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## **A Plan for Plenty: The International Thought of Barbara Wootton**

Or Rosenboim

In the interwar years, the British economist and sociologist Barbara Wootton (1897-1988) developed a strong interest in the international aspects of economic and political order. By the 1930s and 1940s, domestic and international politics were, to her mind, closely intertwined. She proposed a distinct vision of world order based on a democratic federal system where social justice, planning and equality could be implemented beyond state borders. During the Second World War, she became a leading member of the British organization Federal Union that advanced the cause of democratic federalism. For her, Federal Union was a suitable institutional setting to promote a global vision of social justice, based on her conviction that socio-economic discrepancies caused domestic and international political unrest and war.

Wootton's federalist writings, I argue, expressed an original approach to the problem of domestic and international inequality, which emphasizes its transnational, even global dimension. Thus, in parallel to the foundation of the British welfare state, she built on her knowledge and expertise in economics and sociology to fashion an innovative vision of a new welfarist international order. Designed along federalist lines, the post-war world order would guarantee welfare to individuals and communities across state borders using central economic and social planning to mitigate inequalities and improve living standards around the world.

Although today Barbara Wootton may no longer be a household name, her original and innovative writings enjoyed a lasting impact on the British welfare system as well as on the social and economic foundations of the European Union.<sup>1</sup> Her federalist vision drew on liberal internationalism and domestic socialism while levelling a critique at both approaches. Opposed to abstract thinking, she used notions such as 'planning', 'needs' and 'want' to outline a

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Castelli, *Una pace da costruire : I socialisti britannici e il federalismo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002).

concrete vision for international change. Yet she was confident of the capacity of the law to redress racial and gender discrimination. Although her proposals were not realized, she anticipated present-day debates on global justice, offering interesting insights on the interplay between the global and the domestic aspects of social and economic inequality and justice.

Wootton crafted her ideas about the international realm by examining the links between fundamental principles and policy making. She endorsed a coherent set of normative values that should be applied internationally – including social and economic equality, universal living standards, participation-based democracy and social and political rights – which she sought to embed in her policy proposals centred on the idea of planning extended beyond the boundaries of the state. Her advocacy of federalism was therefore motivated by a sophisticated and coherent political thinking. For Wootton, as well of other thinkers of her times who were closely interested in public debates and policy, including Lionel Robbins, Friedrich Hayek and E. H. Carr, scholars had the responsibility – and duty – to reflect on the desirable links between abstract thinking and its practical applications in society. Her ideas were informed by theoretical assumptions, but she insisted on exploring their potential application in practice, thus marking the limit of pure abstract thinking in politics. By examining her thought, this chapter seeks to highlight that policy proposals constitute theorising and are underpinned by it.<sup>2</sup>

Despite her influential position in British mid-century public debate, the title she chose for her autobiography was ‘In a World I Never Made’, possibly reflecting the challenges she faced as a woman to valorize her knowledge and expertise against gender discrimination and narrow-mindedness.<sup>3</sup> A sense of struggle accompanied her illustrious career. After the completion of her studies in economics at Girton College, Cambridge, Wootton shifted her

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<sup>2</sup> On policy makers as subjects of intellectual history see for example Christopher Bayly, “The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru’s India”, *Modern Intellectual History*, 12, 3, (2015): 605-626.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Wootton, *In a World I Never Made* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967).

focus to sociology. In 1948, she was appointed Professor of Sociology at Bedford College, London, the first higher education college for women in the United Kingdom. Her apparent professional success could not conceal the difficulties she encountered in securing academic positions in institutions such as Cambridge and LSE, where she held temporary teaching and research jobs. Later, she commented that she ‘supposed women in my position were so accustomed to what we would now regard as outrageous insults that we took them as all in a day’s work’.<sup>4</sup> In response, she extended her activities beyond academia to the public sphere: she was a Justice of Peace, member of national policy commissions and Royal Commissions, delegate to the League of Nations World Conference and governor of the BBC.<sup>5</sup> In 1958 she was the first woman to become a life peer and used her position as a deputy speaker of the House of Lords to promote her socialist vision.<sup>6</sup> She published pamphlets and articles for a general readership, aimed at harnessing academic scholarship for the benefit of society.

Wootton did not consider herself part of the nascent discipline of International Relations. In the 1930s and 1940s she developed her international thought in an effort to translate her conception of economics and social justice into a thorough plan for a new political world order. By the late 1940s, she turned away from international politics, and for the rest of her career her main concerns remained domestic: penal law, criminology and welfare in Britain. She was often invited to apply her knowledge to other countries, such as Ghana and India, but her attention remained focused on the domestic problems of British society. Nonetheless, as this chapter will show, her brief engagement with the domain of international politics merit the attention of historians and international relations scholars today.

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Oakley, *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 73–75.

<sup>5</sup> Oakley, *A Critical Woman*.

<sup>6</sup> Oakley, *A Critical Woman*, 1–5.

In the remainder of the essay, I will examine aspects of Wootton's international thought. First, I will examine her vision of a transnational democratic federation as developed in the context of Federal Union. The following section will discuss her attempts to extend the notion of social justice beyond the state and will critically assess her relative silence on the legacies of empire, the colonial world and transnational racial inequality. The third section will consider the notion of 'planning' on transnational and international scales, which later inspired the founders of the European Union. The conclusion will assess some of the contribution and limits of Wootton's international thought.

### **A Democratic Federation for Welfare**

In 1938, Wootton joined the British organization Federal Union, and two years later became a member of the Executive Committee, President, and Chair of the Federal Union National Council, a role she held until 1944. At the backdrop of the war, her international vision and economic thought collided most clearly. She joined other London-based economists in a lively discussion on the desirable route to economic prosperity for Britain and the world as a whole: a democratic federation. At Federal Union, she strengthened her relations with William Beveridge, who in 1919 had offered her a studentship for social research at the LSE. For Beveridge and Wootton, the war was an opportunity to establish a new social order to be planned on an international rather than merely national scale. Beveridge maintained his relations with Federal Union after Wootton had left the organization and became its honorary president in 1944.<sup>7</sup>

The war years saw an intense public political discussion in Britain about the post-war order: What should be its founding principles? How could economic growth and social justice

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Mayne and John Pinder, *Federal Union, the Pioneers: A History of Federal Union* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

be guaranteed? What international political mechanism could safeguard peace? Federal Union was hardly the only hub of debate at the time, and Barbara Wootton divided her attention between several initiatives, often at the invitation of senior (male) scholars, but she did not have a scholarly or political ‘patron’. She operated in relative freedom within the academic and political landscape of mid-century Britain and preserved her political and professional independence. For example, in 1942 Beveridge invited her to help elaborate his famous report on unemployment in Britain, and she later published many articles in the popular press defending Beveridge’s welfare reforms.<sup>8</sup> In the same year, Wootton became a member of the committee of intellectuals set up by H. G. Wells to formulate his universal declaration of the ‘Rights of Man’.<sup>9</sup> Wootton also collaborated with G. D. H. Cole’s New Fabian Research Bureau (and the Federation for Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI) led by Wells and by her Federal Union colleague Cyril Joad. She held roles at the Trades Union Congress and Chatham House Council. In this myriad of political visions, she fashioned her own public voice as a socialist, federalist and staunch defender of liberty and democracy, concerned with the future of international order after the war.

The political climate of wartime Britain generated not only an enthusiasm for new organizations, but also a surge in publication of pamphlets and short essays. Since the early 1930s, the pamphlet became a favorite publication format for scholars and activists who hoped that their ideas could influence not only decision makers but also the general public. During the Second World War, when the British government restricted paper usage and printing, short pamphlets were preferred as a cheaper and more feasible form of publication than books, yet longer-lasting and more respectable than a newspaper article. There was no consensual view

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<sup>8</sup> William Beveridge, *Full Employment in a Free Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1944); Jose Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 434–37.

<sup>9</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Rights of Man: An Essay in Collective Definition* (Brighton: Poynings Press, 1943); Oakley, *A Critical Woman*, 153–54.

about the positive political or ideational impact of pamphlet literature, which was very diverse in scope and quality. George Orwell wrote in 1943 that ‘pamphleteering has revived upon an enormous scale since about 1935 and has done so without producing anything of real value’.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, he affirmed that pamphlets ought to be *the* literary form of his age thanks for their accessibility and informality. Indeed, Federal Union, Chatham House, the National Peace Council as well as commercial and university presses published pamphlets by respectable scholars and commentators, which sold in thousands of copies.

One pamphlet from 1940 records a London conference organized by the National Peace Council on ‘A New International Order’, in which Wootton and Norman Angell iterated their international thought.<sup>11</sup> She emphasized her support for a federation, at a time when the proposal of Anglo-French union was on the table.<sup>12</sup> The basic conditions for a federation, to her mind, was a certain degree of shared political values, yet she conceded that the bar could be set quite low: ‘I should like the minimum of liberty to be a very substantial one, but I should be prepared to take substantial concessions, in that I would be prepared to work a federation with agreement on political liberty in a rather narrow sense.’<sup>13</sup> It was compromise, rather than unity, which rendered the federation possible. While political values such as liberty were key in forming the federal constitution, their economic application was no less important.

The main aim of the federation would be to overcome ‘that sense of nationalism’ which dominated economic policies hitherto: ‘tariffs, currencies, prohibitions and migration really have more a political than an economic basis’, she suggests, ‘They are one way of achieving certain economic ends and a bad one too. They are forms of economic planning

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<sup>10</sup> George Orwell, ‘Pamphlet Literature’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 January 1943, 23.

<sup>11</sup> National Peace Council, *A New International Order: Political and Constitutional Aspects* (London: National Peace Council, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> Avi Shlaim, ‘Prelude to Downfall: The British Offer of Union to France’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 9, no. 3 (1974): 27–63.

<sup>13</sup> National Peace Council, *New International Order*, 6.



conceived only in the interests of a particular state and which emphasize before the mind of every citizen the separateness of one state from another'. The League of Nations is complicit in the increase of national animosities as it is an organization based on the outdated principle of national statehood, yet has the merit of providing professional expertise on matters of health, labor and economic cooperation, which could serve the federal order after the war.<sup>14</sup>

While targeting the League of Nations for its failure to stand up to aggressive nationalism, Wootton did not address the economic and political impact of existing imperial structures. In referring to the possibility that a member of the federation would be an empire, she said that 'it would be quite essential that it should place under federal control the administration of any non-self-governing dependencies'. In addition, if, for example, independent India would want to join the federation, a 'practical' problem of 'literacy against illiteracy' may arise and prove incompatible with the federation's democratic system of representation. Yet, she soon dismissed this problem and reassured her audience that 'some experience has been gained as to how you can overcome those things' and ensure that the principles of democracy were maintained. The inclusion of ex-colonies was neither a central part of her federal plan, nor a significant obstacle for its realization. Rather, it was a marginal detail in a plan centered on the developed and industrialized countries of Europe and North America.

The potential extension of the federation to the imperial sphere was not a prime concern for Wootton or her Federal Union colleagues.<sup>15</sup> Their plans seem to assume the decline of the British Empire, but many, including Wootton, agreed that membership in the federation required, first and foremost, a degree of political similarity in the form of democratic constitution and some shared values.<sup>16</sup> She did not circumscribe her ideas to the West, but

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<sup>14</sup> National Peace Council, *New International Order*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Bosco, *The Federal Idea* (New York: Lothian Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'Economic Problems of Federal Union', *New Commonwealth Quarterly* 5 (1939): 150–56.

considered this vision to be globally applicable: ‘It is, therefore, particularly a European, or at least a Western European, Federation that I have here in mind; though much of what is said may well have a more general reference, and be relevant to any and every Federation that is democratic’.<sup>17</sup> The reality of the war – when most of Europe lived effectively under a German dictatorship – rendered more urgent the federation of Europe after the war.

Moreover, in her autobiography, Wootton concluded that the decision to advance a European federation was based on the notion that such a scheme would be the most likely to be realized after the war.<sup>18</sup> Yet focusing on Europe was more than a pragmatic decision. Evidently, Wootton based her vision on a substantially Western socio-economic experience; she remained silent on the ways to overcome the significant differences in living standards between the European and American societies and those in Africa, Asia and South America. In 1940, ‘Dependent territories’ would remain, for her, under colonial administration: federal rather than national.

The liberated peoples of the colonies were invited to join the federation once free and democratic, there was no provision to assisting these populations to attain formal independence and establish a democratic government. Her federal vision assumed that Britain would no longer cultivate a special relationship with its imperial possessions; instead, she proposed to turn to Europe as the most effective partners for constructing a welfarist post-war order. Wootton’s silence on the problem of empire did not reflect a moral or political support for imperial politics. Possibly, she might have seen her own input – as a white, British and privileged academic – as undesirable in the context of post-colonial politics. It was time for the local population to shape their polity according to their own views. Her visit to Ghana in the 1960s may be indicative of her approach to colonial liberation.<sup>19</sup> She expected to find post-

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<sup>17</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Socialism and Federation* (London: Macmillan, 1941).

<sup>18</sup> Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*.

<sup>19</sup> Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*, 110-113.

colonial grassroots political movements, yet she was surprised to discover that local students were more interested in pursuing a professional career. The disappointment with the students' political disengagement did not prompt her to express her own views on the desirable future of the ex-colony.

If the goal of the democratic federation was not colonial emancipation, what would it be? Wootton's democratic federation relied on a post-imperial future in which Europe was tasked with rebuilding its economic and social structures after the end of the Second World War. The main aim would be to outline social economic plans to provide not only basic 'needs' but also 'plenty': concrete economic prosperity and social welfare for all. The challenge might be, for her, 'to consider how we can work together a highly collectivized economic system with one of a largely capitalistic character'.<sup>20</sup> The great divergence for her was not between North and South, but between East and West, between collectivism and capitalism. 'Could you combine under one political federal system states predominately collectivist and states like ourselves?', she asked, and hoped for an affirmative answer.<sup>21</sup> Such coalition would be facilitated, she argued by the closing gap between the 'collectivist' and 'capitalistic' states due to the planned war economy that enhances the collectivized qualities of capitalistic economies. The underlying aspiration of her vision was that democratic federation could merge liberal capitalism and socialist collectivism to promote equality and social justice on a global scale.

One of the main hubs for sustained research within Federal Union was its research institute, known as FURI.<sup>22</sup> As scholars and researchers joined the organization, it became a platform for theoretical and practical studies on federation. It was in this setting that Wootton's international ideas took shape through publications and discussions on world order and federation with other key economists like F.A. Hayek, Lionel Robbins, William Beveridge and

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<sup>20</sup> Wootton, *Socialism and Federation*.

<sup>21</sup> National Peace Council, *New International Order*.

<sup>22</sup> Melville Channing-Pearce (ed.), *Federal Union: A Symposium* (London: Lothian Foundation Press 1991 [1940]).

James Meade. She and her colleagues agreed on the economic and political advantages of federalism, yet they disagreed on the role of individual entrepreneurship and centralized planning in the federation. Wootton focused on the economic aspects of a federal world order with the aim of establishing a new transnational system of social justice: it was a proto-welfarist discourse on the potential extension of the notion social justice beyond the state, an innovative analysis of the intertwined relations of economics and politics on the global scale.

The commitment to social and economic welfare went, according to Wootton, hand in hand with a democratic political system based on freedom and ‘the rights of man’. In 1940, when Charles Kimber published the first Federal Union policy pamphlet *How We Shall Win*, she praised his assertion that ‘man has certain rights and certain needs, and the business of the political machine is to fulfil [sic] the needs and safeguard the rights’.<sup>23</sup> Her interpretation implies that ‘needs’ like ‘rights’ could be discovered and agreed upon by political decision-makers. Although their meaning could be interpreted in various ways, it was still possible to lay down standards as the basis of state – or federal – laws.

In the *Federal Union News* issue of March 1942, she referred to the importance of F.D. Roosevelt’s ‘freedom from want’ as a fundamental step towards transnational equality in the post-war world order. While acknowledging that Federal Union could not, at that point, outline a consensual economic plan for the future, she underlined her commitment to economic security and social wellbeing as the foundation of a democratic world order. She perceived federalism as a means to achieve a democratic socialist society in which equality was not merely legal and political but also economic. Hence, as Ransome wrote in a letter to Beveridge as early as 1940, Wootton represented the interventionist faction in Federal Union, who sought to create a ‘new economic policy’ based on planning and state intervention.<sup>24</sup> Her initiatives

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Wootton, ‘Plan for Plenty’, *Federal Union News*, 29 March 1940.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Ransome, ‘Letter to W. Beveridge’, 1941, British Library of Social and Economic Sciences, London School of Economics, The papers of William Beveridge, London.

were blocked by other economists like Robbins and Hayek, who saw her vision as a menace to democracy.<sup>25</sup>

### **Social Justice beyond the State**

In her early writings about economics, Wootton despaired about the abstract theorizing, which dominated the British discipline at the time, and prevented, to her mind, economists from offering practical, scientific and useful economic policies. In *Lament for Economics* (1938) Wootton offered a critique of abstract thinking in economics. The problem with abstraction was that it distanced the study of economics from real-world issues. The problem was, in her words, that ‘economics was no use’ if economists engage in ‘pure science’ rather than in solving real-world concerns.<sup>26</sup> While embracing rationalism as a method of enquiry in the social sciences, she deplored the excessive weight classical economic theory gave to individual rational choice. She claimed that a more complex understanding of human nature and social interaction, based on empirical data and statistical analysis, was necessary to identify, assess and improve social and economic interactions.<sup>27</sup> Instead of theory-driven research, she called for problem-driven studies. Economics should be not only useful, but also ‘intelligible to the common man’: ‘there is no merit in technicality for technicality’s sake’, she argued.<sup>28</sup> She envisioned a methodological turn away from grand theory towards social policy-oriented investigations, and demanded that economists provided clear, useful and applicable answers to ambitious problems, such as should Britain restore the gold standard, or raise tariffs. Her criticism was levelled not only to the economists themselves but also at the university system that prioritized certain – abstract - forms of social knowledge that were of little use to society.

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<sup>25</sup> Or Rosenboim, ‘Barbara Wootton, Friedrich Hayek and the Debate on Democratic Federalism in the 1940s’, *The International History Review* 36, no. 5 (2014): 894–918.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Lament for Economics* (London: Routledge, 1938), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Wootton, *Lament for Economics*.

<sup>28</sup> Wootton, *Lament for Economics*, 22.

Wootton suggested that the real problems of equality and social justice should guide economists to effective solutions. This methodological position led to a critical exchange with leading economists such as Lionel Robbins, who conceded that their positions were not significantly different.<sup>29</sup> Yet Wootton's revolt against mainstream economics came at a price: she was unable to secure an academic post in one of Britain's prestigious universities. Instead, she accepted a professorship at a women's college specializing in social work, which agreed with her conceptual view of the disciplines of economics and sociology but relegated her to the margins of academic debate at the time.

One real-world problem emerged as a particularly strong concern for Wootton: inequality. The idea that social justice and equality were integral parts of international thought was a constant in her thought. Her pamphlet 'In Pursuit of Equality' opens with an important declaration: "I seem to have been pursuing the ideal of equality all my life but have been singularly unsuccessful in catching my prey".<sup>30</sup> Looking back on her 1941 tract on inequality in Britain, she argued that little had changed over the past three decades. While the accuracy of this judgement may be contested, it reveals her long-sighted and innovative approach to the problem of inequality back in the 1940s. Wootton brought to Federal Union her academic experience in economics and sociology, as well as in public policy making, through her activities at the War Office and Chatham House, where she was secretary to the 'Study Groups on Reconstruction' which aimed to provide social, economic and political vision for post-war Britain. The pursuit of equality was, therefore, a particular British domestic concern, but also a potential remedy for a global malaise that posed a threat to world peace. Yet what might be the best approach for thinking about inequality in the national and global dimensions? The decision was, for Wootton, essentially political.

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<sup>29</sup> Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), chap. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Wootton, *In Pursuit of Equality* (London: Fabian Society, 1976).

Wootton's international thought sought to reconcile federalism, democracy and socialism. As becomes clear from her 1941 tract on equality, what renders 'democracy' the most appropriate political form for social and economic progress was the centrality of the value of 'equality' in the democratic system, which could also be extended beyond the state. The public campaign led by Federal Union enhanced her interest in federalism and its impact on economics, although federation as a political form was not, of course, inherently conducive to equality and democracy. For Wootton, a federation meant 'the establishment over more than one previously independent state of a supra-national government with strictly limited functions'.<sup>31</sup> The most fundamental of these functions was war prevention. She argued – with many other British internationalists – that international control of armed forces and foreign policy could guarantee world peace. However, her interest in the federal form of government extended beyond this fundamental function.

A federation could prove more appropriate than nation-states for the attainment of social justice, if it could become a fertile land for ambitious social and economic planning. The key benefit of world or regional federalism would be its vast territorial scale, which lent itself to more complex and sophisticated economic planning. Moreover, a powerful centralized government could effectively enforce its policies. In the nation-state system, economic planning was limited by the difficulty of addressing economic issues caused by powers that were beyond the reach of individual states. Moreover, the limited territorial scale of extant states set clear boundaries to the availability of human and natural resources for the development of the economy. The world's growing technological interconnectedness accelerated the flow of capital, goods and people across national borders. Yet national economic policies were not always equipped with the appropriate tools to deal with these

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'The Keynes Plan', *Federal Union News*, June 1943.

phenomena. This situation rendered federal large-scale planning a necessity, but there was no particular implication for the geographic boundaries of the federation.

In one of her early federalist publications, *Socialism and Federation* (1941) Wootton made a clear case for large-scale federations, arguing that a large canvas for planning was necessary to raise the standard of living for people across national boundaries.<sup>32</sup> Thus, she outlined the contours of a global – or at least transnational – concept of social justice. Her vision was anchored in a universal idea of the public good, which could not be confined to the political space of the state. In this sense, equality between individuals was of prime importance. Similar ideas were proposed in Wells’s declaration of the rights of man, which Wootton helped drafting. Yet Wootton’s conception of welfare and social justice was not individualistic, but also considered the influence of societal relations and tensions.

Wootton approached equality from two perspectives: equality of opportunities and social equality. The first related to providing access to benefits of education, profession and welfare to individuals regardless of their income or background. The second related to the formal and informal boundaries within society based on notions of class, gender, and race. For her, no democratic society could prevail if these two aspects of inequality were not addressed properly by government acts. Yet at the same time, she assumed that the formation of a welfare-oriented democratic order could, eventually, bring to the elimination of inequalities. She employed the idea of ‘planning’ as a means for curtailing inequality in society and attaining prosperity and welfare for all individuals and communities.

In her federal pamphlet, Wootton considered migration as a key aspect of the federal plan. In the late 1940s, when the 1948 British Nationality Act reflected some of her considerations about the social and economic desirability and necessity of migration, she did not provide any further reflections on the subject. Later on, her optimism about the capacity of

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<sup>32</sup> Wootton, *Socialism and Federation*.



the law to redress gender and race discrimination brought her thought closer to classic liberalism. She argued that racial discrimination was a deplorable problem that had to be tackled by policy makers and by society at large, yet she believed in the capacity of the law in modern democracies to overcome these social tensions.<sup>33</sup> In 1975, in a public lecture on equality, she argued that racial differences could never justify different social, political or economic treatment: “members of different races living in this country may, of course have special cultural and religious practices, to which they attach great value, and may therefore not wish for total integration into British way of life; but these give no excuse for discrimination in regard to jobs, or housing or credit facilities or educational opportunities, or in access to places of recreation or entertainment”.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Wootton did not see any real difference between people of different races, or, between man and women. By extension, her argument would imply that equality in the law could, for her, end women’s subordination in the same manner in which it could hopefully end the hierarchical relations of race in the international sphere.

The federal polity was therefore charged by Wootton with the onerous task of achieving what might today be called ‘global justice’. State intervention in the economy was necessary to obtain social justice: ‘social equality is, itself, plainly the product of deliberate planning’.<sup>35</sup> It was a welfarist vision based on the fulfilment of the basic needs of the individuals: housing, nourishment, employment, and health services. The advantage of the federal form of government for social justice revolved around the idea of social democratic planning. Effective economic planning had two conditions: it required extensive territorial space, and a stable balance between centralized government and popular participation.

Wootton argued that federal economic planning would be more effective if the central authority had decision-making power over matters of immigration, trade, currency,

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<sup>33</sup> Wootton, *In Pursuit of Equality*.

<sup>34</sup> Wootton, *In Pursuit of Equality*, 10-11

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Wootton, *Freedom under Planning* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945), 180.

credit, tariffs, employment and production. Here some of her ideas are more original than others. In the 1940s the notion that currency, trade and tariffs should be internationally regulated became more readily accepted.<sup>36</sup> Fewer economists considered the impact of immigration on international prosperity and welfare. Since she was interested in the relations between social welfare and the individual freedom to improve her life, she thought migration should be managed by an impartial international authority, rather than by self-interested states. Lionel Robbins, her colleague at Federal Union, also espoused a vision of free movement of people in the federation, centrally regulated only for the benefit of the federation as a whole.<sup>37</sup> Yet while Robbins prioritized the advantage of free migration for the economy, Wootton perceived the problem from the migrants' viewpoint, enabling individuals to improve their living conditions by relocation.

The problem of migration was similar to the problem of class inequality in the domestic context. In both cases, the social and economic gaps would be closed thanks to better state-led planning. This is the precondition for the attainment of freedom on a collective scale. For her a federation would be a means to increase social wealth and prosperity universally, in both the private and the public sectors. Largely, a unified economic and social policy had more chance of success because it would eliminate excess by improving the coordination of various aspects of consumption, production and trade.

### **International 'planning'**

In this section, I will focus on one important aspect of Wootton's federalist vision, that brings together the key features of her international thought: planning. The idea of a plan-based international system drew on Wootton's socialism, on her problem-driven approach to

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Daunt, 'Britain and Globalization since 1850: The Rise of Insular Capitalism 1914-1939', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (2007): 1–33.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick Ransome, ed., *Studies in Federal Planning* (London: Macmillan, 1943).

economics, and on her optimism about the human capacity to realize social justice through legal and political reform. Wootton's vision of international politics was based on two fundamental precepts: first, economic planning is politically beneficial because strife and poverty lead to political radicalization and war. Second, since the war budget showed that the State could finance large-scale projects, in the post-war era these funds should be diverted towards social causes to prevent future war. Her international thought assumed that government planning was possible and desirable beyond the state's boundaries.

In her discussions of planning, Wootton had not always attached to the term the same meaning. For example, in 1939, she suggested that the world federation should follow the American New Deal experience and establish a central authority for economic planning which would gradually grow 'up to the Russian level'.<sup>38</sup> However, if initially she endorsed centralized regulation and direction of the economy, six years later, in *Freedom under Planning*, she argued that planning need not entail centralized authority following the Soviet model, which, in her mind, sacrificed individual freedom for vague economic goals.<sup>39</sup> This means that initially she advanced an idea of a centralized federal authority responsible for setting plans for economic outputs, but also for controlling the means of production and coordinating the whole economy.

Later her vision of planning was more limited, endowing the state with the responsibility to set plans for economic growth, and to regulate the economy accordingly. 'Planning' in this sense included not only social services to the poor and unemployed, but also free or subsidized nutrition and housing for all. She denied that this idea of planning meant a centralized control of the means of production. Why did Wootton change her mind? There are several possible reasons. First, observing the political and economic situation in the USSR, she

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<sup>38</sup> Wootton, 'Economic Problems', 156. Some American thinkers, like Rexford Tugwell and Charles Merriam who were inspired by the New Deal, proposed similar ideas without taking the USSR as their model.

<sup>39</sup> Wootton, *Freedom under Planning*, 5–12.

might have changed her mind about the desirability of the Soviet model. A self-defined socialist, Wootton did not feel obliged to support blindly the policies of the Soviet Union; as time went by, she became increasingly critical of the news arriving from Russia. Second, the debates in Federal Union might have persuaded her that many federalists opposed the Soviet economic model as repressive and intolerant. Finally, Wootton might have been influenced by the criticism levelled at her arguments by Hayek, who was concerned over the illiberal aspects of economic planning, and sought a non-repressive form of planning, which focused on setting plans, regulating the economy and providing subsidies and similar measures for individual welfare.<sup>40</sup>

In her subsequent three articles on ‘Plan for plenty’, Wootton underlined her idea of economic democracy. For her, the better off the poor states would be, the more they could contribute to the federal treasury through taxation. Thus, it was in the rich countries’ interest to promote greater economic equality on a world scale. This economic equality would translate into equality of opportunities in trade, access to resources and financial investment. Yet, she applied a domestic analogy to argue that the universal ‘living standard’ was flexible rather than fixed, and by no means implied ‘mathematical’ equality between individuals or between states. The British system of social services paid for by taxation provided an appropriate model of serving a universal living standard by state subsidy of basic goods and services.

Furthermore, Wootton proposed a fiscal reform to finance these social provisions, based on three principles: individual – rather than corporate – taxation, tax on inheritance up to a maximum of 60%, and finally fixing an ‘absolute upper limit’ to individual income or inheritance. These ideas sought to moderate the socio-economic gaps by mobilizing wealth across society and dismantling the wealthiest classes. However, they are obviously relevant only for Western industrialized countries. Although Wootton repeated that it was in the rich

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<sup>40</sup> See Rosenboim, ‘Wootton & Hayek Debate’.

states' interest to mitigate the economic and social gap between them and the poorer states, she did not propose any specific means for overcoming the political challenges that such a proposal for global taxation and global re-distribution implied. Yet she did approve of the role of migration in mitigating social and economic gaps between states.

Besides fiscal measures, Wootton expressed her views on international finance and institutional reform. Although she upheld a more radical notion of economic planning than Keynes ever envisaged, she supported some of his instruments of international financial regulation, and in particular his idea of an International Clearing Union (ICU), a global banking institution which Keynes presented to the British Parliament in 1943, and at Bretton Woods in 1944.<sup>41</sup> The ICU was to regulate currency exchange and trade using a new international currency, 'Bancor'. By penalizing creditor states, Keynes hoped the ICU would encourage states to use their capital to purchase foreign goods and improve the world economy as a result.<sup>42</sup> These were the sort of institutions Wootton hoped could facilitate the transition to a transnational economic – and political – system. The ICU would have helped stabilize and control economic markets, thus contributing to a more balanced distribution of wealth and industry. Yet, by 1943, she seemingly despaired of the lack of political willingness to undertake federal and transnational reforms and proposed to use some – not well specified – political authority to impose these schemes on reluctant states.

The reaction to her views was mixed. Some federalists supported her plan, yet others accused her of paternalism and over-emphasizing irrelevant details, which could obstruct the federalist cause. Others yet preferred social policies based on economic incentives rather than subsistence provisions.<sup>43</sup> Wootton was keen to persuade Hayek and her fellow economists at

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<sup>41</sup> Benn Steil, *The Battle of Bretton Woods : John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Wootton, 'The Keynes Plan'.

<sup>43</sup> For a collection of letters replying to Wootton's argument see *Federal Union News*, 20 July 1940.

Federal Union that the problem of social and economic equality had to be taken seriously when thinking about a democratic world federation. Yet others doubted the feasibility – and at times the desirability – of her vision. A summary paper of the committee’s activities before Wootton joined stated that a federal economy should be endowed with a common currency and a strong central authority to regulate monetary and trade policies also within the member states. However, it added, such a ‘radical solution would probably have to be abandoned’ because the existing states would not give up their economic sovereignty and independence. The economists sought a compromise, which consisted of applying the principle of free trade to the international sphere, and leaving the fiscal, monetary and planning decisions to the national governments. They asserted that ‘free trade may be taken to be the fundamental basis for the international relation of the nations constituting the International Organisation’.<sup>44</sup> Upon joining the economists’ committee, Wootton underlined the close relations between economic policy and social rights on a global scale and suggested that the new economic policy for Federal Union should be based on planning to foster equality of opportunities around the world. As Robbins noted in his interim report on the committee’s activities, the final solution was to avoid any decision and concentrate on envisaging a federation with substantial economic powers that could be used only in exceptional cases.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, Wootton did not give up on her vision of planning federal social justice and penned various publications aimed at explaining her views to the members of the organization. Her article series in Federal Union’s official publication, *Federal Union News*, ‘Plus plan for plenty’ and ‘Plan for plenty’ focused on planning as ‘a recognition of certain elementary needs and of the fact that, if it were not for the war and war preparation, the satisfaction of those

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Economic Problems of International Government’, n.d., British Library of Social and Economic Sciences, London School of Economics, Federal Trust, London.

<sup>45</sup> Lionel Robbins, ‘Interim Report on Economic Aspects of the Federal Constitution’, in *Towards a United States of Europe*, ed. Patrick Ransome (London: Lothian Foundation, 1991), 91–97.

needs would be entirely possible'.<sup>46</sup> This definition presupposed – rather than proved – that the public authority and not private individuals had responsibility to identify and satisfy these 'elementary needs'. The discovery and fulfilment of 'elementary needs' was indeed the main duty of the government and the public sector en route to realizing global social justice.

## **Conclusion**

After the 1950s, Barbara Wootton largely turned away from the question of world order. She was doubtful that federalist advocacy could generate change in the international arena. Given her preference for practical and useful rather than pure abstract research, she decided to focus her efforts on reforms in British social welfare and penal systems. It may be tempting, therefore, to dismiss her contribution to international thought as marginal or inconsequential. This essay, however, argues that Wootton was able to weave together theoretical assumption and policy proposals to provide an original contribution to international thought in three different aspects.

First, Wootton made a long-lasting contribution to transnational federal thought, and in particular to theorizing European integration. She outlined the economic and social principles that grounded her proposal for a new federal order as a vehicle of transnational political change, providing inspiration for the economic thought of the founders of the European Union.<sup>47</sup> Her idea that a federation – and especially a European one – should embrace the precepts not only of liberty but also of social justice and democracy resonated with federalist thinkers beyond the British Isles. Wootton's writings underline the great weight of inequality on international relations, and the need to actively create a global institutional and political framework to generate plenty and justice across borders.

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'Plan for Plenty', *Federal Union News*, 1 March 1940; Barbara Wootton, 'Plan for Plenty', *Federal Union News*, 15 March 1940; Wootton, 'Plan for Plenty', 29 March 1940; Barbara Wootton, 'Plus Plan for Plenty', *Federal Union News*, 6 July 1940.

<sup>47</sup> Castelli, *Una Pace*.

The originality of Wootton's federalism is reflected in the conceptual content of her proposals, but also in her methodological approach that merged ideas from liberal and socialist political thought. This perspective shows the important interplay of economics and politics in twentieth century international thought, which has often been marginalized in the accepted historiography of international thought. International thought underpinned policy proposals and provided their justification. For Wootton, the benefits of European federalism could be best identified at the intersection of Economics, Sociology, and International Relations. Thus, she outlined a sophisticated international thought which set out to realize her social and economic principles on the domestic sphere, alongside more conventional international objectives such as peace and security.

In Ventotene, the Italian prison camp island where Mussolini's opponents were incarcerated, Wootton's writings generated a great deal of interest. Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, both left-leaning liberal democrats who opposed fascism, read Wootton's books on federalism and planning and found them particularly inspiring for thinking about a new European order after the war.<sup>48</sup> Their own federalist tract, known as the Ventotene Manifesto, became one of the foundational documents of the European Union.<sup>49</sup> In this document, that called for a common social policy in Europe based on the precepts of liberal socialism and democracy, Rossi and Spinelli embodied Wootton's vision. The Italian federalist tract merged the defence of liberty with a strong commitment to social justice and equality, replicating Wootton's original combination of liberal democracy and socialism. The legacy of Wootton's ideas in Europe suggest that her ideas outlived the Federal Union moment and provided a long-lasting intellectual foundation for the evolution of the European Union as a very loose

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<sup>48</sup> Castelli, *Una Pace*; Bosco, *The Federal Idea*.

<sup>49</sup> Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, "Il Manifesto di Ventotene / The Ventotene Manifesto". Bilingual edition. (Ventotene: Ultima spiaggia, 2016 [1944]).



federation, and more importantly, as a sphere of large-scale social-economic planning for liberty, welfare and democracy.

Second, Wootton's writings reflect her conviction that practice, not abstract theory, should guide international thought. She advanced a critique of pure abstract thinking in economics and politics and challenged common legalistic approaches to international relations. For her, political thinkers should not work in a bubble and imagine an ideal world of norms and principles. Instead, she advanced an alternative, problem-driven practical approach to politics, in which theory serves as a means to effectuate social change. Like Wiskemann and other women who were activist-scholars such as Eslanda Robeson, both of whom are discussed in this edited volume, Wootton found merit in fact-based, practical research in the social science, that aimed to use theory to intervene directly in 'real world' problems. This position could be explained in two ways. On the one hand, social scientists had, for Wootton, a duty to provide clear and effective policy guidance. Thus, she advanced a utilitarian approach to research that highlighted the applicability and impact of theoretical ideas. On the other hand, her professional trajectory as a woman might have also influenced her view. Her major academic position was as a professor at a women's college that aimed to provide practical formation in social care, while she failed to obtain a permanent position in more prestigious universities. In more general terms, Wootton's life experience as a woman highlighted to her eyes the importance of practical conditions over formal and theoretical structures. Wootton's privileged background – the gifted daughter of two dons educated at an elite British university – was 'marred' by gender.<sup>50</sup> In her 1967 autobiography, she included a chapter titled 'woman', where she deplors work-place sexism and practices that we would now call 'mansplaining' and 'hepeating'. Doubtlessly her professional trajectory was conditioned by her gender to a

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<sup>50</sup> Albert Henry Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain: Science, Literature and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63.

more significant extent than that of her male colleagues.<sup>51</sup> Gender equality, for her, was based not only on social mores but also on practical economic conditions such as equal pay, maternity leave, and social benefits. While biographic details should not be over-stressed, Wootton's career is indicative of a more general trend that encourages women activist-scholars to embrace a practice-driven approach to international thought, drawing on their experience outside the more conventional spheres of academic knowledge-production.

Third, Wootton's thought has the merit of highlighting some of the limits of mid-century visions of world order. In her writings, there is little or no discussion of empire and its structures of international inequality. By prioritizing a seemingly more feasible European federal project, Wootton turned her gaze away from major international inequalities that would eventually hinder the realization of her vision of global justice. In her largely Western narrative, the colonial and non-western world featured very little – if at all. Possibly, Wootton lacked a direct experience with the colonial world. Following her practice-based methods, such lack of knowledge excluded her intervention in planning the post-imperial world. Nonetheless, acknowledging the blind-spots of her proposals helps recognize the diversity and complexity of women's international thinking in the twentieth century. In Wootton's case, a progressive approach to gender and race equality may conceal a conservative pragmatism that delimits the boundaries of progress to Europe and ignores Africa. The spatial and conceptual limits of her vision reveal the challenge of global thinking in the twentieth century.

The history of women's international thought is an ongoing endeavor. Often, it requires shifting the gaze away from the 'canon' of international thinkers to recover neglected or minor figures who contributed to shaping the international imaginary. Such an exercise is useful to challenge the conventional narratives about the development of international thought, but also

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<sup>51</sup> Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*, 150–155.

to bring back thinkers such as Barbara Wootton whose influential and original contributions to international thought were hitherto forgotten. Her international thought embodied the conviction that politics and economics should be considered as two aspects of a common problem, that of constructing a society based on social equality, economic justice, and political liberty. As this essay has hopefully demonstrated, her sophisticated analysis of the advantages and limits of a transnational federal order still holds relevant insights for intellectual historians and international relations scholars today.