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**Title:**

**‘Brave little Belgium’ arrives in Huddersfield ... voluntary action, local politics, and the history of international relief work**

**Abstract:**

This article recounts the arrival of Belgian refugees in the textile districts of Huddersfield during the early months of the First World War, examining their reception by local Belgian refugee committees and the controversial question of their employment in the mills. The intention is to place these responses into a wider context of voluntary action, local Labour politics and international relief work, specifically the ‘networks of concern’ that re-emerged after the war as part of a renewed liberal internationalism (for example in the early work of the Save the Children Fund) and in alternative attempts to tie class politics more firmly to international relations, evident, for instance, in the offer to accommodate Basque refugees in Huddersfield over 20 years later.

**Keywords:**

Belgian refugees, Huddersfield, voluntary action, Labour movement, liberal internationalism

In 1913 an extension of the tram system opened in Huddersfield. One of its lines left the centre of the town and ran west through the Colne Valley, linking the mill villages of Milnsbridge, Linthwaite, Slaithwaite and Marsden, following the smear of smog and the route of the canal, and a river which ran red or blue depending on the colour of dye being used in the mills that day. It was here, in the rows of cottages amidst the clattering of looms and the peeling of bells rousing the workers to their shifts, that Belgian refugees were housed in the autumn of 1914, and would later find employment. Over 540 Belgians arrived in Huddersfield and its surrounding villages after making arduous journeys, typically from Mechelen and the surrounding region.<sup>1</sup> They arrived in a town where fears of a slump in production were being rapidly supplanted by the challenges of meeting the demand for military cloth, where old patterns of liberal voluntarism amongst the manufacturing elite were quick to assert themselves, but where relief for Belgians also brought forth subscription lists in the mills and discounted goods supplied by the local co-operative society.

The Belgians comprised the biggest single influx of refugees Huddersfield, indeed the country, had ever seen. If their arrival was regarded with sympathy and an unabashed quiver of curiosity, then it was also the occasion for political manoeuvrings and contentious ideological positions, especially within the town's Labour and socialist movement, positions which came to the fore in the Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council over the question of the Belgians' employment. Three Huddersfield individuals who intervened directly in the practicalities of Belgian relief demonstrate how the arrival of the refugees into the town intensified competing sympathies and concerns: Florence Lockwood, suffragist, Liberal Poor Law Guardian, high-minded member of the president of the Colne Valley Women's Liberal Association and wife of Josiah Lockwood, the director of Black Rock Mills in Linthwaite; her friend, Ben Riley, local Labour councillor, ethical socialist and founder-member of the Independent Labour Party [ILP]; and Riley's long-standing antagonist Arthur Gardiner, a young dye-worker, militant Trade Unionist, and conscientious objector.<sup>2</sup> All three objected to the war, though the nature of their objection differed, and in their separate ways all three contributed to the political and social adjustments which took place after 1914.

In *Remembering Refugees*, Tony Kushner records Rabbi Hugo Gryn's prediction that future historians 'will call the twentieth century not only the century of great wars, but also the century of the refugee'.<sup>3</sup> This was not simply because the Great War resulted in a long history of population displacements, but also because the refugee became a social and legal category of new international agencies.<sup>4</sup> Yet, unlike Armenian refugees, for instance, who were re-settled abroad after the war, Belgians were not the subject of ongoing international concern, and no rump population of exiled Belgians existed in Britain to keep their memory of displacement alive. Until recently, the history of Belgian refugees, and their accommodation in British towns and villages, has slipped from view.<sup>5</sup> With the advent of the Great War centenary, local research has enabled gaps in Belgian and British family histories to be filled, and the place of Belgian refugees to be better contextualised within the history of wartime Britain. Belgian relief in Huddersfield revealed a community response embedded in industrial organisation and local political debates, but animated by concerns that were far from parochial. Indeed, the reception which greeted the Belgians in Huddersfield reverberated within the town's political movements in ways that anticipated interwar internationalist and humanitarian concerns; a local study allows these grassroots connections to be recovered.<sup>6</sup>

### **Huddersfield and the arrival of the Belgian refugees**

Huddersfield was one of the leading textile towns of the West Riding, known for its heavy woollens and fine worsteds. After an initial lull and fears of depression in the opening months of war, industry in the West Riding picked up at such a rate that mill owners struggled to keep up with demand. The anxieties of the local manufacturers changed accordingly. The concern now was a lack of raw materials, especially aniline dye, which was imported from Germany, and the loss of men under Lord Derby's recruiting scheme, particularly those employed in dyeing and finishing who were always difficult to replace.<sup>7</sup> In her autobiography, Florence Lockwood recounted the upsurge at her husband's mill, and caught this change of fortune:

At first glance the trade of the Colne Valley was hard hit. Our mill stopped working during the night ... Then there was only work enough for four days in the week and, later, only work for a few hours. Everyone expected dark days, and a huge subscription list was started for 'The Prince of Wales' Fund'. War Distress Relief Committees were formed ... But things turned out differently from what was prognosticated ... Work was found for all: young and rich, old and poor: "Business as usual" was the word, the Prince of Wales' Fund was forgotten. The mills went off steadily again working night and day, making cloth by the mile – khaki for our own soldiers, horizon blue for the French, and other colours for the Greeks and Russians.<sup>8</sup>

This demand created full employment, generated many hours of overtime, and necessitated the recruitment of mill hands from outlying areas. For the duration of the war, women picked up the slack, often working overtime each day, while children employed under the half-time system also undertook an (illegal, but seemingly overlooked) extension of hours in the mill.<sup>9</sup> The boom in the textile industry saw a recalibration of industrial relations in the region, for where previously union membership was weak, now the unions grew in strength and were able to press their demands. In December 1915, for example, two thousand dyers and finishers in Huddersfield and the Colne Valley threatened to hand in their notice unless employers consolidated their wartime bonuses with the basic scale. The employers responded and the threat was withdrawn.<sup>10</sup> The Huddersfield branch of the General Union of Textile Workers was also keen that women join its ranks in an attempt to create 'a uniform wage basis' and prevent dilution.<sup>11</sup> It was against this backdrop of initial fears over industrial decline and unemployment, followed swiftly by a huge upsurge in demand and productivity, that the first Belgians arrived in the town.

Their arrival was greeted by the editors of the *Textile Mercury* as an opportunity for manufacturers to keep up-to-date with continental methods: the Belgians, they advised, were best treated as guests, 'whom we hope to inform and from whom we welcome instruction.' An historical connection was found for, '[a]ncestors of theirs taught the West of England its trade and shewed (*sic*) besides how to make baize and

herseys'.<sup>12</sup> The Belgian refugees of 1914, though arriving from areas known for their lace-making, cotton yarn and fine cloth, did not replicate their ancestors' example of technical instruction, being more likely to spend their time in Huddersfield as labourers in the mills. But the point was made, and would be made again in a variety of ways: the Belgians were not alien nor their case undeserving, they were kin.

News of the plight of the Belgians preceded their arrival, and, from the outset, allegations of German atrocity and Belgian bravery abounded. The *Huddersfield Examiner*, *Chronicle*, *Colne Valley Guardian* and the *Yorkshire Factory Times* all carried reports of a, 'brave people who loved peace but were yet ready to – and have – sacrificed their all rather than submit to the dictates of a bullying and blasphemous autocratic few.'<sup>13</sup> The German invasion of 4th August 1914 had contravened the neutrality of Belgium encoded in the Treaty of London, thus providing Britain with a clear *jus ad bellum*. As Nicoletta Gullace has argued, the British government depicted this breach of international treaty law in symbolic terms as a call upon their moral responsibility for a victim nation, evoked through the rape, brutalisation and mutilation of Belgian women and children.<sup>14</sup> One consequence of this gendering of the violation of Belgian sovereignty was that those in Britain who interested themselves in the plight of the Belgians anticipated an influx of women and orphans, possibly bearing the wounds of German atrocities. Letters kept on file by the central War Refugees Committee [WRC] in London contained offers to adopt Belgian babies. One woman stipulated that as, 'a great many of them are suffering injuries, either hav[ing] fingers or in some cases hands off' she would 'prefer to have a whole child.'<sup>15</sup> A lack of available orphans prompted the Local Government Board to point out that,

The refugees who have arrived in this country are generally in families ... [and] almost invariably accompanied by at least one man ... offers of hospitality, therefore, for children alone cannot be utilised.<sup>16</sup>

The West Riding of Yorkshire played host to approximately 5,000 Belgian refugees, who found a home in Dewsbury, Keighley, Leeds, Bradford, Morley, and Halifax as well as Huddersfield, the majority of whom had travelled in extended family groups. The first Belgians to arrive in Huddersfield care of the WRC did so on 7 October 1914.<sup>17</sup> Though not owing to such curiosity herself, Florence Lockwood recorded in her diary that her servants at Rock House were desperate to greet the Belgians at the railway station and satisfy their desire for a peek at the town's new guests.<sup>18</sup> Further contingents arrived on 23 October and again on 20 November.

Another batch arrived on 11 December, following an arrangement between the British and the Dutch government for Britain to take further numbers of refugees in order to alleviate the situation at the Dutch border, where thousands of Belgians had congregated. Though Huddersfield housed families of French speakers from Brussels and elsewhere, the majority spoke Flemish, having travelled from Mechelen and other Flemish towns to Antwerp then to Ostend before sailing to Folkestone on boats organised by the British for the evacuation. The account given by one such family was typical. M. Louis Joseph Le Roy from Louvain was a guard on the Belgian state railway. He left his home with his wife and two young children soon after hearing news of the fall of Liège and first sought refuge with a friend in a neighbouring village. However, when he got news from Louvain that his house, though still standing, had no furniture and that the interior was destroyed, he travelled to Ostend with many other refugees and took the last boat to Folkestone. Then ensued a perilous journey in which,

Husbands were seeking their wives, and fathers and mothers sought in vain for sons and daughters. German shot and shell fell around the shipload of misery and wretchedness, but fortunately the shells fell wide, and the boat, after a long and exciting passage, duly arrived at Folkestone, and most of the passengers ... were forwarded to London, where they were received by the Belgian Relief Committee, and arrangements were eventually made for ... transfer to Slaithwaite.<sup>19</sup>

Once in Slaithwaite, a small village huddled in the shadows of its 14 mills, M. Le Roy and his family lived out the war in the midst of a small community of Belgians given shelter in cottages owned by the local mill owners. He was the near-neighbour of M. Geryl, a fisherman with the Belgian North Sea fleet, who had sailed his family to Calais before being evacuated, and another family, M. and Mme. Van Boxeins, who resided at Carr Lane in Slaithwaite with their four children and who had fled Sempst, a small town between Mechelen and Brussels, accompanied by four female neighbours.<sup>20</sup>

### **Huddersfield's Belgian Refugee Committees**

In mid-September, a sub-committee of the Borough's War Relief Committee was formed at the Town Hall to welcome Belgian refugees to Huddersfield. The Huddersfield War Relief Committee had been instigated at the request of the Local Government Board by the County-level West Riding Distress Committee in Wakefield, which had written to Urban and District Councils for the purpose in early

September 1914.<sup>21</sup> It was overseen by Sir William Raynor, President of the Huddersfield Liberal Association and a well-known local businessman. The 23 townships in the Colne and Holme Valleys declined the suggestion that they join with the Borough's War Relief Committee and instead acted independently. The request that these Committees then form Belgian Refugee Committees was likewise passed down from the West Riding Distress Committee (which had on 16 September itself formed a West Riding 'War Refugees' Sub-Committee to aid Belgian Refugees at the request of the Local Government Board) with the result that, as well as the Belgian Refugee Committee in Huddersfield, a patchwork of small committees to assist the Belgians existed up and down the Colne and Holme Valleys. It was soon decided that these local committees ought to communicate offers of accommodation for the Belgians directly to the Local Government Board, rather than apply through the West Riding committee, and that they open their own, local, funds.<sup>22</sup>

The Chair of the Huddersfield Belgian Relief Fund, Ben Riley, was the owner of a small bookbinding business, a local Labour councillor and a prominent member of the Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council.<sup>23</sup> He was assisted in his work for the Belgians by Rev. Father O'Connor as Vice-Chair, Rev. S. Swire as Hon. Sec, and Alderman Ernest Woodhead, the owner and editor of the Liberal *Huddersfield Examiner*, which had come out in reluctant support of the war, as Treasurer. That, early in the war, Huddersfield could boast a Labour man in the chair of the Belgian refugee committee is worthy of note, for while it reflected a trend nationally for local Labour councillors and Trades Council leaders to be appointed to various wartime committees, few of the committees formed to welcome the refugees included a representative of Labour until persuaded to do so by the Local Government Board.<sup>24</sup> Trades Councils were the collective forum for local trade unions, and Huddersfield's was one of the more active nationally. At the opening of the war, it was quick to form its own War Relief Committee to represent those wishing to apply to the Borough for relief.<sup>25</sup> A merger between the ILP and the Huddersfield Trades Council in the Spring of 1914 had secured the dominant influence of the ILP, but had been hotly contested by more militant trade unionists such as Arthur Gardiner.<sup>26</sup> The appointment of Riley to Chair of the committee for Belgian relief attests to the local prominence of the ILP, but also how, 'opposition to war as such ... did not ... lead the Council in any way into an attitude of apathetic inactivity, for it did its best to ease the hardships which war imposed.'<sup>27</sup> Cyril Pearce offers a more dynamic analysis, noting that in Huddersfield the success of the Labour-dominated anti-war movement in maintaining unity lay in its ability to 'devise a rhetoric and an analysis which regularly and systematically linked wartime conditions with the class struggle', particularly in the Trades and Labour Council.<sup>28</sup> He cites discussions over food



prices and housing shortages as well as the threat of dilution posed by Belgian refugees. Certainly for Gardiner and his British Socialist Party [BSP] comrades, class politics was in evidence in their approach to the Belgians; but Riley's Chairmanship of the Huddersfield Belgian Relief Fund also provided opportunity to re-open existing divisions in the Trades Council, particularly for those voicing suspicions that participation on wartime welfare committees to 'ease the hardships of war' failed to best serve the interests of the working class.

Huddersfield had long been a Liberal town, its political and social life dominated by the paternalism of generations of local manufacturing families, many of them non-conformists, and their leadership of the Town Council, as well as the Poor Law boards and philanthropic organisations such as the Charity Organisation Society and Huddersfield's small Guild of Help. If Riley, for one, was quick to bemoan, 'how completely out of touch modern local official Liberalism is with the real progressive spirit of the time', he found he was able nevertheless to work with Liberals in the town, many of whom would have found congenial the combination of his principled anti-militarism and pragmatic wish to deal with the practical issues raised by the conflict.<sup>29</sup> For men such as Riley, who opposed war on ethical grounds and was at the forefront of Huddersfield's anti-war movement, aid to the Belgians exemplified and publicised the suffering and destruction caused by war and afforded opportunity to forge bonds of international friendship between the peoples of different nations. It also acted in practical continuity with Riley's past involvement in humanitarian politics in the town. Fifteen years earlier, at the outbreak of the South African War (1899-1902), Riley and Allen Gee, one of Huddersfield's leading Labour activists, had taken the platform at the Huddersfield Peace Meeting; they would later form a branch of the South African Conciliation Committee on which sat such prominent local Liberals as Ernest Woodhead of the *Huddersfield Examiner* and the Quaker Joshua Robson, who ran a dye works in the town.<sup>30</sup>

In 1914 Riley renewed his alliance with local Liberals in the administration of local government welfare, through which he, like his fellow Labour committee-men across the country, was able to demonstrate Labour's 'fitness to govern'; however, a united anti-war stance between the local Labour movement and Liberals of the kind which arose in the South African War was no longer possible. Only on the radical fringes of Liberal opinion was common cause found in organisations such as the Union of Democratic Control [UDC] and the No-Conscription Fellowship. In her diary, Lockwood recorded Riley's visits to her house to discuss provision for the Belgians, in whose welfare she had become concerned in her capacity as a Poor Law



guardian and through her work on the Linthwaite War Distress Committee. A forthright woman and keen member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the war and the introduction of military conscription had caused Lockwood publicly to question her existing allegiances.<sup>31</sup> As her opinions took on ever greater conviction, she began to call herself a 'pacivist', finding herself increasingly at odds with the national Liberal Party and with the local Liberal elite's enthusiasm for patriotic war charities and knitting teas.

### **Relief - and the question of employment**

The various Huddersfield Belgian Refugee Committees - after first turning down offers to adopt Belgian babies - began by asking local residents for donations of cash and clothing and by inviting anyone having space within their own homes, or an empty cottage, to house them. The accommodation of Belgians in Huddersfield was a story of the meeting of the paternalistic, voluntary endeavours of the manufacturing class and the in-kind help, weekly subscriptions, and co-operation, of the local working community. Many Belgians were housed initially at Royds Hall in Paddock, a large house with grounds owned by Huddersfield Corporation, from where they were dispersed around the community. The Lockwoods, the Mallinsons, the Crowthers, families whose mills dominated the skyline of the Colne Valley, made available vacant properties and organised for their decoration. Florence Lockwood recorded the days spent supervising the cleaning and whitewashing of an empty Mallinson property near her husband's mill in preparation:

On a cold, foggy day the Committee woke up this gaunt house and we clambered all over it from attic to cellar, reckoning up its possibilities. The next evening we met there again. It was weird there in the darkness, with the rusty gates, the overgrown drive, the clanging emptiness. We had one lantern, one chair, and a spark of fire between us, but discussing the intricacies of entertaining 30 Belgian refugees kept us warm. The next time I visited the place it was full of willing helpers with brooms, pails, buckets, floor clothes etc., all laughing in their Yorkshire way over their work, but sparing no energy in a cause which appealed to them so strongly.<sup>32</sup>

The local Town and Urban District Councils exempted the owners of these properties from rates, and provided free gas and lighting. The assumption, of course, was that the war would be over by Christmas but when it dragged on into 1915 the Town Council decided it could no longer afford this generous offer, especially when members of the Trades Council began to ask why similar provision was not forthcoming for Huddersfield's own needy.<sup>33</sup> Donations of bedding and clothes were

sent to the Committees as the philanthropic spirit rippled up and down the Colne and Holme valleys. Quakers at the Friends' Meeting House in Paddock made regular monetary donations.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, in addition to a donation of £100 pounds, the Huddersfield Co-operative Society opted for aid in kind, making a gift of boots on 19 October 1914, and offering to supply goods to the Belgian Relief Committee at selling price less 10 percent.<sup>35</sup> Weekly subscription lists were opened among the mill workers to raise money for the Belgians' upkeep. It was thus that the Colne Valley Tweed Company in Slaithwaite opted to support a family of refugees in a cottage in the village: Mr Frank Firth, the Principal, gave 10s a week and the employees pledged a weekly levy to make up the remainder.<sup>36</sup> Philanthropic effort receded, however, once the Belgians took up paid work.

Gradually, the novelty of the war's early months gave way to a winter gloom lit by mills working round the clock, and to whisperings that not all the Belgians therein employed were destitute refugees. Some, it was rumoured, had been directly recruited by local employers.<sup>37</sup> Ben Riley was quick to present this in sympathetic terms: surely the working man of Huddersfield would approve instances of self-help among Belgian workers? 'They had long been saying with regard to their own class in England that what they wanted was not charity but wages, and that was what the Belgians were asking today'.<sup>38</sup> But allegations that Belgians were working in the mills below union rates, and as substitutes for British workers, were now being voiced in the Trades Council, where the accusation was put that, 'a prominent member of the War Relief Committee had taken on two young refugees, and had "sacked" one or more of his older workmen.' It was resolved that the Trades Council would, 'have to watch the Belgian Refugees' Committee more than they had done.'<sup>39</sup> Here occurred an exception to the feminisation of the refugees as the personification of 'poor little Belgium': for in the controversy over the Belgians' employment their masculinity – particularly their position as male workers and potential rivals – was to the fore. Sir William Raynor speaking for the War Relief Committee asked whether, 'all questions of sympathy [were to be] knocked on the head where employment comes in?', and had the support of Conservative Alderman E. A. Beaumont, who lamented, that 'they should have such discussions about their Belgian friends'. Riley recognised the potential for conflict with the unions and was eager to conciliate, seeking a, 'clear and cordial understanding with the various kinds of labour in the town and the trade organisations'.<sup>40</sup>

Yet Riley's claim to represent Labour in the town continued to be under attack from militant trade unionists such as Arthur Gardiner of the Society for Dyers and Finishers. Gardiner was one of a band of men who opposed the war on grounds not of

pacifism but as an example of capitalist oppression, and who were imprisoned as conscientious objectors for their beliefs, willing to undertake neither military service nor non-combatant war work. In his court martial transcript (he had disobeyed a superior by refusing to don military uniform), published in full in the *Huddersfield Worker*, he set out his opposition to the war and his refusal to enlist:

I have for the last 10 years held deep-rooted opinions and convictions in regard to militarism and warfare. I am an International Socialist and Anti-Militarist, believing that Militarism and war are opposed to the best interests of all nations. I believe modern wars to be the direct outcome of the ridiculous, inhuman and anarchical system of production and distribution under which we live.

... Believing in the solidarity of labour and the identity of interests of the workers of all lands, I would refuse at all times to march against my fellow working man, no matter what the consequences of such refusal might be.<sup>41</sup>

But what of the worker of a foreign land rendered destitute by war, and now on the doorstep?

Every other person is falling over himself to do something for the poor dear Belgians – and at the same time our own unemployed can go to the devil. Let us help the Belgians by all means, provided the needy British are dealt with too. Let us find work for the Belgians – after we have found work for the British.<sup>42</sup>

Assistance from members of allied unions existed for those who remained in Belgium, but refugees, it seemed, ought to be kept through a form of outdoor relief if British workers risked being supplanted. This model of relief was akin to that of Sidney Webb (now advising the War Emergency Workers' National Committee) who upheld the need for the systematic distribution of government money in place of the injustices of the Poor Law and the vicissitudes of private charity.<sup>43</sup> In practice, of course, local grievances and local anxieties were often a spur to principle, but in Huddersfield's case the presence of a cohort of young, committed BSP activists injected the debate with the ideals of state socialism.

Gardiner had long goaded the old-ILPers Ben Riley and Alfred Shaw (Chair of the Huddersfield Trades Council) for their brand of ethical socialism and indifference to Marxist analysis.<sup>44</sup> Mr Dawson, Gardiner's associate in the Society of Dyers and Finishers, publicly questioned Shaw's conduct on the War Relief Committee in respect to unemployment. He was met by a sharp retort: 'he [Shaw] had given his life to the trade union and Labour movement ... Men like Mr Dawson and others had read Karl Marx ... then they come out as brilliant intellects and posed as though they had all the brains in the country.'<sup>45</sup> But up and down the land, Trades Councils were

facing similar divisions, with allegations that the conditions of British workers were deteriorating and disillusionment growing at the work of Labour leaders, nationally and in the Trades Councils. For these critics,

It seemed strange ... that they were making every exertion to give permission to get employment for 100 Belgian refugees and at the very same time the deputy chairman of the Unemployment Committee had told them that there were over 100 of their townsmen that could not find work. They ought to be attended to first. (Hear, hear). If they were not employed they should be eligible to come on the distress funds. They, too, were refugees and ought to be supported equally at least with the Belgians, or any other nation that might come to this country for hospitality.<sup>46</sup>

The complaint was not so much that the Belgians were being supported, but that the Distress Committees were not looking sufficiently after their own. Accusations flew that they were poorly administered and sitting on funds that they did not distribute - moreover, and this was a common gripe - that they lacked proper representation from the Labour movement. In fact, they seemed a little too close to the inadequacies of peace-time poor relief and the 1905 Unemployed Workmen Act. These fears echoed those expressed at a national level by the War Emergency Workers' National Committee (the forum for defending workers' rights during the war, primarily through seeking 'direct' representation for Labour on wartime committees), which advised unions on the arrangements for Belgian employment, corresponded with the Belgian socialist leader Emile Vandervelde, and forwarded grievances from various unions and Trades Councils to Arthur Henderson.<sup>47</sup> In January 1915, Henderson had been appointed as Labour Representative on a Local Government Board commission to oversee recommendations for Belgian labour alongside Robert Smillie, Harry Gosling, Susan Lawrence and C. W. Bowerman. They advised that that no Belgian should be employed before every reasonable effort had been made to find British labour through the Labour Exchanges and that no Belgian should be employed at rates lower than British workers.<sup>48</sup> Though Labour Exchanges were viewed with suspicion by the unions, who accused them of strike breaking, the situation in Huddersfield eased considerably with the boom in the textile industry and the opening of munitions plants: Belgians now met the demand for workers in significant numbers, mostly as labourers in the mills and factories.

In the midst of the controversy over employment, a separate appeal was launched in Huddersfield on behalf of the Belgian famine relief fund (for Belgians remaining in Belgium) by Mr E. F. Hastings-Pimbury, representing the Comité Officiel de Secours aux Victimes Belges de la Guerre. In early January 1915, Florence Lockwood recorded his arrival at Black Rock Mills in her diary. His speech to the mill workers assembled in the yard resulted in the opening of a subscription list

among her husband's employees. Invited to make his appeal at the Trades Council, his methods were endorsed by the Council's leaders and by others present that day to discuss the Huddersfield Distress Fund. But dissenting voices were again heard. Tom Beaumont, President of the Huddersfield branch of the Workers' Union, reminded his listeners that, 'there was another section of the community that ought to be forced to do their duty. The Trades Council ought to move a resolution, urging the manufacturers and the landowners who drew ground rents from the town to do their part.' Another speaker asked whether there was, 'any connection between Mr Pimbury's appeal and that of the Belgian trade unionists. His society had already decided to subscribe 3d per week in response to the latter appeal.'<sup>49</sup> Mr Pimbury replied that, 'he had nothing to do with any trade unionists. What did the people of the Ardennes know about Trade Unionism? He appealed for Humanity.' Arthur Gardiner sought to correct him:

An appeal had been made by bona-fide trade unionists. That was the fund he would help. All the delegates would sympathise with the suffering Belgians. It should be noted, however, that when similar suffering was seen as a result of the class war, the people who were so readily opening funds did not come forward to open funds for that suffering. The war was the work of the diplomats, cosmopolitan financiers, and international buccaneers; yet these people had the cheek to come before working men for help to relieve the consequences.<sup>50</sup>

Gardiner was not alone in his choice of relief fund. A letter to the *Yorkshire Factory Times* noted that, 'the Amalgamated Society of Engineers were going to have a levy of 6d. per member in aid of the trade unionists of Belgium ... like the Teachers Union they are putting themselves into line and going to help those of their own class from their own funds.'<sup>51</sup> Here then was an alternative Labour internationalism in action, distinct in its commitment to worker co-operation from local traditions of voluntarism, and removed, in its emphasis on class struggle, from the humanitarianism and liberal internationalism of Riley, Lockwood and others in their anti-war Liberal and ILP circles.

## **War's end**

The question of Belgian relief in Huddersfield figured in a broader discussion of the representation of Labour, of war, peace and international obligations, workers' rights to employment and state assistance, and the role of charity. But, with full employment, the Belgians in Huddersfield lived out the war without further controversy. Florence Lockwood continued to entertain her 'Brussels fellows' and launched a repatriation fund, devoted to building huts for their eventual return to

Belgium. The end of the war brought the government order that the Belgians must return home for fear of risking conflict with returning soldiers. A letter in the Huddersfield archives suggests that their return was premature, and that conditions in Mechelen and elsewhere in Belgium forced many to rely on soup kitchens.<sup>52</sup> The threat of famine stalked not only Belgium but also much of central Europe, especially during the continuing British blockade of German ports. In the *Huddersfield Worker*, an appeal for rubber teats for German mothers no longer able to feed their babies was made by the Huddersfield branch of the Women's International League.<sup>53</sup> 'On the continent millions were stricken with starvation and disease', Lockwood recorded in her diary, and, 'I became interested in "Save the Children" and "Fight the Famine" funds.'<sup>54</sup> Lockwood was one of the founders of the Huddersfield branch of the SCF which had been inaugurated under the patronage of the Robson family at the Friends' Meeting House in Paddock to publicise and ameliorate the suffering in Germany caused by the British blockade.<sup>55</sup> Increasingly, Lockwood found herself questioning her adherence to the Liberal Party. 'Socialism stands today as a progressive party where Liberalism stood years ago', she noted in the months following the introduction of conscription.<sup>56</sup> Her usual 'Saturday afternoon Liberal Conferences', soon became, 'poor stuff after the Sunday evening Socialist meeting, U.D.C., Women's International League meetings and Women's Peace Crusade Meetings.'<sup>57</sup>

Like Lockwood, many in the avowedly non-political SCF had collaborated in the voluntary endeavours of the First World War, not least in relief efforts for Belgian refugees.<sup>58</sup> Given the overlapping composition and outlook of the British Women's International League, the UDC (Lockwood was on the Huddersfield branch's executive), and the SCF, Florence Lockwood's support of these organisations is not surprising. Neither is that of Ben Riley's. Many in ILP circles propagated a trenchant democratic internationalism in their campaigns to bring the war to an end through diplomatic channels, one that accorded with their democratic and reformist socialism.<sup>59</sup> In common with many ILPers and Trades Council leaders nationally, Riley was a leading member of the Huddersfield UDC and criticised, 'so-called democratic governments', for their, 'chicanery and secret diplomacy, which had led to a tremendous and disgraceful war.'<sup>60</sup> In 1922 he contested and won the Dewsbury parliamentary seat for Labour and in Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour government acted as private secretary for Noel Buxton, the Minister for Agriculture between 1929 and 1931, and SCF President from 1930 to 1948.<sup>61</sup> Riley's own long-lasting association with SCF included membership of the SCF Council between 1934 and 1945, after which he was appointed SCF Vice-President.<sup>62</sup> Riley continued to

advocate liberal internationalism as form of collective security, and displayed a lasting concern for the fate of refugees. Alongside work for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, he sat on the Labour Party's International Committee, and accompanied Noel Buxton on fact-finding missions to Czechoslovakia, among other places in Central Europe, to report on the position of minorities and refugees.<sup>63</sup> In the early 1930s, Riley invoked British aid for Belgian refugees to encourage a similar welcome for the victims of fascism in Germany: 'In 1914, when the Great War came, we welcomed the Belgian refugees with open arms ... The Germans are now refugees from tyranny.'<sup>64</sup>

The rank and file of the trade unions and the Trades Councils who had provided mutual aid to Belgians in the First World War via affiliated unions also proffered aid in post-war Europe, including grants to the Belgian and Austrian Trade Unions for relief purposes (following an appeal to the General Federation of Trade Unions in 1919 led by, amongst others, Allen Gee of Huddersfield's Textile Union).<sup>65</sup> Arthur Gardiner, by 1924 a Labour Party agent, continued his interest in internationalist causes. Like Riley, he visited Czechoslovakia in the 1920s, though his concerns were with the struggles of the Czech textile unions. Later Gardiner expressed his admiration for the international volunteers who fought in the Spanish Civil War and, along with the Huddersfield Trade Council, was critical of the TUC for blocking debate on British intervention in Spain.<sup>66</sup> It was in the context of this political stalemate that in 1937 the local Trades and Labour Council was pleased to report that in Huddersfield direct action had been taken and, '20 [Basque] children ... are under the care of a Spanish Aid Committee inaugurated by the Trades Council's efforts'.<sup>67</sup> The following year, Gardiner took up the cause of Czech trade unionists who had settled in Huddersfield after fleeing Nazi persecution.<sup>68</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Local history demonstrates how a community's political and social relations governed attitudes to Belgian refugees in the Great War. Belgian relief, its organisation, and the question of the Belgians' employment, took place in the context of a strengthening Labour and socialist movement which, nationally, had become more attractive through its commitment to protecting workers' wartime gains, and in Huddersfield had found common cause in its opposition to war - but which saw no truce in its ideological conflict at either the local or national level.<sup>69</sup> This was reflected in attitudes to foreign affairs. For proponents of reformist, ethical, socialism such as Ben Riley, relief to the Belgians formed a humanitarian cause linked to



internationalist hopes for an inter-governmental arbitration and democratic control of foreign policy. In addition, for suffragists of Lockwood's liberal internationalist persuasion, voluntary work on welfare committees attested to women's participatory citizenship, representing a key facet of the democratic international order they wished to bring forth:

If the relief work that suffragists are doing is considered a means of achieving "for women the right to manifest their powers in equal freedom with men in the state" may not the promotion of a stable international law, upheld by the common will of men and women "be a step towards the same end?"<sup>70</sup>

These values were again present at the foundation of new relief organisations at the end of the war. The politically radical SCF exemplified a continued liberal voluntarism which rested on the discretionary intervention and the moral leadership of an intellectual and social elite, many of them middle-class women and suffragists.<sup>71</sup> It became the home of many Liberal radicals and wartime converts to the ethical socialism of the kind espoused by the ILP. Thus had Lockwood started the war bestowing relief as a confirmed and active Liberal; by the end of the war she had embraced a new subject of relief, her progressivism and internationalism intact, but directed now at a campaign critical of the government policy of blockade.<sup>72</sup> But internationalist concerns called forth different commitments: among Trade Union socialists, aid to the Belgians centred on degrees of solidarity with the male worker as Arthur Gardiner and his comrades attempted to tie class politics more firmly to international relations. The focus here was on mutual aid for allied trade unionists and direct state assistance to the needy in place of voluntarism and humanitarianism: notions of Labour international brotherhood were firmly wedded to the wartime battles of militant British trade unionism, and were tempered by the extent to which foreign workers threatened their gains.<sup>73</sup>

Huddersfield's links with Belgium continued throughout the interwar period. Two British-Belgian concerns, Bailey-Ancien Mill in Marsden and the Anglo-Belgian Mill in Lindley were founded in the early 1930s to avoid the import tariffs on fancy yarns from Belgium and a Belgian consulate was opened in Slaithwaite to assist this trade (the Belgian Consul was M. Bailley). Meanwhile, personal friendships endured: the Slaithwaite neighbours of the Van Boxeins family travelled to visit them in Belgium, suggesting something of the fraternal feelings that had developed, while their granddaughter recalls attending school in Slaithwaite with Georg and Josette, the Belgian Consul's children.<sup>74</sup> Relationships between local women and Belgian refugees and soldiers accommodated in Huddersfield also resulted in Anglo-Belgian families; numbers are difficult to come by, though at least one Belgian refugee threw his repatriation papers into the fire and decided to stay in Huddersfield with his new

household.<sup>75</sup> By the time of the Second World War, a new generation of refugees from Belgium were working in the mills, many taking up employment at Crowthers in Marsden, just as they had in the Great War. Had they raised their eyes when walking up the main street, they would have seen a marble plaque on the side of the Mechanics Institute bequeathed by their compatriots to commemorate the hospitality received in this earlier conflict.

## NOTES

The author would like to thank Keith Laybourn and Janette Martin for their helpful comments on this article.

<sup>1</sup> This number reflects the total number of refugees aided by the Huddersfield Belgian refugee committees by 1917. *Huddersfield Examiner*, 19 Jan 1917.

<sup>2</sup> See Liddington, *Rebel Girls*, for a discussion of Lockwood's pre-war activities; and Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, for details of Gardiner and Huddersfield's anti-war movement.

<sup>3</sup> Gryn, quoted in Kushner, *Remembering Refugees*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Gatrell, *Modern Refugee*, 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> However, see Kushner, *Refugees*, where Belgians appear in a compendium of responses to refugees in Britain, and Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, for a detailed examination of the WRC. Storr, *Excluded*, places refugee relief in the context of the women's movement and international relief work, sharing many of the concerns of this article.

<sup>6</sup> On the internationalist culture of interwar voluntary associations see McCarthy, *The British People*, 8. An examination of grassroots origins reveals connections, commitments and political allegiances overlooked by a more conventional focus on figureheads, for example, on the founder of SCF see, Mulley, *Biography*, and Mahood, *Eglantyne Jebb*.

<sup>7</sup> Huddersfield Chamber of Commerce, monthly meeting of the Council, minutes, 30 Oct 1914, 24 Nov 1914 and 15 Jan 1915, West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), S/KCC/H/1.

<sup>8</sup> Lockwood, *An Ordinary Life*, 193.

<sup>9</sup> The General Union of Textile Workers (GUTW) in the Huddersfield and the Colne Valley Districts asked workers to be vigilant in ensuring that the district wage rates were being paid, see the file of papers relating to GUTW activities in WYAS, S/NUDBTW/7.

<sup>10</sup> Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 86. These early successes were tempered by a change in the law to ensure that anyone wishing to leave a job had certification of the right to do.

<sup>11</sup> Flyers calling women feeders and piecers to a GUTW meeting at the Socialist Club in Milnsbridge in the Colne Valley on 1 June 1916, WYAS, S/NUDBTW/7.

<sup>12</sup> *The Textile Mercury*, 7 Nov 1914 and 1 May 1915.

<sup>13</sup> *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 24 Sept 1914.

<sup>14</sup> Gullace, "Sexual Violence". Government statistics show that out of approximately 7,500 refugees who had arrived by 30 Sept 1914 the percentage of men was 23.5%, women 32% and children 44.5%. Cabinet Papers, October 1914, The National Archives, CAB/37/121/115.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Irene Lawley (a WRC 'Lady Allocator', responsible for matching refugee families with potential hosts) from Eva Sammonds, 16 Sept 1914, Hull University Archives, Lawley Papers, DDFA[3]/6/31.

<sup>16</sup> Local Government Board, *Memorandum (No.2) For the Use of Local Committees for the Care of Belgian Refugees*, 6 Nov 1914, Keighley Local Studies Unit, Briggs Papers, BK 10/671.

<sup>17</sup> The first Belgians to arrive in Huddersfield settled in the neighbourhood of Kirkburton in September 1914. They appear to have made their way independently to England before the foundation of the WRC and were greeted by one of the many spontaneous local Belgian relief committees which sprang up at the start of the war. With thanks to Robert Carter for this information.

<sup>18</sup> Lockwood, diary, 7 Oct 1914, WYAS, KC329.

<sup>19</sup> *Colne Valley Guardian*, 30 Oct 1914.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Nov 1914.

<sup>21</sup> The WRC advised it would pay Corporation or Urban District Councils which agree to receive Belgian Refugees the sum of 10/- a head per week if they were accommodated with board and lodging, WRC, *Memorandum on the Reception of Belgian Refugees*, January 1915, Imperial War Museum, Women at War Collection, WRC papers, Bel 1/2/7.

<sup>22</sup> Agendas of the West Riding Distress Committee, WYAS, S/NUDBTW/10.

<sup>23</sup> Riley had been elected to the School Board (1898), co-opted onto the Town Council Education Committee (1902), served on the Town Council (1904), and was Labour Councillor for the North Ward (1904 – 9). During the war, Riley was a leading member of the National Council Against Conscription and National Council for Civil Liberties. See Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 258.

<sup>24</sup> Clinton, "Trades Councils," 209.

<sup>25</sup> Huddersfield Trades and Labour Council (HTC), minutes, 16 Sept 1914, WYAS, S/HTC/1. Alan Clinton, "Trades Councils," 207.

<sup>26</sup> Tanner, *Political Change*, 274; Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> 'Huddersfield and District Associated Trades and Industrial Council, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1885 – 1960, programme,'11, WYAS, KC46/15/6.

<sup>28</sup> Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> *Huddersfield Examiner*, 22 Oct 1910.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 Oct 1899.

<sup>31</sup> The Women's International League's linkage of feminism, pacifism and internationalism was not typical of suffrage campaigners, who mostly suspended their suffrage work for patriotic duties during the war. See Miller, "Geneva," Vellacott, "Feminist Consciousness," and Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage*.

<sup>32</sup> Lockwood, *An Ordinary Life*, 197.

<sup>33</sup> County Borough of Huddersfield, Council Proceedings, Nov 1914 – April 1915, Kirklees Local Studies Library; Linthwaite Urban District Council, minutes, 26 Oct 1914, WYAS, KMT23.

<sup>34</sup> Religious Society of Friends, Huddersfield Preparatory Meeting, minute book, University of Leeds Special Collections, MS/DEP/1979/1/HUD/1/25.

<sup>35</sup> Huddersfield Industrial Society, minute book, 12 and 19 Oct 1914, 2 Nov 1914, WYAS, KC63/10/18, 1914 – 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Colne Valley Guardian*, 23 Oct 1914.

<sup>37</sup> This was part of a larger story, for the British government discreetly recruited Belgians from Belgium and Holland for work in war industries under cover of rescuing 'refugees'.

<sup>38</sup> *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 Nov 1914.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Jan 1915.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 Nov 1914.

<sup>41</sup> *Huddersfield Worker*, 25 March 1916, reproduced in Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, Appendix 3, 216 – 224.

<sup>42</sup> 'Editorial', *Huddersfield Worker*, 6 Feb 1915.

<sup>43</sup> See Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 218-19.

<sup>44</sup> Like many Trade Unionists who rejected the ethical socialism of the ILP, Gardiner joined the Labour Party after the war.

<sup>45</sup> *Huddersfield Worker*, 28 Nov 1914.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 Nov 1914.

<sup>47</sup> Trade union anxieties over the employment of Belgian refugees are recorded in the papers of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee, The Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC) at the People's History Museum, WNC 3/1. For a discussion of the Workers' National Committee see Winter, *Socialism*, chapter 7.

<sup>48</sup> See Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, chapter VI; its work was eventually amalgamated with the WRC.

<sup>49</sup> This was probably the appeal issued through the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress in October 1914 which raised £6,000. LHASC, WNC 3/1/8 and WNC 3/1/48i.

<sup>50</sup> *Huddersfield Worker*, 2 Jan 1915.

<sup>51</sup> *Yorkshire Factory Times*, 3 Dec 1914.

<sup>52</sup> Belgian Refugees, Correspondence, WYAS, KC65.

<sup>53</sup> *Huddersfield Worker*, 15 Feb 1919.

<sup>54</sup> Lockwood, diary, 10 Nov 1920, WYAS, KC329.

<sup>55</sup> Quaker Adult Schools (including at the Friends' Meeting House in Paddock), circularised material on SCF and subsequently sponsored children on the Continent, minute book, Huddersfield and District Adult School Union, 16 Aug 1919.

<sup>56</sup> Lockwood, Diary, n.d., c.Sept 1916, WYAS, KC329. For similar concerns, Mulvey, "From Liberalism to Labour".

<sup>57</sup> Lockwood, diary, 2 March 1918, WYAS, KC329.

<sup>58</sup> These included Percy Alden (Chair of the SCF), Kate Courtney, Mrs Wintringham and Violet Markham who had been involved in Belgian refugee relief in the Great War. Other members included Ramsay MacDonald and Philip and Ethel Snowden of the ILP, and Emily Hobhouse and Dorothy Buxton of the British Women's International League.

<sup>59</sup> Riley campaigned for a League of Nations during the war, see report of his speech to the HTC, *Huddersfield Examiner*, 28 March 1918. On socialist hopes for a new democratic world order, Pugh, *Liberal Internationalism*; Laqua, "Democratic Politics".

<sup>60</sup> Report of ILP Divisional Conference, *Huddersfield Worker*, 30 January 1919.

<sup>61</sup> See Griffiths, "Making farming pay".

<sup>62</sup> The internationalist hopes of Riley and the SCF were evident in their advocacy of Britain's non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and their hesitancy over proffering aid in the conflict. See Riley, 'Case for non-intervention', *Manchester Guardian*, 9 Sept 1936. Riley did however become involved in SCF's belated relief mission to Spain, acting as SCF representative on the General Relief Fund and serving as the Joint Committee for Spanish Aid. The SCF eventually agreed to be a party to the evacuation of Spanish child refugees to the UK. SCF Council minutes, 1 Oct 1936 and 21 Jan 1937, University of Birmingham Special Collections, Save the Children papers, SCF/A/1/1/8 (M1/8). Buxton and Riley also advocated international mediation with Germany. Only in November 1939 did Riley write to Buxton to finally reject the efficacy of an international conference. Noel Buxton papers, McGill University, Montreal, Rare Books and Special Collections, M5951, C.2/49.

<sup>63</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 March 1938.

<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Sep 1933.

<sup>65</sup> See pamphlet by W. E. Appleton (Secretary of the General Federation of Trade Unions), 'Austria, 1920', March 1920, WYAS, GUTW papers, S/NUDBTW/7; also see the appeal by Belgian Trade Unionists in the TUC Annual Reports, 1919, 95.

<sup>66</sup> For the Trades Council resolution criticising the TUC see HTC, minutes, 15 June 1938, WYAS, S/HTC/1/7. The TUC feared the divisive effects of the war on their members, Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War*.

<sup>67</sup> HTC, Annual Report 1936-7, 5. WYAS, S/HTC/4.

<sup>68</sup> Gardiner eventually became mayor of Huddersfield, 1941-2, and continued his involvement in relief work for Czech refugees in Huddersfield during the Second World War. With thanks to Franc Grombir for this reference.

<sup>69</sup> Tanner, *Political Change*, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Lockwood, diary, n.d., c.3 June 1915 (quotation in marks in the original; unattributed quote).

<sup>71</sup> Gill, "Moral minefields".

<sup>72</sup> Lockwood's political transformation was not typical in Huddersfield where traditions of Liberalism remained strong. Liberals continued to dominate the local council independently and in alliance with the conservatives long after the war.

<sup>73</sup> For post-war divisions in socialist and Labour internationalism, Laqua, "Democratic Politics".

<sup>74</sup> Recollections of Isobel Bannister, personal communication with the author.

<sup>75</sup> This Belgian refugee remained in the country with his new wife. His wife's cousin also married a Belgian refugee, Hendrick, who returned to Belgium at the end of the war leaving behind two young children (his wife was later told he had died clearing mines). Personal communication of Mary and Anne McCarthy (granddaughters of Hendrick) with author.

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