

Female delegates at the peace congress and the ‘peaceable women’

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Ever since Berta von Suttner described the horror of war from a wife’s perspective in her 1889 novel *Die Waffen nieder* (‘Lay down your arms’), thus prompting fierce debate, women – despite their lack of political rights – had been part of the incipient international peace movement. However, even at the Lucerne Universal Peace Congress in 1905 – the same year in which von Suttner received the Nobel Peace Prize – the *Luzerner Vaterland* (‘Lucerne Fatherland’) reported, ‘Women, incidentally, have little opportunity to make themselves heard in the assemblies [...]. The more the matter in question is addressed with reason, rather than with the impulsiveness of the heart, the more it is the men who have the decisive voice.’

At the 1912 Basel congress too, the vast majority of the 550 participants were men, but the speeches made by the women participants also attracted attention. Even before the congress, Clara Zetkin had called on women for their support:

‘In this important demonstration of the will of the world proletariat, socialist women are as essential as they are in the holy war against war.’ In her speech she also stressed the particular significance of peace to women and mothers.

The paper considers the women participants at the congress – their biographies and motivations – and enquires as to the significance they assigned to women in the peace movement.