

U DX215 Publications of the Union of Democratic Control 1915-[1933]

Historical Background:

The UDC was established during the first days of the First World War to work for parliamentary control of foreign policy and a moderate peace settlement. There was a belief in some quarters that Britain had been dragged into the war because of secret military agreements with France and Russia. The early leaders of the group initially called the Committee of Democratic Control, were Charles Trevelyan (the only member of the Liberal government to resign over the declaration of war), James Ramsay Macdonald, Arthur Ponsonby, Norman Angell and ED Morel. Morel became the secretary and initial driving force behind what was soon re-named the Union of Democratic Control. The group was formally launched with an open letter to the press in early September 1914. The UDC's stated objectives were: parliamentary control over foreign policy and the prevention of secret diplomacy, a movement for international understanding after the war, and a just peace. A Committee of 18 members was established, including Arthur Henderson, JA Hobson and Bertrand Russell. Operations were initially based at Charles Trevelyan's London home, but offices were quickly acquired off the Strand, and later, on Fleet Street. Running costs were met from subscriptions, plus large donations received from several major Quaker business concerns. In late 1917 the UDC reached its maximum membership of some 10,000 individuals in over 100 branches. By 1918, 300 other groups (mainly co-operatives, trade unions and women's organisations) with 650,000 members were also affiliated to the UDC.

The UDC undertook a massive publicity effort in support of its aims. During the War, 28 pamphlets, 47 leaflets and 18 books were issued, plus a journal, The UDC (later re-titled Foreign Affairs). The pamphlets, in particular, were very successful, and the first 15 sold over 500,000 copies by 1915. The UDC also played a part in the terminal decline of the Liberal Party, especially after the formation of the Lloyd George coalition government in December 1916. Joining the UDC became a sort of half-way house between leaving the Liberals and joining the rising Labour Party. Morel himself started the War as a prospective Liberal Parliamentary candidate, but in 1918 joined the Independent Labour Party. Members of the UDC (especially Morel, with his Germanic name) were often harshly criticised for their views (and Morel was even imprisoned). But this was softened by two factors: the publication by the Bolsheviks after the Russian revolution of the secret treaties between Britain, France and Russia before 1914; and the first of President Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', referring to 'open covenants openly arrived at'. However, the UDC's campaign to modify the Treaty of Versailles peace settlement was largely ineffective.

Nevertheless, the UDC, established as a wartime phenomenon, continued to thrive after the War. By July 1921 organisations affiliated to the UDC contained over one million members. Thirty members of the UDC were elected as Labour MPs in 1922, and in November 1922 Morel himself defeated Winston Churchill (then a National liberal) at Dundee for Labour. The first ever Labour government in 1924 included five members of the UDC Executive and eight members of its General Council - although not Morel, owing to personal animosity between him and the Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. Again, in practice the UDC still had very little influence on government policy, except in gaining British recognition of the Soviet Union.

ED Morel died suddenly in 1924 at the age of 51. The UDC was never really the same again, even though membership subsequently included the likes of Fenner Brockway and Harold Wilson. From the 1920s the UDC concentrated its efforts on highlighting and offering solutions to problems in international affairs, eventually becoming a leading anti-colonial

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organisation. In the 1920s, it pressed for the keeping of peace by open diplomacy and a reformed League of Nations (to include Germany and Russia); in the 1930s, it challenged the growth of armaments and imperialism in China and East Africa; and in the 1940s it supported the struggles for independence in Asia and Africa. With the virtual disintegration of the British Empire by the mid-1960s, the UDC was eventually wound up in December 1966.

Custodial history:

Donated by David Tyler, Senior Editor, Research Publications, April 1990

Description:

Additional publications not contained within the main UDC archive

Extent: 24 items

Related material:

Main archive of Union of Democratic Control [U DDC]

Other publications at U DX216

Papers of members include: Audrey Jupp-Thomas [U DJT]; Ben Parkin MP [U DBP]; Cdr. Edgar Young [U DY0]

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DX215/1	Leaflet. 'Statement of object and policy' 1 item	c.1915
U DX215/2	Leaflet, with form of membership 1 item	c.1915
U DX215/3	Handbill advertising 'Peace with honour' by Vernon Lee 1 item	c.1915
U DX215/4	Pamphlet no. C3 'Notes for study and discussion circles, with a bibliography of useful books and pamphlets' 1 item	Oct 1915

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U DX215/5	Speech delivered by Charles Trevelyan M.P 1 item	3 Mar 1917
U DX215/6	Open letter. 'The Union of Democratic Control to President Wilson' 1 item	c.1918
U DX215/7	Leaflet no. 24b. 'Labour and a permanent peace' 1 item	1918
U DX215/8	Leaflet no. 36b. 'Manifesto of Russian workers and soldiers' 1 item	c.1917
U DX215/9	Leaflet no. 41b. 'Secret diplomacy no. 2: Peace proposals: what are the real facts?' 1 item	c.1917
U DX215/10	Leaflet no. 45b. 'General Smuts on victory' 1 item	c.1918
U DX215/11	Leaflet no. 5a. 'The control of foreign policy', by Arthur Ponsonby 1 item	1918
U DX215/12	Leaflet no. 21a. 'The war to end war: a plea to soldiers by a soldier', by Lt. R.L. Tawney 1 item	1918
U DX215/13	Pamphlet no. 23a. 'The races of Austria - Hungary', by G.P. Gooch 1 item	c.1917
U DX215/14	Pamphlet no. 25a. 'Alsace and Lorraine: a short historical sketch' 1 item	c.1918
U DX215/15	Pamphlet no. 31a. 'Italy, Serbia and the Adriatic', by F.Seymour Cocks (U.D.C. memoranda on a democratic peace, III) 1 item	c.1919
U DX215/16	Pamphlet no. 34a. 'The new holy alliance' by J.A. Hobson (U.D.C. memoranda on a democratic peace, VI) 1 item	c.1919
U DX/215/17	Pamphlet no. 36a. 'The White death', by F.W. Pethick - Lawrence (U.D.C. memoranda on a democratic peace, VIII) 1 item	c.1919

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U DX215/18	Pamphlet no. 38a. 'Three notable protests against the Peace Treaty (U.D.C. memoranda on a democratic peace IX), by Canon Peter Green, et al' 1 item	1919
U DX215/19	Pamphlet no. 39a. 'The fruits of victory', by E.D. Morel 1 item	1919
U DX215/20	Pamphlet no. 40a. 'The political and economic murder of the German - Austrian people', by Dr. Friederich Hertz 1 item	1919
U DX215/21	Pamphlet no. 44a. 'The horror on the Rhine', by E.D. Morel 1 item	1920
U DX215/22	Notes for speakers: The Chinese situation 1 item	c.1927
U DX215/23	Pamphlet. 'The situation in Manchuria and in Shanghai with a review of the historical background 1 item	c.1932
U DX215/24	Pamphlet. 'The Anglo - Persian oil dispute' 1 item	c.1933