

JANE ADDAMS - Radical Thinker, Courageous Doer

by Mary Zepernick

[The Jane Addams Peace Association, founded in 1949 as the education fund for Addams' beloved Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, is the new fiscal agent for the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. JAPA and WILPF are connected through POCLAD principals Virginia Rasmussen and Mary Zepernick, who used POCLAD's information and analysis to help create WILPF's six-year campaign to Challenge Corporate Power, Assert the People's Rights, featuring a study guide that can be downloaded at <<http://www.wilpf.org>>. The campaign is succeeded by WILPF's Committee on Corporations v. Democracy. We thought you would want to know more about Jane Addams, her work, thinking and deep connection to peace and real democracy.]

Remember when you were happy to see a sidebar in your high school history book? Since these were unlikely to appear on a test, you probably didn't read them. However, if you did and the subject was Jane Addams, it almost certainly talked about her social work and the creation of Hull House in Chicago in 1889.

And a mighty work it was: establishing the settlement house movement that served the needs of immigrants; educating adults and children and training the poor in job skills; even serving as Sanitary Inspector of Chicago's 19th ward in order to clean up the garbage-riddled neighborhood.

What you never saw in your school textbook was a sidebar featuring the Daughters of the American Revolution's "Spider Web Chart" with Jane Addams' face at its center. The DAR created the notorious "chart" of subversive women and their organizations during the Red Scare of the 1920s. Addams had been drawn to wider political activity and "internationalism" due to her revulsion at the imperialism following the Spanish-American War.

Addams lived a courageous journey, from being honored for her social service work to being vilified for her peace activities during World War I and called "the most dangerous woman in America" by isolationists and Red-baiters in the 1930s!

In April 1915, with war raging in Europe, an International Congress of Women met at The Hague, inviting Jane Addams, a prominent and respected woman from a (then) neutral nation, to preside. Some 1400 women suffragists from 12 belligerent and neutral nations reached consensus on proposals for ending the war and creating conditions for a permanent peace.

In pairs, they took these proposals to European leaders as well as to President Wilson, whose Fourteen Points were similar to their ideas. The men received them politely. Jane Addams wrote about one foreign minister to whom she observed that he might think it foolish for women to go

about in this way. He banged his fist on the table and said, "Foolish? ...These are the most sensible words that have been uttered in this room for ten months." And the war went on.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom grew out of the International Congress of Women, with Jane Addams its first president. For the rest of her life WILPF was her primary focus. In 1931 she became the first U.S. woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, primarily for her WILPF work.

In the years before Addams' death in 1935, she worked closely with a group of women - including Eleanor Roosevelt, suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, and Henry Street Settlement House founder, Lillian Wald - advocating peace through mediation, negotiation and inter-national law, and urging U.S. entrance into the World Court. On May 2, 1935, Eleanor Roosevelt held a reception at the White House for Jane Addams' 75th birthday, followed by "the biggest dinner ever held at the Willard Hotel."

What is less well known than her social work, internationalism and peace activities, however, is Addams' evolving commitment to democracy. Beyond "political power bestowed by the right to vote" (which she herself couldn't exercise until 1920), Addams said in 1899, in her first speech against war, that workingmen were the first internationalists, with their "growing conviction" that war leads to such antidemocratic developments as

militarism and standing armies. Her experience of democracy had economic and social roots in the founding of Hull House and Addams' ground-level experience in its working class, immigrant Chicago neighborhood. This growing ferment for reform, to which she contributed so significantly, led to the Progressive Era of the early 20th Century.

In 1899 Jane Addams gave a course at the University of Chicago Extension Program titled, "Democracy and Social Ethics." Louise W. Knight wrote in CITIZEN: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy that "[T]he theme of democracy emphasized the human capacity to change... the untapped potential of the future... Now democracy meant not only citizens mingling socially but also citizens working together to improve unjust conditions." In 1902 she published Democracy and Social Ethics, expounding on these ideas.

After an extraordinarily varied, creative and principled life, from meeting people around the world to authoring numerous books, from receiving public honors to serving her neighbors, Jane Addams' tombstone simply acknowledges her role in *Hull House & the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom*.

Knight closes her book with: "Jane Addams' development into a full-fledged citizen was an achievement that she and the world accomplished together, and she would not have had it otherwise. Believing deeply in the ideals of cooperation and democracy, she had turned them into a way of life that brought many rewards. By joining in solidarity with other citizens of all classes, she gained the circle of friends she had longed for, a reform agenda that she worked to advance for the rest of her days, and deep understanding of the nature of life and of her own humanity."

JAPA sponsors the Jane Addams Children's Book Awards, presented annually to authors and illustrators who most effectively promote peace, social justice, world community, and gender and racial equality to young readers.

This is a *By What Authority* article, not a fundraiser. However, if you are moved to make a tax-exempt contribution to POCLAD, now you know why you write it out to the Jane Addams Peace Association, 777 United Nations Plaza, NY NY 10017.

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By What Authority (ISSN: 524-1106) is published by the Program on Corporations, Law & Democracy. The title is English for *quo warranto*, a legal phrase that questions illegitimate exercise of privilege and power. We the people and our federal and state officials have long been giving giant business corporations illegitimate authority. Today, a minority directing giant corporations and backed by police, courts, and the military, define our culture, govern our nation, and plunder the earth. **By What Authority** reflects an unabashed assertion of the right of the sovereign people to govern themselves.

POCLAD is a group of 11 people instigating democratic conversations and actions that contest the authority of corporations to govern. Our analysis evolves through historical and legal research, writing, public speaking, and working with organizations to develop new strategies that assert people's rights over property interests.

BWA is a tool for democracy proponents to rethink and reframe their work. To that end we encourage readers to engage us with comments, questions, and suggestions.

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