[Women's work in World War I]

When the United States entered the Great War, in April, 1917, there was but one organization in the nation, depending mainly on the efforts of women, which was officially recognized by the Government - the Red Cross. On May 6, 1917, the Red Cross numbered 562 Chapters with a membership of 486,194. At the signing of the armistice, it had a chapter in practically every square mile of continental United States, and upwards of 8,000,000 regular volunteer workers. These women produced, in twenty months, over 371,000,000 relief articles, including surgical dressings, garments for the wounded and the refugees, and a variety of comforts and conveniences for soldiers and sailors. The value of their output was about $94,000,000. The Red Cross enrolled during the War 23,822 women as nurses. These nurses served in the military and naval hospitals in the United States, France, Italy, British Isles, Switzerland, Roumania, Siberia, Palestine and the Near East, as well as in convalescent homes for soldiers and sailors and in a variety of relief work for adults and children both at home and overseas.

In the Red Cross canteens of the United States and Europe, a volunteer army of thousands of American women were on call day and night throughout the War, serving moving troops with refreshments, giving them medical care, transferring them when sick and in scores of ways comforting and cheering them.

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700 of these canteens were conducted in the United States and 130 in France.

The declaration of war found a number of large national organizations of women mobilizing for service, all of which promptly applied to the Government for instructions. It at once became obvious that if the women were to be used to advantage, their efforts must be coördinated. The Council of National Defense, created by Congress in August, 1916, to direct civilian efforts in time of war, appointed, at the end of April, 1917, a committee of nine women - afterwards increased to eleven - with Dr. Anna Howard Shaw as chairman, to formulate and put into operation a plan of organization by which the women of the country, organized and unorganized, could be promptly and efficiently utilized for whatever service the Government might require.

This Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense, selected a woman in each of the States of the Union as a temporary chairman, requesting her to call together the heads of all national organizations of women in her territory, of whatever nature, to elect permanent officers for a State Division. This State Division was in turn to organize in each county of the State a committee selected in the same way; and the county in turn was to form like divisions in each city and township. This colossal work of organization was carried out so rapidly that by December, 1917, county organization was

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complete in 23 States; and by December of 1918, there was a county chairman in more than 80 per cent. of the counties of the country. Seventy-three different national organizations of women coöperated in the undertaking. Through this organization it was possible to convey at once to practically all of the women of the country the requests of the Government.

The plan of work which the Woman's Committee laid out for this organization included: (1) Registration for Service, (2) Food Production and Home Economics, (3) Food Administration, (4) Women in Industry, (5) Child Welfare, (6) Maintenance of Existing Social Service Agencies, (7) Health and Recreation, (8) Educational Propaganda, (9) Liberty Loan, (10) Home and Foreign Relief. The specific tasks of these departments originated either in requests or suggestions of the Government or in plans made by the Committee itself and approved by the Government.

The calls for service from the Government did not, however, wait on the completion of the organization. Two months after the Woman's Committee was created it was requested to enroll the women of the country in a voluntary league to pledge themselves to support the plans of food conservation which the Food Administration should ask of the country. Although the organization of the State Divisions was far from complete and there was no appropriation for the expense of an intensive campaign such as the work required, the State Divisions rallied to the call,

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and in a few weeks were able to return to the Food Administration 5,223,850 signed pledge cards. These signers were the nucleus of a women's food army which, throughout the War, loyally responded to every request for food conservation, substitution or production made by the Food Administration. Practically all of the women of the country numbered themselves as supporters of Herbert Hoover.

Throughout the War, the Woman's Committee continued to serve different departments of the Government in drives similar to that for the Food Administration. For some months it gave active assistance to the Woman's Liberty Loan Committee, and, Creditably Assisted the Secretary of the Treasury in 1918, at the request of the agencies responsible for furnishing nurses to the army, including the Red Cross and the Surgeon General's office, undertook a campaign to enroll students for what was known as the United States Student Nurses' Reserve. While 5,000 student nurses had been asked for, 13,880 were enrolled, and by the end of December of that year, 7,730 of these had been placed for training. There has never been, in any country, a more completely organized exhibit of volunteer civilian coöperation with a government than was conducted by the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense.

Outside of the women's official activities in the Red Cross, the Food Administration and the National Woman's Liberty Loan Committee, the Woman's Committee,

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there were many admirable private developments. The National League for Women's Service, an organization formed some weeks before the United States went into the War, after a study of the activities of English women, developed an extensive motor corps, carried on a variety of direct services to soldiers and sailors, and gave effective support in all drives.

The Young Women's Christian Association organized in June, 1917, a War Council, under which it developed a variety of service clubs, both in the United States and in foreign countries, particularly France. The Hostess Houses of the Young Women's Christian Association in or near the home camps, of both white and colored soldiers, looked after women visitors, checking their parcels, ~~securing~~ them meals, finding them lodgings, a variety of service which proved of such value that the War Department at the close of the War took the work under its educational and recreational branch. Some 50 buildings were turned over to the Government by the War Works Council of the Young Women's Christian Association.

Overseas the Young Women's Christian Association conducted service clubs as the need arose. Particularly valuable were those which served the Red Cross nurses, the signal corps girls and other overseas women workers. Both in France and in the United States this organization carried on industrial

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service clubs near large manufacturing centres, which were an effectic support to the health, contentment, and efficiency of the women in the factories.

The employment of women in war industries began in the United States in the winter of 1914-15 with the manufacture of supplies for the Allies. The proportion of women to every thousand men in the 19 leading war agent and implement industries increased from 65 in 1914 to 77 in the fall of 1916. In the next two years - to the fall of 1918 - the proportion rose in these industries to 139 per thousand men. These women were trained to perform satisfactorily a variety of skilled and semi-skilled tasks in the metal trades - in iron and steel, in electrical and chemical occupations, in the making of fine instruments, in wood, rubber and leather work - which had been believed to be outside of their capacity.

The substitution of women for men on street railways and subways, in the railroad yards, in banks and offices, in shops and hotels and in agricultural pursuits increased steadily to the signing of the armistice.

The invasion of industry and commerce by women was accompanied by a movement on the part of a number of women's organizations to preserve existing legal safeguards and to insure everywhere suitable living and working conditions. This effort crystalized in 1918 in the establishment by Congress of

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a Woman's Bureau in the Department of Labor, the aim of which was to develop in the industries of the country policies and methods which would result in the most effective use of women's service in production for the War, while, at the same time, preventing their employment under injurious conditions.

The immediate important service of this Bureau was the formulation and adoption of a set of standards, governing women's employment. Although created for the war emergency, the Woman's Bureau in June, 1920, was made a permanent section of the Department of Labor.

Although no official nation-wide registration for war service of the women was ever made - plans for such registration were completed by the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense and approved by the Government, it being left to the State, for the time being, to decide whether there was or was not a need for registration in its territory - practically all the women of the United States were doing volunteer war service at the signing of the armistice. They served in the Food Army, in the Farm Army, in the chapters of the Red Cross, in the many drives for funds, and in a multitude of war activities which the Government asked of them through the Woman's Committee.

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