pawn, to beg or to apply to the workhouse.(187) The author blames widespread drunkenness on these conditions, but she views it sympathetically - 'Who th' hell can be sober, allus, in a world like this?' asks Stiner. (188) The workers in the story know that 'Drink doesn't cause poverty'(189) but, rather, that poverty leads to drunkenness, and are excused. It is the rich, who drink as much as anyone, who are condemned, for they do not need a cheap escape from their misery. (190)

Despite all this Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's proletariat are good neighbours who share food and fuel when they have it,(191) and those with work help those without.(192) By contrast the bourgeoisie lead

(181) *Ibid.*, p.78.

(182) *Ibid.*, p.30.

(183) *Ibid.*, p.15.

(184) *Ibid.*, p.79.

(185) *Ibid.*, p.141.

(186) *Ibid.*, p.64.

(187) *Ibid.*, p.106.

(188) *Ibid.*, p.11.

(189) *Ibid.*, p.173.

(190) *Ibid.*, p.180.

(191) *Ibid.*, p.63.

(192) *Ibid.*, p.80.

superficial, mannered lives debased by artificial behaviour. Mrs Martin, who goes to live with Hester after her daughter's marriage to Sanderson, sees 'how foolish it seemed to ring the bell of the house where you lived - waiting for a paid servant to let you in,'(193) and how false was the polite conversation of those who lived without working. It made them stiff because they had nothing real to say to each other.(194) Their tea-time talk is about bothersome flies, the excellence of the scones and the immorality of free love, but these 'views' are stated as incontestable facts, they are never discussed, so they lead to awkward silences in the dialogue.(195)

The portrait of proletarian and bourgeois life shown in *This Slavery* gives a stereotyped view of early twentieth century society. It is a society in which the class war is clear cut - the workers are good and exploited, the bosses are bad and rich, socialism will bring justice to the deserving. What animates the stereotype is the introduction of four characters who are products of such a society and who are used to explore a solution to its ills. It is not an exploration with a convincing outcome and the characters are not uniformly well realised, nevertheless this aspect of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's method justifies the structure of the novel because Stiner, Baines, Hester and Rachel are memorable creations, whose fate is of concern to the reader. Their presence prevents the novel from reading like just another Marxist

(193) *Ibid.*, p.202.

(194) *Ibid.*

(195) *Ibid.*, p.229.

polemic, and at the same time offers stimulating ideas about the role that Marxism, socialism, unions and democracy could play in the establishment of a better world.

Bob Stiner is unemployed and often drunk, a victim of the capitalist system but not prepared to compromise with it to ease his suffering. He refuses to use the workhouse or the chance of blackleg work. He sees himself as an Omar Khayyam for his times, chalking revolutionary messages on walls or flagstones in the belief that he is contributing to international brotherhood.⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ After an unprovoked beating by the police and an unwarranted prison sentence from the magistrate he continues his propaganda crusade. His messages are brief: 'Workers of the World Unite', 'Socialism is the hope of the World', 'You cannot serve God and Mammon',⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ but Stiner is prepared to elaborate upon them to anyone who will listen. His views are portrayed as eternal truths under attack. His mission is to keep them alive at all costs, to foil the capitalist attempt to silence the voice of the Left. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses Stiner's time in jail to develop an analysis of state control. His fight with the policeman O'Neill was like the fight of the people against the state, she says. The odds against the people were overwhelming, 'it was the triumph of a machine over humanity',⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ it yolked the people to an old tradition

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.31. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth knew that spreading the word this way was a common tactic forced on early socialists by financial considerations. It was cheap. See Cowman, K., 'Incipient Toryism? The Women's Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903-14', *History Workshop Journal* (53, 2002) p.137.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.26.

which eliminated those strong enough to speak out against it.(199) Through Stiner she shows her belief that 'caste' rather than 'class' would more accurately describe the way society was organised in Britain than in India, a system which divided small traders from big business, shop girls from mill hands and bank clerks from weavers by the illusion that they were 'different'.(200) This caste system divided families too, for Stiner's criminal record forced him to leave home so that his wife and children could hold their heads up in their community. It forced them to 'aspire to caste'.(201) It taught them to think of class distinctions as inevitable. It drove workers who could not reach the required production quota to suicide.(202)

It is through Jack Baines that we see something of Ethel Carnie Holdworth's view of the role of the unions in the class war. As a trade union official Baines represents the workers' case to the masters. They will strike unless the 5% pay cut imposed during the slump is restored now that boom conditions prevail again, unless driving (speeding up machinery) and the slate-system (advertising to all what each worker earns) are stopped, and unless the manager who caused a girl to kill herself because she was not working fast enough is dismissed.(203) There is nothing surprising in this, it reflects a standard response to injustice. What is surprising is the fierce criticism to

(199) *Ibid.*

(200) *Ibid.*, p.27.

(201) *Ibid.*, p.29.

(202) *Ibid.*

(203) *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

which the author subjects the union's position. Through Hester, who has to act as an 'Ambassadress of Capital'(204) in the absence of Sanderson, Baines is ridiculed for the timidity of his demands. Hester belittles the union as a mere go-between on petty matters when it should be advocating freedom and the 'wholesale destruction of Private Interests.' (205) She claims that the union's action will only put a higher price on the workers' slavery, not destroy it, and she asks Baines how long this namby-pamby attitude will force the people to wait before capitalism is overthrown.(206) Hester represents the author's feelings in the early 1920s when she says that the unions ought to be laying down their lives to save the people from slavery.(207) It is not 5% but 100% that they should be demanding. The proof of this comes in Baines's response to Hester's harangue. He spends the night on the fells reflecting on what she has said and comes round to her point of view. This shift is expressed through the image of the dawn. The beauty of the new day helps him realise that the sun does not compromise with the night(208) and that he must not compromise with capital. He resolves to make rebels, not beggars for 5%, of his

(204) *Ibid.*, p.139.

(205) *Ibid.*, p.143.

(206) *Ibid.*

(207) *Ibid.*, p.144. Gustav Klaus claims that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was a union organiser. In correspondence with me he cites Ashraf, P.M., *Introduction to Working Class Literature in Great Britain Part II : Prose* (Berlin, 1979) as his source, but I can not find it there. Susan Bruley, *op.cit.*, p.204, suggests that politicised mill girls as young as thirteen were union activists in north east Lancashire in the 1920s, and she gives Bessie Dickinson of the Nelson Weavers Union, who applauded Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's 1917 red flag gesture, (see p.130 above) as an example. But although the role of union organiser would fit comfortably into Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's profile, the evidence for it is at best circumstantial, and can be supplemented from her fiction only by Carrie's actions in *Miss Nobody* and those of Hester and Rachel in *This Slavery*.

(208) *Ibid.*, p.146.

members. This identification of the interests of the workers with Light and of the capitalists with Dark is exactly the language and imagery Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses in *The Clear Light*.

She gives Baines good qualities. His selflessness is magnificent - he donates his £300 savings to the strikers when union funds are exhausted and he cares for Hester, thrown out of her home when Sanderson discovers her fifth column activities. But he is a man and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fictional dilemmas are resolved by women, so Baines makes his conversion to revolution conditional on first settling the strike by traditional means,(209) and he is rattled by Sanderson's jibe that 'Socialists have private interests of your own...we are not the only class that makes pawns of the mob.'(210) Sanderson means that Baines is harnessing the passion of the workers because of his passion for Hester, and Baines recognises the truth of this. The confusion into which it throws him allows the novel's denouement to be assumed by women, its joint heroines Hester and Rachel.

It is clear from Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's writing that there were two sides to her character, the revolutionary firebrand and the gentle pacifist. Both sides were born of a deep humanity and a conviction that good could overcome evil if right thinking people tried hard enough. Her ideas about how such a victory could be achieved changed according to circumstances although the creation of a united Labour front was always her preferred option. By the time *This Slavery*

(209) *Ibid.*

(210) *Ibid.*, p.245.

was revised and published her faith in this option and been shaken - the SDF was a spent force by 1914 and Hyndman supported Britain's involvement in the war; fitful ILP/Labour Party co-operation was shattered by Ramsay MacDonald's repudiation of the ILP's 'Socialism in Our Time' as the basis for the policies of his government after 1924. But she still believed that the individual could make a difference if political parties faltered. The question for her was how. It is the question at the heart of *This Slavery*. She looks for the answer by casting Hester and Rachel in roles that represent her own inner conflict.

Hester seems less well equipped to cope with poverty than her sister because of her gentle, sensitive qualities. She feels the suffering of others as if it were her own. The death of granny is described mainly through Hester's eyes.(211) It is an intense and harrowing experience conveyed with a conviction that suggests understanding gained from a death in the author's family. She finds consolation in music (212) and, briefly, the love of Baines. For Hester the curse of capitalism is its threat to individuality,(213) that is it forces her to make choices that lead either to material or spiritual deprivation and kill her artistic nature. Her heroic stature is emphasised because she lacks Rachel's robustness and is exposed to greater hardship. When she tries to raise the money to pay for granny's funeral by playing her

(211) *Ibid.*, p.65.

(212) *Ibid.*, p.38.

(213) *Ibid.*

violin for three hours in the rain in Redburn she earns a shilling, and she sacrifices ninepence of that rather than accept a free meal from Sanderson who tries to use her distress to win her affection.⁽²¹⁴⁾ Her only way home is a terrifying walk along the unlit canal.⁽²¹⁵⁾ The church on its banks is no solace, like all but granny in *This Slavery* Hester sees religion as an ally of the state and an oppressor of the people, but she takes courage from reciting fragments of poetry to reach home in the early hours soaked and feverish.

Coincidence deepens Hester's despair. Stiner forgets to deliver her note accepting a proposal of marriage from Baines, who leaves for America.⁽²¹⁶⁾ A tip-off about work in the next valley comes to nothing.⁽²¹⁷⁾ Hester is reduced by the author to a position of hopelessness, unable to believe in revolution by the poor, conversion to decency by the rich, or the mercy of God.⁽²¹⁸⁾ In this state she is, it seems, made to forsake her values, betray her class, and marry Sanderson. She gives her reasons with disarming frankness - 'You are my only means of escape,' 'I am tired of being a slave,' 'I want Life - now'.⁽²¹⁹⁾ At this point in the story Sanderson represents freedom for Hester, but her capitulation has its immediate corollary. The action moves forward six years and Hester reviews her position - 'she thought that freedom lay in the possession of things,'⁽²²⁰⁾ 'she had entered the cage of the bourgeois world, and a new slavery,'⁽²²¹⁾ her

⁽²¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ See Appendix 22.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.175.

⁽²¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*, p.111.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.121-122.

⁽²²⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁽²²¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.138.

bracelet had become a 'slave bangle'.⁽²²²⁾

But this turn of events is more than a rags to riches to regret melodrama. Hester is put in this position so that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth can analyse the response of the proletariat to capitalism more closely. Betrayal of her class at least gave her children a childhood and protection from poverty. At least it had given her 'the wonder and the flowers of motherhood.'⁽²²³⁾ It saved her the anguish of lying and denying herself in order to feed her family, and only turned her from a slave of many to a slave of one.⁽²²⁴⁾ Hester argues that this compromise is no worse than the compromise of those who choose instead to continue accepting the slavery of their 'religious, educational, political and economic' masters.⁽²²⁵⁾ Her ordeal has given her a new definition of freedom - a world where none need sell and none need buy⁽²²⁶⁾ - and she will not accept that Baines's commitment to the proletariat has done more to make this a reality than has her defection to the bourgeoisie.

It is a spirited defence of her actions but its purpose is to correct the novel's representatives of good, not to destroy them. Hester's conscience is pricked by William Morris' dream in *News From Nowhere*. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses the allegorical style of *The Clear Light* to help Hester explain the dream to her son.⁽²²⁷⁾ This enables Hester to take the road to martyrdom by giving her jewels to

⁽²²²⁾ *Ibid.*, p.141.

⁽²²³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁽²²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²²⁵⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²²⁶⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²²⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.148-149.

the strikers,(228) by advising the union of the bosses' plans to use blackleg labour and the militia to break the strike,(229) and to bring the crisis to a peaceful conclusion by presenting proof that the bosses will give in and grant the 5% wage increase.(230) But unlike Morris' soldiers who bury their guns and grow corn over them after the Last Battle, the Whitleigh militia ignore Hester's plea 'Brothers in bondage, comrades of poverty. Don't shoot your own'.(231) They open fire and kill her.

Mary Ashraf is critical of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's use of two women in leading roles. She says this creates a psychological problem which overshadows, rather than mediates, the class conflict which should be the novel's chief concern.(232) The focus is on the turmoil in Hester's mind when it should be on the rising tension of the masses. As a result, Ashraf says, the novel's purpose is not clear - does Hester's martyrdom signify the author's belief that wealth is an illusion which costs integrity and loyalty, or that the enemy's bullets make no distinction between those they kill, or that armed confrontation is the inevitable outcome of the class struggle?(233)

Ashraf's reservations are unfounded, for the dual heroine device is one of the novel's greatest strengths. Hester's place in it seems quite clear. The author calls Hester the pivot of her story.(234) Her actions

(228) *Ibid.*, p.236.

(229) *Ibid.*, p.167.

(230) *Ibid.*, p.254.

(231) *Ibid.*, p.255.

(232) Ashraf, P.M., *op.cit.*, pp.189-190.

(233) *Ibid.*, p.192.

(234) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*,p.246.

certainly guide the plot of *This Slavery* and her decision to side with the people leads to her final tragedy. Hester is the author's warning to the masters that they face 'the revolt of the gentle' (235) as well as of the brutalised, and that the strength of an artistic temperament 'is more to be feared than that which spends itself, letting off steam as it goes.'(236) Through Hester Ethel Carnie Holdsworth is justifying her own role in the class war - the gentle side of her nature provides the stamina to continue writing that is vital in an on-going struggle.

However, anxious to claim *This Slavery* as a Marxist text, Ashraf approves the creation of Rachel. Ashraf considers her to be the novel's star, convincing because she was the product of a writer who 'was nearer to the real processes within society'(237) and who knew that poverty alone would not produce revolutionary consciousness. It needed the study of Marx as well. By making Rachel read *Capital* the author shows a qualitative change in political thinking, says Ashraf, that was germinating amongst workers. As a result *This Slavery* marks an advance in realistic method in fictional writing,(238) its aim is no longer simply to describe workers' lives, but to rouse workers to act.(239)

This had been Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's aim since her outburst in *Women Folk* in 1910,(240) so *This Slavery* is less of an advance than

(235) *Ibid.*, p.19.

(236) *Ibid.*

(237) Ashraf, P.M., *op.cit.*, p.194.

(238) *Ibid.*

(239) *Ibid.*, p.198.

(240) *Women Folk*, 23 May 1910, p.163.

Ashraf suggests. Nevertheless I share her enthusiasm for Rachel, possibly the first fictional female militant Marxist, who, in my view, represents the author's most extreme response to capitalism. Rachel despairs of those in the working class who passively accept their predicament by pretending to have food when they have not, and by denying themselves marriage because they can not afford to have children.(241) She sees coping in a capitalist world as a matter of the survival of the fittest(242) and is puzzled by Hester's reluctance to fight for a seat on a tram or a place in a butcher's queue.(243) Part of the answer is that they are only half sisters. Rachel was the daughter of the mill owner Barstock who took advantage of her mother's need to pay for medical attention for her sick husband.(244) Rachel dissociates herself totally from the idea of inherited capitalist characteristics. The discovery of her parentage guarantees her revolutionary credentials. Witnesses wonder whether she is a socialist or an anarchist but Rachel makes it clear that the only label that counts is one that identifies her hatred of the capitalist class. She calls her father a hypocritical, thieving devil and vows to put a bullet through him when the revolution comes.(245)

Rachel frequently confirms her self-image as a militant revolutionary prepared to kill if necessary to ensure victory in the class war.(246)

(241) *This Slavery, op.cit.*, p.36.

(242) *Ibid.*

(243) *Ibid.*, p.69.

(244) *Ibid.*, p.58.

(245) *Ibid.*, p.56.

(246) See, for example, *Ibid.*, pp.60 and 118.

It is the position that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had reluctantly argued herself into by the early 1920s. Characters in her earlier fiction who clearly reflect her thought refer to pacifism as a lost belief,(247) and in *This Slavery* even Hester sees it as a part of her past.(248) But that does not mean that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had abandoned a constitutional approach to the fight against capitalism, for non-violent alternatives to bloody revolution are explored through Rachel's role as well. The mill fire that made her unemployed gave her time to study Marx. Rachel describes the effect of this in impressionistic rather than concrete terms - 'I can feel myself *expanding*, evolving...I shall become a scientific Revolutionist.'(249) She is anxious to teach others what she learns. The author does not engineer regular opportunities for this as does Tressall with his tea break lectures in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* but socialism is nevertheless explained in *This Slavery*. However it is consistently characterised as the salvation of the workers, as a humanising and unifying force.(250) Rachel uses the term 'socialist' to show that despite their differences she and Hester share the same goals. She articulates these in an impromptu speech whilst the crowd waits for the delayed official socialist speaker to arrive. They are general rather than specific goals, following Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's usual format in her fictional polemical passages - an end to a world divided into classes and nations; an end to

(247) *General Belinda*, *op.cit.*, p.292.

(248) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.139.

(249) *Ibid.*, p.96.

(250) See, for example, *Ibid.*, pp.97 and 167.

ignorance and apathy; peace, plenty, freedom and human brotherhood; and a Labour government.(251) Her work is full of noble slogans, they form part of all her anti-capitalist tirades and they have a jaded look about them by now. What is different here is her demand for a three hour working day.(252) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth felt a detailed socialist prospectus was unnecessary if this idea was adopted, for all other reforms would stem from it - it would create full employment, provide for the needs of all, and allow time for individual development. This may be an idiosyncratic way of defining socialism, but it transcended the conventional 'control of the means of production, distribution and exchange by the people' in her view because it was more readily understood.

Perhaps this suggests that she had an imperfect grasp of Marxist theory, and perhaps it adds weight to an image of her as an impractical, naive dreamer. Her notion that workers freed from drudgery would use their leisure time studying, making music or painting(253) is certainly optimistic, but it nevertheless had a valid function in *This Slavery* - to shock. The crowd gasps at Rachel's suggestion, and, surely, so does the reader. The three hour working day proposal shows that the author was continuing to search for new ways to make an impact.(254) In this respect she was successful.

(251) *Ibid.*, p.118.

(252) *Ibid.*

(253) *Ibid.*

(254) The author may owe the idea to the SDF which had advocated a three or four hour working day in the 1890s. See Shepherd, J., *George Lansbury*, *op.cit.*,p.47.

Some of *This Slavery's* scenes are sharp, some of the arguments clear, some of the characters memorable. If this led some readers to play a more active role in the creation of a fairer world Ethel Carnie Holdsworth would have been satisfied. At least that is what she says on the last page of the novel. She reverts to the label 'Democracy' to name the ultimate triumph of the people. She says it will have been gained by innumerable tiny contributions from the unremembered and the unhonoured, and she hopes, 'like a million Stiners, Baineses, Rachels and Hesters that she too will be forgotten, but that she will have played her part.(255)

This Slavery is an important guide to the development of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's thought. It shows the same concern for the oppressed, and the same anger against the oppressors that her earlier work does, but it also shows a growing impatience with strategies that had previously satisfied her, and a desire to try Marxist solutions now. However it is not easy to see precisely what Marxism meant to her from the novel. Even if she had a sound grasp of Marxist theory herself she faced the problem of how to communicate this to her audience. Susan Bruley has shown that a major cause of high CPGB membership turnover in the 1920s was the difficulty recruits had understanding the textbooks used in the party education programme,(256) and Stuart Macintyre suggests that even G. D. H. Cole

(255) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.256. The same sentiment had been expressed in 'Who Are The Great' (*Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*, p.88).

(256) Bruley, S., *op.cit.*, p.219.

and Harold Laski found Marx hard.(257) So although the characters in *This Slavery* read *Capital* its message is represented only through their actions. In this sense Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was following the advice of Lenin's *Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder*, which had been translated into English immediately on its publication in 1920 and recommended British Marxists to create revolution through easily understood propaganda. John Maclean was a master of this, and an influence on Ethel Carnie Holdsworth at the time she was writing *This Slavery*.

She was six years his junior, but in some respects her political history paralleled Maclean's. He joined the SDF in 1902 and felt that its failure to unite with the ILP in the 1890s had left the stage clear for a non-socialist Labour alliance. In 1911, convinced that Labour would never be an effective instrument for socialist growth despite its electoral success, he joined the BSP and became its most prominent anti-war propagandist.(258) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth may have met him in 1919 when he spoke in Nelson on 'The Coming Revolution', (259) for she was living there then. Maclean had the ability to present complex ideas simply that she strove for. For example he defined profit as unpaid labour, and Marx's theory of surplus value as a 'legalised burgling expedition against the working class'. (260) And when

(257) Macintyre, S., *op.cit.*, p.193.

(258) Howell, D., *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986) p.161.

(259) Liddington, J., *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel*, *op.cit.*, p.301.

(260) Macintyre, S., *op.cit.*, p.150.

asked at his trial in 1921 to explain what he meant by revolution he placed one hand, representing the workers, on top of the other, representing capitalism, reversing the traditional arrangement. This was the sort of accessible Marxism to which *This Slavery* aspired, and the inspiration behind the poetic tribute *The Clear Light* paid Maclean when he died:

Sleep well. If ever shadows fall.
If doubt should stay your hand
An echo of thy bugle-call
Shall give us courage grand.
Now dawn the struggle ripened years
(Though Winter frowns between)
We yet shall write thy name - with spears
Red-blossomed - John Maclean. (261)

This Slavery also shows that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was a committed feminist, convinced that women could solve the problems men caused. I have argued that Hester and Rachel are her alter egos, but the fact remains that in this novel the complement of strong women is doubled. This enables the author to re-affirm her feminist stance, for it gives her two voices through which to attack the male dominated nostrums - the unions, the Church, commerce, the law - with which the story deals. There is a romance story line in (261) *The Clear Light*, No.10, March 1924.

This Slavery, the love triangle involving Hester, Baines and Rachel, but it is never more than a sub-plot in the background of the main business of the novel, the causes and effects of the Brayton strike. Pamela Fox disagrees with this reading. She believes that the title *This Slavery* refers not only to the capitalist system but also to the bourgeois/patriarchal institution of courtship-marriage.⁽²⁶²⁾ She praises the author for giving prominence to romance in the plot of a serious working-class novel. In Fox's terms the private sphere is as important as the public in *This Slavery*. It allows a 'veiled critique' of the working class to be made through Hester's focus on dissatisfaction, longing and refusal in her relationships with Sanderson and Baines which, Fox says, amount to a redefinition of political narrative in working-class writing.⁽²⁶³⁾ This is an attractive proposition. Certainly Fox is right to criticise Mary Ashraf for relegating Hester to no more than a symbol of class treachery, and to remind us that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth condemns contemporary romance codes as 'distinctly harmful to women'.⁽²⁶⁴⁾ However in promoting Hester, Fox neglects Rachel and creates a view of the novel as unbalanced as Ashraf's. My view, argued above, is that both sisters were crucial to the author's purpose and that their roles should be equally valued.

(262) Fox, P., 'Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's 'Revolt of the Gentle': Romance and the Politics of Resistance in Working Class Women's Writing', in Ingram, A., and Patai, D., (eds.), *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals, British Women Writers 1889-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1993) p.67.

(263) *Ibid.*, p.72.

(264) *Ibid.*, p.67.

There is another problem with Fox's analysis of *This Slavery*. She claims that the portrayal of Hester shows the author's 'lingering sense of shamefulness surrounding working-class identity'.⁽²⁶⁵⁾ Ethel Carnie Holdsworth often used her fiction to criticise aspects of working-class identity, like gossiping, of which she disapproved, but to interpret Hester's experience as proof of shame in her working-class identity rather than despair and anger towards the way patriarchal/capitalist society was organised shows a misjudgement of the author due, perhaps, to a sketchy knowledge of her background (Fox says Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was from south Lancashire and she does not know when she died),⁽²⁶⁶⁾ and a familiarity with her writing limited to only two novels. In all her work Ethel Carnie Holdsworth identifies proudly with the working class. What she was ashamed about was the capitalist system that oppressed it.

This Slavery gives a new view of the author's attitude towards religion. Despite consistent criticism of the Church throughout her career she had always seemed deeply religious,⁽²⁶⁷⁾ but in this novel her rejection of religion in any form is bitter and total. Even the natural beauty of north east Lancashire seems unable to provide the pantheistic comfort it once did, for the sort of lyrical pastoral descriptions common in her earlier work are rare here, and they

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ See, for example, 'Night' (*Rhymes from the Factory*, p.5); 'Civilization' (*Voices of Womanhood*, p.77); *Helen of Four Gates*, p.71; *General Belinda*, p.199.

usually reflect the harshness of winter - wind-tossed trees cower under brassy-edged clouds;(268) black ling pokes through ground white with 'the ermine of the Poor';(269) violets mark Stiner's death, not, as he intended, reconciliation with his wife.(270) The whole spectrum of the Church from Salvationist to Catholic is indicted now, and the Bible has become a pack of lies.(271) Religion has assumed a major role in her analysis of the capitalist plot.

1925, the date of *This Slavery's* publication, if not its composition, was a watershed in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work. Her earlier writing, whether journalism or fiction, had been gradually moving towards the position she adopted then. She could go no further with *The Clear Light* because it was a financial millstone. She could do no more for the cause with her fiction than endorse the violent overthrow of the state.

Although the novels after *This Slavery* contained less social and political comment and experimented with plots that in some respects were unlike those of her earlier work, her revolutionary ardour remained strong, as did her confidence in her propaganda style. This is well illustrated by her response to a critical review of *This Slavery* in the *Sunday Worker*.(272) 'Peachem' had accused her of bourgeois

(268) *This Slavery*, *op.cit.*, p.40.

(269) *Ibid.*, p.106.

(270) *Ibid.*, p198-200.

(271) *Ibid.*, p.43.

(272) The *Sunday Worker* was the paper of the National Left Wing, Labour Party supporters sympathetic to CPGB affiliation.

tendencies by allowing a romance element to intrude on a story of revolution.(273) In a spirited reply she dismissed 'Peachem' as a feeble and degenerate 'amateur assassin' who needed to get out more. If he did, she said, he would find romance amongst the proletariat, for his theory of 'mass control of mass destinies' was nothing but intellectual claptrap.(274)

Early in 1926 there was an industrial dispute in Barnoldswick and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's *Sunday Worker* piece on it(275) recalls the language and sentiment of her recent novel. She criticises the authorities for bringing sixteen extra police to the town, with the threat of more to follow. It was an act of deliberate provocation against a demoralised work force in her view. The locked-out mill hands were grim-faced but they were peaceful, helping each other when they could or pulling uncomprehending children past the unaffordable temptations of a cake shop. Bitter, but enduring, as usual. What is revealing is the author's response to a grandmother who told her ragged grandchild 'I'll knock your brains out if you're not a good girl'. It made her cry. She knew it was an unnatural reprimand caused by yet another period of poverty. Her question 'How long, O Workers, will you endure these tortures? How long before you lock them out, whose inhuman interests murder you ... body and soul?' could have been made as easily by Rachel of Redburn as by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth of

(273) *Sunday Worker*, 5 July 1925.

(274) *Ibid.*, 26 July 1925.

(275) *Ibid.*, 28 March 1926, p.8.

Barnoldswick.(276)

June Hannam and Karen Hunt have examined the attempts made in the 1910s and 1920s to encourage the political development of women through their involvement in consumption. They describe the efforts of the National Women's Council of the British Socialist Party for example, which in 1914 petitioned for the nationalisation of food production and distribution, claiming that in private hands unjustified increases in the price of necessities had been introduced.(277)

Although I have argued that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had links with the BSP, I have no evidence of her connection with the National Women's Council's campaign. Nevertheless the politics of consumption is relevant to her work. Her interest in it is, however, buried deep within the pages of her last three novels. Her earlier work had frequently dealt with inadequate wages, but she rarely mentioned costs. What she really wanted was to get rid of a system which excluded so many from the pleasures that lay beyond the struggle for survival. Her last novels by contrast are concerned with the consequences of wealth rather than the causes of poverty. In this final phase of her activism she focused on the conspicuous consumption of the 1920s and tried to use it to trigger protest against squandered resources and greed.

(276) I have found no references to the General Strike of 1926 in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's journalism.

(277) Hannam,J., and Hunt,K., *Socialist Women: Britain 1880s to 1920s*, op.cit., p.143.

The following section considers this aspect of her work. It also deals with a major consequence of her separation from Alfred Holdsworth - her changing views on the role of marriage in society. I seek here to show how plot aberrations dilute the effectiveness of her propaganda style and the power of her message, but still confirm her belief in a process begun a decade earlier - that she could best serve the cause of socialism by writing.

3.6. THE QUEST OF THE GOLDEN GARTER, 1927

The contrast between *This Slavery* and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's next novel, *The Quest of the Golden Garter* could not be sharper, for it is a gangster story. Crime fiction was a popular genre during her lifetime. One branch, typified by Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown and Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly, featured the detective as a romantic hero and protector of civilization. Another, typified by E.W. Hornung's Raffles or Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Manchu, gave the hero's role to the criminal. A third belonged exclusively to Edgar Wallace whose prolific output lasted from 1906 when *The Four Just Men* was published, through the 1920s when his creation J.G. Reader dealt with the crimes of *Room 13* (1924), *Terror Keep* (1927) and *Red Aces* (1929). Women are also prominent during 'the golden age' of detective fiction in the 1920s and 1930s. Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was published in 1920, Dorothy L. Sayers' *Whose Body?* in 1923, and

Margery Allingham's *The Crime at Black Dudley* in 1929. However they were not polemicists. They came from and wrote about the middle and upper classes and did not try to make socio-political points through their work as Ethel Carnie Holdsworth did.

Most of the great American gangster story writers made their breakthroughs after Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's activism came to an end. Damon Runyon's *Guys and Dolls* appeared in 1931 and *The Big Sleep*, which starred Raymond Chandler's private eye Philip Marlow, not until 1939. Dashiell Hammett's best know detective, Sam Spade, hero of *The Maltese Falcon* also belongs to the 1930s, although his Continental Op stories were first published in *The Black Mask*, a magazine of detective fiction founded by H.L. Mencken and George Nathan, in 1923.

None of these writers are referred to directly by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, but her decision to use the crime novel as a vehicle for her message suggests that she had a familiarity with the genre, and especially with the work of the Americans, perhaps through her interest in film,⁽²⁷⁸⁾ for *The Quest of the Golden Garter* follows the fortunes of a group of jewel thieves of the hard-bitten Hammett type.

Perhaps it was bought or borrowed by those who, from previous experience of the author, thought they could rely on her for a good read. If so they would have been disappointed. The opening scenes of

(278) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's hope that this novel would be filmed is shown in the contract she signed with Herbert Jenkins for the publication of *The Quest of the Golden Garter*. See Memorandum of Agreement, undated, p.3, Barrie and Jenkins archive, Random House, London.

metropolitan highlife are well managed, the author perhaps buoyed by the challenge of the new form, but after the heist the plot disintegrates. One of the gang is shot during the robbery and the leader and his moll try to escape across a marsh. He perishes, but she is rescued by fishermen, having lost both her memory and the ability to speak. A storm and a shipwreck restore her faculties but her face has been disfigured and her hair has turned white. She discovers that she is in the village where she was born and that the aunts who brought her up, now dead, have left her 'everything'. She uses the money to train as a singer and becomes a star of the opera.

The effect is comic rather than dramatic, but once again, beneath an unconvincing story line, the author's purpose and message remain the same. The clue is in the dedication - 'To honest folk who strive to build a better world amidst hypocrisies and strife'. *The Quest of the Golden Garter* is really a morality tale about what happens to a poor country girl who goes to the big city - she is corrupted by it. Decent values retreat in the face of greed. The point is embellished in the poem that precedes chapter one entitled 'Today and Tomorrow'. The heartless rich are characterised as Greed, denying Liberty to the poor for their own selfish ends. But Freeman, with honest and caring standards, return the Mother to her birthright of equality in the end.

This is an optimistic novel. Good triumphs over evil. Billy, a representative of the idle rich, is changed by news of a mine

disaster.(279) He redeems his pointless life and helps Lydia, who joined the Golden Garter Gang out of desperation, a green, starving and friendless newcomer to London, to redeem hers. The gang's activities are inimical, but one of its members, Slimmy (the breaking and entering expert), is portrayed sympathetically. He, too, is a victim, in crime to fund his drug habit, but dreaming of a fair society where he can lead an honest life. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth uses him to appeal for socialist equality, or at least for an end to capitalist indifference. 'You take all and give nothing' Lydia says to her rich friends. It is an attitude that acts as a recruiting sergeant for dishonesty. The poor are forced to 'gather ye rosebuds while ye may,' and so a society corrupted by greed is perpetuated.(280) Expediency becomes 'the father of Dishonesty and Cowardice' as the exploited hesitate to unmask the exploiters, and try to join them.(281)

The idea of tackling capitalism like this is a good one. The novel shows that the author was still looking for new ways to say something worthwhile. But it was badly planned, the second half smacking of desperation and failing to fulfil the promise of the first.

In fact *The Quest of the Golden Garter* is only half the usual length of a popular novel of the time. Presumably the publisher was expecting the regulation 80,000 words out of which to produce a 300 plus page book.(282) He got 45,000, and artificially bulked this up to a

(279) Holdsworth, E.C., *The Quest of the Golden Garter* (Herbert Jenkins, London, 1927) p.65.

(280) *Ibid.*, p.133.

(281) *Ibid.*, p.92.

(282) Memorandum of Agreement between Ethel Holdsworth and Herbert Jenkins re. *The Quest of the Golden Garter*, *op.cit.*, p.4.

saleable 274 pages by the use of a larger than usual type face and heavier than usual paper. This may explain why the arrangement between publisher and author was ended. Herbert Jenkins issued no more of her work. It is perhaps significant that she chose the name Jenkins for her chief baddie, the leader of the Golden Garter Gang.⁽²⁸³⁾ It may be just coincidence of course, or did Ethel Carnie Holdsworth fit Herbert Jenkins' contractual terms into the picture of greed and exploitation that becomes the message of this novel? Certainly his royalties offer for *The Quest of the Golden Garter* in 1927 was less generous than the one he made for *Helen of Four Gates* in 1915.⁽²⁸⁴⁾

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth appropriated the crime novel on this occasion as part of her established practice of trying to reach a wide audience with a socialist message through a popular form. Perhaps the novelty sustained her initially, but she had to accept its ultimate failure. She did not try the genre again.

3.7. BARBARA DENNISON, 1929

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's separation from her husband in 1928 had a profound influence on her next novel, *Barbara Dennison*. She was always alive to the drawbacks of marriage and frequently commented on its potential for trapping people in miserable relationships.

(283) At least this is the name he goes by for most of the story. His real name is Shaney.

(284) The contract for *Helen* promised 15% on sales over 5,000. That for *Quest* 12.5% on sales over 2,000. In other respects the contracts are identical, except that in the case of *Quest* Kinema and Dramatisation rights were reserved to the author. It was never filmed however. (Barrie and Jenkins archive, *op.cit.*).

Despite this her earlier fiction had usually viewed marriage favourably - it was doubly celebrated with the unions of Polly and Adam, and Susan and Bob in *The Taming of Nan*, and it provided happy endings for *Miss Nobody*, *The House That Jill Built* and *General Belinda*. In those novels however marriage was not a major theme. In *Barbara Dennison* it is.

Changes had occurred in the law regarding marriage and divorce since *General Belinda* had been written, although Ruth Adam suggests that they made little difference to the position of working-class women. She argues that despite the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 which made adultery by husbands grounds for divorce for wives for the first time, in real life the stigma attached to divorce, and the opposition of the Church to change, prevented this and other recommendations of the 1912 Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce from becoming effective until the 1937 Herbert Act.⁽²⁸⁵⁾ Roderick Philips disagrees. He points out that in 1925 the Poor Persons' Rules were introduced in assize courts specifically to put easier divorce within the reach of the working class.⁽²⁸⁶⁾ There had in fact been a four and a half fold increase in the number of decrees absolute granted between 1910 and 1920, a rise usually attributed to the upheavals of the First World War,⁽²⁸⁷⁾ nevertheless Lesley Hall maintains that those developments

(285) Adam, R., *A Woman's Place, 1910-1975* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975) p.18.

(286) Philips, R., *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991) pp.192-193.

(287) Hall, L., *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (Macmillan, Basingstoke and London, 2000) p.84.

led to the dissolution of relatively few working-class marriages, and that brutality and humiliation remained the common experience of working-class women.(288) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fiction endorses that view.

It is mental rather than physical cruelty that lies behind the breakdown of marriage in *Barbara Dennison*, but it is relevant to Hall's argument because of the solution it proposes. Hall claims that dissatisfaction with the existing matrimonial situation, though great, did not lead to a demand for the abolition of marriage.(289) Indeed, she says, prominent supporters of liberalisation of the divorce laws like Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter saw it as a means of enabling individuals to make new and healthier marriages. This is not the position Ethel Carnie Holdsworth adopts in her 1929 novel however. Here she is more critical than anywhere else of the corrosive qualities of marriage as she charts its ruinous effect on two couples, and calls for it to be scrapped in its current form.

Barbara and Chrichie are incompatible. She is sensitive, sensual with a warm concern for people. He is materialistic and spiritually barren. She responds to nature, he does not. In the Peachley marriage it is Flora who is materialistic and soulless, capable of cruel unconcern for her son in pain from toothache.(290) By contrast

(288) *Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

(289) Hall's view is seconded by Lucy Bland. See her *Banishing The Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (Penguin, London, 1995) p.133.

(290) Holdsworth, E.C., *Barbara Dennison* (Stanley Paul, London, 1929) p.135.

Fred is caring of their children, a thwarted scholar who likes to spend his spare time learning languages.

Clearly circumstances have paired the wrong individuals. Chrichie is consumed by money-making and maintaining the social standards expected of the middle class. Barbara's indifference to wealth puzzles him until he 'recalled that women had small outlooks,' and so 'could not grasp the bigness of a thing like men.'⁽²⁹¹⁾ He uses the same faulty reasoning to explain Barbara's refusal to accept his view that the working class is content with its lot. But Flora agrees with him. She admired men who were prepared to exploit others to get on, and could not believe that the exploited minded. To her they were mere automata. Not surprisingly both Chrichie and Flora hate democracy. For them it was 'rowdyism', an unjustified intrusion on their selfish complacency.⁽²⁹²⁾

Fred was 'one of those bewildered dreamers caught in the cog wheels of life's grind.'⁽²⁹³⁾ He earns Flora's contempt because he sees the profit of his knowledge of languages in the pleasure that reading Montaigne in the original gives him, rather than in the income it could generate, and because he prefers to move to plebeian Hammersmith and still have time to spend with his children rather than work longer hours to afford a house in a smarter area. He earns Chrichie's contempt because he felt the equal of anyone and got 'worked up about

⁽²⁹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁽²⁹²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.136-138.

⁽²⁹³⁾ *Ibid.*, p.17.

people who were starving.'⁽²⁹⁴⁾

So Ethel Carnie Holdsworth seems to set the stage for a change of partners to correct the cruel trick fate has played on these four. Clearly Barbara and Fred deserve each other and so do Chrichie and Flora. But the author only goes part way down this road. Sure enough by chapter five the philistines have started an affair, but Barbara and Fred remain faithful to their marriage vows. Fred is tempted by no one. Barbara is, by Dave, the Rimton blacksmith with whom she was brought up, both orphans saved from the workhouse by Sarah and Dan, their saintly foster parents. The relationship is intense because it is based on a shared love of music and nature - 'For half an hour, as they walked through the bracken, she had not spoken, too happy to speak ...all forgotten but this rolling space and glory and beauty and silence broken only by voice of bird or sound of running water, and ever this incense of earth-fragrance flung up from bracken and earth touched by rain and sun.'⁽²⁹⁵⁾

However Barbara and Dave are made to resist their passion. She determines to accept society's expectations rather than her own inclinations - 'I've realised that one or other (partner in marriage) has to pretend, and I shall till I care more about Chrichie's ideas on systematized business than I do about Chopin.'⁽²⁹⁶⁾ He makes the best of his disappointment by marrying a worthy Rimton girl.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, pp.145 and 148.

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.227.

So *Barbara Dennison* is a tale of incompatibility, infidelity and selfishness through which Ethel Carnie Holdsworth explores her ideas about marriage in the late 1920s. The novel opens on the first anniversary of Barbara's marriage, just as it is starting to disintegrate, her infatuation with Chrichie over. Her experience makes her form opinions which the author presents as universal truths -'two people meet, grow wild about each other, feel they can't go on without each other, take a house, live there all their lives and spend a big lot of time wondering why they did such a thing.'⁽²⁹⁷⁾ This is an opinion with which both Barbara and Ethel would have been familiar before they married, but in neither case was the knowledge of value, both married and both marriages failed.

Ethel's point seems to be that being forewarned of failure does not prevent it, but she takes her analysis further. Barbara thinks women only marry to have children -'there'd be such a fuss if they had them without' (being married).⁽²⁹⁸⁾ She blames society, not nature for this, for whilst the impulse to procreate is nature's, the formula for achieving it decently is man's, and it is a disaster. Barbara's cynicism about marriage seems complete when she says 'people lose their point of view in marriage. They try so hard to see each other's they lose their own.'⁽²⁹⁹⁾ This must reflect the author's feelings about her own marriage. It is surprising, then, to find that she can still be even-

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.225.

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ *Ibid.*

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ *Ibid.*

handed about it, for she makes Dave disagree with Barbara. Although he admits that there are those who marry that the race may go on, he also claims that there are those so akin in spirit that they are natural life-long partners, and for these marriage is ideal. Sarah and Dan are perfect examples of this. So, of course, are Barbara and Dave but social mores deny them the chance of happiness.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth deals with a second major issue in *Barbara Dennison* - repression and freedom - and relates it to her concern about marriage. She represents repression as the city and freedom as the country, specifically London and rural Lancashire. The stifling claustrophobia of the city is personified by Chrichie whose values are anti-democratic, capitalist, culturally philistine and parochial. The spiritual liberation of the country is personified by Dave whose values are democratic, socialist, culturally sensitive and internationalist. Barbara is caught between the two, but it is clear that once the novelty of the city wears off she finds it repressive and sterile. Her life is joyless despite the material comforts that surround her. It is her soulless husband who is the 'automaton', not the masses about whom Flora uses this term.⁽³⁰⁰⁾ Nothing good comes from the city in *Barbara Dennison*. It is even less sympathetically drawn here than it is in *The House That Jill Built*, the only other novel in which the action is split between city and country. It is a place of deceit and destruction - sordid affairs, extinguished academic ambition, failed

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ *Ibid.*, p.36, cf p.137.

businesses. Even the fashion for 'head phones' hair which muffled the wearer's ears seems to symbolise the city's deafness to the needs of the human spirit.(301)

By contrast her treatment of the country in this novel reaches a high pitch of appreciation. Some passages are simple pastoral elegies - 'Pagan gods, in robes of purple, had lolled on golden couches that morning, hurling flaming torches at each other, flinging rubied javelins high above the world' (of the sunrise 'on Ridgely Fells).(302) Others are homages to the ability of nature to uplift and inspire:

'the moor-pools were gently rippling silver against the dark rushes and out of the sky came the last curlew's last cry - and all was silence, hushed, mysterious, through which sounded the spring of the heather beating back after their feet passed, the shake of the whin, and the murmur of a little stream flowing through the evening.'(303)

The curlew is a recurring image in *Barbara Dennison* used as a symbol not only of freedom but of wisdom by the author to show people how much better they could get along if they copied it - 'They were not afflicted, these birds, with...the constancy of humans. Was man wiser or more of a fool for forgetting less easily?'(304) The author's point is that man is not in harmony with nature. Whilst 'every other

(301) *Ibid.*, p.132.

(302) *Ibid.*, p.45.

(303) *Ibid.*, p.223.

(304) *Ibid.*, p.199.

living thing went disrespected, happy and moral,'(305) man perversely put himself in a position of conflict with nature by creating the unnecessary constraints of marriage.

Throughout the novel the harmony of the countryside with its successful relationships, whether monogamous like Sarah and Dan's or promiscuous like the curlews', is contrasted with the discord of the city. It is highlighted by the reactions of Barbara and Dave, the only characters who move between the two settings. On her last journey home Barbara finds she cannot respond to its natural beauty as she used to, she felt adrift, belonging to neither the city nor the country.(306) When he visits London Dave wonders 'if ever a man would be born great enough to create a fugue which expressed the sounds of London' in a way that blended human sounds with bird song.(307) The message seems clear, the city degrades all that comes into contact with it. It is confirmed by the authorial comment on the fur Chrichie gives to Flora - 'women array themselves in the skins of little creatures who probably lived nearer to the Almighty's idea of perfection than humans could'(308) - and by the image of the train which is used to describe the tragic journey through life 'always away and on from what one had loved' towards 'the city of Nothingness.'(309)

In 1896 Margaret Oliphant characterised contemporary feminist

(305) *Ibid.*, p.271.

(306) *Ibid.*, p.257.

(307) *Ibid.*, p.123.

(308) *Ibid.*, p.188.

(309) *Ibid.*, p.196.

writers as members of the 'anti-marriage league'.⁽³¹⁰⁾ The 'Marriage Debate' as it was called was certainly prominent in the late Victorian press. An important contribution to it was made by Mona Caird. Her view was that marriage was based on barbarism and possession and should be based on love and freedom. As a result she formulated precisely the alternative arrangement advocated in *Barbara Dennison* - a free contract outside church or state control, framed by the couple themselves.⁽³¹¹⁾ So it is possible that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was influenced by Mona Caird, but perhaps her thinking on marriage was more directly affected by the Clitheroe Case. In 1891 Emily Jackson, a Clitheroe woman, refused to live with her husband when he returned from working in New Zealand for three years, so he kidnapped her and locked her up in a relative's house in Blackburn. The Court of Appeal ruled that wives who left their husbands could not be confined in order to be forced to provide conjugal rights. Over a hundred years on the case still reverberates locally and the sympathy is with Emily, but in 1891 she was criticised for defying her husband and her home was stoned.⁽³¹²⁾

In the Labour movement many considered that alternatives to conventional marriage were dangerous, providing neither fulfilment nor stability. Robert Blatchford, for example, described free-love unions, that is unions outside marriage, as 'transient amours which

(310) Kemp., S., Mitchell, C., and Trotter, D., (eds.), *Edwardian Fiction* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997) p.126.

(311) Bland, L., *op.cit.*, p.129.

(312) Oral evidence of Ruby Holland to Roger Smalley, 1 January, 2002.

shall leave one jaded, disillusioned and unmated'.⁽³¹³⁾ James Keir Hardie, on the other hand was amongst those who wanted to move marriage from the sphere of party to private politics so that the reputation of socialism would not be tarnished by becoming identified with the abolition of the family.⁽³¹⁴⁾ National attention was focused on the matter again in 1895, by the Lanchester Case. Two SDF members, Edith Lanchester and James Sullivan, who had announced their intention of living together in a free-love union were prevented from doing so because Edith's family committed her to an asylum for the insane. She was soon released, but the SDF leadership was not sympathetic, indeed *Justice* advised members to comply with the marriage laws. It was reform of lunacy, not marriage regulations that the SDF officially supported.⁽³¹⁵⁾

However according to the editors of *Edwardian Fiction* novelists interested in the position of women in society began to shift their attention to economic independence, as for example Olive Schreiner did in *Women and Labour* (1911), or to political equality, the subject of, for example, Evelyn Sharp's *Rebel Women* (1910).⁽³¹⁶⁾ Nevertheless the marriage problem remained a preoccupation for some. After the Boer War George Meredith suggested that marriage contracts should be reviewed every ten years and extended only if both parties

(313) Hunt, K., *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884-1911* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) p.91.

(314) *Ibid.*, p.102.

(315) *Ibid.*, p.99. As Lucy Bland points out, some individuals within the SDF supported Lanchester. See Bland, L., *op.cit.*, p.161.

(316) Kemp, S., Mitchell, C., and Trotter, D., *Edwardian Fiction, op.cit.*, p.127.

agreed,(317) and the misery that could result from the complexity of the laws relating to marriage and divorce was the theme of Douglas Sladen's *The Unholy Estate*(1912).(318)

Although written much later, *Barbara Dennison* illustrates a continuing concern with an aspect of the 'Marriage Debate' that had still not, in the author's opinion, been satisfactorily settled. Now Ethel Carnie Holdsworth rejects even Meredith's severe compromise by demanding that the terms of any relationship should be fixed only by the couple concerned. Outside agencies are given no mandatory role, although their services may be requested. This shows how far her thinking on marriage had moved on from the cautious approval shown in *The Taming of Nan*. She argues now that society is so alienated from nature that one of its basic mechanisms no longer works. Marriage demands unnatural behaviour and provides no safety valve by which mistakes can be remedied. Her solution is to let people unite for love, for companionship or to have children, but to let them, not society, decide on the permanence of the union. It was what she, the victim of a failed marriage, wanted for herself.

However it was an extreme position that she did not occupy for long, for there is another source from which her feelings about the breakdown of her marriage may be gauged. It is the short novel *All On Her Own*, also published in 1929.(319) The title describes the condition

(317) *Ibid.*, p.278.

(318) *Ibid.*, p.267.

(319) Holdsworth, E.C., *All On Her Own* (J.Leng, London, 1929).

of the heroine, Estelle, but the plot shows competent self-reliance to be a poor substitute for co-operation and marriage, if these can be arranged on terms of equality and trust. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth believed interdependence was natural and good, and her failure to make her marriage work must have been a great disappointment to her, a regret that found expression in *All On Her Own* as well as in *Barbara Dennison*. Did she join the Labour Party in an attempt to create a new interdependence to replace that lost with her husband? I do not see her as one of Elaine Showalter's 'emotional tycoons' unable to resolve the tensions between their needs as women and their commitment to literature,⁽³²⁰⁾ but I think there was a void in her life that writing alone did not fill. The dates fit and the evidence from the fiction she was writing at the time suggests it, although without providing conclusive proof. It is an impossible question to answer with certainty, but together with the failure of *The Clear Light* her marriage breakdown was perhaps a factor. She did not like being all on her own.

3.8. *EAGLES' CRAG*, 1931

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's last novel, *Eagles' Crag*, is her strangest, and it is the least useful as a guide to the development of her thought on social and political matters because it is a gothic fantasy in which sleepwalking, murder and conflagration provide the action and

⁽³²⁰⁾ Showalter, E., *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing* (Virago, London, 1978) p.244.

lunatics, ghosts and spectral eagles the cast. It is hard to imagine such a plot carrying the sort of socio-political propaganda with which Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was concerned, but it does, for as usual the central character, Burl the gypsy, is a strong woman designed to capture the imagination and sympathy of the reader, and through her the author attacks two of her favourite targets, capitalism and religion.

The most grotesque character in the story, perhaps in all Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fiction with the possible exception of Abel Mason in *Helen of Four Gates*, is Jane Mowbray. She controls the purse strings and manipulates the workers at Eagles' Crag farm by promising first one, then another, that they will inherit her wealth. It is fickle behaviour, a calculated play on fear typical of the author's portrayal of capitalism. In this case it is characterised as a disease which causes a craving for security against old age that people will kill for.⁽³²¹⁾ It is at the root of all the evil in the novel, just as it was in her early poem 'The God of Gold'.⁽³²²⁾ The poem makes the point better, and more elegantly, but the re-occurrence of the theme of greed in her late work shows her abiding concern for its destructive power. Only Burl is free of it, her gypsy background has given her a fierce independence and unworldliness that makes her indifferent to the avarice raging around her. So Burl is used as an anti-capitalist symbol here, although it is asking a lot of the reader caught up in a horror story to notice this.

(321) Holdsworth, E.C., *Eagles' Crag* (Stanley Paul, London, 1931) p.135.

(322) *Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*, p.17.

Burl is also the focus of an attack on religion. She ridicules prayer because it is used only to plead for money, and she criticises Christianity because it stifles love.⁽³²³⁾ Burl is untainted by such a discredited religion. Instead she claims nature for her god,⁽³²⁴⁾ as the author herself sometimes did, especially in this passage:

Thoughts, like white birds, passed to and fro across her spirit's sky, ignorant and crude though it was. Perhaps the nearest approach to a clear thought in her pagan mind was: 'That star up there is alive. It has its own form of life. From it to the grass in this cave, all is alive. There are no vacuums...I am God. The grass is God. The star is God.'⁽³²⁵⁾

This suggests that whilst conventional religion still found no favour with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, a personal form of nature worship had perhaps survived the apparent atheism of *This Slavery* and re-asserted itself as a force in her life. The evocations in *Eagles' Crag* of the Pennine countryside in winter, some of which, like the lunar rainbow,⁽³²⁶⁾ have a powerful impact, support this view, for her loss of faith had been matched by an absence of descriptions of nature in much of *This Slavery*.

Eagles' Crag also makes a feminist point despite the diabolical influence of Jane Mowbray in the story. It is Burl, for all her gypsy

⁽³²³⁾ *Eagles' Crag*, *op.cit.*, pp. 211-212.

⁽³²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁽³²⁵⁾ *Ibid.*, p.203.

⁽³²⁶⁾ *Ibid.*, p.35.

eccentricities, who is held up for our admiration. She always behaves honourably, she speaks the truth consistently, she accepts her unjustified death rather than endanger others.⁽³²⁷⁾ It is Burl who fulfils the author's vision of woman's grace and freedom, enduring in a world controlled by men.

So it is just possible to fit *Eagles' Crag* into my thesis of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's overall purpose, but it is hard to understand why she chose such a wild story line this time. She does not mention any gothic novels or their authors anywhere in her work, but there are elements of the gothic in *Helen of Four Gates* as well, so perhaps it was a style she thought worth trying again in an attempt to shock a response out of her audience or persuade a contract out of a film maker. She was forty-five when *Eagles' Crag* was published. According to her daughter her failure to prevent capitalism and fascism from flourishing broke her health and ended her activism as the Second World War approached.⁽³²⁸⁾ In fact it ended with *The Clear Light* and *This Slavery*. Although her subsequent work contained some propaganda important in making judgements on her thought up to 1931 none of it was successfully realised. The experiments with new settings which mark her last novels did not work, and the author's opinions are less often expressed and harder to identify in them.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth also experimented with drama. Its quality

⁽³²⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, p.280.

⁽³²⁸⁾ Oral evidence of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 26 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.

cannot be assessed because it has been lost, but I believe it formed a part of the last phase of her activism. In 1926 she joined the committee of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM). This was the latest expression of cultural politics which Raphael Samuel says can be traced back at least to the 1900s.(329) At that time it played a role which linked it especially to the ILP which saw theatre as a useful way of supporting its propaganda, in the same category as the activities of the Clarion League. The Labour Party, too, recognised the propaganda value of theatre, for in 1925 its National Executive sponsored a Choral Union and a Federation of Dramatic Societies. (330)

The WTM however identified with the communist wing of the Labour movement, and focused on the class struggle by highlighting current concerns. Its militant agenda resulted from the failure of the General Strike,(331) and Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's involvement with it from its inception suggests both the regard in which she was held as a writer by the Left in 1926 and the common cause she made with the strikers. In Lancashire WTM groups were established in Salford and Manchester. The Salford group, the Red Megaphones, used a collectively written script(332) to focus attention on the 'more looms'

(329) Samuel, R., 'Workers' theatre 1926-1936', in Bradley, D., James L., and Sharratt, B., (eds.), *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980) p.213.

(330) *Ibid.*, p.214.

(331) Worley, M., *Class Against Class. The Communist Party In Britain Between the Wars* (I.B.Tauris, London, 2002) p.204.

(332) *Ibid.*, p.207.

agitation of 1931-1932,(333) and in 1934 evolved into Theatre of Action in response to the increasing threat of fascism.(334) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was living in Manchester by then and it is possible that she made a new anti-fascist attack, this time against Oswald Mosley and the British Union of Fascists, for she claimed to have collaborated in the writing of plays, and to have made addresses which revealed revolutionary thought, at the end of her career.(335) But if her activism did not take the form of playwright or actor, her involvement with the WTM at least shows her continuing commitment to a strategy that she herself had pioneered - communication through a wide range of propaganda styles.

(333) Samuel, R., *op.cit.*, pp.220-221. The employers' response to the depression in the cotton industry in the 1920s was to reduce wages and to increase the rate of exploitation of the labour force. In an attempt to make British cotton goods cheaper on world markets the Labour government and the textile unions had reluctantly accepted these tactics. For example in Burnley the 'more looms' experiment required weavers to work eight rather than the usual four looms. They were paid more, but much less than two four loom weavers would earn, and many weavers lost their jobs. In 1931 Burnley workers struck against the new system. They were initially successful, but by 1932 wage cuts and more looms were again implemented in some mills. See Bruley, S., *op.cit.*, pp.207-208.

(334) Frow, R., and Frow, E., 'The Workers' Theatre Movement in Manchester and Salford, 1931-1940', *North West Labour History* (17, 1992/93) p.69.

(335) *Labour Who's Who* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1927) p.105.

CONCLUSION

Some critics see writing biography as fraught with danger. Michael Holroyd considers it to be a parasitic process which reduces the creative to the pedestrian as biographers plunder their subjects' work for material that will fit their theories, and rob it of its enchantment whilst doing so.⁽¹⁾ Louis Menand believes historians cling to whatever bits of evidence surface, and give them disproportionate significance, because they are all they have. In the meantime the submerged wreck, the full story, remains hidden.⁽²⁾ The school of cultural studies represented by Richard Hoggart⁽³⁾ and Jeremy Seabrook⁽⁴⁾ has been criticised because it creates a stereotypical view of working-class communities which celebrates the psychological simplicity which it finds there⁽⁵⁾ - passive subjects without dreams of change or the belief that change would be desirable. ⁽⁶⁾

These are pessimistic judgements which suggest that manipulation, exaggeration and simplification are endemic in representations of people and the past. However other critics take a more optimistic view. Seeking a way of giving the inhabitants of the Hoggart/Seabrook working-class landscape distinct voices, what she calls the power to use 'the autobiographical I',⁽⁷⁾ Carolyn Steedman

(1) Holroyd, M., *Works on Paper : The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (Little, Brown, London, 2002) p.6.

(2) Menand, L., 'The Historical Romance. Edmund Wilson's adventure with Communism', *The New Yorker*, 24 March 2003, p.80.

(3) See for example: Hoggart, R., *The Uses of Literacy* (Penguin, London, 1958).

(4) See for example: Seabrook, J., *Working Class Childhood* (Gollancz, London, 1982).

(5) Steedman, C., *Landscape for a Good Woman. A Story of Two Lives* (Virago, London, 1986) pp. 6-7.

(6) *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 15.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 16.

found the structure to do so in the psychoanalytical case-study. Her method enabled her to present 'the ebb and flow of memory, the structure of dreams, the stories that people tell to explain themselves to each other' as historical evidence in the biography of her mother and in autobiography.⁽⁸⁾ However she admits that she did not know enough about some of the individual pieces of evidence in her possession to explain the causal order of them, let alone to make causal connections between them.⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore she acknowledges the transitory nature of her evidence. It has, she says, a momentary completeness only, it changes once the story has been told, for life goes on.⁽¹⁰⁾

The honesty of this approach is shared by Liz Stanley whose view is that contradictions must be expected and admitted in biography, for there is nothing unusual in discovering that the subject was both like this and like that.⁽¹¹⁾ June Hannam and Karen Hunt too are able to write biography optimistically because they recognise from the outset that all they can do is 'to tell one amongst many possible versions of a life.'⁽¹²⁾ Their work has shown that socialist women followed many different routes to get to their political objectives, all of which contribute to our understanding of the period in which they lived and the causes they promoted. As a result, they say, the historical record

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(9) *Ibid.*

(10) *Ibid.*, p.22.

(11) Stanley, L., *The Auto/Biographical I : The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002) p. 163.

(12) Hannam, J., and Hunt, K., *Socialist Women : Britain 1880s to 1920s* (Routledge, London, 2002) p. 32.

is constantly being amended and enriched.⁽¹³⁾ They clearly believe that one version of a life, however incomplete, is better than no life at all. I agree.

Although I can claim to have traced all her novels and improved the data base for my subject by treating them as historical sources, there are periods in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's life about which I have no information. So this is an unfinished story, for whilst I have often been able to say with confidence what she did or thought, sometimes I have been forced into conjecture. The sources suggest this or that but they do not prove it. For example her attitude towards workers and employers is consistent throughout her career, and indicates that she would have backed the Triple Alliance and the threat of a general strike on 'Black Friday', 15 April 1921. But the sources are silent on the matter and so I prefer to leave a gap in the narrative. The same problem applies to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's friendships. Liz Stanley has highlighted the importance of friendship links, as distinct from family links, in the writing of biography because they show how the subject was seen and treated by others, and the subject's response.⁽¹⁴⁾ It is hard to find evidence of the impact of such revealing friendships in Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's case, for whilst she certainly had friends, I know nothing about them, and the question 'what was the nature and effect of her friendship with Miss M. A. Pilkington,⁽¹⁵⁾ Julia⁽¹⁶⁾

(13) *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 51, 204-206.

(14) Stanley, L., *op.cit.*, p.217.

(15) Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory* (Denham, Blackburn, 1908) p. 83.

(16) *Miss Nobody* is dedicated to 'Julia'. See unnumbered page following the title page of the first edition, 1913.

or Ernest Soulsby?'⁽¹⁷⁾ must remain unanswered.

Nevertheless I believe I have provided a substantial account of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's life and work which, if I have avoided the pitfalls to which Holroyd, Menand and Steedman refer, may complement the process of change in the record that Hannam and Hunt identify, and throw extra light on the history of working-class women in the early twentieth century.

Jill Liddington's life of Selina Cooper was based on the chance survival of a mass of biographical material. She assumed this represented a unique find which would not be repeated for other women, especially of the working class. Her judgement has proved to be accurate in the case of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth. Unlike Selina Cooper who lived at the same Nelson address for forty-five years, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth moved house often, and this perhaps explains why so few personal papers have survived. However material not available to biographers of other working-class women activists has - her journalism, fiction and poetry. It has facilitated my analysis of her ideas and her strategy for implementing them, and enabled me to piece together a story of her life.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth enjoyed a certain celebrity in the 1910s and 1920s as a political activist, so why has she been neglected since?

⁽¹⁷⁾ *Helen of Four Gates* is dedicated to 'my dear friend Ernest Wharrier Soulsby in token of helpful comradeship.' See unnumbered page following the title page of the third edition, 1917.

Partly because her ambition was not for herself but for those who had not been able to overcome their circumstances as she had done. She sought anonymity, not fame, as her poem 'Who Are The Great'(18) and the conclusion to *This Slavery* (19) show. Perhaps, also, her northern location helped to remove her from the public eye, although Isabella Ford and Ellen Wilkinson, for example, are still remembered. Both were northern novelists, (20) but it is Ford's suffragist, socialist, pacifist and trade union activism, (21) and Wilkinson's career as an MP that have ensured their fame today, not their literary work. Hannah Mitchell is perhaps the best example of a northern working-class woman whose propaganda style can be compared to Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's. She, too, wanted to be a writer(22) but she was forgotten until her autobiography was discovered, edited and published after her death.

Unlike these women, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth has lacked a biographer, an editor, or the political prominence necessary to keep her memory alive, but she campaigned on the same issues that dominated the political agenda of the day - equal rights for all, international peace, welfare reform, the need for unity within the Labour movement to combat capitalism, as well as one that did not -

(18) Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory*, op. cit., p.88.

(19) Holdsworth, E.C., *This Slavery* (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1925) p.256. The same sentiment is expressed in the final paragraph of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

(20) Isabella Ford's novels were *Miss Blake of Monkshalton* (1890), *On The Threshold* (1895) and *Mr Elliott* (1901). Ellen Wilkinson's were *Clash* (1929) and *The Division Bell Mystery* (1932).

(21) See Hannam, J., *Isabella Ford* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1989).

(22) Mitchell, H., *The Hard Way Up* (Virago, London, 1984) p. 32.

fascism. As demands were met and threats overcome the agenda changed and her writing became unfashionable. Her concern to bring beauty and justice into the lives of ordinary people, to encourage the development of everyone's potential, and to transform personal relationships seemed too utopian during the Second World War and the period of reconstruction that followed.

Sandra Holton has suggested that their experiences in the contemporary world of political, social and economic exploitation would have given the work of activists a contemporary relevance.⁽²³⁾ I believe Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's work also has a relevance today. I have been confronted by the modernity of her activism regularly during this research. It is inescapable when the evidence of her life and work is examined. It must have taken guts for someone of her background to speak to an educated audience at Blackburn's literary circle, to go to London to work as a journalist, to flout the conventions surrounding weddings, to face a pro-war crowd and argue the pacifist cause, to persuade Cecil Hepworth to make a film of one of her novels, to sink her life savings into a failing newspaper in an attempt to create a revolution, to outface fascist bullies, and to leave her husband rather than remain in a loveless marriage. This is not conventional behaviour for an early twentieth century northern working-class woman. Furthermore she stuck to her chosen task in the face of Blatchford's disaffection, periodic unemployment and poverty, the demands of

(23) Holton, S.S., 'The Suffragist and the average woman', *Women's History Review* (1, 1, 1992) p.20.

family management, and, in 1918 and 1919, the belief that she would have to cope without the support of a husband. Despite her commitment, survival must often have seemed more important than political posturing, and yet there is no sense that she ever found herself in an activist's vacuum, as, for example, some suffragists did after the vote was won. She moved on from one issue to the next, and between propaganda styles, apparently renewing her energy and enthusiasm from the changes and challenges that this involved. Her methods were innovative and her themes universal.

It is the identification of what I have called Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's propaganda style that encourages me to claim a place for her in the protest tradition of the period. I have analysed the form it took - poetry, journalism, fiction, film, political demonstration and platform speaking and I have judged it to represent a distinct form of activism. Of all the strands that make up this style the most important was her decision to try to make a difference through writing. Her forays into public speaking suggest that she performed competently, and her successful dealings with film makers and book publishers support my belief that she could be persuasive in face to face debate. Yet she remained convinced that she could engage those who did not think about social and political issues, and change the minds of those who did, most effectively through the technique of broadcasting a serious message via the medium of light fiction.

The belief that her words could be powerful in that way took root

early. It can be seen in the very first poem of her very first publication:

'If these, my simple lays, have power
To help one pilgrim on his way,
I will be content...'(24)

In 1910 she explained her purpose and described her strategy unequivocally - 'It is too terribly easy to give people what they want. The difficult task is to teach them to want something better and this is our task.' (25) On that occasion she was referring to writing journalism, but in 1914 it was to the authors of the books produced by the Esher bookbinders, who were on strike, that she appealed, asking them to use the power of their pens to help rectify an injustice.(26) The idea of literature as teacher is especially marked in *General Belinda* where Ethel Carnie Holdsworth makes a case for the ability of writing to save society.(27) In 1924 her efforts on behalf of the Solovetsky prisoners were based on belief in the power of her poetry,(28) and she tried to create a united front against capital through her articles in *The Clear Light*. Even after she realised that her own work had failed to achieve the changes she had hoped for, she retained her faith in the strategy, recommending it to more able practitioners. In spring 1925 she attended a performance of George Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* presented by The Comrades Circle at the Co-operative Hall in Hebden Bridge. She wrote to the local paper to say how much she had enjoyed

(24) Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory*, *op.cit.*,p.v.

(25) *Women Folk*, 23 May 1910, p.163.

(26) *Daily Herald*, 16 June 1914, (British Library Jaffray Collection, Jaff.168.31).

(27) See Chapter 2, p.206 above.

(28) See Chapter 3, p.260 above.

the show, but the main point of her letter was to promote writing, like Shaw's, that 'at least makes one think.' (29) She believed that if only someone of greater skill and subtlety than herself would match her commitment the battle could still be won.

The variety of approaches that she used to present such a broad range of concerns suggests that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth was a pragmatist who responded imaginatively to changing circumstances, and this is the key to understanding the nature of her socialism. There is evidence of ILP influence - the Blatchford connection, her membership of the Blackburn branch, the prominence of ethical concerns in her thinking - but she was strongly attracted to Marxist ideas through her links with Dan Irving, Victor Grayson, John Maclean and the Central Labour College as well. I argue that she favoured Marxist solutions but disliked Marxist rhetoric. Harry McShane complained that Marx was too difficult to read and that workers could not be expected to seek emancipation through a doctrine they could not understand. He wanted a new William Morris or Robert Blatchford to make Marxism more accessible.(30) Ethel Carnie Holdsworth had also spotted this problem, and she tried to develop a simple propaganda style to overcome it. By examining this style I hope I have not only retrieved a life that has disappeared from the story of early twentieth century dissent, but illuminated some of the political ideas and social practices of the period, especially as they relate to class and

(29) *Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette*, 13 March 1925, p.7.

(30) Rose, J., *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001) p.305.

gender.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth expected women to dominate all aspects of the movement for social and political reform if they were given the opportunity. She frequently expressed her conviction that change for the better was more likely if power was in the hands of women. It is a conviction most clearly seen in the roles played by her fictional heroines, but it can be detected elsewhere. In 1909 she complained about the suppression of women's voices in discussion of politics not only because it was unjust but because it was counter productive, for, she said, women had a keener political sense than men.⁽³¹⁾ In a 1911 newspaper interview she claimed that 'women are more tenacious than men in conflicts between labour and capital'.⁽³²⁾ She saw the prominent role played by women in the Russian revolution as a guarantee of its ultimate success because they had an ability to endure not shared by men.⁽³³⁾ Even the women in her less successful novels demonstrate Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's view that in failing to see women's qualities the nation was wasting its most precious resource - Barbara's creativity is stifled by middle-class conventions in *Barbara Dennison*, Lydia's is channelled into crime by poverty in *The Quest of the Golden Garter*, Burl's honesty and honour are snuffed out by her treacherous lover in *Eagles' Crag*.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth deserves a place within the protest tradition of her age. She shared the aims of Lancashire working-class

⁽³¹⁾ *The Woman Worker*, 1 December 1909, p. 498.

⁽³²⁾ *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 15 April 1911, p.3.

⁽³³⁾ *Freedom*, November/December 1924, p. 63.

women who helped to win the vote and welfare reform, and of Lancashire working-class men who wrote about revolution. However her contribution to the tradition is far greater than hitherto suspected. By failing to consider any of her journalism, and by concentrating on only a few of her poems and novels, those who have commented on Ethel Carnie Holdsworth previously have marginalised her. They see her as a curiosity - a working woman who nevertheless managed to write something about the circumstances of her class. They have not attempted to build up a coherent picture of those circumstances nor to make a comprehensive survey of her work. I believe my research indicates her true achievement and entitles her to a more central position in the history of early twentieth century dissent. Her activism was immense. In the twenty-four years after 1907 she wrote three volumes of poetry, ten novels, several long stories and a substantial body of journalism. They were broad canvases, but socialism, feminism, religion, fascism and the utopian struggle against capitalism featured prominently in them because she had chosen this way of expressing her own dissent and of trying to attract others to it. At the same time she was deeply involved in three specific campaigns for freedom - for young men like her husband from conscription, of the people from fascism, and of Bolshevik revolutionaries from reactionary persecution. Like Hannah Mitchell she worked for a future which would not only be more just but more humane, for she wanted to put

warmth and colour, as well as bread, into people's lives.⁽³⁴⁾ She believed that 'if you want more roses you must plant more trees'.⁽³⁵⁾

When I began this study I thought of Ethel Carnie as a Lancashire weaver who made a commendable effort to break out of factory drudgery by writing novels. But as I located new sources and interpreted them in the light of my changing perception of her life and work, she became both flesh and blood and a representation of what it was possible for people like her to achieve in the difficult circumstances they had to face. She emerged as a socialist internationalist with a clear plan for the betterment not only of herself, other Lancashire weavers, and other women, but for all mankind. She was a dynamic character at the heart of contemporary affairs. It has been the purpose of my research to reveal the quality of her thought and the nature of her involvement. If I have succeeded the narrative of the early twentieth century protest tradition has been strengthened, and our understanding of the pacifist and anti-fascist movements has been changed.

⁽³⁴⁾ Mitchell, H., *The Hard Way Up* (Virago, London, 1977) p.116.

⁽³⁵⁾ *World's Work*, May 1922, Blackburn public library local studies collection B920. The quotation is from George Elliot.

APPENDIX



1. Ethel Carnie in 1907.

This photograph accompanied the Preface to the second edition.

Source: Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory* (Denham, Blackburn, 1908).

2. A Chronology of the Main Events in the Life and Work of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth.

- 1886 Born at 80, Roe Greave Road, Oswaldtwistle, on 1 January.
Source: Birth certificate (Y000579, 23 January 1886).
- 1892 Moved to Great Harwood.
Source: *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915.
- 1892- Attended Great Harwood British School.
1897 **Source:** *The Millgate Monthly*, November 1909, p.70.
- 1897 Started work as a half-timer at Delf Road mill.
Source: Carnie, E., *Rhymes from the Factory*, (Denham and Co., Blackburn, 1908) p.vii.
- 1899- Worked full time at St. Lawrence mill.
1908 **Source:** *Blackburn Times*, 20 June 1908.
- 1901 Ethel's parents had split up by this date. Her mother took Ethel and Rupert to live with their grandparents at 2, Railway View, Great Harwood.
Source: 1901 Census for Great Harwood, p.152, and oral testimony of Margaret Quinn to Ruth Frow, 21 January 1987, Ethel Carnie archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.
- 1903 Ethel and Rupert moved with their mother to 3, Lewis Street, Great Harwood.
Source: *Barrett's General and Commercial directory of Blackburn and District*, (Barrett and Co., Preston, 1905).
- 1905 Attended SDF and ILP meetings in Burnley and Blackburn.
Source: Frow, E. and R., 'Ethel Carnie : writer, feminist and socialist,' in Klaus, H.G.. (ed.), *The Rise of Socialist Fiction*, (Harvester, Brighton, 1987) pp.251-252.
- 1906 'The Bookworm' and other poems published in local papers.
Source: *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 November 1906.
- 1907 *Rhymes from the Factory*.
A White Geranium, her first short story to be published.
Source: *Fellowship*, 26 July 1907.
- 1908 Joined the Blackburn branch of the ILP.
Source: *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 10 October 1908.
- Offered a job with *The Woman Worker*.
Source: *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908.

- 1909- In London writing 'The Editor's Chair' and other pieces for
 1910 *The Woman Worker*.
Source: *The Woman Worker*, 28 July 1909 and 26 January 1910.
- 1910 Travelled in Scotland and Germany before returning to Great Harwood to work at St. Lawrence mill and live in Windsor Road.
Source: *The Co-operative News*, 24 July 1915, p.998 and *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 15 April 1911.
- 1911 *Songs of a Factory Girl*.
The Lamp Girl and Other Stories, her first collection of children's stories to be published.
- 1911- Moved to the University Settlement, Ancoats Hall, Owens
 1912 College Manchester as a non-degree student for the 1911-1912 session.
Source: The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Special Collections Division, RA/39/10.
- 1913 Taught creative writing at Bebel House in London, but returned to Great Harwood before the end of the year.
Source: *The Wheatsheaf*, November 1913, pp. 85-86.
- Miss Nobody*.
- 1914 *Voices of Womanhood*.
- 1915 Married Alfred Holdsworth on 3 April. Moved to 76, Garnett Street, Barrowford.
Source: *Blackburn Times*, 10 April 1915.
- Iron Horses*, a long story, serialised in *The Co-operative News* between 31 July and 11 December.
- Chaired the BCP anti-conscription rally in Nelson.
Source: *Colne and Nelson Times*, 3 December 1915.
- 1916 Birth of her daughter Margaret, on 15 May 1916.
Source: Birth certificate (CM896838, 17 May 1916).
- 1917 Alfred Holdsworth conscripted.
Source: Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, BK63.
- Helen of Four Gates*.
- 1918 Alfred Holdsworth reported killed. Ethel and Margaret move to 24, Palmer Street, Blackburn to lodge with the Simm family.
Source: oral testimony of Arthur Simm to Roger Smalley, 8 June 1993.

1919 Moved to 36, Charles Street, Nelson. Alfred returned from a prisoner of war camp. The Holdsworths moved to Long Tail, Colden, which Ethel bought for £100.
Source: Alfred Holdsworth archive, *op.cit.*, and West Riding Registry of Deeds, Vol.66, p.491, No.160.

1920 Birth of her daughter Maud, on 14 January 1920.
Source: Birth certificate (CM910003, 20 January 1920).

The Taming of Nan.
The Marriage of Elizabeth.
The House That Jill Built.

Helen of Four Gates filmed in the Hebden Bridge area.
Source: *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 26 June 1920.

Helen of Four Gates published in the USA.
Source: Chester County Library, Exton, Pennsylvania, USA.

1921 Ethel sold Long Tail and the family moved in with her parents, now reconciled and living in Barnoldswick.
Source: oral testimony of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.*

1922 Tried to find work in London.
Source: *Sunday Worker*, 26 July 1925.

Returned to live at Robertshaw, 29, Slack Top.
Source: Electoral Register for Heptonstall (Hebden Bridge township), Spring 1923, and oral testimony of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.*

Down Poverty Street, a long story, serialised in 'a popular weekly newspaper'.
Source: *World's Work*, May 1922.

1923- *The Clear Light*. Twenty five monthly editions produced
1925 between June 1923 and July 1925.

1924 *General Belinda*.

Became the general organiser of the NUCF.
Source: *The Clear Light*, July 1925.

Intervened in the campaign to free the Solovetsky prisoners.
Source: *Freedom*, October 1924 to August 1925.

1925 *This Slavery*

1926 Became a member of the committee of the Workers' Theatre Movement.
Source: Klaus, H.G., *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, *op.cit.* p.97.

1927 *The Quest of the Golden Garter.*

Joined the Labour Party.

Source: *Labour Who's Who*, (Labour Publishing Co., London, 1927) p.105.

1928 Left Alfred and took the children to live with her parents at 51, Rainhall Road, Barnoldswick.

Source: oral testimony of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.* and Electoral Register for Barnoldswick, Spring 1929.

1929 *Barbara Dennison.*
All On Her Own.

1931 *Eagles' Crag.*

1932 Alfred Holdsworth joined the CPGB.

Source: Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, (Journeyman, London, 1993) p.177.

1934 Ethel and the children moved to Manchester. She wrote poems and short stories till 1936.

Source: *The Wheatsheaf*, December 1936, p.178.

1948 Lived alone after Margaret married.

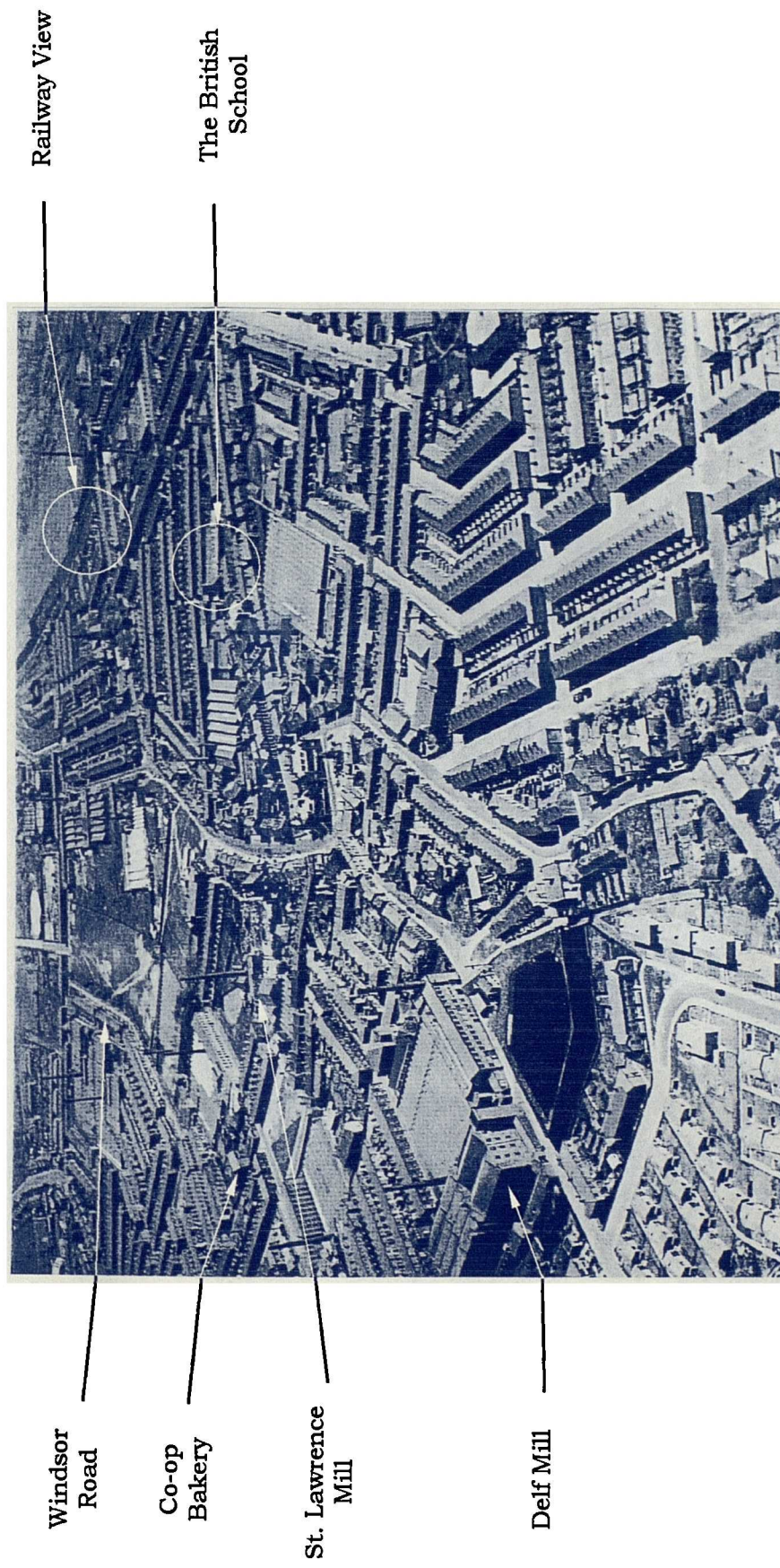
Source: oral testimony of Margaret Quinn, *op.cit.*

1962 Died at Crumpsall hospital on 28 December, aged 76.

Source: Death certificate (G003649, 2 January 1963.)



3. 80, Roe Greave Road, Oswaldtwistle.
Ethel Carnie's birthplace and home until 1892.
Source: Jack Aston.



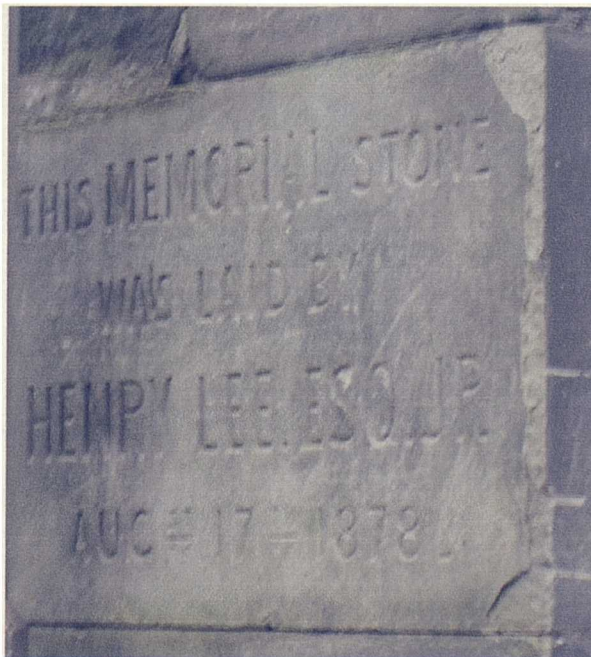
4. Great Harwood in the 1950s. Redevelopment had not taken place, so this photograph shows the town much as it was when Ethel Carnie lived there. Seventeen mills can be seen, including Delf Mill, where she started work as a half timer in 1897, as well as other locations relevant to the time Ethel Carnie lived there. **Source:** Pollard, L., and Eaton, H., *Old Harwood* (Adelaide Publishing Co., St.Annes, 1973) p.5.



5. 2, Railway View, (now Hameldon View), Great Harwood.
Ethel Carnie's grandparents' house and her home after her parents
separated (c.1900?) until 1903.
Source: Jack Aston.



6.(a). The British School, Barnmeadow Lane, Great Harwood.
 Ethel Carnie was a pupil here from 1892 to 1899.
Source: Jack Aston.



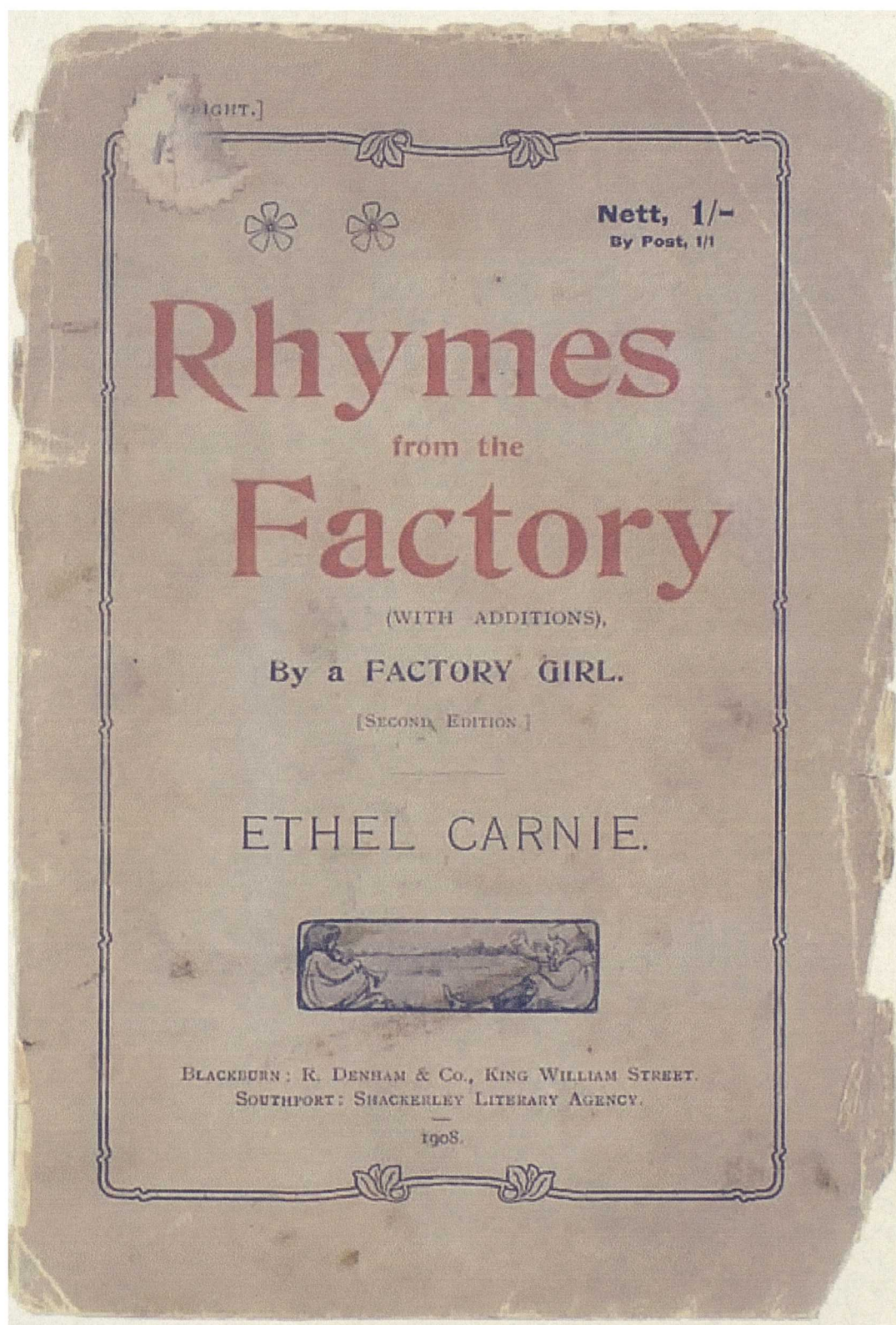
6.(b). Memorial Stone of The British School, Great Harwood.
Source: Jack Aston.



7.(a). St. Lawrence Mill, Great Harwood. Ethel Carnie worked there as a winder from 1899 to 1908.
Source: Jack Aston.



7.(b). The Co-operative Bakery, St. Lawrence Street, Great Harwood, near to St. Lawrence Mill. It opened in 1904. Ethel Carnie was a keen co-operator and used the town's Co-operative Wholesale Society's facilities, including its bakery and library. See *Woman's Outlook*, September 1920, p.295.
Source: Jack Aston.



8. The front cover of Ethel Carnie's first collection of verse.
Source: publication details as shown.



9. Ethel Carnie in 1908.

This photograph accompanied an article by Robert Blatchford, in which he described his meeting with her and announced her appointment to the staff of *The Woman Worker*.

Source: *The Woman Worker*, 10 July 1908, p.155.



10.(a). Windsor Road, Great Harwood as it was when Ethel Carnie lived there between 1910 and 1911, after she lost her job on ***The Woman Worker***.

Source: Pollard, L., and Eaton, H., *op.cit.*, p.21.



10.(b). Windsor Road, Great Harwood today.

Source: Jack Aston.

THE
BASKET OF VIOLETS

And other Original Fairy Tales.

BY
ETHEL CARNIE.

ILLUSTRATED BY
BRINSLEY LE FANU AND CONSTANCE FOXLEY.

"BOOKS FOR THE BAIRNS,"
BANK BUILDINGS, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.C.

Dépôt Exclusif pour la France :
Librairie Larousse, Rue Montparnasse 13-19, Paris.

11. The title page of *The Basket of Violets*, a collection of children's stories.

Source: publication details as shown. No date is given, but publication preceded her marriage in 1915.

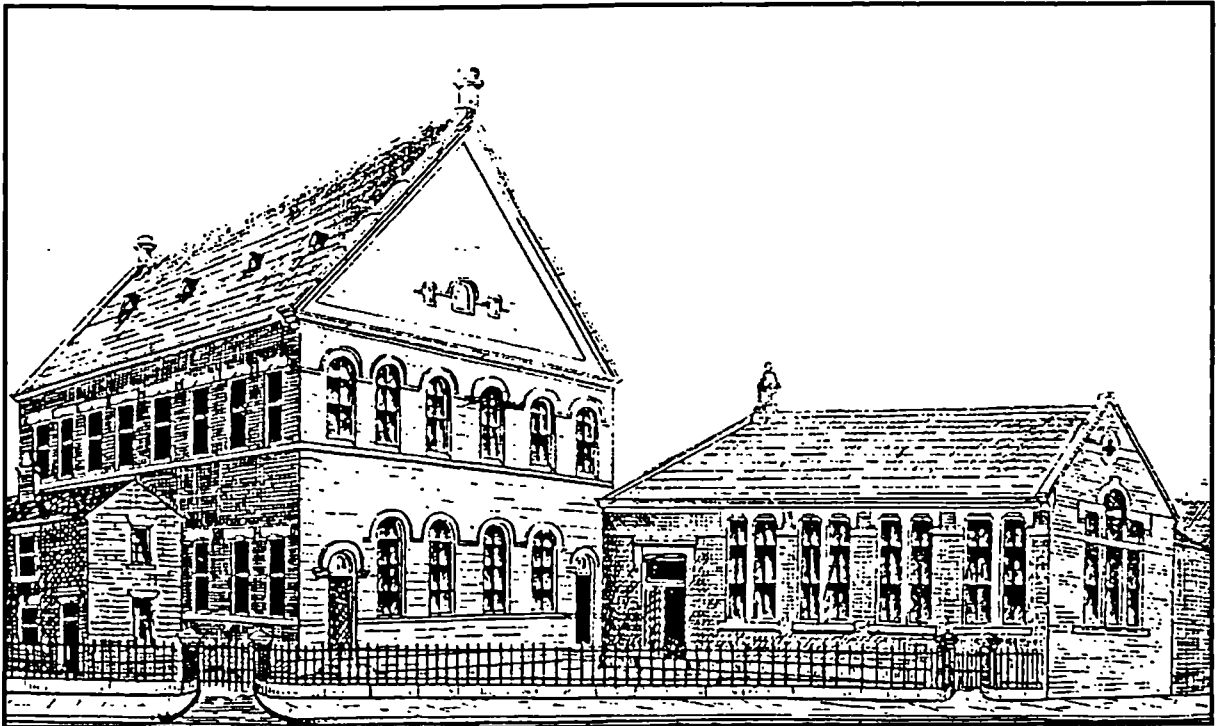
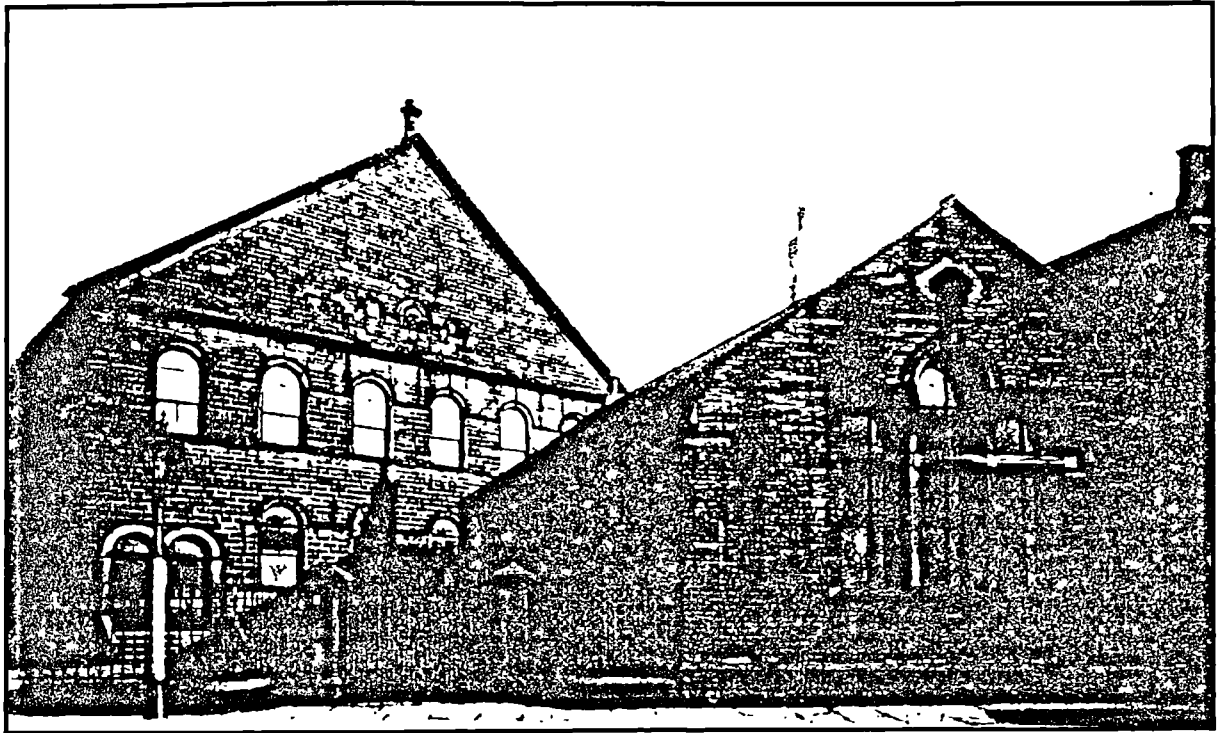


12. Ethel Carnie on her wedding day, 3 April 1915.
Alfred Holdsworth inset.

Source: Un-attributed press cutting, Blackburn public library.



13. 76, Garnett St., Barrowford.
Ethel Carnie's home from 1915 to 1918. *Helen of Four Gates* was
completed there.
Source: Jack Aston.



14. Salem School Hall, Nelson. The British Citizen Party anti-conscription meeting, chaired by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, was held in the larger building, on the left, on 30th November 1915.
Source: Nelson Public Library.

15. Herbert Jenkins contract with Ethel Carnie Holdsworth for the publication of *Helen of Four Gates* and her next six novels. Adjustments to standard terms have been added by hand and initialled.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT made this
BETWEEN

16th

HOLDSWORTH
day of May 1915

E T H E L H O L D S W O R T H

(hereinafter termed the Author) of the one part and HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED of 12 Arundel Place Haymarket London (hereinafter termed the Publishers) of the other part WHEREBY it is mutually agreed between the parties hereto for themselves and their respective executors administrators and assigns (or successors as the case may be) as follows:-

1. The Publishers shall at their own risk and expense and with due diligence produce and publish the work at present intituled

H E L E N O' F O U R G A T E S

by Ethel Carnie

and use their best endeavours to sell the same subject to Clause 1

2. The Author guarantees to the Publishers that the said work is in no way whatever a violation of any existing copy-right and that it contains nothing of a libellous or scandalous character and that she will indemnify the Publishers from all suits claims and proceedings damages and costs which may be made taken or incurred by or against them on the ground that the work is an infringement of copyright or contains anything libellous or scandalous

3. The Publishers shall during the legal term of copyright have the exclusive right of producing and publishing the work in the United Kingdom the Colonies India and the United States

of America The Publishers shall have the entire control of the publication and sale and terms of sale of the book and the Author shall not during the continuance of this Agreement (without the consent of the Publishers) publish or allow to be published any abridgment portion translation or dramatized version of the work

4. The Publishers agree to pay the Author the following royalties that is to say:-

(a) A royalty of ten per cent (10%) on the published price of all copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12) of the British Edition up to five thousand (5000) copies and fifteen per cent (15%) upon all subsequent copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12)

(b) If the Publishers be successful in arranging for an edition of the work being printed in the United States of America fifty per cent (50%) of the net sum realised shall be paid to the Author If however they sell an edition of the English Sheets or Bound Copies to the United States of America the amount payable to the Author shall be at the rate of ten per cent (10%) of the net amount realised.

(c) In the event of the Publishers disposing of copies or editions at a reduced rate for sale in the Colonies or elsewhere or as remainders a royalty of ten per cent (10%) of the

amount realised by such sale unless by their books they can show that the publication of the book has resulted in a loss to them in which case no royalty shall be payable upon remainders

(d) In the event of the Publishers realising profits from the sale of Continental or other rights (always excepting serialisation previous to publication in book form) ^{which the Author reserves (which the Author reserves)} or from claims for infringement of copyright a royalty of fifty per cent (50%) of the net amount of such profits remaining after deducting all expenses relating thereto.

(e) No royalties shall be paid on any copies given away for review or other purposes

(f) The Author shall be entitled to six (6) gratuitous copies and any further copies required at trade price for her own use

(g) In the event of the Publishers deciding to re-issue this work in a cheaper form the royalties payable to the Author upon such copies shall be at the rate of upon a shilling edition one penny a copy and upon a seven penny edition one halfpenny a copy upon all copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12)

5. The Author agrees that all costs of corrections and alterations in the proof sheets exceeding twenty per cent (20%) of the cost of composition shall be paid for by her

6 During the continuance of this agreement the copyright of the work shall be vested in the Author

7 The Publishers shall make up the account ^{Semi} ~~annually~~ annually to ^{June 30.} ~~and~~ ~~December 31st~~ and deliver the same to the Author within three months thereafter and pay the balance due to the Author on the same date

8 If the Publishers shall at the end of three years from the date of publication or at any time thereafter give notice to the Author that in their opinion the demand for the work has ceased or if the Publishers shall for six months after the work is out of print decline or after due notice neglect to publish a new edition then and in either of such cases this Agreement shall terminate and on the determination of this Agreement in the above or any other manner the right to print and publish the work shall revert to the Author and the Author if not then registered shall be entitled to be registered as the proprietor thereof and to purchase from the Publishers forthwith the plates or moulds and blocks or plates of illustrations (if any) produced specially for the work at half-cost of production and whatever copies the Publishers may have on hand at cost of production and if the Author does not within three months purchase and pay for the said plates or moulds blocks or plates of illustrations and copies the Publishers may at any time thereafter dispose of such plates or moulds blocks or plates of illustrations and copies or melt the plates paying to the Author

in lieu of royalties ten per cent (10%) of the net proceeds of such sale unless the Publishers can prove from their books that the publication has resulted in loss to them in which case they shall be liable for no such payment

9 The Author agrees to give to the Publishers the offer of her next six (six) novels of approximately seventy to eighty thousand (70,000 to 80,000) words upon the following terms: When of any particular book two thousand (2000) copies shall have been sold of the ordinary English edition at the usual trade terms up to the date of publication of the said book the rate of royalty shall be ^{12 1/2} ten per cent (10%) upon the first two thousand (2000) copies sold and ¹⁵ twelve and a half per cent (12 1/2%) upon all subsequent copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12) when of any particular book three thousand (3000) copies shall have been sold of the ordinary English edition at the usual trade terms ~~up to the date of publication~~ up to the date of publication the rate of royalty shall be fifteen per cent (15%) on the first five thousand (5000) copies sold and twenty per cent (20%) upon all subsequent copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12). ~~When of any particular book four thousand (4000) copies shall have been sold of the ordinary English edition at the usual trade terms up to the date of publication the rate of royalty shall be twenty per cent (20%) on the first five thousand (5000) copies sold and twenty per cent (20%) upon all subsequent copies sold (13 being reckoned as 12).~~

10 The Publishers agree to make up an interim royalty account

three months after publication of each work published and pay to the Author within ten days the amount due to her upon such work

11 This Agreement to be entirely contingent upon the Publishers approving of the manuscript of HELEN O' FOUR GATES as finally submitted by the Author

12 If any difference shall arise between the Author and the Publishers touching the meaning of this Agreement or the rights or liabilities of the parties thereunder the same shall be referred to the arbitration of two persons (one to be named by each party) or their umpire and the parties agree to accept their decision as final

13 The term "Publishers" throughout this Agreement shall be deemed to include the person or persons or Company for the time being carrying on the business of the said HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED under as well its present as any future style and the benefit of this Agreement shall be transmissible accordingly

14 The Author hereby authorises The Authors Syndicate of 3 to 7 Southampton Street Strand W C to collect and receive all sums of money due ~~to~~ under the terms of this Agreement and declares that their receipt shall be a good and valid discharge in respect thereof and the said Authors Syndicate are hereby em-

powered by the Author to act on the Author's behalf in all matters arising in any way out of this Agreement



Source: Barrie and Jenkins archive, Random House, London.



16. The only surviving image from the film of *Helen of Four Gates* – Alma Taylor as Helen.

Source: *Kinematograph Weekly*, (Vol. 43, No. 701) 30 September 1920.



17. Long Tail, Colden. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth bought the house in 1919 for a hundred pounds. She had to sell it in 1921.
Source: Jack Aston.



18. Robertshaw, 29, Slack Top, Heptonstall. The Holdsworth's home from 1922 to 1928. All issues of *The Clear Light* were prepared there.
Source: Jack Aston.



19. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth in 1922, the year *Down Poverty Street* was published in 'a popular weekly newspaper'.
Source: *World's Work*, May 1922.

20. The Carnival of State 1923.

First came Tradition, ancient, stumbling
On gouty feet - her glory crumbling -
With vile, blood-rotted banner flying
O'er Monarchy, senile, half-dying -
His new name (Democracy!) proclaiming,
Wire pulled (too weak for human blaming)
Swordless and voiceless, a crowned dummy
Droning a speech - galvanised mummy!
Whilst all about, admiring flunkies
Half proved the theory about monkeys.
Next - a grim hangman, scarcely human,
Dragged to the rope a drooping woman,
And, safe (behind), strutted Lord Curzon,
Blowing War's trumpet - ribbons - spurs on.
There went the traitor Mussolini,
Apeing a look like grand Mazzini -
Upon his vest of blood -soaked darkness
An English crest gleamed in its starkness.
Next to him : Prostitution (legal)
Went shamelessly by, with footsteps regal,
Sweetening herself with scent of lilies,
Flaunting success to gaping sillies -

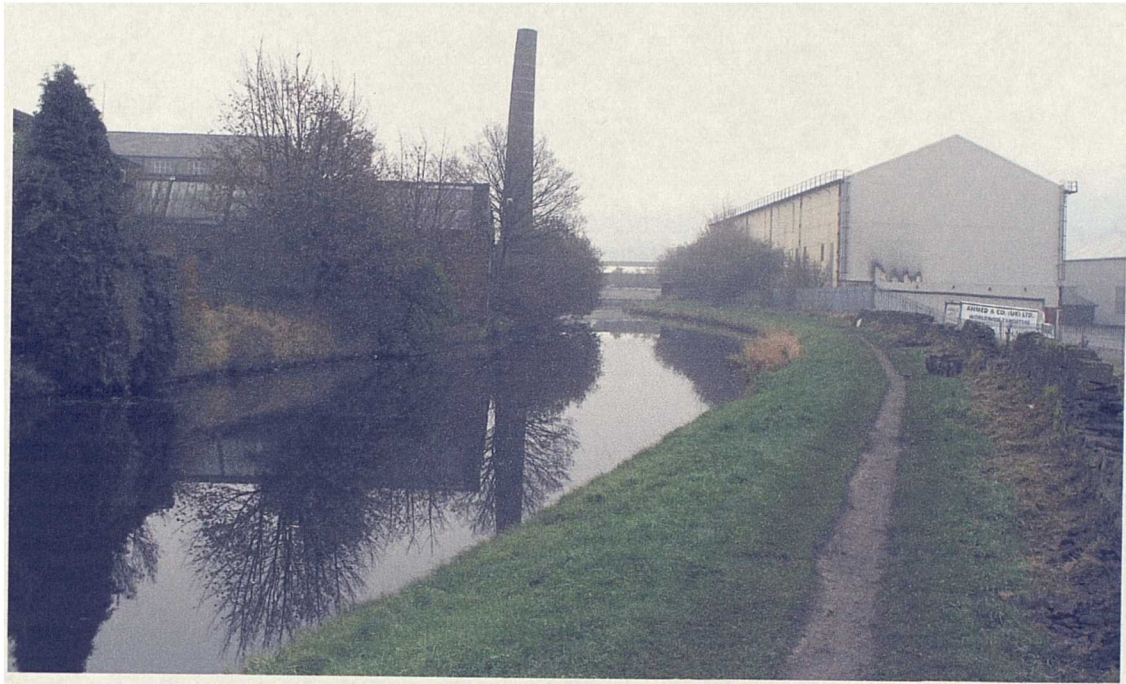
Whilst her poor sister, wan and painted
Went hissed, defiant, unsainted.
There ambled Thrift, rattling scant savings,
Answering the breadless with wild ravings,
Mumbling a litany against wasting,
Licking dry lips that ne'er had tasting
Of one great hour with Joy full-crowded -
Coffined and meagre, and living shrouded.
Then Proletarian Life came walking
With anxious Love, of prices talking.
Their children, Fear and Want and Striving,
And Son (born dumb), ricketly thriving.
Then went Divorce, following foul Scandal
Dressed as a jester - and the Vandal
Of Law who spoke of alimonies,
Whilst danced the Follies, ribald lunies.
Religion, gibbering creeds and cantings,
Held out Christ's body for all wantings,
Whilst Unemployment, nail marked, crying
'Work, give us work', staggered, half dying
With Motherhood behind it, thinking
Dark thoughts of Death, 'ere life came blinking.
Then Drama, breathing with much anguish'

In heavy Pagentry did languish -
So swaddled round with rags of splendour
Its very soul it did surrender.
Then went the Strike, all fierce and haggard,
Shouting of wages; and that laggard
Meek Pacifism, all negation
Whilst nation made arms against nation,
And hounds of war shouted in wonder
For aeroplanes - with blood and thunder.
There walked the Soldier, left unlettered,
With all his ignorance, slave fettered,
For to give him erudition
Would bring the menace of sedition.
O motley throng! O forms of all shameless!
Go by. Go by! Some shall be nameless.
Far off in the rain our Freedom waiteth,
Her hour shall come when Courage mateth
With Thought and Dream and holy Passion,
And other carnivals gain Fashion.

Source: *The Clear Light*, No.3, August 1923.



21. The dust jacket of *This Slavery*.
Source: Labour Publishing Co., London, 1925.



22. The Leeds and Liverpool canal at Church. The towpath was Hester's way home from Redburn, (Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's fictional Blackburn) in ***This Slavery.***
Source: Jack Aston.



23. (a). The North View Terrace date stone, Rainhall Road, Barnoldswick.
Source: Jack Aston.



23. (b). Rainhall Road, Barnoldswick. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth moved to number 51, (the fourth house from the left, in North View Terrace), to live with her parents in 1928, after her marriage broke up. She wrote ***Eagles' Crag*** there. It was her home until 1934.
Source: Jack Aston.

24. **Alfred Holdsworth.**

Alfred Holdsworth's family was from Nelson, although he was born at Linton, near Grassington in Yorkshire on 6 February 1885. Before he met Ethel Carnie he had been a friend of William Holt, the Todmorden socialist, and like Holt he had worked his way round the world, visiting America and Canada, where he met Jack London, in 1910, and Australia and New Zealand in 1912. He shared Ethel's love of the countryside as well as her political convictions and her interest in writing.

After he was conscripted he taught typing, but it is likely that he saw action as well because he was shell-shocked and captured by the Germans. He was something of a jack-of-all trades, describing himself as a life assurance agent at the time of his marriage in 1915 and a farmer when his daughter Maud was born in 1920. After the failure of *The Clear Light* he became a Labour Party official, he joined the Communist Party, was secretary of the Cotton Textile Fund and wrote poetry, plays and short stories.⁽¹⁾ He continued to live in the Hebden Bridge area after the breakdown of his marriage. He opened a herbalist shop in December 1933 where his cousin, Jane Crossland typed his work with a view to its publication, and finally moved to Hob Lane Cottage,⁽²⁾ next to 'The Silent Inn' at Stanbury, gaining a reputation as a skilful chiropodist.

(1) *Poems from My Drawer Corner*, with a preface by his wife, was published in 1926, and after his death a collection of verse, *A Poet Passed* (The Ridings Publishing Co., Driffeld, 1968), and a story 'The Jungle' in Klaus, H.G., (ed.), *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries* (Journeyman, London, 1993) pp. 29-31.

(2) See Appendix 25.

He died in St. James' Hospital, Keighley on 25 May 1963, five months after Ethel, aged 78. His will directed that he be cremated with 'secular observances' only. He never saw his wife and children after the separation, and left nothing to his daughters.⁽³⁾

⁽³⁾ Alfred Holdsworth archive, Keighley public library, BK63.



25. Hob Cottage, Stanbury, Alfred Holdsworth's home after his separation from Ethel in 1928.
Source: Jack Aston.

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National Council for Equal Citizenship Archive, Working Class Movement Library, Salford.
Owens College Archive, John Rylands University Library of Manchester Special Collections Division.
Women's Labour League Papers, National Museum of Labour History Archive Centre, Manchester.

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Blackburn 1918
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Heptonstall 1920, 1922, 1923, 1924
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Accrington Observer and Times
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Blackburn Times
Blackburn Weekly Telegraph
British Citizen

Burnley News
Clarion
The Clear Light
Colne and Nelson Times
Common Cause
The Co-operative News
Cotton Factory Times
Craven Herald
Daily Herald
Fellowship
Freedom
Hebden Bridge Times and Calder Vale Gazette
Justice
Kinematograph Weekly
Labour Leader
The Millgate Monthly
New Crusader
The New Yorker
Northern Daily Telegraph
Northern Voice
The Pioneer
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Sunday Worker
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The Workers' Tribune
World's Work
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 Of Arthur Simm to Roger Smalley, 8 June 1993.
 Of Ruby Holland to Roger Smalley, 1 January 2002.

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Miss Nobody (Methuen, London, 1913).
Voices of Womanhood (Headley Brothers, London, 1914).
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