

Emily Green Balch

1946

“As the world community develops in peace, it will open up great untapped reservoirs in human nature.”



Emily Greene Balch (1867 – 1961) was a co-recipient of the 1946 Nobel Peace Prize which she shared with fellow American, John R. Mott. Throughout her long life, she remained a committed believer in the ability of human beings to cooperate and find ways to live in justice and peace. Her beliefs found expression in her passion for education, social activism, and international political activity.

Emily Balch was born into a prosperous Boston family on January 8, 1867. In her youth, she attended private schools and later was a member of the first graduating class from Bryn Mawr College in 1889 with a degree in Greek and Latin. After a year of independent study of sociology, she was awarded a fellowship to the Sorbonne in Paris to study French poverty alleviation policies. On her return to Boston in 1892, she founded Denison House, the city's first settlement house, based on the example of Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago. Her formal education was completed with coursework at Harvard, the University of Chicago, and a year at the University of Berlin.

In 1896, she joined the faculty of Wellesley College in Massachusetts, becoming a professor of economics and sociology in 1913. Her work as an outstanding teacher and scholarly writer did not overshadow her active participation in a myriad of social justice movements. She spoke out loudly for women's rights, racial equality, improved labor conditions and wages, an end to child labor, fair treatment for immigrants, as well as efforts to promote world peace.

The outbreak of World War I was a turning point for Emily Balch as she realized that ridding the world of war was going to occupy a major portion of her life's work. In 1915, Ms. Balch was a delegate to the International Congress of Women (ICW) at The Hague from which later evolved the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). She served as secretary for the WILPF from 1919 to 1922 and from 1934 to 1935. She was an outspoken pacifist during the years of the First World War and was a strong proponent of continuous mediation as an alternative to battle. Along with her good friend, Jane Addams, and other women delegates, she traveled to many European nations and met with President Woodrow Wilson, in an unsuccessful attempt to make mediation, not war, the preferred choice for solving international differences.

In 1918, Emily Balch was dismissed from her teaching position at Wellesley College due to her many absences while doing work for the ICW and, perhaps, for her vocal

1867 – 1961

- One of first graduates from Bryn Mawr College in 1889
- Professor of economics and sociology, political and social activist, peace activist, visionary, author, speaker, leader of women's movement
- One of founders of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Advocate for humane treatment of prisoners of war

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opposition to the war and the participation of the United States in the conflict. Seemingly undaunted, she continued to work for peace, through the WILPF and individually, for the rest of her life. Indeed, she always found a suitable outlet for her energies. In 1919, speaking as a WILPF member, she criticized the punitive nature of the Treaty of Versailles and, in the same year, she found another forum for her ideas as a writer for the periodical, *The Nation*.

Between the two world wars, Ms. Balch kept busy as an advocate for peace and for social and economic justice through her writing, speaking, and organizing. She was sought out for several projects of the new League of Nations including strategies for international disarmament, drug control, and the encouragement of the United States' participation in League activities. She was a member of a WILPF committee in 1926 which monitored conditions in Haiti and formally recommended the withdrawal of

American forces. In the 1930's, she became very concerned about isolationist tendencies among nations, a trend which directly conflicted with her firm belief in "internationalism" as the hope of the future. She also grew concerned with the plight of refugees from many nations around the globe and in particular the fate of those individuals persecuted by the Nazis in Germany.

The evils she perceived in the Nazi regime, led Emily Balch to push the United States' government to accept more refugees into the country and, later, caused her to override her inherent pacifism and encourage American participation in World War II. She was appalled by the mass murder of Jews in Europe and lamented the moral depravity which could lead to such activity. In the United States, during the war years, she helped to relocate Japanese-Americans who had been removed from their homes and interned in concentration camps against their will. By the end of the war, Ms. Balch was in her late seventies but that did not keep her from remaining active in the causes she had served for so long.

The Nobel Peace Prize which Emily Balch received in 1946 was a fitting recognition of her role as a major leader of the peace movement in the United States. In all endeavors, individual and collective, she believed humans needed to combine action with a sense of higher purpose, practical reality with an idealist's vision. Overarching values are essential guides to human interaction. Her advocacy of internationalism was accountable to this

necessity as well. This was pointed out by Gunnar Jahn, Chairman of the Nobel Committee, in his Nobel presentation speech:

“Hers was not just passive, armchair interest, for she personally drafted proposals for peace terms (after World War II), terms based not on unconditional surrender but on the realistic view that the world would have to be rebuilt. She also drafted proposals for a constructive international settlement. She has given her loyal support to the newly created United Nations Organization and has brought all her influence to bear on American peace organizations to enlist their support for it, even if it does not now correspond perfectly with their ideals. ‘For’, she says, ‘the future shape of the new organization will not depend upon what the documents appear to state, but on what the members make of it. Practice in cooperation is what will give the United Nations its character. Plans have not been set up for a utopia but for Europe, Russia, America, and all the other countries with their conflicting interests and ideas. And it is precisely because the proposals we have before us are fairly modest that they may perhaps be realized.’

But now and again we espy a different approach to the coldly calculating, realistic evaluation of the task before us. I cannot refrain from quoting a few words in her own language: ‘International unity is not in itself a solution. Unless this international unity has a moral quality, accepts the discipline of moral standards, and possesses the quality of humanity, it will not be the unity we are interested in.’”

In the Nobel Lecture which she delivered in 1948, Emily Balch spoke of her undying optimism and hope for the future:

“As the world community develops in peace, it will open up great untapped reservoirs in human nature. Like a spring released from pressure would be the response of a generation of young men and women growing up in an atmosphere of friendliness and security, in a world demanding their service, offering them comradeship, calling to all adventurous and forward reaching natures. We are not asked to subscribe to any utopia or to believe in a perfect world just around the corner. We are asked to be patient with necessarily slow and groping advance on the road forward, and to be ready for each step ahead as it becomes practicable. We are asked to equip ourselves with courage, hope, readiness for hard work, and to cherish large and generous ideals.”

Suggested Classroom Activities

Introduction/Warm-Up:

The teacher should provide background information about the Progressive movement in the United States and the status of international relations before and after World War I. This would give a broader perspective to the life and work of Emily Balch.

Discussion Questions:

1. List the wars, major and minor, that occurred in the lifetime of Emily Balch.
(Level 1)

2. In what ways did her life and her work aid the cause of international peace? What obstacles did she face? (Level 1)
3. Is there a common theme among the causes for which she was a vocal advocate? (Level 2)
4. Describe the meaning of “internationalism” and explain why Emily Balch considered it so important? (Level 2)
5. Explain her hope in the future.(Level 3)
6. Demonstrate why might it be said that Emily Balch was a unique woman for her time? (Level 3)

Vocabulary:

1. alleviation
2. settlement house
3. myriad
4. Jane Addams
5. The Nation
6. isolationism
7. internationalism
8. pacifism

Activity:

Overview – Emily Balch lost her job as a teacher at Wellesley College in 1918. The question remains unanswered as to whether this termination was just. For the purpose of this exercise, we will assume it is 1920 and Ms. Balch is attempting to be rehired.

Objectives – By participating in this activity, the students will:

1. research the life of Emily Balch and especially her time at Wellesley and the events which led to her losing her job
2. uncover possible reasons for the termination of Emily Balch and evaluate their relative merit
3. develop individual opinions about whether she should have been terminated or should have kept her position
4. understand the interplay of personal, professional, and professional considerations in the public arena

Procedures –

It will be assumed that the students have received some background about the time period, have read the biography of Emily Balch, reviewed the vocabulary, and discussed the questions with the teacher.

Students will be assigned to read about Emily Balch and her work from one of the resources below or from another source of their choosing.

Students will be divided into three groups, as determined by the teacher: an impartial jury, supporters of Emily Balch who believe she should be rehired, opponents of Emily Balch who believe she should not be rehired.

Supporters and opponents must make their cases based on rational concepts and legal principles, no emotion allowed.

The jury must decide which side had the strongest argument, make a decision, and share the reasons for their decision.

Technology Option:

Read about the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) at www.wilpf.org.

What are the issues of most concern to the League today?

How do these issues compare to the issues from the 1920's and 1930's?

Resources:

Randall, Mercedes M. *Improper Bostonian: Emily Greene Balch*. New York, 1964. Twain Publishers, Inc.

www.discoverthenetwork.org/individualProfile.asp?indid=1592

www.harvardsquarelibrary.org.unitarians/balch.html

www.irwinabrams.com/articles/balch.html

www.nobelprize.org

www.wilpf.org