# Speaking as citizens: women's political correspondence to Scottish newspapers 1918-1928.

PEDERSEN, S.

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Sarah Pedersen, Robert Gordon University

## Introduction

Scholars investigating those who write letters to the editor on the subject of politics agree that the typical correspondent is middle-aged or older, male, well educated, with an above-average income and frequently conservative in his politics (Buell 1975; Singletary and Cowling 1979; Cooper *et al* 2009). While the majority of research into newspaper correspondence columns has focused on contemporary newspapers, this dictum holds true for historical examples as well. Newspaper correspondence columns in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were dominated by male, elite voices. However, this does not mean that no women are to be found writing about politics. Women made good use of letters to the editor during their campaign for the vote in order to give detailed explanations of the reasons behind the demand for women's suffrage and, later, to justify the turn to militancy (Pedersen 2017). Anti-suffrage campaigners also used newspaper correspondence columns to rehearse their arguments and ask for support. In this way, pro-suffrage material was published in anti-suffrage newspapers and *vice versa*. For example, conservative and generally anti-suffrage newspapers such as the *Dundee Courier* and *Aberdeen Daily Journal* frequently carried pro-suffrage correspondence while the more sympathetic *Dundee Advertiser* and *Aberdeen Free Press* would publish letters from members of the Anti-Suffrage League.

In 1918, some women – those over the age of 30 and with a property qualification – achieved the Parliamentary vote in the UK. Others had to wait until 1928 before achieving complete equality with men as far as suffrage was concerned. This chapter investigates women's correspondence on political issues to Scottish newspapers during this decade. The new focus for many of those who had campaigned for women's suffrage was now to teach women how to be citizens. Women used newspaper correspondence columns to assert their new claims to citizenship and to support and encourage some women to claim political office. However, there are also clear continuities between the suffrage campaign in Scotland before the war and correspondence on subjects relating to 'women's issues' during the 1920s. This chapter also identifies another group of women – some of them veterans of the anti-suffrage movement – who continued to use the correspondence columns to assert their own ideas about the place of women, ironically using the public sphere of the mass media to suggest that women's place was in the private sphere of the home.

This chapter suggests, however, that women correspondents to newspapers did not fully enter the public sphere with their letters to the editor. Instead, it argues that they mostly inhabited a smaller feminine public sphere within the correspondence columns. Using Hartley (1992)'s concepts of 'We'-dom and 'They'-dom, Richardson (2006, p.149) describes a newspaper's correspondence column as an important site for the (re)production and/or resistance of discourse on and around such notions, with the elite 'We' establishing rules for membership and exclusion. It is argued that, during the first decade after the First World War, women's correspondence to Scottish newspapers demonstrates an attempt to persuade readers that women citizens were now part of the 'We'-dom that was only partially successful, often because the correspondents themselves continued to situate themselves in a separate feminine public sphere.

Habermas (1989) suggests that the mass media is one of the institutions that makes up a public sphere, within which the problems of a society can be opened to the scrutiny of a critical public and some sort of consensus achieved. Public opinion is therefore formed by conversation and discussion among citizens, facilitated by institutions such as newspaper correspondence columns (Wahl-Jorgensen 1999, 2002). Feminist scholars, however, have suggested a more nuanced approach to the gendering of the public sphere. For example, Fraser (1992) conceives of many different public spheres, including one overarching one in which participants can deliberate as peers across lines of difference about policy concerning them all. She suggests late-twentieth-century US feminism as one such 'subaltern counterpublic'. Smitley (2009) also identifies a different, 'feminine public sphere' in her work on middle-class women in Scottish civic life, 1870-1914, arguing that this sphere was carved by more affluent women out of a hostile, male-oriented 'public' through heterodox interpretations of the concept of separate spheres. This chapter identifies a similar feminine public sphere in the correspondence columns of Scottish newspapers in the decade after some women had achieved the parliamentary vote. These women were now citizens, and thus had a claim to a voice in the public sphere. However, analysis of their correspondence in relation to politics demonstrates that, while asserting their roles as citizens and electors, they nevertheless tended to only address other female citizens in their correspondence. They mostly entered into debate and discussion with other women and generally focused on what might be deemed 'women's issues' in their letters. Women might also receive appeals to ignore such issues for the (assumed) greater good of the country by other women.

## The Scottish context post-1918

Recent work on the post-1918 women's movement in the UK has challenged previous assessments of the movement as divided and in decline. In Scotland, work by scholars such as Sue Innes, Jane Rendall, Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright has demonstrated that this period was marked by increasing participation by women in public and political life, particularly at a local-government level (Breitenbach and Wright 2014; Innes 2004; Innes and Rendall 2006). They argue that women were active in many different types of organisations, some but not all party political, and campaigned on a range of issues across the equal rights and social welfare spectrum. Women's organisations such as the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and the Women's Co-operative Guild sought to become influential in local and national politics, educate women in order to foster a sense of citizenship, support women to stand for office and make women voters' voices heard. Gaining the vote for some women was not the signal to stop campaigning, but rather to use the power of those women who had the suffrage to progress an agenda of social reform and to campaign for equality. However, rather than a movement united around the gaining of the vote for some women, partial women's suffrage meant that energies were now spread over a wide range of issues, from birth control to pacifism (Hilson 2001), and class differences became increasingly apparent.

Despite censorship, the war had increased the demand for news, which continued post-1918. As Bingham (2018, p.153) argues, newspapers were critical to British political and popular culture in this period, particularly before the advent of radio, and played a significant role in setting the political agenda and framing public discussion. In his study of the British press and the 1918 Representation of the People Act, Bingham argues that the press played an important role in legitimising the parliamentary system and celebrating a more inclusive politics – presenting this model of democracy

as a key part of what the allies had been fighting for. It must be remembered that the central achievement of the 1918 Act was to enfranchise all men over 21 – and over the age of 19 for any man who had seen military service during the war. Additional clauses enfranchised some women – those over the age of 30 with a property qualification, which in practice meant middle - and upper-class women. The press generally defended the new democracy, although some commentators expressed anxiety that some of these new voters lacked the capacity or the inclination to properly exercise their political responsibilities. Breitenbach and Wright (2014, p. 413) also note that, after achieving partial suffrage, many women's organisations were treated respectfully by the press, with a level of coverage that made them highly visible to their contemporaries.

Hutchison (2011) argues that the Scottish press has played an important role in the construction of national identity over the past two hundred years. Scotland has a distinct set of institutions, such as the law, education and religion, from England, but until recently no Parliament in which to debate related issues. He therefore argues that, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the press played a valuable part in providing such a venue. In common with English newspapers, Scottish papers benefited from the repeal of the three 'Taxes on Knowledge' – advertisement duty, newspaper stamp duty and paper duties – in the mid-nineteenth century. In addition, the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act brought in compulsory education for all children between 5 and 13, producing a growing potential readership for both local and national titles. The Scottish press also benefited from the limitations of the railways, which meant that London-based morning newspapers arrived too late in Scotland to compete with local morning newspapers, and therefore Scottish newspapers, such as *The Scotsman, The Herald, Aberdeen Press & Journal* and *Dundee Courier,* had sufficient time to build up customer loyalty (Blain and Hutchison 2008). Each daily was associated with a particular city – *The Scotsman* with Edinburgh and *The Herald* with Glasgow – but each aimed to become the pre-eminent newspaper in Scotland and reported local, Scottish, British and international news.

Nearly 8.5 million women were enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act of 1918. In Scotland the electorate expanded from 760,000 in 1910 to 2.2 million in 1918 (Cameron 2018). In addition, the redistribution of seats in the country led to a profound shift in representation from the rural areas of the north and south to the industrial areas of west central Scotland and the city of Glasgow. These changes created new political conditions in Scotland that favoured the Labour party and led to the demise of the dominance of the Liberals (Cameron 2018). Newspapers across the political spectrum joined women's organisations in urging all new voters to gain a political education and use their vote, while political parties debated how to appeal to these new working-class and female voters (Jarvis 1994).

## The general election of December 1918

Women electors had their first experience of voting during the General Election of December 1918. The war had only been over for a month and not all soldiers had yet returned home, which meant that many new electors, both men and women, were unable to register in time. There was also some confusion about who was and was not qualified to vote. 'Why Not' wrote in confusion to the *Aberdeen Evening Express* (13 December 1918) when she discovered that she had no vote because she lived with her parents. 'Why a rent restriction should prevent any woman having the right to vote is something I should like explained, as I do not think the average woman's ability to vote, or

her loyalty to the Government, can be regulated by the amount of rent her parents pay.' However, it was not loyalty, or her war work, that qualified a woman to vote, as 'Why Not' had learned. Despite the government's rhetoric and the press' enthusiasm for the idea of rewarding women for their contribution to the war, it was older women rather than the young nurses and 'munitionettes' who achieved the vote in 1918. 'Over Thirsty' was equally nonplussed to discover that, because she occupied furnished apartments, 'I am… apparently to be deprived of a vote because I do not provide my own furniture' (*Aberdeen Daily Journal* 3 May 1918). The lesson she took from this was 'The sooner women are into Parliament the better. The new man-made Act seems to be as badly made as men could make. We certainly need a strong Women Citizens Association, as there are no doubt many other Acts as unfair to women as this one is.'

New organisations such as the Women Citizens Associations (WCAs) sprang up to help the new women citizens understand their new responsibilities and to suggest subjects they might want to consider when using their vote. Many of these WCAs grew out of suffrage associations in the towns and cities of Scotland. For example, in Aberdeen, a meeting in March 1918 celebrated the formation of the Aberdeen WCA and was addressed by its new honorary President, Mrs Trail, who was the only surviving member of the original Aberdeen Women's Suffrage Society founded in the 1870s. Other office bearers came from the city's NUWSS branch. As Helen R. Macdonald suggested in her letter to the *Daily Record* on 2 May 1918: 'The Citizens Association is out to … teach women the value of their vote, their responsibilities as citizens, how to have, not only the courage of their convictions, but also to have convictions.' She also suggested that 'the issues of housing reform, child welfare, temperance, education, day nurseries and national purity are peculiarly women's topics'. However, not all women voters were impressed with such suggestions. A letter from 'Mrs M.C.W.' a few days later scorned the suggestions of the Glasgow WCA that 'only women can understand and deal with questions like housing reform, temperance, national purity' (*Daily Record*, 4 May 1918). In her opinion, 'If women are going to revolutionise things, it shouldn't need a Citizens Association to show them how. It's not when they have got the vote that they should begin to be taught how to use it; they should have come equipped, prepared for the responsibility for which they have been clamouring.' It should also be noted that 'Mrs M.C.W.' saw the woman voter as helping her husband 'discharge *his* responsibilities as parent and citizen' [my emphasis] rather than showing any particular initiative herself. She firmly placed the woman in a secondary role and in the home rather than as a citizen in her own right – although ironically her feelings on this matter had led her to write to a newspaper, thus stepping into the public sphere of the mass media.

'Mrs M.C.W.' was, however, in the minority in considering that women needed no guidance in the use of their new votes. Newspapers throughout the country published a plethora of columns and editorials advising women on how to vote, and WCAs arranged meetings to address what they considered to be the questions women ought to consider. On 5 September 1918, for example, Lady Edith Baxter of the Dundee WCA wrote to the *Courier* to advertise a meeting to address the question of housing, 'a question with which women are particularly concerned'. However, Hilson (2001) and Jarvis (1994) agree that, in 1918, new women voters were pressured to vote as proxies for male members of their family still on service overseas or dead, rather than considering the issues raised by WCAs or those more nearly relating to their own experiences on the home front such as housing and food shortages. Women's correspondence to the Scottish press concerning their voting intentions in 1918 agreed that the main issue for these new electors was the war, and in particular men's experience at the front. In her investigation of the election campaign in Plymouth, Hilson

(2001) argues that women's own wartime experiences were largely marginalised. In particular, she notes a narrowing focus on the candidates themselves, and particularly their war service, and therefore their ability to serve as representatives of soldiers and sailors.

Much of the women's correspondence to Scottish newspapers supports Hilson's argument with its focus on the war service of individual candidates. 'A Woman Elector' wrote to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* on 12 December 1918 hoping that 'women electors specially will … give their vote for the Coalition candidate, Mr Thomson, who has so splendidly done his bit to help preserve for us for all time our liberty and freedom'. 'A Woman Voter' agreed and praised Lieutenant Thomson's leadership in wartime: 'As an officer he was simply worshipped by the men under him, and I learn that he has fought with credit and distinction'. The lack of such a military career was also used to denigrate other candidates. In the *Dundee Courier* on 7 December 'A Woman Voter' stated that she would like to ask the Opposition candidate, Mr Gardiner, 'what he has done for the gallant boys who fought and died for him', pointing out that while General Stirling, who was also standing, 'was bravely doing his bit in Gallipoli, Mr Gardiner was safely home, with "Business as usual" for his battle-cry.' Hilsom suggests that Conservative candidates and the Portsmouth press made connections between Labour candidates and pacifism and bolshevism. Similarly, 'A Working Woman' wrote to the *Falkirk Herald* on 7 December to warn her 'sister women' not to vote for the Co-operative candidate because 'when we see the Bolshevists of our district backing him up, we smell powder and remember Russia.' Thus, in the first election in which they were allowed to vote, women correspondents fell into line with a focus on candidates' wartime experiences and military performance dictated by the male Coalition government and Coalition candidates, rather than discussing these candidates' pledges regarding issues about which the women themselves might have experience, such as housing, food rationing, health and education. Even while addressing other women, and despite the urging of the WCAs, women correspondents focused on male achievement on the warfront rather than what these candidates could do for their homes and families.

It is important to note that women's correspondence to Scottish newspapers on the subject of the General Election was aimed at other women voters rather than all electors – women did not presume to advise men on how to vote. While it is true that much newspaper editorial on the subject of how women should use their votes was written by men, women correspondents did not offer advice to male electors on how to use their vote, despite the fact that many of these male voters were just as new to elections as the women were themselves. WCAs were formed so that middle-class women could advise and support other *women* in using their vote correctly. In this way, women voters continued to exist within the feminine public sphere identified by Smitley (2009).

The choice of a pen name

Note the choice of pen names from these correspondents, many of which emphasised their role as women voters or electors, thus justifying these women's letters to the press. Their achievement of citizenship was used to support these women stepping into the public sphere of political debate, although they still preferred to use a pen-name rather than give their own. Anonymity offered them the opportunity of presenting their opinion on the first election in which women were allowed to vote without revealing their identity, a step they were not yet ready to take. Indeed, Reader *et al* (2004) suggest that the requirement by modern newspapers that letters are published with their writer's full details reduces the number of people who write letters to the editor, especially among

women, racial minorities and urban residents. In fact, the particular pen names used by the correspondents quoted above gave more weight to their argument than their own name would. I have argued elsewhere that maternal pen names were frequently used by female correspondents to Scottish newspapers before and during the war to justify their correspondence on issues related to local government or the conduct of the war as mothers (Pedersen 2004). Equally, 'Suffragette' was a popular pseudonym for those who wished to support the cause without outing themselves to family and friends before the war (Pedersen 2002).

Other pen names used by women in their correspondence regarding the 1918 election emphasised the correspondent's familial associations to members of the armed forces, such as 'A Soldier's Mother' who wrote to the *Dundee Courier* on 10 December 1918 asking women to use their votes to return Lloyd George and his government to power since they had 'brought this war… to an honourable end'. Again, she attacked one candidate for telling electors 'that a poor, miserable "conchie" is far more of a hero than the brave, gallant boys who went and nobly did their best to keep him and his kind at home in comfort and safety'. Bingham (2018) suggests that the framing of women's enfranchisement as a reward for their service to the nation during wartime impacted how woman voters were viewed and notes that Gullace (2002) argues that citizenship was redefined around notions of patriotism, duty and sacrifice, and thus women's private suffering as wives and mothers enabled them to be included within this new concept of the citizen. As Bingham points out, however, this muted the language of democratic rights and equality.

## Considering 'women's issues'

The new focus for many of those who had campaigned for women's suffrage was now to teach women how to be citizens. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies changed its name to the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) and, throughout Scotland, many Women Citizens Associations were founded by women who had been suffragists or suffragettes. For example, the vice-presidents of the Edinburgh WCA were Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair, the president of the Edinburgh National Society of Women's Suffrage, and Louisa Innes Lumsden, president of the Aberdeen branch of the NUWSS, both constitutional suffragist societies. They were joined by ex-suffragettes such as Lilias Mitchell, Agnes Macdonald, Alexia Jack and Mona Chalmers Watson, who had been members of the WSPU and Women's Freedom League (Innes 2004). By the end of its first year, the Edinburgh WCA had over a thousand members and was a large and well-organised group with a clear idea of women's role in public life and the influence that 'organised women' could wield (Innes, 2004, p.622). At the same time, local government in Scotland acquired greater powers in terms of housing, education, poor relief and hospital provision, all of which might be argued to fall into the realm of women's special interests, which reinforced the demand for women to be represented in local government (Breitenbach and Wright 2014). 'Housekeeper' wrote to the *Edinburgh Evening News* on 1 January 1920 calling for women to replace those responsible for housing in Edinburgh since 'the selfishness of the Edinburgh authorities responsible for housing is a disgrace'. Similarly, the ex-WSPU organiser Phyllis Ayrton wrote to the *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser* calling for women to be appointed to the Housing Committee in Coatbridge and arguing that 'if ever the advice and help of women were needed, surely it would be in connection with housing' (12 February 1921), while A. P. Taylor of the Dundee WCA sent a letter to the *Dundee Courier* asking owners of country cottages to sub-let them at this time of need (19 March 1920).

Dealing with the housing crisis was clearly seen as a matter for which women, and WCAs, were suitably equipped.

WCAs claimed to be non-party and aimed to include women from all parties. However, the wish to be neutral soon clashed with a desire to support suitable women candidates in elections. The Edinburgh WCA claimed early success in its support for women to be elected to the city council, with Ella Morison Millar returned for the Morningside ward in January 1919. By 1930 six of Edinburgh's city councillors were women (Baxter 2010). Glasgow also had female councillors from 1920. However, in November 1922 the Edinburgh WCA faced severe disruption over the campaign of the Liberal candidate Catherine Buchanan Alderton for the seat of Edinburgh South. The committee of the South Division branch resigned in protest over official WCA support for Mrs Buchanan Alderton because she was campaigning for the seat of a local MP who had been supportive of their work for women. The correspondence pages of *The Scotsman* were filled for several days with letters from women supporting and condemning the decision of the Edinburgh WCA executive to actively campaign for the Liberal candidate. On one side were women such as the Unionist Minna Galbraith Cowan, who had become convenor of the city's new education authority in 1919, and who blamed the Executive Committee of the Edinburgh WCA for adopting a policy of active support for all women candidates. She was supported by the educationist Louisa Innes Lumsden, who deplored the decision of the Association to support Mrs Buchanan Alderton because she was a woman rather than because of her policies: 'What is this but to create a special women's party?' (*The Scotsman* 15 November 1922). Lumsden stated that 'nobody in Scotland did more than I… for the political enfranchisement of women', but now she entreated 'all women, to whatever political party they belong at this moment, when dangers of all kinds confront their country, to think first of country and not of the special interests of women'. In their defence, members of the Edinburgh WCA executive, such as the President Mary Chalmers Watson, Honorary Secretary Helen McLachlan, and Convenor of the Parliamentary Committee D. L. Rees, rejected the accusation that they were attempting to form a 'woman's party' and argued that the action of the Association was in full accord with its constitution. Whilst acknowledging that Mrs Buchanan Alderton was a Liberal candidate, they argued that they would have happily supported any other suitable woman from the Unionist party if one could be persuaded to stand, and portrayed themselves as eager to send Mrs Buchanan Alderton to Westminster so that she could support the work of the Unionist Lady Astor and Liberal Margaret Wintringham as they worked together 'for the reforms in which women are especially interested' (13 November 1922).

There was a clear statement here that women politicians were assumed to cooperate to campaign around 'women's issues' irrespective of party, which was in clear contrast to Lumsden's demand that women think first of their country and not the special interests of women. It also suggests a continuing fissure between suffragists such as Lumsden and suffragettes such as Chalmers Watson, who might be more interested in rejecting the constitutional approach of traditional party politics. During the campaign for votes for women, constitutional suffragists had been criticised by militant suffragettes for being willing to work within traditional party-based approaches to politics rather than embracing a different, more woman-focused approach. The suffragettes claimed, with some justification, that trusting political parties to addressing woman suffrage was doomed to failure. It should be noted that it was a coalition war government that eventually gave (some) women the vote.

While not forming a 'Woman's Party,' elected female representatives were assumed to have particular interest in 'women's issues' such as housing, health and children. Such an assumption is not surprising given that the campaigning of both suffragists and suffragettes for the vote had stressed the need for a woman's voice in politics because women had experience in social-welfare matters. The assumption that women politicians would work together for the betterment of women was shared by the correspondent 'Woman Citizen' who wrote to the *Edinburgh Evening News* on 25 April 1923 to encourage women who were concerned about the lack of women's lavatories in the city to write to Ella Morrison Millar and Euphemia Somerville:

> Both these ladies are members of the Edinburgh Women Citizens Association. Therefore, I take it that our two women councillors will not resent the assumption that they stand not only for the women of the wards which elected them, but for the interests of all the women of Edinburgh and districts.

Both women were independents on the council, which presumably made it easier for the Edinburgh WCA to support their campaigns, but also for the assumption to be made that they had a special interest in women's issues as opposed to party politics.

In its defence of its support for Mrs Buchanan Alderton, the Edinburgh WCA executive described her as standing 'for the whole programme of the Association', which is by no means purely feminist' (*The Scotsman* 13 November 1922). The post-war women's movement is often depicted as splitting between the feminists who wished to campaign for equality with men, for example in the professions, and those who saw women's politics as different and wished to focus on specific women's issues (Bingham 2004). As Innes (2004) points out, 'citizenship' was described as different from feminism, allowing mainstream organisations such as WCAs to distinguish themselves from feminist organisations. WCAs focused on improving social conditions, and had success in campaigns regarding children's welfare, social housing and other health and welfare issues. In 1927 the fifteen Scottish WCAs worked together to raise funds to establish a 'colony scheme for the mentally deficient' (*Aberdeen Press & Journal* 9 February 1927). However, as Innes (2004) argues, WCAs cannot be dismissed simply as welfare or social feminists: they also campaigned on equality issues, such as supporting women candidates in elections, although, as noted above, this was not always received well. Indeed, even when WCAs campaigned on issues that were seen to fall under their aegis, they could be criticised. The Dundee WCA was criticised by a correspondent calling herself 'Municipia' for hosting a speaker who advocated the reinstitution of women police to the city. She mocked the way in which

> By means of the Women Citizens Association the benighted inhabitants of Dundee and district are occasionally made the recipients – free, gratis and for nothing – of announcements brimming over with wise counsel concerning civic administration (*Dundee Courier* 28 February 1923).

Similarly, 'One of the Women Citizens' criticised the Edinburgh WCA for its 'profoundly disappointing' pronouncements on slum conditions in the city. While calling for the appointment of a qualified woman house property manager by the council, the correspondent suggested that the most convincing proof the WCA could give of its concern in connection with the grave conditions in the city would be the erection of a 'carefully thought-out demonstration house' (*The Scotsman* 21 July 1926).

Comparable controversy was caused in St Andrews in 1925 when the president of the local WCA wrote to the *St Andrews Citizen* to remind members that 'one woman member, Miss Warrack, will require every vote we can give her or get for her' (31 October 1925). This implies much more than a request to members to vote for a woman candidate – it also suggests that they should campaign for the votes of others. 'Woman Citizen and Elector' wrote to protest 'against the individual liberties of the members to vote as their judgments tell them being interfered with in this way', describing it as 'Trade Union tyranny with a vengeance' (*St Andrews Citizen* 31 October 1925). The St Andrews WCA was on safer ground with its campaign in 1926 against the Town Council's decision to 'erect a public convenience on the north wall of the East Infant School in close proximity to the class-room windows' (*St Andrews Citizen* 15 May 1926). WCAs clearly had to tread a careful line between campaigning for a female voice on matters that were judged to be relevant to women, such as housing and public conveniences, without stepping into the realm of party politics, even if there was a woman on the slate. It is clear, however, from the correspondence to be found on the subject of WCAs in Scottish newspapers that the topic was seen as relevant to women only. Women debated WCA politics with other women, and called on members of WCAs who had achieved elected office to work for other women, whether or not they had elected them. In this they followed the example of their mothers and grandmothers in the creation of a middle-class civic identity through participation in philanthropic and local government bodies (Smitley 2009).

Temperance and Bolshevism

Breitenbach and Wright (2014) note that patterns of women's activism generally followed class lines. While the Edinburgh WCA argued about supporting Unionist or Liberal candidates, the Glasgow WCA was closely associated with the Glasgow Good Government Committee set up to combat the growth of socialism in the city. Dundee offers an interesting contrast to the politics of Glasgow or Edinburgh. As Baxter (2010) points out, whilst the city was often described as a women's town in the early 20th century, with high numbers of married women workers and active female unions, and had been one of the main centres for suffragette action before the war, it was also the last of Scotland's four cities to have a female councillor. It was not until 1924 that a woman even stood for election to Dundee Council and 1935 before Lily Miller became the city's first female councillor. Baxter (2010) suggests that the fact that Dundee had little involvement from the Scottish Co-operative Women's Guild meant that working-class women in particular had no clear way into party politics. The Dundee WCA, which might have been expected to work with Moderate parties, had a leadership that included both members of the Independent Labour Party and the Conservatives and therefore worked at being a non-party and non-political association until 1924 when it campaigned for Edwin Scrymgeour, who became the only British Prohibition Party MP.

As has been seen in correspondence related to the 1918 election, temperance was assumed to be an issue particularly important to women voters. As 'Woman Citizen' pointed out in the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* on the subject of 'The nation's drink bill' on 4 April 1925: 'A woman's point of view is probably different from that of most men'. Like many temperance reformers, her letter focused on the consequences of drinking on the home: 'higher mortality among babies, a greater number of neglected children, a heavier burden for many wives and mothers, who are already putting up a brave fight against overwhelming odds'. In contrast, one correspondent to the *Dundee Courier* on 10 November 1923, describing herself as 'A Moderate Drinker's Wife' argued that 'No one has the right

to ram teetotalism down our throats'. She hoped that 'every woman will turn out for the poll' and 'Give the teetotaller this time a smash he won't get over.' Her wish was not fulfilled and Edwin Scrymgeour was returned for Dundee in both 1924 and 1929.

Neighbouring St Andrews also had women who campaigned for prohibition in the correspondence columns of the local newspaper. In 1920 a series of letters to the *Citizen* debated the question of St Andrews becoming 'dry'. 'Seven Women Electors' argued that a dry town would become more popular than ever as a holiday resort while 'Citizen' called on women to 'protect your own homes by voting "no license"!' (*St Andrews Citizen* 23 October 1920 and 1 November 1920). Writing to the *Citizen* in March 1922, the temperance campaigner Helen Barton defended the advice given to women voters by the British Women's Temperance Association to vote for men or women who favoured their principles (11 March 1922).

Interestingly, women correspondents to the Dundee newspapers on the subject of women's votes tended to focus on warning women electors not to support the Labour party rather than discussing the temperance candidate. Jarvis (1994) suggests that Conservative and Unionist party propaganda aimed at women stressed that women's interest in issues of personal morality such as temperance meant that women should also consider the moral dangers of socialism. In 1920 'Bonnie Dundee' warned women voters that 'the spirit of avarice and Bolshevism' had 'crept' into the Labour party (*Dundee Courier* 1 November 1920). She was, however, happy to support Rev Mr Nelson, who she described as a 'Labour man of the best type' because of his war service record: 'when our country was in need he gave of his best, while some of the so-called Labour party went to prison for safety'. In 1923 one correspondent sent a warning to the women electors of Dundee about the 'importance of giving their serious attention to the treatment of women, the denial of all religion, the debasement of childhood, and the destruction of home life – at present being practised in Russia under Socialism' (*Dundee Courier* 22 October 1924). 'Bonnie Dundee' again agreed with her that 'Communism in its worst form is being camouflaged as Labour' and demanded that the women of Dundee awake and 'remember that on the issue of this election the fate of the British Empire possibly hangs' (29 October 1924). Women were thus appealed to using both imperial arguments and the image of their own homes under Communist rule, and urged to be aware of the subterfuges with which socialists might lead people astray and introduce immorality into the home.

## The perfect candidate

Similar to Dundee, it was not until 1930 that a woman councillor was elected in Aberdeen. Correspondents to the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* suggested that one reason women candidates did not stand for election to the council was because of the selectiveness of the local WCA. 'An Ordinary Woman' suggested that the requirements imposed by the WCA for 'a splendid and quite exceptional woman' to step forward meant that more ordinary women were discounted (*Aberdeen Press & Journal* 7 December 1928), while 'An Interested Listener' blamed the President of the WCA in particular for the inactivity of the Association in promoting the interests of women (*ibid*). It is true that the standard demanded of a woman candidate in order to be supported by the Aberdeen WCA was high. In October 1926 a letter in the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* from the headquarters of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, signed by Dorothy Balfour of Burleigh, appealed for suitable women to step forward as candidates in the upcoming city council elections.

> We recognise that the word 'suitable' is a question-begging phrase. We feel that women candidates should not only be women of experience and judgment in public matters, but that they should be prepared also to champion the cause not only of their women constituents, but also of woman employees of the Town Council. Many Town Councils now refuse to employ married women, and there is discrimination against the employment of women such as doctors, etc., unless they can be employed on cheaper terms than men; in many localities, educational facilities, especially as regards trade schools, are far fewer in the case of girls than in that of boys. For these and for many other reasons we appeal to women to play their part and to help return women interested in these matters in the forthcoming elections. (*Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 14 October 1926)

Such a summary of the requirements of a woman councillor demonstrates that women were expected to serve as both a representative of their constituents but also of women in general – both electors and those who worked for the council. The letter also demonstrates that, at least in Aberdeen, a WCA candidate was expected to be involved in wider issues relating to equality, particularly in relation to employment.

Having been selected to stand for office, women candidates might also face problems at the hustings, demonstrating the physical issues related to stepping into the public sphere. These were identified by correspondents to various newspapers as being particularly caused by Labour party supporters. In a letter to *The Scotsman* on 21 December 1922. 'Woman Speaker' noted the 'hooligan practices of Socialists where women speakers are concerned' while the *Aberdeen Press & Journal* received a number of letters debating the treatment of the Unionist candidate Dr Laura Sandeman by Labour supporters in October 1924. While the majority of letters deplored the 'rowdyism' of 'small noisy groups who deliberately attend for the express purpose of obstructing the speakers,' other correspondents opined that, 'as women are aspiring to Parliamentary honours that it is impossible for them to expect treatment different to men. They must be prepared to face the music.' The newspaper's editor commented after this particular letter that 'Women candidates are prepared to face the music, but the conduct of Labourists at Kittybrewster shows that they… were determined their brazen music would prevent the candidate from being heard – Ed.' (16 October 1924).

Other women correspondents reported problems in engaging in political life themselves because of the attitudes of men. 'Disgusted' reported being shouted at by a parish councillor and accused of being a member of Sinn Fein when she approached the polling station in December 1918. She suggested to the *Bellshill Speaker* that the solution to such behaviour was that women should have separate polling stations (20 December 1920). Similarly, 'Eppie' wrote to the *Arbroath Herald* to describe how she had tried to attend a ward meeting 'but preferred to wait outside until a few of my sex arrived on the scene. After waiting half an hour and more I left for home disappointed.' Eppie felt that women should take more of an interest in local politics so that they could 'pick and choose the man whom they think can speak and act intelligently and does his best for the good of the town' (7 November 1919). Interestingly, Eppie made no mention of the possibility of a woman standing for election to the ward.

## Dissenting voices

Whilst women workers had been mostly accepted during the wartime emergency, once the war was over and men returned to Scotland, these women workers found themselves surplus to requirements and pressured to return to their home. Some fought back. 'An NACB Employee' wrote in defence of her fellow female employees at the Navy and Army Canteen Board, pointing out that experience during the war had found that women were more suitable for these jobs, 'especially in coffee bars' (*Edinburgh Evening News* 24 March 1920). She argued that many of these women were single and therefore had to work for their living, and that the employment of women was good from an economic point of view, because women could be paid less than men. This was, of course, one of the main reasons why some unions had fought against the dilution of the workforce by women during the war and why pressure was now put on women to give up their jobs.

As Dorothy Balfour's letter quoted above suggested, it was not just coffee bar workers who were expected to give up their jobs for returning men. A letter to the *Dundee Courier* on 3 June 1919 complained about the 'recent extraordinary action of a majority of the committee in ousting women doctors from the staff' of the Dundee Infant Hospital. The correspondent argued that 'it will be best for the larger homes of city and state when… man sees woman as coadjutor, not competitor, in life and the guardianship of life!'

However, women might also be criticised by others for working. 'A Widow' wrote in complaint to the *Motherwell Times* arguing that school cleaner jobs should only be given to returned soldiers or widows who needed to support a family and that it was a 'downright shame … having women working who have got their husbands working every day' (10 December 1920). Some women returned to more traditional jobs for women, such as domestic service. An ex-munitions worker from Motherwell reported that she had worked on munitions for over a year, but after being paid off had returned to domestic service to make way for returning men, 'which I thought was my duty' (*Motherwell Times* 31 January 1919). However, even girls who returned to domestic service were changed. 'A Scunnert Slavey' wrote to the *Dundee Courier* on 10 February 1920 suggesting that domestic servants should have a union to improve the servants' lot while 'A Perfectly Satisfied Domestic' revealed that she was perhaps not that satisfied by suggesting that employers make domestic service more attractive by raising the wages (*Dundee Courier* 12 February 1920).

Individual women correspondents might also use the newspaper's correspondence column to let off steam about inequalities within the family circle and to suggest that women work together to campaign for better conditions. These plans seem to be situated outside the party political system and suggest more the 'consciousness raising' meetings of women in the 1970s. 'M. M.' wrote to the *Dundee Courier* on 1 September 1919 to describe the 'slavery' of the married woman. Having compared her working week with that of her husband, who spent his day off watching the football, she demanded 'Something ought to be done to compel our husbands to share the burden of household management.' She suggested married women stay in bed when their husbands had a day off to force them to work in the home and that women 'should insist on having two evenings to ourselves each week, when we could visit each other and compare notes'. Similarly, 'M. A.' wrote to the *Edinburgh Evening News* asking 'Is Life Worth Living?' (27 February 1920). She outlined a variety of 'injustices' the average working woman had to deal with and suggested 'Let every British working woman, married and single, organise herself. Let us have meetings and demonstrations.'

Just as not all women had been enthusiastic about the campaign for women's suffrage – branches of the Anti-Suffrage League had been established in cities and towns throughout Scotland before the

war – not all women correspondents were supportive of the campaign to encourage women to take leadership roles in public life. 'One of Them' wrote to the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* on 30 January 1919 to criticise proposals to admit women to membership of the Representative Church Council of the Episcopal Church on the grounds that 'women are neither very good nor very trustworthy financiers and… not suitable for the proposed honour the bishops wish to bestow on them'. There was also an underlying understanding that the most important role for a woman was still as a wife and mother. One of the leaders of the anti-suffrage campaign in Scotland had been Lady Griselda Cheape, who wrote to the *Southern Reporter* in 1921 to encourage young women to enter domestic service where they would be well trained – and 'when she marries she will be an example as a good wife and mother, and her house will be well kept' (4 August 1921). 'An Old-Fashioned Mother' agreed, arguing in the *Dundee Courier* on 29 July 1922 that 'A married woman and a mother may be forced by circumstances to go out to work, but it is always regrettable.'

## Conclusions

Between 1918, when some women achieved the Parliamentary vote, and 1928, when all women over 21 achieved franchise equality with men, the correspondence columns of Scottish newspapers were used as a place – a 'public sphere' – within which women could perform their new role as citizens. Many used gender-neutral pen names that asserted their rights to citizenship in their letters to the newspapers, such as 'elector', 'citizen' or 'voter'. While these women correspondents were tempted to step into the public sphere and engage in political debate, many were still not ready to reveal their personal identities. The pen names they chose, however, added gravitas to their letters by emphasising their legitimacy as citizens to enter into such debate.

Women were encouraged and supported in their first steps into politics by organisations such as the Women Citizens Associations, which had grown out of suffrage societies and were led by women who had once been leading suffragists and suffragettes in Scotland. These organisations were also keen to assist prospective women candidates in achieving elected positions in either local or national government and aimed to work with such women to achieve the social welfare and equality improvements that suffrage was hoped to deliver.

However, women correspondents on political issues did not step directly into a wider public sphere of debate that contained all members of the newspaper's public. Instead, their letters demonstrate that, for the most part, they stayed within a 'feminine public sphere' with which they were already familiar – one established by their mothers and grandmothers in their own carving out of a civic identity through philanthropy and local government positions during the later nineteenth century. Women corresponded with other women, both in encouragement and criticism, rather than with men. The expectation was that women who became involved in politics would represent both their constituents but also a much larger constituency of women, however they had voted. They were expected to be interested in 'women's issues' such as housing, temperance and the welfare of women and children. However, at the same time, women were urged not to set up 'women's parties' and to put the welfare of the country before that of themselves. Thus in 1918 women correspondents urged other women to follow the lines of campaign established by male politicians and focus on men's war records rather than their pledges relating to welfare issues. Similarly, constitutional women suffrage campaigners such as Louisa Innes Lumsden urged women to vote for

political party candidates rather than a woman candidate who might champion women's issues in the House of Commons and who was supported by Edinburgh's suffragettes.

Hartley (1992) conceptualises newspaper correspondence columns as helping to identify a 'We'-dom and a 'They'-dom: those whose voices are allowed to be heard in public debate and those who are not. I would argue that women correspondents to Scottish newspapers in the 1920s were neither 'We' nor 'They', as far as the wider public sphere was concerned. They might be addressed by the newspapers or male correspondents directly, particularly in terms of political guidance. However, this was not reciprocal. Women correspondents offered advice primarily to other women, not to men. Instead, they created their own 'We'-dom within a particularly feminine public sphere.

Other women entered into this feminine public sphere, but only to urge their sisters to return to the domestic sphere. Immediately at the end of the war and the start of the return of the armed forces, women were urged to return to their homes or at least to approved employment such as domestic service to make way for the returning men. Female correspondents grappled with wider questions of equality – at work and in the home, but again mainly writing to and for other women rather than engaging with men. The appeals of 'M. A.' and 'M. M.' for women to meet together to 'compare notes' and 'organise' themselves suggest proto consciousness raising events in women's own homes that would be key to the second wave of feminism a generation later. Fraser (1992) describes late twentieth-century US feminism as a 'subaltern counterpublic'. This chapter demonstrates that a similar feminine public sphere can be identified in women's correspondence to Scottish newspapers fifty years earlier.

In terms of wider scholarship on the subject of letters to the editor, this chapter argues both for a wider use of such correspondence in women's history and a more nuanced understanding of the concept of the newspaper correspondence page as an important part of the public sphere. The analysis of women's letters to local newspapers allows a better appreciation of the different voices and points of view that formed the feminine public sphere in the decade after the achievement of partial suffrage. Many accounts of women's fight for the vote finish at 1918, despite the fact that all women did not achieve the vote until 1928. The suffragists and suffragettes did not just go away when they had achieved the vote for some women. They had been fighting for a place at the political table, and now that women had it, they intended to use it. It is clear, however, that political women were more confident addressing other women rather than men, and discussing political matters between themselves rather than in the wider public sphere. Thus there is a need for the incorporation of the concept of the 'counterpublic' when discussing correspondence pages as part of the public sphere, and an acknowledgement of the continuation of a feminine public sphere within which women learned – or were told – which issues were deemed to be legitimate 'women's issues,' and the terms within which they should be discussed.

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