Against All Odds: Vira B. Whitehouse and Rosika Schwimmer in Switzerland, 1918*

Tibor Glant

During the past quarter century much has been written about the role of women, especially American women, in World War I. These studies cover an amazing variety of topics ranging from the role of women in the American Expeditionary Forces and in the international peace movements through discussions of the images of women in World War I movies and posters to work on the home front and behind enemy lines. Interestingly, women doing important diplomatic work have largely escaped attention: the stories of Vira Boarman Whitehouse, triumphant New York suffragist leader and Committee on Public Information director for Switzerland in 1918, and Rosika Schwimmer, a prominent feminist turned diplomatic representative for Hungary between October 1918 and January 1919, have each been treated to one single secondary account.[1] The discussion of their work requires further clarification, and at the same time, naturally lends itself to a comparative study. Following a loose

Tibor Glant is assistant professor and deputy chair at the North American Department, Debrecen University, Debrecen, Hungary. His main research interest lies in twentieth-century U.S. foreign policy, U.S.-Hungarian relations, and in American popular culture. He is the co-author of a U.S. history textbook for Hungarian students, and a monograph in Hungarian on U.S.-Hungarian relations and the Holy Crown of Hungary. His book, Through the Prism of the Habsburg Monarchy: Hungary in American Diplomacy and Public Opinion during the First World War, *was published by Columbia UP in 1998. He has just completed a one-year research Fulbright at GWU.*

chronological order, the present study surveys Whitehouse's Swiss mission, describes the Whitehouse-Schwimmer relationship between 1914 and 1919, and concludes with an assessment of Schwimmer's mission and an attempt to place the whole story in a broader context.

According to the 1918-1919 edition of the American *Who's Who*, Vira Whitehouse was born in Virginia in 1875, attended Wellesley College and then married Norman R. de Whitehouse of New York in 1898. She joined the New York suffrage movement in 1913, and emerged as its most prominent figure following the defeat of the suffrage amendment in the state in 1915. She assumed the leadership, then they used the term "chairman," of the New York State Suffrage Party and forced through the amendment by November 1917. She did so with invaluable help from two prominent men who would later play a key part in her 1918 adventures: President Woodrow Wilson and CPI Chairman George Creel.

The Whitehouse-Wilson correspondence spans more than three years (August 1915-October 1918), and contains more than thirty letters, with the bulk of the material focussing on winning the right to vote for women in the State of New York. Their correspondence testifies to the fact that she was able to maintain the president's interest in her cause and won a couple of audiences with the chief executive in the process.[2] Clearly, Whitehouse was no unknown entity in the White House. Furthermore, Creel, one of Wilson's closest, and most underestimated, advisors, had a high opinion of her: in his postwar memoir on the CPI he devoted an entire chapter to her work in Switzerland. After pointing out that it "was a new thing to place a woman in such a position of absolutely international importance," Creel describes her appointment as both "wise and necessary." He goes on to praise her for almost single-handedly reviving the cause of woman suffrage and taking it to its triumphant conclusion in her state.[3] Whitehouse had a gift for working relentlessly and for presenting her case with humor. She testified to the latter in a series of articles for the *New York Sun* in 1914, called "Why Women Shouldn't Vote." Perhaps more importantly, she openly condemned radical suffragists and, in the fall of 1915, showed little interest in international pacifists, Schwimmer among them, visiting New York,[4] thus making herself acceptable to the Wilson administration, but also subject to accusations that she was short on patriotism.[5] And this explains Creel's curious choice of the word, "necessary," when describing her appointment: Creel felt that women deserved such a

push, while Whitehouse needed a way to prove her loyalty to her country. Their accounts of the appointment itself authenticate this conclusion.

In December 1917 Whitehouse attended a woman's suffrage convention in Washington, D.C., and there she met Creel again. She proposed to do "some war-work," and the CPI director was only too glad to enlist her. She points out in her memoir that they had actually worked together in New York in 1915 and that Creel vividly remembered it: "In fact, when he asked me to go he said it was because he remembered how hard I had made him work. I had slave-driven him, he said."[6] In a predominantly male dominated society further irritated by Wilson's style of leadership, he was repeatedly accused of ignoring Congress, such an appointment was nothing short of daring. And trouble started even before Whitehouse left the country.

Creel was obviously aware of the possibility of being attacked on account of appointing a woman for such important war work, and they agreed to treat the matter confidentially. But when the news was leaked to the press an angry Secretary of State Robert Lansing publicly denounced Creel for proposing propaganda work abroad in general and for Whitehouse's appointment in particular, only to eat his own words within a day.[7] This seemingly minor incident highlights one of the key problems Whitehouse would have to face in her work for her country, and, therefore, a brief bypass must be taken here to explain the complex relationship between Wilson, Lansing, Creel, Whitehouse and Mrs. Lansing.

Wilson had a tendency of handpicking his own representatives for official work and disregarding the government department that was supposed to do the job in question. The establishment of the CPI in early April 1917, between asking for a declaration of war and getting it from Congress, was one such step. It was the first modern American ministry of propaganda in the European sense of the word, in a country that has, all through its history, distinguished itself from the "decadent old world" on the grounds of First Amendment rights. Although Creel supposedly shared its leadership with the Secretaries of State (Lansing), War (Newton D. Baker) and Navy (Josephus Daniels), he actually directed the organization alone. He was a muckraker journalist and long-time Wilson supporter, a veteran of two elections (1912 and 1916), but a relatively unknown entity in Washington. The loud protests against his appointment in some important east coast papers suggest, at least to the present author, an ele-

ment of jealousy on the part of his more prominent colleagues. While Baker and Daniels had no objections to Creel, Lansing saw yet another challenge to his curtailed licenses in the CPI. And jealousy flared up within the administration, too, when the president made it clear that the publication of diplomatic correspondence, one of the more pleasant public relations duties of the State Department, would now be the task of the CPI. Added to this was Mrs. Lansing's openly anti-suffragist stand and her husband's conservative New England background.[8]

What then actually happened in the final days of 1917, the first report on the Whitehouse mission in the *New York Times* was published on the penultimate day of that year, was that Lansing found out about the appointment and, understanding its covert diplomatic nature, publicly challenged it. It was probably Wilson who made him withdraw the statement, thus spoiling the Whitehouse-State Department relationship once and for all.[9] The odds were heavily stacked against America's first official woman pseudo-diplomat even before she left the United States: the State Department not only refused to grant her a diplomatic passport but it also continuously double crossed her, all that while Creel was being roasted in the papers and grilled in Congressional investigations during much of 1918. And she was heading for a country notorious for its rejection of women's issues (and which granted woman suffrage only in 1971), fully aware that her failure would be presented as "further evidence" that women could not be entrusted with such (or any) important work.[10]

Switzerland was the single most important neutral country in 1918: it lay in the very heart of Europe, bordered on two Allied countries, France and Italy, and two Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, and had important newspapers in both French and German. Switzerland was at the crossroads of international diplomacy and public opinion in a way no other country in Europe has been in modern times. Accordingly, official international diplomatic representation in the capitol of Europe's oldest republic grew from 71 in 1913 to 224 in 1919. The American legation in Bern supervised no less than seven consulates, and its staff grew gradually as the war progressed. Charles Campbell came from Romania, Allen W. Dulles, of later CIA fame, from Vienna via Berlin, and Hugh Robert Wilson from South America via Berlin and Vienna. The joint representative of the American Red Cross and the War Trade Board was

Ellis Loring Dresel, who would later serve as Wilson's special envoy to Germany until the separate German-American peace was signed in 1921. Life in Switzerland was something special: pre-war friends now representing belligerent governments ate in the same restaurants and lived in the same hotels but refused to talk to each other, and international rivalries were confined to the "battle of the tennis courts," a battle in which representatives of the two warring camps fought each other not on the courts but for the use of the courts. Entertainment and secrecy became the catch-phrases of life, while both sides tried to influence the public opinion of the other by articles printed in the Swiss press in the appropriate language.[11] Into this world came a rather attractive woman in her forties from New York's highest circles, a woman who spoke little French and practically no German, and who refused to be entertained and wanted to work without secrecy. The American Minister Pleasant Alexander Stovall and his staff must have been puzzled.

Vira Whitehouse arrived in Switzerland on January 26, 1918 and, in the absence of Minister Stovall, she was received by Hugh Wilson, acting charge d'affaires of the legation. Wilson claimed no knowledge of her appointment nor of the very existence of the CPI, and went public with a cover story that she had gone to Bern to study the conditions of women and children, even before her arrival in the Swiss capitol. The legation staff tried to entertain her but made it clear from the start that she should expect no help form them. In the meantime, she established contacts with prominent Swiss newspapermen and liberal intellectuals, who called her attention to the strict Swiss neutrality laws, a lesson that she would learn and use later. After two frustrating months and learning all diplomatic means of biding time, she decided to return to the States and take up the issue with Creel and Wilson. The relevant chapters of her otherwise accurate and entertaining memoir radiate frustration over the contrast between the friendliness of the Swiss people and the unfriendliness of the American diplomats.[12]

She was fully aware of the fact that she was in a much better bargaining position on American soil than in her Swiss isolation, and she later speculated that the fact that she still was the head of a powerful New York women's organization might have made Creel more willing to take on Lansing. Like his boss, Stovall too lobbied vehemently with the president against her return, but she submitted a detailed project to her boss and Creel made up his mind. He

played what must have been the final trump card: in conversations he emphasized the open nature of the CPI venture, something that Wilson appreciated well enough to mention it in a letter to Whitehouse before her second departure for Europe. With the rules of the game reset in her favor, she now even had a diplomatic passport, and with a much better CPI infrastructure in Europe to back her up, she returned to Switzerland in June 1918 and started actual work.[13]

In her memoir she describes the difficulties of launching a news service in wartime in an environment that is only partly supportive, and discusses the scope of her work in some detail. Her chief task was to provide accurate information on a regular basis to Swiss newspapers that were interested in American news without violating the Swiss neutrality laws. She also worked with photographs, films and pamphlets, had many of Wilson's speeches translated into German, and organized a visit for six Swiss journalists to the United States. Her effective work in Switzerland was confined to less than six months, and she departed for the United States on December 25, 1918, eleven months after setting foot on Swiss soil. Much to the relief of the American legation, she was replaced by Guy Croswell Smith, who stayed at his post until February 22, 1919, when the CPI office in Bern was closed down.[14]

Wolper points out that evaluating Vira Whitehouse's work in Switzerland is no easy task. The State Department people obviously tried to present her in the worst possible light to the American public and the president alike. In her nine-page final report to Creel Whitehouse described her work but offered no definitive evaluation. Creel believed that she had done a great job, and cited the visiting Swiss journalists as proof: "'She has changed the whole attitude of Switzerland,' they joined in declaring. 'It was never the case that we were pro-Germans, but rather that we did not know America. This was the knowledge she gave us, openly, honestly, and with rare intelligence... reaching the heart and mind of Switzerland in a manner never approached by the agent of any other country.'" He then went on to describe her efforts on the basis of her memoir and reports, offering little if any further insight. Similarly, in his final report, Guy C. Smith simply stated that he continued Whitehouse's work and cited several Swiss sources expressing their regret for the closing of the CPI offices in Bern.[15]

An overview of the known facts offers not only a more balanced evaluation of Vira Whitehouse's work for the United States in Switzerland in 1918 but also insights into the more diplomatic aspects of her work. These are the basic facts to consider: She first arrived in Switzerland on January 26, but was forced to delay the opening the CPI offices until July 1. Her work was strongly opposed by the diplomatic representatives of her own country, and the CPI financial resources were made available to her only on the last day of July. She had visited Switzerland as a tourist before the war more than once but she spoke only basic French and practically no German.[16] These factors combined for strict limitations on her work, while, at the same time, provide the framework in which her achievements should be assessed.

Her greatest achievements came in the field of distributing American news in the Swiss, especially the German Swiss, press. The Foreign Press Bureau of the CPI sent her daily news summaries through the diplomatic pouch and naval intelligence communications. These included two to five news items of forty to one hundred words each, and covered issues as diverse as the drinking habits of American soldiers, US loans to Romania, and a New York court decision to refuse the petition of a German-American citizen to change his name to something more American. More traditional news items covered American contributions to the Allied war effort as well as speeches by the president and his key cabinet members. A biweekly feature service summed up earlier news coverage and supplemented it with photographs and general material reminiscent of Sunday papers. With a masterstroke prompted by one of her associates, William B. Fife, she invited the Swiss authorities to censor American news items before they were distributed to the Swiss press, thus reducing German claims of abusive propaganda to the minimum. On October 8, 1918 she reported to the CPI that 123 American articles had been printed. In her memoir she attributed the success of the news service to the following factors: (1) Allied victories in the field confirmed CPI reports on American war production, which had been described as exaggerated by the pro-German papers; (2) her openly acknowledged goal of bringing about a better understanding between the American and Swiss peoples; (3) attacks on prominent pro-German Swiss papers made them more willing to print American news to restore a semblance of impartiality; and, most importantly (4), the CPI was the only source of American news for both neutrals and belligerents.[17]

Her achievements in the fields of photographic and film propaganda, as well as with pamphlets, proved less convincing. Creel claimed that Whitehouse had filled the Swiss shop-windows with photographs, while she pointed out in her report that "[t]his department was late in starting." The chief sources of photographs were the CPI and the AEF in France, and she placed them in the papers and in special exhibitions. In a letter to Philip Holland of the American consulate in Basle on August 14, she outlined the difficulties of pictorial propaganda: on one occasion she accepted the, rather high, price named by a Swiss photographer, but later he changed his mind and refused to do the job for her. Added to this was the difficulty of getting photo paper for printing. And she listed the same problems as late as October 25, in a letter to Major A. L. James of the AEF.[18] This clearly indicates that photographic propaganda not only started late, it could not be carried out effectively.

Films presented Whitehouse with a different set of problems and challenges. At home the CPI used films most effectively in conjunction with the four-minute-men campaign. In Europe, and especially in Switzerland, the CPI had to play a whole different ballgame. The idea there was to show American propaganda movies with American feature films, but importing movies into Switzerland was not easy. Allied cooperation existed only on paper, and she was instructed to view and censor each film before releasing it to the public. This was another burden on Whitehouse, and she had no answer until as late as October 29, when she decided to use Lieutenant Valentini of the AEF as her film censor. Thus, despite Creel's claims to the contrary, film propaganda never took off in Europe's oldest republic, not least because "the motion picture houses in Switzerland were almost continuously closed on account of the succession of epidemics of Spanish grippe."[19]

As regards pamphlets, both Creel and Whitehouse claim successes in the field, but their statements again must be treated with caution. There was such a shortage of paper in Switzerland that the newspapers were reduced in size and some went out of business. Furthermore, the first full set of CPI publications was mailed to her on August 17, and Whitehouse's reply dated a month later clearly shows that the material had not yet reached her by then. The scope of this work also remained limited: the CPI collection in the National Archives includes ten pamphlets for Switzerland: one on the supposed German-Bolshevik conspiracy, the rest translations of speeches by

President Wilson. Nine of the ten pamphlets were printed only in German, the tenth was a bilingual English-German print of Wilson addresses.[20] 10,000 copies of each pamphlet were run, they all bore the logo of the CPI, but, all in all, this was far from impressive for a five-month campaign. The very fact that these pamphlets were printed in German suggests that her primary target was not the Swiss, but the German public.

Similarly, Vira Whitehouse's pet project of sending six prominent Swiss journalists to the United Sates came to naught, partly because of delays but also because their reports reached home only after the cessation of hostilities: "If the armistice had not come before their return to Switzerland, their stories and accounts would have had a significant place in hurrying the end of the war," she lamented later.[21] If anything, they provided much needed ammunition for a battered Creel in the Congressional hearings in the fall of 1918, when he tried to justify the various aspects of his work.

From a strictly propagandistic point of view, Vira B. Whitehouse put in a successful effort but, for reasons often beyond her control, fell well short of the ambitious plans she had outlined to George Creel and President Wilson in May 1918. That notwithstanding, she provided further important intelligence and semi-diplomatic services to her country, thus making her European mission a success beyond any reasonable doubt.

As has been emphasized before, the Whitehouse mission had a diplomatic overtone from the very start. After all, she was going to the diplomatic crossroads of Europe to win a propaganda war in neutral as well as in enemy countries. She was continuously in touch with official and unofficial diplomats, ranging from the legation staff through Wilson's secret negotiator in Switzerland, George D. Herron, to President Calonder of the Swiss republic. Her propaganda work was nothing short of what we now call cultural diplomacy, and the State Department personnel's obstructionism suggests an understanding that her appointment was an infringement on their licenses.[22] Being in touch with American and Swiss diplomats may have been officially on the cards, but Whitehouse's contacts with American military intelligence as well as with the Hungarian diplomat Rosika Schwimmer represent a quite different dimension of her work.

Her wartime records and postwar memoirs make it quite clear that Vira Whitehouse never thought of herself as a diplomat, in fact, she developed an "us and them" attitude towards the official diplo-

matic representatives of her country, in response to the way they treated her. She, furthermore, rejected secrecy and claimed to have had no part in any secret, covert venture, but the secretive atmosphere of Bern did not leave her fully untouched.[23] She repeatedly supplied the American military attaché in Bern, Colonel W. F. H. Godson, with reports on the Swiss press, German propaganda in Switzerland, and on the illegal trafficking of movies into Germany. On August 16 Colonel Churchill of the General Staff requested information on the pro-German press in Switzerland, and his request was forwarded to the CPI offices in Bern by George Howe, the assistant military attache, who did not even realize that he was dealing with a woman. In response, he received a detailed, three-page analysis of the situation from Whitehouse. She also supplied sensitive information for the AEF: on October 5 she informed Captain Donald McPhearson, the AEF purchasing agent in Switzerland, about Italian projects to thwart President Wilson's plans. Furthermore, she was in touch with General D. Nolan, chief of the intelligence section of the General Army Headquarters in France and with Colonel R. H. Van Deman, another high ranking intelligence officer of the AEF.[24]

On one occasion it was the State Department that got her involved in a secret project. In a memo dated August 6, 1918 Hugh Wilson informed her that a secret agent called Lieutenant Mostowski was on his way to Switzerland, on a CPI mission to work with the Lithuanian National Council. She was instructed to work with him, and this cooperation lasted until at least early November.[25] Clearly, providing intelligence reports and dealing with secret agents for a good cause did not qualify as covert action. And the real test of loyalties and principles was yet to come in the shape of a special relationship with another feminist, Rosika Schwimmer, who now represented a defeated enemy power, Hungary.

Unlike Whitehouse, Schwimmer, whose real name is Róza Bédy-Schwimmer, was a well-known feminist and suffragist. Born into a Jewish Hungarian family, she, together with Vilma Glücklich, singlehandedly created the non-militant, non-socialist wing of the Hungarian suffrage movement and became its chief spokesperson even before the war. She masterminded the ill-fated Ford Peace Ship, and worked towards the peaceful resolution of the war. She seemed a logical choice to represent the new bourgeois liberal government of Count Michael Károlyi, and interestingly, she arrived in Bern a day before Károlyi officially assumed control of Hungary on October

30. Her credentials for the job were impressive: she spoke nine languages, knew several European heads of state in person, and was received twice by President Wilson, who was the number one hope of the Hungarians, on account of his Fourteen Points. Károlyi believed that he could pitch his high hopes on her, and forced her official appointment through the Hungarian National Council, actually his own government, despite loud protests from some of his associates.[26] And he could not be more wrong.

True, she was a personal acquaintance of Wilson, but she was also *persona non grata* in the Wilson White House. Following their 1914 meeting she gave an unauthorized interview to the American press, disclosing details of their discussion. Her next reception was granted as a courtesy to Jane Addams, and was delayed considerably. Her participation in the Ford expedition may have looked good on her resume, but, especially after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, it hardly endeared her to American decision makers. Furthermore, her association with more radical feminists, something unavoidable in large conferences, prompted first the British, then the Americans to describe her as a socialist.[27] This got even worse in Switzerland in November 1918, when she was accused of being a Bolshevik, a claim that made it even into American historical writing.[28] Of course she never was, her most prominent American contacts included Jane Addams, Carrie Chapman Catt and Emily Greene Balch, none of whom represented any serious left wing challenge to American democracy.

Schwimmer's odds were probably worse than those of Whitehouse. Hungary was in turmoil, and Károlyi's control of the situation well short of satisfactory. Various domestic conservative and radical groups were challenging him publicly, and the newly created "successor states" of the Habsburg Monarchy were attacking Hungary for additional territorial gains, all that with thinly veiled French support. His decision to send Schwimmer to Bern was as brave as Creel's one to send Whitehouse overseas, and he too was challenged from within the circles of his closest associates. Furthermore, Schwimmer generated controversy in a way no one else could, and, at times, was disturbingly confident in herself. In addition, Károlyi's domestic opponents also realized the potential advantages of securing Allied attention in Switzerland, and Bern was flooded by real and self-appointed Hungarian diplomatic representatives. And since the Allies refused to recognize Károlyi's administration

as the official representative of the new Hungary, Schwimmer had no way to authenticate her claim that she really represented her native land.[29] Finally, she was heading for Switzerland, a country still unfavorably disposed towards women and, not least due to Whitehouse's efforts, more neutral in thought than in action. It remains one of the mysteries of Hungarian history why she, alone in the world fully aware of all the above facts, accepted the mission.

Whitehouse and Schwimmer had known each other from before the war. Whitehouse first heard the Hungarian speak at an American suffrage convention in 1914. Then, as a delegate to the Women's International Congress at the Hague in April 1915, Whitehouse opposed a key resolution proposed by Schwimmer. Back in the States, later in 1915, she refused to meet the Hungarian in New York, which, as has been indicated above, earned her the support of the White House. Obviously, no ill-feelings remained, and, on finding out about the American's mission, Schwimmer called on Whitehouse in Bern and asked her to put her in touch with Colonel House, who she knew now was in France. Whitehouse promptly introduced Schwimmer to Hugh Wilson and Colonel Godson, thus making it possible for the new, democratic Hungary to have her voice heard for the one and only time before the Coolidge mission set up shop in Vienna in January 1919.[30]

At the same time, President Wilson decided to send an appeal to the peoples of Austria-Hungary, and Whitehouse was instructed to translate the message into all the languages of the Habsburg Monarchy and distribute it to the widest possible audience. Under these circumstances it seemed quite natural for her to seek Schwimmer's help in the matter. Following a car ride which is cut out for a Hollywood movie, the mission was accomplished. It earned Schwimmer an official appointment to Bern, but a lot of trouble for Whitehouse.[31] Both the American legation in Bern and the military intelligence division of the AEF thought that using, and encouraging, Schwimmer was not a good idea, partly because some Swiss papers described the Hungarian as a Bolshevik, but, perhaps more importantly, because it created the impression that the Wilson administration supported Karolyi – an option the American president never seriously considered. But despite repeated warnings and protest from American diplomats and intelligence officers, Whitehouse, and then her successor, Guy C. Smith, remained in touch with Schwimmer and promptly forwarded all information acquired from her to the au-

thorities.[32] In response, first Hugh Wilson, then Minister Stovall broke relations with the Hungarian envoy, which resulted in a most moving, six-page letter from "the modern world's first woman ambassador" to the first official woman semi-diplomat of the United States. In this unique document of not only women's studies but also of World War I diplomacy, Schwimmer recites their contact and cooperation, her attempts to reach Colonel House via Hugh Wilson, and Wilson and Stovall's turnaround. She rejects the charges of Bolshevism, describes Hungary's difficulties, and asks her American friend to explain the situation to her.[33] While Whitehouse's reply has not been preserved, her correspondence with Colonel Van Deman testifies to the fact that she was unwilling to go along with the official American position:

> I wish you would let me have the information you have against Madame Rozika Schwimmer. I have already written to you that I believe her to be acting honestly as a representative of the present republican government of Hungary and that she is neither a German agent nor a Bolshevist. She can be of great use to me and while I have confidence in my own judgement I should certainly be influenced by anything definite you or your Department have against her.[34]

Needless to say, neither her memoirs nor unpublished American sources carry "anything definite" against Schwimmer. Yet handling Schwimmer, an enemy representative, confronted Whitehouse with a moral dilemma she was unable to settle by herself before her departure for the United States on Christmas Day, 1918.

Schwimmer's papers in the New York Public Library reveal her gradual isolation and growing frustration. In a later letter to Károlyi, Schwimmer claimed that she was allowed to borrow Whitehouse's car, that her own car was borrowed by American diplomats, and that she was called on to brief an American mission before its departure for Hungary.[35] While All this is probably true, what really happened in Switzerland was that she became completely isolated from American diplomats by early December. Her letters to Colonel House went unanswered, and she lost touch with Colonel Godson, too. Her only other contact with American diplomats came around the turn of the year, when an American mission headed by Alonzo E. Taylor of the American Relief Administration convened in Bern and asked her to provide them with information about Hungary. The focus of her work gradually shifted from diplomatic to propa-

ganda issues, with much of her energies tied down in attempts to challenge lies directed at her and Károlyi's new Hungary.[36]

For reasons the discussion of which would go much beyond the scope of the present study, the Allies decided not to hear Hungary's case and used Schwimmer's being a woman as a cheap excuse to force her resignation on January 18, 1919. To add insult to injury, Stovall made it quite clear that his dislike of the Hungarian diplomat partly stemmed from the fact that she was of Jewish stock. Despite her own and Károlyi's published statements, Schwimmer's diplomatic mission was a clear-cut failure. In all fairness to her, it never stood any realistic chance of success: in a hostile environment she was unable to establish herself as the chief spokesperson for Hungary and was recalled on the request of Swiss President Calonder.[37]

The story of Vira Boarman Whitehouse's semi-diplomatic mission to Switzerland in 1918 and her cooperation with Rosika Schwimmer in November-December 1918 is a story of coincidences. Having just won the battle for woman suffrage in New York and in need of an opportunity to demonstrate her patriotism, Whitehouse happened to be in Washington exactly when Creel was looking for someone to send to Switzerland. Creel happened to be the only member of Wilson's closest circle who would appoint a woman to such a key position, and he happened to be in the fighting mood when the State Department's obstructions forced Whitehouse to return to the United States in April-May 1918. Whitehouse, a relatively unknown entity in the international women's movement, happened to remember, and be remembered by, Schwimmer, and they happened to meet in Bern when they needed each other. And Whitehouse's mission happened to end before she could put up a stronger stand on behalf of Schwimmer, and, indirectly, of Hungary.

It is also the story of irony and cruel twists of fate. Ironically, they were both given a hard time by their own fellow countrymen in Switzerland. They both offered to resign and had their resignation turned down by their respective bosses for the same reason: publicly admitting the failure of their female appointees would have weakened their domestic position further. Wolper points out that Creel and his staff were sensitive enough to provide Whitehouse with additional emotional support. Schwimmer's relations with Károlyi were more formal. On one occasion he she remarked in a letter to State Secretary Lajos Bíró of the Foreign Ministry that he was the only one who ever replied to her and she was wondering

whether her reports ever reached Károlyi.[38] Whitehouse experienced no such problems. And it is a most cruel twist of fate that Schwimmer, the first modern woman minister from a relatively unimportant country, Hungary, came to be remembered despite the failure of her mission, while Whitehouse, America's first official woman semi-diplomat, came to be forgotten despite the obvious success of her mission. This I find quite surprising since with the benefit of twenty-twenty hindsight it is fair to say that in the long process of emancipation in the diplomatic profession in the United States, George Creel's decision to appoint Vira B. Whitehouse to Switzerland, together with her successful tour of duty, ranks as high as President Clinton's decision, sixty-odd years later, to appoint Madeline Albright as America's first woman secretary of state.

NOTES

* This essay is dedicated to a colleague and friend of mine, Nóra Séllei, a pioneer of women's studies at Debrecen University, Hungary. I would like to thank Professors Peter Pastor of Montclair State University and David Foglesong of Rutgers for their helpful comments. Research for this paper was done over the course of a decade, with funding coming from the University of Warwick, UK, East European Scholarship program, FKFP 0120/1999 and OTKA F025268 of Hungary, and a Fulbright research grant to George Washington University for 2000-2001.

[1] A simple keyword search on *America: History and Life* displays 273 items in English alone. Also: Peter Pastor, "The Diplomatic Fiasco of the Modern World's First Woman Ambassador, Rosa Bedy-Schwimmer, " *East European Quarterly* 8:3 (1975): 273-82. Hereafter cited as Pastor, "Diplomatic Fiasco." Gregg Wolper, "Woodrow Wilson's New Diplomacy: Vira Whitehouse in Switzerland, 1918," *Prologue* 24:3 (Fall 1992): 226-39. Hereafter cited as Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland." Both are excellent studies, but with a single focus on their subjects: Pastor explains Schwimmer's failure in the context of Allied policies towards Hungary while Wolper places the emphasis on Whitehouse's struggle against the diplomatic representatives of her own country.

[2] The Whitehouse-Wilson correspondence was consulted in the Woodrow Wilson papers in the Library of Congress. Additional Whitehouse manuscripts were found in the CPI collection of the National Archives (RG 63) and in the Women's studies manuscript collections in the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. Wilson was not known for supporting woman suffrage before 1917. An entry in the diary of Third Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, dated March 31, 1920, casts some light on Wilson's position. Long describes the ratification of the 19th Amendment and reveals the scenario for its proclamation: "Ratification... is confidently expected tomorrow. The Governor [Wilson] will immediately sign and send [it] by special messenger. The proclamation for the signature of the Secretary of State [Bainbridge Colby] is all drafted. The National Woman's Party – that may be the wrong name – which acted so outrageously toward the President, picketed the White House, burned him in effigy, etc., now wants us to credit them with having brought this about. But the organization of Mrs. Carrie C. Catt will get the credit. Her Vice President, Mrs. Helen Garner, has kept in touch and she and I have framed it all up and will hurry it through to promulgation of the proclamation by the Secretary of State in order to beat the movement to obtain an injunction against the Secretary.... [which] would... prevent most of the states from passing sufficient legislation to permit women to vote in the primaries." Library of Congress: Breckinridge

Long Papers: Box 2: Diaries, 1919-21.

[3] George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1920): Part II: Chapter VIII: "The Work in Switzerland." The quote is from page 317. Hereafter cited as: Creel, *How We Advertised*.

[4] Vira B. Whitehouse, *A Year as a Government Agent* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1920): 70. Hereafter cited as: Whitehouse, *Government Agent*. On the events of 1915 see Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women. Feminist Peace Campaigners and the Great War* (London: Pandora, 1985): 122-23. Hereafter cited as: Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*. This book is a thinly veiled tribute to Schwimmer, but, importantly, it is based upon her manuscripts in the New York Public Library.

[5] For the attacks on Whitehouse for lack of patriotism see Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:" 228.

[6] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 2-4.

[7] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 7; *New York Times*, January 9, 1918: "No Credentials to Mrs. Whitehouse" with the telling subheading: "Lansing Opposed Mission: Was Not Consulted and Protested When He Heard the Project – Mission Will Distribute Creel's Literature."

[8] For details see chapters 8, 10 and 11 in my book: *Through the Prism of the Habsburg Monarchy: Hungary in American Diplomacy and Public Opinion during World War I* (Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications, 1998), hereafter cited as Glant, *Through the Prism*. On Whitehouse's take on the CPI-State Department relationship and Mrs. Lansing see her *Government Agent*: 56-58.

[9] A reading of his desk diaries indicate that in late 1917 and early 1918 Lansing had limited access to the President: he was consulted on the Fourteen Points only the day before Wilson delivered the speech (3-4.15 pm), which appears to be his first conference with his boss in the new year. An entry dated January 3rd shows that Lansing conferred with Frank L. Polk, Counselor of the State Department, about Whitehouse, but no details are given. It seems an educated guess to say that Wilson instructed Lansing to back down.

[10] The two standard studies of the CPI are: James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1939) and Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Whitehouse's memoir is full of references to the abusive conduct of the State Department personnel, and her claims are authenticated by documents reprinted at the back of the book. These documents do exist in the CPI collection and have not been edited by her in any way. On her awareness of the significance of her mission for the cause of women see: *Government Agent*: 102-06. Wolper's "Whitehouse in Switzerland" offers a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the subject, see esp. pp. 227-33.

[11] Pleasant A. Stovall, *Switzerland and the World War* (Savannah, GA: Mason Inc., 1939): Chapter XIII: "Some of the Diplomats." See also Hugh R. Wilson, *The Education of a Diplomat* (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938): 176-77, 209-18. Allen Dulles's unpublished letters to his mother in the same period offer an amusing take on the battle of the tennis courts: Princeton University: Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library: Allen W. Dulles Papers: Series 1: Correspondence: Box 19, Folder 5: "Dulles, Edith Foster, 1917-1918." Not surprisingly, these sources do not even mention Whitehouse.

[12] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: Chapters II and IV: "Diplomatic Methods" and "Apparent Defeat" respectively.

[13] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 103-06; Creel, *How We Advertised*: 320-21; Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:"233. Because of frequent trips to Paris she needed a diplomatic passport. It is in the Schlesinger Collection, and has about fifty stamps in it. By better CPI infrastructure I meant the opening of the Paris office and effective lines of communication with CPI headquarters in New York City.

[14] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: Chapters VI-IX. On the closing of the CPI offices: National Archives: Record Group 63: Committee on Public Information: CPI 21-A1: General Correspondence of the Commissioners Vira B. Whitehouse and G. C. Smith, April 1918-February 1919: Box 1, Folder "B": Smith to Dr. A. Oeri, editor of *Basler Nachrichten*, February 14, 1919. Hereafter cited as: NA RG 63: CPI 21 and by entry, box and folder identification.

[15] Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:" 236; he offers only a limited assessment of CPI work in Switzerland: 236-37. Creel, *How We Advertised*: 317-26, the quote is from pp. 317-18. Women's studies manuscript collections from the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. Series 1: Woman Suffrage: Vira B. Whitehouse papers: 1 box (M-133, Reel B15): Folder 12: "VBW's report on her activities in Switzerland, n. d.": this includes several copies of both Whitehouse's and Smith's final reports. Hereafter cited as: Whitehouse Papers and by folder identification.

[16] On the financial resources see: Edgar Sisson (CPI, New York) to Whitehouse, cable, July 31, 1918, in NA RG 63: CPI 21-A4: General telegrams of the Berne office, June 12, 1918-February 19, 1919: Folder "Incoming Telegrams."

All other information cited here is from her memoir.

[17] Creel, *How We Advertised*: 319-23. Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 136-48 includes a discussion of the scope of her work, sources of success and Fife's role. Her report on the publication of articles: Whitehouse to Paul Kennaday (chief of CPI Foreign Press Bureau, NYC), October 8, 1918: NA RG 63: CPI 21-A1: Box 1, Folder "Kennaday – Foreign Press Bureau." NA RG 63: CPI 21-B1-3 (two boxes and a folder) contains all the daily and biweekly news bulletins. The reference to drinking habits is dated August 24, and reads, in part: "As wines are not drunk in the United States as they are in Switzerland and France, the American soldier is not accustomed to drinking them, and for this reason it is imperative that the American Expeditionary Force[s] shall have absolutely pure drinking water."

[18] Creel, *How We Advertised*: 324-25. For the details of Whitehouse's final report see note 14 above. For Whitehouse's correspondence with Holland and James, see NA RG 63: CPI 21-A1: Box 1, Folders "H" and "I&J" respectively. For a detailed description of the work with photographs see: Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 146-47.

[19] Creel, *How We Advertised*: 324; Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 151-55. NA RG 63: CPI 21-A2 is devoted exclusively to the film issue. The quote on the movie theatres being closed because of the flu epidemics is from Whitehouse's final report.

[20] Creel, *How We Advertised*: 323; Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 148-49: se also her final report. The pamphlets are filed under NA RG 63: CPI-21-C2: two folders. Wolper refers to Italian translations of Wilson's speeches (p. 235), but those were not CPI publications, at least not according to the CPI files in the National Archives.

[21] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 167-79; the quote is from page 179. About one fifth of her correspondence in the CPI files deals with this issue.

[22] Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:" 228-29, 237-38. Yet he is reluctant to call it a diplomatic mission, with the notable exception of the title of his study.

[23] She establishes her dislike of secret work as early as page 10 of her memoir, and makes repeated references to the open nature of her work later, as well as in her final report. I find it quite amusing that this was not the only CPI project based at least in part on the contrast between the rhetoric of openness and behind the scenes intrigue. The best known example is that of the infamous Sisson papers, a bunch of documents forged by the CPI to demonstrate the German-Bolshevik connection.

[24] All the correspondence cited in this paragraph comes from NA RG 63: CPI 21-A1, folders "G" and "H" from Box 1, "M" and "N" from Box 2, and "V" from Box 3.

[25] All the Mostowski material comes from NA RG 63: CPI 21-A4. Whitehouse sent at least two cables to Sisson on Mostowski, on October 8 and November 1.

[26] Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women*, especially the first chapter; Pastor, "Diplomatic Fiasco."

[27] For details see my *Through the Prism*: 58-59.

[28] Edward Robb Ellis, *Echoes of Distant Thunder: Life in the United States, 1914-1918* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1975): 254. His other references to Schwimmer also make it clear that he completely misread the Hungarian suffragist.

[29] Károlyi Mihály, *Az új Magyarországért. Válogatott írások és beszédek, 1908-1919* (Budapest: Magveto, 1968): 470-73 [For the new Hungary: selected writings and speeches, 1908-1919]. Hereafter cited as Károlyi, *Új Magyarországért*. The actual quote comes from the second, unpublished volume of his World War I memoirs, *Against the Whole World* (c. 1923). See also Pastor, "Diplomatic Fiasco."

[30] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 238-40; Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women* offers a detailed discussion of the events of 1915 in chapter 5 ("Meeting across enemy lines"), without mentioning Whitehouse.

[31] Whitehouse, *Government Agent*: 232-53; Pastor, "Diplomatic Fiasco:" 276-78, Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:" 234-36.
[32] Whitehouse and Smith's earlier cited correspondence with Colonels Godson and Van Deman carries ample evidence.
[33] Schwimmer to Whitehouse, December 7, 1918, in Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace: Rosika Schwimmer Papers: Box 2. A copy of the letter can also be found in the New York Public Library in the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection: A 106, General Correspondence, December 5-9, 1918: December 7, 1918. Hereafter cited as Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, and by box number and title, and by folder title.
[34] Whitehouse to Van Deman, December 10, 1918, in NA RG 63: CPI 21-A1: Box 3, Folder "V".
[35] György Litván, ed., *Károlyi Mihály levelezése. I: 1905-1920* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1978): 389-90 [The letters of Michael Károlyi. Volume 1: 1905-1920]: Schwimmer to Károlyi, July 25, 1945. Note that all the correspondence between the two of them included in this volume is from the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection.
[36] For published correspondence between Schwimmer and Károlyi see Litván, ed., *Károlyi levelezése:* 255-412. For Schwimmer's diary on her American contacts see: Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection: A 482-483: Diaries, 1917-1919. An extensive correspondence file in the same collection (Boxes A 101-113) includes her letters to Colonels House and Godson, Alonzo E. Taylor, Whitehouse, Guy C. Smith and Mrs. White, Whitehouse's secretary. Her last attempts to contact House and Godson officially came on January 8 and 13, 1919 respectively.
[37] Pastor, "Diplomatic Fiasco:" 278-81. Károlyi in *Új Magyarországért* (pp. 472-73) praises her and calls her mission a success; see also Litván's commentary (p. 389) on the letter cited in note 35 above. In 1946 Károlyi contradicted his memoir: "We must admit that both of us – I as appointer and you as appointed – failed because we were unable to overcome anti-feminist prejudice." Schwimmer-Lloyd collection: A 467: Diplomatic Service, 1919: Diplomatic Services [second folder of the same name]: Károlyi's letter to Schwimmer, April 29, 1946.
[38] Schwimmer offered her resignation on the very day that Whitehouse left Switzerland: December 25, 1918. See Litván, ed., *Károlyi levelezése*: 347-48. Wolper, "Whitehouse in Switzerland:" 236. Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection: A 106, General Correspondence, December 5-9, 1918: December 7, 1918: Schwimmer to Bíró. The latter's position roughly equals that of the Under Secretary of State in the US.