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## **A Job Like Any Other?**

### **Feminist Responses and Challenges to Domestic Worker Organising in Edwardian Britain**

Laura Schwartz

#### **Abstract**

*This article focuses on the Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland (est. 1909-1910), a small, grassroots union organised by young female domestic servants in the years leading up to the First World War. This union emerged against a backdrop of labour unrest as well as an increasingly militant women's movement. The article looks at how the Domestic Workers' Union drew inspiration from the latter but also encountered hostility from some feminists unhappy with the idea of their own servants becoming organised. I argue that the uneven and ambivalent response of the women's movement towards the question of domestic worker organising is significant not simply as an expression of the social divisions which undoubtedly characterised this movement, but also as reflecting a wider debate within early twentieth-century British feminism over what constituted useful and valuable work for women. Attitudes towards domestic worker organising were therefore predicated upon feminists' interrogation of the very nature of domestic labour. Was it inherently inferior to masculine and/or professional forms of work? Was it intrinsically different from factory work, or could it be reorganised and rationalised to fit within the industrial paradigm? Under what conditions should domestic labour be performed, and, perhaps most importantly, who should do it?*

## Introduction

At the turn of the twentieth century, domestic service was the most common form of employment for women in Britain, and servants made up between one third and one quarter of the female workforce.<sup>1</sup> Most British women were therefore either employers of servants or servants themselves, and this of course meant that the majority of those active in the large and increasingly high-profile Edwardian women's movement would also have had first-hand experience of domestic service. No wonder, then, that many 'first wave' feminists turned their attention to the 'servant problem' – a widely perceived shortage of competent and reliable domestic workers lamented by the employer class as a whole. During this period, the 'servant problem' formed the subject of countless newspaper columns, political treatises, novels, plays and dinner-party conversations. Yet this seemingly trivial preoccupation pointed to a deeper and widespread social anxiety over rising worker militancy, the strengthening of the women's movement and the changing relationship between the domestic sphere and the world of work. Domestic workers were not merely the passive object of this debate. Inspired by the upsurge in labour unrest which marked the years leading up to the First World War, some domestic workers attempted to redefine the 'servant problem' from their own perspective: as a problem of low wages, miserable conditions and unjust employers.

The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland by no means represented the voices of all servants, but it offered a particularly articulate expression of a more generalised restlessness among domestic servants in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> The Domestic Workers' Union (DWU) was formally launched in the spring of 1910, as a branch

of the National Federation of Women Workers (a general trade union for women established in 1906 that focused on unorganised workplaces neglected by the more established male-dominated trade unions).<sup>3</sup> By 1913 the DWU was reported to have acquired a regular subscribing membership of about 400 servants with another 2,000 having passed through its books. Regional branches were established in Manchester and Oxford, and by 1913 the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers – a grassroots organising project based in Glasgow – had also joined. The DWU saw itself as part of the wider labour movement, not as a top-down charitable organisation but a union run ‘by servants for servants’. Its first object was ‘to raise the status of domestic work to the level of other industries’ and it called for servants to be included in labour legislation such as the Week-day Rest Act and the ten hour day in opposition to the 16 hour day servants as young as 14 were often expected to work.<sup>4</sup>

The DWU was also rooted in the women’s movement and some of its main organisers were active in support of a range of feminist causes, especially the ongoing struggle for the vote. The first section of this article will discuss how many servants became politicised through the women’s movement, and how feminist rhetoric and ideas were freely deployed to argue for a fundamental transformation of domestic service. The feminist press was central to this process because it provided one of the few ways in which domestic servants could gain access to and participate in the wide range of campaigns for women’s right to education, access to the professions, political and legal equality, sexual freedom and improved working conditions, taking place at this time. Women’s movement periodicals also provided key forums for both middle- and working-class women to debate the ‘servant problem’ and the possibility of domestic workers organising themselves into trade unions.

Yet when the DWU was founded, the response from within this large and diverse feminist public sphere was mixed. While the editors of some feminist newspapers lent their formal support to the new union, many of their readers felt otherwise. Some complained that lazy and incompetent servants were one of the greatest obstacles to the ‘emancipated’ woman who sought a professional career outside the home. Others insisted that the introduction of class conflict into the home would destroy the sanctity of the domestic sphere. And even many feminists sympathetic to servants’ desire for better treatment maintained that domestic labour was too different by its very nature to be unionised, regulated and legislated for as if it were a job like any other. The second section of the article goes onto to discuss this latter point in more detail, arguing that feminist responses and challenges to domestic worker organising need to be understood in the context of broader feminist debates on and redefinitions of work. More ‘philosophical’ consideration of the nature of domestic labour, and whether it was inherently inferior to or different from masculine forms of work, had an impact on the practical question of whether domestic workers could be successfully unionised. The third and final section of the article analyses the Domestic Workers’ Union’s contribution to this debate. Union members Kathlyn Oliver, Jessie Stephen and Grace Neal insisted that that domestic service was a profession of national importance of equal value to all other forms of work. Yet when they came to articulating servants’ experience of exploitation, they too found themselves arguing that there was something distinct (and quite possibly *worse*) about domestic labour.

### The Domestic Workers’ Union and the Women’s Movement

The feminist movement, and the feminist press in particular, played a crucial role in domestic servant militancy and the formation of the DWU. Its founder, Kathlyn Oliver, maintained that ‘[t]his servant agitation belongs to the feminist movement’.<sup>5</sup> And this view was supported by

a 1916 enquiry into domestic service (surveying 566 servants and 708 mistresses) which likewise concluded that ‘waves of suffrage agitation’ had opened the minds of servants to their own struggles as workers in the home.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, leading figures in the DWU combined agitating for a servants’ trade union with active support for a wide range of women’s rights causes. Kathlyn Oliver (b.1885) worked in London as a servant for Mary Sheepshanks – a prominent activist in the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance.<sup>7</sup> Oliver instead chose to support the People’s Suffrage Federation which argued for universal franchise for both men and women. She also contributed to debates on sexuality in the feminist press, and corresponded with radical sexologist Edward Carpenter on the subject of her love and sexual desire for other women.<sup>8</sup> Jessie Stephen (1893-1979) founded the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers in 1911-1912, and continued working as a domestic servant in Glasgow until 1914 when blacklisting by local employers compelled her to leave her hometown to work as an organiser for the DWU in London.<sup>9</sup> She was also a member of the Women’s Social and Political Union (the largest militant suffrage organisation), and she later claimed that her black and white maid’s uniform proved useful in distracting attention when she undertook militant actions such as acid-bombing post-boxes.<sup>10</sup> Frances Dickinson, the first President of the DWU, worked as housekeeper for a socialist family in London. She too was an active member of the Women’s Social and Political Union and her name appears on the Suffragette Fellowship’s list of those imprisoned for acts of militancy.<sup>11</sup>

Such women may have been impressive, but they were not entirely exceptional. Other, lesser known, domestic servants were also drawn to suffrage activism, risking their reputations and their livelihoods in the process. 26 year old Eliza Simmins or Simmons (the spelling of her name varies), described in the Women’s Social Political Union newspaper Votes for Women as a ‘housemaid’, was arrested on 23 November 1910 for smashing the

windows of Winston Churchill's residence. She told the reporter that 'she would devote her whole time to help the cause if she were in a position to do so'. Refusing on principle to pay the 40 shillings fine, Eliza was sentenced to 14 days imprisonment.<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Griffiths (b.1857) of Rochdale, nurse and domestic servant for John Albert Bright MP, also endured imprisonment in the name of votes for women. When Maurice Levy MP claimed that she had only been induced to participate in the 'rowdyism' under orders from her mistress Edith Bright, Charlotte Griffiths wrote a letter to the Manchester Guardian in order to state publicly that 'I went entirely of my own free will, without any pressure or persuasion, but because I believed that the cause was just and right.' Like Kathlyn Oliver, Charlotte Griffiths did not simply replicate the politics of her suffrage-supporting mistress but made up her own mind on questions of strategy – choosing militant tactics while Edith Bright remained committed to constitutional measures.<sup>13</sup> John Albert Bright pleaded his servant's cause and even went to visit Griffiths in prison, but for many suffragette-servants association with the militant wing of the movement often led to the loss of one's post. One anonymous 'Domestic' wrote to the Woman Worker in 1908 recounting how, following her imprisonment two years earlier for storming the House of Commons, she 'had a hard fight to get a situation' and she was 'afraid that if my present mistress were to know that I was an ex-convict she would not want me any more'.<sup>14</sup> This 'Domestic' also reminded her readers that servants' exceptionally long working days made it even more difficult for them than for other workers to attend political meetings in the evenings, while another correspondent (Nellie Best, 'keeper' at a servants' registry) pointed out how the fashion for wearing evening dress to 'Suffragist At Homes' effectively 'debar[red]' servants from attending.<sup>15</sup>

Because servants found it so difficult to participate in the regular round of meetings and demonstrations, not to mention highly public and/or illegal actions, the feminist press

became particularly important to them in asserting their rights as both women and workers.

The ‘ex-convict’ ‘Domestic’ lamented not being able to attend the ‘big WSPU demonstration’ that was taking place in her hometown that day. Instead, she was ‘sat reading the Woman Worker’, which offered an alternative way of demonstrating her solidarity and, indeed, of intervening in the feminist public sphere without fear of losing her job. Women’s movement newspapers would have been relatively accessible to servants since, by the first decade of the twentieth century, they were increasingly sold on the streets by supporters who also left copies lying about in cafes and railway station waiting rooms with the hope of picking up a new audience.<sup>16</sup> Periodicals’ short or serialised articles offered an ideal format for servants who might only have five or ten minutes to spare between the incessant tasks that constituted their 16 hour working day. Letters could be published anonymously and frequently provoked responses from other servants. Correspondence columns therefore made it possible to collectivise the grievances of an otherwise fragmented and isolated workforce.

Between 1908 and 1912, debates on the servant problem featured over several issues of the Common Cause (the organ of the non-militant National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies), the Woman Worker (the adult-suffrage supporting paper of the National Federation of Women Workers)<sup>17</sup> and the Freewoman (a diversely individualist, anarchist, socialist, feminist and self-consciously provocative weekly).<sup>18</sup> The culture of controversy and debate which characterised the feminist press at the turn of the twentieth century,<sup>19</sup> encouraged servants to make their voices heard and sometimes to challenge the hypocrisy of feminists from the employer-class who failed to include servants in their visions of freedom and justice. One servant, calling herself ‘Freedom’, wrote to the Common Cause in 1911, asserting:

It is one thing to plead equality in pamphlets and from the platform, but we want it in reality and not as an ideal only. We don't want mistresses saying, 'who is that man you spoke to just now? Why have you had bacon for breakfast instead of butter?'<sup>20</sup>

In fact, it was maids' insistence upon this question which led to the formation of the DWU via the pages of the Woman Worker. Mary MacArthur, General Secretary of the National Federation of Women Workers and editor of the Woman Worker, included domestic servants among the 'sister women ... toiling day after day' to whom the paper sought to appeal. It reported on servants' trade unions in other parts of the world<sup>21</sup>, and in 1908 the National Federation of Women Workers made an aborted attempt to form a branch for domestic servants in Birmingham.<sup>22</sup> That same year an article in Woman Worker proclaimed the need for the women's movement to take up the cause of domestic servants, insisting that 'One of our most pressing reforms, one of our earliest tasks, must be to set free those thousands of women who toil in other women's houses.'<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the formation of a union had to be pushed for by the servants among its readership. Despite a formal commitment to improving the conditions of domestic servants, the Woman Worker often ended up focusing on the working conditions of factory girls or professional women. Why did the rights and wrongs of the domestic servant not figure more prominently in the pages of the Woman Worker, asked one disgruntled maid, 'have socialists forgotten her altogether?'. Referring to a proposal to start a regular Woman Worker feature for art students, she suggested that they might also find space for a column for domestic servants who, as a portion of the female workforce, surely outnumbered lady artists?<sup>24</sup> Other letters were published throughout 1908 to 1909 criticising the Woman Worker for not taking up strongly enough the cause of domestic servants and offering to help with any plans for a union.<sup>25</sup>

Kathlyn Oliver wrote a particularly trenchant letter insisting that the servant ‘should be encouraged to feel (what she really is) as important to the community as the worker in any other sphere’. A trade union would help to ‘raise’ the domestic worker and Oliver therefore hoped that ‘the proposal will not be allowed to drop’. The paper’s editors were swift to respond: ‘Will Miss Oliver start a Domestic Union herself? The WOMAN WORKER will be happy to receive and forward names of those willing to join.’<sup>26</sup> Oliver agreed and the prospective union was subsequently advertised as an organisation which would not only provide out-of-work benefits for its members, but also ‘agitate for legislation to compel employers to provide proper and healthy accommodation for servants, and reasonable hours of labour and rest.’<sup>27</sup>



Portrait of Kathlyn Oliver,  
accompanying the announcement  
of the formation of a servants'  
trade union.  
*Daily Mirror* 1 Nov 1909

The DWU sought to intervene in the women’s movement, deploying feminist arguments in support of their goals. General Secretary Grace Neal wrote to the Common Cause: ‘We so often hear it said that women are anxious to leave the home but of equal importance to this movement are the conditions still imposed on domestics’.<sup>28</sup> Editors at the

Common Cause agreed, declaring in 1911 that ‘Nothing could be of greater advantage to the status of women than to raise domestic work to a skilled trade with proper conditions... protected by unions.’<sup>29</sup> Publishing letters from Grace Neal and Kathlyn Oliver in support of the DWU, the Common Cause supported legal regulation of domestic service.<sup>30</sup> The Freewoman also published an article which linked the rights of domestic servants to the wider struggle of women to escape the domestic sphere: ‘Servants have struck against the tyranny of home life – more power to their elbow.’<sup>31</sup>

Not all the readers of these feminist periodicals, however, were quite so ready to accept the DWU as part of the struggle for women’s emancipation. Catering to the many mistresses among its readership, the Common Cause frequently posted advertisements seeking ‘a Good Cook-General’ or ‘Lady Housemaid’<sup>32</sup> With a readership of between twenty and forty thousand, the Woman Worker sold to many middle-class socialists and feminists and also placed advertisements for servants, although these sometimes included the promise of ‘decent wages ... [t]reated as one of the family’.<sup>33</sup> Among these feminist mistresses were some outraged by the claims of the DWU or even the very notion that exploitation could exist in the workplace of the home.<sup>34</sup> Some women in middle-class occupations – juggling family life with the demands of work – argued that, by comparison, servants had an easy time of it. ‘I often come home at 7 or 7.30pm, tired, cold, and famished,’ wrote one such ‘business woman’, only ‘to find ... [the maid] cosily seated by a big fire doing drawn thread work!’<sup>35</sup> Some of these letters supported the idea of a servants’ union in principle but, from their own experience as mistresses, could not really believe that servants were as exploited as the DWU claimed.<sup>36</sup> The Woman Worker in particular, received letters from employers who claimed to have consciously extended their progressive politics to the treatment of their maids.<sup>37</sup> A hardworking doctor’s wife had not only paid her servants good wages, but also lent them books from her library and sent them to suffrage meetings. The ingratitude with

which they had repaid her led her and others to feel ‘disillusioned on the servant question’.

Having previously believed that servants were ‘a badly treated lot and mistresses very much at fault’ they now suspected that servants were not up to being treated as equals at all.<sup>38</sup>

Servants and their supporters were, however, quick to point out the hypocrisy of those claiming to fight for women’s emancipation while benefitting from the exploitation of women workers in their own homes. The editors of the *Common Cause*, surveying the correspondence that took place in their paper during 1911, commented:

It is curious to notice how many women who see the need for political enfranchisement do not extend their sympathy to this deeper and more elementary need for social and domestic enfranchisement.<sup>39</sup>

While the feminist support for women servants could, in a context such as this, seem little more than lip service, the feminist politics of these periodicals did play an important role in shaping the debate on domestic service if only in giving servants an opportunity to get their voices heard. ‘Why don’t suffragists begin their reform work at home, before they start with factory girls...?’ jeered one woman who had been in service since she was thirteen years old and who wanted only to win for herself and other workers a twelve hour day.<sup>40</sup> ‘I wonder if “Another Mistress” imagines I put in sixteen hours work a day for a hobby?’, countered ‘Another Servant’, making no effort to hide her contempt for a woman with so little experience of the realities of domestic work.<sup>41</sup> One domestic servant was clear as to why women who elsewhere proclaimed their commitment to emancipation should be so slow to turn their attentions to servants, and why, as Kathlyn Oliver noted, the DWU had such little support from mistresses, for ‘It is to the mistresses’ advantage that things should remain as they are.’<sup>42</sup>

## Domestic Labour and Feminist Debates on Work

Was the ambivalence of many in the women's movement simply a case of selfish suffragists unwilling to share their new-found emancipation with their militant maids? While the servant problem certainly highlights social divisions within feminism, these cannot be explained solely in terms of competing class interests. Rather, attitudes to the servant problem need to be understood in relation to a much wider discussion about the nature of work and women's relationship to it. When middle-class supporters of the women's movement complained about their servants they were indeed expressing the prejudices of the employer class and contempt for those who laboured for them. Yet they were also identifying a very real problem – one faced by all women seeking to utilise their talents in the professional sphere while remaining responsible for the home and the labour that took place within it. A note of desperation crept into the letter of the working doctor's wife, a significant shift in register from the snobbish tone which marked her description of her maids: 'Please tell me whose fault it all is,' she pleaded, 'Only it is no use saying I ought to take a flat and do all the work myself, as well as my other work and my mothering work. My husband's practice would disappear, for one thing, and then we could not live at all.'<sup>43</sup>

The burden of housework during this period was immense. Before the mass production of efficient household appliances keeping a house involved a great deal of manual labour.<sup>44</sup> Whether this labour was performed by a waged domestic servant or an unwaged wife and mother, it was indeed a full time job. The women's movement recognised the problem and a range of solutions were debated in the feminist press; from skimping on one's household chores, to labour saving devices, to communal living. These were treated as

serious political issues, with some even arguing that the introduction of cheap electrical kitchen appliances or better designed houses would be one of the most important outcomes of the struggle for the suffrage.<sup>45</sup> Many feminists saw the problem as one common to working and middle-class women, servant and mistress. ‘To me the servants’ chains are the same chains that bind the mistress,’ wrote Carra Lyle in the Woman Worker, ‘the identical chains that fetter working-class women.’<sup>46</sup> The labour organiser and suffragist Ada Neild Chew likewise spoke of the ‘bond’ that existed between herself and her charwoman ‘Mrs W.’, describing them both as ‘married working women’ struggling to combine housekeeping and childcare with waged work. Chew believed that the mistress-maid relationship was, at least in her own progressive household, a form of ‘mutual help’.<sup>47</sup>

Such arguments were important in highlighting the continuum between waged and unwaged forms of domestic labour. Those who actively sought to bring a feminist perspective to the widely discussed ‘servant problem’, therefore, often insisted that it should be understood instead as a problem of household labour per se.<sup>48</sup> Some argued for the eradication of domestic labour altogether. A writer in the Woman Worker maintained, along with many other radical thinkers during this period, that ‘The rational way to lessen [the mistreatment of servants]... is by a scientific reduction of the labours of a house, by co-operative collectivist associations for the discharge of domestic duties.’<sup>49</sup> Yet when these schemes were explained in detail, they often relied upon the labour of a paid domestic workforce separate from the residents of these supposedly progressive communities.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the variety of views put forward on the servant problem, these discussions continued to be framed by the longstanding feminist commitment to liberating women from the confines of the domestic sphere. The right to education and professional employment had been central demands of the women’s movement since the 1860s. Financial independence and the fulfilment of creative potential were counter-posed to the enforced idleness and

dependencies of the middle-class home. '[L]et us not suppose that... our sole vocation is housework,' warned Monica Poulboise in the Woman Worker, instead 'let us lift our heads and learn the nature and purpose of our existence.'<sup>51</sup> The association of emancipation with the public world of work had a powerful hold over the feminist imagination.<sup>52</sup> This rhetoric of work was frequently seen to unite the interests of middle-class professional women and their working-class sisters: 'if a woman works, she has some claim to be called "respectable"'; if she doesn't – well, she hasn't' the Woman Worker insisted,<sup>53</sup> with one of its leading journalists further declaring that 'To not work is a terrible state for a woman to be in.'<sup>54</sup>

There was much uncertainty, however, as to whether domestic labour ought to be included in this vision of ennobling and liberating work. The desire to free women from the burden of housework was not simply about protecting them from over-work, or allowing them to do other work, but also an assertion of their right to do better work. In the feminist newspapers discussed here domestic work was frequently denigrated by feminists as 'drudge' work – 'menial', 'monotonous' and 'purposeless'<sup>55</sup> Even the Woman Worker, which claimed to value equally the work of all women, published numerous denunciations of domestic labour: 'Kitchen work is dirty work, is unceasing work, is monotonously unmental work ... and is not nice work either, and only fool anti-suffragists would say it is.'<sup>56</sup> This derogation of domestic labour was one of the factors behind the Freewoman's opposition to the introduction in 1912 of a new degree for women at the University of London in 'Home Science and Economics'. This 'degree for housewives', the Freewoman argued, undermined the intellectual integrity of the University. The science of the home could not be considered as equal or equivalent to subjects such as chemistry, and did not therefore deserve degree status.<sup>57</sup> Not only was the knowledge and labour of the home unfit for higher education, but it was also of inherent lesser value:

Housework is a craft. Like a craft, it should be done deftly and accurately, either by those who have a natural leaning towards it or by those who are unfitted for work demanding a greater degree of intellectual endowment. It is lower grade work.<sup>58</sup>

No emancipated woman of any intelligence should waste her time on ‘the mere removing of the mess of living and the arranging of the disorder of it.’ Domestic labour ‘should be done quickly and efficiently without anyone taking much note of it.’ Even the servant paid to take on this task, would, as she became ‘more highly evolved’, perform her work with an appropriate degree of distaste similar to ‘a public executioner … effective and swift.’<sup>59</sup>

Despite its provocative tone, the Freewoman was not merely engaging in polemics. The controversy over the introduction of the course in home science extended beyond the pages of this periodical and concerned many of those who had been fighting over the last fifty years for women’s right to attend university. Supporters of women’s higher education had long argued over the best way to ensure that women received an education equal to that of men. The prospect of introducing degrees specially attuned to women’s interests was seen by many as threatening to increase the segregation and marginalisation of university women. Women’s educational resources (meagre at the best of times) would be diverted into a qualification which would never allow women to compete with men holding degrees in traditional subjects.<sup>60</sup> However, not all readers of the Freewoman agreed with the editorial’s opposition to the new degree, or with the idea that all housework was low grade drudge work. Adele Meyer wrote ‘as a feminist and suffragist and one of those responsible for helping on the development of Home Science’. She argued that the aim of the new degree was to give due recognition to the important contribution to society that women made raising children

and keeping house. Domestic work was therefore as deserving of the application of ‘scientific principles and education’ as the work which went into building naval battleships.<sup>61</sup>

Such debates give a clear sense of the contradictions at the heart of the servant problem. To recognise domestic labour as valuable and necessary was to risk undermining a longstanding feminist commitment to women’s entry into the public sphere. It was all very well to praise the work women performed in the home, but in the hands of the ‘anti-suffragists’ this could all too easily become a justification for keeping them there. One important indicator of the resistance to attributing any real value to domestic labour was the striking absence of suggestions that the problem of housework might be solved by men taking on their fair share. Domestic labour, partly because it was historically defined as women’s work and partly because of the personal and maternalistic relationships it involved, was, as historian Lucy Delap has pointed out, frequently seen as antithetical to modern, industrial, democratic society.<sup>62</sup> Yet these debates went further, scrutinising the very practice of work itself to ask if there was something different about the doing of domestic labour. Freewoman journalists who described housework as ‘drudgery’ and suitable only for women of ‘the primitive type of mind’<sup>63</sup> were challenged to define exactly what it was about housework which made it thus. Granted, domestic labour was often tedious but what made it different from other types of repetitive labour? ‘There is no more drudgery in washing up after a family feast... than in cleaning up a laboratory after a debauch by an eminent or amateur scientist’, suggested one reader, ‘the home is still a more pleasant place to work than the office, the sales counter, or the daily round elsewhere.’<sup>64</sup>

The direct comparison made here between domestic work and the new forms of female employment in the public sphere – the office, the shop and the factory – was key. The editors of the Common Cause gave voice to a popular idea when they argued that the servant problem would be solved if service could be brought ‘up to date’ and made more like other

forms of industrial and professional work.<sup>65</sup> Comparisons with nursing were especially common, for this once despised sphere of female labour had been elevated by establishing training schools and professional qualifications.<sup>66</sup> Improved training for domestic servants was a popular theme across the political spectrum in the first half of the twentieth century, called for by philanthropic societies as well as in the feminist press, and it became an important aspect of government policy following the First World War.<sup>67</sup> Opinion divided very rapidly, however, when this argument was extended to its logical conclusion. If service was to become more like other forms of work, surely this meant that it should also be subject to labour legislation and state regulation. Esther Longhurst, a regular columnist in the Woman Worker put forward the idea of a government training college for girls of sixteen to nineteen, offering a two year course with a government diploma on completion. Far more controversial, however, was her belief that 'the employer must be obliged ... to treat her employee properly. We have been able to limit the hours of the factory workers ... Surely it is not, therefore, impossible to legislate for the domestic worker.'<sup>68</sup> Yet domestic labour was viewed by many in the women's movement as too intimate, too attuned to the rhythms of domestic life, to different by its very nature, to be treated thus. When the National Federation of Women Workers and the DWU called for limited hours of work in 1909, women who otherwise supported the improvement of conditions in domestic service nevertheless believed that this would be 'deleterious and fatal'.<sup>69</sup> Domestic work could not be conceived of in the same terms as factory work. While the latter consisted of continuous and controlled activity, domestic service responded to the events of family life – the cry of the baby, the arrival of visitors – yet also included moments of respite when no particular task presented itself.<sup>70</sup> The Enquiry by the Women's Industrial Council into the Conditions of Domestic Service (which was supported by the editors of the Common Cause and large sections of the women's movement) opposed suggestions made by the DWU for a national standard of wages, due to

the fact that domestic work was not ‘definite’, and that it was difficult to develop ‘a standard of efficiency’ for work that ‘produces utilities and not commodities’.<sup>71</sup>

### The Domestic Workers’ Union and the Problem of Work

The DWU was thus faced with a considerable problem when it sought to organise around the extremely contentious and slippery concept of household labour. The Union insisted that it was valuable, useful and indeed real work. In 1911 Kathlyn Oliver wrote a pamphlet, published by the People’s Suffrage Federation, that was particularly clear on this point:

The entirely wrong conception of housework as menial work will be admitted by all thoughtful persons. Cleaning, rightly understood, is a necessary and therefore honourable occupation and unless we are prepared to deny the necessity of clean well-kept homes, there really is no more important work than housework. The health of our national life is dependent on our home life.<sup>72</sup>

Oliver was not the only domestic servant to challenge the tendency for feminists to view themselves as above housework. Another servant supporter of the DWU likewise reminded the journalists at the Woman Worker that we ‘are all servants to one another in this life... And so I say what is there in our profession and position in life that should make us so inferior to our fellow creatures?’<sup>73</sup> Oliver deployed the popular feminist idea that ‘it is work which justifies a person’s existence’ to argue that domestic labour and the women who did it deserved the respect of other women.<sup>74</sup>

The DWU and other militant maids also stood firm in their insistence that household work could be measured, regulated and protected in the same manner as industrial labour. Many commentators, even those critical of current conditions in domestic service, noted that it was not particularly badly paid compared to other kinds of women's work because room and board was included.<sup>75</sup> Yet the DWU argued that if servants' wages were calculated at an hourly rate, in the same manner as factory and shop workers, their excessively long working days reduced their pay considerably. Grace Neal maintained that, the average domestic servant, working a sixteen hour day with a wage of £20 per annum, earned as little as 1 pence per hour.<sup>76</sup> She also insisted that any time spent 'on duty' even when not actually engaged in a task, counted as time at work just as it did for the office or shop worker. '[E]ven if not actually at work we must always be ready to answer bells at any time and all times, no matter whether it be at meal times or even at night.'<sup>77</sup> Jessie Stephen's memoirs of her time in service chimed with this:

the quicker I was in doing my jobs the more work I found to do for the reason that employers, even in those days, thought that when they were paying a girl for doing housework she should be employed for most of the hours she was working.<sup>78</sup>

The DWU hoped that, ultimately, domestic service could be completely transformed and rationalised along the lines of industrial labour. The best course of action, maintained Kathlyn Oliver, was for the living-in system to be abolished in favour of the state-employment or 'nationalisation' of domestic workers.<sup>79</sup> In 1913 Grace Neal was reported to have 'already formulated a scheme for the establishment of hostels for working-women, whence the ordinary domestic could go to her work each day as does the typist, the shop girl

or any other worker. Payment by the hour would be the rule ... ', and in the final recognition of domestic labour as real and necessary work, Grace Neal envisaged that these servants would have their own domestic needs catered for by well-paid workers: 'Each hostel would have its own domestic staff so that the daily servant would not have several hours of drudgery before leaving for her work'.<sup>80</sup>

However, despite the best efforts of the DWU to maintain that the solution to the servant problem lay in the treatment of domestic work as a job like any other, it was far harder to articulate servants' experience of exploitation in these terms. Domestic work exceeded the parameters of an industrial model of labour, not only in refusing to be contained within a clearly delineated working day, but also because of how it seemed to seep into all aspects of the servants' existence. The language maids used to describe the frustrations of always being on-call is in itself telling. More than one servant complained that they did 'not have half and hour to call their own', foretelling Virginia Woolf's words a decade later to describe the lack of space for women to pursue independent thought and fulfil their creative potential.<sup>81</sup> The problems of the 'living-in' system signalled servants' lack of space to express themselves independently of their work. Grace Neal pointed out that domestic work

brings with it so many worries that cannot occur when minding a loo, packing cornflour, or stitching trousers. In each of these mentioned trades the worker can, at a given time, put it all away and get home, outside of all cares of work.

Not so the domestic.<sup>82</sup>

It was also almost impossible to have autonomy over their work, or to do it very well without their capability being further exploited. Jessie Stephen, for example, put in extra work in her post as a cook general 'cleaning all the black lead off all the steel parts of the kitchen range

making them shine as they did when the range was first put in.' She was proud of her ability to make the otherwise dreary kitchen appear 'very much brighter', which helped her feel closer to her mother who 'had the same ideas about keeping brasses and steel shining.' Her employer Mrs Harvey 'delighted with ... how much nicer the whole place looked' had already recognised Jessie's exceptional competence, fired the second servant to save money and made Jessie responsible for the whole house with only a small increase in her wages.<sup>83</sup>

Servants often described domestic work as colonising of one's entire existence, leading to a 'dwarfing' of their spiritual and mental lives.<sup>84</sup> Many maids declared that they wanted 'not only their bodies fed but also their minds', and Kathlyn Oliver complained that too many mistresses failed to regard their servants 'as an intelligent being with a mind and a soul to cultivate and not merely a machine.'<sup>85</sup> Service prevented them from fulfilling their capacities as human beings. 'A Comrade' wishing the DWU 'every success' wrote of how she had worked in service for twelve years, during which time 'I never knew what an oratorio, grand opera, or scientific lecture was.' Having left service for factory work, she now had her evenings and weekends free to sing in a choir, ramble on the moorlands and 'enjoy the glory of a caravan holiday.'<sup>86</sup> Prevented from attending evening lectures<sup>87</sup>, exercising in the fresh air, joining political demonstrations or socialising with friends, many servants agreed that 'domestic service is simply stagnation to the intelligent mind'.<sup>88</sup> A servant of twenty years standing played on the double meaning of the term 'character' (as both employment reference and personhood) to describe the manner in which many militant maids felt their work to have eroded their very self: 'We want the legislature to come to our aid,' she explained in the Common Cause, 'so that we can retain our own characters rather than being "given" one by one whose own will not bare inspection very often.'<sup>89</sup>

'I think there is no other work which so crushes the soul out of everyone and tends to make them worms indeed', Kathlyn Oliver wrote, while simultaneously exhorting her fellow

workers to take pride in such work.<sup>90</sup> Oliver's indictment of domestic labour at times verged on the self-loathing: agreeing that it was 'deadening and brutalising work', causing 'anaemia, nervousness, ugliness and ill temper, prostitution, suicide and insanity'.<sup>91</sup> The problem turned again on the nature of the work itself, and the fact that servants were employed to perform work which their middle-class employers felt to be an 'unrefined, unpleasant business'.<sup>92</sup> It was therefore hard even for the union to deny the fact that only girls with no other options would ever take it up.<sup>93</sup> Oliver was forced to conclude that the only answer was the revolutionising of domestic service to the degree that it was unrecognisable.<sup>94</sup> Not all servants felt this way and experiences of service were varied during this period with some servants enjoying their work. However, the DWU was made up not only of militant and dissatisfied servants, but also those with a connection to the women's movement. Perhaps it was the impossibility of reconciling the life of the average servant with the vision of fulfilled womanhood striven for within the feminist periodicals, which made generating pride in its members such a difficult task for the union. For what the servant lacked was 'that priceless treasure, her liberty... Not only do you lose freedom of action in service, but freedom of thought and freedom of speech is denied to you.'<sup>95</sup>

Domestic service sometimes became a metaphor for the oppression of all women, when debated in the pages of the feminist press. And this could preclude the possibility of envisaging 'real life' servants as workers with the ability for self-empowerment, or indeed as women capable of feminist emancipation. 'In my opinion,' wrote journalist Bessie Smallman in the Woman Worker, 'no woman can hold the position of nurse or cook or lady's maid in ordinary households and be a free woman – that is, a woman free to think and express her thoughts...'. And she lamented the 'thousands of women, who obey other women's minds, who must think other women's thoughts until they have nothing of their own left'.<sup>96</sup> This view of domestic service is especially evident the Freewoman. Its opening editorial described the

Bondswoman (the Freewoman's opposite) as one who 'By habit of thought, by form of activity... round off the personality of some other individual' – an idea very close to that of the servant who is permitted only to think another woman's thoughts. In fact, wrote Mary Gawthorpe and Dora Marsden, 'women as a whole have shown nothing save "servant" attributes... The servile condition is common to all women.'<sup>97</sup> Thus, the bondswoman and the domestic servant became interchangeable. In another editorial, Marsden and Gawthorpe wrote:

The Freewoman applauds the girl who prefers to work in a factory, for 10s per week, and live in her own independent squalid conditions, rather than earn 7s 6d per week and live in better conditions in her employers' house... We consider this attitude, with its resultant effects in a dearth of servants of the present order, one of the most hopeful signs in England today.<sup>98</sup>

Both practically and conceptually, the conditions and labour of the domestic servant mitigated against her aspiring to any of those qualities which this periodical believed to be such important indicators of belonging to the 'race' of 'Freewomen'. The servant, like the servile wife, had exchanged freedom for 'security' and 'protection'. She was not the mistress of her own home, just as she was not the mistress of her own life, and although she earned a wage she did not do so on the 'free market' so lauded by Marsden, but in an economic terrain contaminated by emotions and dependencies. Worst of all, she laboured not for herself, but as proxy for another – and within the complex matrix of feminist debates on work and the importance placed on work as a sign of spiritual independence – this was tantamount to thinking the thoughts of another.<sup>99</sup>

The highly individualist feminism of the Freewoman offered an extreme version of the polarisation between the woman of the public sphere and the woman of the home, the freewoman and the bondswoman, the factory girl and the domestic worker, which should not be taken as representative of feminist approaches to the servant problem in general. However, its idiosyncratic style illuminated certain categories that were deployed across the women's movement. The suffragists at the Common Cause for example, loaded their politics with metaphor when they opposed a government move to ban women working at the pit heads. This periodical contrasted 'the work of the free, jolly, healthy, red-faced pit brow girl' with the ill health of the domestic servant.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes it was implied that servants themselves were to blame for their own oppression. One domestic servant, writing not to a feminist newspaper but to the Daily Dispatch in 1912, maintained that lack of unionisation and consequent low status was the fault of servants themselves, 'who by their slavish docility to conditions that stultify them mentally, morally and physically, compel the other workers to see them as a class lacking in common sense or grit.'<sup>101</sup> Grace Neal wrote in reply the following week, but rather than defending her profession, she agreed with the previous correspondent that 'I would like to impress on all domestics that just as long as they want bad conditions they will get them. Let them once wake up and organise and the domestic will instead of being looked down on, be one of the recognised workers.'<sup>102</sup> Within the vocabulary of the women's and workers' movement, the domestic servant was imbued with a great many feelings and political aspirations which exceeded the ostensible discussion of working conditions. She could easily become not only a symbol of victimhood, but also of the docility and cowardice which at times so frustrated the most militant feminists and trade unionists.

## Conclusion

The women's movement created the conditions for a minority of servants to translate resentment with their working conditions into a form of militancy which combined trade union principles with a feminist aspiration for a more fundamental kind of freedom. The DWU emerged from the interstices of the women's and labour movements in a period of exceptional industrial unrest. The combination of labour movement and feminist politics promoted by the National Federation of Women Workers and the Woman Worker made it fertile ground for discussions which led to the launch of the DWU in 1909-1910. Yet servants themselves had to push for demands which were far from wholeheartedly endorsed by their fellow feminists and suffragists, many of whom promoted a vision of autonomy and emancipation that was limited by valorisation of 'productive' work in the 'public' realm.

The servant problem had significant implications for how feminists came to understand women's work, their role as citizens and the liberation they fought for. In spite of its desire to view domestic work as equal and equivalent to male, industrial forms of labour, the DWU was unable to reconcile this with both their experience of exploitation and the identity of the modern emancipated woman. The effects of this can be felt today as feminists grapple with how to conceive of agency and empowerment in a context where many middle-class women feel compelled to purchase the labour of low-paid (and often migrant) women as the only way to liberate themselves from the 'double shift', at a time when a rapidly shrinking public sector shifts even more 'reproductive labour' back into the home.<sup>103</sup> This article suggests that we look again at the Edwardian servant problem and the ensuing debates on work as central to shaping the dominant ideas of 'autonomy' and 'emancipation' that twenty-first century feminists have inherited. In doing so, it poses the question as to whether these are adequate to dealing with the power differentials that inevitably arise from the global chain of care, and the challenges faced by women in relation to both their waged and unwaged labour in an age of austerity.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Servants constituted 34 per cent of all women employed in 1891 and still twenty-three per cent in 1930, Leonore Davidoff, ' "Mastered for Life": Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Social History* 7: 4 (1974): 406-28, 410. The 1911 census recorded 1, 359,359, women employed as indoor servants.

<sup>2</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (Basingstoke, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the founding and politics of the Domestic Workers' Union, see Laura Schwartz, '"What We Think Is Needed Is a Union of Domestics Such as the Miners Have": The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1908-1914', *Twentieth Century British History* 25: 2 (2014), 173-98.

<sup>5</sup> *Common Cause* 7 Dec 1911, 621-2.

<sup>6</sup> C. Violet Butler, *Domestic Service: An Enquiry by the Women's Industrial Council* (London, 1980 (first published 1916), 6, 11. See also, *Labour Leader* 3 June 1910, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 21, Reel 10, 504e/1; *Manchester Guardian*, 20 June 1913, 'Press Cuttings' The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/23.

<sup>7</sup> Census return for 1 Barton Street, London (1911). Sheepshanks became Secretary of the Alliance in 1913, and the editor of the newspaper *Ius Suffragii*, Sybil Oldfield, *Spinsters of this Parish: The Life and Times of F.M. Mayor and Mary Sheepshanks* (London, 1984), 159-60.

<sup>8</sup> *Woman Worker* 11 Aug 1909, 126; *Freewoman* 22 Feb 1912, 270; Kathlyn Oliver to Edward Carpenter, 25 Oct 1915, Sheffield Local Archive, Edward Carpenter Collection, Carpenter/Mss/386/262; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London, 1995), 281-2, 291-2; L. Bland, 'Heterosexuality, Feminism and the *Freewoman* Journal in Early Twentieth-Century England', *Women's History Review*, 4 (1995), 5-23, 14; Lucy Delap, *Knowing Their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2011), 26.

<sup>9</sup> The precise dates of the Scottish Federation of Domestic Workers, as well as the point at which it formally merged with the London-based Domestic Workers' Union, are somewhat unclear, see Schwartz, 'Domestic Workers' Union', 17-19. See also, Audrey Canning, 'Jessie Stephen (1893-1979), Suffragette and Labour Activist', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition).

<sup>10</sup> After the First World War Jessie Stephen worked for Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Suffrage Federation, the successor to the East London Federation of Suffragettes, and later for the Workers' Birth Control Movement, see 'Miss Jessie Stephen', 'Oral Evidence on the Suffragist and Suffragette Movements: The Brian Harrison Interviews', The Women's Library@LSE, London, 8SUF/B157; Jessie Stephen, *Submission is for Slaves* (no date), Working Class Movement Library, Salford; Suzie Fleming and Glodian Dallas, 'Jessie', *Spare Rib* Feb 1975, 10-13.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen, 'Submission is for Slaves', 56; Suffragette Fellowship, 'Roll of Honour Suffragette Prisoners (1905-14)' (no date, c.1950), The Women's Library@LSE, London, 7LAC/2.

<sup>12</sup> *Votes for Women* 25 Nov 1910, 129, 2 Dec 1910, 143; 23 Nov 1910, 'Register of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction sitting at Bow Street', Part 1., 1910 (July, September, November), London Metropolitan Archives, PS/BOW/A/01/040. NB *Votes for Women* incorrectly records her arrest as 24 November.

<sup>13</sup> 1911 Census return for One Ash, Rochdale; *Manchester Guardian* 22 Feb 1908, 10, 3 March 1908, 5; , *Rochdale Observer*, 19 February 1908. Edith Bright and her daughter Hester were both active in the Rochdale branch of the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage, allied to the constitutionalist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Wales: A Regional Survey* (London, 2008), 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Woman Worker* 31 July 1908, 239.

<sup>15</sup> *Woman Worker* 25 Sept 1908, 430.

<sup>16</sup> For the distribution practices of feminist periodicals, see Maria Dicenzo, Lucy Delap, and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke, 2011). It was also relatively common for servants to have access to their employers' newspapers, see Margaret Beetham, 'Domestic Servants as Poachers of Print: Reading, Authority and Resistance in Late Victorian Britain', in *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain Since 1800*, ed. Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin, Abigail Wills (Basingstoke, 2009), 185-203. A couple of mistresses even complained to the *Common Cause* that the paper's content was either too sexually explicit or too informative about workers' rights to leave it lying within reach of their domestics, *Common Cause* 26 Jane 1911, 682, 7 Dec 1911, 621-2.

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- <sup>17</sup> The name was changed to Women Folk 2 Feb 1910 and Winifred Blatchford took over as Editor. The paper retained 'Woman Worker' in the subtitle and this article will refer to all editions as Woman Worker for ease of reference.
- <sup>18</sup> Bland, 'Heterosexuality, Feminism and the *Freewoman*, 5-23; Lucy Delap, 'Individualism and Introspection: The Framing of Feminism in the *Freewoman*', in Dicenzo, Delap, and Ryan, Feminist Media History, 159-193.
- <sup>19</sup> Dicenzo, Delap, and Ryan, Feminist Media History, 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Common Cause 9 Nov 1911, 543.
- <sup>21</sup> Woman Worker 10 July 1908, 174, 28 Oct 1908, 555.
- <sup>22</sup> Woman Worker 5 June 1908, 1, 4 Sept 1908, 367.
- <sup>23</sup> Woman Worker 28 Oct 1908, 555.
- <sup>24</sup> Woman Worker 24 Feb 1909, 189.
- <sup>25</sup> Woman Worker 17 July 1908, 190, 31 July 1908, 239, 25 Nov 1908, 634, 9 Dec 1908, 694, 2 June 1909, 518, 23 June 1909, 590, 14 July 1909, 30, 28 July 1909, 78, 4 Aug 1909, 102.
- <sup>26</sup> Woman Worker 25 Aug 1909, 182.
- <sup>27</sup> Woman Worker 8 Sept 1909, 230, 22 Sept 1909, 275.
- <sup>28</sup> Common Cause 19 Oct 1911, 484.
- <sup>29</sup> Common Cause 9 Feb 1911, 710. See also 19 Oct 1911, 484.
- <sup>30</sup> Common Cause 19 Oct 1911, 486, 26 Oct 1911, 594, 2 Nov 1911, 521.
- <sup>31</sup> Freewoman 25 Jan 1911, 187.
- <sup>32</sup> See, for example, Common Cause 24 Aug 1911, 349.
- <sup>33</sup> Woman Worker 28 Aug 1908, 332.
- <sup>34</sup> Common Cause 9 Nov 1911, 542-3. See also 23 Nov 1911, 579.
- <sup>35</sup> Woman Worker 7 July 1909, 6. See also 2 Dec 1908, 617.
- <sup>36</sup> Common Cause 9 Nov 1911, 542-3.
- <sup>37</sup> Woman Worker 8 Dec 1909, 517, 24 Nov 1909, 475.
- <sup>38</sup> Woman Worker 2 Dec 1909, 670, 24 Nov 1909, 475.
- <sup>39</sup> Common Cause 4 Jan 1912, 672-3.
- <sup>40</sup> Common Cause 9 Nov 1911, 543.
- <sup>41</sup> Common Cause 30 Nov 1911, 600.
- <sup>42</sup> Common Cause 12 Oct 1911, 466, 2 Nov 1911, 521.
- <sup>43</sup> Woman Worker 2 Dec 1908, 670.
- <sup>44</sup> Caroline Davidson, A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles, 1650-1950 (London, 1982); C. Christine Hardymon, From Mangle to Microwave: The Mechanisation of Household Work (Cambridge, 1988); Ellen Ross, Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870-1918 (Oxford, 1993), especially chapter 2.
- <sup>45</sup> Woman Worker 1 Nov 1908, 591, 12 June 1908, 9.
- <sup>46</sup> Woman Worker 1 Nov 1908, 591.
- <sup>47</sup> Common Cause 21 Sept 1911, 409-10.
- <sup>48</sup> Woman Worker 1 Nov 1908, 591.
- <sup>49</sup> Woman Worker 25 Aug 1909, 189-190. See also Freewoman 7 Dec 1911, 42-4; Woman Worker 16 Dec 1908, 719. For co-operative housekeeping in Britain, see Alistair Thomson, "Domestic Drudgery Will Be a Thing of the Past": Co-operative Women and the Reform of Housework, in New Views of Co-operation, ed. Stephen Yeo (London: 1988), 108-27; Lynn F. Pearson, The Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living (Basingstoke, 1988); Carol Dyhouse, Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939, (Oxford, 1989), chapter 3; Sheila Rowbotham, Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century (London, 2011), chapter 6.
- <sup>50</sup> Woman Worker 25 Aug 1909, 190, 23 Oct 1908; Freewoman 7 Dec 1911, 42-4, 29 Feb 1912, 296-7. For exchange between Alice Melvin and Kathlyn Oliver on this question, see Freewoman 4 April 1912, 386-7, 11 April 1912, 410-11, 20 June 1912, 98, 4 July 1912, 137.
- <sup>51</sup> Woman Worker 12 June 1908, 20.
- <sup>52</sup> Joyce Senders Pedersen, 'Victorian Liberal Feminism and the "Idea" of Work', in Women and Work Culture, Britain c.1850-1950, ed. Krista Cowman and Louise A. Jackson (Aldershot, 2005), 27-47.
- <sup>53</sup> Woman Worker 5 June 1908, 18.
- <sup>54</sup> Woman Worker 18 Nov 1908, 611.
- <sup>55</sup> Woman Worker 12 June 1908, 20, 16 Dec 1908, 719.
- <sup>56</sup> Woman Worker 1 Nov 1908, 591, see also 12 June 1908, 20, 23.
- <sup>57</sup> Rona Robinson, the recent holder of the Gilchrist Post-Graduate Scholarship for the course in Home Science and Economics at Kings College for Women, resigned her post and publicly stated her support for the position of 'Educationalist', Freewoman 15 Feb 1912, 256-7.

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- <sup>58</sup> Freewoman 23 Nov 1911, 16-18. My emphasis.
- <sup>59</sup> Freewoman 23 Nov 1911, 16-18.
- <sup>60</sup> For an overview of debates on university curriculum for women, see Laura Schwartz, 'Feminist Thinking on Education in Victorian England', *Oxford Review of Education* 37 (2011), 669-682. For housewifery as an academic subject, see Dena Attar, *Wasting Girls' Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics* (London, 1990).
- <sup>61</sup> Freewoman 7 Dec 1911, 54.
- <sup>62</sup> Delap, Knowing Their Place, 2; Woman Worker 30 Dec 1908, 767.
- <sup>63</sup> Freewoman 18 July 1912, 178.
- <sup>64</sup> Freewoman 4 July 1912, 136.
- <sup>65</sup> Common Cause 24 Aug 1911, 349.
- <sup>66</sup> Common Cause 19 Oct 1911, 484.
- <sup>67</sup> Woman Worker 29 Sept 1909, 306; Diane Aiken, 'The Central Committee on Women's Training and Employment: Tackling the Servant Problem, 1914-1945' (Ph.D. diss, Oxford Brookes, 2002).
- <sup>68</sup> Woman Worker 7 April 1909, See also Woman Worker 29 Sept 1909, 396, 5 Jan 1910, 602.
- <sup>69</sup> Daily Mirror 28 Aug 1909, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/5.
- <sup>70</sup> Liverpool Courier 30 Aug 1909, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/6; Woman Worker 9 Nov 1911, 542-3.
- <sup>71</sup> Butler, Report of the Women's Industrial Council, 60, 82.
- <sup>72</sup> Oliver, Domestic Servants and Citizenship (London, 1911), 14-15.
- <sup>73</sup> Woman Worker 13 Oct 1909, 345.
- <sup>74</sup> Woman Worker 22 Dec 1909, 566.
- <sup>75</sup> Common Cause 4 Jan 1912, 672-3.
- <sup>76</sup> Even if the value of board and lodging was added, 'our services cannot be considered well-paid, for wages would average 2d an hour', Common Cause 19 Oct 1911, 486. Jessie Stephen claimed that 'the average wage of the domestic servant worked out at ¾ d to 1 ½ d per hour', Glasgow Herald 16 Oct 1913, 10.
- <sup>77</sup> Common Cause 23 Nov 1911, 578.
- <sup>78</sup> Stephen, 'Submission is for Slaves', 16-18.
- <sup>79</sup> Oliver, Domestic Servants and Citizenship, 18.
- <sup>80</sup> Weekly Dispatch 5 Jan 1913, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/21.
- <sup>81</sup> Woman Worker 2 June 1909, 518; Glasgow Herald 3 Oct 1913, 5; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Harmondsworth, 1975 (first published 1928), 67. Of course, Woolf's writing career was to a large degree made possible by the hard work of her own domestic servants, Alison Light, Mrs Woolf and the Servants (London, 2007).
- <sup>82</sup> Common Cause 23 Nov 1911, 578.
- <sup>83</sup> Stephen, 'Submission is for Slaves', 26-7.
- <sup>84</sup> Woman Worker 2 June 1909, 518.
- <sup>85</sup> Woman Worker 14 July 1909, 30, 25 Aug 1909, 182. For servants complaining about being treated as machines rather than as human beings, see Glasgow Herald 2 Oct 1913, 3, 20 Sept 1913, 3, 26 Sept 1913, 5; Woman Worker 21 July 1909, 54. For a long tradition of servants as 'automata' see Carolyn Steedman, Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England (Cambridge, 2009), 47.
- <sup>86</sup> Woman Worker 12 Jan 1910, 626.
- <sup>87</sup> Common Cause 9 Nov 1911, 543.
- <sup>88</sup> Common Cause 28 Sept 1911, 432.
- <sup>89</sup> Common Cause 28 Sept 1911, 432.
- <sup>90</sup> Woman Worker 20 Oct 1909, 382; Labour Leader 20 May 1910, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/11.
- <sup>91</sup> Common Cause 23 Nov 1911, 578-9.
- <sup>92</sup> Common Cause 7 Dec 1911, 610.
- <sup>93</sup> Woman Worker 20 Oct 1909, 382; Oliver, Domestic Servants and Citizenship, 14.
- <sup>94</sup> Oliver, Domestic Servants and Citizenship, 18.
- <sup>95</sup> Common Cause 19 Dec 1911, 486.
- <sup>96</sup> Woman Worker 28 Oct 1908, 555. Lucy Delap has noted how the position of domestic servants was used as an 'index' by which to attend to the condition of women more generally, Delap, Knowing their Place, 2.
- <sup>97</sup> Freewoman 23 Nov 1911, 1.
- <sup>98</sup> Freewoman 7 Dec 1911, 43.
- <sup>99</sup> Freewoman 29 Feb 1912, 281.

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<sup>100</sup> Common Cause 10 Aug 1911, 313, 24 Aug 1911, 349.

<sup>101</sup> Daily Dispatch 11 Sept 1912, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/19.

<sup>102</sup> Daily Dispatch 16 Sept 1912, 'Press Cuttings', The Gertrude Tuckwell Papers, Trades Union Congress Library, London Metropolitan University, Box 25, Reel 12, 609/20.

<sup>103</sup> Feminist Fightback Collective, 'The Cuts are a Feminist Issue', Soundings 49 (2011), 73-83.