

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT ASHEVILLE

THE NATIONAL WOMAN'S PARTY, 1945-1949

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An estimated 18 million women worked in WWII defense industries and support services including steel mills, foundries, lumber mills, aircraft factories, offices, hospitals and daycare centers. Rosie the Riveter became the symbol of the millions of American women who came to their country's service. In 1945, Rosie the Riveter stepped out of the factories and back into the kitchen upon the return of the soldiers. As the era of feminism dawned, equality between the sexes had little priority. To be a feminist in these times of hostility was a trying and lonely pursuit. Ranks of women that had filled women's organizations in the heyday of suffrage gradually thinned as younger women failed to replace older ones. The National Woman's Party (NWP) reached out to numerous women's organizations to rally together for the cause of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) but few chose to join the path of the NWP. Without support, the NWP stood alone in its attempt to carry the banner for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. From the 1920's and the passage of the 19th Amendment to 1945 this group fought for ERA and failed. This failure was due to the internal and external difficulties that ultimately prevented the NWP of achieving their primary goal of passing the ERA.

Only one former suffragist group survived the years of "doldrums."¹ The National Women's Party has spanned the twentieth century and is the oldest feminist organization still in existence. While noteworthy as the militant wing of the woman's suffrage movement, the NWP also deserves credit for keeping the Equal Rights Amendment alive. For many years, it worked to ensure equality under the law

¹ Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 22.

without regard to gender. The NWP, though small in number, had strong willed and hard working women to continue the fight for equality. It is these women that molded the history of the National Woman's Party and the tireless struggles they faced in their attempts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment from the end of World War II to 1949.

During this short post war era of the NWP, several issues hindered the group's efforts to secure the passage of the ERA. On more than one occasion, many women in the United States felt the NWP did not represent their interest and the NWP was therefore unable to secure support for the ERA. In addition, membership declined and the numbers needed to pressure the U.S. Administration to pay attention to the NWP was gone. Strong feminist personalities of the NWP fought among themselves to determine the direction and means to pass the ERA. Past membership leaders had ideas that clashed with the less militant approach of the new members.² Beyond this, the NWP wanted to push blanket legislation that was not supported by all women's organizations. This blanket legislation approach was the approach taken by the militant leadership of the NWP and not necessarily representative of all its membership. Outside the NWP membership, opposing national organizations were against the blanket approach and disapproved of the militant attitude of the group. Because of rising strife within the NWP, Senator Joe McCarthy began to investigate members of the group for ties to the Communist Party. Upon examination of the sources, a clearer focus of the NWP in the late 1940's will shed light on the group's failure to pass the ERA.

The history of the NWP has been neglected. While most historians of the equal rights movement mention Alice Paul as the leader and founder of the NWP, her contributions are usually summarized in only a sentence. The party, if covered at all, does not receive much more than a small commentary of examination and those remarks are usually associated with the passage of the 19th Amendment. Some scholars quickly advance to the 1960's and the age of liberation but only note the militant feminist views of the group's leaders.³ Upon closer assessment of internal documents of the NWP, the struggles of the group to pass the ERA become apparent.⁴

Following the publication of the party's papers on microfilm in 1979, a handful of historians have begun to take a closer look at the organization. However, the party records drastically thin out before stopping entirely in 1973. Almost all the NWP leaders have died and only a handful was interviewed before their deaths. In summary, information about the latter years of the party is meager and no comprehensive examination of the NWP in the post-World War II years yet exists. Some authors such as Becker and Feinberg touch on the NWP as a feminist organization but say nothing regarding the struggles they faced in passing the ERA.⁵ Most authors, such as Lunardini, want to jump from WWII straight to the civil rights movement of the 1960's therefore totally missing this era of mystique.⁶ Donald

² New members wanted to take the approach of passing small bits of legislation but older members felt that even if legislation passed the laws in place would not support or protect the legislation. Therefore it would be more beneficial to pass blanket legislation.

³ Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 39-40.

⁴ Becker, 41.

⁵ Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 44. Renee Feinberg, et, *The Equal Rights Amendment: An Annotated Bibliography of the Issues, 1940-1985* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 137.

⁶ Christine A. Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 97.

Johnson does touch on the NWP in his book *National Party Platform, 1840 – 1972* and his interest, though slight, mentions how the NWP had lost its zeal to push legislators for their cause.

This thesis is based upon the papers of NWP and the interviews with its long-time National Chairwomen, Alice Paul and Elizabeth Chittick. It is an exploration of the party's involvement with the ERA from the close of World War II until 1949. The reason for focus on this time frame is because historians have neglected the later forties and the issues NWP members faced during this time. To better understand the NWP, it is important to understand some of the history of the organization and its longtime leader Alice Paul.

The story of the National Woman's Party is very much the biography of Alice Paul. Born into an upper middle class Quaker family in 1885, Paul graduated from Swarthmore College in 1905 before spending a year as a social worker in New York's Lower East Side. It was amidst this poverty that Paul first became aware of the need for legal equality. She witnessed women being barred from membership in labor unions and being denied jobs that required night work or heavy lifting. She saw women being paid lower wages for performing the same work as men.⁷ Disillusioned with social work, Paul returned to the halls of academe. At the University of Pennsylvania, she entitled her dissertation "Towards Equality." It was an examination of legal status of women in Pennsylvania and foretold Paul's long involvement with legal remedies for discrimination.⁸

⁷ Amelia R. Fry, *Alice Paul and the ERA, in Rights of Passage*, ed. Joan Hoff-Wilson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 17.

⁸ Fry, 42.

Moving to England in 1907 to study social work, Paul soon joined the suffrage campaign and learned militant tactics standing shoulder to shoulder with the Pankhursts. Returning to the United States in 1913, she put forth this knowledge to form the Congressional Union (CU). The Congressional Union was initially a branch of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), but a rift over strategy separated the two groups. Paul wanted to target politicians who opposed suffrage without regard to the stand taken by the national parties. This is the same approach Paul later employed in the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment.⁹

In 1916, the National Woman's Party rose from the remains of the CU and soon attracted its own national spotlight. Members of the NWP fought for suffrage by shocking the nation. They picketed the White House and chained themselves to the gates. Jailed, they went on hunger strikes to demand status as political prisoners. The force-feeding and brutal treatment accorded the suffragists, including Paul, was a national disgrace. Eager to be rid of the embarrassing militants, President Woodrow Wilson came out for suffrage. On August 26, 1920, women were granted the vote.¹⁰

The suffrage campaign brought unity to the women's movement. While the various groups disagreed over strategy, they all agreed upon the goal. With suffrage won, many women's organizations were left without a clear purpose and many disbanded. After a meeting with a group called Wage Earning Women, the National Woman's Party became convinced that the suffrage amendment was not sufficient to

⁹ Fry, 49.

¹⁰ The best history of the early years of NWP is Christine A. Lunardini's *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1986). Susan D. Becker provides a good examination of the party between the world wars in *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Westport: Greenwood Quadrangle Books, 1971), 78.

establish equality between the sexes.¹¹ In 1921, the NWP became a permanent body dedicated to the pursuit of full equality for women. To this end, Alice Paul wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, known to NWP members as the Lucretia Mott amendment. The amendment read: “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”¹² Senator Charles Curtis and Representative Daniel Anthony, both of Kansas, introduced it in Congress in December of 1923.

As it was written, the ERA would have abolished all legal distinctions between the sexes. In doing so, the amendment would also remove protective legislation for women. This protective legislation limited women’s participation in the labor forces and often “protected” women out of job opportunities.¹³ Nevertheless, many prominent women had lobbied for years in support of these reforms and objected to the ERA on the grounds that the invalidation of protective legislation would contribute to overworking of women. In 1943, the amendment was altered to address these concerns and garner the support of protective legislation advocates. The new version read, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”¹⁴ This wording of the amendment has remained unchanged.

Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment would remove every gender assumption written into law. While it is not surprising that this revolutionary concept

¹¹ Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 78.

¹² Nation Woman’s Party Papers, S.E. Wimberly Library, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, Reel 113.

¹³ NWP Party Paper, Reel 85.

would have some adherents, the single-minded dedication of NWP members to its passage merits attention.

On January 4, 1945, on the second day of the first session of the Seventy-ninth Congress, the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in the House of Representatives. Both major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, had formally endorsed the amendment. Prominent legislators lined up along side major women's organizations for its support. For the National Woman's Party, the year that was emerging promised to end with the culmination of its long sought after goal. Twelve months later, the status of the ERA remained unchanged due to being held in Congressional sub-committees for so long. In its current form, the committee decided not to pass it through.¹⁵

Failing to pass the ERA, the NWP developed the first of a series of internal conflicts that ultimately led to its demise to pass the ERA. Isolated from society as a whole and uninterested in attracting a large membership, the NWP fought a lonely battle to keep the ERA alive.¹⁶ Members who disagreed with the leadership of Alice Paul abandoned the party, sometimes with acrimony. Because the amendment did not pass through the committees of Congress, little energy remained amongst the members for a wholehearted promotion of the ERA.¹⁷

The National Woman's Party was never a typical women's organization. Formed to fight for woman's suffrage, the NWP evolved from a very small collection of militant feminists. Membership never amounted to more than a few thousand. This

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Birch Bayr et al, "Controversy Over the Equal Rights Amendment," *Congressional Digest* 56 (1977): 187.

¹⁶ Alice Paul to Eastern region leaders meeting of NWP, March 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 66.

lack of numerical strength suited guiding light Alice Paul, who was quoted as saying, “We thought the easiest way to get the Amendment through was to try to get each of the national organizations to come out for it with its membership, not try to build up a duplicate membership of our own.”¹⁸ While Paul’s strategy may have been beneficial to the ERA, it did not serve the NWP well.

Membership in women’s organizations dropped after suffrage was won. The last stages of the campaign had been exhausting, particularly for those NWP members who suffered abuse in prison. Alice Paul’s Congressional Union co-founder, Lucy Burns, felt the time had come to pass the torch of activism on to a new generation. Burns, like many others, withdrew from the women’s movement to quietly pursue personal goals.¹⁹ The NWP membership rolls never returned to the numbers of the suffrage days.²⁰ The ranks further declined when Alice Paul decided to pursue equal rights for women and took the NWP along. Many members of the NWP were also members in other groups. One such group was the Protectionist, whereupon their primary goal for this group was to protect the working rights of women. Because Paul chose a more direct path to win the ERA, many Protectionist members felt it would be in conflict and members left the party.²¹ By the mid-1940’s, several of the NWP’s most active members had died. Others wrote to party officials at the National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. to explain that while their spirits were willing to

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fry, 17-18.

¹⁹ Lunardini, 153.

²⁰ At the peak of its strength, 9000 women belonged to NWP. Once a woman appeared on the membership list, the NWP was loath to drop her. Every name represented additional public relations power. These 9000 women remained members in good standing for years, according to NWP co-founder Mabel Vernon, whether their dues were paid or not. Therefore, the official NWP membership records are unreliable. See Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 38.

fight on, their bodies were too enfeebled by age to continue.²² Without membership drives, the NWP gradually withered and its insularity increased.

The party promoted an amendment for all women, but it failed to be representative of all women. The lack of diversity could only have damaged the party's effectiveness. Class and racial homogeneity left it unable to comprehend fears about the effects of an equality amendment. Without this understanding, the party was unable to adequately respond to opponents' charges.²³ Clearly, the NWP considered passage of the ERA to be most beneficial to college-educated, professional women.²⁴ The absence of clear concern for both homemakers and blue-collar workers plagued the Party. This lack of concern was proof of the wide spread attitude and fear that could be found among women in the United States.²⁵

While it is dangerous to place too much emphasis upon generalizations, some conclusions about the composition of the party are evident from an examination of the organization's papers.²⁶ The membership was quite homogeneous, composed primarily of white women from the upper and middle classes. Most members had college educations and many held professional jobs, particularly in the field of law. Almost all of the leaders were Protestant, with a high percentage belonging to the equality-minded Society of Friends. A few Catholic women joined the NWP, but not

²¹ NWP, Reel 66.

²² Unknown to Caroline Babcock, March 1, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

²³ The issue of race related topics was not found in the NWP Papers but several references were made in how they could avoid the topic. Such tactics included answering questions with questions or using comments that would lead away from the race issue.

²⁴ Unknown to Carol Atkins, August 5, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ A quantitative analysis of the party membership is not possible to conduct with scanty information available in the party papers. Assumptions about the members are based on the author's careful reading of the papers, particularly correspondence by members and Biographical Sketches, NWP Papers, Reel 113.

many. The case of Vina M. Betterley, state chair of the Florida NWP in the mid-1940s and a state officer in the Catholic Daughters of America, explains why few of her faith participated. After a small amount of Catholic women “confused the issue of birth control with equality for women” and made Butterley’s life a “hell,” she no longer cared to be publicly associated with the ERA or the NWP.²⁷ A minority of Jewish members is also evident but none held any substantial position at the regional level.²⁸ Never affiliated with any particular political party, the organization’s members found freedom to hold various offices in both the Democratic and Republican parties. Additionally, a number of its leaders were single and some lived in domestic relationships with other women.²⁹ In summary, the NWP might be described as an elitist WASP organization whose members were atypical of American women as a whole and insensitive to the rights of others outside the core group.

The issue of civil rights never received much official attention by the party. In the 1920’s, a majority of the 160 members National Advisory Committee chose to be non-committal when questioned about racial discrimination and this indifferent attitude continued.³⁰ Evidence of the NWP advocating segregation does not exist, and it should be noted that some members strongly supported civil rights.³¹ However, others pandered to racists in order to garner support for the ERA.³² Only one African-American NWP party member, Mary Church Terrell, founder of the National

²⁷ Ethel Ernest Murrell to Alice Paul, May 9, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 86.

²⁸ Biographical Sketches, NWP Papers, Reel 113. It is unclear as to the number of Jewish members because of marriage and sentiments towards Jews during this time.

²⁹ Elizabeth Chittick Interview with Leila J. Rupp, “The Woman’s Community in the National Woman’s Party, 1945 to the 1960s,” *Signs* 10, no. 4 (1985): 733-738.

³⁰ “The White Woman’s Burden,” *The Nation* 112 (February 16, 1921): 27-28.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 29.

Association of Colored Women has been identified.³³ The NWP did not militantly support justice for all women. This lack of empathy towards African-American women is certainly typical of the social and political climate of the time, but it is nevertheless striking that an organization dedicated to equality between the sexes would ignore equality between the races. The NWP would contend that it was not ignoring the allegation of racism but concentrating on its goal of passing the ERA.³⁴

As World War II drew to a close, the United States found itself facing a number of serious concerns. Amidst such turmoil of a nation in transition, it is surprising that Congress devoted so great an amount of attention to the ERA. Such attention to a women's issue may have been a reward for the contributions of women to the war effort, as the suffrage amendment came in partial response to democratic victory in World War I. Certainly many theories about the "weaker" sex were laid to waste by the many women who undertook hazardous and difficult jobs on the home front and the war front. The Congressional interest delighted Paul, who took the same approach with the ERA campaign as she had with the suffrage effort. To Paul, pushing ERA bills through state legislatures, while a noble pursuit, wasted time. A slow and piecemeal approach to removing legal inequities left millions of women to suffer. The best route to improving the lives of women, in Paul's opinion, lay in changing the law all at once. Paul directed the NWP to focus upon the United States Congress.³⁵

³³ Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, "The Women's Community in the National Woman's Party, 1945 to the 1960s." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10, no. 4 (1995): 719.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Few letters by Paul exist in the NWP files. Nevertheless, Paul's views can be found in the correspondence of her secretary and in communication directed to her. NWP Paper, Reel 113.

After the ERA had been introduced, it was referred to the judiciary Committee. Paul, in her second term as National Chairman, thereupon commanded fellow NWP members to apply pressure to the committee members. The rank and file across the nation fired off letters, postcards, and telegrams while Paul led a NWP team in a series of meetings with the committee. Among the NWP group were: Nora Stanton Barney, granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and founder of the anti-protective legislation League for Equal Opportunity; Emma Guffey Miller, longtime Democratic Party activist married to a senator from Pennsylvania; and Helen Hunt West, author of a law requiring equal numbers of men and women on the executive committees of political parties in the state of Florida.³⁶ On July 12, the NWP was rewarded when, for the first time in history, the House Judiciary Committee issued a favorable report on the ERA.³⁷ Unfortunately, the bill then stalled in the Rules Committee and never reached the floor of the House.

Passage of the ERA through the Senate Judiciary Committee proceeded less smoothly. The committee chair, Pat McCarran of Nevada, refused to consider constitutional amendments while the United States was still at war. McCarran apparently felt that people in overseas military service should not be denied an opportunity to express their views on proposed amendments.³⁸ His refusal to consider the ERA sparked considerable wrath among NWP members. This letter from Josepha Whitney to Paul is typical of their reaction: "We have to wait until the soldier boys come back to tell us what our status is as citizens or part-time citizens of our own

³⁶ Biographical Sketches, NWP Papers, Reel 113.

³⁷ Thomas C. Pardo, *The National Woman's Party Papers, 1913-1974: A Guide to the Microfilm Edition*. (Stanford: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1979), 128.

³⁸ Gertrude Robbins to Caroline Babcock, March 10, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

countries. It is certainly a reversal of all the ideals between mother and son when I have now to put into the hands of my own boy, whom I have brought up, the question: Is I or is I ain't a citizen."³⁹ In September of 1945, the Judiciary Committee lifted its ban on considering constitutional amendments. Formal action on the ERA was delayed, however, and consideration of the ERA was postponed until January 1946.

Additional roadblocks beset the amendment. The charge of blanket legislation had been leveled at the ERA for years but in 1945, it again came up. As a Congressional opponent declared, "Using the Constitution for a broom with which to sweep away indiscriminately the good with the bad is neither sound law nor sane behavior."⁴⁰ The NWP replied by arguing that constitutional inequality encouraged the enactment of laws detrimental to women. Inequality fortified "every employer, every college, and every professional school in discrimination against women. It sends women into the world handicapped."⁴¹

Congressional opponents of the ERA charged that passage would destroy labor laws beneficial to women. This point had arisen before and it continued to have life throughout the ERA's history. Speaking through her secretary Olive Beale, Paul directed Party members to challenge this interpretation by "giving specific examples of the unfairness to women of certain laws applying only to them."⁴² Amendments are by definition abstract; judges determine law as court cases are decided. While it is

³⁹ Josepha Whitney to Alice Paul, March 10, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

⁴⁰ Unidentified legislator quoted in Susan Randall, "A Legislative History of the Equal Rights Amendment, 1923-1960," (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1979), 165.

⁴¹ Speech by Emma Guffey Miller to the Pennsylvania General Assembly, March 7, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

⁴² Olive Beale to Ella M. Sherwin, March 7, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85.

likely that courts in the 1940s would have overturned some protective legislation, it is not certain that all would have been removed. The NWP found the present loss of opportunities to be of a greater threat to women than possible changes in workplace law in the future.⁴³ The ERA meant opportunity and a level playing field. Protective legislation often blocked women from taking certain jobs that paid well. Such disparate occupations as welder, electric meter reader, printer, telegram messenger, railroad ticket taker, miner, shoeshiner, and taxi cab driver were deemed by protective legislation advocates to be either too dangerous or morally unsuitable for women.⁴⁴ Placing the government and employers in the role of parent prevented women from exercising full control over their own lives. The NWP sought to provide women with freedom of choice. Additionally, NWP members realized that men had spent years laboring under difficult conditions and they did not believe that it was just for women to enjoy special considerations.⁴⁵ Confident that children would always be protected and crime always punished, the NWP did not seriously address the concerns of ERA opponents that the amendment would undermine support laws and jeopardize legal penalties for the sexual abuse of women.⁴⁶

The NWP choose to address the challenge that the opinion of women on the ERA was not unanimous. By February of 1945, the NWP knew of only one Protestant affiliated woman's group, Girls Friendly Society of the United States, which still opposed the ERA.⁴⁷ Other major organizations standing in opposition were: the

⁴³ Emma Guffey Miller speech to the American Association of University Women, February 10, 1945, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁴⁴ Miller, Reel 120.

⁴⁵ Ella M. Sherwin letter to Babcock, June, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 86.

⁴⁶ Mary N. Winslow, quoted in "Manchester Boddy," *Daily News*, Los Angeles, January 25, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 85; Miller speech, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁴⁷ Caroline Babcock to Mrs. Harry C. January, February 1, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 84.

National Consumers League, the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Federation of Settlements, the League of Women Voters, the Women's Trade Union League, Service Star Legion, the YWCA, and a host of labor groups.⁴⁸ The National Federation of Business and Professional Clubs, General Federation of Women's Clubs, National Education Association, American Federation of Soroptimist Clubs, and the National Association of Women Lawyers all officially supported the ERA. Endorsements by these groups came only after years of intense lobbying efforts by the NWP, and still the party sought to convert more members of the opposition. Much to the chagrin of the leaders of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the NWP turned its attention to their organization.⁴⁹ With a membership that numbered well over 700,000 women, an AAUW endorsement meant a great deal.⁵⁰ Many NWP members belonged to AAUW, including two-time president Mary E. Wooley. The chances of obtaining AAUW support appeared strong. The NWP formed a Committee on College Women and charged it with the mission of educating young women about the ERA and converting AAUW members into ERA supporters. Dr. Agnes E. Wells, a former executive officer of the AAUW, chaired the committee.⁵¹ The educational efforts of the committee proved ineffective. Following months of work, one AAUW County Chairman expressed doubts that many in the association understood the ERA.⁵² AAUW voted down the ERA in May on the grounds that it supported the theory of

⁴⁸ Frances Valiant Speck to all AAUW State Chairmen on Legislation, early 1945, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁴⁹ Kathryn McHale to Helen White, February 2, 1945, AAUW Archives, Reel 88.

⁵⁰ Helen White to the Italian Federation of University Women, AAUW Archives, Reel 9.

⁵¹ Agnes E. Wells to AAUW Branch Presidents, May 12, 1945, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁵² Elizabeth M. Hine to Agnes Wells, May 8, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 86.

equality, but not the blanket method espoused by the NWP.⁵³ Fearful of “impairing social efforts to safeguard the health, safety and economic welfare of women workers,” AAUW reiterated its support of the excruciatingly slow one-on-one method of removing discriminatory laws.⁵⁴ The women of the NWP, refusing to surrender a fight, resolved to continue the AAUW campaign.

Weary of working for the ERA and wishing to spend more time promoting the World Woman’s Party, Paul decided to leave office.⁵⁵ Faced with her resignation as national chairwoman, the party needed to choose a new leader. This was no simple task for two reasons. First, the government ban upon convention travel at the close of the war forced many organizations to hold conventions-by-mail. When the War Committee on Conventions advised the NWP to cancel its planned gathering as most rail transportation would be restricted to returning troops, the Executive Council decided that it too would conduct elections with mail-in ballots. Secondly, the NWP remained, as always, the party of Paul. Women dedicated their lives initially not so much to the party or its cause, but to Paul and her cause.⁵⁶ For example, if Paul wished a certain forum for the National Convention, she was rarely challenged. In a letter to Paul to persuade her to run another term, Lavinia Lock, the chairwomen of the Eastern Region of the NWP described Paul, as “a charismatic, fiercely determined, and highly focused woman who inspired a devotion that was cult-like in its intensity.”⁵⁷ The tight links between Paul and the NWP usually prompted those who were in conflict with her to be viewed as being in conflict with the party. In view

⁵³ Helen White to Agnes B. Wells, September 28, 1945, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁵⁴ Item 14 of the AAUW National Legislative Program, AAUW Archives, Reel 120.

⁵⁵ Fry, 234.

⁵⁶ Lavinia Dock to Alice Paul, May, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 86; Elizabeth L. Chittick interview.

of her power, it is likely that she handpicked her successor. From the names submitted by members, the Nominations Committee selected Anita Pollitzer as national chairman. Pollitzer, a member since 1918 and among those arrested for picketing the White House, held a Master's degree from Columbia University and taught in New York City.⁵⁸ Following traditional party form, the Committee offered only one candidate for each office. Thus began the first NWP schism of the postwar era.

The majority of NWP members came from the East Coast. As befits a populous region, the New York State chapter, led by Dr. Jeannette Marks, had one of the largest membership rolls. Marks personally disliked Pollitzer, blaming her for a failed merger between the New York City and the New York state chapters.⁵⁹ The Maryland and Massachusetts chapters joined New York State in complaining about the authoritarian manner of the national leadership, specifically accusing Paul of dictatorial methods.⁶⁰ Supported by these chapters, Marks attempted to halt the nomination. Ignoring Pollitzer's experience as National Vice Chairman, National Secretary, National Congressional Secretary, Vice Chairman of the National Congressional committee and leader of the New York City chapter, Marks declared that she lacked qualifications for office.⁶¹ When the attempted overthrow failed, Marks and nine other members formed a "Coalition Council" to choose another slate of candidates.⁶² In the meantime, voters put the official candidates into office. This

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Anita Pollitzer biographical sketch, NWP Papers, Reel 113.

⁵⁹ Rupp and Taylor, 28.

⁶⁰ Marie T. Lockwood to Emma Guffey Miller, January 24, 1945, NWP Papers, Reel 84.

⁶¹ Pardo, 131.

⁶² Rupp and Taylor, 28.

dispute raged from September to December and consumed time and energy away from the fight for the ERA. Pollitzer's victory ultimately meant little; disagreement over the direction of the Party flared up again in 1946.

Years of dispute for the ERA left the members of the NWP with one automatic response to injustice and that was to fight. By 1946, the women who lacked the fortitude to resist overwhelming odds and hostile opinions had long since left the party. The members who remained were a stubborn lot. When they challenged each other, as a matter of habit, none of the participants considered a retreat.

Frustration within the NWP at the failure to win the ERA grew rapidly after the war. Members had thought that passage would come quickly once the nation turned its attention to domestic matters. But hopes were dashed yet again when legislators failed to vote on the ERA once more. It was held up in committee and failed to meet the time line necessary to have a vote. A strategy debate began among NWP members and some suggestions, like one from Elizabeth M. Hine, were rather

simple. Hine sought a name change for the amendment, “If it is so firmly established with a negative value that we cannot get it passed in 25 years, it is time to try something else... [such as] Constitutional Equality.”⁶³ Others recommended more drastic steps. Still angry over the “Convention by mail,” a faction that was self-styled as the “Constitutional Group” and known to its enemies as the “Rump Group,” called for an overthrow of the national leadership.

As Alice Paul the longtime leader of the NWP prepared for Pollitzer to take over, some members began to question Paul’s management skills. This challenge aimed at Paul was an attempt by the Rump Group to discredit Paul so to call for a new election and a means to oust Pollitzer. Paul inspired and led with a purposeful approach to the ERA but she often lost sight of the people who followed her. Content to run things her way, Paul failed to realize the importance of good communication to the party. As the Rumps later commented, “Many of our present difficulties have arisen from the few not acquainting the many with what takes place and why.”⁶⁴ Why was the ERA not law? What were the NWP funds being used for? Why are there no fresh faces on the National Council? Members were asking what was wrong with the party and Paul was not hearing them.

At the meeting of the Eastern Regional Conference in June of 1946, audience members heckled Pollitzer. Adding to the insult, in a speech to the convention, Doris Stevens cited the accomplishments of the NWP as a basis for berating the leadership because the ERA had not been won. Stevens, a long-time member of the NWP and Paul’s closest friend, called for an examination of the party’s administrative, political,

⁶³ Elizabeth M. Hine to Agnes Wells, October 12, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 96.

⁶⁴ Laura Berrien et. al. to Alice Paul and Anita Pollitzer, December 2, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 150.

financial, and organizational methods.⁶⁵ Others agreed and at a national council meeting, ten members called for a convention to iron out difficulties. Paul and Pollitzer correctly perceived this call as an attack on the current administration and walked out.⁶⁶ A “Rump Convention” held without them in January of 1947, elected a new slate of national officers. Pollitzer and her supporters refused to leave office. The NWP now had two separate sets of officers. Since the Paul and Pollitzer group refused to surrender party records to the newly elected officers, these officers resolved to take them. Storming the Belmont House Headquarters late at night in November 1946, Laura Berrien, Doris Stevens, and Anna Kelton Wiley engaged in a scuffle with the occupants of the Belmont House. One of them managed to evade the inhabitants long enough to force open the door of the room where the records were kept and searched the files.⁶⁷ Thereafter, both sides filed lawsuits over NWP property and, in 1948, the Rump group lost. While some of the loyal members darkly grumbled that “some force is at work whose motive is the defeat of the Amendment,” many were simply saddened by the turn of events.⁶⁸ Some, like Mary Kennedy argued that for “intentionally obstructing” the work of the party, the dissidents had forfeited their membership.⁶⁹ Others hoped that they would return to the fold and again work for the party, but this was not to be. The NWP forever lost some of its most energetic members.

⁶⁵ NWP Eastern Regional Conference minutes as reported to the National Council meeting, September 28, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 90.

⁶⁶ Rupp and Taylor, 29.

⁶⁷ Olive Beale statement, November 15, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 90.

⁶⁸ Mabel Griswold press release, February 10, 1947, NWP Papers, Reel 159.

⁶⁹ Mary Kennedy to Alice Paul, April 5, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 43.

Throughout the history of the ERA, arguments against it have occasionally veered into the realm of the absurd as a means of steering away from the issues and goals of the NWP. In 1946, ERA opponents implied that unanimity of opinion in American politics could be reached. Senator Abe Murdock emphasized the fact that three female members of Congress, Helen Douglas, Chase Going Woodhouse, and Emily Taft, opposed the amendment during the Senate debate. Murdock used the names of these prominent women to prove that the ERA was seriously flawed since women themselves rejected it.⁷⁰ In a speech at the NWP Regional Conference, Fannie Ackley acidly replied, “The biased arguments against the ERA remind us that human progress has always had opponents; that all slaves hug their chains.”⁷¹ In this, Ackley was attempting to push the legislation to see that the ERA will not be denied, the same way that the abolition of slavery was not denied.

Discrimination against women is not written into the Constitution per se. As ERA opponents in the 1940s cited, women are not specifically mentioned until the Woman’s Suffrage Amendment. The words “persons,” “people,” and “citizens” are most often used. The word “man” or “men” only appears three times, and then not until the Fourteenth Amendment. Anti-ERA forces used this absence as proof of the lack of existence of a problem. However, the courts had consistently ruled that the interpretation of women’s rights fell under English common law, which holds that women are chattel.⁷² Unless a specific statute provided otherwise, women only had an inalienable right to suffrage.

⁷⁰ Randall, 286.

⁷¹ Fannie Ackley to the NWP Regional Conference and National Council meeting in Iowa, May 6, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 150.

⁷² George L. Radcliffe, quoted in the *Congressional Record*, May 7, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 133.

In 1947, foes of the amendment devised legislation that came to be known as the Taft-Wadsworth or Biological Status Bill. Introduced into the Senate as S.J.R. 67 by Robert A. Taft of Ohio and into the House as H.R. 2007 by James W. Wadsworth of New York, this bill had been drafted by the National Committee to Defeat the Unequal Rights Amendment.⁷³ It read: “It is the declared policy of the United States that in law and its administration no distinctions on the basis of sex shall be made except as are reasonably justified by differences in physical structure, biological, or social function.”⁷⁴ The legislation felt that under the ERA’s current form, radical changes in the amendment would lead to unfair treatment of women. In 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt’s counsel was asked to construct a positive alternative to the ERA, and in doing so, the bill appealed to a wider range of advocates trying to protect the current rights of women. To proponents, it prohibited sex discrimination while allowing sensible differentiations “based on rational and commonly accepted assumptions and beliefs.”⁷⁵ To opponents, it provided a justification for virtually all discrimination. NWP member Iola S. Ranek called it a “menace to the future status of women.”⁷⁶ Another stalwart charged that it was a “ghastly and shameful mistake” to label women a class “not quite acceptable for full legal stature.”⁷⁷ The NWP sought to orchestrate a broad based attack with Pollitzer directing Mabel Griswold to “find a DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] delegate to speak against the bill.”⁷⁸ They need not have bothered. The definition of “reasonable differences” frightened

⁷³ Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 27.

⁷⁴ “Information Bulletin on the ERA,” March 11, 1947, NWP Papers, Reel 91.

⁷⁵ Helen Gahagan Douglas as quoted in Harrison, 27.

⁷⁶ Iola S. Ranek to Senate Judiciary Committee, April, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

⁷⁷ Helen Ratterman to Robert Taft, April 9, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

⁷⁸ Anita Pollitzer to Mabel Griswold, April 14, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

women who opposed the ERA. Some feared that married women would be barred from employment and hopes of equal pay would be dashed.⁷⁹ This controversy doomed the bill. A failure at an effort of conciliation, it disappeared after 1948.

In that year, a split within the Democratic Party resulted in four major presidential candidates. The diversity of political affiliations within the NWP clearly worked in its favor as three parties came out in support of the ERA. The two major endorsements were rather weak, but the members happily collected them anyway. Both the Democratic and Republican Parties decided to “recommend to Congress the submission of a constitutional amendment on equal rights for women.”⁸⁰ The identical language suggests that the plank may have been written by the NWP. The party did present prepared ERA statements to women’s organizations that it had recruited to the cause. It is likely that the same procedure was repeated with the political parties.

The Progressive Party statement differed. NWP member Nora Stanton Barney, also part of “Women for Wallace” spoke at the party convention.⁸¹ Perhaps as a result of her high-profile efforts, the Progressive statement strongly stated that “it is the first duty of a just government” to treat all citizens equally regardless of sex.⁸² But even with the support of high profile political leaders, the Progressive Party did not seem fully committed to the goals of the NWP.⁸³

⁷⁹ Harrison, 28.

⁸⁰ Donald Bruce Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, eds. *National Party Platforms 1840-1972* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 435, 453.

⁸¹ Nora Stanton Barney to Alice Paul, August 1, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

⁸² Johnson and Porter, 438.

⁸³ Ibid.

One ERA endorsement never came, much to the relief of the NWP. The offending party's platform stated: "The Communist party calls for an end to any and all political, social and economic inequalities practiced against women and demands the maintenance and extension of existing protective legislation."⁸⁴ The Communist Party of the United States opposed the ERA because they saw it as being harmful to the interests of industrial workingwomen. However, the Communists did wholeheartedly support equality and thus posed a problem for the NWP. With the nation in the midst of the Second Red Scare, such a statement on behalf of women's rights had frightening implications. A link between Communism and ERA would effectively spell the end of the hope of passage. Emma Guffey Miller, desperate to put as much distance as possible between the party of equal rights for women and the self-proclaimed party of equality, told the House Judiciary Committee in 1948 that the Communists distorted and misconstrued the issue relating to equal rights and the amendment.⁸⁵ Margaret Bean of the NWP took the furor as an opportunity to plug the ERA. She wrote anti-communist Senator Pat McCarran that, "It is time we stop doing so much shouting about our democracy and practice it."⁸⁶ Alice Paul supported Joseph McCarthy in his witch-hunt and wondered if the Communist Party planned a takeover of the NWP.⁸⁷ Other members also looked for Communists. In a final swipe at the Rump group, the National Council gave evidence concerning the schism to the FBI and the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ *New York Times*, August 7, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

⁸⁵ U.S., Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, *Equal Rights Amendment and Commission on the Status of Women, Hearing Before Subcommittee no. 1 of the House Committee on the Judiciary on H.J.R. 49 etc.* 80th Cong., 2d sess., 1948, 11-12.

⁸⁶ Margaret Bean to Sen. Pat McCarran, March 1, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 95.

⁸⁷ Alice Paul to Anita Pollitzer in NWP Newsletter, April 1, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 95.

⁸⁸ Margaret Bean in committee meeting, April 12, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 95.

They sought “an investigation as to what was behind the attempt to seize the Woman’s Party and its property.⁸⁹ The charge of Communist influence lacked merit, particularly in view of the fact that Rump leaders Berrien and Stevens both became outspoken supporters of McCarthy.⁹⁰

The Red Scare provided the NWP with another justification for ERA passage. “Uncle Sam is not practicing what he preaches,” stated a NWP member.⁹¹ To truly serve as a role model of democracy, the United States needed to extend full citizenship to all its citizens. Support for the ERA would be “in harmony with American ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.” “A national policy emphasizing sex discrimination followed fascist and Nazi ideologies.”⁹²

Additionally, as the equal rights movement progressed in international circles, the United States appeared behind the times. The United Nations Charter, ratified by the United States without reservation, affirms the promotion of human rights without distinction as to sex.⁹³ To lead the world, NWP members argued, the United States needed to first clean its own house of discriminatory laws.

With the tumult of the preceding years finally concluded, 1949 began full of promise. Rep. Katherine St. George of New York introduced the ERA at the 81st Congress on the 5th of January. The NWP quickly gathered 296 pledges of support for the amendment.⁹⁴ Only 290 were needed for passage, but at this point NWP halted the

⁸⁹ Alice Paul to Mrs. George Howard, August 4, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93.

⁹⁰ Rupp and Taylor, 31.

⁹¹ Fannie Ackley speech to the NWP Regional Conference and National Council Meeting, Iowa, May 6, 1946, NWP Papers, Reel 150.

⁹² Alma Lutz, “Equal Rights Amendment Versus Taft-Wadsworth Legal Status Bill, 1947,” NWP Papers, Reel 150.

⁹³ Florence A. Armstrong, “Eight Points on the Equal Rights Amendment,” July 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 150.

⁹⁴ Pardo, 152.

progression of the bill through the House. To assure a complete victory, the Executive Council concluded that it would be wiser to push the ERA through the Senate and then return to the House. The NWP apparently thought the ERA's success in the Senate would push House Judiciary Committee chair Emanuel Celler into allowing the bill out of his committee.⁹⁵ Initially the strategy appeared sound, for the first time, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported the bill without opposition and did so earlier than in any previous session.⁹⁶ It appeared incredible that with few working members remaining and the organization falling apart, the NWP held things together to gather the support needed. Then the rapid movement of the bill halted when Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois declared that other legislation was more important. Among other things, the Senate found itself locked in a debate over proposed changes in Senate rules in anticipation of civil rights legislation.⁹⁷ Lucas, chair of the Democratic Policy Committee refused to permit a vote on the ERA.⁹⁸ Following a bombardment of letters, postcards, telegrams, telephone calls, and personal visits by NWP members, Lucas ostensibly changed his position. He agreed to allow a vote, but sabotaged the bill through the classic bureaucratic technique of delay. He never scheduled a date. The ERA died again.

The Pollitzer era also came to a close. Pollitzer and Paul were both nominated for the national chairmanship in 1949. Both declined. Paul's interests now lay in the

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ "Drive for Rights Pressed by Women," *New York Times*, April 2, 1949, p. 24, col. 5.

⁹⁷ Unknown senator to NWP Headquarters, September 18, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 96.

⁹⁸ Lucas, a liberal Democrat from Chicago, is also a footnote in the political career of Senator Joseph McCarthy. The infamous Communist hunter from Wisconsin took to the stump to defeat Lucas in the 1950 elections. Charges of political corruption that combined with a strong campaign by Lucas's opponent, Everett McKinley Dirksen, probably played a bigger role in dooming the Senator re-election bid though. However, as was his habit, McCarthy claimed full credit and called the defeat a demonstration of his invincible power.

World Woman's Party, while Pollitzer sought to spend more time with family. Dr. Agnes E. Wells was elected to the NWP's top leadership position. Members hoped that Wells, a retired dean from Indiana University, would be able to end the friction within the Party and bring a conclusion to the ERA struggle.⁹⁹ To some extent she succeeded, at least with the first objective. Wells possessed a talent for soothing hurt feelings and personal jealousies.¹⁰⁰ However, hampered by illness, Wells had a brief tenure and her influence upon the party was not long lasting. Cooler minds did not prevail among the party members in the 1950s.

Along with the sudden loss of leadership, the NWP was also facing external resistance to the ERA. "What will destroy the family, help only homosexuals, produce unisex restrooms, throw housewives on the street, force women into foxholes, and confuse everyone?" The women of NWP could not answer, but Phyllis Schlafly did.¹⁰¹ The leader of STOP-ERA in 1949 appealed to the emotions of state legislators as a backlash against liberalism. Schlafly challenged the legislators, "Do not hamper woman's progress by allowing all women to suffer for a few."¹⁰² Hampered by a deadline, feminists could not muster enough support for a solid majority or to gain all the states necessary for ratification.

The years immediately following World War II were grim ones for women's organizations. Although the NWP managed to survive, it never managed to thrive. Great determination on the part of its members to ban gender discrimination did not prove adequate to the challenge of getting the ERA through Congress. After the war,

⁹⁹ Kate Brown to Agnes Wells, April 12, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 95; Mabel E. Griswold to Agnes Wells, April 19, 1949, NWP Papers, Reel 95.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ "Drive for Rights Pressed by Women," *New York Times*, April 2, 1949, p. 24, col. 5.

the United States wanted to put the war behind them and concentrate on putting the country back together.¹⁰³

As women began returning home to tend the household rather than welding cargo ships, the NWP started to fade. Always a small band of intensely single-minded activists, the NWP lacked broad appeal. The activists had neither the strength, nor the skill to convert many others to their brand of equality. Unable to attract much fresh blood, the party was dominated by the aged. As they diminished in numbers, the party shrank also.

NWP challenged long held assumptions about gender. By inserting “sex” into Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in, party members smashed gender barriers.¹⁰⁴ Law now, gives persons of like qualities an equal chance in employment. This equal chance extends, by law, no further. The ERA is not yet the law of the land. However, for keeping the amendment alive and leaving a legacy of stubbornness in the pursuit of justice, the NWP deserves much credit.

¹⁰² New York Times, p. 24, col. 5.

¹⁰³ Nora Stanton Barney to Alice Paul, August 1, 1948, NWP Papers, Reel 93

¹⁰⁴ Birch Bayr et al., *Controversy Over the Equal Rights Amendment* (Congressional Digest 56 1977), 189.

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